

The Book of Genesis

Chapter 11

11:1 In the days when the whole earth had one language and one vocabulary, (MOF)

Time Frame

This was true immediately after the Flood. Because prior to the Flood, God had divided the sons of Adam (DEU 32:8) by language, as archeological evidence demonstrates.

11:2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east [NIV: "moved eastward"; REB: "in the east"], that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there.

Nimrod's Followers

"They" refers only to those who followed Nimrod in rebellion against God's plan of colonizing the world, not to all of mankind.

11:3 They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. (NIV)

James Pritchard quotes the Akkadian Creation Epic in his book Ancient Near Eastern Texts: "*Let us build a shrine...Let its brickwork be fashioned. You shall name it 'The Sanctuary.'* For one whole year they molded the bricks. When the second year arrived, they raised high the shrine equaling a great height..."(p.68-69).

11:4 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 and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth." (NIV)

One question is: how many people were alive by this point? The Babylonian historian Berossus wrote, "*they knew their wives, who, on the very day expected, regularly brought forth twins of different sexes; afterwards, when these twins had grown to years of puberty, and married, they also had twins at each birth.*" Although this could be an exaggeration, a conservative estimate would put the number between ten and twenty thousand human beings.

As we saw in 10:8-9, Nimrod had great influence in the world about 100 years after the Flood. With this great influence, God's plan to colonize the world did not appeal to Nimrod because he could not continue to control everyone. Josephus gives us more of the story: "*God also commanded them to send colonies abroad, for the thorough peopling of the earth, that they might...cultivate a great part of the earth...but they...did not obey God; for which reason they fell into calamities...for when they flourished with a numerous youth, God admonished them again to send out colonies; but they, imagining the prosperity they enjoyed was not derived from favour of God, but supposing that their own power was the proper cause of the plentiful condition they were in, did not obey Him. Nay, they added to this their disobedience to the Divine will, the suspicion that they were therefore ordered to send out separate colonies, that, being divided asunder, they might the more easily be oppressed. Now it was Nimrod who excited them to such...contempt of God...He also said he would be revenged on God, if He should have a mind to drown the world again; for that he would build a tower too high for the waters to be able to reach! and that he would avenge himself on God for destroying their forefathers! 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...It was built of burnt brick, cemented together with mortar, made of bitumen, that it might not be liable to admit water..."(Antiquities, I.IV.1-3)

11:5-6 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. 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. (NIV)

Tower of Babel

The Targums of both Jonathan ben Uzziel and Jerusalem state that the tower was for idolatrous worship; and that they intended to place an image on the top of the tower with a sword in its hand.

11:7-8 Come, let Us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. (NIV)

Scattering Rebellious Mankind

Josephus adds: *"After this they were dispersed abroad, on account of their languages, and went out by colonies everywhere; and each colony took possession of that land which they light upon, and unto which God led them; so that the whole continent was filled with them, both the inland and maritime countries. There were some also who passed over the sea in ships, and inhabited the islands..."(I.V.1)*

Although the Bible does not give us any way to know the exact date of this event, Berossus does mention that a major event of some kind occurred 131 years after the Flood in 2197 B.C.

11:9 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. (NIV)

Some traditions indicate this occurred 131 years after the Flood. Although Noah had already established some colonies by those willing to cooperate, God had to force the remainder of humanity to colonize.

As they dispersed, those who had participated in Nimrod's system took with them the idolatrous religion they had learned from him. Paul states in ROM 1:21-23, *"Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things."* This is no doubt a reference to this time in man's history.

All defiled religions, both western and eastern, sprang from the Babylonian system concept of Nimrod. John writes in REV 17:15,5: *"The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues...on her forehead a name...MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."*

Josephus quotes the historian Hestius: *"Such of the priests as were saved [from the destruction of the tower of Babel] took the sacred vessels of Jupiter Enyalius, and came to Shinar of Babylonia."* It is possible that these "sacred" vessels were smuggled onto the Ark by Ham's wife, Naamah, daughter of Lamech.

Shem's Line

Up to this point, Moses has presented to us a world permeated with idolatry and outright rejection of God. Now he directs us toward the other branch of Shem's descendants.

11:10 This is the account of Shem. Two years after the flood, when Shem was 100 years old, he became the father of Arphaxad [2326 B.C.]. (NIV)

In 10:22 Shem had two sons, Elam and Asshur [probably twins] born before Arphaxad. Since Arphaxad is listed as Shem's heir, his two older brothers must have done something to cause themselves to be rejected. They may have been involved with Nimrod's movement.

11:11 And after he became the father of Arphaxad, Shem lived 500 years and had other sons and daughters. (NIV)

Genealogical Significances

Shem died in 1826 B.C. It is important to take note of the number of years the lives of individuals in the genealogical records overlapped. Although Abraham was born 352 years after the Flood, he was not far removed from the deluge which destroyed the world because Shem, who lived 98 years in the pre-Flood world, overlapped his life for 150 years. Since they were related, and Shem's fame was obviously known by his descendants, not only did Abraham know the truth of the Flood, it is very possible he met and communicated with Shem during that time.

11:12-19 When Arphaxad had lived 35 years, he became the father of Shelah. And after he became the father of Shelah, Arphaxad lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters. When Shelah had lived 30 years, he became the father of Eber. And after he became the father of Eber, Shelah lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters. When Eber had lived 34 years, he became the father of Peleg. And after he became the father of Peleg, Eber lived 430 years and had other sons and daughters. When Peleg had lived 30 years, he became the father of Reu. And after he became the father of Reu, Peleg lived 209 years and had other sons and daughters. (NIV)

Peleg died in 1988 B.C. The division of nations God achieved by Noah had been completed.

11:20-25 When Reu had lived 32 years, he became the father of Serug. And after he became the father of Serug, Reu lived 207 years and had other sons and daughters. When Serug had lived 30 years, he became the father of Nahor. And after he became the father of Nahor, Serug lived 200 years and had other sons and daughters. When Nahor had lived 29 years, he became the father of Terah. And after he became the father of Terah, Nahor lived 119 years and had other sons and daughters. (NIV)

Terah was born in 2106 B.C. when Noah was 823 years old.

11:26 After Terah had lived 70 years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. (NIV)

Haran was the firstborn, but Abram is listed first because he was Terah's heir. As revealed in 12:4, Abram was 75 years old when he left the town of Haran after the death of his father, Terah, who was 205 years old when he died (vs 32). This proves that Terah was 130 years old when Abram was born in 1976 B.C., three years after the death of Noah.

11:27 This is the account of Terah [REB, NRS: "These are the descendants of"]. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. (NIV)

11:28 Haran died in the lifetime of his father Terah [JPS: "Haran died in the presence of his father Terah"], **in his native land, Ur of the Chaldeans.** (TAN)

The Midrash records that Terah was responsible for the death of Haran.

11:29 Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milcah and Iscah. (NIV)

Sarai was born in 1967 B.C., 9 years after Abram (17:17), from a different mother (20:12). Nahor was father of Bethuel, grandfather of Rebekah and Laban, great-grandfather of Leah and Rachel.

11:30-32 Now Sarai was barren; she had no children. 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 Haran, they settled there. Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran. (NIV)

Abram & the Patriarchal System

In 15:7 and NEH 9:7, we are told that God brought Abram out of Ur of the Chaldeans. Either Terah was sickly and relied on Abram to care for him, or Josephus is correct when he says: "*Terah, hating Chaldea, on account of his mourning for Haran, they all removed to Haran of Mesopotamia, where Terah died, and was buried.*" (I.VI.5).

The Patriarchal system was the family form in that time. The patriarch was father to the whole family. His sons lived in the area with him, along with their wives, their children and all their servants, slaves and their children. Everything the sons owned was the legal property of the patriarch. He remained the patriarch until his death, at which time the oldest surviving son usually became patriarch unless another son had been designated. The patriarch made all decisions affecting his family—when and who his children married, what vocation the family would have and where the family would live.

Although God had called Abram, he was not free to leave until his obligation to the family government was fulfilled, which did not occur until Terah died.

Nahor

There is no mention of what happened to Nahor, but Terah obviously left him behind to become a patriarch in his own right since Abram was to succeed Terah. However, after Terah died and Abram moved on to Canaan, Nahor relocated to Haran with his new patriarchal family [24:10—to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor; 27:43—to Haran].

Lot

Since Haran was 60 years older than Abram, Lot could have been as old or older than Abram.