

Genesis Chapter 11 - Commentary By Mike Wells

Chapter 11 Overview:

Genesis Chapter 11 is a summary of history from the end of the flood to the time of Abraham. There are several significant events here. (1) The first attempt to create a one-world system is attempted by man and aborted by God at Babel. Also the actual cause of the dispersion of nationalities is found. (2) The continued lineage of the godly seed is noted in tracing the line of Christ to Abraham. (3) A few details of the life and heritage of Abraham are provided.

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

- Evidently, God created only one language when He created Adam.
- Verbal communication is another aspect of man being created in the image of God.
- No other creature on earth has this ability.
- It would be interesting to know with which original language God created Adam.
- Many believe that Hebrew was the original language.
- This would make sense since was the language the earliest biblical patriarchs.
- However it is only an assumption as there is no biblical verification

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.*

- The ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat which is in northeastern Turkey.
- Shinar is another name for Chaldea or its later name, Babylon.
- Shinar is southeast from Ararat.
- The *they* is the families of Noah and his descendants.

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.*

- At the time of Peleg (see Genesis 10:25) at *least* 100 years after the flood, the ‘community’ of man decided to build a monument to their presumptuous plans.

Genesis 11 : 4 - *Let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.*

- The phrase “go to,” used twice here, is translated from the Hebrew word (*yahab*) and has the sense of ‘come’ or ‘come on.’
- The ‘world community’ called themselves together—“come on, let’s build us a city”.

Some Key Points:

- No one sought God’s will in the matter. To the contrary, their plan was in direct rebellion to God’s will. (**Genesis 9:1** – “*Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth*”)
- They were trying to reach heaven on their own terms and through their own ability.
- They thought they could build a tower high enough to reach heaven and God.

- It was just one of the first human schemes of religion (Many today are just as ridiculous)
- They sought to make a name for themselves (Pride of Life)
- The first organized attempt for a one-world system was launched.
- As has been the case down through the ages, God was left out.
- Humanism at it's finest – trying to accomplish a human plan while ignoring God
- God was not ready to allow such an attempt – That fullness of time was not yet ready.
- The ultimate one world government will be when Jesus Christ returns and establishes His kingdom on this earth.
- The primary building material was some sort of brick.
- The *slime* mentioned was a sort of asphalt or tar.
- Towers and pyramids were not uncommon structures in the civilization after the flood.

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

- He did not need to actually go down and see what was going on.
- He already knew.
- However, the Holy Spirit chose to portray Him so doing, perhaps to convey His likeness to mankind and that a man would investigate a matter.
- God noted their united effort and their common language.

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.*

- There were those who remained faithful to God, particularly in the lineage of Shem.
- The tower of Babel was commenced in the lifetime of Peleg (Genesis 10:25) which according to Genesis 11:10-16 was born about a century after the flood.
- Peleg lived to be about 239 years old {see Genesis 11:16- 19}.)
- Remember that Noah lived after the flood 350 years. (See Genesis 10:28.)
- Therefore, Noah was most likely living when the matter of Babel got under way.
- It is likely that he and others would have protested such an undertaking.
- “Nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do” is likely in that context.
- It is not that God could not restrain them from anything they would imagine to do.
- Rather, no longer could the *godly minority* restrain them from making this big mistake.
- God’s plan was for man to be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth (Genesis 9:1).
- Implied is that God’s plan was for mankind to spread out and inhabit the entire earth.
- The planned tower at Babel was a direct violation of His will.

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

- As noted above, the phrase “go to” might once again be rendered ‘Come’ or ‘Come on.’
- God’s plan was simple.
- He would “confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.”
- God can, will, and does thwart man’s plans with the simplest adjustment.
- Man’s plans were based upon the assumption they could communicate with each other.

- God simply changed the language of the various tribes, clans, and family groups.
- No longer could they work together.
- No longer could their willful, rebellious plans function.
- They were of necessity forced to break off the work.
- Can you imagine waking one morning, going off to some work or off to your project, and not being able to communicate with anyone.
- I bet the fighting and the distrust started immediately when the groups could not communicate with each other.
- Material suppliers could not understand the tradesmen laying the brick.
- Those keeping record of materials could not communicate with those who supplied them.
- The tower project all came to a screeching halt

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.*

- Each basic family group or tribe evidently could understand each other.
- The friction and distrust likely caused them to seek new places to settle and start over.
- Linguists have determined of all the earth's languages present today, there are only three basic, root linguistic families.
- Linguists further have suggested that of those three root languages, they likely at one time had one root.
- Recall that Noah had three sons and that there are three basic racial groups in the world.
- The basic nationalities spread across the earth on the basis of languages.
- Each nationality to this day has its own distinct language.

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 word *Babel* is of note.
- The Hebrew word appears 262 times in the Old Testament.
- Of these, it is translated as 'Babylon' 257 times, 'Babylonian' 3 times, and 'Babel' twice.
- It simply means 'confusion.'
- Even though the tower of Babel was stopped, Nimrod still settled there.
- He continued to build the city as noted in Genesis 10:10.
- Historically, Babylon has been the seat of all false religion since the flood and the source of Satanic counterfeit.
- The Babylonian mystery religion has found its way into most idolatrous, false religions to this day including the Roman Catholic Church.
- The ungodly, rebellious spirit who motivated the original tower of Babel project continued on through Nimrod and the city he built.
- Satan has always favored a one world system, because it allows him an opportunity to effectively seek control
- He was thwarted in his bid at Babel.
- He will try again during the Tribulation when the church and the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit are removed.

- However, God's perfect plan is for a one world government to exist under the royal authority: the King of Kings, Jesus Christ.

Genesis 11 : 10-26 – *10 These are the generations of Shem: Shem was an hundred years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood: 11 And Shem lived after he begat Arphaxad five hundred years, and begat sons and daughters. 12 And Arphaxad lived five and thirty years, and begat Salah: 13 And Arphaxad lived after he begat Salah four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters. 14 And Salah lived thirty years, and begat Eber: 15 And Salah lived after he begat Eber four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters. 16 And Eber lived four and thirty years, and begat Peleg: 17 And Eber lived after he begat Peleg four hundred and thirty years, and begat sons and daughters. 18 And Peleg lived thirty years, and begat Reu: 19 And Peleg lived after he begat Reu two hundred and nine years, and begat sons and daughters. 20 And Reu lived two and thirty years, and begat Serug. 21 And Reu lived after he begat Serug two hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters. 22 And Serug lived thirty years, and begat Nahor: 23 And Serug lived after he begat Nahor two hundred years, and begat sons and daughters. 24 And Nahor lived nine and twenty years, and begat Terah: 25 And Nahor lived after he begat Terah an hundred and nineteen years, and begat sons and daughters. 26 And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran.*

- Another major lineage is set forth.
- Of note is that this line is the descendants of Shem and is the lineage of Christ.
- It is quoted in Luke's lineage of Christ in Luke 3:34-38 specifically.
- The lineage of Genesis 11 tracks Shem's descendants to Abram in 12:1.
- Only those in the direct lineage of Jesus Christ are noted.
- The Scripture thus narrows its focus of human history to the ancestors of our Lord.
- It zooms in and then follows the life and descendants of Abraham in chapter 12 and following.

The summary of this lineage is:

- **Shem** lived two years after the flood and begat Arphaxad. (2 years later)
- He lived another 500 years thereafter.
- **Arphaxad** begat Salah at the age of 35. (35 years later)
- He lived another 403 years.
- **Salah** begat Eber at the age of 30. (30 years later)
- He lived another 403 years.
- **Eber** begat Peleg at the age of 34. (34 years later)
- He lived another 430 years.
- **Peleg** begat Reu at the age of 30. (30 years later)
- He lived another 209 years.
- **Reu** begat Serug at the age of 32. (32 years later)
- He lived another 207 years.
- **Serug** begat Nahor at age 30. (30 years later)
- He lived another 200 years.
- **Nahor** begat Terah at age 29. (29 years later)
- He lived another 119 years.
- **Terah** begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran at age 70. (70 years later)

- Terah died at the total age of 205 (11:32).
- In adding the time-line, there are 292 years from the end of the flood to the birth of Terah's first son.

Genesis 11 : 27-29 – 27 Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot. 28 And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees. 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.

- The focus of divine history now narrows to the family of Abraham.
- Abram's wife's name was Sarai.
- It is noteworthy that Nahor married his first cousin.
- Such practices were not prohibited until the giving of the law in Leviticus.
- Abram also apparently married his half sister. (See Genesis 20:12).

Genesis 11 : 30 - *But Sarai was barren; she had no child.*

- As recorded in later chapters, Sarah did not have children until she was 90 years old.

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.*

- The land of Abram's birth was the Ur of the Chaldees, a region near the mouth of the Euphrates River where it joins the Persian Gulf.
- It was an idolatrous area.
- Evidence exists the inhabitants there worshiped the moon.
- From Joshua 24:2 it seems clear Terah and, perhaps in his earlier years, Abram as well as Nahor were idolaters.
- Genesis indicates that Terah took his small clan including Abram, Sarah, and Lot, departed from the Ur of the Chaldees and began a journey to Canaan.
- Hebrews 11:8 however, says it was God's call to Abram which prompted the family to begin the journey.
- For reasons undisclosed, they made it as far as Haran (present day Syria).
- Again, for reasons not told us, they **dwelt there**.
- How long, we are not told.

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

- In Haran, Terah, Abram's father died at the age of 205.
- It might be inferred the reason Abram, and his family stopped their journey at Haran was the declining health of Terah, though that is not stated in the text.