

Babel On 12-31-06

Genesis 11

I'm going to address the lineage of Shem first, and then come back to the story of the tower of Babel told in the first 9 verses of this chapter. We know the family of Shem has a special blessing pronounced over it by Noah, so now the focus is on his line up to Abram. We already saw the lineage of Shem up to Peleg and through his brother Joktan and Joktan's descendents in the last chapter. Now we will see the rest of it.

Here in 11, the author reverts to the pattern we saw in chapter 5. So-and-so has a son at a certain age and then lives so many more years. The big difference is that in these ten generations, the words, "and he died" are not added. (Genesis 5:5) Either the author is assuming we have already gotten the point that we all die, or because there is no exception like Enoch it goes without saying.

The other noticeable difference is the declining life spans after the flood. Some theorized that with the layer of water no longer in the upper atmosphere, the UV rays of the sun sufficiently affected our DNA so as to shorten our life span to the 120 years that God had predicted. (Genesis 6:3)

The patterns of numbers continue in this section. The fourteenth (2x7) from Adam is Eber, from whom we get the name Hebrews. The seventh from Eber is Abram, who is the 21st from Adam (3x7). All this would suggest that there is a divine plan that is being carried out. God is sovereignly writing His story.

In that chapter 10 we read about the languages of the different family groups covering parts of the known world. Then we begin 11 with there being only one language. Apparently 11 is the story of how they dispersed. So then we could interpret the statement about Peleg in whose days the earth was divided as the generation in which Babel took place. Abram comes on the scene only five generations after the tower of Babel and ten from the flood.

Verse 27 begins with what should now be familiar words to you, "these are the generations of," or the story of, *toledot* in Hebrew. Verse 26 was the last of the primeval fathers and 27 begins the sixth *toledot* of Genesis, the story of Abram in the patriarchal period. This is the second major division in Genesis.

This set of ten generations ends like the last set of ten, with the birth of three sons. (Genesis 5:32) Abram, like Shem, was named first, not because of birth order but because of importance. And here, a whole new story begins. It is a story of hope and promise, of another covenant with God. It is important for us to understand that official covenants began with an introduction to both parties. In one sense, the whole of Genesis through this chapter is an introduction of God and Abraham. It is telling us who God is by what He has done and said, and it's telling us who Abram is by way of telling us about his ancestors. We see over and over again how unfaithful and rebellious man is and how faithful, just, and holy God is. These are the two

Commented [notes1]: 5 Altogether, Adam lived 930 years, and then he died.
Gen 5:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 3 Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal ; his days will be a hundred and twenty years."
Gen 6:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 32 After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth.
Gen 5:32 (NIV)

parties involved in the great covenant of the next chapter. (Genesis 12:2,3) Our Genesis roller coaster is now ascending from the depths of that disastrous low at Babel.

At this point, let us go back to the story of the dispersion from the plains of Shinar during the days of Peleg. The first nine verses of this chapter in the Hebrew language contain another wonder of literature. There are plays on similar sounding words, rhyme, alliteration and most fascinating of all is the whole story is done as an extended chiasmus. The first four verses are mirrored in the last four in opposite order with verse 5 being the hinge. A B C D E D C B A

There is also a similarity to the Eden story. Both Eden and Babel are between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. (Genesis 2:14) Both stories are of man trying to go beyond the limitations God has placed on them. (Genesis 3:17) Both were attempting to obtain godlike power. (Genesis 3:5) God's reference to Himself in the plural is the same. (Genesis 1:26) Both are confronted by God and judged, and both are remembered for their expulsion. (Genesis 3:24) This implied that man had come back to his original problem. The flood had not changed his heart. He was back where he started, ignoring God and demanding his own way. How typical of man. I'm by no means a literary scholar, but I don't believe that there are any other ancient writings that even come close the genius of Genesis.

¹ Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. ² As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. Remember, we are going back in time to the days of Peleg, only 100 to 300 years after the flood. It is amazing they fell so far so fast, but that is about the age of the U.S.A. The descendents of Noah had moved from the mountains of Ararat eastward. They were ignoring the Lord's command to fill the earth. (Genesis 9:7) They had decided that there was security in sticking together. Besides, they were one extended family, and who wants to leave all the relatives behind? The warrior Nimrod may have been a type of king that directed the people in this move. (Genesis 10:8) Josephus tells us that was the belief of early Jews. They saw Nimrod as a tyrant king that promoted idolatry.

In Genesis, moving eastward is often a sign of moving away from the Lord. The cherubim guarded the entrance on the east of Eden. Lot left Abram and traveled east toward Sodom. (Genesis 13:11) Abraham's sons by Keturah were sent away from Isaac to the east country. (Genesis 25:6) Jacob fled to the land of the people of the east. In our story today, all of mankind is moving eastward. Together as one they are refusing to obey the Lord. Instead of disbursing, they settled there in the East.

There are times in almost every life when we have made up our mind that we are more comfortable doing what we desire than what the Lord has asked. (Luke 14:33) We settle for being silent, for being the final decision maker, for possessions or for places as in this story. We know what God has called us to, but we rationalize that we are better off doing it our way, and we head east. As Rick Warren says, "To

Commented [notes4]: 2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.
3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."
Gen 12:2-3 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 14 The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.
Gen 2:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."
Gen 2:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: 5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."
Gen 3:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."
Gen 1:26 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 24 After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.
Gen 3:24 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 7 As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it."
Gen 9:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 8 Cush was the father of Nimrod, who grew to be a mighty warrior on the earth.
Gen 10:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 11 So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company:
Gen 13:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: 6 But while he was still living, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them away from his son Isaac to the land of the east.
Gen 25:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.
Luke 14:33 (NIV)

rationalize is to come up with rational lies." We take our rational lies and squelch the conviction of the Spirit and settle down in our own Babylon.

³ *They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar.* The people of Mesopotamia believed their ziggurats were built by the gods. Moses is telling them that it was man that made the bricks and built the towers. So the story begins with them thinking they have come up with the greatest technology, fired brick, so they can achieve some amazing feat.

Man is stuck on himself. (Obadiah 1:3) In every age he always thinks he finally has it all together. "Now we really know how things happened and what makes things tick." The next generation comes along and completely rewrites the textbooks and now they believe they have it all figured out. And the next one comes along and so forth. Every generation thinks it has arrived. (Psalm 37:35,36) That is because we have the same heart as these builders. The truly great minds will tell you that the more answers we discover the more questions we have. The more we know, the more we realize we don't know. (Psalm 147:5)

My wife has asthma and allergies. We went to an allergy specialist and asked about all those tests they do where they prick you with different irritants. We thought we might find out what it was and then know what to do about it. How many years have they been doing that kind of testing? The specialist told us that that was determined to be a waste of time. It doesn't work! And how long did people place their trust in it? I'm not telling you not to go to doctors. I'm telling you man has this problem of always thinking he knows way more than he really knows and so he believes his own rational lies. We reek with pride. The truth is we desperately need God! We need to be obedient to God because He knows what we need and why we need it. (Exodus 20:20)

Their attitude was, "So what if God told us to disburse!" They were going to build a tower high enough that it could be seen from a far distance. This would keep them together. ⁴ *Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."* The first person in Genesis that built a city was Cain. (Genesis 4:16,17) That was in defiance of God ordering him to be a wanderer. This city of Babel was built in defiance of God as well.

What is the significance of the tower? Not only was it intended to keep them together, but it was their new religion. If the gods were in the heavens, they would make their way to the gods. The top of the tower would be in the clouds at the very gate of the moon. Later, a moon cult would be the snare to the people of the area. At the top of the ziggurats human sacrifice would take place. It is a picture of every false religion that says man can please God by his own works. (Titus 3:5)

Christianity is the only religion that says you can't build a tower to God! Nearly every false religions and Christian sect tells you that you can build a tower. Every time you think you need to do something for your salvation, to earn God's favor, its just another mud brick and some tar mortar. (Isaiah 57:12; Psalm 49:11) They had

Commented [notes15]: 3 The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, 'Who can bring me down to the ground?' Ob 1:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 35 I have seen a wicked and ruthless man flourishing like a green tree in its native soil, 36 but he soon passed away and was no more; though I looked for him, he could not be found. Psalms 37:35-36 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 5 Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit. Psalms 147:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning." Ex 20:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 16 So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. 17 Cain lay with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch. Gen 4:16-17 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, Titus 3:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 12 I will expose your righteousness and your works, and they will not benefit you. Isaiah 57:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 7 No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him-- 8 the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough-- 9 that he should live on forever and not see decay. Psalms 49:7-9 (NIV)

forgotten that the ark was God's design just like we forget the cross needs nothing added. Obedience is the result of salvation, not the path to it. (Ezekiel 36:26,27)

Let's make a name for ourselves, not for God who spared the human race, not for God who is bringing the seed that will crush the serpent's head for them! The last people who made a name for themselves were the men of renown in chapter 6, the offspring of demons. (Genesis 6:4) Now that is something to live up to. What kind of rational lies would prompt man to desire to attain that reputation?

Making a name for ourselves is the goal of many ambitious people. Fame is a seductive goal. But looking at the lives of the rich and famous should cause us to think again. (Psalm 49:11) People that live to make a name for themselves usually do so at the expense of others. The price they pay for a moment in the spotlight, a page in a book, is hardly worth it. Some believe that the only way to achieve immortality is to make a name for themselves. That is the last way to gain eternal life. In fact, Jesus promised that if you try and save your life you will lose it for sure. (Luke 9:24)

⁵ But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. Here is the hinge, the turning point in the story. God didn't have to come down to see the city and the tower. It is a mockery of human effort. As tall as their tower was (seven stories remain to this day) the LORD had to come down. (Isaiah 55:9) They could build it for the next ten generations and the Lord would still have to come down. They were never going to reach God with all their tower building and neither will we. The LORD has to come down to us, and He did! (John 8:42) In fact, this is the very season when we remember that He became Immanuel, God with us. He comes down to show us that all our tower building is a waste of time. Jesus is our high tower, (2 Samuel 22:3) our Jacob's ladder. (John 1:51) He was the only one that could make a way for us to come to God.

⁶ The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Please understand that God is not worried about the accomplishments of man. He was concerned about what man would do to himself. When man becomes united in his rebellion toward God, there is a group mindset that is hard to break free from. Every culture has a taste of it. Every cult is entrenched in it. Political groups speak the same language. Philosophies of man speak the same language. If we are going to speak the same language, it better be the language of God's word or we are in trouble. (John 12:49)

⁷ Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." There is the "us" of heaven, the royal language of the heavenly court. (Genesis 1:26) When God says, "Let us..." it makes man's determined expression of "Let us..." look pathetic. They must have just woken up one morning to a "foreign movie – without subtitles," (K. Hughes) each clan speaking its own unique language. They couldn't go on. The unity they once had for a God dishonoring goal was lost, and they disbursed into the patterns we saw in the last chapter.

Commented [notes23]: 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.
27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.
Ezek 36:26-27 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days--and also afterward--when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.
Gen 6:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: 11 Their tombs will remain their houses forever, their dwellings for endless generations, though they had named lands after themselves.
Psalms 49:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: 24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.
Luke 9:24 (NIV)

Commented [notes27]: 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
Isaiah 55:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes28]: 42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me.
John 8:42 (NIV)

Commented [notes29]: The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence.
2 Sam 22:3 (KJV)

Commented [notes30]: 51 And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.
John 1:51 (KJV)

Commented [notes31]: 49 For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.
John 12:49 (NIV)

Commented [notes32]: 26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."
Gen 1:26 (NIV)

⁸ So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. They weren't going to obey, so God made it so that they had to obey. In doing so, the depravity man was slowed for a time. It is not as though this period was without a witness. There were righteous men like Melchizedek and Job. Going away from the city and back to the earth surely caused many to think about their Creator. I don't know what that says about city life today. It is certainly filled with distractions.

⁹ That is why it was called Babel --because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth. What some referred to as "the naval of the earth" was now known as the place of confusion. It would be rebuilt again as Babylon. One of its kings would boast about the amazing city he had built there saying, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" Daniel 4:30 (NIV) He had built his own city and tower of a similar kind, and God confused him too. (Daniel 4:33) Babylon became known in Scripture as place of evil. (Revelation 18:2) To make our own way, independent of God, is to live in a Babylon of our own making for our own glory. It is the natural way for unredeemed man. Even preachers can build churches that are really for the glory of their majesty. God often confuses them too.

At this point the narrative of Babel is complete and the generations of Shem begins again. This was the explanation of how those tribes in the last chapter were scattered in their own language groups.

Remember that there was a reversal of Babel in the first century, Pentecost, when everyone heard the disciples speaking in their own language the wonders of God. (Acts 2:7,8) When the Spirit is poured out there is no need to impose on people restrictions to keep them from sin, the conviction of the Spirit will do that.

There is coming a day predicted by Zephaniah. ⁹ "For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, That they all may call on the name of the LORD, To serve Him with one accord. Zephaniah 3:9 (NKJV) The nations of the earth will again be united, but not to rebel against God, but to worship Him. Of New Jerusalem, John wrote, ²⁴ And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. ²⁵ Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). ²⁶ And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. Revelation 21:24-26 (NKJV) The nations will be united to bring glory and honor to God. Man has always been trying to build a counterfeit for the city of God. The city of man is for man's glory and man's ways instead of the New Jerusalem for the glory of God.

If unity is over something other than the Lord and His glory, it can be very persuasive and very destructive. Unity for the sake of unity can be evil. People can be united in slander, in pride, and in all kinds of works of the flesh. Or we can be united in the Spirit for the glory of God. Let us pray that each of us is united with the body of Christ one purpose, the glory and praise of God. Let us speak the

Commented [notes33]: 33 Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird. Dan 4:33 (NIV)

Commented [notes34]: With a mighty voice he shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. Rev 18:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes35]: 7 Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Acts 2:7-8 (NIV)

language of love. Let us find Jesus alone to be our high tower. Let us be pleased to lift up the name of the Lord rather than our own, to see Him alone exalted. Amen?