

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
7-31-19

Genesis 11

The Tower of Babel - Verses 1-9

¹ Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. ² As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. ³ They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. ⁴ 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; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth." ⁵ But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. 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. ⁷ Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." ⁸ So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹ 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.

11:3 The brick used to build this tower was man-made and not as hard as stone. Naturally occurring asphalt—a sticky, tar-like substance—was used for mortar.

11:3-4 The tower of Babel was most likely a ziggurat, a common structure in Babylonia at this time. Most often built as temples, ziggurats looked like pyramids with steps or ramps leading up the sides. Ziggurats stood as high as 300 feet and were often just as wide; thus they were the focal point of the city. The people in this story built their tower as a monument to their own greatness, something for the whole world to see.

11:4 The tower of Babel was a great human achievement, a wonder of the world. But it was a monument to the people themselves rather than to God. We may build monuments to ourselves (expensive clothes, big house, fancy car, important job) to call attention to our achievements. These may not be wrong in themselves, but when we use them to give us identity and self-worth, they take God's place in our lives. We are free to develop in many areas, but we are not free to think we have replaced God. What "towers" have you built in your life?

From Shem to Abram - Verses 10-26

¹⁰ This is the account of Shem's family line. Two years after the flood, when Shem was 100 years old, he became the father of Arphaxad. ¹¹ And after he became the father of Arphaxad, Shem lived 500 years and had other sons and daughters.

¹² When Arphaxad had lived 35 years, he became the father of Shelah.¹³ And after he became the father of Shelah, Arphaxad lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters. ¹⁴ When Shelah had lived 30 years, he became the father of Eber. ¹⁵ And after he became the father of Eber, Shelah lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters. ¹⁶ When Eber had lived 34 years, he became the father of Peleg. ¹⁷ And after he became the father of Peleg, Eber lived 430 years and had other sons and daughters. ¹⁸ When Peleg had lived 30 years, he became the father of Reu. ¹⁹ And after he became the father of Reu, Peleg lived 209 years and had other sons and daughters. ²⁰ When Reu had lived 32 years, he became the father of Serug. ²¹ And after he became the father of Serug, Reu lived 207 years and had other sons and daughters. ²² When Serug had lived 30 years, he became the father of Nahor. ²³ And after he became the father of Nahor, Serug lived 200 years and had other sons and daughters. ²⁴ When Nahor had lived 29 years, he became the father of Terah. ²⁵ And after he became the father of Terah, Nahor lived 119 years and had other sons and daughters. ²⁶ After Terah had lived 70 years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran.

11:10-27 Here and in 10:22-31 appears a list of Shem's descendants, who were blessed (9:26). Because of that blessing, from Shem's line came Abram and the entire Jewish nation, which would eventually conquer the land of Canaan in the days of Joshua.

Abram's Family - Verses 27-32

²⁷ This is the account of Terah's family line. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. ²⁸ While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth. ²⁹ Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milkah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milkah and Iskah. ³⁰ Now Sarai was childless because she was not able to conceive. ³¹ Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Harran, they settled there. ³² Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Harran.

11:27-28 Abram grew up in Ur of the Chaldeans, an important city in the ancient world. Archaeologists have discovered evidence of a flourishing civilization there in Abram's day. The city carried on an extensive trade with its neighbors and had a vast library. Growing up in Ur, Abram was probably well educated.

11:31 Terah left Ur to go to Canaan but settled in Harran instead. Why did he stop halfway? It may have been his health, the climate, or even fear. But this did not change Abram's calling ("the LORD had said to Abram," 12:1). He had respect for his father's leadership, but when Terah died, Abram moved on to Canaan. God's will may come in stages. Just as the time in Harran was a transition period for Abram, so God may give us transition periods and times of waiting to help us depend on him and trust his timing. If we patiently do his will during the transition times, we will be better prepared to serve him as we should when he calls us.