

GENESIS

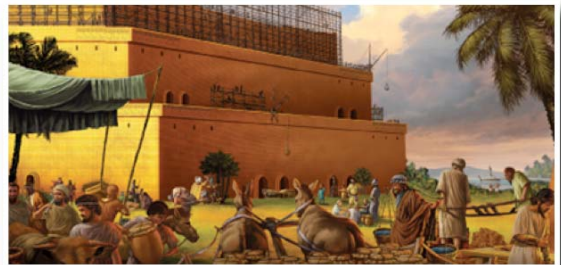
Lesson 8

The whole earth had one language . . .

THE TOWER OF BABEL

Genesis 11:1-9

In a few short verses Genesis 11 records the dramatic event surrounding the Tower of Babel. Chronologically Genesis 11 comes before Genesis 10. In fact Genesis 10:25 reveals, “To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided, and his brother's name was Joktan.” This division points to the Tower of Babel. (Illustrations from Answers in Genesis)¹



1. Prior to Babel, how many languages were found in the world (Genesis 11:1)?

In Genesis 9:1, God had commanded Noah and his descendants to be fruitful and multiply and to “fill the earth.” They were not to stay in one location, but to spread throughout the earth. Now here in Genesis 11:2, people had moved to a plain in the land of Shinar (a very fertile valley) and they stayed there with no intention of going any further. So, one part of the sin that God confronted at Babel was a people who refused to fill the earth as God commanded.

The people had learned how to make bricks and even how to bake them which made them harder. Noah and his sons probably possessed building knowledge before the flood arrived and had passed this knowledge to their children. The people used bitumen for mortar.

There was an abundance of clay in the plains providing ample resources for bricks. With these bricks the people decided to build a city and a tower. The problem here is found in

¹ <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/am/v3/n2/world-in-revolt>

Genesis 11:4 where the people express their desire to make a name for themselves. They were arrogant and filled with pride. Once again in Genesis 11:4 the people say that they wish to keep from being dispersed over the earth. They are willfully disobedient to God.

There is some question as to the purpose of the tower. While we do not know for certain why the tower was constructed there are several ideas that have been proposed. Some thought it was to protect them from future floods, but this seems unlikely since they built on a plain. Others think this was to be a ziggurat (a center for false worship that was built to interact with the gods between heaven and earth.)



While the people built the tower with the idea of reaching to the heavens, God comes down to them and takes a look at the tower. (Obviously God sees all and is everywhere, but he illustrates his dissatisfaction with them.)

If they are allowed to proceed God says that nothing they propose to do will be withheld from them (Genesis 11:6). God's decision to intervene not only punishes sin, but it also protects the people from harming themselves even further.

2. How did God intervene in Genesis 11:7-9?

3. Why does the tower became known as Babel?

The events of Genesis 11:7-9 were truly miraculous. Just as God must have given Adam and Eve the knowledge of language; now God creates multiple languages and people who had spoken one language all their lives, now speak a new language with no ability to speak the old one any longer. This confusion of language would keep people from cooperating easily on large projects like the Tower of Babel. Not only did God confuse the languages, he also scattered the people. Since they would not fill the earth as he commanded, he scatters them against their own will.

Languages do change over time and people who are isolated from one another for a period of time may lose the ability to communicate. This is not what happened at Babel however because here the confusion of languages was instantaneous. Cultures not only differ in languages, but thinking patterns vary from nation to nation. It possible that God changed more than simply the words that people use to communicate. Some also believe that at Babel God planted ethnic and racial distinctions in mankind.²

² Constable, Thomas L. *Notes on Genesis: 2009 Edition*.

All humans are from the same race since we all descended from Adam and Eve and all people have descended from the family of Noah. All human beings have the same colour of skin, just different amounts of melanin.

James Smith points out the parallelism in Genesis 11:1-9. The following chart illustrates this parallelism.³

Presumptive Intentions 11:1-4	Punitive Actions 11:5-9
One language/common speech 11:1	Confuse their language 11:7
Come let us 11:3, 4	Come let us 11:7
Build a city and a tower 11:4	Left off building the city 11:8
Make a name for ourselves 11:4	City name becomes Babel 11:9
Let we be dispersed 11:4	The Lord dispersed them 11:9

SEMI'S DESCENDANTS

Genesis 11:10-26

God continues to care man and attention now shifts to Shem and his descendants. "The history of this family becomes the focus of the rest of the Old Testament.⁴ God is still acting in the interest of man and through Abram, the descendent of Shem all the world would be blessed. Note also the declining lifespan of man. Shem lived to be 600, Arpachshad 438, Shelah 433, Eber 464, Peleg 239, Reu 239, Serug 230, and Nahor 148, and Terah 205.

Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran who was the father of Lot. Abram's wife (also his half-sister) is named Sarai and she is barren. Nahor married his niece Milcah. The marriage to those who are closely related will later be forbidden in the Law of Moses.

From 1 Kings 6:1 and Exodus 12:40 we are able to calculate other dates in the patriarchal age. This would date Abram's birth to the year B.C. 2166. We know from Genesis 15:7, Nehemiah 9:7, and Acts 7:2-3 that Abram was called from Ur.

4. Describe the travels of Terah, Abram, Lot, and Sarai according to Genesis 11:31.

³ Smith, James E. *Biblical Protology: Commentary on Genesis 1-11*. 2007. p. 508.

⁴ <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/am/v3/n2/world-in-revolt>

THE CALL OF ABRAM

Genesis 12:1-9

5. What does God call Abram to do in Genesis 12:1?

6. What blessings does God promise to Abram in Genesis 12:1-3?

Abram never personally gained the land that was promised to his offspring, but he did leave his home, his family, and his land not even knowing where he was headed (Hebrews 11:8). He is called a great man of faith.



The great nation promised in Genesis 12:2 was the nation of Israel. He gained a great name as his descendants made a great nation and as the Saviour eventually came through his lineage (Galatians 3:8, 16).

7. Who did Abram take with him when he departed Haran (Genesis 12:4-5)?

8. What promise did God make to Abram at Shechem (Genesis 12:7)?

THE CALL OF ABRAM

Genesis 12:10-20

9. Why did Abram go to Egypt (Genesis 12:10)?

It appears that Abram suffered a lack of faith as famine struck the land. He moved to Egypt which was the most prolific grain producer in the ancient world. We have no record that God instructed Abram to make this journey, so he must have done it on his own.

Four consequences came upon Abram as his faith wavered. 1) Abram was deceptive by saying that Sarai was his sister (Genesis 12:13). Even though she was his half-sister, he only made this claim to protect himself. It was selfish and faithless. 2) Sarai was taken by the Egyptians for Pharaoh (Genesis 12:15). 3) Because of his deceptiveness; pain and suffering came to the house of Pharaoh (Genesis 12:17); 4) Abram was chastised by Pharaoh (Genesis 12:18-19).