

CHAOS TO ORDER

The tower of Babel.

Genesis 11

Introduction

From Adam and Eve to the Tower of Babel, the whole earth was of one language. When God observes the people and their tower, he confuses their language because of their rebellion and wickedness. Since the people could no longer understand one another, the people scattered over the face of the earth. The place became known as Babel because it is where God confused their language.

One of the descendants of Shem is Terah. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran died in the land of Ur. He was the father of Lot, Abram's nephew. Terah, Abram, and his wife, Sarai, take Lot and set out for the land of Canaan, but they stop and settle in the Haran.

Genesis Chapter 11 begins by telling us about the tower in the land of Shinar.

"Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. 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. Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake *them* thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *is* in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." ([Genesis 11:1-4 NKJV](#))

The Bible teaches that mankind has a common origin in Adam, which makes it evident that there was a time when humanity spoke one language instead of the hundreds on the earth today. Shinar was also the term used of Babylon in Genesis 10:10.

It's hard to believe, but many of the descendants of Noah later came together to build a great city and tower in rebellion against God's command to spread out over the earth Genesis 9:1. They used baked bricks and asphalt for mortar and built a strong and waterproof tower, just as Noah waterproofed the Ark. (Moses' mother, Jochebed, used the same material to waterproof Moses' basket (Exodus 2:3).

Archaeologists have discovered that this type of kiln-fired brick and asphalt construction was common in ancient Babylon. The type of materials used to construct the tower of Babel shows that they were disobedient to God's command to fill the earth. But it also shows they didn't believe God's promise to never again flood the earth. They made their tower waterproof to protect themselves against a future deluge. It's a strong statement of distrust in God.

When they said, "Let us build ourselves a city and a tower whose top is in the heavens," they meant it. The intention was to build the first skyscraper as a monument to the glory of mankind. The builders of the tower intended for it to

reach into the heavens, but it's doubtful they thought they could really build a tower *to* heaven. It is more likely they built the tower as an observation point of their man-made achievements on the earth. (Most astrological and occult practices have a history back to Babel.)

If they really wanted to build a tower to reach heaven, it is unlikely they would start on the plain of Shinar, which is about Sea Level. Common sense says they would start on one of the nearby mountains.

The Tower of Babel was real. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus said the tower of Babel still stood in his day, and he had seen it.

I. God Confounds Man's Plans

In verse 5, God scatters the people over the whole earth.

"But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, "Indeed the people *are* one, and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth." (Genesis 11:5-9 NKJV)

When it says, "The LORD came down to see the city and the tower," it could very well indicate this was an Old Testament Christophanies, a time when Christ came down in bodily form. The personal character of the language indicates this perhaps was a time when God came down in the form of a man, in the Person of Jesus Christ. The plural reference to God is a subtle reference to the Trinity.

The potential for evil in fallen humanity is terrible and powerful. When we think of evil and violence in our world right now, it's amazing people are entirely unreasonable, destructive, and unwilling to dialogue without shouting down those who disagree with them. This force became so volatile and demonic during this time in Genesis that God had to scatter the people to break up this fixation on evil.

In God's mercy, the confounding of their language forced them to abandon their goal of unifying against God and caused their separation. This actually initiated what God had commanded the people to do: to spread out across the face of the earth. By dividing the people both linguistically and geographically, it put a check on the power of their fallen nature.

The division of the languages is a fascinating subject. Modern linguists know that we did not invent language any more than we invented our own circulatory or nervous system. Most modern linguists believe language is so unique that the only way they can explain it apart from God is to say it was part of a unique

evolutionary process. But language is so complex because languages exist as whole systems, not as small parts. Most modern linguists believe all languages come from one original language.

Verse 9 says that from the land of Shinar, the LORD scattered the people abroad over the face of all the earth. The people had to look for a suitable place to live. Once they found it, they existed by hunting and gathering, living in crude dwellings or caves until they could support themselves through agriculture and take advantage of the natural resources.

Families multiplied rapidly developed their own culture and distinctive biological and physical characteristics influenced by their environment. In a small population, genetic characteristics changed very quickly, but as the population of a group grew larger, the changes stabilized.

Sadly, the account of what happened at Babel with its anti-God dictator, its organized rebellion against God, and its direct distrust of God's promise shows we haven't gotten any better since the flood. Time, progress, government, and organization have made people to be better off, but certainly not better people.

God's goal is to make us better. And that always starts with one person who is willing to trust and obey God.

II. God Always Has A Remnant

Verse 10 lists the line of Adam through Shem to Abram.

"This *is* the genealogy of Shem: Shem *was* one hundred years old, and begot Arphaxad two years after the flood. After he begot Arphaxad, Shem lived five hundred years, and begot sons and daughters. Arphaxad lived thirty-five years, and begot Salah. After he begot Salah, Arphaxad lived four hundred and three years, and begot sons and daughters. Salah lived thirty years, and begot Eber. After he begot Eber, Salah lived four hundred and three years, and begot sons and daughters. Eber lived thirty-four years, and begot Peleg. After he begot Peleg, Eber lived four hundred and thirty years, and begot sons and daughters. Peleg lived thirty years, and begot Reu. After he begot Reu, Peleg lived two hundred and nine years, and begot sons and daughters. Reu lived thirty-two years, and begot Serug. After he begot Serug, Reu lived two hundred and seven years, and begot sons and daughters. Serug lived thirty years, and begot Nahor. After he begot Nahor, Serug lived two hundred years, and begot sons and daughters. Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and begot Terah. After he begot Terah, Nahor lived one hundred and nineteen years, and begot sons and daughters." ([Genesis 11:10-25 NKJV](#))

This is the genealogy of Shem. This genealogy is important because, in Luke 3, it becomes part of the Messianic line. Nahor was 29 when he fathered Terah. Nahor was Abraham's grandfather, and Terah was his dad. Abraham would become the godly line through which the promised deliverer of Genesis 3:15 would come.

III. Abraham Is the Godly Line

Verse 26 lists the family of Terah in Ur of the Chaldeans.

"Now Terah lived seventy years, and begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. This *is* the genealogy of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran begot Lot. And Haran died before his father Terah in his native land, in Ur of the Chaldeans."
(Genesis 11:26-28 NKJV)

Terah was seventy when he fathered Abram. Verse 26 first mentions Abram, who God later changed his name to Abraham. The Bible mentions Abraham 312 times in 272 verses. Abraham is arguably the most famous man of the Old Testament and certainly one of the most influential men in history.

The Book of Genesis covers over 2,000 years and more than 20 generations. Yet, it spends almost a third of its text on the life of one person – Abram. Abram is also uniquely called "the friend of God" in James 2:23. 2 Chronicles 20:7 calls him, "Abraham, Your friend forever." And in Isaiah 41:8, "Abraham, My friend." We all know how valuable it is to have friends in prominent positions. But Abram had a Friend in the highest place of all!

Abraham Lincoln once received a request for a pardon from a man who deserted the army. When he was told the man had no friends, Lincoln said, "I will be his friend," and he pardoned him. Thank God, Jesus calls us friends and has pardoned us of all our sins.

People in the Bible are famous for many different things, but Abram is great for his faith. Moses was the great lawgiver, Joshua a great general, David a great king, and Elijah a great prophet. There are a lot of things we will never be great at. But one thing we can all excel at is becoming a person of great faith.

In John 15, Jesus calls us friends. He said, "**You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.**" (John 15:14-15 NKJV)

We are a people of faith because of Jesus. Hebrews 11 says, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a *good* testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible." (Hebrews 11:1-3 NKJV)

Verse 8 says, "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God."
(Hebrews 11:8-10 NKJV)

And Hebrews Chapter 12 wraps it all up for us when it says, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12: 1-2 NKJV)

Christ builds the faith of Abram within us because He built it in Abram himself.

Verse 29 lists the family of Abram and his brother Nahor.

"Then Abram and Nahor took 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. But Sarai was barren; she had no child." (Genesis 11: 29-30 NKJV)

Abram's wife Sarai (her name means *Princess*) was barren, unable to bear children. Abram's name means high father or exalted father. In such a patriarchal society, it must have been an awkward embarrassment for Abram to explain that he had no children. But God can take our seemingly worst situations and turn them into blessings. For Abram and Sarai, their lack of children would eventually play an important role in God's plan of redemption.

Conclusion

In verse 31, Terah and his family travel from Ur of the Chaldeans to Haran.

"And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there. So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran." (Genesis 11: 31-32 NKJV)

Abram's story begins in Ur of the Chaldeans. Joshua 24 describes Abram before the LORD called him.

"And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Your fathers, *including* Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.'" (Joshua 24: 2-3 NKJV)

Abraham came from a family of idol worshippers and was probably an idol worshipper himself. When Abram's grandson Jacob returned to Abram's relatives, they were still worshipping idols.

Acts 7 makes it clear the call of Genesis 12 came to Abram while he still lived in Ur.

When Abram received this call from God, he wasn't completely obedient. Genesis 12 says, "Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing." (Genesis 12: 1-2 NKJV)

Abram brought with him his father, Terah, and his nephew Lot, even though God called Abram out of his country, from his family (Genesis 12: 1). Abram stopped and, at least for a time, dwelt in Haran, but it was not where God promised. They stopped short of the land that God said, "I will show you."

One writer says, "They start together for Canaan. So far, so good; at least, it looks so. The traveling is wearisome, and many are the murmurings. The huge caravan has not gone very far before the proposal is made that they should be satisfied with the move which they had made, and remain at Haran. True, it was not Canaan, but it might do as well." (Spurgeon)

Spurgeon said, "Half-way obedience increases our responsibility, because it is a plain confession that we know the Lord's will, though we do it not. Abram had received the call, and knew that he had done so, else why had he come to Haran? He admitted, by going as far as Haran, that he ought to go the whole way to Canaan; and so, by his own action he left himself without excuse." (Spurgeon)

But then Terah died in Haran. The name Terah means delay. The name Haran means parched, barren. When Abram was in partial obedience, delay, and barrenness marked his life. When we knowingly disobey God, we often delay the outworking of His plan in our lives and experience the barrenness of our disobedience. The result of this for Abram was the absence of privilege. God did not speak to his servant, Abram, in Haran, not by dream, or vision, or voice.

It isn't until Terah dies that Abram resumes the call of God upon His life. Sometimes, it takes a tragic circumstance for us to get back on track and pursue a life of faith in Christ. Whenever we fall upon hard times, we first need to check to see if we've settled for Haran instead of God's Land of Promise. If we have, we need to make some corrections and get back to pursuing our faith and trust in God and moving forward in our faith journey. Then, it won't be long and we'll be back to experiencing God's grace and promises of blessing.