

GENESIS 11:1-9 SCATTERED!

This lesson focuses on events at Tower of Babel.

Background – After the flood God tells Noah and his family, who are the only eight people left alive on the earth: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Genesis 9:1). This is the same thing God had told Adam and Eve way back in Genesis 1:28. God reiterates this when He says: “And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it.” (Genesis 9:7). God’s instruction is twofold: have children and spread out over the earth.

Well, Noah’s three sons Shem, Ham and Japheth and their wives have many children. Genesis Chapter 10 records the generations of Noah’s sons. Seven sons are born to Japheth (Japhetic race): Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, Tiras. Four sons are born to Ham (Hamitic race): Cush, Mizraim, Put and Canaan. Six sons are born to Shem (Semitic race): Eber, Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud and Aram. The entire human race today was established from these people.

The migration of the various people groups can be summarized as follows:

Japhetic race – Western Europe, Russia, North America, South America

Hamitic race – Africa, Asia, Far East, India

Semitic race (both Jews and Arabs) – Canaan, Middle East

What was the catalyst that caused these people groups to spread out? It was a single act of God. And that is what today’s lesson is about.

READ Genesis 11:1.

For the first 100-years-plus after the Flood everyone spoke one common language and had the same vocabulary. All the various people groups not only shared the same language, the language spoken by Noah,

whatever that was, but they also spoke in the same dialect. Think about our own English language and just how different the various dialects are. Some, like the Creole dialect spoken in Louisiana, can be hard for us Texans to understand.

READ Genesis 11:2

From the mountains of Ararat (where Noah and his family started) to the Mesopotamian Valley, the fertile crescent region (where the plain of Shinar was located) was a SE journey. The text says that they “settled there.” They stopped moving and congregated in one general area. Back in Genesis 10:8-10 we see that Noah’s great grandson Nimrod was the one who ruled over four cities, one which was Babel in the land of Shinar. Flavius Josephus (Jewish historian) characterizes Nimrod as a powerful and ruthless tyrant who opposed God. It is very likely that Nimrod is the leader of the people mentioned in the next few verses.

There has been a spiritual decline just a few generations after the Flood. Noah and some of the people who had been saved on the ark are still alive and can attest to God’s judgment on sinful humanity. But the hearts of their children’s children are drifting away from God.

READ Genesis 11:3-4

Like Noah, the people in this chapter want to build something great. They are ingenious, crafty, and proud, but they are rebellious. They devise a plan. They are going to do what they want rather than what God wants.

They come up with three parts to their plan: (1) build a city, (2) build a tower, (3) make a name for themselves.

The Tower of Babel was likely a stair-stepped pyramid-like structure known as a ziggurat. One commentary describes this ancient form: “In the center of each town, was the Ziggurat. The Ziggurat was a temple. The ancient Sumerians, believed their gods lived in the sky. In order for the gods to hear better, you needed to get closer to them. Ziggurats were

huge, with built in steps. Ziggurats had a wide base that narrowed to a flat top. When the Babylonians took over in the south, and the Assyrians in the north, ziggurats continued to be built and used in the same manner as they were in ancient Sumer. The ziggurat was the tallest building in the town. From its top, you could see well into the farmlands that surrounded the city. The largest ziggurat was probably the one built in ancient Babylon. The Assyrians also built ziggurats.”

So then, it is very likely that the tower of Genesis Chapter 11 is an early form of the Babylonian and Mesopotamian ziggurats – similar form and purpose. It was for religious purposes to reach upward to heavens either to false gods or false ideas about God. Their lives were characterized by what Romans 1:18 calls the “ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” “For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things” (Romans 1:21-23).

What you need to understand is that the people here in Genesis Chapter 11 are NOT God-fearing people. They are not following after the one true God. In fact, they are rebellious and defiant. They are defying what God had told Noah and his descendants to do. They are putting their own personal ambition, to make a name for themselves, above what God had commanded. They are a rebellious people working to prevent the very thing that God wants. They said, “lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth... Come, let us ---”

Well, how does God respond to them? We know He is not going to wipe them out with a worldwide flood. He promised He wouldn't do that. Fire and brimstone, maybe? No, that will come later.

READ Genesis 11:5

“The Lord came down...” I love what John MacArthur said about this phrase: “No matter how high they built their tower, God had to come down to get to it. Way down. They didn't get close.” Of course, God “coming down” is what we call anthropomorphic language. In other words, in this case, ascribing human characteristics to God. This is similar to what we read earlier in Genesis Chapter 9, when the Lord “smelled” the soothing aroma of Noah’s burnt offering.

READ Genesis 11:6

God observes that the sin and rebellion of mankind has a united front with unrestrained unilateral evil. There is a reason why God wants separate independent nations over the face of the earth. There needs to be checks and balances. Otherwise, you get one dictator uniting all people toward an evil agenda and that is not a good thing (examples: Hitler, Stalin, and the antichrist in Revelation). Paul says, “Their feet are swift to shed blood” (Romans 3:15).

Well, God announces His plan...

READ Genesis 11:7

“Come let us –” In one divine act, God creates different languages. The result is mass confusion. That pretty well puts an end to their ill-conceived building project. Today there are nearly 7,000 different languages in the world. Approximately half the people in the world speak one or more of 15 languages, 90% of the world’s population speaks one or more of 100 languages. Language tends to separate people. People tend to congregate and socialize with those who share a common language and culture.

READ Genesis 11:8

The people scattered – “the Lord dispersed them.” It was a divine act of God. Evil, rebellious people spread out and they take their sinful pagan practices, their warped ideas about God with them. Within a matter of just

a few generations the earth is inhabited, not by God-fearers but by ungodly idolatrous people who have rejected the one true God.

Moses, the writer of Genesis, offers some closing words summarizing the events we just read...

READ Genesis 11:9

“Babel” is a term for confusion, even in English! “To babble” means to talk without making any sense.

Some application from Genesis Chapter 11:

Our world today is no different from the pre-Flood world or the events at Babel. People today are basically just as sinful as they were. Our world places high priority on self-gratification, getting and doing whatever they want to.

God’s ultimate plans and purposes WILL be carried out despite man’s best efforts to thwart them.