

ACCOUNT #1: TOWER OF BABEL

Genesis 10:1-11:9 (p. 14-16)

February 9, 2020

*These are the clans of Noah's sons,
according to their lines of descent, within their nations.
From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood.
Genesis 10:32*

The next step in God's plan

*This is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah's sons, who themselves had sons after the flood
Genesis 10:1*

- 1) Reminds us of HISTORICAL HUMILITY
- 2) Prepares us for the miracle of PENTECOST
- 3) Equips us to DISCERN THE CANAAN LINE

The family likeness

*The sons of Japheth The sons of Ham The sons of Shem
Genesis 9:18-19*

Japhethites: GOD ALSO LOVES ISLANDERS!

Hamites: GOING EAST DOESN'T CANCEL OUT COMMON GRACE

Semites: LEFT OUT 70

A city and a tower (a flashback)

*Now the whole world had one language, and a common speech.
As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other
"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 earth."
Genesis 11:1-4*

- 1) The city is where I FIND SECURITY APART FROM GOD
- 2) The name rejects GOD'S REIGN

What the Lord saw

But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower
Genesis 11:5

- 1) Sin DOESN'T SURPRISE GOD
- 2) God sets aside Peleg to BLESS THE ALL (MICROCOSM A TYPE OF MACROCOSM → 70'S)

Dazed and confused

So the Lord scattered them from there all over the earth
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.
Genesis 11:8-9

- 1) 'Eber has no fellowship with BABEL, A RETURN TO CONFUSION/CHAOS
- 2) Only THE HOLY SPIRIT! can reverse Babel

Resources for studying Genesis 5-11

- Wilson's "When God Lays Down his Bow" at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/jared-c-wilson/when-god-lays-down-his-bow/>
- John Stevenson's studies in Genesis at <http://www.angelfire.com/nt/theology/genesis.html>
- Tremper Longman and John H. Walton, *The Lost World of the Flood* (InterVarsity Press, 2018)
- J.I. Packer's article on the hermeneutics of Genesis 1-11 at <http://preachingsource.com/journal/hermeneutics-and-genesis-1-11/>
- Bruce Waltke's *Genesis* (Zondervan, 2001). Good bibliography.
- Allen Ross' *Creation and Blessing* (Baker, 1988)
- William Ryan and Walter Pitman's *Noah's Flood: The New Scientific Discoveries About the Event that Changed History* (Simon and Schuster, 1998)
- John Sailhammer's Genesis commentary in the *Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 2* (Zondervan, 1990)
- Kenneth Mathews' *New American Commentary, Vol. 1A* (Broadman and Holman, 1996).
- Spurgeon's "Human Depravity and Divine Mercy" at <https://www.monergism.com/topics/sermon-manuscripts-mp3s-scripture/genesis/chapter-genesis/chapters-06-09-flood>
- Jonathan Edwards' message on Genesis 6:22, "The Manner in Which Salvation of the Soul is to Be Sought" at <http://www.biblebb.com/files/edwards/je-manner.htm>
- Todd Pruitt's "If God is Love . . ." article in *Credo*, December 2, 2019, at credomag.com
- Steve Ross' "Unity" blog at <https://www.acts29.com/the-unity-of-the-human-race/>
- Leupold's commentary at ccel.org/ccel/leupold/genesis.xi.html
- Ligon Duncan's "The Curse of Canaan" at www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/scripture/genesis?page=2

11:9 The narrative comes full circle with this verse, which presents the consequences of the tower event (“Therefore”). Now the people of Shinar are depicted in disarray. The parade indication of their changed situation is the new appellation “Babel.” This verse brings together the key interpretive elements we have discovered in the account. “Confused,” “name,” “whole world/earth,” “language,” “there/from there,” and “scattered” occur again as a crowning crescendo. The author’s symmetrical story has contributed to the reader’s sense that the tower awaits only to topple.

Naming a place or person based on popular etymology is common in the Bible and in Genesis in particular. Here we have the familiar naming formula where “call” (*qārā’*) and “name” (*šēm*) appear jointly, often preceded by “therefore/that is why” (*‘al kēn*). Thus the formula reads, “That is why he/she/they called his/her/its name X.” Usually the occasion for the naming is an incident at birth or a momentous event at a specific location. The etymology is not linguistic but derived by the similarity in sound between the name and the incident in view. In the case of “Babel” (*babel*) the name is phonologically related to the verb “confused” (*bālal*), which occurs twice in the story (vv. 7, 9). We remarked earlier that the Babylonians themselves understood their city to mean “gate of the gods” (*bāb-ili*). Our author’s sarcasm bites at the Babelites’ deluded aim of obtaining a “name” through the erection of the city (v. 4). We also point out the intriguing coincidence of *Enuma Elish*, where following the building of Babylon for the hero Marduk the assembly of the deities proclaims the fifty names of the god. Biblical Genesis shows that the appropriate name of Babylon—Babble—is no commendation!

The significance of the Babel story for the Mosaic community would speak to the critical role its father Abraham played in the world of nations. Israel, as his successor, must take up the same role, serving as the appointed vehicle of God’s salvation among the Gentiles. Moreover, Babel exemplified the threat that the indigenous Canaanite cities presented for Israel. These cities were perceived as overwhelming fortresses (Num 13:28; Deut 1:28; 3:5; 9:1); nevertheless they would fall before the judgment of God. Any culture, such as Babel, that defied the moral will of God would meet with the same end as the tower.

Canaan’s cities no doubt were attractive to the Israelite sons of Egypt’s slaves. It was the temptation of idolatry, a blatant rejection of the Ten Words, that especially spelled disaster for the Israelites. They were forewarned that their adoption of idolatry meant the “scattering” of the populace among the nations and the ruin of their cities. Just as the scattering meant ultimately the purging of the Babelites and their fulfillment of God’s will to “fill the earth,” the diaspora of Israel resulted in their final cleansing from idolatry. It was the exile that would pave the way for the ultimate restoration of the people whose affections once more would be turned toward their Sovereign Lord (Deut 30:3).¹

The list of descendants of Shem is also highly selective, though it does not follow any particular numerical scheme as the earlier lists. Rather, the line of Shem is traced up to the two sons of Eber and from there continues to follow the line of the second son, Joktan (vv.26–29). It is significant that another genealogy of Shem is repeated after the account of the building of Babylon (11:1–9), and there the line is continued to Abraham through the first son of Eber, Peleg (11:10–26). In arranging the genealogy of Shem in such a way, the author draws a dividing line through the descendants of Shem on either side of the city of Babylon. The dividing line falls between the two sons of Eber, that is, Peleg and Joktan. One line leads to the building of Babylon and the other to the family of Abraham. The author supplies a hint to this division of the line of Shem with the comment that in Peleg’s day “the earth was divided” (v.25). As throughout the biblical text, the “earth” is a reference to the “inhabitants of the land.” Thus not only is the land divided in the confusion of languages (11:1), but, more fundamentally, two great lines of humanity diverge from the midst of the sons of Shem: those who seek to make a name (Shem) for themselves in the building of the city of Babylon (11:4) and those for whom God will make a name in the call of Abraham (Shem, 12:2).²

¹ Mathews, K. A. (1996). *Genesis 1-11:26* (Vol. 1A, pp. 485–486). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

² Sailhamer, J. H. (1990). *Genesis*. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers* (Vol. 2, p. 102). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

Principles for problem passages

In a wonderful article titled “Hermeneutics and Genesis 1-11”, J. I. Packer outlines some very important principles, questions and themes that will help us understand and apply these sometimes divisive and often difficult passages. By “canon” Dr. Packer refers to the rule or authority of the Bible.

1. The canon is *coherent*

2. The canon is *organic*

3. The canon is *churchly*

4. The text is *poetic prose* that illustrates *archetypal history* that are explored with these four questions:

- exegetical: what is the writer’s meaning and message?
- theological: what is the writer’s truth for us today?
- hermeneutic: what prejudices are keeping me from taking God’s word more seriously?
- practical: what then must I do?

5. Packer identifies these as the key themes of the prologue to God’s word:

- God’s sovereign power, in creation and providence
- God’s covenant purposes which shape his dealings with us
- God’s moral glory which cannot approve evil
- God’s gracious kindness to humanity, tempering judgment with mercy and never abandoning his covenant promises

During the next 35 years, the traditional view of the sanctity of human life will collapse under pressure from scientific, technological, and demographic developments. By 2040, it may be that only a rump of hard-core, know-nothing religious fundamentalists will defend the view that every human life, from conception to death, is sacrosanct.

Peter Singer, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/20/the-sanctity-of-life/>