

# GENESIS 11

## THE TOWER OF BABEL

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If you have been with us for a while, you are probably expecting for us to move into chapter 10 today. However we will move straight into chapter 11. Chapter 10 is parenthetical. Parenthetical meaning contained as in a parenthesis, explanatory. We will come back to chapter 10 after we are finished with chapter 11.

I also want to mention that it is at this time in the history of the world that the Great Ice Age is happening. This event was brought on by the flood.

Explain:

- Volcanic activity and warm water
- Job mentions snow

So with all that we can now move into chapter 11.

The story of the Tower of Babel is probably one of the most well known but least believed stories in the Bible. Virtually anyone with a church

background can give you an overview of the story, but most people seem to find it unbelievable. The thought of everyone in the world living in the same general area and speaking the same language just doesn't compute. We have a habit of looking at things from our present perspective. As we look at the globe today we see virtually every corner settled by someone. As we watch television we hear various languages, each one with different dialects. In East Asia there are different countries with the same written language, yet the people can't communicate with each other because they pronounce the characters differently. Looking at this, how are we supposed to believe that at one time everyone spoke the same language? Once again the Bible goes out on a limb. If you make bold claims you must have something to back them up.

I believe that looking at things from our present perspective should validate the biblical claims if they are true. Archeologists and anthropologists believe that civilization started in the very place that the

Bible states. If you go to any textbook on ancient civilizations they all say that the oldest civilization was that of *Mesopotamia*, meaning *land between the rivers*. This is where Noah's descendants settled after the flood. The oldest city and what is thought to be the oldest written language has been found in this region. Score 1 for the scientists, they discovered what God's Word said all along. Many linguists, though not all, have concluded that at one point in time, there was one *mother language*. That is precisely what we should see if the Bible is correct. There are extraordinary claims made in the first 11 chapters of Genesis from the creation of man to the dispersion of mankind at Babel with the confusion of languages to boot. In my mind it can be said that the bible stands or falls with the claims of Genesis 1 through 11. Once again we see just what we should see if Genesis is correct.

Genesis 11 starts out with the claim the whole earth was of one language and that all its inhabitants were located in the same region.

**Genesis 11:1-2 ( KJV )**

*<sup>1</sup>And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.*

*<sup>2</sup>And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.*

We see a natural progression here. Noah and his family exited the ark and began to repopulate the earth. As the population grew a sort of urban sprawl came about. Eventually people settled into the plain of Shinar, which is in modern day Iraq between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

God's plan was for the people to disperse and populate the planet.

However, no one seemed to want to leave the plain. We are told that a grandson of Ham, Nimrod, established at least four cities and it is inferred that he established more. We are told a little about this man in Genesis 10:

**Genesis 10:8-10 ( KJV )**

*<sup>8</sup>And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth.*

*<sup>9</sup>He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD.*

*<sup>10</sup>And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.*

First, what does the name Nimrod mean? It comes from the Hebrew verb *marad*, meaning “rebel.” Adding an “n” before the “m” it becomes an infinitive construct, “Nimrod.” (see Kautzsch 1910: 137 2b, also BDB 1962: 597). The meaning then is “The Rebel.” Thus “Nimrod” may not be the character's name at all. It is more likely a derisive term of a type, a representative, of a system that is epitomized in rebellion against the Creator, the one true [God](#). Rebellion began soon after the [Flood](#) as civilizations were restored. At that time this person became very prominent.

In [Genesis 10:8-11](#) we learn that “Nimrod” established a kingdom.

Therefore, one would expect to find also, in the literature of the ancient Near East, a person who was a type, or example, for other people to follow. And there was. It is a well-known tale, common in Sumerian literature, of a man who fits the description. In addition to the Sumerians, the [Babylonians](#) wrote about this person; the [Assyrians](#) likewise; and the [Hittites](#). Even in Israel, tablets have been found with

this man's name on them. He was obviously the most popular hero in the Ancient Near East.

Nimrod was a mighty hunter. When the Bible says he was “before the Lord” it means against or in the face of God. He was defiant. He was seen as a conqueror and a protector of the people. This reputation caused the people to look to him for security. It is also possible that he was seen as something of a dragon slayer. Large animals such as dinosaurs were roaming the landscape. Man and animals were now meat-eaters. If you couple this with Nimrod’s success as a landowner, and despot it is easy to see why the people would follow his lead. Ancient Jewish history states that Nimrod caused the people to look to his government as the source of their prosperity. He also taught that God was to be feared as a tyrant, not the benevolent creator of the universe. It was then that Nimrod implemented his grand building project; the Tower of Babel.

The first kingdom established after the Flood was [Kish](#), and the name “Kish” appears often on clay tablets. The early post-Flood Sumerian [king](#) lists (not found in the Bible) say that “kingship descended from

heaven to Kish” after the Flood. (The Hebrew name “Cush,” much later, was moved to present-day [Ethiopia](#) as migrations took place from Mesopotamia to other places.)

The Sumerians, very early, developed a religio-politico state, which was extremely binding on all who lived in it (except for the rulers, who were a law unto themselves). This system was to influence the Ancient Near East for over 3000 years. Other cultures which followed the Sumerian system were [Accad](#), [Babylon](#), [Assyria](#), and [Persia](#), which became the basis of [Greece](#) and [Rome's](#) system of rule. Founded by [Cush](#), the Sumerians were very important historically and Biblically.

Two of the premiere commentators on the Bible in Hebrew have this to say about [Genesis 10:9](#),

Nimrod was mighty in [hunting](#), and that in opposition to YHWH; not ‘before YHWH’ in the sense of according to the will and purpose of YHWH, still less,... in a simply superlative sense... The name itself, ‘Nimrod’ from marad, ‘We will revolt,’ points to some violent resistance to [God](#)... Nimrod as a mighty hunter founded a powerful kingdom; and the founding of this kingdom is shown by the verb with consecutive to have been the consequence or result of his strength in hunting, so that

hunting was intimately connected with the establishing of the kingdom. Hence, if the expression ‘a mighty hunter’ relates primarily to [hunting](#) in the literal sense, we must add to the literal meaning the figurative signification of a ‘hunter of men’ (a trapper of men by stratagem and force); Nimrod the hunter became a tyrant, a powerful hunter of men (Keil and Delitzsch 1975: 165).

## THE GILGAMESH EPIC

The Gilgamesh Epic describes the first “[God](#) is dead” movement. In the Epic, the hero is a vile, filthy, perverted person, yet he is presented as the greatest, strongest, hero that ever lived (Alexander Heidel, 1963: 18). So that the one who sent the Flood will not trouble them anymore, Gilgamesh sets out to kill the perpetrator. He takes with him a friend who is a monstrous half-man, half-animal-Enkidu. Together they go on a long journey to the [Cedar](#) Mountain to find and destroy the monster who sent the Flood. Gilgamesh finds him and finally succeeds in cutting off the head of this creature whose name is “Huwawa” (“Humbaba” in the Assyrian version; see Heidel 1963: 34ff).



**Genesis 11:3-4 ( KJV )**

<sup>3</sup>And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.

<sup>4</sup>And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top *may reach* unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

This great building project was taken up for a specific purpose. The people didn't want to be scattered abroad, so they would build a grand temple, *to make a name for themselves*. The people decided to exalt their own will above that of the one true God. Led by Nimrod, which means *let us rebel*, the majority of the people shook their fist at God's commandment to disperse.

These verses tell us a lot about the culture at Babel. First of all we see that the infrastructure was in place to build this great tower. History tells us that the tower was a ziggurat, (Assyrian for mountaintop) a step pyramid much like the ones that can still be seen in Southeastern Asia

and South America. Think of how much labor and industry is involved in building mega structures of today. It was no different then. Mud had to be quarried, and bricks had to be molded and baked. In Egypt bricks are molded and left to dry in the sun. These bricks were fired in a kiln and held together with mortar, not mud. There was also a lot of labor involved. There are also extra-biblical accounts of the tower and its demise.

*There is the Sumerian account of Etemenanki: known as the temple of the foundation of heaven and earth*

Nebuchadnezzar wrote that the original tower had been built in antiquity: "A former king built the Temple of the Seven Lights of the Earth, but he did not complete its head. Since a remote time, people had abandoned it, without order expressing their words. Since that time earthquakes and lightning had dispersed its sun-dried clay; the bricks of the casing had split, and the earth of the interior had been scattered in heaps."

(Slide of temple ruins)

The Greek historian [Herodotus](#) (440 BC) later wrote of this ziggurat, which he called the "Temple of Zeus Belus", giving an account of its vast dimensions.

The already decayed Great Ziggurat of Babylon was finally destroyed by [Alexander the Great](#) in an attempt to rebuild it. He managed to move the tiles of the tower in another location, but his death stopped the reconstruction. Since then only the basis remains, but it is visible from Google Earth.<sup>4</sup>

From the book of Jubilees we read:

*And they began to build, and in the fourth week they made brick with fire, and the bricks served them for stone, and the clay with which they cemented them together was asphalt, which comes out of the sea, and out of the fountains of water in the land of Shinar. And they built it: forty and three years were they building it; its breadth was 203 bricks, and the height [of a brick] was the third of one; its height amounted to 5433 [cubits](#) and 2 palms, and [the extent of one wall was] thirteen [stades](#) [and of the other thirty stades]. (Jubilees 10:20-21, Charles' 1913 translation*

The Jewish historian Josephus gives us this account:

*Now it was Nimrod who excited them to such an affront and contempt of God. He was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah, a bold man, and of great strength of hand. He persuaded them not to ascribe it to God, as if it were through his means they were happy, but to believe that it was their own courage which procured that*

*happiness. He also gradually changed the government into [tyranny](#), seeing no other way of turning men from the [fear](#) of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence on his power... Now the multitude were very ready to follow the determination of Nimrod and to esteem it a piece of cowardice to submit to God; and they built a tower, neither sparing any pains, nor being in any degree negligent about the work: and, by reason of the multitude of hands employed in it, it grew very high, sooner than any one could expect; but the thickness of it was so great, and it was so strongly built, that thereby its great height seemed, upon the view, to be less than it really was. It was built of burnt brick, cemented together with mortar, made of [bitumen](#), that it might not be liable to admit water. When God saw that they acted so madly, he did not resolve to destroy them utterly, since they were not grown wiser by the destruction of the former sinners [in the Flood]; but he caused a tumult among them, by producing in them diverse languages, and causing that, through the multitude of those languages, they should not be able to understand one another. The place wherein they built the tower is now called [Babylon](#), because of the confusion of that language which they readily understood before; for the Hebrews mean by the word [Babel](#), confusion...*

**To the people of Shinar it meant: Gate of God or gateway to God.**

We see then that the tower was a grand project. The problem wasn't the building, necessarily, but the motive. The people wanted to build a name for themselves. They chose the rule of man over the rule of God. Some accounts state that the tower had a great "zodiac" on top. It is here, merely hundreds of years after the flood that paganism is born. Many of the rituals and beliefs are still with us today.

When large numbers of people come together to combine their ideas, skills and information there is virtually nothing they can't do. God knowing this, in His infinite mercy moved to stop the project in its tracks. It is great when people come together for a good cause, but if this had been allowed to continue the downward spiral of man would have been greatly accelerated.

*Genesis 11:5-9 ( KJV )*

*<sup>5</sup>And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.*

*<sup>6</sup>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.*

*<sup>7</sup>Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.*

*<sup>8</sup>So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.*

*<sup>9</sup>Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.*

People can't do anything together when they can't communicate. Can you imagine thousands of laborers, foremen, contractors and engineers trying to build something while not being able to talk to each other? It was impossible. Every aspect of life in the region would have come to a grinding halt. Therefore as the people settled into groups according to their families and languages, they began to disperse as God had planned

in the first place. Genesis 10 gives us the template for how this happened.

We went over chapter 10 a couple weeks ago, for now we need to look at the mindset of these people and ask ourselves if anything has changed.

The people of Babel had a grand plan and were united behind a grand leader. In our own personal lives plans may not be so grand as to build a tower to heaven, but there are those of us that would settle for a stairway to Heaven. As was said earlier, the building was not the main problem. It was a symptom of a larger problem. It was symbolic of the heart of man.

***Jer 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"***

Nimrod (Gilgamesh) taught the people that God was an ogre, waiting to judge them. He convinced them that God was holding out on them. He convinced them that they should stay in one place to be a great people and that they should depend on his government instead of God. These

were the same tactics that Satan employed in Genesis chapter 3. They are still in use today. We hear them when we are encouraged to give up and quit things that we started in God's name. We hear them when we are encouraged to find our own way, when we are encouraged to seek pleasure in things other than the will of God. We hear this when we are encouraged to give up on a marriage.

*Psalm 2*

*1 Why do the nations rage,*

*And the people plot a vain thing?*

*2 The kings of the earth set themselves,*

*And the rulers take counsel together,*

*Against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying,*

*3 "Let us break Their bonds in pieces*

*And cast away Their cords from us."*

*4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;*



*The Lord shall hold them in derision.*

*5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,*

*And distress them in His deep displeasure:*

*6 “Yet I have set My King*

*On My holy hill of Zion.”*

*7 “I will declare the decree:*

*The Lord has said to Me,*

*‘You are My Son,*

*Today I have begotten You.*

*8 Ask of Me, and I will give You*

*The nations for Your inheritance,*

*And the ends of the earth for Your possession.*

*9 You shall break them with a rod of iron;*

*You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel. ’”*

*10 Now therefore, be wise, O kings;*

*Be instructed, you judges of the earth.*

*11 Serve the Lord with fear,*

*And rejoice with trembling.*

*12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,*

*And you perish in the way,*

*When His wrath is kindled but a little.*

*Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.*

We can't follow our hearts; they are wicked. We have to follow the Word of God. We have to know that God has a plan for us and that He is steering our boat. Our Grand plans don't necessarily match up with His plans for us. It is at that point that we are in big trouble.

Even if you don't know what God's plan is for your life, He will give you peace until He reveals it to you. And He generally gives that revelation in small doses.