

## Genesis Chapter 11

**Genesis 11:1 "And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech."**

"One language, and of one speech":

God, who made man as the one creature with whom He could speak (1:28), was to take the gift of language and use it to divide the race, for the apostate worship at Babel indicated that man had turned against God in pride (11:8-9).

"One language": is literally "one lip," meaning language or dialect.

There is a single family in one place speaking one language.

We know that when Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth were on the ark, all the people of the earth, eight, truly did speak the same language.

As we have said before, the Bible was not written in chronological order.

At what point in history (Chapter 11:1) occurred, is hard to say.

This was, probably, an explanation of some of the things we have read in the previous chapter.

Details very often overlap in the Bible.

**Genesis 11:2 "And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there."**

"As they journeyed from the east":

God had restated His commission for man to "be fruitful and multiply; populate the earth" (9:7).

It was in the course of spreading out that the events of this account occurred.

"From the east":

An idiom for "off east," indicating direction.

"Shinar":

This was in the region of Babylon.

This "they" that was spoken of above means the descendants of Ham that we read about in the last lesson.

We learned in our last lesson that the descendants of Nimrod settled in Babel, Erech, Accad and Calneh, which was in the area of the tower of Babel.

This area was in the land of Shinar.

Japheth's children scattered and even went to the islands, we learned in a previous lesson.

It seemed the group that did not want to scatter was Ham's descendants.

That was the group that built the tower of Babel.

Verses 3-4

“Let us make brick ... let us build us a city and a tower”:

While dispersing, a portion of the post-Flood group, under the leading of the powerful Nimrod (see 10:8-10), they decided to stop and establish a city as a monument to their pride and also for their reputation.

The tower, even though it was a part of the plan, was not the singular act of rebellion.

Human pride was which led these people to defy God.

They were refusing to move on, i.e., scattering to fill the earth as they had been instructed.

In fact, this was Nimrod's and the people's effort to disobey the command of God (in 9:1), and thus defeat the counsel of heaven.

They had to make bricks, since there were few stones on the plain.

**Genesis 11:3 "And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar."**

“Brick”:

The irony of the passage is that they did not have the stone or mortar for building and had to use makeshift materials.

Verse 3 was, probably, the first mention in the Bible about people making brick for building.

It must have been very similar to the brick we use today.

They even baked them, as we do.

**Genesis 11:4 "And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top [may reach] unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."**

“Let us build us a city and a tower”:

Their ambition is expressed.

They wish to bind their strength with the city and tower.

The tower may mean a fortress (Deut. 1:28; 9:1 speaks of cities fortified up to heaven).

“Whose top may reach unto heaven”:

Not that the tower would actually reach to the abode of God and not that the top would represent the heavens.

They wanted it to be a high tower as a monument to their abilities, one that would certainly enhance their fame.

In this endeavor, they disobeyed God and attempted to steal His glory.

“Us a name”:

This goes back to 4:17; 22:24; 6:4; 10:9); all of which are focal points of rebellion against God.

Here they do not want to fulfill God’s command to Noah and his family after the Flood (9:1).

These people were not interested in following what God told them to do (scatter).

They were defiant, doing exactly the opposite.

They were seeking worldly fame.

Probably, the heaven that they were speaking of was the immediate heaven that they could see with their natural eyes.

Many teachers and historians believe they built a ziggurat (a rectangular stepped tower), like similar structures which were built in adjoining towns.

The Bible was not clear on this.

It just spoke of a very tall tower.

Jesus is the way to heaven, anyone who tries to get to heaven any other way, but through Jesus, is a thief and a robber.

**Genesis 11:5 "And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded."**

"And the LORD came down":

The "coming down" is significant (18:2, 21; 19:1).

God was already aware of the program, but being the righteous judge, He wished to examine it more closely.

No matter how high their tower, He still comes down.

You notice in the Scripture above, that God called them children of men.

They were followers of the flesh, and not the spirit.

Whatever felt good, they did, following their fleshly lust.

**Genesis 11:6 "And the LORD said, Behold, the people [is] one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do."**

"Nothing will be restrained":

They were so united that they would do all they desired to do.

"They begin to do":

This would be only the start!

"Imagined to do":

This means "they purposed."

These people remind me of little children.

One child will not get into much trouble, but when you add the second child, they get into ten times as much.

These people had evil hearts with every evil imagination.

The fact that they spoke the same language, made it much easier for them to work together.

Working together, people can accomplish more than working as individuals.

Even today, if those of other countries and American common people could sit down and talk together in the same language, we would find that we have many things in common.

They love their families, just as we do; they want a peaceful world, just as we do.

You see, the heads of government are the ones who have many problems, seeking power.

These people working together were not good, because Nimrod's descendants had been following false gods.

Whatever they did would be bad, because their hearts were evil.

**Genesis 11:7 "Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."**

“Let us go down”:

Again, the plural does not refer to angels, but is a plural of majesty (1:26; 3:22).

God the Father was speaking to Jesus, probably.

Jesus is the doer of the God Head.

They were going to make it impossible for the people to understand each other.

**Genesis 11:8 "So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city."**

“So the LORD scattered them”:

God addressed their prideful rebellion at the first act.

They had chosen to settle; He forced them to scatter.

This account tells how it was that the families of the earth “were separated ... every one according to his language” (10:5), and “were separated on the earth after the flood” (10:32).

What men will not do willingly, God forces them to do as a result of judgment, and today there are more than three thousand languages and dialects.

The result of this confusion (verse 9), was the scattering of mankind.

The name Babel is linked with the Hebrew verb “balal”, (meaning to confuse).

But the ancient Babylonians called the city Bab-ilu, meaning “Gate of God.”

At any rate, there is a pun in the construction of Babel-balal.

In the Bible, this city increasingly came to symbolize the godless society, with its pretensions (chapter 11), persecutions (Daniel 3), pleasures, sins and superstitions (Isaiah 47:8-13), as well as its riches and eventual doom (see Revelation chapters 17 and 18).

Certain lessons appear:

- (1) Boastful pride in material power is sinful in God's sight. This is the theme behind all sin: pride;
- (2) Yahweh's purpose endures forever. Every plan He formulates is inevitably implemented in spite of all efforts and devices of man. The peoples will settle in all the earth;
- (3) Unity and peace are not ultimate goals in a sinful world: better division than collective apostasy.

God scattered this wicked group to many countries and changed their language, so they would not be able to cooperate in their evil adventures.

What a contrast to the day of Pentecost, when every man heard in his own language the message of God.

**Genesis 11:9 "Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth."**

"The name of it called Babel":

This is linked to a Hebrew word meaning "to confuse".

From this account, Israel first understood not only how so many nations, peoples and languages came about, but also the rebellious origins of their consummate enemy, Babylon (10:5, 20, 31).

"Scattered them":

Because they would not fill the earth as God had commanded them, God confused their language so that they had to separate and collect in regions where their own language was spoken.

The word Babel is used today to mean something spoken unintelligibly, something that was difficult to understand.

If they would not scatter on their own, then God would do it for them.

There is a definite break here.

We will take up the ancestry of Shem which was another group entirely.

Verses 10-26

“Shem ... Abram”:

The genealogy of Shem (verse 10).

Israel, upon hearing this section read, learned how the generation who survived the Flood related to their own father, Abram (verse 26), later known as Abraham (17:5).

The shortening of lifespans was in effect.

**Genesis 11:10-11 "These [are] the generations of Shem: Shem [was] a hundred years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood:" "And Shem lived after he begat Arphaxad five hundred years, and begat sons and daughters."**

“These are the generations of Shem”:

Or a genealogy of the posterity of Shem; not of all of them, only of those of the line which led to Abraham, by which might appear the true line in which the Messiah from Adam through Abraham sprung.

Shem was one hundred years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood; by which it is pretty plain that he was younger than Japheth (see Genesis 10:21).

The new section, opening with the usual formula (compare Gen. 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1), reverts to the main purpose of the inspired narrative, which is to trace the onward development of the line of promise.

And this it does by carrying forward the genealogical history of the holy seed through ten generations till it reaches Abram.

Whilst Noah with his 950 years belonged entirely to the old world.

Now we see Shem, born before the flood; reached the age of 600, as we see that he “begat Arphaxad two years after the flood”, when he was 100 years old.

Here then, we see that the two catastrophes, the flood and the separation of the human race into nations, exerted a powerful influence in shortening the duration of life; the former by altering the climate of the earth, the latter by changing the habits of men.

But while the length of life diminished, the children were born proportionally earlier.

The usual phrase, "These are the generations," marks the beginning of the fifth document.

Accordingly, we now enter upon a new phase of human development.

The nations have gradually departed from the living God.

They have not, however, stopped at this negative stage of ungodliness.

They have fallen into polytheism and idolatry.

And the knowledge of the one true God, the Maker, Possessor, and Upholder of heaven and earth, is on the verge of being entirely lost.

Nevertheless, the promises, first to the race of Adam, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head.

And next to the family of Noah, that the LORD should be the God of Shem, were still in force.

It is obvious, from the latter promise, that the seed of the woman is to be expected within the line of Shem.

Verse 10 lets us know that Shem was 98 years old, when the flood was over.

This too, makes you wonder about the belief that Noah was 120 years building the ark.

Notice here (in verse 11), the apparent dropping of the names of the other children who were not in the lineage of Jesus.

Here again, you see the Bible is not written in chronological order.

These few verses were going more into detail about those who were mentioned in Jesus' lineage.

**Genesis 11:12-13 "And Arphaxad lived five and thirty years, and begat Salah:" "And Arphaxad lived after he begat Salah four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters."**

And Arphaxad lived thirty five years, and begat Salah.

Arphaxad is the first on record that had a son born to him so early; of Salah (see Genesis 10:24).

**Genesis 11:14 "And Salah lived thirty years, and begat Eber:"**

“Eber”:

Progenitor of the Hebrews (i.e., Eber's descendants).

**Genesis 11:15-19 "And Salah lived after he begat Eber four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters." "And Eber lived four and thirty years, and begat Peleg:" "And**



**Eber lived after he begat Peleg four hundred and thirty years, and begat sons and daughters." "And Peleg lived thirty years, and begat Reu:" "And Peleg lived after he begat Reu two hundred and nine years, and begat sons and daughters."**

Have you noticed something here?

These years were like our years, because these people were having their first children around the age of thirty.

Something else interesting, the life spans were decreasing just a little bit.

**Genesis 11:20-22 "And Reu lived two and thirty years, and begat Serug:" "And Reu lived after he begat Serug two hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters." "And Serug lived thirty years, and begat Nahor:"**

I guess it is time to stop and look at a few of these names.

"Reu" means friend.

In Luke, Reu was called Ragau.

Being in the ancestry of Abraham, it is very important to remember these people.

Reu's son, Serug, is the great grandfather of Abraham.

Serug was the father of Nahor.

In Luke, his name was translated in Greek and came out Saruch.

There was a city in Mesopotamia near Haran, which tells us these Hebrews really did come to Haran to live.

"Nahor":

This means snoring.

Nahor was the son of Serug, and father of Terah.

Nahor would be the grand-father of Abraham.

Later in this lesson, we will realize that one of Abraham's brothers was named Nahor, as well.

In Luke, many of these names sound a little different, and that's because they have been translated into Greek.

**Genesis 11:23-25 "And Serug lived after he begat Nahor two hundred years, and begat sons and daughters." "And Nahor lived nine and twenty years, and begat Terah:" "And Nahor lived after he begat Terah a hundred and nineteen years, and begat sons and daughters."**

Whilst Noah with his 950 years belonged entirely to the old world, and Shem, who was born before the flood, reached the age of 600, Arphaxad lived only 438 years, Salah 433, and Eber 464; and again, with Peleg the duration of life fell to 239 years, Reu also lived only 239 years, Serug 230, and Nahor not more than 148.

**Genesis 11:26 "And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran."**

“Seventy years”:

The age that Terah began to father children.

Abram was born later when Terah was 130 (2165 B.C.; 11:32 with 12:4).

“Begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran”:

Abram was not the oldest, but is mentioned first since God chose him for the messianic line (5:32 for the same pattern).

According to 12:4, Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran; and according to verse 32, Terah died when he was 205 years old, which means that Abram was born when his father was 130.

Abram means “Exalted Father.”

This signified his honored status as progenitor of God’s chosen people.

Later, in 17:5, his name would be changed to Abraham, which means “Father of a Great Multitude.”

He was born in approximately 2165 B.C.

In Genesis 11:26 the genealogy closes, like that in Genesis 5:32, with the names of three sons of Terah, all of whom sustained an important relation to the subsequent history.

In other words, Abram as the father of the chosen family, Nahor as the ancestor of Rebekah (compare Genesis 11:29 with Genesis 22:20-23), and Haran as the father of Lot (Genesis 11:27).

Now the reason three sons were mentioned here, specifically, was because all three would enter into the movement of the history of Abraham.

Terah, the father of Abram (Abraham), was an idolater, as we read in Joshua.

Joshua 24:2 "And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, [even] Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods."

We will find later on that they settled in Ur of the Chaldees.

The word Abram means high father.

We will see the name Abram changed to Abraham in future lessons.

The name Haran means road, caravan, or route.

Verses 11:27 – 25:11

The genealogy of Terah (verse 27).

**Genesis 11:27-28 "Now these [are] the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot."**

“Abram”:

The name means “exalted father” (17:5).

**Genesis 11:28 "And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees."**

“Ur of the Chaldees”:

A prosperous, populous city in Mesopotamia.

Most locate “Ur of the Chaldees” in Sumer, in southern Mesopotamia, while others locate it in northern Mesopotamia, at Urfa, Haran.

The Sumerian Ur was one of the most spectacular cities of the ancient world.

If indeed Abraham migrated from this city to Haran, he left behind an advanced culture, to put his faith in the promises of God.

“Ur”:

This was one of the most significant and prosperous cities of its time.

It was located about 10 miles west of the Euphrates River near the Persian Gulf, some two hundred miles southeast of Baghdad.

It is significant in Scripture as the city from which Abraham departed on his pilgrimage to the Promised Land (verse 31).

Archaeological excavations were begun there as early as 1854, but the most significant work was done by Sir Charles L. Woolley (1922-34).

Discoveries included a golden helmet, golden daggers and drinking cups, a royal cemetery where kings were buried with an entire retinue of servants, numerous clay tablets, cylinder seals, statues, musical instruments, the elaborate headdress and jewelry of Queen Shubad, and a 70-foot-high ziggurat (a brick, pyramid tower rising in step-like stages).

This Sumerian city had one of the most advanced cultures in all the ancient world.

We see here, that Abram's brother, Haran, died and left Abram with Lot (Abraham's nephew).

It seemed that the whole family lived in Ur of the Chaldees at this time.

**Genesis 11:29 "And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife [was] Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah."**

Milcah was mentioned prominently, here, because she was the grandmother of Rebekah, who later on married Isaac.

**Genesis 11:30 "But Sarai was barren; she [had] no child."**

"Sarai", probably, means contentious.

Later on, God changed her name to "Sarah", which means princess.

Later in the Scriptures, Abraham would call Sarah his sister.

Genesis 20:12 "And yet indeed [she is] my sister; she [is] the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife."

It seems, she was his half-sister.

The Scriptures did not go into detail on this.

At any rate Sarai had not had children at this point.

**Genesis 11:31 "And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there."**

“Haran”:

This was a commercial center on the main highway linking the Mediterranean coast to the Euphrates River.

The city was a center of the Babylonian moon cult and so it was probably founded by Sumerians from Ur.

Haran is identified in Scripture as the city Terah settled in after leaving Ur (verse 31) and the place Abraham departed from to go south into Canaan (12:1).

Later, Abraham's servant went to Haran seeking a bride for Isaac (24:4), and Jacob fled to Haran from Esau.

There also Jacob married Leah and Rachel (chapter 29).

Excavations were concluded there by D.J. Rice (1951-56), revealing the early culture of the Sumerian city and its later Assyrian influence.

By 1300 B.C. it was fortified by the Assyrian King Adad-nirari I, and thereafter served as an Assyrian provincial capital.

Josiah lost his life in battle to keep the Egyptians from going to the aid of the Assyrians in the crucial Battle of Haran (609 B.C.).

"From Ur ... came into Haran":

See 7:2-4; Heb. 11:8-10.

Abram traveled along the Euphrates to Haran, a crossroads trading town in northern Mesopotamia or Syria, the best route from which to come down into Canaan and avoid crossing the great desert with all his people and animals (see 12:4).

The city Haran was named for the man Haran.

Abram, at this time, seemed to have already taken the responsibility for Lot, his nephew.

**Genesis 11:32 "And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran.**

Now, with the death of Abram's father, who was Terah, this left Abram kind of in charge of the entire family.

At any rate from this point on, Abram felt responsible for Lot.

Note again here, that the life spans were getting a little shorter.

One thing that I forgot to mention before is that if you begin with Adam and add up all of years to Abram, you will discover that Abram was born 1948 years after Adam.

Abram is the promise to the believers.

Israel, the promise to the Jews, was born in 1948 our time.

## **Genesis Chapter 11 Questions**

1. We know for sure the language was one at what time?
2. We learned in a previous lesson that what tribe, or descendants settled there in Shinar?
3. What four cities were located in Shinar?
4. Was this the type brick that we know today? Why?
5. Where was the tower to reach?
6. What were they doing in defiance to God?
7. What were they seeking?
8. What is the only way to heaven?
9. Why did God call them children of men?
10. Why was it not good for these people to work together?
11. Did they finish their city and tower?
12. Why did I say there was a break at verse 10?
13. How old was Shem when the flood was over?
14. What makes me think that these are regular years like ours?
15. Why was Reu translated Ragau in Luke?
16. Who was the father of Abram?
17. Why were 2 of Abram's brothers named specifically?
18. Who in Abram's brothers named specifically?
19. Where did they settle?

20. What does the word Abram mean?
21. Name Abram's brothers.
22. Who was Abram's wife?
23. Who was Nahor's wife?
24. What relation was Lot to Abram?
25. Where did Terah die?
26. How many years after Adam was Abram born
27. What relation, besides wife, was Sarai to Abram?