

# Genesis 11 Commentary

Previous

Next

CLICK VERSE  
To go directly to that verse

- Genesis 11:1 Commentary
- Genesis 11:2 Commentary
- Genesis 11:3 Commentary
- Genesis 11:4 Commentary
- Genesis 11:5 Commentary
- Genesis 11:6 Commentary
- Genesis 11:7 Commentary
- Genesis 11:8 Commentary
- Genesis 11:9 Commentary
- Genesis 11:10 Commentary
- Genesis 11:11 Commentary
- Genesis 11:12 Commentary
- Genesis 11:13 Commentary
- Genesis 11:14 Commentary
- Genesis 11:15 Commentary
- Genesis 11:16 Commentary
- Genesis 11:17 Commentary
- Genesis 11:18 Commentary
- Genesis 11:19 Commentary
- Genesis 11:20 Commentary
- Genesis 11:21 Commentary
- Genesis 11:22 Commentary
- Genesis 11:23 Commentary
- Genesis 11:24 Commentary
- Genesis 11:25 Commentary
- Genesis 11:26 Commentary
- Genesis 11:27 Commentary
- Genesis 11:28 Commentary
- Genesis 11:29 Commentary
- Genesis 11:30 Commentary
- Genesis 11:31 Commentary
- Genesis 11:32 Commentary

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Summary Chart of The Book of Genesis								
Focus	Foundation Events (Four Events) (Events Predominant)				Foundation People (Four People) (People Predominant)			
Divisions	Creation (Ge 1-2)	Fall (Ge 3-5)	Flood (Ge 6-9)	Nations (Ge 10-12)	Abraham's Faith (Ge 12-24)	Isaac's Family (Ge 25-26)	Jacob's Conflicts (Ge 27-36)	Joseph's Calamity (Ge 37-50)
	Beginning of the Human Race (Race As A Whole)				Beginning of the Hebrew Race (Family of Abraham)			

<b>Topics</b>	Faithfulness of Mankind (Noah)	Faithfulness of One Man's Family (Abraham)
	Historical	Biographical
<b>Place</b>	Eastward From Eden to Ur	Westward From Canaan to Egypt
<b>Time</b>	~2000+ Years (20% of Genesis) (~4004-2090BC)	About 300 Years 193 Yr in Canaan, 93 Yr in Egypt (80% of Genesis) (2090-1804BC)
	Primeval History of Humanity	Patriarchal History of Israel
<b>Author</b>	Moses	

## BEGINNINGS

- Ge 1:1-25 - The Universe (Everything)
- Ge 1:26-2:25 - The Human Race
- Ge 3:1-7 - Sin Enters the World
- Ge 3:8-24- God Promises Redemption from Bondage to Sin
- Ge 4:1-15 - Family Life
- Ge 4:16ff - Civilization
- Ge 10:1-11:32 - The Nations of the World
- Ge 12:1ff - The Story of Israel and the Jews

## Genesis 11:1 Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words.

- Isa 19:18 Zep 3:9 Ac 2:6
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## Related Passages:

Acts 2:6+ And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language.

Acts 17:26-27+ and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, 27 that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

## WHOLE WORLD HAS COMMON LANGUAGE

The reader should be aware that Genesis 11:1-9 explains the scattering of the people in Genesis 10 "The Table of Nations."

[NIV Study Bible](#) (BORROW) - The author of Genesis uses the story of the flood and the story of Babel to characterize the ways of humankind and God's responses through acts of judgment in order to thwart humanity's proud efforts to rule over the creation, not as God's faithful representatives but as rebels. With this characterization of human history outside God's saving work, the author sets the stage for God's call of Abram out of the post-Babel world to begin his redemptive work that would unfold in Israel's history.

[Warren Wiersbe](#) has an excellent introduction to Genesis 11 writing that "Man proposes, but God disposes." That familiar statement is almost a religious cliché. Many people who use it don't even know what it means. It was written by the Augustinian monk Thomas à Kempis (ca. 1380–1471) in his classic book On the Imitation of Christ. An expanded version is the proverb, "Man does what he can, God does what He will." Solomon used more words but said it best: "There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless the Lord's counsel—that will stand" (Prov. 19:21 nkjv). Few chapters in the Bible illustrate this truth better than Genesis 11. When you read the narrative about Babel and then read the genealogies that follow, your immediate impression is that God is at work in His

world and is accomplishing His purposes in spite of the plans and projects of sinful people. Four great events are recorded in Genesis 1—11: the creation of the universe, the fall of man, the flood, and the attempted construction of the Tower of Babel. These chapters reveal that where mankind disobeys God, the Lord judges sin, and then in His grace makes a new beginning. Adam and Eve sinned, but God clothed them and promised to send the world a Redeemer. Cain killed Abel, but God sent Seth to carry on the godly line. The Sethites intermarried with the godless Cainites, and God had to wipe the earth clean with a flood, but Noah and his family believed God's Word and were spared. After the flood, the descendants of Noah's three sons repopulated the earth. But the new beginning with Noah eventually led to one of the most arrogant revolts against God recorded anywhere in Scripture."

**Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words**(Hebrew = one lip) - This fact sets the stage for what God will soon do to the world's language. In a sense this parallels Ge 10:1 where "the generations of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah" all had a common language. **Whole earth** reminds me of the old chorus "[He's Got the Whole World in His Hands](#)." Keep in mind in Genesis 10 we see the **whole earth** (the inhabitants thereof) had been scattered into multiple nations (Ge 10:5). Same words is literally "one lip" signifying they had the same vocabulary. As an aside the actual first language is not known.

**NET NOTE - The whole earth.** Here "earth" is a [metonymy](#) of subject, referring to the people who lived in the earth. Genesis 11 begins with everyone speaking a common language, but chap. 10 has the nations arranged by languages. It is part of the narrative art of Genesis to give the explanation of the event after the narration of the event. On this passage see A. P. Ross, "The Dispersion of the Nations in Genesis 11:1–9," BSac 138 (1981): 119–38. ([SEE BELOW](#)) **The Same Words** = Heb "one lip and one [set of] words." The term "lip" is a metonymy of cause, putting the instrument for the intended effect. They had one language. The term "words" refers to the content of their speech. They had the same vocabulary.

**Bob Deffinbaugh:** Now there is nothing wrong with a common **language**. It is not evil, nor is it the cause of evil. Communication was greatly enhanced by it. It facilitated community life and was the foundation for unity. Potentially, a common language could have drawn men and women together in the worship and work of God. Practically, it was perverted to promote disobedience and unbelief. God's gift of language, like other gifts of His grace, was misused. Sinful man cannot do anything but misappropriate God's gifts of grace. ([Genesis 11:1-9 - The Unity of Unbelief](#))

**MacArthur Study Bible** (Borrow) - God, who made man as the one creature with whom He could speak (Ge 1:28), was to take the gift of language and use it to divide the race, for the apostate worship at Babel indicated that man had turned against God in pride (Ge 11:8, 9).

**Bob Utley** - It is obvious that Genesis 11 explains the dispersion described in Genesis 10. This one language, which apparently went back to Eden, was not Hebrew. The first discovered examples of ancient Hebrew date from about 1000 B.C., although newly found wall texts from mines in the Sinai peninsula may be earlier. The oldest written languages known to moderns is cuneiform [Sumerian](#), dating from 3,000 B.C. (ABD, vol. 1, p. 1213), and the culture from 10,000-8,000 B.C. There is a Sumerian epic called "[Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta](#)," where it specifically states all people spoke one language.

**John Piper** - A Perplexing Matter Answered. Let's begin by clarifying one perplexing matter of context. Genesis 11:1–9 seems to describe the origin of languages. But careful readers of Genesis notice that in chapter 10 the peoples and languages are described already before the tower of Babel in Genesis 11. For example, look at Genesis 10:5: "The coastland peoples spread in their lands, each with his own language, by their clans, in their nations." Then you get to Genesis 11:1 and it says, "Now the whole earth had one language and the same words." The author knew what he was doing. He has not forgotten in Ge 11:1 what he just wrote in Ge 10:5, 20, and 31 (just two verses earlier). The solution is to recognize that the author has not put these two stories in chronological order. He first describes the spread of the peoples and languages in chapter 10 and then he describes the origin of that diversity in Genesis 11:1–9. Sometimes, when you have something shocking to say about why an event happens, you put it at the beginning of the event, and sometimes you wait and put it at the end of the event. After the flood God had said to Noah in Genesis 9:1, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." That's what chapter 10 describes. It was happening as peoples and languages multiplied. It looked like a simple fulfillment of God's command. It looked like obedience. Then Genesis 11:1–9 drops the bomb on us. It wasn't obedience. They weren't spreading. They were clustering. God came down and shattered their disobedience and made their clustering impossible. He confused their language and broke humanity into many peoples and languages. (Full sermon [The Pride of Babel and the Praise of Christ](#))

**Griffith Thomas:** This is an example of the characteristic, already mentioned, of dealing with collateral branches first, and only after that considering the main stream in the descendants of Shem. . . . This table of nations show their kinship with the chosen race, out of which all spiritual blessing is to become. Then the nations are dismissed from the Scripture record, and attention concentrated on the Semitic line. ([Genesis 11:1-9 The Tower of Babel](#))

**Ray Pritchard - Background to Help Understand Genesis 11** - In order to understand this story, there are a few background facts we need to know. **First**, the story of the Tower of Babel occurred just a few generations after Noah's flood. It may have happened 100-150 years later. By this time the population of the world had expanded considerably from just eight people to a much larger

number. One writer suggests that there were more than 30,000 people living on earth at the time. **Second**, in those days everyone spoke the same language. That fact (mentioned in verse 1) is crucial to understanding this passage of Scripture. The human race was united then in a way that has never been repeated since then. A careful student of Scripture may wonder how the whole world could speak one language in Genesis 11 when Genesis 10 specifies that the whole earth was divided into competing tribes and nations, each with its own language or dialect. The answer is that Moses has flip-flopped the narrative in order to highlight the essential problem of the human race. Chronologically, the Tower of Babel story comes before the scattering of the nations in Genesis 10. But Moses reversed the order to emphasize the high cost of rebelling against God. We are supposed to come to the end of Genesis 10 and ask, “How did the world become so hopelessly divided?” Genesis 11 answers that question.

**Third**, most people lived in the Middle East, in an area called Shinar, which is another name for Babylonia, which is in the region of modern-day Iraq. As the post-flood generations migrated east from Ararat, they settled in the region we now call the “fertile crescent,” a well-watered plain near the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. **Fourth**, the tower they built was religious in nature. This fact might not be evident from a quick reading of the text. When this passage is taught in Sunday School, teachers sometimes imply that the people were trying to build a tower all the way to heaven. That’s probably not accurate. It seems more likely that they were building a tower that would bring heaven down to earth. Some writers suggest that the tower was tied to the early development of astrology. They suggest that at the top of the tower was an altar surrounded by the signs of the zodiac, making it an enormous symbol of man’s attempt to control the universe apart from God. This suggestion seems likely since we know that astrology originated in ancient Babylon. ([The Tower That Fell: Why God Stopped the Building Program](#))

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### **Rod Mattoon - UNITY IN THE COMMUNITY-Ge 11:1**

This chapter completes a pattern of broken relationships.

- Chapter Three-A husband from the wife.
- Chapter Four-A brother from a brother.
- Chapter Nine-Children from parents.
- Chapter Eleven-People from other people.

Broken fellowship with others can be attributed by a broken relationship with the Lord. As the curtain opens in chapter eleven, we see the earth is of one language and speech. There was unity in communication. Communication is the key to reaching goals on a team effort level. Good teams, good marriages, good churches and businesses communicate effectively. When communication breaks down, commitment is destroyed or weakened. Problems in an organization or in a marriage fall into three key categories.

- Commitment is lacking in order to work on clearly defined goals.
- Closeness and Concord is lacking between individuals.
- Communication is lacking.

The men of Babel had a successful organization going before God intervened. This chapter reveals four key ingredients to develop a successful organization.

- Commitment to work on a goal. 11:3, 4
- Closeness among the people. 11:6
- A Communication system that was very effective. 11:1, 6
- Compliance to the will of God. 11:7-9 These verses reveal that they were disobedient in this area. This is why God intervened.

Similar principles of success and unity are found in Joshua 1:16-18.

- Cooperation-We will do. 11:16
- Compliance-We will go. 11:16
- Commitment-We will obey 11:17
- Constancy-Anyone who rebels will be put to death. 11:18
- Cheering-Be strong and courageous. 11:18

([Treasures from Genesis](#))

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**Excerpt from - The Dispersion of the Nations in Genesis 11:1–9 Allen P. Ross**([CLICK HERE FOR FULL ARTICLE](#))

### **Introduction to the Passage**

#### **THE NATURE OF THE ACCOUNT**

The narrative in Genesis 11:1–9 describes the divine intervention among the human family to scatter them across the face of the earth by means of striking at the heart of their unity—their language. A quick reading of the passage shows that the predominant idea is not the tower of Babel but this scattering.

If the point is not simply the tower, then this passage does not present, as some have suggested, a Hebrew adaptation of the Greek

Titans storming heaven to dislodge God. Rather, the characteristics of the people in this story are anxiety and pride through their own gregariousness. (1) The tower, on the one hand, is born from the people's fear of being scattered across the earth; and on the other hand it is an attempt to frustrate God's plan to fill the earth (Gen. 9:1).

**The sin.** Since the story has the trappings of a judgment narrative in which Yahweh interrupts mankind's misguided activities and scatters them abroad, it may be assumed that the antithesis of this scattering must be the sin. The major error was not the building of a city, but the attempt of the race to live in one city. (2) Therefore it appears that the human family was striving for unity, security, and social immortality (making a name) in defiance of God's desire for them to fill the earth.

**Divine punishment.** It is important to keep in mind that the "judgment" was not the destruction of the city but of the language that united the people. It was shattered into a multiplicity of languages so that the common bond was destroyed. (3) Thus the text is demonstrating that the present number of languages that form national barriers is a monument to sin.

**Divine prevention.** Since the people's purpose was to make a name for themselves and to achieve power through unity, the apostasy of the human spirit would shortly bring the race to the brink of another catastrophe such as the Deluge. By frustrating their communication and dividing them into nations, it is evident that "it is the will of God, so long as sin is present in the world, to employ nationalism in the reduction of sin." (4)

For ages people have restricted themselves to native manners and customs and regarded diverse languages of foreigners with great horror. (5) Thus Israel was delivered from a people of "a strange language" (Ps. 114:1) and was frequently warned of destruction by a fierce nation whose language would not be understood and whose deep speech could not be comprehended (Deut. 28:49; Isa. 28:11; 33:19; Jer. 5:15). The language barrier brought sudden fear and prevented unification.

Ringgren summarized the twofold aspect of Yahweh's intervention in Genesis 11 as divine reaction to pride.

Theologically, the building of the tower in Gen. 11 is interpreted as an act of human arrogance and rebellion against God; accordingly, Yahweh intervenes against its builders and scatters them over the whole earth. This action of God is both punishment and a preventive measure; it prevents men from going too far in their pride. (6)

Later prophets would draw on this narrative, recording the very beginnings of the divisions as they looked to the end of days when God Himself would unify mankind once again. Zephaniah 3:9–11 appears to be constructed antithetically to this passage with its themes in common with Genesis 11:1–9: the pure speech (i.e., one language), (7) the gathering of the dispersed people (even from Cush), (8) the removal of pride, and the service in the holy mountain. The miracle on the day of Pentecost is often seen as a harbinger of that end time. (9).....

**SETTING FOR THE PASSAGE** The Babylonian background. That this passage has Babylon in mind is clear from the explication of the name "Babel" in Ge 11: 9. The first time this term was used was in the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 where the beginning of the kingdom was recorded in the exploits of Nimrod from Cush (Ge 10:10). Not only is there this direct reference to proud Babylon, but also other evidences show that the background of the story was Mesopotamian. Speiser says, "The episode points more concretely to Babylonia than does any other portion of primeval history and the background that is here sketched proves to be authentic beyond all expectations." (16)

Babylon was a thing of beauty to the pagan world. Every important city of Babylonia was built with a step-tower known as a ziggurat (ziggurratu). (17) In Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon itself, in the area of Marduk's sanctuary known as E-sag-ila, "the house whose head is raised up," (18) there was a seven-storied tower with a temple top that was known as E-temen-anki. This structure, measuring 90 meters by 90 meters at the base as well as being 90 meters high, became one of the wonders of the world. (19) The tower was a symbol of Babylonian culture and played a major role in other cultures influenced by it. (20)

The first of such towers must be earlier than Nebuchadnezzar's, for his were rebuildings of ancient patterns. Cassuto maintains that this reference must be to E-temen-anki (although he suggests that the occasion for the tradition giving rise to the satire would come from an earlier time, from the Hittite destruction of Babylon). (21) Speiser does not agree. He points out that it cannot be E-temen-anki, which cannot antedate the seventh century. Therefore this account must be centuries earlier than E-temen-anki. (22) Since Esarhaddon (seventh century) and Nebuchadnezzar (sixth century) were the first since Hammurabi to build such works, the biblical reference in Genesis 11 must be to a much earlier Babylon.

So while the actual Neo-Babylonian Empire's (23) architecture cannot be the inspiration for this account, one must conclude that their buildings were rebuildings of some ancient tower located in the same area.

But when the literary parallels concerning this architecture are considered, some very significant correspondences to the narrative are noted.

First, there is a specific connection of this story with the account of the building of Babylon, recorded in the Akkadian Enuma Elish,

tablet VI, lines 55–64:

When Marduk heard this,  
Brightly glowed his features, like the days:  
“Like that of lofty Babylon, whose building you have requested,  
Let its brickwork be fashioned. You shall name it the sanctuary.”  
The Anunnaki applied the implement;  
For one year they molded bricks.  
When the second year arrived,  
They raised high the head of Esagila equaling Apsu.  
Having built a stage tower as high as Apsu,  
They set up in it an abode for Marduk, Enlil, Ea;  
In their presence he adorned it with grandeur. (24)

Within this passage are several literary parallels to the biblical narrative. Line 62 reads, “They raised the head of Esagila miḥrit apsî,” (ša Esagila miḥrit apsî ullū rēšī [šū]). Speiser notes the word play of ullū rēšīšū with Esagila, which means “the structure which raises the head,” explaining that it evokes a special value for the Sumerian name, giving it a significant meaning in Babylon. (25) Thus he concludes that rēšam ullūm became a stock expression for the monumental structures of Babylon and Assyria.

Speiser shows that apsū is a reference to the heavens. He allows that it often means “the deep,” but that cannot be correct in the light of line 63 which says, “when they had built the temple tower of the upper (elite) apsu” (ibnūma ziggurat ša apsî elīte). In line 62 then, miḥrit apsî must be “toward heaven,” and apsu must be celestial and not subterranean. (26)

A second important element is the bricks. The Hebrew text in Genesis 11:3 describes the brickmaking with a cognate accusative construction. Once the bricks are made, the tower is made. Speiser observes that the bricks figured predominantly in the Babylonian account where there is a year-long brick ritual. (27) The Babylonian account not only records a similar two-step process (making bricks in the first year and raising the tower head in the second), but it also has a similar construction, using a cognate accusative, libittasu iltabnū (Hebrew: וַיִּבְנֶה לְבִיטָסוּ). In fact, the Hebrew and Akkadian words are cognate. The similarity is striking.

So in Enuma Elish and Genesis there are at least three solid literary connections: the making of the tower for the sanctuary of the gods, with Genesis reporting the determination to build the tower and city in rebellion to God; the lofty elevation of its head into the heavens, with Genesis recording almost the same reference; and the making of the bricks before the building of the city, with Genesis describing the process with the same grammatical construction.

Another correspondence is reflected in the great pride of the builders. One of the purposes of the Babylonian creation epic at its composition was to show the preeminence of Babylon over all the cities of the country, and especially the supremacy of Marduk over all deities. They were so pleased with themselves that they considered Babylon to be a celestial city, prepared by the Anunnaki gods and made for Marduk on behalf of his victory over Tiamat. It then became the pattern for the earthly city (Enuma Elish, tablet VI, lines 113–15). In fact Babylon, that metropolitan city for so many peoples, claimed to be the origination of society, their city having descended from heaven. (28) Herein is the immense pride of Babylon.

Therefore with this world-famous city and tower culture claiming to be the heavenly plan and beginning of creation, the record in Genesis 11 is a counterblast and a polemic. (29) To communicate this most forcefully, the text employs literary elements of that ancient, traditional theme preserved in the Babylonian culture, but the contents and thrust of the message differ remarkably. (30)

The differences are pointed out in part by Vos. (31)

**First**, Genesis implies that nothing like this had ever been built before by man, but the ziggurats represent traditional workings.

**Second**, Genesis presents the building as evidence of their disobedience, but the Babylonian work was for the purpose of worshiping a local deity.

**Third**, Genesis describes this as the work of one united race of people that became the basis of the scattering and confusion into languages and tribes, but the ziggurats were man-made mountains of a national group (their towers were the symbol of their culture). Also these towers developed gradually over the centuries after the diffusion and scattering.

So Genesis, in setting forth the account of the divine intervention at Babel in the ancient past, deliberately alludes to the arrogance of Babylon that was represented in their literature. The result is a satire on the thing of glory and beauty of the pagan world. The biblical writer, having become familiar with the vainglorious words in the traditions of Babylon, weaves his account for the purpose of deriding the literary traditions of that ancient city and establishing the truth. In fact traditions from Mesopotamia recorded the ancient



division of languages as well. The Sumerians had recorded that there was originally one language since everyone came to worship Enlil with one tongue (Enmerkar Epic, lines 141–46). (32)

Cassuto suggests a collection of satirical ideas that would have given rise to the Genesis narrative, and he paraphrases them as follows:

You children of Babylon ... you called your city Babel—Bâbili, “Gate of god,” or Bâb-ilani, “Gate of gods”—and your tower you designated “House of the foundation of heaven and earth.” You desired that the top of your tower should be in heaven.... You did not understand that, even if you were to raise the summit of your ziggurat ever so high, you would not be nearer to Him than when you stand upon the ground; nor did you comprehend that He who in truth dwells in heaven, if he wishes to take a closer look at your lofty tower, must needs come down.... Your intention was to build for yourselves a gigantic city that would contain all mankind and you forgot that it was God’s will to fill the whole earth with human settlements, and that God’s plan would surely be realized.... You were proud of your power, but you should have known that it is forbidden to man to exalt himself, for only the Lord is truly exalted, and the pride of man is regarded by Him as iniquity that leads to his downfall and degradation—a punishment befitting the crime.... On account of this, your dominion was shattered and your families were scattered over the face of the whole earth. Behold, how fitting is the name that you have given to your city! It is true that in your language it expresses glory and pride, but in our idiom it sounds as though it connoted confusion—and confusion of tongues heard therein, which caused its destruction and the dispersion of its inhabitants in every direction. (33)

Babylon was the prototype of all nations, cities, and empires that despise God’s instructions and raise themselves in pride (ED: THUS IT SHOULD NOT SURPRISE US THAT THE TERM "BABYLON" OCCURS 298x IN 264 VERSES!). (34) Babylon represented man’s megalomaniacal attempt to achieve world peace and unity by domestic exploitation and power. They would be brought down in confusion; herein was the warning to the new nation of Israel: any disobedient nation would be abased and brought low in spite of her pride, ingenuity, and strength.

The “Babylon” motif became the common representation for the anti-theocratic program. Later writers drew on this theme and used the name as a symbol for the godless society with its great pretensions. Isaiah 47:8–13 portrayed Babylon’s pleasures, sins, and superstitions. Isaiah 13:19 pictured her as “the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans’ pride”; and Isaiah 14:13 describes her sinful arrogance in exalting her throne above the Most High in the heavens only to be brought low. Jeremiah also predicted the cup of vengeance on this arrogant city (Jer. 51). Daniel recorded her persecutions against Judah. And Revelation 17–18 applies the theme to the spiritual Babylon in the eschaton (ED: I BELIEVE THIS FUTURE BABYLON WILL BE LITERAL WITH A SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE OVER THE ENTIRE WORLD - SEE COMMENTARY), showing that it was her sins that reached heaven and brought the catastrophe to her, thus preparing the way for the true celestial city to come down to earth. (35)

**The setting in the primeval narratives.** The present story of the scattering is part of the primeval events of Genesis which give a picture of man in open rebellion to God and of God intervening in judgment on each situation. (36) The scattering of the race from Babel forms the capstone to the primeval history of the human race. (37) This development of mankind is accurately described by Kidner.

The primeval history reaches its fruitless climax as man, conscious of new abilities, prepares to glorify and fortify himself by collective effort. The elements of the story are timelessly characteristic of the spirit of the world. The project is typically grandiose; men describe it excitedly to one another as if it were the ultimate achievement—very much as modern man glories in his space projects. At the same time they betray their insecurity as they crowd together to preserve their identity and control their fortunes. (38)

**So it is with this story that the common history of all mankind comes to an abrupt end, which leaves the human race hopelessly scattered across the face of the entire earth.** It is this that makes the present narrative so different from those preceding it: In each judgment there was a gracious provision for hope but in this judgment there is none. It does not offer a token of grace, a promise of any blessing, a hope of salvation, or a way of escape. There is no clothing for the naked sinner (Ge 3:21+), no protective mark for the fugitive (Ge 4:15+), no rainbow in the dark sky (Ge 9:12-16+). There is no ray of hope. **The primeval age ends with judgmental scattering and complete confusion. The blessing is not here; the world must await the new history.**

In view of this, the story of the scattering of the nations is actually the turning point of the book from primeval history to the history of the blessing. From this very confused and dispersed situation nations would develop in utter futility until God would make a great nation (ED: ISRAEL) through one man (ED: ABRAM) who himself would be “scattered” from this alluvial plain to the land of Canaan. The blessings of final redemption and unification would come through his seed (ED: Ge 15:5+ WHERE "DESCENDANTS" IN LXX = SPERMA = 2ND PERSON, MASCULINE SINGULAR "SEED" - COMPARE Gal 3:16+).

The beginning of Genesis 11 presupposes a linguistic unity and localization comparable to the beginning of Genesis 10. Since the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 describes the many families of the earth “after their families, after their tongues, in their lands, in their nations,” and Genesis 11 describes the divine intervention to scatter them, the question is how this story of the dispersion is compatible with the Table. They appear to be reversed chronologically.

Most modern scholars follow the critical view that Genesis 11 is independent of the ethnographic Table and is fundamentally irreconcilable with it. (39) However, this is not seen as a major obstacle, for as von Rad states. “The chapters must be read together because they are intentionally placed next to each other in spite of their antagonism.” (40) (ED: SEE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT FOR ACCURATE INTERPRETATION) So while critical scholars are bothered by the antagonisms, they recognize that the two chapters are complementary in referring to the same scattering.

The Table of Nations gives absolutely no explanation for the scattering, but “that the author was intending right along to treat of the confusion of tongues appears from Ge 10:25.” (41) There it is stated that in the days of [Peleg](#) (“Division”) was the earth divided.

Writers have explained this division as some sort of tribal split, (42) or some piece of trivia about conditions at the time, such as, for example, irrigation ditches. (43) The word [לָחַץ](#) is often used for trenches and irrigation ditches, but the implication of the Table is toward universal events. (44) It is worth noting that the root word occurs in Psalm 55:9 (Eng., 10) for a moral division: “Destroy, O LORD, and divide ([לָחַץ](#)) their tongues” (author’s translation here and throughout the article). The prayer is that God would break apart their counsel into contending factions, an end that is comparable to the story of the division of the nations.

So the point of contact appears to be the birth of [Peleg](#) (and thus his naming) in Genesis 10. (45) At that point the incident of chapter 11 would have happened, causing the people to spread out into the earth until they settled in their tribes as described in chapter 10. Chapter 11 is the cause; chapter 10 is the effect.

The passages are arranged in a manner consistent with Genesis. The broad survey is given first; the narrowing and selection and/or explanation are given afterward. (46) The order is thematic and not chronological. The choice of this reversed order is a stroke of genius. Jacob stated it well: “The placement of chapter 10 before this one is a special refinement. The absurdity of the undertaking becomes obvious if we know the numerical nations into which mankind should grow.” (47)

## THE PURPOSE OF THE DISPERSION NARRATIVE

It should be clear by now that the story of the dispersion is a sequel to the Table of Nations and is designed to explain how the nations speak different languages in spite of their common origin and how they found their way to the farthest corners of the earth. The major theme of the passage is the dispersion of the nations because of their rebellious pride and apostasy in uniting at Babel. But the story is more than an explanation of the scattering; it is an explanation of the problems due to the existence of nations.

It was at Babel—that city founded by Nimrod, a descendant of Ham through Cush; that city known for its pride and vanity; that seat of rebellion toward the true God and pagan worship of the false gods—that Yahweh turned ingenuity and ambition into chaos and confusion so that the thing the people feared most came on them and that their desire to be men of renown was suddenly turned against them. For the Israelite nation the lesson was clear: If she was to survive as a nation, she must obey God’s will, for the nation that bristles with pride and refuses to obey will be scattered. (48) (ED: THIS APPLIES TO INDIVIDUALS ALSO!!!) Thus the account of the scattering at Babel has a theological significance for God’s people.

## FOOTNOTES:

- NOTE THAT MANY OF THE FOOTNOTES HAVE ACTIVE LINKS TO THE ORIGINAL RESOURCE WHICH CAN BE BORROWED.

1 - [B. Jacob, The First Book of the Bible: Genesis](#) (BORROW), ed. and trans. Ernest I. Jacob and Walter Jacob (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1974), p. 79. Luther felt this story gave rise to the story of the giants trying to expel Jupiter (Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., Luther’s Works, Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 6–14 [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960], p. 211.

2 - [Hugo Gressmann, The Tower of Babel](#) (New York: Jewish Institute of Religion Press, 1928), p. 3.

3 - Delitzsch explains that the primitive language through this intervention “died the death from which comparative philology is incapable of awakening it” ([Franz Delitzsch, A New Commentary on Genesis](#), trans. Sophia Taylor [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899], p. 355).

4 - Harold G. Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 129.

5 - [A. Dillmann, Genesis, Critically and Exegetically Expounded](#) (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897), p. 387.



6 - Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, s.v. "Bābhel," by Helmer Ringgren, 1:467.

7 - Spoken of in the singular, the "pure lip" must mean the language barriers will be broken down to make one universal tongue. The second idea in the expression means that their speech will be cleansed.

8- The Bible uses this word for both Ethiopia and the Kassite power. What the connection is remains a matter of debate. In this connection, the similarities between Ethiopic and Akkadian are interesting for speculation.

9 - [Derek Kidner, Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967). p. 110.

16 - [E. A. Speiser, Genesis, The Anchor Bible](#) (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1964), p. 75. It is not to be inferred from this statement that Speiser holds a conservative view of this Scripture.

17 - It is necessary to say at the outset that it is not that the writer saw a ziggurat and composed a myth about the origin of languages, and that this myth somehow found its way into the Book of Genesis. Rather, Genesis implies that such towers had not been built before this and this would be quite unique (Howard F. Vos, *Genesis and Archaeology* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1963], p. 47).

18 - Emil G. Kraeling, "The Earliest Hebrew Flood Story," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 66 (1947): 282.

19 - [Cassuto, From Noah to Abraham](#), p. 227; André Parrot, *Ziggurats et Tour de Babel* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1949); Merrill F. Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954), p. 47; *Encyclopedia Biblica*, s.v. "Babylon," by A. Oppenheim, 2:28.

20 - [Hugo Gressmann, The Tower of Babel](#), pp. 15–19. Gressmann thought the tower structure was related to their understanding of the world with God at the pinnacle, the door of heaven, and man on the slopes of the artificial mountain. The entire world rested on the breast of the underworld. Thus it was fitting for this to be included in primeval events. Most would view it as an artificial high place of worship erected on the plain.

21 - [Cassuto, From Noah to Abraham](#) p. 228. Cassuto is (unnecessarily) assuming that the traditions demand a city and a tower in ruins. The judgment passage, however, says absolutely nothing of that at all. The most that is said is that this project was not completed.

22 - [E. A. Speiser, Genesis, The Anchor Bible](#), p. 75. This argumentation is used here simply to show the difficulty in ascribing the identification to E-temen-anki even if one were to take the late date of the composition in accordance with a J document.

23 - E. A. Speiser, "[Word Plays on the Creation Epic's Version of the Founding of Babylon](#)," *Orientalia*, n.s. 25 (1956): 317–18. Speiser shows that there is a chronological problem with the date of J and E-temen-anki, but then he adds in his argumentation that other temples also had the-anki element in the name, such as Borsippa's which was E-ur-me-imin-anki, "house of the seven preceptors of heaven and earth," so that we are not limited to one reference that first fits the idea with -anki. His point is that the source was literary and not monumental (architectural).

24 - [James B. Pritchard, ed., Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament](#), 3d ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 60. Speiser, who translated the Akkadian myths and epics for Pritchard's work, states at the outset that the majority of the scholars would assign Enuma Elish to the Old Babylonian period on internal evidence alone. Unger explains that it was composed in the days of Hammurabi in the mold of political and religious propaganda to show the preeminence of Babylon and supremacy of Marduk. "However, the poem itself, though one of the literary masterpieces of the Babylonian Semites, goes back to much earlier times. It is clearly based upon the earlier traditions of the Sumerians, the non-Semitic precursors of the Babylonian Semites in lower Babylonia" ([Unger, Archaeology and the Old Testament](#), p. 27).

25 - [Speiser, "Word Plays,"](#) p. 319. He compares this to other and similar phrases to show that they did it frequently.

26 [Alexander Heidel, The Babylonian Genesis](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), p. 48. Heidel had the same difficulty attempting to render it "deep." Speiser says, "I was equally at sea in translating 'equaling apsû.'" Speiser alludes to Enuma Elish, tablet IV, lines 142–45, where apsû = šamāmu ([Speiser, "Word Plays,"](#) p. 319).

27 The making of the first brick was a trial ordeal before the gods and was to be accomplished by the king. The ceremony of the bricks was to be a sign that the service was offered to the gods ([Henri Frankfort, Kingship and the Gods](#) [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948]. pp. 272–74).

28 - Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, s.v. "Bābhel," by H. Ringgren, 1:467. Ringgren suggests that the metropolis with so many peoples (= languages) was natural for such an account of the dispersion.

29 - [Cassuto, From Noah to Abraham](#), p. 227.

30 - It seems clear that the story did not originate in Babylon. There is no exact correspondence, but that is to be expected since it is a travesty on Babel. Gressmann thought the story came from Babylon to the Assyrians and was brought to the Israelites by the Arameans, but that is unlikely ([Hugo Gressmann, The Tower of Babel](#) p. 5). There were stories of the glories of Babylon with all the towers and cult mountains even in Palestine ([Gerhard von Rad, Genesis](#), trans. John Marks [London: SCM Press, 1972], p. 146). Later it would be recorded by the classical writers: Diodorus 2.7; Herodotus 1.178; Strabo 16.1.5; and Pliny 6.121.

31 - [Vos, Genesis and Archaeology](#), p. 47.

32 - [S. N. Kramer, "The 'Babel of Tongues': A Sumerian Version."](#) in Essays in Memory of E. A. Speiser, ed. W. W. Hallo (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1968), pp. 108–11; [George Smith, The Chaldean Account of Genesis](#) (New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1876), p. 160.

33 - [Cassuto, From Noah to Abraham](#), pp. 229–30. Cassuto has attempted to reconstruct the type of satirical material behind the passage by relating the passage to the time when Babylon was sacked by the Hittites. The idea of the message as a polemic (against what the Israelites would have known Babylon claimed for herself as opposed to the truth) is an accurate presentation of the message, but Cassuto does not treat the text with precision. In the first place, Genesis presents it as a universal judgment on the race collected in Shinar and not one group of people scattered by the Hittites. True, Cassuto is looking for some occasion and the Hittite invasion is a happy one for him. However, that is unwarranted. Second, there is no hint whatsoever that the city and the tower were reduced to rubble. They were just not completed. Third, the text is not saying that all the languages could be spoken there but that one was once in the beginning and God confounded it. Cassuto's attempt to take a naturalistic explanation to the occasion for the text weakens it.

34 - [Alan Richardson, Genesis I–XI: Introduction and Commentary](#) (London: SCM Press, 1953), p. 124.

35 - [Derek Kidner, Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary](#) p. 111.

36 - Ryle observed that "we are led to suspect that the mystery of the origin of distinct languages belongs to the dim obscurity of the infancy of the human race, an infinitely remote and prehistoric age" ([Herbert E. Ryle, The Book of Genesis](#) [Cambridge: University Press, 1914], p. 144).

37 - [Von Rad, Genesis](#), p. 143.

38 - [Derek Kidner, Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary](#) p. 109.

39 - [John A. Skinner, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis](#) (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910), p. 224. Skinner was quick to add that the inconsistency is not such that would hinder the collector of traditions from putting the two in historical sequence.

40 - [Von Rad, Genesis](#), pp. 147–48.

41 - H. C. Leupold, Exposition of Genesis, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1942), [Volume 1:381](#). ([Volume 2](#))

42 - [Skinner, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis](#), p. 220.

43 This is suggested by Driver who follows Sayce in the suggestion ([S. R. Driver, The Book of Genesis](#) [London: Methuen & Co., 1913], p. 130).

44 Josephus referred the dispersion to the time of Peleg and related the whole story to the efforts of Nimrod ([Antiquities of the Jews 1.146](#) or [HERE](#), and [Apion 1.19](#)). Most traditional scholars have followed this line.

45 - According to Genesis 11:10, 12, 14, and 16 Peleg was in the fifth generation after the Flood. At this time, according to Keil, there could have been 30,000 people on the earth. That may be a bit generous, but even a conservative estimation turns up enough to satisfy the passage. Certainly not all the tribes listed in chapter 10 need to have been existing at Babel ([C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, The Pentateuch, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament](#), trans. James Martin, 25 vols. [reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968], 1:176).

46 - For example, Genesis 37 records the sale of Joseph into Egypt. The story line of Genesis 38 traces the family of Judah into further generations. Chapter 39, however, traces the account of Joseph from his sale into

Egypt. The same could be posited for chapter 1 (the total survey of creation) and chapter 2 (the selective discussion of the main elements of the creation, viz., man and woman). The princes of Edom (chap. 36) are also discussed in some development before the narration returns to the story.

47 - [Jacob, The First Book of the Bible](#), p. 80.

48 - The concept of dispersion or scattering of peoples was an ancient one. Kitchen deals with the idea of exile and scattering in the ancient literature to show that the concept was real (fearfully real) for Israel (Kenneth A. Kitchen, "Ancient Orient, 'Deuteronomism,' and the Old Testament," in [New Perspectives on the Old Testament](#), ed. J. Barton Payne [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1970], pp. 1–24).

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**Gleason Archer** - [New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties](#) - Genesis 10:5, 20, 31 seem to indicate that mankind spoke many tongues. But Genesis 11:1 affirms that "the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech." How are these two statements to be reconciled?

Genesis 10 describes the development of racial differentiation and dispersion that went on after the Flood and Noah's descendants began to repopulate the earth. This includes the entire process up to and including the third millennium B.C., just prior to the time of Abraham.

After this general survey, the author of Genesis reverts to a pivotal episode that occurred early in this postdiluvial era, the confusion of tongues that followed the vain attempt to build the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1–9). This must have been within a very few centuries after the Flood.

The various tribes that descended from Ham, Shem, and Japheth all spoke the same language (presumably that of Noah himself) but preserved their tribal distinction quite carefully. When God put an end to their arrogant humanism and their "one-world" policy (adopted in a rebellious attempt to get along without any need for God), He confused their speech so that one tribe could not understand another any longer; and it became impossible for them to continue with their collective project.

We have no way of knowing whether the pre-Babel worldwide language was preserved in any of the subsequent tongues that sprang up after that debacle. (Some have suggested that Hebrew may have been that original language and that we have the actual words of Adam, Eve, Cain, and so on, preserved in Gen. 3–4. But since Hebrew is demonstrably a later dialect of Northwest Semitic, or of the Canaanite language group within that division, it seems unlikely that biblical Hebrew could have been the most primitive or original of all human languages.)

We can only conjecture that within the various subtribes and clans the new language distribution or differentiation was not so utterly complete as to keep even blood relatives from understanding one another. The fact that they continued to maintain their integrity according to their lineage strongly suggests that each of these smaller subdivisions was allowed a language mutually comprehensible to those within the clan, even after the confusion of tongues at Babel.

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### **Walter Kaiser - Hard Sayings of the Bible - Genesis 11:1–9 One Language Before Babel?**

Genesis 11:1–9 is the record of the departure from one language and common speech to a plurality of tongues in the human race. This event took place at the tower of Babel, where mortals had decided that they would "make a name for [them]selves [lest they be] scattered over the face of the whole earth" (Gen 11:4). A recently discovered Sumerian tablet also tells for the first time from an extrabiblical perspective the story of a time when all languages were one on the earth. (Samuel Noah Kramer, ["The Babel of Tongues: A Sumerian Version."](#) *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88 (1968): 108–111. See also [Nahum M. Sarna, Understanding Genesis - borrow](#) (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966), pp. 63–80.)

The problem therefore is this: why does Genesis 10:5, 20, 31 describe each of the descendants of Noah's three sons as having differing languages when this was not supposed to have happened until the next chapter? Isn't this a mistake (called by scholars an anachronism) on the part of the writer of Scripture, in that it is a misplacement in time and space?

The Bible does not represent itself as always desiring to present its material in a strictly chronological sequence. Often it prefers to present it in a topical sequence. For example, the three temptations of Jesus in the Gospels are found in three different arrangements because the aim of the author was to present them so as to make the preaching and teaching point of theology that each had in mind. Likewise, the writer of Genesis jumps ahead of himself for the moment to describe what happened to the descendants of Noah's three sons, even though it outdistanced the story that he would resume in chapter 11. This technique is typical of the writer of Genesis.

There is another clue in the text itself that demonstrates that this is so. In Genesis 10:25 it mentions "one [who] was named Peleg, because in his time the earth was divided." Here is a clear allusion to the confusion of languages at the tower of Babel that will be

described in the next chapter (Gen 11:8–9). Since Peleg in Hebrew means “to divide” or “to split,” it is more than likely that he received his name in memory of this event.

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## James Smith in Handfuls of Purpose - THE TOWER OF BABEL Genesis 11:1–9

There are seven interesting points of contrast between this scene and the one recorded in Acts 1. The gift of new tongues by the Holy Spirit is the divine remedy for the pride that results in the strife of tongues. We have here—

**I. A Revelation of Human Ambition.** “Out of the heart are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). A straw may indicate which way the wind blows. Observe—

**1. THE OBJECT IN VIEW.** “Let us make us a name.” The natural man seeks a name for himself, and one of his own making. Name-making is a very common and popular business, although it never pays well in the end. See the failure of three name-makers in Numbers 16. It is possible to be doing Christian work with the same end in view.

**2. THE METHOD EMPLOYED.** “Let us build a city and a tower.” This purpose of theirs betrays a felt need of protection, abiding fellowship, and future prospect. Every man needs a city of safety and a tower of hope. The self-righteous seek to build them for themselves. “Going about to establish their own righteousness” (Rom. 10:3). Thank God, Jesus Christ has built such a city and tower, where all may have salvation and hope.

**3. THE MEANS USED.** “Let us make brick.” Those who would save themselves by their own works have much to do. They have not only the building, but the very bricks to make. Not only to do good works, but they have the very desires to manufacture (a hard task), and, after all is done, it is only brick at the best. In Luke 18:11, 12 we see one of these brick-makers busy at work.

**II. A Manifestation of Divine Displeasure.** What will all our building do for us if it does not please God? It is only wood, hay, stubble—fit for the fire.

**1. THE DIVINE INSPECTION.** “The Lord came down to see what they had built.” Every man’s work will be tried. This is a very solemn truth. The eyes of Jehovah will scan every brick or jewel. Every motive and act alike must be tested. “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6).

**2. THE SUDDEN CONFUSION.** “The Lord did there confound, so they left off to build.” What a change when God comes! When the Spirit of God comes upon the self-righteous He makes them leave off their vain and presumptuous works. Think of it. The presence of God means confusion to the religious self-seeker. What may be very pleasing in the eyes of men may be suddenly turned into Babel at the approach of God. “He that BELIEVETH on Him shall not be confounded” (1 Peter 2:6).

**3. COMPLETE DISPERSION.** “From thence did the Lord scatter them abroad.” The very thing they were labouring to prevent was the thing that came upon them. Proud men labour to save themselves from being cast out by God at last, and their faithless works are securing for them the doom they strive to avoid. The city of God, seek ye it (Heb. 11:10). The name of the Lord is a strong tower; flee unto it (Prov. 18:10).

**Genesis 11:2 It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.**

- **east** - Ge 13:11
- **Shinar** - Ge 11:9 10:10 14:1 Isa 11:11 Da 1:2 Zec 5:11
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## THE HUMAN FAMILY MIGRATES EASTWARD

**It came about as they journeyed** ([nasa](#); Lxx - [kineo](#) ~ "kinetic energy") **east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there** - Shinar is the region of ancient Babylon. They refers to the entire population. In effect they were refusing to obey God’s Great Commission for the post-Noahic flood world had been clearly communicated (commanded) in Genesis 9:1+ **“Be**

**fruitful and multiply**, and **fill** the earth." And do not be confused by the order of the chapters. Normally you would think the events of chapter 10 precede chapter 11. However the Account of the Table of Nations in chapter 10 follows the account of the Tower of Babel in chapter 11 and explains the dispersion of peoples throughout the world as the result of God's intervention.

**THOUGHT** - God's post-diluvian commission to the world reminds me of Jesus' post-resurrection commission to the church in Mt 28:19-20+ "Go therefore and **make disciples** (THE ONLY COMMAND IN THE GREAT COMMISSION - [matheteuo](#) = [aorist imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) of all the nations (THINK ABOUT THE TABLE OF NATIONS IN Genesis 10-11), baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe (RAISING UP DOERS NOT HEARERS OF THE WORD! - Jas 1:22+) all that I commanded you; and **lo** (**BEHOLD**)(HERE IS YOUR PERSONAL POWER SOURCE), I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Dear reader, are you obeying our Lord's command? Are you making disciples? Would your response to Jesus' Great Commission be more accurately (sadly) characterized as "the Great Omission?" I am not talking about grabbing a coffee and danish in the mornings! The question is as a mature believer are you sharing the pure milk of God's Word (1Pe 2:2+) and the "danish" of His solid food (Hebrews 5:14+) on a regular (weekly) basis? Are you passing the baton to faithful (trustworthy) men and women (2Ti 2:2+)? If not, you are overtly disobeying Jesus! So let me encourage you to pray about who God might be able to disciple. They may come to you before you even go to them! (I have had that experience several times in the past few years). I know from stories I hear that there are many young men and women who are hungry for the Word and would give anything to have a disciple leader like yourself pour the Word into their life! Now is the time to redeem (Eph 5:16+ - "Redeem the Time") and now is the only time you will have to store up for yourself treasure in heaven (Mt 6:19-21+) which you will be able to enjoy forever and ever. Amen!

**Ross** on **journeyed** - The verb used to describe their journey (יָסַע) carries the sense of bedouins moving tents by stages. This wandering continued in an easterly direction from Armenia until they settled (וַיֵּשְׁבוּ) in Shinar where they found a plain. This "valley of the world," as the Talmud calls it, became the designated place for the nomads-turned-settlers.

**Mattoon** has an interesting note on **journeyed east** - ([Treasures from Genesis](#)) The Scriptures state that these people journeyed from the East and settled in the plain of Shinar. The phrase journeyed from the East had significant meaning as well as stating what direction they came. The East was symbolical of light, truth, or the right direction since the sun arose in the East. The West was symbolical of darkness or going the wrong direction. For a person to journey from the East was to turn the back on God and go the wrong direction. We find that these people did this. They did forsake the Lord. The word "plain" was symbolical too signifying going down as mountains signified going up.

**Bob Deffinbaugh**: Leupold observes that the word "**journeyed**" in Genesis 11:2 literally meant 'to pull up stakes.' Urban life has not been presented in a favorable light thus far in Genesis. Cain built a city and named it after his son Enoch (Genesis 4:17). God had said that he should live as a vagrant and a wanderer (Ge 4:12). Nimrod, a descendent of Ham, seemed to be an empire builder also (Ge 10:9-12). In fact, it is possible that Nimrod was the leader in the movement to settle in Shinar and build this city with its tower. Settling in the valley of Shinar was an act of disobedience. God had commanded men to spread out and fill the land, not to congregate in cities. ([Genesis 11:1-9 - The Unity of Unbelief](#))

**Bob Utley** - **they journeyed east** seems to imply a movement away from the location of the ark, the mountains of Ararat. The literal phrase "journeyed" means "pulled up stakes" (*Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT). Mesopotamia is southeast of the mountains of Ararat (which run from modern Turkey to Iran). [SPECIAL TOPIC: CHALDEANS](#)

**Shinar** (08152)([Shinar](#)) is the name of the plain between the Tigris and Euphrates near the Persian Gulf where the city and nation of Babylon were begun by Nimrod (Ge 10:8-10; 11:2). NIV

Shinar - 8v - Gen. 10:10; Gen. 11:2; Gen. 14:1; Gen. 14:9; Jos. 7:21; Isa. 11:11; Dan. 1:2; Zech. 5:11

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**Journeyed** ([05265](#))(*nasa*) means to pull out or up (as when pulling up stakes preparing to move on), set out, journey. It has the basic meaning of moving something out, pulling it out, taking it away; causing something to move out. It is probably the most common term in the Old Testament referring to the movement of clans and tribes. Indeed, the word is used almost 90 times in the Book of Numbers alone, since this book records the "journeying" of the people of Israel from Sinai to Canaan. The root meaning "to pull out tent-pegs," i.e. to break camp (cf. Isaiah 33:20; also note Judges 16:3 where Samson "pulls up" two gateposts from the ground), gave rise to the derived meaning of "to set out," or "journey"—the usual meaning of this frequent verb.

**W E Vine** - This word has the basic meaning of "pulling up" tent pegs (Isa. 33:20) in preparation for "moving" one's tent and property to another place; thus it lends itself naturally to the general term of "traveling" or "journeying." Samson is said to have "pulled up" the city gate and posts (Jdg. 16:3), as well as the pin on the



weaver's loom (Jdg. 16:14). Nāsa' is used to describe the "movement" of the angel of God and the pillar of cloud as they came between Israel and the pursuing Egyptians at the Sea of Reeds (Ex 14:19). In Num. 11:31, the word refers to the "springing up" (neb) of the wind that brought the quail to feed the Israelites in the wilderness. Nāsa' lends itself to a wide range of renderings, depending upon the context. ([Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words](#))

**Marvin Wilson** - Considering the nature of the verbal idea, nāsa' fits well into the historical life setting of the Hebrews of this early period. Before the conquest, they were a primarily semi-nomadic, itinerant, tentdwelling people. As desert travellers, each morning they pulled up their tent-pegs, folded their tents, and set out with flocks and herds on the next stage of their journey. Thus for the wandering Hebrews, the idea of "pulling up" or "breaking camp" (cf. massa' in Numbers 10:2) led to the more common meaning of "setting out" (Numbers 10:6). In this regard it is of note that Numbers 33 (RSV) renders nāsa' "to set out" forty-two times in its list of the various stages of Israel's journey from Egypt to the border of Canaan.

In OT times, "to set out" was normally to journey and go travel somewhere. This then gave rise to such expressions of hendiadys as "take your journey, and go" (Deut. 1:7; Deut. 2:24). The patriarch Jacob "journeyed" about Canaan (cf. Genesis 35:16; Genesis 46:1): The Israelites "set out" from Elim, journeying to the wilderness of Sin (Exodus 16:1). From Rephidim they "set out" for Sinai (Exodus 19:2). Forty years later, "the people set out from their tents, to pass over the Jordan" (Joshua 3:14). Occasionally nāsa' carries the nuance of "setting out" in the sense of to "go forward" or to "go onward." When Israel fled Egypt and was suddenly halted by the Red Sea, the Lord said to Moses, "Tell the people of Israel to go forward (nāsa')" (Exodus 14:15). Later, Israel was instructed to "go onward" (nāsa') only when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle (Exodus 40:36-37). People are not the only subject of nāsa'; other things also are said to "set out" such as the standard of a tribe (Numbers 10:18, 22, 25), the ark (Numbers 10:35), the tabernacle (Numbers 1:51), and the tent of meeting (Numbers 2:17).

In a number of passages, nāsa' means to "depart," "leave," or "go back." It is used of those who have "gone away" to a nearby town (Genesis 37:17) and of a king who had "left" one city to fight at another (2 Kings 19:8). Sennacherib "departed," i.e. retreated, from Jerusalem to Nineveh when he saw that his army was miraculously decimated (2 Kings 19:36). Likewise, King Jehoram and his forces "withdrew," i.e. retreated, from attacking Moab and returned to their own land (2 Kings 3:27). The rendering "struck camp" (NEB) for nāsa' in this verse seems open to question.

nāsa' is also used in the sense of to "journey by stages." Headed for Sinai, the Israelites "moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages" (pl. of massa'; Exodus 17:1). Later they "set out by stages from the wilderness of Sinai" (Numbers 10:12). Moses recorded the itinerary of Israel's journeys "stage by stage ... according to their starting places" (Numbers 33:1-2). The same nuance of journeying gradually, stopping from place to place, is conveyed by nāsa' in Genesis 12:9 where Abram, having left Haran, "journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb" (cf. Genesis 11:2 where the term "migrate" seems to be an appropriate rendering of nāsa'). nāsa' is likewise used of shepherds who "wander" from place to place with their flocks (Jeremiah 31:24). The Hiphil stem of nāsa' sometimes means to "cause to set out" or "make start out." It was Moses who "brought Israel from the Red sea" (Exodus 15:22; cf. LXX); but it was the Lord who "caused the east wind to blow" (Psalm 78:26; cf. Exodus 14:21) and who "led forth his people like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness" (Psalm 78:52). The Hiphil is also employed with the nuance of to "remove" or "take (something) from its place." A jug is "set aside" when it has been filled (2 Kings 4:4). Hope may be "pulled up," i.e. removed, like a tree (Job 19:10). When stones are quarried, they are "removed from their place" (cf. 1 Kings 5:17 [H 31]; Eccles. 10:9). Hence the derivative massā', the "breaking (of stones)" or "quarrying" (1 Kings 6:7). ([TWOT](#))

Nasa - blow(1), continuing(1), departed(3), go about(1), go forward(1), journeyed(56), journeying(1), led(1), led forth(1), left(2), marching(1), move(2), moved(6), plucked(1), pulled(4), quarried(1), quarries(1), removed(1), set(53), set journey(1), set aside(1), sets(1), setting(1), take our journey(1), uprooted(1), wander(1), went forth(1). Gen. 11:2; Gen. 12:9; Gen. 13:11; Gen. 20:1; Gen. 33:12; Gen. 33:17; Gen. 35:5; Gen. 35:16; Gen. 35:21; Gen. 37:17; Gen. 46:1; Exod. 12:37; Exod. 13:20; Exod. 14:15; Exod. 14:19; Exod. 15:22; Exod. 16:1; Exod. 17:1; Exod. 19:2; Exod. 40:36; Exod. 40:37; Num. 1:51; Num. 2:9; Num. 2:16; Num. 2:17; Num. 2:24; Num. 2:31; Num. 2:34; Num. 4:5; Num. 4:15; Num. 9:17; Num. 9:18; Num. 9:19; Num. 9:20; Num. 9:21; Num. 9:22; Num. 9:23; Num. 10:5; Num. 10:6; Num. 10:12; Num. 10:13; Num. 10:14; Num. 10:17; Num. 10:18; Num. 10:21; Num. 10:22; Num. 10:25; Num. 10:28; Num. 10:29; Num. 10:33; Num. 10:34; Num. 10:35; Num. 11:31; Num. 11:35; Num. 12:15; Num. 12:16; Num. 14:25; Num. 20:22; Num. 21:4; Num. 21:10; Num. 21:11; Num. 21:12; Num. 21:13; Num. 22:1; Num. 33:3; Num. 33:5; Num. 33:6; Num. 33:7; Num. 33:8; Num. 33:9; Num. 33:10; Num. 33:11; Num. 33:12; Num. 33:13; Num. 33:14; Num. 33:15; Num. 33:16; Num. 33:17; Num. 33:18; Num. 33:19; Num. 33:20; Num. 33:21; Num. 33:22; Num. 33:23; Num. 33:24; Num. 33:25; Num. 33:26; Num. 33:27; Num. 33:28; Num. 33:29; Num. 33:30; Num. 33:31; Num. 33:32; Num. 33:33; Num. 33:34; Num. 33:35; Num. 33:36; Num. 33:37; Num. 33:41; Num. 33:42; Num. 33:43; Num. 33:44; Num. 33:45; Num. 33:46; Num. 33:47; Num. 33:48; Deut. 1:7; Deut. 1:19; Deut. 1:40; Deut. 2:1; Deut. 2:24; Deut. 10:6; Deut. 10:7; Jos. 3:1; Jos. 3:3; Jos. 3:14; Jos. 9:17; Jdg. 16:3; Jdg. 16:14; Jdg. 18:11; 1 Ki. 5:17; 2 Ki. 3:27; 2 Ki. 4:4; 2 Ki. 19:8; 2 Ki. 19:36; Ezr. 8:31; Job 4:21; Job 19:10; Ps. 78:26; Ps. 78:52; Ps. 80:8; Eccl. 10:9; Isa. 33:20; Isa. 37:8; Isa. 37:37; Isa. 38:12; Jer. 4:7; Jer. 31:24; Zech. 10:2

**QUESTION** - [What is the significance of the land of Shinar in the Bible?](#)

**ANSWER** - The land of Shinar is referenced eight times in the Old Testament (Genesis 10:10; 11:2; 14:1, 9; Joshua 7:21; Isaiah



11:11; Daniel 1:2; Zechariah 5:11), always in connection to the geographical location of Babylonia. In certain passages, some versions of the Bible translate the word for “Shinar” as “Babylonia” for clarity’s sake. Shinar is significant for these reasons:

**Shinar was the location of the [Tower of Babel](#).** Genesis 10:10 mentions that Nimrod, a descendant of Ham, built “Babylon, Uruk, Akkad and Kalneh, in Shinar.” A plain in Shinar was the site chosen to construct the notorious Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–4). As punishment for the people’s wickedness, God confused their language, and thus the land of Shinar earned the name of “Babel” or “Babylon” (Genesis 11:5–9). Babylon and Babylonia both derive their names from *Babel*, which means “confusion.”

**Shinar was ruled by a king that Abraham fought.** During [Abraham’s](#) time, four kings, including Amraphel, king of Shinar, fought against the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and three other kings (Genesis 14:1–3, 8–9). After overpowering the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, the four kings plundered the cities, carrying away [Lot](#) and all he owned (Genesis 14:10–12). To save his nephew, Abraham and 318 of his men routed the raiding party, defeated the four kings, and recovered Lot, his family, and his possessions (Genesis 14:13–17).

**Shinar was associated with temptation.** After taking Jericho, the Israelites failed in conquering Ai because of sin in the camp (Joshua 7:10–12). Achan had stolen devoted items from Jericho, which the Lord had specifically commanded against (Joshua 6:18–19). Included in the plundered items was a finely crafted, beautiful robe from Shinar (Joshua 7:21). Because of Achan’s sin, about thirty-six people lost their lives during the failed attempt at taking Ai (Joshua 7:4–5). After his sin was discovered, Achan and his family were stoned to death in accordance with God’s command (Joshua 7:24–26).

**Shinar was associated with [Babylon’s](#) wickedness.** Zechariah the prophet [recorded a vision](#) of a basket with a lead cover. The angel guiding Zechariah identified the meaning of the basket: “This is the iniquity of the people throughout the land” (Zechariah 5:6). Then the angel raised the cover of lead, revealing to the prophet that there was a woman in the basket. The angel said, “‘This is wickedness,’ and he pushed her back into the basket and pushed the lead cover down over its mouth” (Zechariah 5:8). The basket with the woman was then carried through air to the land of Shinar where a temple would be built for it (verse 11). This strange vision pictures the suppression of wickedness and its banishment to Shinar/Babylon. In Shinar, the wickedness would eventually be freed and even worshiped (cf. Revelation 17). Shinar is associated with the wicked worship of false gods, and in the end times, Babylon the Great is the center of wickedness and demon worship (Revelation 18:2–3).

**Shinar was the location of Judah’s exile.** When the nation of Judah was finally taken into [exile to Babylonia](#), Nebuchadnezzar carried off the devoted things of the Lord’s temple and placed them in a temple to the god he worshipped (Daniel 1:1–2). Nebuchadnezzar probably placed the precious items into the temple of Marduk, also called Bel, which was the chief god of the Babylonians. Because of disobedience and idol worship, the Jews were exiled from their land to Shinar (2 Chronicles 36:15–21).

**Shinar is a place that will contain a faithful remnant of Israel.** [Isaiah 11](#) mentions the future millennial kingdom of the “[Root of Jesse](#)” who will “stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious” (Isaiah 11:10). During His reign, Jesus will “recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea” (Isaiah 11:11, ESV). This promise assures us that God’s people will be regathered—even from Shinar—to worship the Lord in His future kingdom.

**Shinar is significant in its connection to the world’s historical rebellion against God: everything from the construction of the Tower of Babel to its association with idols, its mistreatment of Israel, and its future association with the Antichrist.** Despite the many evils in the land of Shinar, God has preserved His people there. Believing Israelites in Shinar will participate in Jesus’ millennial kingdom in the future, demonstrating God’s grace and redemption. [GotQuestions.org](#)

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## SHINAR [ISBE]- shi'-nar (shin`ar; Senaar Sen(n)aar) by T. G. Pinches -

### 1. Identification:

The name given, in the earliest Hebrew records, to Babylonia, later called Babel, or the land of Babel (babhel, 'erets babhel). In Gen 10:10 it is the district wherein lay Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, cities which were the "beginning" of Nimrod's kingdom. In 11:2 Shinar is described as the land of the plain where migrants from the East settled, and founded Babel, the city, and its great tower.

### 2. Possible Babylonian Form of the Name:

Though sometimes identified with the Babylonian Sumer, the connection of Shinar with that name is doubtful. The principal difficulty lies in the fact that what might be regarded as the non-dialectical form singar (which would alone furnish a satisfactory basis of comparison) is not found, and would, if existent, only apply to the southern portion of Babylonia. The northern tract was called Akkad, after the name of its capital city (see ACCAD). The Greek form Sen(n)aar shows that, at the time the Septuagint translation was made, there was

no tradition that the `ayin was guttural, as the supposed Babylonian forms would lead us to expect. As the Biblical form Shinar indicates the whole of Babylonia, it corresponds with the native (Sumerian) Kingi-Ura, rendered "Sumer and Akkad," from which, by changing "K" into "Sh" (found in Sumerian), Shinar may have been derived, but this explanation is not free from difficulties.

### 3. Sumerian and Other Equivalents:

This two-fold designation, Kingi-Ura, is that which is commonly used in the inscriptions of the earlier kings, though it cannot then have indicated always the whole country, but only such parts of it as acknowledged their overlordship. Later on the corresponding term seems to have been Kar-Dunias ("the territory of the god Dunias," to all appearance a term introduced by the Kassite rulers). Nabonassar and his successors seem to have contented themselves with the title "king of Babylon," rule in the city implying also the dominion over the whole country. Often, however, the equivalent term for Babylonia is Ehi, probably an abbreviation of Eridu, and here standing for the land belonging to that sacred city--"the good city," a type of Paradise, Babylonia being, in fact, situated upon the edinu, or "plain."

See EDEN.

### 4. The Syriac Sen'ar:

All these comparisons tend to show that the Babylonian equivalent of Shinar is not any of the above, and as yet has not, in fact, been found. This is also implied by the fact, that Sen'ar was used in Syriac for the country around Bagdad, and in ancient times included (it may be supposed) the plain upon which the ruins of Babylon stand. Sen'ar was therefore in all probability an ancient Babylonian designation of the tract, now lost, but regarded by the Hebrews as synonymous with Babylonia.

### 5. The Primitive Tongue of Shinar:

From the inscriptions it would seem that the primitive language of Shinar was not Semitic, but the agglutinative idiom now named Sumerian--a tongue long regarded as Turanian, and having, it is thought, Turko-Chinese affinities--gal, "to be," Turkish ol-mak; ama (ana), "mother," Turkish ana; abba, "old man," Turkish baba, "father"; (h)e, "house," Turkish ev, etc. The Chinese affinities seem less close, but the following may be quoted: a(y)a "father," Chinese ye (Amoy ia); ge, "night," Chinese ye; gu, "to speak," Chinese yu; shu, "hand," Chinese sheu; kin, "business," Chinese kung, "work"; etc. Chinese and Turkish, however, have had time to pass through many changes since Sumerian was current in Shinar. Many words of the Sumerian language were borrowed by the Semitic Babylonians, and a few (like hekal, "temple," Semitic (h)egal, "great house") entered the other Semitic languages.

### 6. Comparison with the Semitic Idiom:

Halevy's contention, that Sumerian is simply "an allography" for the expression of Sera Babylonian, seems to be untenable, as they differ not only in words, but also in grammar; moreover, Sumerian had a dialect, called by the natives "woman's tongue." For the rest, the principal differences between Sumerian and Semitic Babylonian are: (1) post-positional suffixes instead of prepositions; (2) verbs with long strings of prefixes and infixes to express the persons and regimens, instead of a prefix and a suffix; (3) compound words, both nouns and verbs, are common instead of being exceedingly rare. Sumerian seems to have borrowed several words from Semitic Babylonian.

### 7. The Testimony of the Sculptures, etc. to the Race:

Not only the language, but also the sculptures which they have left, point to the probability that the earlier inhabitants of Shinar belonged to a different race from the later. The Semites of Babylonia were to all appearance thick-set and muscular, but the Sumerians, notwithstanding the stumpy figures which their statues and bas-reliefs show, seem to have been slim--in any case, their warriors, in the better bas-reliefs, as well as the figures of the god Nin-Girsu (formerly known as "the god with the firestick"), and the engraved cylinders, have this type. Moreover, the sculptures and cylinder-seals show that certain classes--priests or the like--were clean shaven, in marked contrast to Semitic usage elsewhere. Their deities, however, always had hair and beard, implying that they came from a different, though possibly related, stock. These deities were very numerous, and it is noteworthy that, though those with Sumerian names may be counted by hundreds, those with Semitic names are only to be reckoned by tens.

### 8. The Sumerians Probably in Shinar before the Semites:

Though there is no certain indication which race entered Shinar first, it is to be noted that Nimrod, presumably Shinar's first king and the founder of its great cities, was a son of Cush (Gen 10:8), and the name of Shinar seems to have existed before the foundation of Babel (Babylon) and its tower (Gen 11:2). In the native sculptures, moreover, the non-Semitic type precedes the Semitic; and in the inscriptions the non-Semitic idiom precedes that of the Semitic translation. Everything points, therefore, to the Sumerians having been in Babylonia before the Semitic inhabitants.

Map of Some of Locations in Shinar

## 9. The States of Shinar:

At the earliest period to which our records refer the Sumerians of Shinar were divided into a number of small states, of which the following may be regarded as the principal:

### (1) [Sippar](#):

Sippar or Sippar-Aruru (-Ya'ruru), possibly including Accad (Gen 10:10), some distance Southwest of Bagdad. It is the modern 'Abu-habbah, "father of grain." Though it seems to have fallen early under the dominion of the Semites, it was at first Sumerian, as its native name, Zimbir, and the ideographic writing thereof show. According to Berosus, who calls it Pantablibion, one of its earliest kings was Amelon or Amillarus, who reigned 13 sari, or 46,800 years. Later on came Evedoreschus, the native Enwe-duran-ki, renowned as a priest favored by the gods. His descendants, if of pure race, inherited the divine grace which he enjoyed. It is said to have been in Sippara (Sippar) that Ut-napistim, the Babylonian Noah, buried the records before entering the ark. ([Archaeology find](#))

### (2) [Kes \(Kish\)](#):

About 18 miles North of Babylon lay Kes, now Oheimmer--a foundation which seems to have preceded Babylon as the capital of Shinar. Its early queen, Azag-Bau, is said to have been the wife of a wine-merchant and to have reigned 100 years.

### (3) [Babylon](#):

Babylon, for which see BABEL; BABYLON. As one of its early kings, Berosus mentions Alorus, "the shepherd of the people," as having reigned for 10 sari, or 36,000 years. The state of Babylon probably included Cuthah. (Tel Ibrahim), which once had kings of its own, and possessed a special legend of the Creation. Belonging to Babylon, also, was the renowned city Borsippa, now Birs, or the Birs Nimroud, the traditional site of the Tower of Babel.

See BABEL, TOWER OF.

### (4) [Nippur](#):

Some distance Southeast of Babylon lay Nippur or Niffur, now Niffer (Noufar), identified by the rabbis with the "Calneh" of Gen 10:10. It was a place of considerable importance, and the seat of the worship of Enlil and Ninlil, later, also, of their son Ninip and his spouse (see CALNEH). The American excavations on this site have thrown a flood of light upon almost every branch of Assyriological research. ([See ruins of Temple](#))

### (5) [Adab](#):

Adab, now called Bismaya, the city of Mah, the goddess of reproduction. One of the earliest rulers of Adab was seemingly called Lugal-dalu, of whom a fine statue, discovered by the American explorers, exists. It was apparently renowned as a necropolis.

### (6) [Surippak \(Shuruppak\)](#):

South and a little West of Adab was Surippak, now Fara. This was the birthplace of the Babylonian Noah, Ut-napistim, son of Opartes (Umbara-Tutu), a Chaldean of Larancha. The coming of the Flood was revealed to Ut-napistim here.

### (7) [Umma](#):

Practically East of Fara lay Umma or Gisuh (or Giuh), now Jokha. This city was apparently of considerable importance, and the traditional rival of Lagas.

(8) [Uruk \(Erech\):](#)

South of Fara lay Unuga, Semitic Uruk, the Biblical ERECH (which see), now Warka. Its most celebrated king, after Gilgames, was Lugal-zaggi-si, one of the opponents of the rulers of Lagas.

(9) [Lagas:](#)

Some distance East of Warka was the territory of Lagas, now Tel-loh--a little state, rather in accessible, but of considerable importance to the antiquarian, which is a testimonial to the advance in civilization which it had made. Its kings and viceroys were among the most renowned, though apparently unknown outside their own domains. The most celebrated were the reformer Uru-ka-gina and viceroy Gudea, to whom many erections in the city were due. (See [Gudea's remarkable statue in the Louvre.](#))

(10) [Larsa:](#)

Somewhat to the Southeast of Warka lay Larsa, the "Ellasar" of Gen 14:1 (which see). This center of learning maintained its independence even after the other states had been absorbed by Hammurabi and his dynasty into the Babylonian empire.

(11) [Ur:](#)

To the Southeast of Warka and Senqara lies the site of the ancient [UR OF THE CHALDEES](#) (which see) now Mugheir. It was renowned for its temple to the moon, and for the kings known as the dynasty of Ur: Sur-Engur, Dungi, Bur-Sin, Gimil-Sin, and Ibi-Sin.

(12) [Eridu:](#)

South of the Ur lay Eridu, or, in full, Guruduga, "the good city," wherein, apparently, lay the earthly Paradise. This is identified with the present `Abu-shahreïn, and was the seat of Ea or Enki, god of the sea and of fertilizing streams. According to the tradition, it was there that the "dark vine" grew--a type, seemingly, of the tree of life. The later kings of Babylon sometimes bear the title "king of Eridu," as though rulers of the domain of Paradise.

(13) The Land of the Sea:

The Land of the Sea (that bordering on the Persian Gulf), in which, seemingly, the Chaldeans afterward settled, seems to have played an important part in the early history of Shinar. Berosus speaks of its king Ammenon, who reigned 12 sari, or 43,200 years, and in whose time the Musarus Oannes, or Annedotus, arose out of the Persian Gulf. Like others referred to in the legends which Berosus refers to, he was half-man and half-fish. It is thought that these incidents, though evidently mythical, point to the introduction of civilization into Babylonia, from this point.

See also JONAH; JONAH, THE BOOK OF.

(14) Nisin, Isin, or Karrak:

Nisin, Isin, or Karrak, seat of the worship of Nin-Karraga, was also an important state governed by its own kings.

(15) Upe or Upia (Opis):

Upe or Upia, the Greek Opis, apparently obtained renown at a very early date, its kings being given in the great chronological list before those of Kis.

(16) Other Well-known Cities:

Other well-known cities, possibly state-capitals, were Larak, Greek Laranche; Amarda, one of the centers of the worship of Nergal; Asnunna, a province East of the present Bagdad; Dilmu, now Dailem; Nuru, Ennigi, and Kakra, seemingly centers of the worship of Hadad; Tilmun, at the head of the Persian Gulf, and including the island of Bahrein; the province of Sabu; Seseb or Bagdadu, possibly the modern Bagdad; and several others.

10. Shinar and Its Climate:

Whether the country was in the same seemingly uncared-for state in ancient times as at present is unknown; but one cannot help admiring the courage of the original immigrants into such a district, for example, as that of Lagas. This, which belongs to the southern region, is very inaccessible on account of the watercourses and

marshes. Like the whole of Shinar in general, it is more or less dried up in summer, and unhealthy for Europeans. The alterations in the waterways, owing to changes in the irrigation-channels, must then, as now, have hindered communication. Sharp cold, with frost, succeeds the heat of summer, and from time to time sand-storms sweep across the plain. Notwithstanding the destruction sometimes wrought, the floods were always welcomed in consequence of the fruitfulness which followed, and which was such as to make Babylonia one of the most fertile tracts known.

#### 11. Sculpture in Shinar:

The reference to the Sumerian sculptures in (7) above will have shown that the inhabitants of the Plain of Shinar possessed an art of no mean order and of some antiquity, even at the time when it first presents itself to our notice. It is true that many specimens are crude and uncouth, but this is probably due to the sculptors having been, often enough, the slaves of their material. Their stones were frequently more or less pebble-shaped, and they had neither the skill nor the tools to reduce them to better proportions--moreover, reduction of bulk would have meant a diminution of their importance. The broad, squat figures which they produced, however, gave them bad models for their bas-reliefs, and it was long ere this defect was removed, notwithstanding the superior work produced by their seal-engravers during and after the 4th millennium BC.

#### 12. The First Nation to Use Writing in Western Asia:

But in all probability special renown will always be attached to the non-Semitic inhabitants of Shinar as the inventors, or at least the earliest users known to us, of the cuneiform script. It may be objected that the system which they introduced was cumbersome and imperfect, but they knew of nothing simpler, and modern Chinese, with which their script has been compared, is far less practical. Briefly, the system may be described as syllabic for the prefixes and suffixes, and ideographic for the roots. To show this the following transcribed example will probably suffice:

#### 13. The System Employed, with an Example:

E nu-DU URU nu-DIM, A house was not built, a city was not constructed;

URU nu-DIM ADAM nu-mun-GAR, A city was not constructed, a community he had not founded;

ABZU nu-DU GURUDUGA nu-DIM, The abyss was not built, Eridu was not constructed;

E AZAGA DINGIRene KI-DURA-bi nu-DIM, The holy house of the gods, its seat was not constructed;

Su-NIGIN KURKURAgI AABBAama, The whole of the lands was sea.

The nominal and verbal roots of the above extract from the bilingual account of the Creation are in capitals, and the pronominal prefixes and suffixes, with a couple of lengthenings which determine the pronunciations of the nouns, in small letters. This will not only give an idea of the poetical form of the Sumerian legend of the Creation by Merodach and Aruru, but also show how short and concise, as a language, was the speech of Shinar, before Semitic supremacy.

**Genesis 11:3 They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar.**

- they said one to another - Heb. a man said to his neighbour, Go to. Ge 11:4,7 Ps 64:5 Pr 1:11 Ec 2:1 Isa 5:5 41:6,7 Jas 4:13 5:1, not as, Heb 3:13 10:24
- burn thoroughly - Heb. burn to a burning
- brick - Ex 1:14 5:7-18 2Sa 12:31 Isa 9:10 65:3 Na 3:14
- slime - Ge 14:10 Ex 2:3
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

**"COME ON PEOPLE  
LET'S GET TOGETHER"**

When I was teenager, there was a song that would be apropos for this passage as it was entitled [Get Together](#)," (the words are not bad).

This first section of Genesis 11 reminds me of God's Word in Proverbs 19:21

**Many plans are in a man's heart,** But the counsel of the LORD will stand.

**They said to one another** (Heb - re'eh - a friend, neighbor or companion) - "**They**" refers to what at that time composed the entire race of man, those who had migrated east and had a common language and vocabulary. **One another** is the Hebrew idiom "a man to his neighbor." The Hebrew word re'eh describes a friend, neighbor or companion and the Lxx has [plesion](#), the word for neighbor (one near). This supports the premise that they were of one mind, unified, at harmony at this time.

**Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly**- Note the command **Come**. The Hebrew more literally is "'Give, let us make bricks," give implying "give help." The verb "give" is in the masculine singular which would suggest this command came from one man, one who had assumed the role of leader. The identity of the man who uttered this is not stated (I AM TEMPTED TO SAY "NIMROD" BUT THAT IS JUST A SUGGESTION - [George Bush](#) follows Josephus in designating Nimrod as the leader of this founding of Babylon). This man's words are clearly not a suggestion but a command to the people to carry out the "plans of their hearts."

Note that 4 times in chapter 11 we encounter the phrase "let us" three times from the lips of men (Ge 11:3, 4) and the final utterance from God (Ge 11:7)

**John Phillips** observes that "God builds with stone (1 Peter 2:4–8+). The coming world empire of Christ is depicted as one of stone (Daniel 2:34–35+, Da 2:44–45+). But man uses brick. "They had brick for stone and slime had they for mortar" (Ge 11:3). Brick is simply hardened clay, a fitting symbol for humankind. That ancient world empire, in other words, was humanistic. Nothing really lasting can be made out of hardened clay and slime. All human things are bound to be faulty and frail. The slime used by those old world builders was bitumen, a tenaciously adhesive substance. What a contrast between the precious stones of the heavenly city (Revelation 21:19) and the clay and slime of Babel!" (BORROW [Exploring Genesis](#) page 104)

**Steven Cole** - Making bricks when there was no stone bolstered their pride and confidence in themselves. "We can do anything, overcome any hardship. The only limit on what we can do is our own imagination. Let's go forward." As in Genesis 4, it was progress; but it was progress without God. ( [Man Versus God: God Wins Genesis 11:1-9](#) )

**And they used brick ([lebenah](#)) for stone, and they used tar for mortar ([chomer/homer](#))** - Note that they did not have rocks or stones with which to build so they were forced to invent their own "stones."

**Ross** - In their zeal for societal development, alliance, and fame, and with all the optimism of a beginning people, they began to organize their brickmaking. They were an ingenious lot, for they lacked the proper stone and clay and had to make do with makeshift materials. Making bricks to replace the unavailable stones would further feed the pride of the people who would rise above their difficulties. The writer's attitude toward this comes across in an appropriate pun: they had no clay (חֹמֶר) but they used asphalt (חֵמֶר).

**Walton - brick technology.** The passage speaks of using kiln-baked bricks in place of stone. In Palestine readily available stone was used for the foundations of important buildings and sun-dried brick for the superstructure. Kilnfired brick was unnecessary and is not attested in this region. In the southern plains of Mesopotamia, however, stone would have to be quarried some distance away and transported. The technology of baking brick was developed toward the end of the fourth millennium, and the resulting product, using bitumen as a mastic, proved waterproof and as sturdy as stone. Since it was an expensive process, it was used only for important public buildings

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**Brick (03843)**(lebenah from **laben** = to be white) means brick. **Gilbrant** says "The verb for "making bricks" (HED #3967) is derived from the noun levfināh, "brick." The noun is a loanword from Akkadian, which is attested in a number of West Semitic languages. It is a generic, which denotes both sun-baked and oven-baked brick. **Lebenāh** is used in the account of the building of the tower of Babel, placed in Mesopotamia (Gen. 11). It appears in the Hebrew translation and expansion of the Akkadian phrase found in foundation inscriptions, meaning "with mortar and burnt bricks." The emphasis on bricks instead of stone underscored the difference in building materials in Mesopotamia, where quarriable stone was a rarity in the natural environment. In Egypt, Israelite slave labor was employed in the making of bricks. They used straw in making sun-dried bricks to prevent them from cracking while they dried. Exodus indicates that the Hebrew slaves had a set quota of bricks they were expected to meet each day (Ex 1:14; 5:7f, 18). Tomb paintings depict slaves at work making bricks. In Isa. 9:10, simple bricks are set in contrast to squared stones. The Lord denounced the arrogance of the inhabitants of the fallen northern kingdom of Israel, who failed to see his punishment and proclaim that the kingdom would arise even more lavishly than it had existed before its destruction. In Ezek. 4:1, the Lord directs the prophet to draw the city of Jerusalem upon a brick and then to lay siege to it. Two passages extend the meaning of the word beyond a single brick. In Isa. 65:3, the people provoke the Lord by burning incense upon the bricks. This alludes to incense altars apart from the Temple. The usage of the material underscores the profanity of the altars. Altars to the Lord were to be made of undressed (not worked by human hands) stones, found in their natural created state. The use of tools upon the rocks was to impose human, rather than divine,



molding upon the material. Metal altars are mentioned, acceptable presumably because of the refinement process, in which impurities are removed. Bricks are human creations, composed of decaying matter. Thus, there is an inherent unholiness, ritual impurity, associated with a brick altar. In Exo. 24:10, Moses, Aaron, two of his sons and the seventy elders of Israel see and eat with the Lord at the time God makes a covenant with his people. They saw "what was like the work of a brick of sapphire" under his feet. Here *levfināh* takes an extended meaning of "stone slab" or "pavement." The phrase then indicates a sapphire pavement under the Lord's feet. ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**Lebenah - 10v** - Gen. 11:3; Exod. 1:14; Exod. 5:8; Exod. 5:16; Exod. 5:18; Exod. 5:19; Exod. 24:10; Isa. 9:10; Isa. 65:3; Ezek. 4:1

**Dictionary of Biblical Imagery page 443 - BRICKS** - The most commonly used building material of ancient biblical times, bricks were usually made of mud or clay mixed with sand and chopped straw. This mixture was baked either in the sun or (especially for more decorative or important buildings) in pottery kilns. Kiln-burnt bricks were durable but much less abundant and were virtually unknown in Palestine until the Roman period. The cheaper and easier sun-dried bricks abounded throughout the ancient world.

Sun-dried bricks appear hard and permanent but crumble easily with rain or temperature change. Isaiah sends a warning from God to the Israelites who arrogantly boast that although "the bricks have fallen down," they will rebuild with stone (Is 9:10; NIV). Stone is long-lasting; the bricks here picture quickly crumbling construction, possibly even of the heathen altars that God's disobedient people set up throughout their land to imitate the altars of the nations surrounding them. According to Isaiah such idol worshipers provoke God to his very face, "offering sacrifices in gardens/ and burning incense on altars of bricks" (Is 65:3). Such altars were made according to human rather than divine plans. They would not last, not only because the bricks would crumble but ultimately because the Lord pronounced judgment on Israel for her sinful idolatry (see, for example, the entire passage of Is 9:8–21.)

Bricks often appear in contexts where people are constructing their own proud, temporal plans rather than obeying the eternal God. Therefore in Scripture bricks often carry negative connotations and associations: they show the limited, temporal creations of human beings, especially when those human beings have set themselves against the eternal God. The builders of the tower of Babel begin by saying to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly" (Gen 11:3). Verse 4 even comments on their use of bricks rather than stone, which became less abundant as the people moved eastward. The bricks in this story are the concrete building blocks of the people's prideful plans. The bricks rising up toward the heavens help picture the people's hardened hearts as they yearn for the heights and the power that belong only to God.

The most extensive mention of bricks comes in the story of the Israelites in Egypt (Ex 1). Again, the people in control are asserting their own prideful will in rebellion against the Almighty God: the Egyptians cruelly force on God's chosen people "hard labor in brick and mortar," and their leader Pharaoh refuses to heed God's command to let the people go (1:14; 5:2).

In each story God's supreme power prevails: he stops the building of the city and tower of Babel; he delivers his people from the hand of Pharaoh; later he punishes his people for their idolatry. Again and again bricks tell the story not only of hard, rebellious hearts but also of the fleeting, transitory rise to power such hearts enjoy.

**Mortar (02563)** (chomer/homer from *chamar* = to ferment, boil or foam up) cement, mortar, clay. Gilbrant - This noun refers to "clay" building material. Nahum challenged the inhabitants of Nineveh to strengthen their defenses ("work the clay," Nah. 3:14, NIV). The reference here is to earthen bulwarks. Yahweh treads on rulers, demonstrating his sovereignty over the nations as One who treads on the ground (Isa. 41:25). Although an individual may pile up silver like mounds of "dirt," security is not certain (Job 27:16). Job pondered the paradox that God, Who formed him of "clay," should allow him to return to "dust" (Job 30:19). Here "clay" is better understood as "moist ground" as it stands parallel to the second thought, "dust." The question is asked whether God should take note of mere humans "who dwell in houses of clay" (Job 4:19). Elihu briefly empathized with Job, "I also am formed out of the clay" (Job 33:6). Chōmer served as mud for the sun-dried bricks the Israelites were required to make for the Egyptians (Exo. 1:14). These consisted of mud and straw (Exo. 5:7). When fired in an oven, these could be quite durable. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah employed the imagery of a potter. Isaiah compared idolaters to clay which would rebel against the potter. Such a thing is seen as going against reason (Isa. 45:9ff). This relationship is further affirmed: "You are our Father; we are the clay: You are our Potter [Fashioner]" (Isa. 64:8). God summoned Jeremiah to go to the potter's house to see how the vessels were made as a symbolic act to accompany his prophecy (Jer. 18:1-12). These vessels molded of clay (v. 4) were really not in a position to say "yes" or "no." The nations are also vessels in God's hands, like the clay, useful only if they obey Him. Paul further develops this metaphor in Rom. 9:20-23.

**Baker** has a different discussion dividing chomer/homer into 3 classes -

I. A masculine noun denoting mortar, mud, mire. It refers to mud in the streets (Isa. 10:6). It was a building material used with bricks (Ex. 1:14). Bitumen was used as mortar at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:3). Potters used a form of mud designated by this word (Isa. 29:16; Jer. 18:4, 6). It is used metaphorically to describe people as opposed to God (Job 10:9; Isa. 45:9; 64:8[7]) who is the potter that forms the clay. Seals were pressed into this malleable substance (Job 38:14). It symbolic of something weak, such as defenses (Job 13:12) or the frail human body (Job 4:19).

II. A masculine noun indicating a heap, churning, surge. Figuratively, it refers to a pile or heap of water (Hab. 3:15), a pile of dead frogs, or even a heap of dead bodies (Judg. 15:16).

III. A masculine noun indicating a homer. It was a dry measure of barley (Lev. 27:16; Ezek. 45:13; Hos. 3:2) or wheat (Ezek. 45:13). A dry homer equaled 354 dry quarts or 412 liquid quarts. ([The Complete Word Study Dictionary – Old Testament](#))

**Chomer/Homer** - 30x in 26v - clay 11, homer 11, mortar 4, mire 2, heap 2; 30 Gen. 11:3; Exod. 1:14; Exod. 8:14; Lev. 27:16; Num. 11:32; Job 4:19; Job 10:9; Job 13:12; Job 27:16; Job 30:19; Job 33:6; Job 38:14; Isa. 5:10; Isa. 10:6; Isa. 29:16; Isa. 41:25; Isa. 45:9; Isa. 64:8; Jer. 18:4; Jer. 18:6; Ezek. 45:11; Ezek. 45:13; Ezek. 45:14; Hos. 3:2; Nah. 3:14; Hab. 3:15

**Genesis 11:4 They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."**

- whose - De 1:28 9:1 Da 4:11,22
- and let - 2Sa 8:13 Ps 49:11-13 Pr 10:7 Da 4:30 Joh 5:44
- lest - Ge 11:8,9 Ps 92:9 Lu 1:51
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## **FIRST BRICKS THEN A TOWER TO HEAVEN**

**They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city and a tower whose top will reach into heaven-** Again **come** is masculine, singular and points to a titular head calling for this building project. It is interesting that both uses of **come** (vv 3-4) are translated with the Greek [deute](#) which is an imperative meaning to come, come on, come now and is used of Jesus to call His disciples (Mt 4:19+) and also to call all weary souls "**Come to Me.**" (Mt 11:28+). In both those uses in the NT the idea is follow me. Whoever the leader was (probably Nimrod), he is calling the people to follow him! Their success in the brick making business motivated and energized the desire to build **a city and a tower.**

**THOUGHT** - Notice the phrase "**for ourselves,**" and not for the glory of God. They forgot (or simply refused to accept) that the chief end of man (from Genesis to Revelation) is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. They wanted to glorify self and enjoy self! This sounds like the mantra of our present godless world. Fallen flesh is still fallen after 1000's of years. It has not evolved and gotten any better than it was in Genesis 11!!

Note the difference in who gives the command to "**come**" - The people said, "Come, let's build." And Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28+).

Have you ever watched a meeting in the UN? They all have headphones on so that translators can help them understand each other. The first "United Nations" had no need for headphones! And so here in Genesis 11, we encounter the first, true "United Nations" and as we see it did not function very well! Is there a message here about the organization we know as the "United Nations?" Just wondering?

**Into heaven** may be hyperbolic language as in Dt 1:28, but also seems to indicate their spiritual aspirations. What was Satan's initial ploy? Ge 3:5 he said "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God." Now substitute "**the day you build it...and you will be like God.**"

One is reminded of John's description of the end times Babylon that in a sense does achieve her goal of reaching to heaven

"I heard **another voice from heaven**, saying, "Come out of her (BABYLON), my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; for **her sins have piled up as high as heaven**, and God has remembered her iniquities." (Rev 18:4-5+)

What a contrast Babylon will be to the holy city John writing

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming **down out of heaven** from God (Rev 21:10+)

**John Piper** on two great sins exposed - The key statements are in Ge 11:4: 1) They aim to build a city. 2) They aim to build a tower in the city that reaches to the heavens. 3) They aim to make a name for themselves. 4) They aim not to be dispersed over the whole earth. The first two of these correspond to the second two. Building a city is the way one avoids being dispersed over the whole earth. And building a tower into the heavens is the way one makes a name for oneself. So the city and tower are the outward expressions of the inward sins. The two sins are the love of praise (so you crave to make a name for yourself) and the love of security (so you build a city and don't take the risks of filling the earth). God's will for human beings is not that we find our joy in being praised, but that we find our joy in knowing and praising him. His will is not that we find our security in cities but in God whom we gladly obey. So the spectacular sin of man is that even after the flood, which was a thunderclap of warning against sin for Noah and his descendants, it turns out that we are no better after the flood than we were before. The human condition is just like it was with Adam and Eve. They will decide for themselves what is best. They think they can even rise up and claim the place of God. This is the story of mankind to this very day apart from redeeming grace. (Full sermon [The Pride of Babel and the Praise of Christ](#))

**John Phillips** They were to have a political unity, symbolized by the city, and they were to have a religious unity, symbolized by the tower....The idea was not to build a tower so tall it would reach to heaven, but to build a tower topped by the heavens, that is, by the signs of the zodiac. Astronomical and astrological data were to be associated with that tower. God was not in their thoughts at all. Stargazing and occultism were to be the features of their religious system. Again, the whole thing looks ahead to the last world empire, which will bear the same hallmarks. The Beast will make great use of religion, but it will be religion based on occultism and the worship of himself. (Rev 13:15) (BORROW [Exploring Genesis](#) page 104)

**ESV Study Bible** (BORROW) - The Babel enterprise is all about human independence and self-sufficiency apart from God. The builders believe that they have no need of God. Their technology and social unity give them confidence in their own ability, and they have high aspirations, constructing a tower with its top in the heavens.

**NET NOTE** - A translation of "heavens" for שָׁמַיִם (shamayim) fits this context because the Babylonian ziggurats had temples at the top, suggesting they reached to the heavens, the dwelling place of the gods.

*The tower becomes a symbol of man's independence from God.*

*It is humanism in its full flower.*

-- Ray Pritchard

**Ray Pritchard** - J. I. Packer calls this passage a "mirror of the modern world." It reveals to us what we might call the power game. The builders of the Tower of Babel had two purposes in mind, both mentioned in verse 4: 1) that we may make a name for ourselves, and 2) that we may not be scattered over the face of the whole earth. The tower was meant to make a statement: "Don't mess with us. We're the greatest city on earth. No one is like us. No one can touch us." How modern that sounds. We live in a world that exalts the superlative. Big, bigger, biggest. Good, better, best. Fast, faster, fastest. Smart, smarter, smartest. Tall, taller, tallest. Rich, richer, richest. We all want to be the "est" if we can. Why be the "er" if you can be the "est"? That's why we compete, that's why we keep score. We Americans love a good fight and we love competition and we love to win.....There are two implications I would pass along for you to think about: First, the compulsive drive for power and prestige stems from our deep-seated fear of dependence on someone else. We want to be the "est" in our field—biggest, strongest, smartest, loudest, richest, fastest—because if we are the "est" then others will have to depend on us, but we won't have to depend on anyone or anything. As the poet said in words that could have been carved on the Tower of Babel, "I am the master of my fate, the captain of my soul." At this point we need to ponder carefully the implications of this story. Is there anything wrong with building a tower? No. Is there anything wrong with working together to build a tower? No. Is there anything wrong with building the tallest tower on earth? No. Is it wrong to advertise that your tower is the tallest tower on earth? No, but at this point we're drifting into a danger zone, one that is so subtle that we hardly see it until it captures us completely. Human pride is a tricky thing. Pride is what made Lucifer rebel against God in the first place. Pride was the original sin of the universe. Ambition is not wrong, competition is not wrong, winning isn't wrong, celebrating your victories is not wrong, being the best is not wrong but it is never entirely innocent either. Sin always lurks in the neighborhood somewhere. And usually not too far away.....That leads me to the second implication, which is that the compulsive drive for power and security leads to the moral degeneration of the soul. Our desperate search for significance leads us to compromise our values time and again in the name of independence, freedom, and the need to control our own destiny. We want to be like Frank Sinatra and say, "I did it my way," which perfectly expresses the spirit of Babel. And so we cut corners, use illegal drugs, wink at insider trading, break the rules, lie to our parents, lie to our spouses, lie to our friends, and we end up lying to ourselves. We use people and then discard them when they don't fit into our plans anymore. ([The Tower That Fell: Why God Stopped the Building Program](#))

*The next time you feel the need to brag about what you've done,*

*pay attention to that faint cracking sound.*

*It's the thin ice beneath your feet that is about to give way.*

-- Ray Pritchard

**[African Study Bible](#)** In the Garden of Eden, Satan deceived Adam and Eve. He told them that by eating the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, they would be like God, "knowing both good and evil." They ate the fruit and God punished them for disobeying his command (Genesis 3:1–19). Later at Babel, humans made another attempt to be like God by building a city and tower to make them famous and to reach the sky. Thus they would be "like God" and keep themselves from scattering over the earth. This also disobeyed God's command to fill the earth (Genesis 9:1, 7)....God punishes any person who attempts to be like God rather than exalt God. Herod in the New Testament became sick and died because, by accepting people's worship, he made himself like God (Acts 12:20–24). We have seen empires, global business leaders, and great celebrities rise and fall; but the name of God remains. Although Africa is among the most diverse continents in terms of ethnicity and language, this confusion of languages should not be considered a curse. It was God's tool to achieve his purpose of filling all parts of the earth with people. As such, language differences should be celebrated. Our thousands of languages in Africa are a testimony to the filling of the earth. They should enrich our worship and should display the beauty of our sovereign God. ([See background of this ground breaking study Bible at Oasis International](#)).

**[Bob Utley](#)** - "a tower whose top *will reach into heaven*" The people of Mesopotamia were astral worshipers (i.e., the heavenly lights were gods). These towers were raised platforms to observe the night sky. They were the place where the gods were worshiped and encountered.

## A VENTURE IN HUMAN AUTONOMY

**And let us make for ourselves a name- NET** = "So that (term of purpose) we may make a name for ourselves." Note the progression - make bricks, make a city and tower and make a name! What what rhymes with name? Fame! What do we see here? Pride, arrogance, hubris, the same sin that caused Satan to fall from Heaven and the root of all sins. The irony of seeking to make for themselves a name was that God would soon grant their wish for this place would be named Babel. This making of a name for oneself makes me think of the building called the [Trump Tower](#) (see [picture Donald Trump in his tower](#)). This passage also reminds me of God's reaction to rebellious men in Psalm 2:4+ "He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them."

And of course **a name** alludes to reputation.

**THOUGHT** - Have you ever set out to make a name for yourself and the result ends up being something akin to "Babel" or confusion? Jesus describes the Name we would all be wish to seek, commanding "**Seek** first His kingdom (King) and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you!" (Mt 6:33+).

**[Warren Wiersbe](#)** - The word "Shem" means "name" in Hebrew, and Abraham, a descendant of Shem, was promised that God would make his name great (Gen. 12:2). The people of the world depend on their own wisdom and efforts, and yet they fail to achieve lasting fame. Who knows the name of anybody who worked on the famous Tower of Babel? Yet the name of Abraham is known around the world and revered by Jews, Muslims, and Christians. There's a vast difference between mankind's "We will make our name great!" and God's "I will make your name great!"

**Steven Cole** - Centuries later, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, boasted in his own great power. He set up a gold statue as a symbol of his glory and power and forced everyone to bow down to it. Later he boasted as he walked on the roof of his palace, "Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?" (Dan. 4:30). He exalted himself against God who is the ruler over mankind, who bestows human sovereignty to whomever He wishes (Dan. 4:32). And he used his power to force people to bow before false gods....**ILLUSTRATION** - Alfredo Stroessner ruled Paraguay as dictator for 34 years. He had named over 10,000 streets and public places after himself. But in February, 1989, he was deposed. The day after the coup, crews were already at work changing all of these names. ([The Roots of the Nations Genesis 10:1-32](#))

In Hebrew, **Shem** means "name." Moses is saying that if we proudly seek to make a name for ourselves by our achievements, God will scatter us. If we want His blessing, we must, like Shem, obey Him. From Shem's line will come Abraham and God's covenant of blessing.

**Steven Cole** - Some have been bothered by Ge 11:5, which seems to imply that God didn't know what was happening on earth, as if He were feeble or near-sighted. So He comes down for a closer look. While the verse is anthropomorphic (using human language to describe God), its point is satirical. Here proud men build a tower whose top (they think) will reach into heaven; but God, who is high and lifted up, must come down in order to view it. It's just a speck from His vantage point. The satire is heightened by referring

to the builders as "the sons of men" (11:5). They are not gods; they were mere, puny men. It is a clever satire on the feebleness of men who vainly think they can penetrate God's realm. Man may plan and build in defiance of God, but God will accomplish His purpose in spite of man's rebellion....Yet in spite of this bravado, these pioneers had an underlying sense of anxiety. They feared that they would be scattered over the face of the earth and die unknown, without a name for themselves. Isn't that just like proud man? Like a little boy, he puts on a brave front, but deep down inside, he's afraid. ( [Man Versus God: God Wins Genesis 11:1-9](#) )

**Otherwise we will be scattered** ([puts](#); Lxx = [diaspeiro](#)) **abroad over the face of the whole earth**- Here is the reason for this construction project! What was the fear of the people? That they would be dispersed throughout the earth. Their desire is contrary to God's charge to be fill the earth (Ge 1:22, 28+, 9:1, 7+), so we see them refusing to scatter and fill the earth as instructed.

**John Phillips** The whole idea was to glorify humanity and to bind men together in a permanent union, and that in defiance of God's will. (BORROW [Exploring Genesis](#) page 104)

**NET NOTE** on **scattered** - The Hebrew verb שָׁחַט ("scatter") is a key term in this passage. The focal point of the account is the dispersion ("scattering") of the nations rather than the Tower of Babel. But the passage also forms a polemic against Babylon, the pride of the east and a cosmopolitan center with a huge ziggurat. To the Hebrews it was a monument to the judgment of God on pride.

**Richardson** suggests that "The hatred of anonymity drives men to heroic feats of valour or long hours of drudgery; or it urges them to spectacular acts of shame or of unscrupulous self-preferment. In the word forms it attempts to give the honour and the glory to themselves which properly belongs to the name of God." (BORROW [Alan Richardson, Genesis I-XI](#))

**Ross** sums up the root causes of their "Desire to Shine in Shinar" as an "underlying anxiety (the fear of being separated and disconnected) and the desire for fame (a sense of security in a powerful reputation)."

**Bob Utley** - Many have asserted that it relates to the Babylonian ziggurats (John W. Walton, *ANE Thought and the OT*, pp. 25,120-121), but the Hebrew word is *migdal* which is usually translated "fortified tower" (cf. Jdg. 8:9-17). It is obviously an attempt by mankind to organize themselves apart from God, and thereby to thwart His will. Philo even says that they wrote their name on every brick so that they would not be dispersed. This is the first example of human pride, organized and functioning apart from God (cf. Daniel's four empires and Revelation 18 and 19).

**Walton on tower** - The central feature of these early cities in southern Mesopotamia was the temple complex. Often, the temple complex was the city. The temple complex in this period would have been comprised of the temple itself, where the patron deity was worshiped, and, most prominently, by the ziggurat. [Ziggurats](#) were structures designed to provide stairways from the heavens (the gate of the gods) to earth so that the gods could come down into their temple and into the town and bring blessing. It was a convenience provided for the deity and his messengers. These stairways were featured in the mythology of the \*Sumerians and also are portrayed in Jacob's dream (Gen 28:12). The ziggurats were constructed of a sun-dried brick frame filled with dirt and rubble and finished off with a shell of kiln-baked brick. There were no rooms, chambers or passageways of any sort inside. The structure itself was simply made to hold up the stairway. At the top was a small room for the deity, equipped with a bed and a table supplied regularly with food. In this way the deity could refresh himself during his descent. None of the festivals or \*ritual acts suggest that people used the ziggurat for any purpose. It was for the gods. The priests certainly would have to go up to provide fresh supplies, but it was holy ground. The ziggurat served as the architectural representation of the pagan religious developments of this period, when deity was transformed into the image of man. (See also John Walton's 18 page paper entitled "[The Mesopotamian Background of the Tower of Babel Account and Its Implications](#)")

*When proud men set themselves against the Sovereign God,  
God always wins.*

**Steven Cole** has an general commentary on Genesis 11:1-9 - For centuries, men have deluded themselves by thinking they could determine their destinies apart from God. As William Ernest Henley boasted in his poem, "Invictus," "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul." Proud men think that they can call the shots. What they forget is that one little virus, one drunk driver, one "freak" accident, is all it takes to end their proud plans. The Bible declares, "There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel against the Lord" (Prov. 21:30). Concerning world rulers, a later king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, was humbled by God until he learned that "the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes" (Dan. 4:17, 25). As the psalmist expressed God's response to proud kings who challenge His rule, "He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them" (Ps. 2:4). Concerning the plans of proud man, the Bible declares, "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but the counsel of the Lord, it will stand" (Prov. 19:21). These verses are a commentary on Genesis 11:1-9, where we find proud man planning to thwart the purpose of God. When proud men set themselves against the Sovereign God, God always wins. It's like saying, When a deluded man sets himself against a speeding locomotive, the train always wins. Unless you want to spend your life in futility, you must submit to the Sovereign God. (**ED: THIS BEGS AN IMPORTANT QUESTION DEAR MORTAL READER -- HAVE YOU SURRENDERED**



YOUR LIFE, YOUR WILL, YOUR HEART, YOUR MIND, YOUR HOPES, YOUR DREAMS TO THE LORD JESUS CHRIST? IF NOT, YOU CAN WRITE UNDER THE LEGACY OF YOUR SHORT LIFE ON EARTH THE WORDS "VANITY OF VANITIES! ALL IS VANITY!" Eccl 1:2. IF YOU WANT YOUR LIFE TO COUNT FOR ETERNITY, YIELD YOURSELF IN TIME TO JESUS CHRIST AND HE WILL GUIDE YOUR STEPS AND YOUR STOPS! [REDEEM THE TIME](#) [PLAY THIS SONG AND REALLY PONDER THE WORDS](#)) ([Man Versus God: God Wins Genesis 11:1-9](#))

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**Scattered** (06327)(puts) means to scatter, be dispersed, to be spread abroad. The first use is of men scattered throughout the earth (Ge 10:18, Ge 11:4). Israel's dispersion (Ezek 34:5), like sheep scattered (Zech 13:7). Be scattered - army (2Ki 25:5, Jer 52:8); people (Ge 11:8, 9); Israel's being scattered (Dt. 4:27; 28:64; Jer. 9:16; Ezek. 11:16) Lightning scattering an enemy (2Sa 22:15, Ps 18:14). A second meaning for **put** is to shatter, to crush, to break in pieces. It points out figuratively the Lord's apparent attack on Job in sickness (Job 16:12). God's word, shatters or crushes rock like a sledgehammer (Jer. 23:29). God's look breaking, shattering mountains (Hab. 3:6).

**Victor Hamilton** - The word is first used in Scripture to describe the "scattering" of the families of the Canaanites in Genesis 10:18. On the heels of this is the famous Tower of Babel incident (Genesis 11) in which the builders of the tower(?) did not want to be "scattered abroad" upon the face of the earth (Genesis 11:4). The Lord, however, made such a scattering inevitable (Genesis 11:8-9) by destroying their language. This made further communication among the peoples impossible, and thus brought to a halt their building project. It should be observed in this passage that no mention is made of God confusing the languages. Rather, what was destroyed was the universal language (Genesis 11:1), an international lingua franca. The individual dialects (Genesis 10:5, 20, 31) remained intact.

There is no substantial change in the meaning of the verb as it is used in one of the above mentioned three stems. The only perceptible difference is that in the Qal and Niphal pûš is intransitive and in the Hiphil it is transitive.

There are three repeated categories which most often serve as the subject or object of pûš. (1) It may refer to the scattering of armies, either that of the enemy (Numbers 10:35; Psalm 68:1 [H 2]) or one's own (1 Samuel 11:11; 1 Samuel 14:34; 2 Kings 25:5=Jeremiah 52:8). (2) The subject/object of pûš may refer to sheep, (a) as subject, in Jeremiah 10:21; Ezekiel 34:5-6, 12; Zech. 13:7; (b) as object, in Jeremiah 23:1. Sheep may get lost inadvertently. They may, quite literally, nibble their way to lostness. But that is not the nuance inferred by the verb under consideration. Sheep scatter, if possible, impulsively when there is some external threat to their safety and security. It is the shepherd's duty at that time to take command of the situation and repulse the threat. Ezekiel 34:5 mentions the hapless sheep who were scattered because of the absence of a shepherd. (3) Most frequently, the object of pûš is Israel, who sometimes is likened to scattered sheep (1 Kings 22:17 = 2 Chron. 18:16). In a few passages not only Israel, but Israel's enemy, Egypt, is scattered abroad (by God): Ezekiel 29:12-13; Ezekiel 30:23, 26.

There are two things of interest when the Bible speaks of God's "scattering" Israel. One, the phrase, "I/He/the Lord scatters Israel" is confined to the prophetic books of the Bible (and here, either in the past, Ezekiel 20:23; Ezekiel 28:25, or as a threat, Ezekiel 22:15 for example). The only exceptions to this are: Deut. 4:27; Deut. 28:64; Deut. 30:3; Neh. 1:8. Two, when in this phrase God is the subject and Israel is the object, the verb is always in the Hiphil stem. It is not the Assyrians or Babylonians who scatter the people of God. They are simply instrumental. God himself is the scatterer. ([TWOT](#) online)

**Puts - 66v - KJV uses = scatter 48, scatter abroad 6, disperse 3, spread abroad 2, cast abroad 2, drive 1, break to pieces 1, shake to pieces 1, dash to pieces 1, retired 1;** Gen. 10:18; Gen. 11:4; Gen. 11:8; Gen. 11:9; Gen. 49:7; Exod. 5:12; Num. 10:35; Deut. 4:27; Deut. 28:64; Deut. 30:3; 1 Sam. 11:11; 1 Sam. 13:8; 1 Sam. 14:34; 2 Sam. 18:8; 2 Sam. 20:22; 2 Sam. 22:15; 1 Ki. 22:17; 2 Ki. 25:5; 2 Chr. 18:16; Neh. 1:8; Job 16:12; Job 18:11; Job 37:11; Job 38:24; Job 40:11; Ps. 18:14; Ps. 68:1; Ps. 144:6; Prov. 5:16; Isa. 24:1; Isa. 28:25; Isa. 41:16; Jer. 9:16; Jer. 10:21; Jer. 13:24; Jer. 18:17; Jer. 23:1; Jer. 23:2; Jer. 23:29; Jer. 30:11; Jer. 40:15; Jer. 52:8; Ezek. 11:16; Ezek. 11:17; Ezek. 12:15; Ezek. 20:23; Ezek. 20:34; Ezek. 20:41; Ezek. 22:15; Ezek. 28:25; Ezek. 29:12; Ezek. 29:13; Ezek. 30:23; Ezek. 30:26; Ezek. 34:5; Ezek. 34:6; Ezek. 34:12; Ezek. 34:21; Ezek. 36:19; Ezek. 46:18; Nah. 2:1; Hab. 3:6; Hab. 3:14; Zeph. 3:10; Zech. 1:17; Zech. 13:7

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### [The Babel Project](#)

Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Psalm 127:1



Two workmen were asked what they were building together. One said he was building a garage. The other replied that he was building a cathedral. A day later there was only one man laying bricks. When asked where the second was, the first replied, "Oh, he got fired. He insisted on building a cathedral instead of a garage."

Something similar happened on the ancient worksite of Babel. A group of people decided they would build a city and a tower that would reach to the heavens and unite their world (Ge 11:4). But God didn't want them working on a grand, self-centered plan based on the idea that they could rise to the heights of God and solve all of their own problems. So He came down, stopped the project, scattered the people "over all the earth," and gave them different languages (Ge 11:8-9).

God wanted people to see Him as the solution to their problems, and He revealed His plan for them to Abraham (Ge 12:1-3). Through the faith of Abraham and his descendants, He would show the world how to look for a city "whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:8-10).

Our faith does not rise out of our own dreams and solutions. The foundation of faith is in God alone and what He can do in and through us. By: Mart DeHaan (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Dear heavenly Father, forgive me for focusing on my own schemes and dreams. Help me to look to You for guidance in all that I do.

God wants to do what only He can do in and for us.

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### **New Humanity**

When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Acts 2:6

Today's Scripture & Insight : Acts 2:1–12

While I was visiting London's Tate Modern gallery, one piece of art caught my attention. Created by Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles, it was a giant tower made of hundreds of old radios. Each radio was turned on and tuned to a different station, creating a cacophony of confusing, indecipherable speech. Meireles called the sculpture Babel.

The title is appropriate. At the original tower of Babel, God thwarted humanity's attempt to seize heaven by confusing mankind's languages (Genesis 11:1–9). No longer able to communicate with one another, humanity fractured into tribes of various dialects (vv. 10–26). Divided by language, we've struggled to understand each other ever since.

There's a second part to the story. When the Holy Spirit came upon the first Christians at Pentecost, He enabled them to praise God in the various languages of those visiting Jerusalem that day (Acts 2:1–12). Through this miracle, everyone heard the same message, no matter their nationality or language. The confusion of Babel was reversed.

In a world of ethnic and cultural division, this is good news. Through Jesus, God is forming a new humanity from every nation, tribe, and tongue (Revelation 7:9). As I stood at Tate Modern, I imagined all those radios suddenly tuning to a new signal and playing the same song to all in the room: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound." By: Sheridan Voysey (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

How does your shared faith with believers of other nationalities bring you together despite your differences? How can you help create harmony?

God is breaking down barriers to form a new humanity.

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**Genesis 11:5 The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.**

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- Ge 18:21 Ex 19:11 Ps 11:4 33:13,14 Jer 23:23,24 Joh 3:13 Heb 4:13
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## **SHINAR STRUCTURES PROMPT A "DIVINE BUILDING INSPECTION"**

What was the mistake of the earth dwellers? They left God out of their plans. Noah had built an altar to worship Yahweh and exalt His Name, but we see no suggestion of such a thing in their plans which were to build a city and a tower to exalt their name! Clearly

they did not know that one of the names of God is Jealous (Qanna) (Ex 34:14+), but they would soon discover that He was indeed a jealous God! "God has never permitted men to realize a lasting social order from which He is excluded, nor will He do so to the end." ([Phillips](#))

*Unless the Lord builds the house,  
they labor in vain who build it.*

-- Psalm 127:1

**The LORD (Jehovah - Yahweh) came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built-** This is the hinge passage in Ge 11:1-9. God sovereignly acts to bring about His own purpose in spite of man's rebellion. First note the "pun" -- they were going up toward heaven, but God came down from heaven! Their tower fell short of God's standard of righteous behavior (and building)! This is interesting anthropomorphic language (**came down** and **to see**), for God does not need to go anywhere to see because He is everywhere (omnipresent) and knows everything (omniscient). In this case the text pictures Yahweh as making a personal inspection of **the city and the tower**. We might say He was functioning somewhat like a "divine building Inspector," just as building inspectors do today. They come to check your structure to make sure the building is up to code and meets all the regulations.

[Warren Wiersbe](#) writes "Whom the gods would destroy," wrote historian Charles Beard, "they first make drunk with power." From Babel to Belshazzar (Dan. 5), and from Herod (Acts 12:20–25) to Hitler, God has demonstrated repeatedly that it doesn't pay to rebel against His will. "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18 nkjv), and Jesus warned that those who exalt themselves will be abased (Matt. 23:12)

[Ross](#) on **came down** - Midrash Pirke of R. Eliezer (c. 14) records ten comings down of the Lord: Paradise, Babel, Sodom, the Bush, Sinai, twice at the Rock, twice at the Tabernacle, and once in the last day. The coming down was viewed as Yahweh's revealing of Himself. It is seen in Scripture as the divine intervention breaking through the course of events (Exod. 19:20; 34:5; Num. 11:25; 12:5); however, one should also see Exodus 3:8 and Numbers 11:7 (for deliverance and blessing). **Sons of men** - In referring to them as בְּנֵי הָאָדָם ("sons of the earth"), he shows them to be earthlings. This strikes at the heart of the Babylonian literature which credited the work to the [Anunnaki gods](#). The work, according to Genesis, was terrestrial, not celestial.

**Procksch** has an interesting comment pointing out that "Yahweh must draw near, not because he is near-sighted, but because he dwells at such tremendous height and their work is so tiny. God's movement must therefore be understood as a remarkable satire on man's doing." (Cited by [Von Rad, Genesis](#)) Cassuto quipped that no matter how high they built their tower, Yahweh still had to descend to see it!

**NET NOTE** on the phrase **sons of men** - Heb "the sons of man." The phrase is intended in this polemic to portray the builders as **mere mortals**, not the lesser deities that the Babylonians claimed built the city (**ED: THE IMPLICATION OF THE PHRASE "LESSER DEITIES" IS THAT THEY ARE ALREADY INVOLVED IN IDOL WORSHIP**).

**John Piper** on the phrase **sons of men** (**ED: Hebrew for "men" is "adam"**) - Notice that He calls them **the children of man**, or translated another way, **the sons of Adam**. The building of this city and this tower are similar to what Adam did when he rebelled against God and ate of the tree. The sinful nature of Adam goes on in his descendants—including you and me. (Full sermon [The Pride of Babel and the Praise of Christ](#))

**Ray Stedman** - No, this is not a primitive concept of God at all; it is an ironic expression. It is a humorous expression, if you please, designed to indicate to us, in a very clever way, the ridiculousness of this whole situation. Here is this tower that men erect, thinking that it will take God's breath away, it will threaten him. Men think, "Here we are, we wild [Promethean](#) creatures; we've dared to invade the heavens! You had better watch out, God!" But up in the real heavens this tower is so little that God can't see it. It is so tiny that even the strongest telescope in heaven does not reveal it. So God says, "I'll come down and investigate." It is language designed to set in contrast the ridiculousness of the suppositions of men, and the greatness of the Being of God. He **"came down"** to investigate this tiny tower that men had erected. ([Genesis 11:1-9 Controlling God](#))

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**QUESTION - [What is an anthropomorphism?](#)**

**ANSWER** - The word *anthropomorphism* comes from two Greek words, *anthropos*, meaning "man," and *morphe*, meaning "form." In theological terms, anthropomorphism is making God in some way into the form of man. Mostly, it is the process of assigning human characteristics to God. Human traits and actions such as talking, holding, reaching, feeling, hearing, and the like, all of which are chronicled throughout both the Old and New Testaments, are ascribed to the Creator. We read of God's actions, emotions, and appearance in human terms, or at least in words we normally accept and associate with humans.

In several places in the Bible, God is described as having the physical attributes of man. He "sets [his] face" against evil ([Leviticus](#)

[20:6](#)); the Lord will make “His face” to shine on you (Numbers 6:25); He “stretched out his hand” (Exodus 7:5; Isaiah 23:11), and God scattered enemies with His strong arm (Psalm 89:10). He “stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth” (Psalm 113:6). He “keeps his eye” on the land (Deuteronomy 11:12), the “eyes of the Lord” are on the righteous (Psalm 34:15), and the earth is His “footstool” (Isaiah 66:1). Do all these verses mean that God literally has eyes, a face, hands and feet? Not necessarily. God is spirit, not flesh and blood, but because we are not spirit, these anthropomorphisms help us to understand God’s nature and actions.

Human emotions are also ascribed to God: He was “sorry” (Genesis 6:6), “jealous” (Exodus 20:5), “moved to pity” (Judges 2:18), and “grieved” over making Saul Israel’s first king (1 Samuel 15:35). We read that the Lord “changed His mind” (Exodus 32:14), “relented” (2 Samuel 24:16), and will “remember” when He sees a rainbow in the sky (Genesis 9:16). God is “angry with the wicked every day” (Psalm 7:11), and He “burned with anger” against Job’s friends (Job 32:5). Most precious to us is God’s love, in which He predestines us to salvation (Ephesians 1:4-5) and because of which He gave His only Son in order to save the world (John 3:16).

Anthropomorphisms can be helpful in enabling us to at least partially comprehend the incomprehensible, know the unknowable, and fathom the unfathomable. But God is God, and we are not, and all of our human expressions are intrinsically inadequate in explaining fully and properly the divine. But human words, emotions, features, and knowledge are all that our Creator provided us, so these are all that we can understand in this earthly world at this time.

Yet anthropomorphisms can be dangerous if we see them as sufficient to portray God in limited human traits and terms, which could unintentionally serve to diminish in our minds His incomparable and incomprehensible power, love, and mercy. Christians are advised to read God’s Word with the realization that He offers a small glimpse of His glory through the only means we can absorb. As much as anthropomorphisms help us picture our loving God, He reminds us in Isaiah 55:8-9: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

#### Related Resource:

- [GOD DESCRIBED AS HUMAN \(anthropomorphism\)](#)

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**Norman Geisler - [When Critics Ask](#)** - Ge 11:5—How can God “come down” from heaven when He is already here (and everywhere)?

**PROBLEM:** God is omnipresent, that is, everywhere at the same time (Ps. 139:7–10). But this text declares that God “came down” to see the city that men had built. But if He is already here, then how can He “come down” here?

**SOLUTION:** God “came down” as a theophany, which is a special localized manifestation of the presence of God. These theophanies often appeared in the OT. Once God appeared to Abraham as a man (Gen. 18:2). God also came down to speak to Moses (Ex. 3), Joshua (Josh. 5:13–15), and Gideon (Jud. 6) in a similar manner.

**Genesis 11:6** The LORD said, "**Behold**, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them.

BGT Genesis 11:6 κα ε πεν κ ριος δο γ νος ν κα χε λος ν π ντων κα το το ρξαντο ποι σαι κα ν ν ο κ κλε ψει ξ α τ ν π ντα σα ν πιθ νται ποιε ν

LXE Genesis 11:6 And the Lord said, Behold, there is one race, and one lip of all, and they have begun to do this, and now nothing shall fail from them of all that they may have undertaken to do.

KJV 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.

NET Genesis 11:6 And the LORD said, "If as one people all sharing a common language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be beyond them.

CSB Genesis 11:6 The LORD said, "If they have begun to do this as one people all having the same language, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.

ESV Genesis 11:6 And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.

NIV Genesis 11:6 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."

NLT Genesis 11:6 "Look!" he said. "The people are united, and they all speak the same language. After this, nothing they set out to do will be impossible for them!"

NRS Genesis 11:6 And the LORD said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them."

NJB Genesis 11:6 'So they are all a single people with a single language!' said Yahweh. 'This is only the start of their undertakings! Now nothing they plan to do will be beyond them.'

NAB Genesis 11:6 Then the LORD said: "If now, while they are one people, all speaking the same language, they have started to do this, nothing will later stop them from doing whatever they presume to do."

YLT Genesis 11:6 and Jehovah saith, 'Lo, the people is one, and one pronunciation is to them all, and this it hath dreamed of doing; and now, nothing is restrained from them of that which they have purposed to do.'

- **Behold** - Ge 3:22 Jdg 10:14 1Ki 18:27 Ec 11:9
- the people - Ge 11:1 9:19 Ac 17:26
- **which they purpose to do** - Ge 6:5 8:21 Ps 2:1-4 Lu 1:51
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

Depiction of "ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE"

## NOTHING WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR THEM

The LORD ([Jehovah - Yahweh](#)) said, "**Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language**" - "And Yahweh said. 'If as one people all having one language they have begun to act this way, now nothing that they propose to do will be out of their reach.' **Same language** literally "and one lip to all of them." As [John Piper](#) says this passages "signals that God is not only about to divide their language, but in doing so is about to divide one people into many peoples. He is about to multiply languages and peoples."

[Ross](#) writes "Kidner observed that the note of foreboding marks a father's concern and not a rival's. He shows that it is like Christ's words in Luke 23:31, "If they do these things in a green tree ..." (BORROW [Kidner, Genesis](#); p. 110). It is better to have division than to have collective apostasy in unity and peace."

[Paul Apple](#) says that God's Analysis sees 3 major problems - (1) They have Perverted the Blessing of Unity and a Common Language into Conspiratorial Allegiance; (2) They have Started Down the Path of Rebellion and will Continue that Downward Spiral (3) They will become Emboldened if left Unchecked. God's Action Plan = Frustrate Man's Agenda

**And this is what they began to do, and now** (expresses result that) **nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible** (Lit. - "withheld from") **for them** - Literally "all that they purpose to do will not be withheld from them." The implication is that their collective intelligence would fan their imagination and make their imaginings reality. Note that while God acknowledges their "human potential," He did not approve it, but in fact thwarted it in order to show His sovereignty over puny mankind.

**THOUGHT** - It is almost 2024 as I write this note. I cannot help but think of the incredible potential of AI ([Artificial Intelligence](#)) that has come on the global scene in the past few years. The potential is for good (see [picture painted by "AI"](#)), but it is also for evil! Might one see these events in our day as somewhat of a reversal of the tower of Babel and a potential "sign" that we are near the end of this age when God will again "come down" to inspect the world and to war with the world?

[Ross](#) has a most interesting comment on **nothing which they purpose...** - The similarity of style and wording to Genesis 3:22 is most striking. The potential for calamity is dangerous to the race, and God will prevent it. The verb לָלֶךְ is used here; the beginnings of man are commonly counterproductive. Compare Nimrod's beginning with kingdoms and Noah's beginning with viniculture! They will nullify the purposes of God in favor of their own purposes which are within reach. They will be at liberty for every extravagance if they can think only of their own confederation.

[Quest Study Bible](#) (BORROW) on **nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible** suggests that this "Refers to their potential for doing evil. It's similar to our figure of speech "anything can happen." When a culture unites, the power that results can be dangerous. History demonstrates the tragic results when people have power but use it the wrong way. God scattered the people

to undermine this potential for destructive behavior.

**Genesis 11:7 "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech."**

- **Come** - The Hebrew word signifies, "Come," or, "make preparation," as for a journey or the execution of a purpose.
- **let** - Ge 11:5 1:26 3:22 Isa 6:8
- **confuse** - Job 5:12,13 12:20 Ps 2:4 33:10 Ac 2:4-11
- **will not** - Ge 10:5,20,32 42:23 De 28:49 Ps 55:9 Jer 5:15 1Co 14:2-11,23
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

#### **Related Passages:**

Psalm 2:4+ He who sits in the heavens laughs. The Lord scoffs at them.

### **RESULT OF DIVINE INSPECTION: LET'S CONFUSE THEIR SPEECH**

**Come, let Us** ([see note](#)) **go down and there confuse** ([balal](#); Lxx = [sugcheo](#)) **their language** - Babylon's "Let's go up!" was answered by God's "Let's go down!" Obviously God did not need to come down, but this phrase lends dramatic effect to His divine intervention. **Come** is masculine singular. Note the phrase **let us** which some see as a clue to the Trinity. The word **'Us'** is taken here as a plural of majesty ([note](#)) as in the earlier chapters of Genesis (Ge 1:26, Ge 3:22+). **Confuse** ([balal](#)) is translated in the Lxx with the verb [sugcheo](#) which literally means to pour together or mingle and figuratively as in Genesis 11:7 to confuse, stir up, cause dismay (cf God's "reversal" of sorts on Day of Pentecost = Acts 2.6+). The result was "confusion city," with everyone babbling, which drove everyone nuts, so that they had to move away to get some peace and quiet with those they could understand!

**So that** (term of purpose) **they will not understand one another's speech** - All the workers building the tower started talking gibberish, so that no one understood a thing the others were saying. This is one way to bring a massive building program to a screeching halt! God's purpose was confusion, which is interesting in that Paul writes that God is not a God of confusion in 1Co 14:33+. Of course Paul is referring to unintelligible speech in the midst of the congregation, a completely different context than in Genesis 11 (As an aside, once again we see the vital importance of always interpreting a given text in its context!)

[Warren Wiersbe](#) - As with Adam and Eve in the garden (Gen. 3:22–24), God's judgment at Babel not only dealt with the immediate sins but also helped to prevent future problems. The unity of mankind would only give people a false sense of power that would lead them into even greater rebellion against God. By confusing their language and scattering them over all the earth, God graciously spared their lives and gave them opportunity to return to Him. He could have destroyed the builders, their city, and their tower, but He chose to let them live. The word "babel" sounds like the Hebrew word *balal* which means "confusion." Because of God's judgment, the "gate of the gods" became the "the door to confusion." Instead of making a name for themselves, God gave the project a new name! In His church, "God is not the author of confusion" (1 Cor. 14:33), but in the world, God sometimes uses confusion to humble people and keep them from uniting against His will.

[Ross](#) on **confuse** - The second verb describes the actual purpose: "let Us confound." It was this confusion (לְבָבָא) that led to the diversity of their understanding and thus to their dispersion. Bush explains how this would come about.

This was to cause a dispersion of the multitudes congregated at Babylon; an end which did not require for its accomplishment the instantaneous formation of new languages, but simply such a confusion in the utterance of the old, as should naturally lead to misapprehension, discord and division. The dialectic discrepancies, however, thus originating, though perhaps not very great at first, would become gradually more and more marked, as men became more widely separated from each other, and by the influence of climate, laws, customs, religion, and various other causes, till they finally issued in substantially different languages." (BORROW [Bush, Genesis - Volume 1 - Page 178](#))

Once the understanding of one another was confounded, the division would be effected.

*God met the unity on earth with disunity from heaven*

**Steven Cole** - Don't tell me God doesn't have a sense of humor! It must have been hilarious to watch the workers the morning this happened. The boss is trying to tell a crew to do something, and they look at him like he's from outer space. Then they start talking

and every one of them is speaking a different language. Each person must have thought the others had flipped out! Whenever you see the people at the United Nations with their headsets on, so that they can understand the translation, remember Babel, and know that God is exalted over proud man. God's action in scattering the people was both a punishment and a preventative, to keep man's pride from going too far. Man's plans for unity and strength ultimately would have resulted in great evil, because it was done in human wisdom apart from the Lord. It would have resulted in what God will one day permit, the one world government and one world religion under the total domination of the antichrist. And so God met the unity on earth with disunity from heaven. Satan is always trying to counterfeit the work of God. Here he was building a false unity which did not honor the Lord. God one day will unify His people, but it will be under His sovereignty, not under the banner of proud man. In Zephaniah 3:9–12, the Lord says

For then I will give to the peoples purified lips, That all of them may call on the name of the LORD, To serve Him shoulder to shoulder. 10 "From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, My dispersed ones, Will bring My offerings. 11 "In that day you will feel no shame Because of all your deeds By which you have rebelled against Me; For then I will remove from your midst Your proud, exulting ones, And you will never again be haughty On My holy mountain. 12 "But I will leave among you A humble and lowly people, And they will take refuge in the name of the LORD. ([Man Versus God: God Wins Genesis 11:1-9](#))

**Ray Pritchard** - Here is the ultimate irony: They built the Tower so they wouldn't be scattered but they ended up scattered anyway. Thus does God judge all human efforts that leave him out. He brings down the high and mighty with a great big thud. Write over this story these words, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Psalm 127:1).

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**Confuse** (confuse, anoint)([1101](#)) [balal](#) means to mingle, mix, tangle, once to anoint (Ps 92:10) and once to confuse (Ge 11:7 and probably related to the name Babel - Ge 11:9). The idea is to become one or to lose most essential distinctions by combination. Balal was used of mixing oil into the flour or meal of the cereal offering until every particle of flour was mingled or anointed with oil (bālûl bashshemen; Exodus 29:2, 40; Leviticus 2:4-5; and Leviticus 7; and often in Numbers 7, 15, 28, 29). It is interesting that even this term balal is a cooking term and was associated with blending ingredients in cooking! (cf Lev 2:4-5).

**Gilbrant** - This primary Hebrew verb means "to mix," "to confuse" or "to confound." It appears twice in the Qal (preterite) tense. Genesis 11:9 says that Babel, which by folk etymology was understood to literally mean "confusion," was so named because "there the Lord confused the language of all the earth." Psalm 92:10 says, "I have been anointed (in other words, mingled) with fresh oil." Being soaked in fragrant freshening oil was the psalmist's way of depicting the joy he experienced when the Lord enabled him to triumph over his enemies. **Balal** appears 38 times in the passive form of the Qal participle. Unleavened cakes mixed with oil were part of the items used in the consecration of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood. Verse 40 says that part of the daily offerings on the altar included "one-tenth of an ephah of flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of oil from pressed olives." In Lev. 14:10, part of the ritual for cleansing lepers included "three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering." A leper who was poor was permitted to bring "one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering." Other offerings were similar. Other mixtures in the OT include Ephraim among the peoples (Hos. 4:8) referring to Israel's political alliances with pagan nations, "fodder" for donkeys and "mixed fodder." ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

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#### **G Campbell Morgan - Genesis 11:7 Let us go Down.**

God comes down into human life. Though the world is corrupt and full of violence; though his arch-enemy has taught man to dread and hate Him; though attempts are on foot to resist Him in open rebellion, by making a unity apart from Him, and in exclusion of his corner-stone, yet He comes down.

**He comes down to see.** — He will not pronounce judgment till He has satisfied Himself by personal inspection how things stand. He comes down to our bedrooms, and overhears the words we speak, the deeds we do there; to our home-life, and is a silent listener and observer of all its incidents; to our shops, warehouses, and bank-parlors, auditing our accounts, casting up the columns, examining our samples, our weights and measures, our advertisements and circulars. From Him no secrets are hid.

**He comes down to Punish.** — "Let me alone, that I may destroy." Never forget the punitive side of God's character. How easily He asserts his power! He can disorganize the memory, breathe on the brain, touch one small nerve or muscle, and the best-concerted schemes fail. Why shouldst thou fear every day the fury of the oppressor, when God is at thy side!

**He comes down to save.** — If there be one Lot, He will bring him forth. What was the Incarnation, the descent to Calvary and the grave, but the coming down of the "us" of the blessed Trinity. He that ascended is the same that also first descended. He has come that He may heal our wounds, take us in His arms, and bear us with Him far beyond all principality and power. He is the way, by which we may pass from the confusion of Babel to the love of Pentecost, and the one speech of heaven.

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## QUESTION - [What is the majestic plural \(PLURAL OF MAJESTY\), and how is it used in the Bible?](#)

**ANSWER** - The majestic plural, also called the royal plural, is the use of a plural word (such as the pronoun **we** or **us**) to refer to a single person. As a type of nosism, the majestic plural emphasizes something or honors someone in a stylistic way. Basically, when a member of royalty, referring to himself, says, "We" instead of "I," he is using the majestic plural. For example, Queen Victoria, upon hearing a tasteless joke, is said to have replied, "We are not amused."

The ancient Hebrews used the majestic plural, and some examples are found in the Old Testament. But the construction is not unique to Hebrew. The Latin language also had what the Romans called *pluralis maiestatis* ("the plural of majesty"), and, as has been noted, English sometimes uses it as well. Other modern languages using the royal plural include Punjabi, Hindustani, Telugu, and Egyptian Arabic (in which the President of Egypt is referred to as "Your Excellencies").

The effect of the majestic plural is to indicate greatness, power, and prestige. It is normally reserved for use by nobles, kings, popes, and other persons of high rank when speaking in an official capacity or by those of lower rank when speaking of or to their betters.

In the Bible, we find four verses in which God refers to Himself using plural pronouns. The most well-known passage is Genesis 1:26+: "Then God said, **LET US** make mankind in our image, in our likeness." See also Genesis 3:22+; Genesis 11:7; and Isaiah 6:8. The One God is speaking of Himself in plural form: *US* and *OUR*. This is a perfect example of the majestic plural. God's divine greatness and transcendence are emphasized through the simple use of pronouns.

The majestic plural is also found in one of God's most common names in the Old Testament, [Elohim](#). The word itself is plural (the singular is *Eloah*), and it is sometimes translated as "gods" (when referring to a plurality of false gods). When it refers to the One True God, [Elohim](#) (plural) is correctly translated as "God" (singular).

Deuteronomy 4:35+ says, "The LORD is God"—literally, "Yahweh is [Elohim](#)." And the famous [Shema](#) says, "The LORD our God, the LORD is one." (Dt 6:4+) Again, we have the singular *Lord* coupled with the plural [Elohim](#), and this time in a verse that is crystal clear that there is only one God. His name's plural form indicates His sovereign supremacy, His matchless might, and His exceeding eminence.

**We carefully note that the majestic plural in the Old Testament was not meant to teach the doctrine of [the Trinity](#). It is simply a linguistic tool that God employed to accentuate His greatness. However, the use of plural constructions to refer to God leaves open the possibility of God's triune nature. Later, when the doctrine of the Trinity is revealed in the New Testament, the use of the majestic plural fits right in. [GotQuestions.org](#)**

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### Related Resources:

- [Why does God refer to Himself in the plural in Genesis 1:26 and 3:22?](#)
- [What does it mean when God said, "Let Us make man in Our image" \(Genesis 1:26\)?](#)
- [Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Meaning of 'Let Us' in Genesis 1:26," Andrews University Seminary Studies 13 \(1975\):58–66.](#)

**Genesis 11:8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city.**

- **LORD** - Ge 11:4,9 49:7 De 32:8 Lu 1:51
- **over** - Ge 10:25,32
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

### Related Passages:

Genesis 10:25; 32 Two sons were born to Eber; the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided; and his brother's name was Joktan.....32 These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations; and out of these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood.

## PEOPLE SCATTER AND STOP BUILDING

**So** - Term of conclusion. Based on the people's plans which reflected blatant disobedience to the command to multiple and scatter across the earth, the LORD takes action to force them to obey His command.

**THOUGHT** - Have you ever been willfully, knowingly disobedient to what you know is a clear command from the LORD and later in essence "forced" to obey the command? Obedience the first time is always the best policy. When will I learn that simple principle?

**The LORD (Jehovah - Yahweh) scattered (puts; Lxx = diaspeiro) them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth** - Note that they did not volitionally scatter, but it was the LORD Who **scattered** them. The very thing they feared and were concerned about had now come to pass. We see a similar scenario in Exodus 1:12 and Ex 1:10 for a similar situation where the Egyptians were afraid Israel would multiply, but the more they attempted to stop it, the more they multiplied.

As an aside God is not opposed to unity, but it is not a unity of fallen humanity but a unity in regard to matters of faith. In Eph 4:13 Paul writes "until we all attain to the unity of the faith." **John MacArthur** comments on this passage - "Some commentators advocate the view that such an ultimate objective is only attainable at glorification, believing that Paul is describing our final heavenly unity and knowledge. But that idea does not fit the context at all, because the apostle is not describing the final work of Christ on behalf of the church in heaven but the work of gifted men in the church on earth. These results could only apply to the church in its earthly dimension....**faith** does not here refer to the act of belief or of obedience but to the body of Christian truth, to Christian doctrine. **The faith** is the content of the gospel in its most complete form. As the church at Corinth so clearly illustrates, disunity in the church comes from doctrinal ignorance and spiritual immaturity. When believers are properly taught, when they faithfully do the work of service, and when the body is thereby built up in spiritual maturity, **unity of the faith** is an inevitable result." (See [Ephesians MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#)) In sum, God desires unity in the Body of Christ but this is not the same as the unity that these fallen men sought to keep intact by staying aggregated in one locale.

**Deffinbaugh:** The irony of this event is that what men most desired would have destroyed them, and what they most dreaded would prove to be a part of their deliverance. ([The Unity of Unbelief](#))

**John Piper** has a very interesting insight - So his response to the presumption and arrogance of man was to make it harder for man to communicate and thus to unite in God-belittling global plans. God has built into the world a system by which the pride of different groups of people restrains the pride of other groups of people. God knows the immense potential of human beings created in his own image. And he has given them amazing liberty to exalt themselves and design their own security systems without trusting him. But there are limits. Thousands of languages around the world and thousands of different peoples limit the global aspirations of arrogant mankind. ([The Pride of Babel and the Praise of Christ](#))

**And they stopped building the city** - We might say God had not issued them a "building permit!"

**Ross** - The place of unity (עִיר) became the place of dispersion (מִצְרָה). Their view was toward centrality; God moved them universally. The result of this dispersion meant that the city was unfinished as they had planned it. The rebellious race as a unified people did not fulfill their goal.

**Genesis 11:9 Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.**

- Babel - Confusion, Ge 10:5,10,20,31 Isa 13:1-14:32 Jer 50:1-51:64 1Co 14:23
- the face - Ge 10:25,32 Ac 17:26
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

The Tower of Babel by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1563)

## THE PLACE CALLED CONFUSION BECOMES CHAOTIC

**Therefore** Term of conclusion. A fitting conclusion to the confusion caused by their inability to understand one another. One can only imagine the day this confusion hit the unified people and they attempted to communicate with one another.

**Its name was called Babel (babel), because there the LORD (Jehovah - Yahweh) confused (balal; Lxx = sugcheo) the language of the whole earth** - **Babel** means "the gate of the gods." It is interesting that the Hebrew word **Babel** occurs over 233x in the OT, but the only place the Lxx translates [babel](#) with the noun [sugchusis](#) (see note) is in Genesis 11:9! All of the other uses are rendered with a transliteration in the Greek, and thus are rendered "*Babylon*."

**John Phillips** quips that "As the world's first federation of nations, it epitomized the last, for human history begins and ends at Babel

(Revelation 17–18). As there was a great rebel (NIMROD) standing behind the first Babel, so there will be a great rebel (ANTICHRIST) behind the last one. As the first united nations organization centered everything in a cultural, political, and religious unity, so will the last. Here in Genesis is man's first attempt to build a society from which God was to be excluded. But God refuses to be ruled out of human affairs so, consequently, He came down in judgment upon the scene." (BORROW [Exploring Genesis](#) page 104)

**Bob Utley** - It is interesting to note that archaeology has unearthed literary documents from the Sumerian culture in Mesopotamia which assert that at this time all people spoke in one tongue (i.e., Samuel Noah Kramer, in his article ["The Babel of Tongues: A Sumerian Version"](#) in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 88:108-111).

**Steven Cole** - Babylonian accounts tell how their city was built in heaven by the gods, proudly referring to it as "Babili" ("the gate of God"). But God says, "So you want to make a name for yourselves, do you? You call your city the gate of God? How about 'confusion' instead?" The narrative uses antithetic parallelism to contrast and balance the ideas. Ge 11:1 is set off against Ge 11:9, Ge 11:2 against Ge 11:8, and Ge 11:3 against Ge 11:7, with Ge 11:5 being the hinge of the story. Verse 1 mentions "the whole earth" and emphasizes the unity of the language; Ge 11:9 also mentions "the whole earth" (twice), but contrasts God's confusion of the languages with the unity of Ge 11:1. Ge 11:2 shows the people settling in one location; Ge 11:8 contrasts that with the Lord's scattering them abroad. Ge 11:3, 4 show the people boasting in their plans to build a city and a tower, with the words, "Come, let us build ..."; Ge 11:7 and part of Ge 11:8 provide the contrast with the Lord stopping their plans, using the same form, "Come, let us confuse ...." In Ge 11:4, the people plan to build a tower to reach up to heaven; but in Ge 11:5,7, the Lord has to come down in order to view this supposedly great project that man is attempting to build. In Ge 11:4 men fear that they will be scattered over the earth; in Ge 11:8, 9, what they fear comes upon them through the punishing--and yet protecting--hand of God. ( [Man Versus God: God Wins Genesis 11:1-9](#))

**Derek Kidner** has an interesting comment in light of God dividing one language into many at Babel - "Pentecost opened a new chapter of the story, in the articulating of one gospel in many tongues. The final reversal is promised in Zephaniah 3:9: 'Yea, at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord' (RSV)."

In the Bible this city increasingly came to symbolize the godless society, with its pretensions (Gen. 11), persecutions (Dan. 3), pleasures, sins and superstitions (Isa. 47:8–13), its riches and eventual doom (Rev. 17, 18).(BORROW [Genesis: an introduction and commentary](#))

**And from there the LORD scattered (puts; Lxx = [diaspeiro](#)) them abroad over the face of the whole earth** - This divine scattering is repeated from verse 8 indicating the Spirit wants to emphasize this divine action. Implicit is that there were groups who identified with one another and who therefore "stuck together" when they were scattered (again note Yahweh does the scattering!)

Note how the phrase the whole earth somewhat ironically "bookends" this section - Ge 11:1 **Now the whole earth** and Ge 11:9 - **"over the face of the whole earth"**

**Ross** summarizes **Genesis 11:1-9** - God's purpose will be accomplished in spite of the arrogance and defiance of man's own purposes. He brings down the proud, but exalts the faithful. The significance of this little story is great. It explains to God's people how the nations were scattered abroad. Yet the import goes much deeper. The fact that it was Babylon, the beginning of kingdoms under Nimrod from Cush, adds a rather ominous warning: Great nations cannot defy God and long survive. The new nation of Israel need only survey the many nations around her to perceive that God disperses and curses the rebellious, bringing utter confusion and antagonism among them. If Israel would obey and submit to God's will, then she would be the source of blessing to the world. Unfortunately, Israel also raised her head in pride and refused to obey the Lord God. Thus she too was scattered across the face of the earth.

**TSK** - The tower of Babel, Herodotus informs us, was a furlong or 660 feet, in length and breadth; and, according to Strabo, it rose to the same altitude. It was of a pyramidal form, consisting of eight square towers, gradually decreasing in breadth, with a winding ascent on the outside, so very broad as to allow horses and carriages to pass each other, and even to turn. This magnificent structure is so completely destroyed that its very site is doubtful; and when supposed to be discovered, in all cases exhibiting a heap of rubbish.

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**Babel** (Babylon) ([0894](#)) **Babel** or Babylon = "confusion (by mixing)." Babylon is the Greek spelling of the name which in Hebrew is uniformly **Babel**. The word occurs some 286 times and refers to an ancient city on the eastern bank of the Euphrates about twenty miles south of Bagdad, near the modern village of [Hillah](#) in Iraq.

From [Abarim publications on Babel](#) - Meaning = Gate Of God, Anointed, Saturated, Through Production, Through Drive, Through Propitiation. Etymology = From the Sumerian phrase *Bab-ilim*, gate of god. From the verb בלל (*bala*), to mix with oil unto saturation.

**Gilbrant** - Babel appears 286 times in the OT. It refers to the ancient city-state located in modern Iraq, about 20 miles south of Bagdad (near the modern city of Hilla). A popular etymology used by its inhabitants associated the name with Akkadian babili, or bab-ilani ("the gate of the gods"). In reality, the place name preceded the entry of Semitic speakers into this area. The term is used indiscriminately to refer to the city of Babylon, the geographical region of Babylonia, and the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

Babel first occurs in Gen. 11:9, where it is given a Hebrew folk etymology by relating it to the verb ("to confuse"; "to mix"). The English term "to babble" comes from this biblical etymology.

The account of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) has a dual explanatory focus. First, it offers an explanation for the great diversity of languages among peoples; and second, it gives an account of the word. In Sumerian literature prehistoric humans used a common language (cf. Enmerkar Epic, 141-46). Some scholars hold that the tower of the temple of Marduk (E-saq-ila) is the edifice referred to in Genesis 11. The Akkadian text Enel VI, 60-62 reports, in reference to the tower of E-saq-ila, it took an entire year to lay its bricks. It continues, "when the second year approached, they (the gods) raised up the head of Esaqila to Apsu" (TDOT 1:467). Apsu is a reference to heaven as the cosmic region of fresh water.

From a theological point of view, **the building of the tower of Babel is an indication of human pride and arrogance**. In fact, it would seem to be best explained by using the Greek tragic concept of hubris (English hubris), or pride, a usurping of divine right to control one's fate.

Because of this sinful demonstration, Yahweh directly intervened and brought about language confusion and dispersion. God's action was an act of mercy as well as a demonstration of punishment and divine prerogative. The mercy aspect is seen in the preventative measure, as humans now are prevented from reaching the domain of God's presence (heaven) via efforts stemming from hubris.

The tower account thus marked the end of the common history of humanity, and Genesis 12 contains the beginning of the story of Yahweh's own people with the call of Abram.

Additional occurrences frequently appear in the historical books. The majority of those occurrences is in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. The word appears only three times in Ps. 87:4; 137:1, 8. Its use in the prophetic literature is regular and quite frequent, falling into two broad classifications—theological and historical.

From the historical viewpoint, the city-state of Babylon began to increase in importance under Hammurapi, whom scholars date sometime in the 18th or 17th centuries B.C. He is perhaps most famous for his legal code. His empire disappeared shortly after his reign. Assyrian power mitigated Babylonian growth and aggrandizement after 1100 B.C. In 689 B.C., it was destroyed by the Assyrian king Sennacherib as a result of a series of rebellions. Ultimately, Nebuchadnezzar II completed the rebuilding of the city-state and set about the creation of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. He proceeded to conquer Judah in 606-605 B.C. and annexed it in 586 B.C. (cf. Daniel 1 and 2 Kings 25). Its demise came in 539 B.C. at the hands of Persia. During its time of prominence, it enjoyed a far-flung reputation for greatness and worldliness; and it is this aspect which focuses the attention of the Hebrew prophets.

Micah 4:10, in reference to Zion, states, "Be in pain and deliver, daughter of Zion, like one giving birth. For now you shall go out from the city, and you shall live in the field. And you shall come to Babylon." Here, the exile of Judah to Babylon (cf. Ps. 137:1, 8) is presented. The theme of judgment/punishment is present. This also occurs in Jer. 20:4-5, where the prophet foretells the fate of Judah at the hands of Babylon. Jeremiah mentions Babylon some 197 times in stark confronting of the reality of exile. For example, in chapter 27 he castigates those false prophets who foretell of the return of the vessels of the temple. Chapter 29 confronts the captive Jews in Babylon, urging them to prepare for a lengthy stay.

The occurrences in the latter sections of Isaiah (chs. 43-48) convey a sense of the providence of Yahweh and his plan for history. A thematic undercurrent of arrogance on the part of Babylon is clearly present (cf. 43:6-9f). In fact, hubris and arrogance in Babylon's past are seen in chapters 13 and 14 as well. Indeed, the sovereignty of Yahweh is clearly implied in these two chapters. Babylon's destruction at the hand of Cyrus of Persia is a central facet of chapter 14, though the person of Cyrus is not mentioned.

The return from Babylon is a watershed both historically and theologically. The promise of return and restoration drives a number of prophetic messages. The longing of the deportees to return (and to be avenged) is poignantly captured in Psalm 137. The disappointment over the reality of the political restoration is revealed in Ezra 3:12f. ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

In Daniel 1:1 **babel** refers to the ancient city-state located in modern Iraq ([Babylon - included Reconstructed City](#)), about 20 miles south of Bagdad (near the modern city of [Hillah](#)). The term is used to refer to the city of Babylon, the geographical region of Babylonia, and the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Babel first occurs in Ge 11:9, where it is given a Hebrew folk etymology by relating it to the verb ("to confuse"; "to mix"). The English term "to babble" comes from this biblical etymology.

In the **NAS** Babylon is first described by the synonymous term "**Babel**" (= confusion cp Ge 11:9) the genesis of which is found in Ge 10:8, 9, 10, 11. In Ge 10:10 we encounter the first use of the word **kingdom** which indicates Nimrod was a **king**, and specifically one who is repeatedly called "**mighty**". The name **Nimrod** means to rebel, to be rebellious or a rebel, indicating that this earthly king was opposed to the true King. Ge 11:1,2,3,4 substantiates the **rebellious spirit of Babel** (a "monument" to sinful pride opposed to the rule of God) or **Babylon** who John describes as "Babylon, the Mother of harlots and abominations of the earth" (Rev 17:5+). In other words Nimrod's kingdom of ancient Babylon was the fountainhead of every idolatrous, false world religion, as her evil seed was spread throughout the earth (Ge 11:8). This "divine scattering" in Genesis 11 also helps understand John's enigmatic statement of how Babylon came to sit on "peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues" (Rev 17:15+). In Revelation John records the final demise of Babylon (Rev 18:21+), cp Jeremiah's prophecy - Je 51:63, 64)

**Sugchusis** (4799) is derived from [sugcheo](#) meaning to pour together, to confuse, to throw into confusion. The only NT use is in Acts 19:29 where Luke describes "The city was filled with the **confusion**, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia."

**Gilbrant** writes "This noun is found in the New Testament only in Acts 19:29. Here it describes the mob scene stirred up by Demetrius against the Ephesian Christians. The word emphasizes the riotous, but uncertain, confusion of the crowd. The verbal form of the word is repeated in Acts 19:32 where it is reported that "most of them did not know why they had come together" (RSV). The noun form indicates the resulting confusion, disorder, and anger that accompanied the mob scene." ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**Sugchusis** means that which is confounded by mixing and thus speaks of confusion, tumult, uproar (Acts 19:29, 1Sa 5:6; 1Sa 5:11; 1Sa 14:20). It is used once to translate Babel in Ge 11:9.

**Sugchusis** is used in 4 verses in the Septuagint of the OT - Ge 11:9, 1Sa 5:6; 1Sa 5:11; 1Sa 14:20.

**Babel - 233v - note most of uses in Jeremiah** - Gen. 10:10; Gen. 11:9; 2 Ki. 17:24; 2 Ki. 17:30; 2 Ki. 20:12; 2 Ki. 20:14; 2 Ki. 20:17; 2 Ki. 20:18; 2 Ki. 24:1; 2 Ki. 24:7; 2 Ki. 24:10; 2 Ki. 24:11; 2 Ki. 24:12; 2 Ki. 24:15; 2 Ki. 24:16; 2 Ki. 24:17; 2 Ki. 24:20; 2 Ki. 25:1; 2 Ki. 25:6; 2 Ki. 25:7; 2 Ki. 25:8; 2 Ki. 25:11; 2 Ki. 25:13; 2 Ki. 25:20; 2 Ki. 25:21; 2 Ki. 25:22; 2 Ki. 25:23; 2 Ki. 25:24; 2 Ki. 25:27; 2 Ki. 25:28; 1 Chr. 9:1; 2 Chr. 32:31; 2 Chr. 33:11; 2 Chr. 36:6; 2 Chr. 36:7; 2 Chr. 36:10; 2 Chr. 36:18; 2 Chr. 36:20; Ezr. 1:11; Ezr. 2:1; Ezr. 7:6; Ezr. 7:9; Ezr. 8:1; Neh. 7:6; Neh. 13:6; Est. 2:6; Ps. 87:4; Ps. 137:1; Ps. 137:8; Isa. 13:1; Isa. 13:19; Isa. 14:4; Isa. 14:22; Isa. 21:9; Isa. 39:1; Isa. 39:3; Isa. 39:6; Isa. 39:7; Isa. 43:14; Isa. 47:1; Isa. 48:14; Isa. 48:20; Jer. 20:4; Jer. 20:5; Jer. 20:6; Jer. 21:2; Jer. 21:4; Jer. 21:7; Jer. 21:10; Jer. 22:25; Jer. 24:1; Jer. 25:1; Jer. 25:9; Jer. 25:11; Jer. 25:12; Jer. 27:6; Jer. 27:8; Jer. 27:9; Jer. 27:11; Jer. 27:12; Jer. 27:13; Jer. 27:14; Jer. 27:16; Jer. 27:17; Jer. 27:18; Jer. 27:20; Jer. 27:22; Jer. 28:2; Jer. 28:3; Jer. 28:4; Jer. 28:6; Jer. 28:11; Jer. 28:14; Jer. 29:1; Jer. 29:3; Jer. 29:4; Jer. 29:10; Jer. 29:15; Jer. 29:20; Jer. 29:21; Jer. 29:22; Jer. 29:28; Jer. 32:2; Jer. 32:3; Jer. 32:4; Jer. 32:5; Jer. 32:28; Jer. 32:36; Jer. 34:1; Jer. 34:2; Jer. 34:3; Jer. 34:7; Jer. 34:21; Jer. 35:11; Jer. 36:29; Jer. 37:1; Jer. 37:17; Jer. 37:19; Jer. 38:3; Jer. 38:17; Jer. 38:18; Jer. 38:22; Jer. 38:23; Jer. 39:1; Jer. 39:3; Jer. 39:5; Jer. 39:6; Jer. 39:7; Jer. 39:9; Jer. 39:11; Jer. 39:13; Jer. 40:1; Jer. 40:4; Jer. 40:5; Jer. 40:7; Jer. 40:9; Jer. 40:11; Jer. 41:2; Jer. 41:18; Jer. 42:11; Jer. 43:3; Jer. 43:10; Jer. 44:30; Jer. 46:2; Jer. 46:13; Jer. 46:26; Jer. 49:28; Jer. 49:30; Jer. 50:1; Jer. 50:2; Jer. 50:8; Jer. 50:9; Jer. 50:13; Jer. 50:14; Jer. 50:16; Jer. 50:17; Jer. 50:18; Jer. 50:23; Jer. 50:24; Jer. 50:28; Jer. 50:29; Jer. 50:34; Jer. 50:35; Jer. 50:42; Jer. 50:43; Jer. 50:45; Jer. 50:46; Jer. 51:1; Jer. 51:2; Jer. 51:6; Jer. 51:7; Jer. 51:8; Jer. 51:9; Jer. 51:11; Jer. 51:12; Jer. 51:24; Jer. 51:29; Jer. 51:30; Jer. 51:31; Jer. 51:33; Jer. 51:34; Jer. 51:35; Jer. 51:37; Jer. 51:41; Jer. 51:42; Jer. 51:44; Jer. 51:47; Jer. 51:48; Jer. 51:49; Jer. 51:53; Jer. 51:54; Jer. 51:55; Jer. 51:56; Jer. 51:58; Jer. 51:59; Jer. 51:60; Jer. 51:61; Jer. 51:64; Jer. 52:3; Jer. 52:4; Jer. 52:9; Jer. 52:10; Jer. 52:11; Jer. 52:12; Jer. 52:15; Jer. 52:17; Jer. 52:26; Jer. 52:27; Jer. 52:31; Jer. 52:32; Jer. 52:34; Ezek. 12:13; Ezek. 17:12; Ezek. 17:16; Ezek. 17:20; Ezek. 19:9; Ezek. 21:19; Ezek. 21:21; Ezek. 23:15; Ezek. 23:17; Ezek. 23:23; Ezek. 24:2; Ezek. 26:7; Ezek. 29:18; Ezek. 29:19; Ezek. 30:10; Ezek. 30:24; Ezek. 30:25; Ezek. 32:11; Dan. 1:1; Mic. 4:10; Zech. 2:7; Zech. 6:10

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#### QUESTION - [What happened at the Tower of Babel?](#)

**ANSWER** - The Tower of Babel is described in Genesis 11:1-9. After the Flood, God commanded humanity to "increase in number and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1). Humanity decided to do the exact opposite, "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” (Genesis 11:4). Humanity decided to build a great city and all congregate there. They decided to build a gigantic tower as a symbol of their power, to make a name for themselves (Genesis 11:4). This tower is remembered as the Tower of Babel.

In response, God confused the languages of humanity so that they could no longer communicate with each other (Genesis 11:7). The result was that people congregated with other people who spoke the same language, and then went together and settled in other parts of the world (Genesis 11:8-9). God confused the languages at the Tower of Babel to enforce His command for humanity to spread throughout the entire world.

Some Bible teachers also believe that God created the different ethnicities of humanity at the Tower of Babel. This is possible, but it is not taught in the biblical text. On the origin of the ethnicities, please read our article [origin of the different races](#). It seems more likely that the different ethnicities existed prior to the Tower of Babel and that God confused the languages at least partially based on the different ethnicities. From the Tower of Babel, humanity divided based on language (and possibly ethnicity) and settled in various parts of the world.

Genesis 10:5, 20 and 31 describe Noah’s descendants spreading out over the earth “by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations.” How is this possible since God did not confuse the languages until the Tower of Babel in Genesis chapter 11? Genesis 10 lists the descendants of Noah’s three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. It lists their descendants for several generations. With the long life spans of that time (see Genesis 11:10-25), the genealogies in Genesis 10 likely cover several hundreds of years. The Tower of Babel account, told in Genesis 11:1-9, is a “flashback” to the point in Genesis 10 when the languages were confused. Genesis 10 tells us of different languages. Genesis 11 tells us how the different languages originated. [GotQuestions.org](#)

#### **Related Resource:**

- [Article in Dictionary of Biblical Imagery \(page 260\)](#)

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#### **G Campbell Morgan - Gen. 11.9.**

So a name is given to the Mystery of Lawlessness as it operates in human society. From here, the evil thing is seen running on through all succeeding ages of the history of man, until it comes to final expression, and is destroyed (Rev. 18. 20). This story of Babel is that of man's attempt to realize a social order in defiance of a Divine purpose. The purpose of God was the full realization of the race, and that necessitated the replenishing of the whole earth by the scattering of men over all its face. Man took counsel against this scattering, and attempted to realize a State at Shinar, "lest we be scattered abroad." In order to the fulfilment of the larger purpose, God confused their language and drove the nations into separation. The purpose of the scattering was that of the larger gathering which should fulfil His purpose. He confused their schemes that His plan might be realized. This is not only an ancient story, it is the story of a perpetual process. Over and over again men have sought to establish them-selves either in rebellion against, or with-out reference to, the Divine plans. The result has always been confusion. God has never permitted humanity to realize a social order from which He is excluded, nor will He do so to the end. Such an order would mean the limiting and ultimate destruction of humanity. Therefore He confuses all such attempts, and, compelling men to work out their own false conceptions to their logical issue, destroys them.

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#### **QUESTION - [What is the origin of the different races?](#)**

**ANSWER** - The Bible does not explicitly give us the origin of the different “races” or skin colors in humanity. In actuality, there is only one race—the human race. Within the human race is diversity in skin color and other physical characteristics. Some speculate that when God confused the languages at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), He also created racial diversity. It is possible that God made genetic changes to humanity to better enable people to survive in different ecologies, such as the darker skin of Africans being better equipped genetically to survive the excessive heat in Africa. According to this view, God confused the languages, causing humanity to segregate linguistically, and then created genetic racial differences based on where each racial group would eventually settle. While possible, there is no explicit biblical basis for this view. The races/skin colors of humanity are nowhere mentioned in connection with the tower of Babel.

At the [Tower of Babel](#), when the different languages came into existence, groups that spoke one language moved away with others of the same language. In doing so, the gene pool for a specific group shrank dramatically as the group no longer had the entire human population to mix with. Closer inbreeding took place, and in time certain features were emphasized in these different groups (all of which were present as a possibility in the genetic code). As further inbreeding occurred through the generations, the gene pool grew smaller and smaller, to the point that people of one language family all had the same or similar features.

Another explanation is that Adam and Eve possessed the genes to produce black, brown, and white offspring (and everything else in between). This would be similar to how a mixed-race couple sometimes has children that vary in color. Since God obviously desired humanity to be diverse in appearance, it makes sense that God would have given Adam and Eve the ability to produce children of



different skin tones. Later, the only survivors of the flood were Noah and his wife, Noah's three sons and their wives—eight people in all (Genesis 7:13). Perhaps Noah's daughters-in-law were of different races. It is also possible that Noah's wife was of a different race than Noah. Maybe all eight of them were of mixed race, which would mean they possessed the genetics to produce children of different races. Whatever the explanation, the most important aspect of this question is that we are all the same race, all created by the same God, all created for the same purpose—to glorify Him. [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

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### **Steven Cole gives 3 applications based on Genesis 11:1-9:**

**1. If you're not growing in humility, you're not growing as a Christian** Since pride is the root sin of all sins, humility is the chief virtue of the Christian life. Since the original temptation in the garden, Satan has been active in trying to get man to exalt himself against God. It has flooded into the church in our day under the banner of building your self-esteem. But the Bible is clear that we all esteem ourselves too highly. Even the person who goes around dumping on himself is self-focused. I used to teach the popular views on self-esteem. But in reading Calvin's Institutes I came to realize how far I had drifted from the clear teaching of Scripture, and I had to repent. He writes,

A saying of Chrysostom's has always pleased me very much, that the foundation of our philosophy is humility. But that of Augustine pleases me even more: "When a certain rhetorician was asked what was the chief rule in eloquence, he replied, 'Delivery'; what was the second rule, 'Delivery'; what was the third rule, 'Delivery'; so if you ask me concerning the precepts of the Christian religion, first, second, third, and always I would answer, '**Humility**.'" (II:II:11).

Calvin not only taught humility, he modeled it. On one occasion, the Roman Catholic Cardinal Sadolet passed incognito through Geneva. He wanted to have a look at the famous reformer. He found the simple house on Canon Street and stood there amazed. Could the great Calvin live in this little place? He knocked. Calvin himself, in a plain black robe, answered the door. Sadolet was dumbfounded. Where were the servants who should have been scurrying about to do their master's bidding? Even the bishops of Rome lived in mansions, surrounded by wealth and servants. Archbishops and cardinals lived in palaces like kings. And here was the most famous man in the whole Protestant church, in a little house, answering his own door! (Thea B. Van Halsema, *This Was John Calvin* [Baker], pp. 164–175.)

If you ask, How do I grow in humility? the biblical answer is: Get a clearer picture of the greatness of God in His holiness; and, get a more accurate view of the depth of your own sinfulness. C. S. Lewis wrote ([Mere Christianity, page 96](#) - BORROW),

In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that--and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison--you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.

In 1715 [Louis XIV of France](#) died. He had called himself "Louis the Great," and was famous for his brash statement, "I am the State!" His court was the most lavish in Europe and his funeral the most spectacular. His body lay in a golden coffin. To dramatize his greatness, orders had been given that the cathedral would be dimly lit, with a special candle set above the coffin. Thousands waited in hushed silence. Then Bishop Massillon began to speak. Slowly reaching down, he snuffed out the candle, saying, "**Only God is great.**"

**2. Take care how you build because God will inspect it.** "The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built" (Ge 11:5). He inspected their work. He will inspect our work as well. We had better build with that in view. I'm talking about the motive behind your service for the Lord. God looks on our hearts. He's concerned about why you do what you do. Is it to gain the praise of men? Is it to meet your own needs? Or is it to honor and glorify Him? The question is not, What does your work look like from the outside? I'm sure the city and tower were the most impressive thing on the face of the earth in that day. There are many works for God in our day that seem quite impressive. The question is, What does God see?

**Calvin** writes, "We never truly glory in him [God] unless we have utterly put off our own glory. On the other hand, we must hold this as a universal principle: whoever glories in himself, glories against God" (III:XIII:2).

**3. Make sure that your hope for heaven is based only on God's grace through the cross of Christ, not on anything in yourself.** Man's religions always seek to reach God through human effort. Thus man can boast in his standing before God, because he had a part in it. But biblical Christianity says, "May it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14+). The cross strips us of our pride and puts all our hope in the merits of the Savior.

Dr. Harry Ironside told the story of a new convert who gave his testimony at a church service. With great joy he

told how he had been delivered from a life of sin. He gave all the glory to God, saying nothing about his own merits or anything he had done to deserve his salvation. The man in charge of the service was a legalistic man who did not appreciate the reality of salvation by grace through faith apart from human works. So he responded to the young man's testimony by saying, "You seem to indicate that God did everything when He saved you. Didn't you do your part before God did His?" The new Christian jumped to his feet and said, "Oh, yes, I did. For more than 30 years I ran away from God as fast as my sins could carry me. That was my part. But God took out after me and ran me down. That was His part." (cf Jn 6:44+) Ironside observed, "It was well put and tells a story that every redeemed sinner understands" (from "Our Daily Bread").

Scripture is clear: "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5-). If you don't want God as your enemy, humble yourself under His mighty hand, confessing your sin. Forsaking all trust in yourself or your efforts, trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Remember, if you set yourself against the Sovereign God, God always wins! ([Man Versus God: God Wins Genesis 11:1-9](#))

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#### **Ray Pritchard has three application questions related to Genesis 11:1-9:**

**First**, to what extent do I embody the attitude of Babel? Remember, the problem of the tower was not the tower itself but the attitude that built it in the first place. Anything good can become like the Tower of Babel when we are motivated by pride or arrogance or paranoia or a need to establish our own independence from God and from others. There is a mighty thin line between healthy ambition and sinful pride and any of us can cross it without even knowing it. It's the compulsive need to be in control of every aspect of life, including those around us. It's the spirit of Babel that causes us to say, "He's God in heaven but I'm the God of my own little world."

**Second**, in what areas have I experienced the judgment of Babel? In Genesis 11 God judged the people by throwing them into confusion and ruining their massive building program. God does the same thing to us today. We suffer confusion and fear and incredible loneliness in our drive to be the "est" at whatever we do. I heard of a fortune-cookie motto that read: "Confucius say, 'Top of ladder nice place, but very lonesome.'" How true. Some of us have suffered incredibly because we're still trying to live according to our own rules. So we push God out to the edges of life and then do our own thing. But you can't push God to the side and succeed for very long. Your tower will come crashing down sooner or later, and when it does, the shaky foundation of your life will be destroyed with it.

**Third**, have I embraced the alternative to Babel? There is only one alternative—the Lord Jesus Christ. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe" (Proverbs 18:10).....

If you are tired of building castles in the sand only to see them washed away by the tides of life, come to Jesus. If you are weary of trying (and failing) to be the master of your circumstances, come to Jesus. If you are burdened with the pressure of trying to be all things to all people all the time and if you fail to meet your own expectations, much less anyone else's, come to Jesus. If you are worn out from the fruitless search for power and prestige, come to Jesus. Here is a word for frustrated tower-builders everywhere. If you are tired of your life and want something better, come to Jesus. All that hungry hearts seek is found in him. By his death on the cross our sins are forgiven. By his resurrection we gain new life. Do you know him? Has your heart been changed by his mighty power? If you are tired of building towers that fall to the ground, come to Jesus. He's the firm foundation, the cornerstone that can never be shaken. Build your life on Jesus Christ and you will never be disappointed. Amen. ([The Tower That Fell: Why God Stopped the Building Program](#))

**Genesis 11:10 These are the records of the generations of Shem. Shem was one hundred years old, and became the father of Arpachshad two years after the flood;**

- Ge 11:27 10:21,22 1Ch 1:17-27 Lu 3:34-36
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

#### **Related Passages:**

Luke 3:34-36+ the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of **Abraham**, the son of **Terah**, the son of **Nahor**, 35 the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Heber, the son of Shelah, 36 the son of Cainan, the son of **Arphaxad**, the son of **Shem**, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech,

## RECORDS OF SHEM

**These are the records of the generations of Shem**- The genealogy in Genesis 5 takes us from Adam to Noah, and the genealogy in Genesis 11 pick up with Noah and his son Shem to Terah and his son Abraham. It is as if the Holy Spirit turns a corner in this passage in verse 10. Here we see a major shift in God's emphasis from the godless nations of the world to one nation in the world, the nation of Israel, to whom He would reveal Himself as the living God and through whom He would reveal His Son the Redeemer. Thus the remainder of the chapter sets the stage for the chosen nation through which God would carry out His plan of redemption of the world.

**Shem was one hundred years old, and became the father of Arpachshad two years after the flood** - Recall Shem means "name." In the previous passages men were seeking to make a name for themselves. God had given Shem a "name," and through Shem would come the One Whose Name "is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Php 2:9-11+)

[Bob Utley](#) - Shem's descendants continue the Messianic line from Seth from Gen. 5:3-32 and Ge 10:21-31. This line will continue in Terah/Abraham in Gen. 11:10-25 (cf. Luke 3:23-38).

**Genesis 11:11 and Shem lived five hundred years after he became the father of Arpachshad, and he had other sons and daughters.**

- **Shem** - Ge 5:4-32
- **he had other sons and daughters** - Ge 1:28 5:4 9:7 Ps 127:3,4 128:3,4 144:12
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## SHEM'S LONGEVITY

**and Shem lived five hundred years after he became the father of [Arpachshad](#), and he had other sons and daughters** - Note that even in the face of the flood and post-diluvian environmental changes some of the men still lived for much longer than we see today.

[Gotquestions.org](#) note on the origin of "Hebrews" - From Shem, through [Arpachshad](#) and Shelah, came Eber, the eponymous ancestor of the Hebrews; and Eber's descendant, through Peleg, Reu, Sereg, and Nahor, was [Terah](#), the father of Abram and his brothers Nahor and Haran. It becomes clear that, if "Hebrews" are "descendants of Eber," then others besides those of Abraham's line could possibly be included (see Genesis 11:10–26).

**Genesis 11:12 Arpachshad lived thirty-five years, and became the father of Shelah;**

- **became the father** - Lu 3:36
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## ARPACHSHAD BECOMES FATHER OF SHELAH

**Arpachshad lived thirty-five years, and became the father of Shelah;**

**Genesis 11:13 and Arpachshad lived four hundred and three years after he became the father of Shelah, and he had other sons and daughters.**

- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## ARPACHSHAD'S LONGEVITY

and Arpachshad lived four hundred and three years after he became the father of Shelah, and he had other sons and daughters.

**Bob Utley** - The [Masoretic Text](#) excludes *Kainan* (Canaan) in Gen. 11:13 but the LXX includes him as does Luke 3:36+ ("the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad,"). This is a good example of the fact that the MT is not the oldest written text. It, like KJV, has editorial additions.

**NET NOTE - Technical note** - The reading of the [Masoretic Text](#) is followed in Ge 11:11–12NET; the LXX reads, "And [= when] Arphaxad had lived thirty-five years, [and] he fathered [= became the father of] Cainan. And after he fathered [= became the father of] Cainan, Arphaxad lived four hundred and thirty years and fathered [= had] [other] sons and daughters, and [then] he died. And [= when] Cainan had lived one hundred and thirty years, [and] he fathered [= became the father of] Sala [= Shelah]. And after he fathered [= became the father of] Sala [= Shelah], Cainan lived three hundred and thirty years and fathered [= had] [other] sons and daughters, and [then] he died." See also the note on "Shelah" in Gen 10:24; the LXX reading also appears to lie behind Luke 3:35–36.

**Genesis 11:14 Shelah lived thirty years, and became the father of Eber;**

- , Ge 11:14
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

**Shelah lived thirty years, and became the father of Eber;**

**Henry Morris** Luke 3:36 inserts the name "Cainan" between those of Arphaxad and Salah. This name is also found in some of the Septuagint manuscripts (though not the earliest), but it is not found in either Genesis 10:24 or I Chronicles 1:18, in any of the Masoretic manuscripts. The weight of evidence favors the Hebrew text with Cainan's name having accidentally been later inserted by careless scribal copying from Genesis 5:10 and/or Luke 3:37. The inclusion of essentially the same genealogy, with no suggestion of any omitted generations, in Genesis 10:21-25 and 11:10-26, I Chronicles 1:17-28, and Luke 3:34-38, including chronological data in the second, at least places the burden of proof on any who (for archaeological reasons) would maintain there are significant gaps involved.

**Genesis 11:15 and Shelah lived four hundred and three years after he became the father of Eber, and he had other sons and daughters.**

- Ge 11:14
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

**and Shelah lived four hundred and three years after he became the father of Eber, and he had other sons and daughters.**

**Genesis 11:16 Eber lived thirty-four years, and became the father of Peleg;**

- **Eber** - Ge 10:21, 24, 25; Ge 11:14-17; Nu 24:24; 1 Chr. 1:18-19; 1 Chr. 1:25; 1 Chr. 5:13; 1 Chr. 8:12, 8:22; Neh. 12:20
- **Peleg** - 8v - Gen. 10:25; Gen. 11:16; Gen. 11:17; Gen. 11:18; Gen. 11:19; 1 Chr. 1:19; 1 Chr. 1:25; Lk. 3:35
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

### Related Passages:

Genesis 10:21; 25 Also to Shem, the father of all the children of Eber, and the older brother of Japheth, children were born.....24) Arpachshad became the father of Shelah; and Shelah became the father of Eber. 25 Two sons were born to Eber; the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided; and his

brother's name was Joktan.

**Eber lived thirty-four years, and became the father of Peleg** - Moses is taking us down the family tree to the main character Abraham.

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**QUESTION - [In what way was the earth divided in Peleg's time?](#)**

**ANSWER** - The first reference to Peleg is found in Genesis 10:25, which reads the same as 1 Chronicles 1:19. Immediately following, in Genesis 11, is the event that describes this division of the earth: the [Tower of Babel](#).

At the Tower of Babel, the Lord was displeased with the actions of people who sought to build a tower to the heavens and "make a name" for themselves (Genesis 11:4). In judgment, God confused their languages so they could no longer understand one another. The account ends with this summary: "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 11:9).

Peleg's family history is noted once again following the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:16–19). The fact that Peleg is mentioned before and immediately after the account of the Tower of Babel helps clarify that this is the key event that divided the earth. It seems the earth was not divided geologically, but its *people* were divided into various language groups.

Today, more than 7,000 languages exist worldwide. While many of these languages were developed after the Tower of Babel, they can be traced to different linguistic roots. The languages that exist today still serve as a dividing point in culture. These divisions have existed since the Tower of Babel in the time of Peleg.

Interestingly, one final mention of Peleg is found in the New Testament. In Luke 3:35, Peleg is mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus. During the time of Peleg, God divided the earth with language. But all the while He had a plan—one that included Peleg—to send Jesus Christ, the One who can reconcile all divisions. [GotQuestions.org](#)

**Genesis 11:17 and Eber lived four hundred and thirty years after he became the father of Peleg, and he had other sons and daughters.**

- Peleg - 8v - Gen. 10:25; Gen. 11:16; Gen. 11:17; Gen. 11:18; Gen. 11:19; 1 Chr. 1:19; 1 Chr. 1:25; Lk. 3:35
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

**Related Passages:**

Luke 3:35+ (LINE OF MESSIAH) the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Heber, the son of Shalah,

**and Eber lived four hundred and thirty years after he became the father of Peleg, and he had other sons and daughters**

**Genesis 11:18 Peleg lived thirty years, and became the father of Reu;**

- Reu - Lu 3:35
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

**Peleg lived thirty years, and became the father of Reu**

**Genesis 11:19 and Peleg lived two hundred and nine years after he became the father of Reu, and he had other sons and daughters.**

- Ge 11:19
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

and Peleg lived two hundred and nine years after he became the father of Reu, and he had other sons and daughters

**Genesis 11:20 Reu lived thirty-two years, and became the father of Serug;**

- Serug - Lu 3:35
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

**Reu lived thirty-two years, and became the father of Serug**

**Genesis 11:21 and Reu lived two hundred and seven years after he became the father of Serug, and he had other sons and daughters.**

- Ge 11:21
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

and Reu lived two hundred and seven years after he became the father of Serug, and he had other sons and daughters

**Genesis 11:22 Serug lived thirty years, and became the father of Nahor;**

- Nahor - Jos 24:2
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

**Serug lived thirty years, and became the father of Nahor;**

**Genesis 11:23 and Serug lived two hundred years after he became the father of Nahor, and he had other sons and daughters.**

- Ge 11:23
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

and Serug lived two hundred years after he became the father of Nahor, and he had other sons and daughters

**Genesis 11:24 Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and became the father of Terah;**

- Terah - Lu 3:34
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries



## NAHOR FATHER OF TERAH

**Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and became the father of Terah;**

**Bob Utley - Terah** - From Josh. 24:2 it is obvious that he and his family were polytheists. The names of his family suggest primarily that they worshiped the moon goddess *Zin*. She was worshiped in Ur, Tema, and Haran. However, Gen. 31:53 implies that he knew of YHWH.

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### **SPECIAL TOPIC: MOON WORSHIP - Bob Utley**

Moon worship was the most widespread mythology of the Ancient Near East starting with *Sumer* (the first writing culture of the ANE). There was both a male and female aspect to the myth. Originally the moon god came from the rape of the grain goddess, *Ninlil* by *Enlil*, the sky god. *Enlil* was cast out of the pantheon and condemned to the underworld for his act, but when *Ninlil* found out she was with child she joined him. The child, *Sin*, was allowed to climb into the sky each night.

The worship of the moon is designed by its different phases (i.e., symbolically representing the horns of a bull).

1. new moon – *Asimbabbar*
2. crescent moon – *Sin*
3. full moon – *Nanna* (Sumerian "illumination" from *En-su*, "lord of wisdom")

These names basically mean "wise lord" (i.e., *Su'en*, Akkadian) or "illumination" (*Nanna*, Sumerian) worshiped at **Ur of the Chaldees** (also in Haran). The city itself was often called the city of Nannar. The fertility pair (i.e., *En'su* and consort *Ningal*) were worshiped at Ziggurats (large pyramids with flat tops) located in the city. The sun god (*Shamash*) was the firstborn of the couple and later *Ereshkigal* (the Queen of the Underworld) and *Inanna* (the Queen of Heaven/sky).

The cult was spread all across the ANE, but the major centers of worship were the cities of

1. Ur
2. Haran
3. Tema
4. Canaan
5. Mecca

Basically this mythology combined the fertility emphasis with astral worship.

The OT rejects astral worship (cf. Deut. 4:19; 17:3; 2 Kgs. 21:3,5; 23:5; Jer. 8:2; 19:13; Zeph. 1:5) and fertility worship (i.e., *Ba'al* and *Asherah*, Ugarit poems). The Hebrews, originally nomads, were very careful to resist moon worship because in general moon worship was characteristic of nomadic peoples who traveled at night, while the sun was much more generally worshiped by settled or agricultural peoples. Eventually nomads settle and then astral worship in general became the problem.

**Genesis 11:25 and Nahor lived one hundred and nineteen years after he became the father of Terah, and he had other sons and daughters.**

- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

**and Nahor lived one hundred and nineteen years after he became the father of Terah, and he had other sons and daughters** - Note the longevity is decreasing.

**Genesis 11:26 Terah lived seventy years, and became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran.**

- Abram - Ge 12:4,5 22:20-24 29:4,5 Jos 24:2 1Ch 1:26,27
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## Related Passages:

Luke 3:34 (TERAH & NAHOR IN LINE OF MESSIAH) the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, **the son of Terah**, the son of Nahor,

## TERAH FATHER TO THREE SONS

**Terah lived seventy years, and became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran** - Here begins the story of Abram (later Abraham), a story so significant in the counsels of God that the Spirit of God devotes approximately 25% of Genesis to this patriarch.

[Warren Wiersbe](#) writes "What to us is only a list of names was to God a "bridge" from the appointment of Shem to the call of Abraham. God has deigned to use people to help accomplish His will on earth, and people are fragile and not always obedient. But the "bridge" was built and the covenant promises sustained."

[Bob Utley](#) - Abram, Nahor and Haran" This might be the order of importance and not age. The name Abram can mean "exalted father", "exalter of father", "the Exalted One is my father". The name Nahor means "panting" or an Assyrian place name (BDB 637), while Haran means "mountaineer"

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### QUESTION - [Who was Terah in the Bible?](#)

**ANSWER** - Terah is known in the Bible as the father of Abram (known later as Abraham), who in turn received the [covenant promise](#) of God regarding the future birth of His Son, Jesus. Terah is mentioned in Jesus' genealogy in Luke 3:34.

Terah was the son of Nahor, who was of Noah's son's Shem's line. Nahor fathered Terah at the young age of 29 years (Genesis 11:24), but Terah was 70 years old before his three sons, Abram, Nahor, and Haran, were born (verse 26). Haran was the father of Lot, Abram's nephew and traveling companion, but Haran died during Terah's lifetime (verse 28). After Haran's death, Terah uprooted his family from their home in Ur of the Chaldeans and set out for the land of Canaan. For unknown reasons, Terah never made it to their destination but stopped and settled in Harran instead. This is where Terah died at age 205.

After Terah had passed away, God called Abram to continue the journey to Canaan. God promised to make Abram into a great nation (Genesis 12:1-2), even though Abram's wife, Sarai, was barren (Genesis 11:30). Abraham heeded God's command and put His trust in the Lord to the end of his days. Years later, Joshua mentions Terah in an address to the Israelites: "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods'" (Joshua 24:2). Joshua then urged the people to make a clean break from their pagan heritage: "Throw away the gods your ancestors [including Terah] worshiped beyond the Euphrates River . . . and serve the Lord" (verse 14).

Terah and his family were idol-worshippers, and that means God spoke to [Abraham](#) before he even knew God. What a blessing that God can call anyone, regardless of their ancestry and former faith, to live a life for Him and be a part of His great plan. [GotQuestions.org](#)

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### [SPECIAL TOPIC: SEVENTY YEARS](#) - Bob Utley

The time designation appears to allude to a "completed time" (from 7 x 10, see [SPECIAL TOPIC: SYMBOLIC NUMBERS IN SCRIPTURE, #4, 5](#)). Notice usages in Scripture.

1. revenge, Gen. 4:24
2. age of Terah when Abram was born, Gen. 11:26
3. seventy in Jacob's family moved to Egypt, Exod. 1:5
4. seventy elders during the Wilderness Wandering Period, Exod. 24:1,9; Num. 11:16,24,25 (also Ezek. 8:11)
5. number of Abimelech's brothers who were killed, Jdgs. 9:56
6. expected life span, Ps. 90:10 (double is a special blessing from God, Job 42:16)
7. Ahab's seventy sons, 2 Kgs. 10:1,6,7
8. seventy year judgment
  1. Judah in Babylon, 2 Chr. 36:21; Ezra 1:1; Jer. 25:11; 29:10; Dan. 9:2; Zech. 7:5

2. Tyre, Isa. 23:15

9. Jesus sent out seventy, Luke 10:1,17 (possibly symbolically reflects Jewish belief there were 70 languages spoken in all the world)

10. forgiveness 70 times 7, Matt. 18:22

See full exegetical note at Zechariah 1:12 online for more information about "seventy" being a literal number.

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## The Big Story of the Bible

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. 2 Timothy 3:16

Today's Scripture & Insight : Genesis 11:26–32

When Colin opened the box of stained-glass pieces he'd purchased, instead of finding the fragments he'd ordered for a project, he discovered intact, whole windows. He sleuthed out the windows' origin and learned they'd been removed from a church to protect them from World War II bombings. Colin marveled at the quality of work and how the "fragments" formed a beautiful picture.

If I'm honest, there are times when I open particular passages of the Bible—such as chapters containing lists of genealogies—and I don't immediately see how they fit within the bigger picture of Scripture. Such is the case with Genesis 11—a chapter that contains a repetitive cadence of unfamiliar names and their families, such as Shem, Shelah, Eber, Nahor, and Terah (Ge 11:10–32). I'm often tempted to gloss over these sections and skip to a part that contains something that feels familiar and fits more easily into my "window" of understanding of the Bible's narrative.

Since "all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful" (2 Timothy 3:16), the Holy Spirit can help us better understand how a fragment fits into the whole, opening our eyes to see, for example, how Shelah is related to Abram (Genesis 11:12–26), the ancestor of David and—more importantly—Jesus (Matthew 1:2, 6, 16). He delights in surprising us with the treasure of a perfectly intact window where even the smaller parts reveal the story of God's mission throughout the Bible. By: Kirsten Holmberg (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Why is it important to recognize each portion of Scripture as a fragment of God's bigger story?

Father, please help me to see You and Your work more clearly.

Grow deeper in your understanding of the Bible.

**Genesis 11:27 Now these are the records of the generations of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran; and Haran became the father of Lot.**

- Lot - Ge 11:31 12:4 13:1-11 14:12 19:1-29 2Pe 2:7
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

**Now these are the records of the generations of Terah** - Now the focus shifts to one family of Shem's offspring. This is another picture of pure grace (and election cf Neh 9:7 - chose in Lxx = [eklego/eklegomai](#)) on God's part for Joshua describes Terah and his offspring writing "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, **Terah**, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and **they served other gods.**" (Joshua 24:2) In other words Terah, et al (including Abram), were not God worshippers but idol worshippers (probably of the moon god) and yet out of these pagans will come the line of the Messiah, the Redeemer of the world!

**Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran and Haran became the father of Lot**

**Henry Morris** The names of both Nahor (named after his grandfather) and Haran are associated with cities in Mesopotamia (Genesis 24:10; 28:10). Haran died when relatively young, evidently while visiting his father back in Ur (Genesis 11:26 28,32). His son, Lot, soon became attached to his Uncle Abram.

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QUESTION - [Who was Haran in the Bible?](#)

**ANSWER** - Two men named Haran are mentioned in two separate genealogies in the Bible (see 1 Chronicles 2:46 and 23:9), and both were leaders among the tribes of Israel and are points of reference in biblical family lines. In Genesis 11, the Bible speaks of a third man named Haran who takes a larger role in Scripture. Haran was one of three sons born to a man named Terah, making this Haran the brother of one of the most well-known Bible characters, Abram (later known as [Abraham](#)). Haran was the father of [Lot](#). He also had two daughters, Milcah and Iscah (Genesis 11:29).

Genesis 11 records that Terah's whole family, including Haran and Abram, lived in Ur of the Chaldeans. Haran died before Abram left Ur. It seems Haran's death occurred at a young age or in an untimely manner, for Haran's father was still alive at the time of Haran's death (Genesis 11:28). After Haran died, Terah gathered his family and possessions and set off toward Canaan. They stopped in a place called Harran, where Terah died. Some speculate that Terah may have named the town after his dead son, but the biblical text is not clear on this point. Haran's brother Abram would later heed God's call and resume the journey to Canaan, taking with him Haran's son Lot and Lot's family. [GotQuestions.org](#)

**Genesis 11:28 Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans.**

- Ur - Ge 15:7 Ne 9:7 Ac 7:2-4
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

See Ur just South of Babylonia

**Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans** - Haran clearly lived long enough to father a 2 daughters and one named Milcah would marry Nahor, Terah's son.

**Bob Utley** - "Haran died in the presence of his father Terah" This is a Hebrew idiom for Haran dying (1) in the time of his father (JPSOA), (2) in the land of his father (REB), (3) in his father's presence (LXX, Peshitta)....The Chaldean culture developed (i.e., built on the strengths of the Sumerian culture) and thrived after Abram's day

**John Phillips** - [Ur of the Chaldees](#) where Abram lived was an important city of Babylonia. It was a city of luxury and attainment, and a center of [moon worship](#) (BORROW [Exploring Genesis - page 108](#))

**NET NOTE on Chaldeans** - The phrase of the Chaldeans is a later editorial clarification for the readers, designating the location of Ur. From all evidence there would have been no Chaldeans in existence at this early date; they are known in the time of the neo-Babylonian empire in the first millennium B.C.

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Ur of the Chaldees Next to Euphrates River

**QUESTION** - [Where was Ur of the Chaldees?](#) (SEE MAP ABOVE)

**ANSWER** - [Ur of the Chaldees](#) (or [Chaldeans](#)) was a place in Mesopotamia and is mentioned four times in the Old Testament:

Genesis 11:28 says that Haran (Abram's brother and Lot's father) died in [Ur of the Chaldees](#), "the land of his birth."

Genesis 11:31 says that [Abram](#) left [Ur of the Chaldees](#) and moved to Canaan. Chapter 12 goes on to explain that this move was the result of God's call to Abram to leave his home and move to a new land that God would one day give to his descendants.

In Genesis 15:7, God identifies Himself to Abram: "I am the LORD, who brought you out of [Ur of the Chaldees](#) to give you this land to take possession of it."

In Nehemiah 9 the Israelites confess their sins and recount the history of Israel: "You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him out of **Ur of the Chaldeans** and named him Abraham" (verse 7).

**Ur** may have been a city, and there have been many sites suggested as the location of Ur, but no theory is definitive. The site that is most commonly suggested is a city on the Euphrates River, about 150 miles northwest of the Persian Gulf.

The Septuagint (an Ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament) simply calls [Ur of the Chaldees](#) the "land of the Chaldees," and in the New Testament Stephen, reviewing the history of Israel, says that Abraham came out of "**land of the Chaldeans**" (Acts 7:4).

Many scholars believe that Ur is not the name of a city but simply a word that means "land." If this is the case, then Ur of the

Chaldees is simply the land of the Chaldees. Chaldea was in the area known as the Fertile Crescent. Depending upon the time period, the territory of the Chaldeans varied, but it would have included the lower part of the Fertile Crescent, extending from the upper edge of the Persian Gulf northwest to the area of the city of Babylon. The Chaldeans ruled Babylon for a while. The exact boundaries of their territory are not clear.

The point of the story is that God called Abram out of an area of civilization and prosperity. Ur of the Chaldees, the place where he lived, would have had ample water and land for pasturing and would have been active with commerce. It was "the place" to be. God called him away from that to a place that was unknown to him. Abram would probably have had a hard time imagining any place better than the place where he already was. But Abram believed the promises of God, and God credited that faith to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3). History has been filled with pioneers who have left civilization to seek a better life, but usually these people have been in dire straits, desperate for something better. They left a bad situation knowing that, even though there would be dangers and hardships, they could have something better in the end. Abram's situation seems to have been the opposite. He lived in a prosperous civilization among his family, who appears to have been wealthy. He walked away from it all, simply trusting that God was going to give him something better, even though he would be a stranger in a strange land and would not see the fulfillment of God's promises in his lifetime.

Many Christians face the same issue. Those living in ease and luxury can too easily focus on the here and now, forgetting that God has called them, like Abram and his children, to look "forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:10). [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

## UR OF THE CHALDEES MULTIPLE RESOURCES

**Howard Vos** (see also following note for more on Ur) in [Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Manners & Customs](#) (page 6 - BORROW - also for an excellent summary click "[The Land of Mesopotamia](#)") has an interesting discussion related to Ur of the Chaldees which makes it even more striking that Abraham was willing to leave this area of prosperity to go to some unknown place. Vos entitles this section "Ancient Sumerian Ur: Important and Prosperous," asking

"So what is the significance of the move, you ask? For us today, Ur is not an important place, nor is it located in one of the more progressive regions on earth. Conditions were quite different then, however. Instead of being situated in a cultural and political backwater, **Ur was at the forefront of developments.** If we have our chronology straight (see later discussion) Ur controlled a powerful empire and **was perhaps the greatest city-state in the world at the time** The only possible exception was the [Harappan culture of the Indus Valley](#), to be seen at such cities as Harappa and Mohenjodaro. Those cities were on the wane by 2000 B.C., however, and seem never to have been as advanced as the Mesopotamian cities.

**Not only was Ur an important and prosperous place in Abraham's day, but it also stood in the general area where civilization began.** The usual view is that civilization involves such developments as writing, the wheel—for pottery making and transportation—monumental architecture, the decorative arts, and metallurgy. All of these things appeared first in southern Mesopotamia, and the people who get credit for those many achievements were the Sumerians, who lived at the northern end of the Persian Gulf and who controlled Ur in Abraham's day.

The earliest monumental architecture (three large temples) was found at Obeid (4 miles northwest of Ur) dating from about 4000 B.C. At Uruk (biblical Erech, Genesis 10:10), another 35 miles up the Euphrates from Obeid, civilization really began. Pottery was produced on a spinning potter's wheel and four-wheeled chariots with solid wheels were built by 3500 B.C. Soon after 3500 the inhabitants were writing on clay tablets in crude pictograms and by 3000 were using wedge-shaped cuneiform. We might well imagine Abraham learning to write on a clay tablet.

At Uruk, too, archaeologists uncovered monumental architecture in the form of large temples, the first ziggurat or stage- tower, and city walls. Fairly sophisticated artistic production appeared in the decoration of the temples and the cylinder seals of the period. Cylinder seals were small stone cylinders one to three inches long and incised with artwork. These could be rolled across wet clay and serve as a signet or evidence of ownership. An irrigation system was also developed in the Uruk period. **If Ur was the leading city of the world in Abraham's day, and if it was located in an area that stood at the forefront of cultural advancement, Abraham's decision to leave Ur and follow God's call takes on new significance.**

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**NOTE:** Howard Vos's "Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Manners & Customs" has one of the best discussions of Ur of Mesopotamia I have ever read. Click the following links if the book is unavailable (it seems to be very popular and so is often "checked out" and thus unavailable):

1. [Life in Abraham's Hometown - Ur of Mesopotamia](#) - page 5
2. [The land of Mesopotamia](#) - page 6
3. [Cuneiform As it was written during the Ur III period](#) - page 6-7
4. [Where Abraham Lived - Ur and Her Empire](#) - page 8-9 (has an excellent map of the "Ancient Near East")
5. [The state also operated huge factories employing hundreds or even thousands of workers](#) - page 10
6. [Festivals were celebrated](#) - page 10-11
7. [Metal had to be imported](#) - page 12-13
8. [A greater sophistication than the one-story houses of earlier periods or later construction in Babylonian times](#) - page 14-15
9. [Varieties of sheep that cannot as yet be related to modern strains](#) - page 16-17
10. [Abraham probably started life as an upper class family member](#) - page 18-19 (this is the limit of searchable pages)

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**Henry Morris** adds Ur was an old and prosperous city in the days of Abram, Archaeological excavation has revealed a great library which has yielded thousands of clay tablets. Contrary to outmoded theories of cultural evolution, practically everyone knew how to read and write long before Abram's day.

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**Gleason Archer** - [New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties](#) - If Genesis 11:28 places the origin of Abraham's family in Ur of the Chaldees, why does Abraham in Genesis 24:4 locate his country and kinfolk in Haran?

Abraham's family originated in Ur but later migrated to Haran, which was located on the Belikh River, sixty miles from the Euphrates River, at the extreme north of the "Fertile Crescent." The entire clan joined in the migration, including Abram, Nahor, and Lot (the son of the deceased Nahor). Therefore they settled as a group in Padan Aram, of which Haran was the capital. There they all lived together for several decades, giving birth to children and rearing them in this Syrian setting. It is quite to be expected that Abraham would look back to the long sojourn in Haran as a second homeland from which he had migrated at the age of 75 (Gen. 12:4). It was also natural for him to refer to the children of his two older brothers as his "family" (*móledet*)—even though there may have been more distant relatives still living back in Ur (cf. 12:1).

Some have suggested that the Ur referred to as the ancestral home of Abraham's family may actually have been located much closer to Haran, up in the area of Padan Aram. There are references to "Uru" in the Eblaite tablets, according to G. Pettinato ("BAR Interviews Giovanni Pettinato," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 6, no. 5 [September–October 1980]: 51), located in northern Mesopotamia. But "Uru" was simply a Sumerian or Akkadian term for "the city," and as such it might be expected to occur in more than one region of Mesopotamia. Genesis 11:28 says very explicitly, however, that the Ur from which Abraham came was "Ur of the Chaldeans." This Ur was located very near the shoreline of the Persian Gulf back in ancient times, almost one hundred miles northwest of the present coast. As such it was very susceptible to raids by the Chaldean corsairs from the nearby region of what is now called Kuwait.

Just as the east coast of England finally became known as Danelaw, because of the increasing infiltration by Danish Vikings, so Ur became known as Ur Kasdim (by Moses' time, at least, when Genesis was written), because of the establishment of a sphere of influence there on the part of the Chaldeans. But there is no way that any Uru up in the vicinity of Haran would have become subject to a Chaldeans hegemony, for the Chaldeans never penetrated to that part of the Near East. (The suggestion that this might have reflected the Kassites of the Kassite dynasty in Babylon 1500–1200 B.C. has little to commend it. There was never any third radical d attached to the name Kassi.)

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#### QUESTION - [What was Abraham's religion before God called him?](#)

**ANSWER** - [Abraham](#) is called the [friend of God](#), the father of the Jews, and the father of the faithful. He is honored by Jews, Muslims, and Christians as a great man, but what religion did he follow before being called by Yahweh?

Abraham was born and raised in [Ur of the Chaldees](#), which is in modern Iraq, near Nasiriyah in the southeastern part of the country. Joshua 24:2 says that Abraham and his father worshiped idols. We can make some educated guesses about their religion by looking at the history and religious artifacts from that period.

**Ur of the Chaldees** was an ancient city that flourished until about 300 BC. The great ziggurat of Ur was built by [Ur-Nammu](#) around 2100 BC and was dedicated to Nanna, the **moon god**. The [moon was worshiped](#) as the power that controlled the heavens and the life cycle on earth. To the Chaldeans, the phases of the moon represented the natural cycle of birth, growth, decay, and death and also set the measurement of their yearly calendar. Among the pantheon of Mesopotamian gods, Nanna was supreme, because he was the source of fertility for crops, herds, and families. Prayers and offerings were offered to the moon to invoke its blessing.

When God called Abraham (then called Abram) in Genesis 12:1, He told Abraham to leave his country, his kindred, and his father's house. Everything familiar was to be left behind, and that included his religion. We do not know what Abraham knew about the true God at that point, but it is likely that he had received some instruction from his father, as each generation passed down their history to the next. As a worshiper of other gods, Abraham must have been surprised to receive a direct revelation from Yahweh. The moon god and other deities were distant objects of worship, and they did not personally interact with men. Abraham obeyed God's call, and, when he arrived in the land of Canaan, he built an altar to Yahweh at Shechem (Genesis 12:7). The text indicates that God's appearance to Abraham was a deciding factor in his choosing to worship Him. Hebrews 11:8 says that Abraham's departure from Ur was an example of faith in action.

Abraham continued to learn about this God he now worshiped, and in Genesis 14:22, following the example of [Melchizedek](#), Abraham calls Yahweh "the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth." This statement shows that Abraham set Yahweh above and apart from the moon god. His decision to worship God alone was settled in Genesis 17, when God established the covenant of circumcision with him. God appeared to Abraham, saying, "I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be blameless" (Genesis 17:1). In verse 7 God said the [covenant](#) He established with Abraham was to be everlasting and that He alone was to be God to Abraham and his offspring. Abraham chose to follow God alone, and he demonstrated his commitment by circumcising every male in his household.

Though Abraham forsook moon worship, the worship of heavenly objects became a continual problem with his descendants. Many times in the Old Testament, God rebuked the children of Abraham for their idolatry and renewed His call to worship Him alone. In Deuteronomy 17:2–5, God specified the punishment for idolatry—death by stoning. Moses described idolatry as doing what is evil in the sight of God and transgressing His covenant. Much later, King Hoshea of Israel was defeated and the people taken captive. Second Kings 17:16 says the defeat happened because the people “bowed down to all the starry hosts.” In 2 Kings 23:4–5 King Josiah of Judah led a revival of Yahweh worship and deposed the false priests who burned incense to the sun, moon, and stars.

God Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, wants people to worship Him, not the things He created. In Romans 1:18–20, we are told, “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.” When we worship creation instead of the Creator, we exchange the truth about God for a lie (Romans 1:25) and reject what God has revealed about everything in life. God saved Abraham out of idolatry, changed his name, and called him to follow Him. As a result of God’s blessings to Abraham, the whole world is blessed (Genesis 18:18). [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

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**Norman Geisler - [When Critics Ask](#)** - GENESIS 11:28—How could Abraham’s family be from Ur of the Chaldees when elsewhere it says his ancestors came from Haran?

**PROBLEM:** There is an apparent conflict as to where Abraham is really from. Genesis 11:28 says Abraham came from Ur of the Chaldees (in southern Iraq), but Genesis 29:4 claims he is from Haran (in northern Iraq).

**SOLUTION:** This conflict is easily resolved. Abraham’s family originated in Ur, but later migrated to Haran when God called him (Gen. 11:31–12:1). It is not unusual that Abraham would look back to Haran, where he had lived until he was 75 years old, as his homeland. Also, he quite naturally refers to the children of his two older brothers as part of his family.

**Genesis 11:29 Abram and Nahor took wives for themselves. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah.**

- **Nahor** - 17x in Bible - Gen. 11:22; Gen. 11:23; Gen. 11:24; Gen. 11:25; Gen. 11:26; Gen. 11:27; Gen. 11:29; Gen. 22:20; Gen. 22:23; Gen. 24:10; Gen. 24:15; Gen. 24:24; Gen. 24:47; Gen. 29:5; Gen. 31:53; Jos. 24:2; 1 Chr. 1:26
- **Sarai** - Ge 17:15 20:12
- **Milcah** - Ge 22:20 24:15
- **Iscah** - Iscah is called the daughter-in-law of Terah, (ver. 31,) as being Abram's wife; yet Abram afterwards said, "she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother." (Ge 20:12.) Probably Haran was the eldest son of Terah, and Abram his youngest by another wife; and thus Sarai was the daughter, or grand-daughter of Terah, Abram's father, but not of his mother.
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## TERAH'S TWO SONS TAKE WIVES

**Abram and Nahor took wives for themselves** - While it not state specifically, apparently the wives were also from Ur.

**Henry Morris** - Nahor married his niece, and Sarai was Abram’s half-sister (Genesis 20:12), a daughter of Terah by another of his wives. Close marriages were not yet genetically dangerous and so were not prohibited until the Mosaic law was established. Perhaps they were even desirable in those families who still worshipped the true God, in order to maintain a pure faith.

**The name of Abram's wife was Sarai** - Note heretofore wives were almost never mentioned specifically by name, with the exception of course of Eve.

**Warren Wiersbe** - It was God’s purpose to call a man and his wife and from them build a family. From that family He would build a nation, and from that nation, God would bless all the nations of the earth (Ge 12:1–3; 18:18). From start to finish, it was a work of God’s grace; for when God called Abraham and Sarah, they belonged to a family that worshipped idols (Josh. 24:2). In both Ur of the Chaldees and Haran, the people worshipped the moon god.

**NET NOTE** - The name Sarai (a variant spelling of "Sarah") means "princess" (or "lady"). Sharratu was the name of the wife of the moon god Sin. The original name may reflect the culture out of which the patriarch was called, for the family did worship other gods in Mesopotamia. The name Milcah means "Queen." But more to the point here is the fact that Malkatu was a title for Ishtar, the daughter of the moon god.

**And the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah-** Nahor and Milcah will show up again in Genesis 22:20-24 where Nahor's offspring are delineated.

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

- **Sarai** - 13v in Bible = Gen. 11:29; Gen. 11:30; Gen. 11:31; Gen. 12:5; Gen. 12:11; Gen. 12:17; Gen. 16:1; Gen. 16:2; Gen. 16:3; Gen. 16:5; Gen. 16:6; Gen. 16:8; Gen. 17:15
- **barren** - Ge 15:2,3 16:1,2 18:11,12 21:1,2 25:21 29:31 30:1,2 Judges 13:2 1Sa 1:2 Ps 113:9 Lu 1:7,36
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

## SARAI WAS BARREN

**Sarai** ("princess") **was barren** (['aqar](#); Lxx = steira); **she had no child** - The latter clause (**no child**) is the result of the former (**barren**). And keeping in mind that children are a gift from the Lord (Ps 127:3), Sarai's barrenness was from the Lord and would be the foundation for His subsequent divine, miraculous intervention. This parenthetical truth will become very important in subsequent chapters when God tells Abram he will have a son even though his wife is barren at the time God gives the promise. Sarai is the original name of Sarah, the wife and half-sister of [Abraham](#) (same father, namely [Terah](#) (Genesis 20:12).

[Bob Utley](#) - "**Sarai was barren**" The inability of Sarai, Rachel (Gen. 29:31), and Rebecca (Gen. 29:31) to have children was one of the ways God used to exhibit His power and control of human history and genealogy. Human sexual generation is not the key aspect to the lineage of the Messiah. This same style of theological aspect to Israel's history is also seen in the fact that the firstborn is not in the Messianic line. Culturally the firstborn was the head of the clan, but not so among YHWH's people. It was His choice (i.e., Jacob, Judah, David, Solomon)!

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**Barren** ([06135](#)) ['aqar](#) means childless, infertile, sterile, barren and pertains to being sexually infertile. For a male it means not to be able to inseminate a female. For a woman it means not able to bear children.

**Gilbant** - Derived from the primary root 'āqar "to pluck up," "to dig down" or "to root up," the adjective 'āqār is used figuratively to mean "barren." The word may have originated with a similar Arabic word meaning "to have the testicles extirpated," resulting in the inability to reproduce. The adjective 'āqār is used in the OT of both male and female, mankind and animals (Deut. 7:14), although it is most commonly used to refer to women. In Isa. 54:1, 'āqār is used in the personification of Zion in reference to her future restoration. God's blessing was associated with fruitfulness and reproductivity, while barrenness was the mark of God's curse. Procreation was considered to be both a commandment and a blessing (Deut. 7:14; Ps. 127:3ff). All three of the patriarch's wives were barren and experienced God's miraculous intervention on their behalf (Abraham's wife, Sarai, Gen. 11:30; Isaac's wife, Rebekah, Gen. 25:21; and Jacob's wife, Rachel, Gen. 29:31). These three cases indicate that God's promise to Abraham could only have been fulfilled by divine, supernatural intervention. During the time of the judges, Israel needed a deliverer and spiritual leader, and two contemporary barren women needed children. Manoah's wife gave birth to Samson (Judg. 13:2f), and Hannah gave birth to Samuel and six other children (1 Sam. 2:5). These cases illustrate that the barren woman is the special object of God's grace (Ps. 113:9). ([Complete Biblical Library - Incredible Resource](#))

**'Aqar** - 11x - Ge 11:30; 25:21; 29:31; Ex 23:26; Dt 7:14; Jdg. 13:2f; 1Sa 2:5; Job 24:21; Ps. 113:9; Isa 54:1. NAS translates **'aqar** as - barren(8), barren one(1), barren woman(1), barren woman(1).

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### Dictionary of Biblical Imagery - [BARRENNESS](#)

Barrenness in the Bible is an image of lifelessness, where God's redemptive blessing is absent. In the beginning the verdant fecundity of the Garden of Eden and the splendor of male and female sexuality promised a fertility that glorified all life as originally created by God.

When Adam and Eve sinned, God cursed the blessed fertility of his creation. The soil of the garden thereafter produced thorns and thistles, requiring laborious toil to yield food. Human fertility was cursed as childbearing became a painful and life-threatening event. In the Bible fruitful land and fertile women are images of the blessedness of life as God had originally intended it. The opposite of these, desolate land and barren women, are biblical images of the consequences of sin.

The image of the barren wife is one of the Bible's strongest images of desolation and rejection. We find this first in Genesis, where the examples include Sarah (Ge 11:30), Rebekah (Ge 25:21) and Rachel (Ge 29:31). The classic case of barrenness is Hannah (1 Sam 1). A NT example is Elizabeth. In wisdom literature one of four things that are never satisfied is "the barren womb" (Prov 30:16 NIV).

Conversely, few images of joy can match that of the barren wife who becomes pregnant. To the psalmist a supreme blessing of God is his settling "the barren woman in her home as a happy mother of children. Praise the LORD" (Ps 113:9). In Isaiah's oracle of redemption the barren woman is enjoined to "burst into song, shout for joy" at the prospect of bearing children (Ps 54:1). Both Hannah and Elizabeth are examples of barren women who are made to rejoice when they finally bear a child.

In the covenant with ancient Israel, God pronounced blessing for covenant obedience in terms of fertility, and curse for covenant disobedience in terms of barrenness:

If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, ... The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock.... However, if you do not obey the LORD your God ... The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.  
(Deut 28:1–4, 15–18 NIV)

The prophets later use the imagery of barrenness to indict God's people for their sin of disobeying the covenant. Prophetic images of unfruitful and desolate land predict the judgment God would send through drought, insect infestations and the ravages of war (Is 5:1–10; Joel 1:1–12; Hab 3:17). The unfaithfulness of God's people is personified by images of Zion as a barren woman who prostitutes her sexuality, thus frustrating her fertility (Jer 3:1–3; Ezek 23; Hos 9:11, 12).

In Isaiah's prophecy the promise that God will restore the blessedness of life is expressed through transforming the imagery of the barren land and the barren woman. In the day of restoration the desolate land will burst into bloom (Is 35:1–7) and the barren woman will sing and rejoice because of an unexpected and abundant fertility (Is 54:1).

Jesus Christ is the consummation of God's plan to resurrect humanity from the lifelessness of sin. His lineage is traced through unexpected births to barren women, starting with Sarah; through a wanton woman, Rahab; through the adulterous relationship of Bathsheba and David; and finally from the innocent barrenness of his virgin mother, Mary (Mt 1:1–16). Throughout redemptive history God transforms barrenness and frustrated fertility into the fruit of eternal life.

The book of Revelation ends the story of earthly history with images of a garden perpetually bearing fruit in the New Jerusalem (Rev 22:1–6) and of a pure bride coming to meet her bridegroom (Rev 21:1–5). Scripture ends as it begins with images of verdant fecundity and of male and female sexuality signifying the blessing of eternal life with God that, because of Jesus Christ, could not be miscarried by sin.

See also ABUNDANCE; BIRTH; CHILD, CHILDREN; CURSE; FRUIT, FRUITFULNESS; WOMAN, BIBLICAL IMAGES OF; WOMB.

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#### **QUESTION - [Who was Sarah in the Bible?](#)**

**ANSWER** - Sarai began her life in the pagan world of Ur, in the land of the Chaldees, which was located in the area now known as Iraq. She was the half-sister, as well as the wife, of Abram, who would be called Abraham. Sarai and Abram had the same father but different mothers, according to Genesis 20:12. In those days, genetics were purer than they are today, and intermarriage was not detrimental to the offspring of unions between relatives. Also, since people tended to spend their lives clustered together in family units, it was the natural course to choose mates from within their own tribes and families.

When Abram encountered the living God for the first time, he believed Him (Genesis 12:1–4; 15:6) and followed after Him, obeying His command to leave his home to go to a place he had never heard about, much less seen. Sarai went with him.

Their journey brought them to the area called Harran (Genesis 11:31). Abram's father, Terah, passed away in this city, and Abram, Sarai, and their nephew Lot and their retinue continued their journey, allowing God to lead and guide them. With no housing and no modern conveniences, the journey must have been very difficult for all, especially for the women. During their journey, there was a famine in the land, prompting Abram and Sarai to go to Egypt (Genesis 12:10). When they did, Abram feared that the Egyptians would kill him because Sarai was beautiful and they would want her as a wife. So he asked Sarai to tell everyone that she was

Abram's sister—which was technically true but also meant to deceive. Sarai was taken into Pharaoh's house, and Abram was treated well because of her. But God afflicted Pharaoh's house, and the couple's lie was revealed. Pharaoh returned Sarai to Abram and sent them on their way (Genesis 12). Sarai and Abram came back to the land now known as Israel. They had acquired many possessions and a great deal of wealth in their travels, so Lot and Abram agreed to split up in order that the massive herds of cattle would have adequate ground for grazing (Genesis 13:9).

Sarai was barren, an issue of personal distress as well as cultural shame. Abram was worried that he would have no heir. But God gave Abram a vision in which He promised him a son and that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15). God also promised Abraham's offspring the land of Canaan. The problem was that Sarai remained childless. Ten years after God had made His promise to Abram, Sarai, following cultural norms, suggested that Abram have a child with her servant, Hagar. The child born of that union would be counted as Sarai's. Abram agreed, and Hagar conceived a son—Ishmael. But Hagar began to look at Sarai with contempt, and Sarai began to treat Hagar harshly, so much so that Hagar ran away. God met Hagar in the desert and encouraged her to return to Abram and Sarai, which she did (Genesis 16).

Thirteen years after Ishmael was born, God reaffirmed His covenant with Abram, this time giving him the sign of circumcision as well as changing his name. Abram, meaning "high father," became Abraham, meaning "father of a multitude." God also changed Sarai's name, meaning "my princess," to Sarah, meaning "mother of nations." God told Abraham that He would give him a son through Sarah. This son—Isaac—would be the one with whom God would establish His covenant. God would bless Ishmael as well, but Isaac was the son of promise through whom the nations would be blessed (Genesis 17). Isaac means "he laughs." Abraham laughed that, at 100 years old, he could have a son with Sarah, who was 90 years old and had been barren her entire life. Sarah, too, laughed at the prospect (Genesis 18:9–15).

Shortly after God promised Abraham and Sarah a son, He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, but He rescued Abraham's nephew Lot (Genesis 19). Abraham and Sarah journeyed toward the Negeb and sojourned in Gerar (Genesis 20:1). Abraham again asked Sarah to lie about her identity, and the king of Gerar took Sarah to be his wife. But God protected Sarah, through whom Isaac would be born. King Abimelech had no relations with her. God warned Abimelech in a dream, and the king not only sacrificed to God in repentance, but he gave gifts to Abraham and Sarah and allowed them to dwell in the land (Genesis 20).

God remained faithful to His promise to give Abraham and Sarah a son. They named him Isaac, and "Sarah said, 'God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.' And she added, 'Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age'" (Genesis 21:6–7). Though she may have previously laughed in disbelief and secrecy, now Sarah laughed with joy and wanted her situation to be known. God had been faithful to His promise and blessed her.

Unfortunately, the tension between Sarah and Hagar remained. When Isaac was weaned, Abraham held a feast. But Ishmael, Hagar's son, was mocking Isaac. Sarah told Abraham to get rid of Hagar and Ishmael and that Ishmael should never share the inheritance with Isaac. Abraham was distressed at this, but God told him to do what Sarah said and that his descendants would be numbered through Isaac. Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away, and God provided for their needs (Genesis 21:8–21). It was after this that God tested Abraham by asking him to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham was willing to give up his son, trusting that God would somehow still remain true to His promise (Genesis 22; Hebrews 11:17–19).

Sarah was a simple, beautiful (Genesis 12:11), and very human woman; she made mistakes, just like we all do. She stepped ahead of God and tried to handle His business on her own by foolishly sending her handmaid, Hagar, to Abraham to bring forth the child God had promised. In so doing, she ignited a feud that has lasted for 4,000 years (Genesis 16:3). She laughed in unbelief when, at 90 years old, she heard an angel tell Abraham that she would become pregnant (Genesis 18:12), but she gave birth to the promised child and lived another 30 years, dying at the age of 127 (Genesis 23:1).

Hebrews 11:11 uses Sarah as an example of faith: "And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise."

First Peter 3:5–6 uses Sarah as an example of a holy woman who hoped in God and who adorned herself by submitting to her husband. Sarah willingly left her home and stepped out into the unknown to follow Abraham, as he followed the directions of a God with whom she was unfamiliar at the time. She endured much to try to provide an heir for her husband and to keep her husband safe in dangerous lands. In the end, she had faith enough to believe that she and her husband, at the ages of 90 and 100, would produce the promised heir, Isaac. Although she lived in a world of danger and confusion, Sarah stood firm in her commitment to her husband and to God, and her commitment was rewarded with blessing. [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

#### **Related Resources:**

- [How long did Abraham and Sarah have to wait for Isaac? | GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)



- [What is the story of Sarah and Hagar? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Why does God ask Abraham, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" \(Genesis 18:14\)? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [SPECIAL TOPIC: SARAI/SARAH](#)

**Genesis 11:31** Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there.

- **Terah took Abram his son** - Ge 11:26,27 12:1
- **they went** - Ge 11:28 12:1 Jos 24:2,3 Heb 11:8
- **Ur** - Jos 24:2 Ne 9:7 Ac 7:2-4
- **the land** - Ge 10:19 24:10, B.C. cir, 1923, A.M. cir, 2081
- **Haran** - Ge 11:32 12:4 24:10,15 27:43 29:4,5 Ac 7:2-4, Charran
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

#### Related Passages:

Genesis 15:7 And He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it."

Nehemiah 9:7 "You are the LORD God, Who chose (Lxx = [eklego/eklegomai](#)) Abram And brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees, And gave him the name Abraham.

### TERAH TRAVELS TO HARAN

**Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan** - God called Abram out of an area of civilization and prosperity to go to a place he had never seen. The writer of Hebrews says "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed (NOTE THAT TRUE FAITH ALWAYS SHOWS ITSELF TO BE GENUINE BY OBEDIENCE. OBEDIENCE DOES NOT SAVE BUT SHOWS THAT ONE HAS SAVING FAITH!) by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going." (Hebrews 11:8+)

- [See multiple resources related to Ur of the Chaldees](#)

[Henry Morris](#) comments that " Evidently Terah, as well as Abram, had received God's call to go to Canaan, but Terah went north to Haran instead, perhaps intending to go on to Canaan after settling his deceased son's affairs in Haran. Abram also had received God's call while still in Mesopotamia (Acts 7:2,3), and so he and his wife set out with Terah. However, Terah never left Haran, eventually even joining its idolatrous practices (Joshua 24:2,14,15)."

**And they went as far as Haran, and settled there** - What is significant about the verb **settled** (yashab) is that the root idea is to sit and thus to stay in one place and can convey the sense of to remain or linger. The Hebrew **settled** (yashab) is translated in the Septuagint with the verb [katoikeo](#) which normally means literally to settle down (be at home, dwell) in a place so to take up permanent abode or residence. In other words Terah seems to have gotten too comfortable in Haran and does not leave but dies there (Ge 11:32). As recorded in Acts 7:2-4 "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, 3 and said to him, 'LEAVE YOUR COUNTRY AND YOUR RELATIVES, AND COME INTO THE LAND THAT I WILL SHOW YOU.' 4 "Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and **settled in Haran**. From there, **after his father died, God had him move to this country** in which you are now living."

**Steven Cole** on God's choice or election of Abram/Abraham - God's sovereign choice never depends on human merit. He didn't look down from heaven and say, "There's a good man; I'll choose him." Rather, God only chooses and calls sinners to Himself. Abraham was a sinner. God chose him simply because of grace, apart from anything God foresaw in Abraham. If God chose Abraham because He foresaw that Abraham would believe, then Abraham could boast in his faith as the reason God chose him. But salvation, from start to finish, is all from God, not at all from man. C. H. Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher of the past century, was once preaching to a Methodist congregation. During the first part of his sermon, the people were nodding in agreement and saying, "Amen!" and "Hallelujah!" Then Spurgeon came to the doctrine of election and noticed a distinct change in the mood of his audience.



(Methodists do not accept that doctrine.) So he proceeded to put it to them this way. He asked, "Is there any difference between you and others who have not been converted?" They responded, "Yes, glory to God! There is a difference." Then Spurgeon asked, "Who has made the difference, yourself or God?" "The Lord," they said. Spurgeon shot back, "Yes, and that is the doctrine of election; that if there be a difference, the Lord made the difference." One reason that people don't like this doctrine is that they think that it's not fair of God to choose some and not all. But to contend that God is not fair to show mercy to some and not to others is to usurp God's sovereignty and to impugn His character, as Paul argues in Romans 9. God would be fair if He condemned everyone. All of these men and their descendants had known about God through their ancestor, Noah, and the flood. But, as Paul puts it in Romans 1:18, they had "suppressed the truth in unrighteousness," rejecting God's revelation of His attributes and power through creation. Thus they, not God, were responsible for their spiritual condition. Genesis 10 and 11, which shows us the course of the nations going their own way after the flood, is the Old Testament's way of saying what Paul says, that God gave them up to their sin; He permitted them to go their own ways (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28; Acts 14:16). The point is, God didn't choose Abraham because he was a good man. He chose Abraham to demonstrate His grace. He doesn't choose anyone because they deserve it. He only chooses sinners who deserve His judgment. And while that's a blow to our sinful pride, it is actually very good news. It means that you cannot do anything to qualify yourself for God's salvation. You can only come to God confessing your sin and asking for His mercy, and He will grant it because He is a merciful God. God's plan of salvation involves His choice according to His grace.

The thing which separated Abraham from all his contemporaries was that God chose him. It is God's hand on a life that matters. If God does not choose, if He does not call a person to Himself, you've just got human religion. But when God is in it, you've got His power unto salvation.

Some people stumble over the doctrine of election. But the heart of election is that salvation is of God. He originates it, He moves in our lives before we ever seek Him. So we can take no credit for our salvation; it all comes from Him (see 1 Cor. 1:26–31). That humbles your pride, but it's a source of great joy and blessing when it dawns on you.

Abraham's life shows us that God has His hand on a life even before the person is aware of it. He places each person in a particular family. Sometimes, even though that family serves idols, God will take one member and use him to turn the family and even whole nations toward God for generations afterward. Every person who has been used of God will testify that it is God's choice of him that has made all the difference in his life. Jeremiah the prophet said that God knew him, consecrated him, and appointed him before he was formed in the womb (Jer. 1:5). Paul said that God set him apart even from his mother's womb (Gal. 1:15). By nature they all were sinners. But by God's grace, they were chosen to know Him and serve Him. That's what mattered.

The apostle Peter commands us, "Be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you" (2 Pet. 1:10). How can we do this? First, have you believed in Christ as Savior and Lord? This is the prime evidence that He has chosen you. You did not believe because of your will (John 1:13). The fallen human will is bound in sin. You believed because God imparted faith to you (Phil 1:29). Then, to your faith, Peter urges you to supply various godly character qualities (2 Pet. 1:5–9). In other words, growth in godliness will help you to be more certain about God's calling and choosing you (1:11). It is a source of great comfort when God reveals to you that He chose you by His grace and that because of His choice your life can be greatly used by Him in His eternal plan of salvation. ([The God of History and You Genesis 11:10-32](#))

#### **Genesis 11:32 The days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.**

- **Terah** - 11v in the Bible - Gen. 11:24; Gen. 11:25; Gen. 11:26; Gen. 11:27; Gen. 11:28; Gen. 11:31; Gen. 11:32; Num. 33:27; Num. 33:28; Jos. 24:2; 1 Chr. 1:26
- [Genesis 11 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries

Location of Haran North and East of Ur  
On the Way to Canaan which is East and South

### **TERAH DIES IN HARAN**

**The days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran** When Abraham was 75 years old he and his nephew resumed their journey, leaving Terah in Haran, where 60 years later he died. So Terah tarried and did not act on the initial call of God, but Abraham acted in faith Hebrews 11:8 recording that "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going." Terah seems to have a faith failure.

**John Phillips** - Moses records Abram's initial venture as a pilgrim. Again, the immediate narrative does not record how or when the

true and living God revealed Himself to Abram, the pagan idolator of Ur, but evidently He did, because in response to that revelation not only Abram but also Terah his father, Sarai his wife, and Lot his nephew all took the first step. Together they left [Ur of the Chaldees](#) migrating northward until they came to Haran. Evidently, too, God's initial revelation of Himself to Abram was of such a powerful and convincing nature that Terah was not only persuaded to join the pilgrimage but actually took the lead..... The pilgrim family journeyed until they came to the city of Haran, and there the sojourners made their first stop. Haran was a frontier town of the Babylonian Empire and, like [Ur of the Chaldees](#), was devoted to the worship of the moon god. There the whole pilgrimage bogged down and, it would seem, remained inert and inactive for about twenty-five years until the death of Terah. After all, the old nature, as represented by Terah, can make only token responses to divine things. (BORROW [Exploring Genesis - page 108](#))

[Warren Wiersbe](#) contrasts "man's ways at Babel and God's ways in calling Abraham and Sarah. (1) The world depends on large numbers of powerful people in order to accomplish things, but God chose two weak people and started a new nation. (2) The people at Babel wanted to make a name for themselves, but God promised to make Abraham's name great. (3) The workers at Babel followed the wisdom of this world, but Abraham and Sarah trusted the Word of God (Heb. 11:11–12). (4) Babel was built by the energy of the flesh and the motivation of pride, but the nation of Israel was built by the grace and power of God and in spite of human weakness. We live in a confused world and Babel is still with us. But God still has His faithful remnant that follows Him by faith and keeps their eyes on the heavenly city (Heb 11:13–16). Are you a part of that remnant?" (Note numbers added to the 4 points of contrast).

**Steven Cole** - There is a chronological problem I should mention. In 11:32 it says that Terah, Abraham's father, was 205 when he died. Abraham didn't leave Haran until then (Acts 7:4), when he was 75. That would make Terah 130 when Abraham was born. But 11:27 says that when Terah was 70 he became the father of Abraham, Nahor and Haran. The most likely answer is that at 70 Terah had his first son. Abraham is mentioned first in 11:27 because he was the most important son in the story. But Abraham wasn't born until 60 years after his oldest brother. The problem with this solution is that later, Abraham is surprised to learn that he will be a father at 100, which is hard to understand if his own father had been 130 at Abraham's birth. But perhaps with the shortening life spans, Abraham knew at 100 that he was pushing the limit for fathering a child. ([The God of History and You Genesis 11:10-32](#))

[Bob Utley](#) - "the days of Terah were two hundred and five years" When one adds the years in Gen. 11:26 with those in Gen. 12:4, which equals 145 years, and subtracts this from 205, it becomes obvious that Terah lived 60 years after Abram left Haran. This seems to conflict with Stephen's sermon in Acts 7:4. Several aspects of Stephen's historical review conflict with our current understanding of Old Testament history. Possibly he was using Rabbinical Midrash. Other scholars assert that Abram, though listed first in Gen. 11:26, was born much later and that Stephen was accurate. It is interesting that the Samaritan Pentateuch has "144" here.

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**Norman Geisler** - [When Critics Ask](#) - GENESIS 11:32—Was Abraham 75 years old when he left Haran, or was he 135 years old?

**PROBLEM:** Genesis 11:26 states, "Now Terah lived seventy years, and begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran." In Acts 7:4 Stephen states that Abraham did not leave Haran until after Terah, his father, died. Genesis 11:32 says that Terah died at 205 years of age. If Abraham was born when Terah was 70, and did not leave for Canaan until Terah died at 205, that would make Abraham 135 years old when he left Haran to travel to Canaan. However, Genesis 12:4 states, "And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran." How old was Abraham when he left Haran? Was he 75 or was he 135?

**SOLUTION:** Abraham was 75 years old when he left Haran. Although it was customary to list the names of sons from the oldest to the youngest, this practice was not always followed. Genesis 11:26 does not say that Terah was 70 years old when Abraham was born. Rather it states that Terah lived for 70 years before he had any sons, then he had three sons, Abraham, Nahor, and Haran. Haran was probably the oldest son of Terah, indicated by the fact that he was the first to die (Gen. 11:28). Nahor was probably the middle son, and Abraham was the youngest. Abraham was listed first because he was the most prominent of Terah's sons. Since Abraham was 75 when he left Haran, this would mean that he was born when Terah was 130 years old.

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**Ray Pritchard** ([Hope for Tomorrow: How God Keeps His Promises](#)) - The last few verses of Genesis 11 are all about death and loss and a series of separations in Abram's life. He was ...

- Separated from his Homeland when he left [Ur of the Chaldees](#).
- Separated from his Family when his brother and his father died.
- Separated from his Destination when he stayed for many years in Haran.
- Separated from his Dream when his wife was unable to have children.

Any one of these four separations would be a heavy burden for any man to bear. Taken together, they represent the shaping of his faith and his character through adversity. Looking back, we can see that these things were necessary in order to prepare Abram to

become Abraham ("father of multitudes), the supreme biblical example of a man of faith, and the father of the Jewish nation.

Mark this truth: These things were necessary. A. W. Tozer said, "It is doubtful that God can bless a man greatly until he has hurt him deeply." That statement is true both to the Bible and to life. As God prepared Abram through trial and loss, so he prepares us in the same way. Nothing is ever wasted with God. Your pain is not wasted. Your sorrow is not wasted. Your loss is not wasted. Your defeats are not wasted. Your broken dreams are not wasted. Your tears have a purpose, and your broken heart has a place in God's plan. We can state the principle this way: God prepares us for better things to come by weaning us from those things we thought we couldn't live without. This is a hugely important biblical principle. It may be a relationship that we thought would last forever. It may be a job we wanted to keep until we retired. It may be a house we loved or a church family that meant so much to us. It may be a friendship that gave us joy and strength. If we live long enough, we will discover that most of the things we thought were irreplaceable are taken from us one by one by one. It is not that things are bad in themselves. Not at all. These are good things that bring us joy and fulfillment. And God weans us from the good things of life, taking them from us until there is nothing in life but God alone. We come into this world with nothing and we leave with nothing. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Naked we come, naked we go. And the things we possess in between are not really our own. Even our most cherished relationships within the family are gifts from God. The whole process of spiritual growth is a slow weaning away from those things that mean so much to us. In the end we are back where we started—just us and God. Then the Lord says, "I did not do this to punish you but to prepare you and to teach you to trust in me alone."

After all that he had endured, Abram's greatest days were yet to come. Weeping endures for a night but joy comes in the morning. Let that thought encourage you as you consider God's work in your life. The pain you are going through is not for nothing. He takes away the things we thought we couldn't live without in order to give us something better and more satisfying. We yield the temporal to gain the eternal. We give up the things we could not keep in order to receive those things we can never lose.

I close with this thought. The genealogies of the Bible teach us that God is faithful across the generations. He is a trans-generational God. The God who was faithful yesterday is the God who is also faithful today. And the God who is faithful today will also be faithful tomorrow. Because he is the Alpha and Omega, he is fully faithful at all times and in all situations. We can say that another way.

### **The God of Tomorrow**

The God of my ancestors is also the God of my family today. He has promised to care for me and for my children, and he will do it. But that same God is also the God of my grandchildren yet to be born and my great-grandchildren some years down the road. But better than that is this: The God of my great-grandchildren is also the God of my great-great-grandchildren a hundred years from now. And as long as time itself shall last, our God will be faithful to every generation—past, present and future. He is faithful to us, but his faithfulness doesn't depend on us. He is faithful even when we are faithless. So I don't have to worry or fret about the future that lies beyond my vision. The God of Shem and Arphaxad and Reu and Serug and all those other unusual names of Genesis 11 is my God too! He is fully able to take care of any situation that may arise a thousand years from now.

I find another word of consolation from this truth: God is not in a hurry. That's a consolation but it is also a challenge because I am pretty much always in a hurry. Life always seems to be in the fast lane, with too many things to do and too few hours in the day to get them all done. But the God who spans the generations is not in a hurry. And he won't be rushed either. And he doesn't take kindly to people who try to hurry him along. God works according to his own timetable that stretches from eternity to eternity. He's not uptight about whether or not I'll make it to the airport in time to catch my flight tomorrow afternoon.

It helps to remember that we rarely see the big picture of life. As Shakespeare said, all the world's a stage and we are but actors who enter, play our parts, and then exit. The play started long before we got here and it will go on long after we exit stage right. Only God understands the plot of history because he is the writer and the producer and the director of the play. Genesis 11 tells us that God's plan spans the generations. And we who believe in Jesus are privileged to have a small part in the play God is producing.

Fear not, brothers and sisters. Be of good cheer, my Christian friends. Let not your heart be troubled. All that happens to us is part of the unfolding of God's master plan. Don't worry about your future but place it in the strong hands of Jesus Christ. Trust in him and all will be well. Amen. ([Hope for Tomorrow: How God Keeps His Promises](#))