

NOON BIBLE STUDY: GENESIS 11

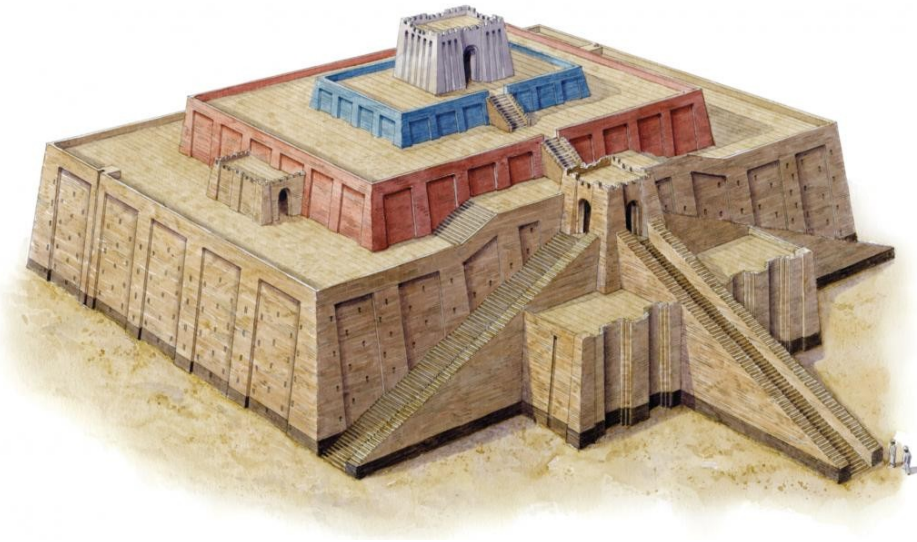
GENESIS 10 HIGHLIGHTED THE SPREADING OF THE NATIONS AFTER THE FLOOD THROUGH THE DESCENDANTS OF NOAH'S SONS, SHEM, HAM AND JAPHETH. WE LEARNED WHERE THEY TRAVELED, WHERE THEY SETTLED AND HOW THEY FARED. WE MET NIMROD, THE FIRST KING, WHO ESTABLISHED A KINGDOM IN THE LAND OF "SHINAR" CALLED BABEL (BABYLON). CHAPTER 11 WILL GIVE MORE DETAILS ABOUT THE LINE OF SHEM AND LEAD US TO ONE OF THE BIBLE'S MOST IMPORTANT FIGURES. BUT FIRST, WE RETURN BACK TO THE LAND OF SHINAR TO SEE HOW NIMROD'S KINGDOM IS FARING.

GENESIS 11:1-4 - NATIONS GATHER AT SHINAR

SINCE THE BEGINNING OF CREATION, EVERYONE SPOKE THE SAME LANGUAGE. GENESIS 11:1 INFORMS US ABOUT THIS TRUTH AS A WAY OF REMINDING THE READER OF "THE WAY THINGS WERE" ON THE EARTH. WE LEARNED IN CHAPTER 10 THAT NIMROD FOUNDED THE FIRST KINGDOM AS HUMANITY SPREAD UPON THE EARTH (GENESIS 10:8-10).

AS THE PEOPLE GATHER IN THIS REGION, THEY COME UP WITH A BRIGHT IDEA TO ENSURE THEIR SURVIVAL AS A PEOPLE. REMEMBER, WE ARE STILL LIVING IN THE SHADOW OF THE GREAT WORLDWIDE FLOOD. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE EARTH AND THE RAMIFICATIONS OF HUMAN SIN ARE FRESH ON EVERYONE'S MIND. YET IN THE LAND OF SHINAR, THE PEOPLE AREN'T RESPONDING TO THE FLOOD'S WARNINGS ABOUT REBELLION FROM GOD BY LIVING FOR HIM, INSTEAD THEY ARE PLOTTING TO SURVIVE IF SOMETHING LIKE THAT HAPPENS AGAIN. THEY SAID:

"COME LET'S BUILD A GREAT CITY FOR OURSELVES WITH A TOWER THAT REACHES INTO THE SKY. THIS WILL MAKE US FAMOUS AND



PERHAPS THEY THOUGHT THAT THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO CLIMB THIS GREAT TOWER TO THE SKY IF THE WATERS ROSE AGAIN? PERHAPS THEY LOOKED AT THE TOWER AS A UNIFYING SYMBOL FOR ALL HUMANS TO TRAVEL TOWARDS OR RALLY AROUND - RATHER THAN FILLING UP THE EARTH IN VARIOUS PLACES? WAS IT A GRAND MONUMENT TO THE GREATNESS OF NIMROD AND HIS KINGDOM?

WHATEVER THEIR INTENTION, IT WAS CLEARLY IN OPPOSITION TO GOD'S PURPOSES AND WILL. THEIR INTENTION WAS TO MAKE A NAME FOR THEMSELVES AND ENSURE THEIR OWN SURVIVAL - THERE IS NOTHING MENTIONED ABOUT THEIR DESIRE TO HONOR GOD'S NAME OR TRUST HIM WITH THEIR FUTURE. HUMANS WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO WORK TO AVOID BEING "SCATTERED ABROAD OVER THE...WHOLE EARTH" (GENESIS 11:4), GOD CALLED THEM TO BE FRUITFUL, MULTIPLY, AND FILL THE EARTH (GENESIS 1:28; 9:1)! AND SO GOD SEES THIS LITTLE BUILDING PROJECT AND TAKES ACTIONS.

"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." (ESV STUDY BIBLE, GENESIS 11:2-4)

"...AS WE HAVE LEARNED EARLIER IN GENESIS 1-11, THE PREROGATIVE OF "MAKING A NAME" BELONGS WITH GOD. AND AS WE HAVE SEEN SEVERAL TIMES, "HEAVEN" IS GOD'S PLACES, AND NOT THAT OF HUMAN BEINGS. HERE, ONCE AGAIN, AS IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN, AS WITH CAIN AND WITH LAMECH, AS WITH THE MARRIAGE OF THE SONS OF GOD AND THE DAUGHTERS OF MEN, GOD-GIVEN BOUNDARIES ARE BEING CROSSED: HUMAN BEINGS ARE TRYING TO GRASP AT WHAT DOES NOT BELONG TO THEM AND TO ASSERT THAT THEY ARE NO LONGER BOUND BY THE LIMITS WHICH GOD HAS SET. ("THE BIBLE SPEAKS TODAY: THE MESSAGE OF GENESIS 1-11", PGS 177-178)"

AS A RESULT OF THIS MOMENT IN HISTORY, "BABYLON" WILL BE SYMBOLIC OF THE SYSTEM OF HUMANITY'S REBELLION AGAINST GOD AND THEIR CONTINUAL FOOLISH DESIRE TO LIVE LIFE ON THEIR OWN, WITHOUT THEIR CREATOR AS KING. THIS PATTERN CONTINUES THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE. THE EVENTUAL EMPIRE OF BABYLON RULED BY KINGS LIKE NEBUCHADNEZZAR DURING DANIEL'S TIME WILL CONTINUE THIS ARROGANT TREND, AS WILL CAESAR'S ROME DURING JESUS AND PAUL'S DAY. IN THE END "BABYLON" IS THE WORD USED TO DESCRIBE THE FINAL REBELLION OF HUMANITY BEFORE THE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST (REFERENCED 6X IN REVELATION).

GENESIS 11:5-9 - THE LORD CONFUSES THE LANGUAGE

V. 5 - "THE LORD CAME DOWN TO SEE THE CITY AND THE TOWER WHICH THE SONS OF MEN HAD BUILT" IS FILLED WITH IRONY. THE VERSE FIGURATIVELY DESCRIBES GOD NEEDING TO "COME DOWN" TO SEE THE TOWER/CITY - IN OTHER WORDS, THIS PROJECT WHICH WAS SO GRAND FOR THE HUMANS, WAS SO SMALL IN COMPARISON TO HIS GREATNESS AND POWER! HUMANS ARE ALSO SPECIFICALLY REFERRED TO AS THE "SONS OF MEN" MEANING "MERE MORTALS". IN OTHER WORDS, GOD IS SARCASTICALLY SAYING "*OH, ARE THE LITTLE PEOPLE BUILDING A LITTLE TOWER? HOW CUTE!*"

GOD'S ULTIMATE RESPONSE TO THIS PROJECT IS TO STOP IT BY LIMITING HUMANITIES ABILITY TO BE PRODUCTIVE. HE CHOOSES TO "CONFUSE THEIR LANGUAGE." THINK ABOUT HOW INEFFECTIVE WORK WOULD BE IF YOU STARTED A PROJECT WITH PEOPLE SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE AND THEN SUDDENLY EVERYONE SHOWED UP SPEAKING DIFFERENT LANGUAGES? THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS.

V. 9 - BABEL: "THIS VERSE LINKS THE NAME OF THE CITY, **BABEL** (HB. *BABEL*), WITH THE VERB *BALAL*, WHICH MEANS "TO CONFUSE, TO MIX, TO MINGLE." BUT *BABEL* IS ALSO THE NAME USED IN THE OT FOR THE CITY OF BABYLON. AS A CITY, BABYLON SYMBOLIZES HUMANITY'S AMBITION TO DETHRONE GOD AND MAKE THE EARTH ITS OWN" (ESV STUDY BIBLE, GENESIS 11:9).

"BABYLON CALLED ITSELF "*BAB-IL*" WHICH MEANS "GATE OF GOD" BUT BY A PLAY OF WORDS, SCRIPTURE SUPERIMPOSES THE TRUER LABEL "*BALAL*" WHICH MEANS "HE CONFUSED." (DEREK KINDER, " *TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES: GENESIS*", PG 119)

(SIDE NOTE: THE USE OF THE PLURAL PRONOUN "US" IN THE TEXT (GOD SAID, "COME LET US GO DOWN AND CONFUSE THEIR LANGUAGE") IS USED BY GOD HERE AND ELSEWHERE (GENESIS 1:26, ISAIAH 6) TO INFER HE IS SPEAKING TO HIS HEAVENLY ANGELIC COURT. HE IS SPEAKING NOT AS A POWERLESS DEITY WHO IS ONE OF MANY OTHER DEITIES, BUT A RULING SOVEREIGN OVER HIS CREATION, SPEAKING TO HIS ANGELIC HOSTS. ANY TIME THERE IS A VISION INTO THE THRONE ROOM OF GOD DEPICTED IN SCRIPTURE, THIS ROYAL COURT OF ANGELS AND SERAPHIM AND CHERUBIM IS PART OF THE SCENE.

IN ADDITION, ANCIENT RABBINICAL TRADITION (JUBILEES 10:20-24) RECORDS AN ACCOUNT OF THE ANGELS COMING WITH THE LORD TO OBSERVE AND DESTROY THE TOWER:

JUBILEES 10:23-24 - 23 AND THE LORD DESCENDED, AND WE DESCENDED WITH HIM TO SEE THE CITY AND THE TOWER WHICH THE CHILDREN OF MEN HAD BUILT. 24 AND HE CONFOUNDED THEIR LANGUAGE, AND THEY NO LONGER UNDERSTOOD ONE ANOTHER'S SPEECH, AND THEY CEASED THEN TO BUILD THE CITY AND THE TOWER.)

THE INCLUSION OF THE ANGELS IN THIS STORY LIKELY FURTHER EMPHASIZES THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE LORD (ALONG WITH ANGELS NO LESS!) AND THE PUNY "SONS OF MEN" TRYING TO REACH HEAVEN. GOD HAS ANGELS ACCOMPANYING HIM, "MIGHTY" NIMROD HAS CONSTRUCTION WORKERS WHO CAN'T EVEN COMMUNICATE.)

AND WITH THAT, GENESIS 11 RETURNS TO TELLING US ABOUT THE FAMILY OF NOAH, SPECIFICALLY THROUGH HIS SON SHEM.

GENESIS 11:10-13 - SHEM AND ARPAKSHAD, SHELAH

GENESIS 11:14-17 - SHELA, EBER, AND PELEG

REMEMBER, WE LEARNED IN CHAPTER 10 THAT "EBER" IS THE FATHER OF THE PEOPLE WHO WILL BECOME KNOWN AS THE "HEBREWS".

GENESIS 11:18-21 - PELEG, REU & SERUG

GENESIS 11:22-25 - SERUG, NAHOR & TERAH

GENESIS 11:26-30 - TERAH'S CHILDREN: ABRAM, NAHOR & HARAN

TERAH AND HIS FAMILY ARE LIVING IN THE LAND OF "UR OF THE CHALDEANS" WHICH WAS AN ANCIENT CITY IN SOUTHERN BABYLON. HARAN, TERAH'S YOUNGEST SON DIED DURING TERAH'S LIFETIME IN THE LAND OF UR (V. 28). BEFORE HARAN DIED, HE HAD A SON NAMED LOT (V. 27). TERAH'S OTHER SONS (ABRAM AND NAHOR) GOT MARRIED. ABRAM MARRIED SARAI. NAHOR MARRIED HIS NIECE, MILCAH (THE DAUGHTER OF HARAN).

GENESIS 11:30 TELLS US THAT "SARAI WAS BARREN AND HAD NO CHILDREN". THIS VERSE IS AN ABRUPT STOP IN A SECTION OF SCRIPTURE LIKE GENESIS 11 WHICH HAS A GENEALOGICAL PATTERN LIKE THIS: X WAS THE FATHER OF Y WHO HAD CHILD Z (AS WELL AS OTHER SONS AND DAUGHTERS). WE HAVE READ THAT FOR THE LAST 20 VERSES OVER AND OVER AGAIN AND JUST WHEN YOU STARTED TO MINDLESSLY READ OVER THE VERSES IN THIS CHAPTER BECAUSE THEY SEEM TO SAY THE SAME THING OVER AND OVER AGAIN (X WAS THE FATHER OF Y WHO WAS THE FATHER Z ETC ETC ETC) YOU READ "SARAI WAS BARREN" FOLLOWED BY "SHE HAD NO CHILD."

LET THE READER UNDERSTAND: **SARAI IS BARREN**. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN? "*SHE HAD NO CHILD!*", IN CASE YOU DIDN'T HEAR IT THE FIRST TIME - NO KIDS, NO HOPE FOR KIDS, NOT FROM SARAI, ABRAM'S WIFE. EVERYONE ELSE IN THE FAMILY HAD KIDS - EVEN HARAN, *WHO DIED* HAD A SON NAMED LOT (AND DAUGHTERS MILCAH AND ISCAH)! BUT NOT SARAI. NOT ABRAM.

GENESIS 11:31-32 - TERAH TAKES HIS FAMILY TOWARDS THE "LAND OF CANAAN"

INSTEAD OF STARTING THEIR OWN FAMILY IN THEIR OWN LAND, CHILDLESS ABRAM AND HIS BARREN WIFE, SARAI, WILL REMAIN A PART OF TERAH'S FAMILY. THESE VERSES TELL US THAT TERAH TAKES HIS SON, HIS DAUGHTER IN LAW AND HIS GRANDSON LOT AND MOVES TOWARDS THE LAND OF CANAAN, BUT END UP STOPPING IN HARAN, WHICH IS IN NORTHERN MESOPOTAMIA (MODERN DAY TURKEY).

(SIDE NOTE: HARAN THE CITY (V. 31) & HARAN THE BROTHER OF ABRAM (V. 27, ETC) APPEAR TO BE THE SAME NAME IN ENGLISH, BUT THEY ARE SPELLED DIFFERENTLY IN HEBREW. THE CITY OF HARAN BEGINS WITH THE HEBREW LETTER "CHET" SO HARAN THE CITY WOULD SOUND MORE LIKE CHARAN IF WE PRONOUNCED IT CORRECTLY.)

GENESIS 1-11 SPANS 2000 YEARS AND FOCUS ON HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE AND DOZENS OF GENERATIONS. GENESIS 12-50 WILL FOCUS ON ONE MAN (ABRAM) AND HIS FAMILY. SOMETHING BIG IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN. YET, THE SOON-TO-BE FATHER AND MOTHER OF FAITH HAVE QUITE THE INTRODUCTION IN SCRIPTURE. ABRAM AND SARAI'S STORY BEGINS WITH THEM CHILDLESS (BECAUSE SARAI WAS BARREN, REMEMBER?) LIVING IN THE REGION OF BABYLON - THE REGION WHICH SYMBOLICALLY REPRESENTS ALL THAT IS WRONG WITH HUMANITY. THE HOPE OF HUMANITY DOESN'T APPEAR TO HAVE A FUTURE (NO KIDS) AND IS SMACK DAB IN THE MIDDLE OF THE MESS OF THIS AGE (BABYLON). YET IT IS IN THIS MOMENT AND WITH THESE UNLIKELY HEROES THAT YAHWEH, THE GOD OF CREATION, DOES HIS BEST WORK.