

Commentary on Genesis Chapter 11 by Chuck Smith 12.11.24

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December Memory Verse, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 (NKJV)

¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

¹⁷ Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

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The whole earth was of one language, and one speech (Gen 11:1).

Probably Hebrew because in the earlier record of the book of Genesis, the names of the people were Hebrew names that have Hebrew meanings. And so the original language was perhaps the Hebrew language itself. "The whole earth was of one language, one speech."

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. And they said one to another, Let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly (Gen 11:2-3).

Now this is an interesting thing because it shows that very early after the flood, they had brick kilns and rather than just building their houses out of rocks, they were advanced to the state of making bricks and putting them in the kiln, burning them thoroughly. So rather than just adobe kind of buildings, they were now using a mortar with a cured brick or a burned brick and they began to build, of course, the city of Nineveh, the city of Babylon, all began to be built in this period by Nimrod himself.

And so they said, Let us build a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth (Gen 11:4).

Now God's command was to actually fill the earth. It's an attempt to sort of countermand God's commandment. "Lest we be scattered abroad throughout all the earth." Let's join together. Let's just, you know, congregate in this area.

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And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded (Gen 11:5).

Now again we're describing the activities of God in human terms as though God were coming down and looking things over. In reality, God is omnipresent. He was watching the thing the whole while.

The LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they all have one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do (Gen 11:6).

The developing of this religious system. God placed the stars in the heavens for signs. But as Satan has always taken the things of God and twisted them and perverted them, so from the original message that God had placed there in the heavens of His plan for the ages, that there was that perversion of it into what is the modern astrology, which began way back again in the Babylonian era here in Babel where they were going to build this tower as an observatory to observe the constellations and so forth of the sky.

Now it would seem that the Magi who came from the east to find the Christ child were reading correctly the heavens. "We have seen His star in the east, we've come to worship Him". And that they were reading truly the signs that God had placed there. Now the Bible says that God has placed the stars for signs and for seasons. And it is very possible that originally there was indeed the message of God in the stars but it was perverted, as I say, into the modern astrology. And the perversion began way back there where they began to look at the stars for the influence over their lives, rather than looking to God.

And so God in His Word puts down astrologers, stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, those who sought them to govern their lives by the influence of the stars upon them and so forth. And God really speaks out very heavily against that in the prophecy of Isaiah. But it is an ancient, ancient thing, the horoscopes and all. But as with so many things, it is possible that in the beginning it was pure and had a true message of God, but it has been perverted as time has gone on.

So God seeing this development said

Let us go down, and confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. And so the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel (Gen 11:7-9);

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Babel, whichever pronunciation you prefer, the word has come to mean confusion, lack of understanding. And so they called the name of the place Babel.

because the LORD did there confound or confuse the languages of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth (Gen 11:9).

And so at this point, the people who had been speaking the same language, now start to speak different languages. Of course this was a tremendous miracle indeed, all of these languages. Now the interesting thing about languages is that many times we think of the English language because we grew up with it, you know, it's such an excellent language in communicating ideas. And we think, you know, people who are living in say, primitive cultures, in stone age cultures surely they must have a primitive form of language. Ours must surely be a highly cultured form of language, the English language. And they must have very primitive language, but it is an interesting thing that many of the primitive cultures have the most complex languages, highly complex languages, much more so than English. And thus, there is great difficulty in translating into many of these languages of primitive people.

I have a friend who was translating the gospel of Mark into the Choco dialect in Panama and he came to the place where he was working with his translating helper, and he came to the place where Jesus spit in the ground and made mud and put it in the blind man's eyes and told him to go to the pool of Siloam and wash it out. So in translating this word "spit" the native said, But how did he spit? You know there's many different ways to spit. Well, we only have one English word but the Choco Indian has so many different words.

Now it is interesting that man has in any and every culture, no matter how primitive, highly complex method of communicating of ideas, and I don't care how primitive or ignorant that particular culture may be. Their languages are highly developed in the ability to communicate their ideas, whether they do it through grunts, through a singsong, or whatever. They are able to communicate their ideas no matter how primitive their culture.

This certainly is something that separates man from the animal kingdom. There is nothing in the animal kingdom that even approximates a complex form of communication of ideas. But yet in the most primitive culture of man, and in every culture of man, there is a language communication. So this was the beginning of the separation of languages.

Now after the separation into the basic language groups, there of course have become modifications even within the same language or generalized language. We find the romance languages and similarities between the Spanish and the Portuguese and the

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Italian and the French. We find that there is certain similarity between the German and the Scandinavian. We find that English is a language that has borrowed much from Latin and from Greek.

So there have been developed languages from the basic language system, but God divided their languages. And instantly they no doubt got together in groups that they could communicate to, family groups and so forth where they could communicate to each other, but it caused the division and the separation. And that spreading out then into the world and scattering abroad upon the face of the earth as is described.

Now we're going to zero in down to Abraham because that's where our story must move.

So these are the generations of Shem (Gen 11:10):

Getting now again a repetition of the generations of Seth, Shem, but moving definitely just down towards Abraham.

He was a hundred years old, and he begat Arphaxad two years after the flood: he lived after he begat Arphaxad five hundred years, and he begat sons and daughters (Gen 11:10-11).

So he lived to be about six hundred years old approximately.

Arphaxad lived thirty-five years, and begat Salah (Gen 11:12):

And we get, he begat Eber and we follow down to Abraham, and actually that's the one where we're coming to, so let's go on to verse twenty-six.

Terah lived seventy years, and he begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran (Gen 11:26).

Now whether or not this is the order in which they were born, we do not know. Whether or not you know how old was Terah when Abraham was born, we don't know. Maybe he was the third son. We have no way of knowing but he lived seventy years and he had these three sons, Abram, Nahor and Haran. Now he lived after that for many years also.

Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot. And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees. And Abram and Nahor took them wives (Gen 11:27-29):

So their brother Haran died early having married and born one son, Lot. Actually he bore some daughters, too. And they took wives and

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the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, for she was also the daughter of Haran (Gen 11:29),

So he married his niece.

But Sarai was barren; and she had no child. And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran (Gen 11:29-31)

So with Haran dead, Lot being his son, Abraham sort of adopted Lot because Abraham did not have any sons of his own. So he sort of adopted Lot and Lot became a journeyer with Abraham.

But they altogether went from the Ur of the Chaldees (Gen 11:31),

Now it was in the Ur of the Chaldees, in this area where this false religious systems, the Pantheism and Polytheism and all began to develop and the perverted religious systems, and so they left the Ur of the Chaldees.

to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran, and dwelt there (Gen 11:31).

Now the fact that they all left to go to Canaan means that in the beginning, it could be that Abraham's father also received the call of God to leave and get out of this area that had begun to become religiously polluted and to come into a whole new area. But Terah, they came as far as Haran and there they dwelt.

And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran (Gen 11:32).

And Abraham took off with Lot and the servants and so forth, and his wife Sarah. And they began then to journey onto the land that God had promised to show him.

Actually going from the area of the Ur of the Chaldees going to Haran, they were going about six hundred miles northwest. It was about four hundred miles from Haran, down to the land of Canaan to the area of Shechem where he was ultimately to end up. But Abraham started off journeying in obedience to God from the Ur of the Chaldees. They stopped with his father. It could be that his dad said "hey, this is good. Let's settle here. Let's settle in this area. It's nice, you know, it's productive and all".

Let's settle here and there was a spiritual death of Terah to the call of God and awareness of God or the spiritual death. Abraham realized that he had to now leave his father and that family and journey on by himself to the land that God had promised to show him.

Added by Pastor John

Rebellion Expressed: The Rise and Fall of Universal Human Pride (11:1-9)

This narrative concerning Babel, just like the flood narrative, is structured in the form of a chiasm in which the points and themes in the "upward" part of the narrative are mirrored—and thus reinforced—in the "downward" part of the narrative. This identical structuring of the flood and Babel narratives links them together and thus reinforces the concluding point of both, namely, that depravity is as "attached" to man as it can be (and its impending judgment as inevitable)—as much so after the flood as before it. The structure of this brief narrative may be diagrammed as follows: The Moody Bible Commentary

