

Genesis 10:1 – 11:26

^{10:1} Now these are the records of the generations of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah; and sons were born to them after the flood. ² The sons of Japheth were Gomer and Magog and Madai and Javan and Tubal and Meshech and Tiras. ³ The sons of Gomer were Ashkenaz and Riphath and Togarmah. ⁴ The sons of Javan were Elishah and Tarshish, Kittim and Dodanim. ⁵ From these the coastlands of the nations were separated into their lands, every one according to his language, according to their families, into their nations. ⁶ The sons of Ham were Cush and Mizraim and Put and Canaan. ⁷ The sons of Cush were Seba and Havilah and Sabtah and Raamah and Sabteca; and the sons of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan. ⁸ Now Cush became the father of Nimrod; he became a mighty one on the earth. ⁹ He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, 'Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD.' ¹⁰ The beginning of his kingdom was Babel and Erech and Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. ¹¹ From that land he went forth into Assyria, and built Nineveh and Rehoboth-Ir and Calah, ¹² and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city. ¹³ Mizraim became the father of Ludim and Anamim and Lehabim and Naphtuhim ¹⁴ and Pathrusim and Casluhim (from which came the Philistines) and Caphtorim. ¹⁵ Canaan became the father of Sidon, his firstborn, and Heth ¹⁶ and the Jebusite and the Amorite and the Girgashite ¹⁷ and the Hivite and the Arkite and the Sinite ¹⁸ and the Arvadite and the Zemarite and the Hamathite; and afterward the families of the Canaanite were spread abroad. ¹⁹ The territory of the Canaanite extended from Sidon as you go toward Gerar, as far as Gaza; as you go toward Sodom and Gomorrah and Admah and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha. ²⁰ These are the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, by their nations. ²¹ Also to Shem, the father of all the children of Eber, and the older brother of Japheth, children were born. ²² The sons of Shem were Elam and Asshur and Arpachshad and Lud and Aram. ²³ The sons of Aram were Uz and Hul and Gether and Mash. 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. ²⁶ Joktan became the father of Almodad and Sheleph and Hazarmaveth and Jerah ²⁷ and Hadoram and Uzal and Diklah ²⁸ and Obal and Abimael and Sheba ²⁹ and Ophir and Havilah and Jobab; all these were the sons of Joktan. ³⁰ Now their settlement extended from Mesha as you go toward Sephar, the hill country of the east. ³¹ These are the sons of Shem, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, according to their nations. 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.

^{11:1} Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. ² It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 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. 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.' ⁵ The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. 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. ⁷ 'Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech.' ⁸

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

^{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; ¹¹ and Shem lived five hundred years after he became the father of Arpachshad, and he had other sons and daughters. ¹² Arpachshad lived thirty-five years, and became the father of Shelah; ¹³ and Arpachshad lived four hundred and three years after he became the father of Shelah, and he had other sons and daughters. ¹⁴ Shelah lived thirty years, and became the father of Eber; ¹⁵ and Shelah lived four hundred and three years after he became the father of Eber, and he had other sons and daughters. ¹⁶ Eber lived thirty-four years, and became the father of Peleg; ¹⁷ and Eber lived four hundred and thirty years after he became the father of Peleg, and he had other sons and daughters. ¹⁸ Peleg lived thirty years, and became the father of Reu; ¹⁹ and Peleg lived two hundred and nine years after he became the father of Reu, and he had other sons and daughters. ²⁰ Reu lived thirty-two years, and became the father of Serug; ²¹ and Reu lived two hundred and seven years after he became the father of Serug, and he had other sons and daughters. ²² Serug lived thirty years, and became the father of Nahor; ²³ and Serug lived two hundred years after he became the father of Nahor, and he had other sons and daughters. ²⁴ Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and became the father of Terah; ²⁵ and Nahor lived one hundred and nineteen years after he became the father of Terah, and he had other sons and daughters. ²⁶ Terah lived seventy years, and became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran.

Historical and Cultural Background

- Recall that humanity's first fall resulted in a city, the city of Cain (Gen.4:16 – 24)
- Hebrew names are often important clues:
 - Shem: *name*; Ham: unknown; Japheth: *may he expand*
 - Nimrod: *we will rebel*; Rashi, the medieval Jewish commentator, translated Gen.10:9: 'Nimrod began to cause the entire world to rebel against the Holy One...He ensnared people's minds with his speech and misled them to rebel against the Omnipresent... He intended to provoke God to His face.' Another rabbinical commentator said that Nimrod was the first to exert force over people to vanquish them and rule them.
- As with Genesis 5:1 – 6:8, the length of people's lives is a literary device that describes the *quality* of their lives. See notes there for who else used this literary device.
- 'At the beginning all [the city's] creative offices were tied to religion, and the most significant messages were sacred ones. These sacred messages, written in the stars or the entrails of beasts, in dreams, hallucinations, prophecies, came within the special province of priesthood. For long they monopolized the creative powers, and the forms of the city expressed that monopoly... The sacred city was primarily a control center, long before it became a center of communication... There is a bitter lament from Egypt's first great popular uprising that reveals the indignation of the upper classes, because the lower orders had broken into their precincts, and not merely turned their wives into prostitutes, but, what seemed equally bad, captured knowledge that had been withheld from them. "The writings of the august enclosure [the temple] are read... The place of secrets ... is now laid bare... Magic is exposed." (*Admonitions of Ipu-wer*: 2300 – 2050 B.C.)'¹

¹ Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformation, and Its Prospects* (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1961), p.99 – 100

Questions

1. How many names do you count here? 70. This is why the number 70 comes to symbolize the Gentile world.
 - a. When Jesus sends out the 70 disciples in Luke 10, it probably symbolizes the whole world, as compared with 12 disciples in Luke 9 symbolizing Israel.
2. Are we supposed to know these people? In some sense, this genealogy was written with the intention of explaining why Israel's ancestral opponents came from Ham's line. Mizraim is the father of the Egyptians. Canaan is the father of the Canaanites.
3. What happens to Ham's family, and especially Canaan?
 - a. Who is Nimrod? His name means 'we will rebel.' Note the comments from Rashi and Maimonides. He defies God by deciding that violence is a way to found a civilization. He is the mighty warrior. A hunter.
 - b. He founds cities. Who else built a city? How is Nimrod like Cain from Gen.4?
 - i. They both revolt against God
 - ii. They both kill people? Implied by Nimrod
 - iii. They both build a city.
 - iv. What do these cities later do? Take Israel captive
 - c. How might Nimrod have been affected by being the grandson of Ham, and the nephew of Canaan? Youngest son of a messed up family. Becomes an adult who oppresses others ('kingdom'?).
4. Babel: What kind of city was this? What was it like for the humans to build this?
 - a. They don't want to spread out. God commissioned them from Gen.1:28 – 31 to spread out. They want to cling together for security instead. They cannot engage with God as their security but only with one another.
 - i. Is this like the family's tendency to have our kids close to us, possibly under our control? That is what Cain wanted in 4:16 – 24 by building a city and naming it after his son, Enoch.
 - b. The tower that reaches up into the heavens
 - i. Visibility
 - ii. Religious significance? To live with the gods? Like moving into the nice neighborhood – you feel like you've arrived?
 - iii. To survive another flood! At least some people can climb up there.
 - c. They say, 'Let us make a name for ourselves.' What does that mean?
 - i. 'Let us' is God's language from Genesis 1, but humanity says it to create dead things. They see themselves as constructors and creators, like God. They have power to determine their own and others' destinies.
 1. We live in a culture that understands technology as identity – that we can, by technology, master the world and be like God. Technical savvy becomes a measure of advancement more than moral growth. What we think of as advancing as creatures is really immaturity.
 - ii. Perceiving our own nature: Naming is associated with knowing in Genesis. Making a name for ourselves: They are trying to know themselves and rule themselves rather than let God name them and seek Him. Let's establish our own specialness, our own uniqueness, above God.
 1. College is a name-making culture. Notice how lecture halls are named after people? When someone gets a building named for themselves, they are essentially trying to secure greater fame and notoriety through their name. The same is true for sports stadiums, billboard ads, and even ways that people sell their bodies for tattooed corporate advertising.
 2. The name they make comes to represent all the corruption, the sin, the kingdom of the rebel Nimrod: Babylon
 3. Notice that the Babel account is bracketed by a genealogy of Shem on either side. 'Shem' means *name*. Name, name, name.
 4. When we name ourselves, we are being tautological. We come from God and the earth. God gave us our name. But when we name ourselves, what is that? It's like the bad joke about the software programmer who died in the shower:

The shampoo bottle said, 'Rinse, lather, repeat.' We become self-referencing, and then we lose ourselves.

- d. DISCUSS: How did you make a name for yourself in high school?
 - e. DISCUSS: What happens when people build community based on the desire for self-aggrandizement (when you only care about your name)?
 - i. For example, when you only care about your name? For example, what happens when you are a really driven careerist/party-er/whatever and someone offers you knowledge of God? Would you think that's important knowledge to have? No. How does that parallel what happened at Babel? A whole society that de-values the knowledge of God – what is that like?
 - ii. STATE: Notice that your goals actually determine what you value. If all we want is self-centered, then we won't actually be interested in God or His truth, and certain other truths, for that matter. Everything just becomes part of the greater goal of SELF. If we're honest, we're almost never just 'neutral' when it comes to knowledge of God.
5. How does God respond?
- a. With humor: He comes down. It's so small He can't see it from up high.
 - b. Out of His mercy (does this need to be explained?), he sows confusion: He renders them appropriately powerless.
 - i. Part of it is that God confuses their *language*. What would it be like if, all of a sudden, we all spoke different languages? We'd look at each other and be stuck! But, people could work hard to translate and communicate. Is that really what stopped people from building the city, tower, name?
 - ii. Another part of it could be that people disagreed what to call things, and what to call each other. Think of dozens of corporations trying to put their name on a stadium. Now think of dozens of groups of people trying to put their words on the tower, on the throne, on the streets, etc. People's own egos will get in the way, and they would not be able to agree.
 - iii. Part of it is that God confuses the *meaning behind their words*. Now that they don't think it's meaningful to *truly* be like God, it's no longer as important to do what they're doing. People will experience that on campus when they try to find meaning in parties, academics, and relationships, but then suddenly it will seem empty, and they'll walk away wondering, 'Why did I think that would satisfy me?' They'll long for more. *We have to watch for that moment in other people's lives.*
 - iv. You have a hard time with anything higher than yourself, because you distrust other people's words as politicians' words, as marketing's words, as fundraising words. One social commentator said: 'But the new rebel is a skeptic, and will not entirely trust anything. He has no loyalty; therefore he can never really be a revolutionist. And the fact that he doubts everything really gets in his way when he wants to denounce anything. For all denunciation implies trust in a moral framework of some kind; and the modern skeptic doubts not only the thing he denounces, [but the words by which he denounces it].' That was written by G.K. Chesterton in his book, *Orthodoxy*, in 1909. He then lists some examples that were pertinent back then, but I'll give you some examples pertinent now. We denounce marriage as a lie, and then we denounce Tiger Woods for treating it as a lie. In a social justice meeting, we denounce Nike for treating Third World people as if they were animals, and then in a science class, we prove that they are animals. In an international studies class, we denounce war as a waste of life, and then in philosophy class, we denounce life as a waste of time. We denounce a white policeman for beating a black man, but we denounce any moral framework by which white bankers are really responsible for black foreclosures. Let me resume with Chesterton: 'In short, the modern revolutionist, being an infinite skeptic, is always engaged in undermining [himself]. In his book on politics he attacks men for trampling on morality; in his book on ethics he attacks morality for trampling on men. Therefore the modern man in revolt has become practically useless for all purposes of revolt. By rebelling against everything he has lost his right to rebel against anything.' Our words have been drained of meaning. Can you hear that?
 - v. Does that mean that language and ethnicity and cultures are bad? No. The diversity of human beings is good. It was intended from Genesis 1. The clumping together at Babel

was bad. And it seems that Genesis 10 comes before Genesis 11 in priority, even though Genesis 11 comes before Genesis 10 in chronology. God had always intended human beings to have a diversity that came from spreading out and interacting with our environment.

- c. Application: Whose name are you living for?
6. What do you notice about the two genealogies of Shem?
 - a. The first is in 10:21 – 32
 - b. The second is in 11:10 – 26. That one has the long life spans.
 - c. They are divided by the story of Babel. The genealogy of ‘the name’ is split by the story of people trying to ‘name themselves’.
 - d. The line of Shem seems to divide into not faithful and faithful. How do we see that? The line of Shem through Joktam finds lands and territories. What drew them away? Babel.
 - e. The line of Shem through Eber and Peleg becomes the line of faith. The line of Shem after Babel is focused on long life and children. They are looking ahead in hope and faith for the human child of God’s promise, from Genesis 3:15, who will eventually be God Himself in Jesus of Nazareth, who will defeat evil and crush the serpent on the head.
 - f. The longer life is symbolic of ‘fuller life’ because of a spiritual connection with God. It leads us to Abram and Sarai, eventually, and then to Israel and then Jesus.
 - g. But the longer life is diminishing, showing that the line of Shem is losing spiritual life. They are less faithful than Adam through Noah.

Ozymandias

Leader’s Notes:

Is the multiplicity of cultures wrong? A result of sin? Ch. 10 and Ch. 11 present us with a puzzle. Ch. 10 tells us about all of the families, languages, lands, and nations descended from Noah; then ch. 11 goes back to a story where there is only one culture. In that story, the multiple cultures come about as God’s response to the pride of Babel. Were multiple cultures part of God’s good design? Or are they merely a curse from God to check human pride? Is there something wrong about the fact that there are many cultures? This question takes us back to what it means to be bearers of God’s image. An integral characteristic of God is his desire to fill the void with diverse goodness. He fills the land with diverse kinds of plants. He fills the sky with diverse birds, the sea with diverse fish, and the land with diverse animals. Then he blesses them with the command to further multiply and fill the earth. He gives that same command to multiply and fill to humans in ch. 1. and again in ch. 8 and in ch. 9. It would be reasonable to assume that as Noah’s family spread out to fill the earth, they would create a diversity of cultures—that is exactly what is described in ch. 10. In ch. 11, we see that they did not do so altogether voluntarily. The plan at Babel was a plan specifically designed to avoid the spreading throughout the earth that God had commanded and blessed. They were resisting God’s plan. Seen in this light, God’s response of confusing the languages may be seen as an attempt to set people back on the right track rather than something which put them off track. Undoubtedly, the fact that this action came as a punishment by God rather than a choice has some negative effect on culture. Perhaps our multi-cultural society would have less misunderstanding and more harmony—with just as much or more diversity—if the people of Babel had freely chosen to spread over the earth rather than being scattered. In any case, in the attitudes of the people of Babel we see one cultural sin which persists today. We see a powerful, homogeneous culture trying to resist difference so that it can make a name for itself which stands as an alternative to worship of God. Any time a culture speaks of unity in a way that resembles these tower-builders, we know that it is not the unity God intends.

Does Genesis 11 happen before Genesis 10 chronologically? In this way, it’s similar to Genesis 2:4 – 25 happening on the sixth day of Genesis 1:1 – 2:3. It’s separated and narrated on its own, and expanded on.

How do we talk about the ‘city’ without driving people back to ‘nature’? This isn’t the real meaning of Genesis 11 anyway, but it sometimes comes up.

- God calls His people to be pilgrims, sojourners and not settlers and city-builders.
 - The city symbolizes human civilization in total, not just actual ‘cities’ as real urban centers.

- God does not call His people to avoid the city, but it's more of a warning that this is where sin accumulates and expresses itself
- The city-builders are convinced that spreading out is a bad thing. Are we afraid of spreading out? Or do we clump to create power and safety for ourselves?
- By emphasizing *motivation* (trying to make a name for oneself) but not the concrete expression. For instance, even ministry can be an attempt at building your own kingdom / city-building.
 - We can take the individual approach concerning motivation: It may not be sinful to be a lawyer, doctor, CEO, etc. on an absolute level, but it might be wrong FOR YOU because of what that would mean for how you'd use your time, how you'd have to wall off parts of your life from God, and how you'd have to contort yourself and your character to do it.
 - Question: 100 years from now, who will remember your name? Mother Teresa didn't seek a name for herself, yet God seems to have given her a name and honored it.
- God moves forward, not backward. He calls us forward into promise. Nostalgia is a lack of faith. There is no way back in time.

Genealogy: Is this the way to end an introduction? We have to step back. Is this what you expected of the Bible? Humanity descends and descends again. Like the movie *Fellowship of the Ring* – scattered, broken

It's not a hero story. If we take the Bible as a collection of independent stories, looking at individual lives with individual lessons, then the Bible becomes about heroes, who we should just imitate. But that's not what it's about. It's not a coming of age story; there's not one hero like Eragon or Harry Potter; and when they do get older, they don't necessarily come out deeper, more profound people. If you want the princess story, about being overlooked even though you have qualities worth looking at, and then being discovered, then watch Cinderella. If you want the story of civilization and technological progress? Read *Germs, Guns, and Steel*. If you want a story of conflict and the resilient human race? Watch *The Avengers*.

It's a strange come-from-behind, underdog story. There is a powerful but very loving God who makes the world as a home for humanity and then is almost driven out of the house completely! His followers are reduced to a fraction of all human beings. And at the lowest point, it seems, the flood, maybe eight people in the whole world still acknowledge him. Then we restart with mainly the line of Shem but fewer and fewer people in the family of Shem still hold to the knowledge of God. God has to resort to some very drastic measures to protect His few people, and to keep the knowledge of Himself alive. So the Bible is a strange underdog story.

It's also a romance with a betrayal, a pursuit, and a return. A romance in the sense that you return to the one you love, who loves you.

It's also the discovery of a diagnosis, and the longing for a cure.

God wanted a story – He wanted an object for His love. God tells us His story from His perspective. God's greater story can actually still be true even if our own stories are imploding. The story goes on because of a single person, the plot twist: Noah; Abram; then others later. God is in search of a human partner, who will help him bless the whole world – not just themselves.

How do we make a jump from our story into God's story?

1. Read the Bible as God's story. Not as individual case studies, lessons on self-improvement, etc.
2. Abram embraced insecurity
3. Abram built an altar

The ultimate significance of Abram's life is not that he's a great role model for faith, but that he is a link in the greater chain of hope.