

A Rood Awakening! Presents

Awakening in the Word

By Glenn McWilliams of TK TORAH KEEPERS
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THE OVERVIEW

In the words of baseball's Yogi Berra, "This is like déjà vu all over again!" In many ways our portion is very much a repeat of all that we have studied so far. It should become clear that there is a cyclical nature to Hebraic time and thought. It is the reality of this cycling of time that prompts the principle: "What happens to the fathers likewise happens to their children." This axiom should cause us to look carefully at these opening stories of our fathers in hopes of avoiding the same mistakes. While there is much the same about our portion today, there is much that is different. While last week's portion explained the origin of all the people on earth, this week's portion explains the great diversity of people, languages, and cultures that exist in the world. This portion transitions between the creation of the universe and all people to the specific story of the roots and origin of one particular people, the children of Israel. We witness, therefore, a subtle shift of focus from the general to the specific, from all people to one people, and from all humanity's primordial history to the specific history of the children of Israel. Understanding the cycle of events will also help us understand why the people of Israel are chosen and the hope and calling that shall be extended to them and to their descendants.

THE OUTLINE

- Genesis 11:1-2 Historical introduction
- Genesis 11:3-4 The willful intentions of mankind
- Genesis 11:5 The Creator's inquiry
- Genesis 11:6-7 The will and intention of the Creator
- Genesis 11:8-9 The consequences
- Genesis 11:10-26 The generations of Shem
- Genesis 11:27-29 The generations of Terah
- Genesis 11:30-32 The history of Abraham and Sarah

SUGGESTED STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of the detail of brick and mortar?
2. What was wrong with the people being of one language or one mind?
3. What are the three things the people desire to build?
4. What is the purpose of the tower?
5. What does the tower represent?
6. What does the symmetry of verses 2-9 reveal?

7. What was the “sin” of the people?
8. What is the great irony of this story?
9. How does the story of Babel still apply to us today?
10. What significant cycle do we see in this portion?
11. Why are the genealogies repeated?
12. How do the genealogies show the mercy of YHWH?
13. What significant differences exist between these genealogies and those of chapters 5 and 10?
14. What do Sarai and Milcah reveal about the origins of the Hebrew people?

THE TEXT Genesis 11:1-32

Genesis 11:1 *And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. ²And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. ³And 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. ⁴And 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. ⁵And YHWH came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. ⁶And YHWH 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. ⁷Go to, let Us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. ⁸So YHWH scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. ⁹Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because YHWH did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did YHWH scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth. ¹⁰These are the generations of Shem: Shem was an hundred years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood: ¹¹and Shem lived after he begat Arphaxad five hundred years, and begat sons and daughters. ¹²And Arphaxad lived five and thirty years, and begat Salah: ¹³and Arphaxad lived after he begat Salah four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters. ¹⁴And Salah lived thirty years, and begat*

Eber: ¹⁵and Salah lived after he begat Eber four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters. ¹⁶And Eber lived four and thirty years, and begat Peleg: ¹⁷and Eber lived after he begat Peleg four hundred and thirty years, and begat sons and daughters. ¹⁸And Peleg lived thirty years, and begat Reu: ¹⁹and Peleg lived after he begat Reu two hundred and nine years, and begat sons and daughters. ²⁰And Reu lived two and thirty years, and begat Serug: ²¹and Reu lived after he begat Serug two hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters. ²²And Serug lived thirty years, and begat Nahor: ²³and Serug lived after he begat Nahor two hundred years, and begat sons and daughters. ²⁴And Nahor lived nine and twenty years, and begat Terah: ²⁵and Nahor lived after he begat Terah an hundred and nineteen years, and begat sons and daughters. ²⁶And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran. ²⁷Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot. ²⁸And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees. ²⁹And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah. ³⁰But Sarai was barren; she had no child. ³¹And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. ³²And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran.¹

¹ BibleWorks 7, King James Version. The names of the Creator have been changed.

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From the very first time I read the story of the Tower of Babel I was overwhelmed with numerous questions. While the story of the Tower of Babel is possibly one of the most familiar and even most popular stories of the Bible, it is rarely treated as anything more than just a simple children's story or fairytale. To gloss over this narrative without addressing some of the significant challenges it presents is a great disservice to the Creator, the Torah, and oneself. Before we begin looking at the specific text and the numerous challenges it poses, let us first look at the historicity of the events and then at the historical context of the narrative itself.

I will be the first to admit that the epic battle of the wills and the Herculean ambitions of mankind presented in this story do make for good storytelling. It is the straightforward and simple elements of this narrative that have lent themselves to its reduction to a mere fairytale or fanciful children's story. The apparent simplicity of the narrative has caused many to conclude that the story either did not really happen or that the attempt to build a tower to the heavens was undertaken by an extremely ridiculous, ignorant, and primitive people. Before we begin, therefore, let me share just a little history to help substantiate the nature and historical actuality of this narrative.

One of the first details we are given in this story is the fact that the family of Noah migrated from the area around the ark to the plain of Shinar.

Genesis 11:1-2 And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. ²And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.

Here we are told that the people, all of a common ancestry, share a common language and speech. There is nothing surprising in this detail, given the fact that they are all of one family. It is in the plain of Shinar that this common family hatches the plan to build a tower that would reach to the heavens.

A second significant detail that is shared with us is the fact that they intend to build their tower out of brick instead of stone.

Genesis 11:3 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.

The expression "*they had brick for stone*" seems to imply that there was a lack of stone or other building materials, necessitating the substitution of brick. The fact that the people knew how to make bricks and temper them in fire indicates that they were intelligent people. To build any structure of substantial size would have required a great number of bricks. That these people knew how to train architects, utilize the resources around them, organize a labor force and a system of production, use levers and pulleys, and make fire-kilns, brick molds, and bricks demonstrates that this was an advanced and developed society. The fact that they were utilizing brick and not stone is also consistent with the area of Shinar. While there are many rocky and stony places in the Middle East, the plain of Shinar is not one of them.

We must remember that the events of the Tower of Babel took place in the period immediately following the flood. The plain of Shinar may well have been a valley filled in with silt and clay from the receding waters of the flood. The geography of the earth had been radically altered by the flood. Any available rock in this area would have been buried beneath layers of silt and clay. This geographical fact is substantiated by current archeology. We also know that the later people of this area continued to build "towers" of burnt brick and asphalt mortar. In most children's books and medieval paintings the Tower of Babel is depicted as something similar to the "Leaning Tower of Pisa," a round structure with straight or nearly straight sides. What is most likely meant by the word "tower,"² however, is a ziggurat or squared pyramid.

The reference is certainly to the ziggurat (Akk. Ziqquratu), the lofty, massive, solid brick, multistage temple tower that was the outstanding feature of most Mesopotamian cities and dominated their landscapes. The term is derived from the Akkadian verb zaqaru, meaning "to build high." This type of architecture seems first to have developed in Babylonia in the third millennium B.C.E. in the dynasty of Akkad (ca. 2360-2180).³

It is important that we understand the very purpose of these ziggurats in the cultic life of the people of Mesopotamia.

Its function, it is generally agreed, was to symbolize a mountain. The sacred mountain played an important role in most religions in ancient times. Rooted in the earth, with its head lost in the clouds, it was taken to be the meeting point of heaven and earth and, as such, the natural arena of divine activity. On its heights the gods were imagined to have their abode. Constituting the obvious channel of communication between the celestial and terrestrial spheres, the sacred mountain was looked upon as the center of the universe, the "navel of the earth."

Many of the ziggurat names reveal an association with the mountain motif. The ziggurat of Nippur was called "The House of the Mountain." At Asshur, there was "The House of the Mountain of the Universe." "The House of the Link between Heaven and Earth" was situated at Larsa. The most famous ziggurat of all, the one at Babylon, is the focus of the present narrative. It was known as the e-temen-an-ki, "The House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth." In the flat, alluvial plain of Lower Mesopotamia, the ziggurat constituted a man-made sacred mountain in miniature, the physical means by which man and god might enter into direct contact with one another.⁴

The idea that the top of this man-made mountain would "*reach unto heaven*" sounds preposterous to those who think of the abode of the Creator (heaven) as being beyond all human reach. But for most of the ancient peoples "the heavens" began at the clouds.

This expression is actually a cliché in Mesopotamian building inscriptions, particularly with reference to ziggurats. The Sumerian king, Gudea (c.a. 2140 B.C.E.), says of the temple Eninnu that "it lies in heaven." A text from Nippur addresses a tower "whose peak reaches the sky." Hammurabi (c.a. 1728-1686 B.C.E.) gave himself the epithet "raiser of the top of Eanna," and it is related of him that he built a temple tower "whose top is sky high." Esarhaddon (c.a. 680-669 B.C.E.) says that he "raised to heaven the head" of the temple of Asshur and that he "made high its top up to heaven." The phrase is most

² The Hebrew word is *migdal* (*mem, gimmel, dalet, lammed*).

³ JPS Torah Commentary, Genesis, Nahum M. Sarna, The Jewish Publication Society, Pg. 82

⁴ *Ibid.*

persistently used in respect of the temple of Marduk in Babylon, which was known as the esagila, meaning "The House of the Lifting Up of the Head."⁵

That man would meet with his *elohim* on the top of a mountain is certainly evident in the history of Israel.

Genesis 12:8 *And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto YHWH, and called upon the name of YHWH.*

Genesis 22:2 *And He said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.*

Exodus 3:1 *Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of Elohim, even to Horeb.*

Exodus 19:3 *And Moses went up unto Elohim, and YHWH called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel.*

2 Chronicles 3:1 *Then Solomon began to build the house of YHWH at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where YHWH appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.*

Mountains and "high places" have played a significant role in man's cultic practices from the beginning of time; thus, the idea of building a "mountain" with its top in the heavens is neither unusual nor fanciful.

Clearly the architecture of later Mesopotamian cultures hearkens back to this first, frustrated attempt to build "a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven." While the idea of building a tower to the heavens may sound fanciful to our modern ears, the fact is that to the ancient mind this ambition was not only possible but eventually commonplace. Given this archeological evidence, the story of the Tower of Babel becomes more than just a fairytale.

Another point to be recalled is the fact that this narrative, like that of creation, was not passed down to the children of Israel from one generation to the next but given directly to Moses by the Creator Himself. Once again, we must understand that this direct revelation of the history of the children of Israel is meant to be a corrective for the numerous oral traditions and practices that were passed down from generation to generation. This would, of course, include any traditions which, having remained from their polytheistic past, were still being practiced by the children of Israel. In this regard we should understand that the primary purpose of this revealed narrative is to explain the great diversity of languages, cultures, and religions that surround those who are called to enter into a covenant relationship with YHWH. Given that the opening chapters of the book of Genesis emphatically teach that all humanity has a common ancestry, our portion clearly addresses the question of how this linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity came to be.

Also present in this portion are the seeds of the calling of Israel from among this din of languages, cultures, and religions. Let me point out here the significance of the children of Israel understanding where the nations around them come from. Again, we must understand that the children of Israel learned these truths by direct revelation from the Creator, not from their forefathers. We must ask, therefore, what purpose all the genealogies explaining the existence of the nations serve if Israel is the chosen line. Is it

⁵ Ibid.

possible that the Creator went through all the difficulty of recording and relaying the genealogies of the nations for no other purpose than to create a background for the calling of Israel?

I believe that these opening stories and genealogies, demonstrating the common origin of all of humanity, were given not merely as background but to evoke empathy towards the whole of humankind. By affirming the commonality of the whole human race, including the chosen line of Israel, the Creator prevents any thought of “elitism” among the children of Israel. Regardless of which language or people group one comes from, the whole of mankind descends from a common ancestry and is, therefore, family. Within these details of the common ancestry of the whole human race, the people of Israel are reminded that the nations are their kinfolk. Therefore, with few exceptions,⁶ they are to fulfill their calling not for their own sake but for the sake of the nations, their extended family.

***Isaiah 42:6** I YHWH have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles.*

***Acts 13:47** For so hath YHWH commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldst be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.⁷*

From the very beginning of their history, the people of Israel are reminded that they are a part of the human race. Although our election from among all the nations blesses us with a unique honor, we must never forget that we have been called for responsibility, not for privilege. Israel's unique calling is for the sake of the salvation of the whole human race, not merely of itself as a representative remnant. Israel is the servant called to manifest YHWH Elohim in the world so that the whole world may know its Creator, Redeemer, Deliverer, and Savior.

In Yeshua's parable of the king who made a marriage feast for his son, we often focus upon the king as being YHWH, the son as being Yeshua, the guests who reject the invitation as being “the Jews,” and the guests who accept as being the Gentiles. What is not ever revealed is the identity of the servants.

***Matthew 22:1-14** And Yeshua answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said,²The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,³and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. ⁴Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. ⁵But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise:⁶and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. ⁷But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. ⁸Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. ⁹Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. ¹⁰So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. ¹¹And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment:¹²and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. ¹³Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.*

While I do not disagree with the traditional understanding of this parable, I would add that the servants referred to are the faithful of Israel who are calling both Jew and Gentile alike to repent and come into a covenant relationship with YHWH Elohim. Clearly this understanding of the calling upon Israel to reach

⁶ Deuteronomy 25:19

⁷ Isaiah 49:6

out to all humanity was evident in the life and teachings of Yeshua, who reached out to Samaritans,⁸ Syrophenicians,⁹ Romans,¹⁰ and many others. He sent his *talmidim*¹¹ to the ends of the earth with the wedding invitation.

Matthew 28:19-20 *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: ²⁰teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

Mark 16:15 *And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.*

By simultaneously revealing the common ancestry of the human race and Israel's origin as a unique nation among nations, YHWH reveals Israel's purpose as a servant of salvation to the whole world. We will look at this concept again later in the study. For now, however, let us simply understand the motive of the Creator in revealing the origin of all humanity and the origin of Israel at the same time.

With this foundation laid, let us now turn our attention to the many challenging questions concerning the wonderful story of the Tower of Babel.

The story begins by telling us that the whole earth was of one language and one speech.

Genesis 11:1 *And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.*

While the expression “*the whole earth*” may evoke images of billions of people from all around the world speaking English, Spanish, or Hebrew, this is simply NOT the case. First of all, we do not know what the original language was. C. F. Keil writes:

With the disappearance of unity the one original language was lost, so that neither in the Hebrew nor in any other language of history has enough been preserved to enable us to form the least conception of its character. The primitive language is extinct, buried in the materials of the languages of the nations, to rise again one day to eternal life in the glorified form of “kainai glossai” [common tongue] intelligible to all the redeemed and extinguished by the power of grace. A type of pledge of this hope was given in the gift of tongues in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church on the first Christian day of Pentecost, when the Apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke with other or new tongues of “the wonderful works of God” so that the people of every nation under heaven understood in their own language (Acts 2:1-11).¹²

While we may indeed trace many of the world's languages and writing systems back to the Ancient Hebrew, we know too much to authentically claim that this Ancient Hebrew was, in fact, the first language. If this were the case, there would have been no need for YHWH to promise to restore a pure language to His people in the future.

Zephaniah 3:9 *For then will I turn to the people a **pure language**, that they may all call upon the name of YHWH, to serve Him with one consent.*

⁸ Luke 17:11-19

⁹ Mark 7:25-30

¹⁰ Matthew 8:5-13

¹¹ *Talmidim* is Hebrew for “disciples.”

¹² Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament, Hendrickson Publishers, Pg. 111

While the people spoke one language, there is no way of knowing what that language was. What is important for our study is to understand that all the people could communicate readily with one another. They spoke in the same manner and understood what was being communicated. The book of Acts adds the further detail that these people were not only of one language but also of one blood.

***Acts 17:26** And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.*

We should understand that it was not many nations; it was one family descended from one man. A little later in the story it is interesting to note that YHWH refers to these people as the “*sons of Adam*,” alluding to their common ancestry.

***Genesis 11:5** And YHWH came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men (b'ney Adam) builded.*

The Torah tells us that it was in the time of Peleg that the earth was divided.

***Genesis 10:25** And unto Eber were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg; for in his days was the earth divided; and his brother's name was Joktan.*

Peleg was only the sixth generation from Noah, who was still alive at the time of this division of the nations. C.F. Keil again writes:

With regard to the date of the event, we find from v. 10 that the division of the human race occurred in the days of Peleg, who was born 100 years after the flood. In 150 or 180 years, with a rapid succession of births, the descendants of the three sons of Noah, who were already 100 years old and married at the time of the flood, might have become quite numerous enough to proceed to the erection of such a building. If we reckon, for example, only four male and four female births as the average number to each marriage, since it is evident from ch. 11:12ff. that children were born as early as the 30th or 35th year of their parent's age, the sixth generation would be born by 150 years after the flood, and the human race would number 12,288 males and as many females. Consequently there would be at least about 30,000 people in the world at this time.¹³

We may recall that between 2.5 and 3 million Israelites departed from Egypt during the Exodus. Let us compare these numbers with those of the “men of war” among the tribes of Israel at the time of the first census in the wilderness.¹⁴

- Reuben 46,500
- Simeon 59,300
- Gad 45,650
- Judah 74,600
- Issachar 54,400
- Zebulun 57,400
- Ephraim 40,500
- Manasseh 32,200
- Benjamin 35,400
- Dan 62,700
- Asher 41,500

¹³ Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament, Hendrickson Publishers, Pg. 112

¹⁴ Numbers 1:19-46

- Naphtali 53,400
- TOTAL 603,550

So we see that the whole population of the earth at the time of the Tower of Babel was smaller than the number of soldiers from the smallest tribe of Israel. When we read the phrase “*the whole earth*,” we must understand that we are talking not about nations but about a single family or tribe. It should not seem strange, therefore, that all 30,000 people spoke the same language. What is essential for us to understand is the small amount of people that we are talking about in this story. If the number 30,000 is at all accurate, then we may understand why they would all want to stay in close proximity to one another and not spread out. Thirty thousand people is the population of a small city. It should not seem unusual that this large, ever-growing family would desire to live near one another and develop a city with an economy to provide for themselves. According to the Torah this is exactly what the descendants of Noah desired to do. They wanted to make three things: a city, a tower, and a name for themselves.

Genesis 11:3-4 *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. ⁴And 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.*

While it is quite understandable that people living together would desire to develop a city to live in, what is not clear is why they feared being scattered. Here we must ask two significant questions. Who wanted to or was threatening to scatter this people, and how would building a city and a tower and making a name for themselves prevent them from being scattered? A possible answer to this question has already been hinted at in the previous chapter.

Genesis 10:8-10 *And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. ⁹He was a mighty hunter before YHWH: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before YHWH. ¹⁰And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.*

While Nimrod is often credited with orchestrating and building the Tower of Babel, I need to point out that there is no such credit given him in the Torah. What is stated is that Nimrod was a mighty one in the earth, that he was a mighty hunter in the face of YHWH, and that his kingdom began in Babel. While some may read these descriptions as positive exaltations of Nimrod, I believe that they are negative statements. As we have already stated above, all 30,000 people were of one family. Where, then, did Nimrod get the right and authority to become king? Just as in the earlier story of the days of Noah,¹⁵ I believe Nimrod was a self-aggrandizing tyrant before YHWH. Clearly Nimrod was building a “kingdom” for himself.

I would suggest that the reason the people wanted to build a city and a tower and make a name for themselves was to protect themselves from Nimrod and his ilk. Is it possible that the people were afraid to spread out over the earth for fear that Nimrod would conquer them and subject them to slavery and a life of oppression? A city could easily be fortified against an aggressor, while a tower, especially one built on a plain, could be used for a watchtower and for high ground in battle. Likewise, a name or reputation as a strong, well-fortified people could provide a deterrent to would-be attackers. A people that could build a “mountain” to heaven would certainly be respected by an enemy. I suggest, therefore, that one possible answer to these questions is a response to Nimrod’s tyranny. If this possibility is correct, then we may understand that the fear of the people shows the weakness of their faith in the Creator. The sons of Adam would rather rely on themselves than on the power of the Sovereign One to protect and provide for them. This failure of faith led to a rebellious stance against the Creator’s direct command.

¹⁵ See my commentary Y1 P4 6008 on Genesis 6:1ff.

Genesis 9:1 *And Elohim blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.*

The next question we must address is: “What was so egregious about the people’s actions that it evoked such a strong response from the Creator?”

Genesis 11:5-8 *And YHWH came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. ⁶And YHWH 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. ⁷Go to, let Us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. ⁸So YHWH scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.*

The Creator’s response seems a bit puzzling at first. The emphasis placed upon the fact that the people are one and that their language is one would seem at first to be the cause of the Creator’s response. But is this truly the cause of the provocation? We should remember that all of these people came from one family, Noah and his sons. The eight souls who came off of the ark are those whom YHWH selected to rescue the human race. That all people come from the same source is the direct consequence of the Creator’s choice; therefore, the oneness of the language and people can hardly be the reason for the Holy One’s intervention. We may also note here that unity of people and language is a promised, prayed-for, and hoped-for reality in the Messianic Kingdom and the world to come.

Matthew 19:4-6 *And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female, ⁵and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall **be one** flesh? ⁶Wherefore they are no more twain, but **one** flesh. What therefore Elohim hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*

John 10:30 *I and my Father are **one**.*

John 17:11 *And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given me, that they may be **one**, as we are.*

John 17:21-23 *That they all may be **one**; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be **one** in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me. ²²And the glory which Thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be **one**, even as we are **one**: ²³I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in **one**; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved me.*

Acts 1:14 *These all continued with **one accord** in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Yeshua, and with his brethren.*

Acts 2:1 *And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with **one accord in one place**.*

Acts 4:24 *And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to Elohim with **one accord**, and said, Lord, Thou art Elohim, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is.*

Acts 4:32 *And the multitude of them that believed were of **one heart** and of **one soul**: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had **all things common**.*

Romans 12:5 So we, being many, are **one body** in Messiah, and every one **members one of another**.

Romans 15:6 That ye may with **one mind** and **one mouth** glorify Elohim, even the Father of our Lord Yeshua Messiah.

1 Corinthians 10:17 For we being many are **one bread**, and **one body**: for we are all partakers of that one bread.

Colossians 3:15 And let the peace of Elohim rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in **one body**; and be ye thankful.

Zephaniah 3:9 For then will I turn to the people **a pure language**, that they may all call upon the name of YHWH, to serve Him with **one consent**.

If unity is the goal and fruit of the Spirit of Messiah, then clearly the unity of the people alone could not be the cause of the Creator's intervention. The answer, therefore, must be found not in the people's unity, but in their intention and ability. This is clearly what is stated in the Creator's response.

Genesis 11:6 And this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

Building a city and a tower and establishing a name for themselves demonstrate that the sons of Adam are relying upon themselves – upon their own power, wisdom, understanding, knowledge, reason, flesh, and willpower – to save themselves, provide for themselves, protect themselves, and glorify themselves. In other words, once they have succeeded in marshalling their resources to accomplish the tasks of building the city and the tower and making a name for themselves, they will continue to rely more readily and exclusively upon their own industry, thus shunning the very one who created them, sustained them, and blessed them. Truly the people are demonstrating that they are indeed sons of Adam, who earlier in the Garden of Eden likewise shunned reliance upon the revelation knowledge of YHWH and chose, instead, the path of self-reliance. By eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam sought to become his own *elohim* (authority) and began living by the mixture of revelation knowledge and knowledge gained through his own senses, experiences, and reasoning.¹⁶ By eating of the mixed seed (word), Adam brought pollution and corruption into the world. This pollution ultimately led to the flood. It is interesting that this defilement is again alluded to in YHWH'S response to the intention of the sons of Adam.

Genesis 11:6 And this they **begin** to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

The Hebrew word translated as "begin" has the same root as the word "began" used in the story of Noah planting his vineyard.

Genesis 9:20 And Noah **began** to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard.

As we stated last week, the root of the Hebrew words translated here as "begin" and "began" is the word *chalal* (*chet, lammed, lammed*), which means to "pierce," "wound," or "defile oneself." The use of this word in our portion as connected with the title "sons of Adam" seems to indicate the same pollution of revelation knowledge with human reasoning. We may remember that all religion comes from such defilement. We have also already stated that the purpose of building the ziggurat was to erect a temple to reach the meeting point of heaven and earth, the natural arena of divine activity. The question is: "A temple to what?"

¹⁶ See my commentary Y1 P2 6008 Bereshit 2:4-3:24.

The Torah tells us that the sons of Adam wanted to make a name for themselves. By building this tower, the sons of Adam ultimately built a monument to their own resourcefulness. It is not only a celebration of human resourcefulness and industry but also the beginning of an idolatrous religion of self-worship. It should not surprise us that the *elohim* of later religions and mythologies stemming from this event would predominantly take the shape of human beings. Instead of recognizing that man was created to be the bearer of the image of Elohim, the sons of Adam began forming their *elohim* in their own human image. By building their tower to the heavens, the sons of Adam were not only seeking to reach Elohim but also to ultimately rule Him or replace Him. This elevation and reliance upon human industry and resources is witnessed even in the children of Israel.

Isaiah 30:1-2 *Woe to the rebellious children, saith YHWH, that take counsel, but not of Me; and that cover with a covering, but not of My Spirit, that they may add sin to sin:² that walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at My mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt!*

Isaiah 31:1 *Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek YHWH!*

Isaiah 31:3 *Now the Egyptians are men, and not Elohim; and their horses flesh, and not spirit. When YHWH shall stretch out His hand, both he that helpeth shall fall, and he that is holpen shall fall down, and they all shall fail together.*

Throughout the history of Israel we witness the children of Israel turning to the strength of man instead of to the power of the Holy One. In many ways this trait is still evident in the land of Israel today.

We should note in this story that it is YHWH, the name associated with the Creator's attributes of mercy and deliverance, which is used. The name Elohim, which is associated with the Creator's attributes of sovereignty, righteousness, and judgment, is not used. This should tell us that the intention of the Creator is not one of strict justice but of deliverance and mercy. The confusion of the languages and the scattering of the people are not acts of revenge or anger. Instead, the Creator is preventing man from continuing along a path that will galvanize the hearts of the sons of Adam in an oppositional relationship. We should, therefore, understand this intervention in the spirit of a loving father chastising and correcting a wayward son.

Deuteronomy 8:5 *Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so YHWH thy Elohim chasteneth thee.*

Proverbs 13:24 *He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.*

Hebrews 12:6 *For whom YHWH loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.*

Hebrews 12:7 *If ye endure chastening, Elohim dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?*

Such was the case when YHWH expelled Adam and Chava from the garden of Eden and prevented them from eating of the Tree of Life in their fallen state. Had Adam and Chava eaten of the Tree of Life, they would have remained eternally at enmity with the Creator, having no need to return to Him. By the reality of the death sentence upon Adam and his descendants, the only hope the sons of Adam had to gain eternal life was to turn to the righteous judge and seek His mercy. Had the Creator not confused the languages and interceded at the Tower of Babel, the sons of Adam would have likewise relied solely upon their own resources to overcome everything, including sin and death. This self-directed effort would

ultimately have lead to alienation from the Creator and frustration on the part of man in the effort to overcome the fall of Adam.

By confusing their speech, the Creator separates man from man, nation from nation, and culture from culture. Given the mixed and sinful nature of man, this division has prevented the sons of Adam from ever uniting. Instead, like Nimrod, the sons of Adam seek to compete, conquer, and oppress one another in the attempt to make a name for themselves. We must again raise the puzzling question of unity. We have demonstrated above that the Creator both desires and promises to restore unity to the sons of Adam; therefore, we must ask why YHWH created disunity by the confusion of languages.

It is important that we understand that “unity” is not the issue. What is at issue is the intention of the heart. The proponents of the One World Government and One World Religion also desire unity (in many ways this is the reincarnation of the Tower of Babel). As the sons of Elohim, our unity is to be in the Sovereign One, not in our own resources, efforts, common causes, governments, traditions, or religious systems. Our unity is in submitting to being a member of the Body of Messiah, dedicated to doing the will of the Sovereign One with our whole heart, mind, and being.

In His merciful manner YHWH humbles the haughtiness of man by frustrating his ability to accomplish his goal without the help of YHWH. We should not miss the great ironies presented in this text. The sons of Adam sought to make a name for themselves, and so they have, although not what they had intended. The name Bab-EL in Mesopotamian inscriptions is interpreted as “the Gate of EL,”¹⁷ but here we see the name Babel meaning “babble,” as in “gibberish” or “nonsense.” Likewise, while the purpose of man was to make a great name for himself by building a tower that would reach to the throne of the Sovereign One,¹⁸ note that the Creator had to “come down” to even see what the sons of Adam were doing. They had hoped to make a great name for themselves by completing this Herculean endeavor, but instead, they were mocked for their failed ambition.

Luke 14:28-29 For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? ²⁹Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him.

The sons of Adam, relying upon their own industry and reason, had hoped to protect themselves from being scattered, yet they found themselves being profoundly scattered and divided one from another. Here we see the Sovereign’s response is indeed measure for measure. Again, however, we should understand this as mercy, not punishment. This mercy may be most evident in the genealogy that follows the narrative of the Tower of Babel. Let us now turn our attention to the rest of the portion.

While the genealogy of Chapter 10¹⁹ explains the existence of so many people, the story of the Tower of Babel explains how these people of common ancestry developed into different people groups with different languages and cultures. But what we see in the repeat of a specific portion of this genealogy is the origin of a particular people – the people of Israel. We should also not miss the great similarities between the genealogy of Chapter 5, from Adam to Shem, and that of Chapter 11, from Shem to Abraham. In both of these genealogies, as contrasted with that of chapter 10, the age of the parent is given at the time of conceiving a son of name, and the son’s name is given, followed by the announcement that other sons and daughters followed. The difference between the genealogies of chapters 5 and 11 is the absence in chapter 11 of the pronouncement of death following the announcement of other children. The lack of this detail heightens the sense of hope. I would go so far as to suggest that the absence of death being mentioned in the genealogy of Shem to Abraham is to teach us that it is, in fact, through this line that sin will be overcome and life will be restored.

¹⁷ JPS Torah Commentary, Genesis, Nahum M. Sarna, Jewish Publication Society, Pg. 84

¹⁸ Matthew 5:34

¹⁹ The genealogies appear on the last page of this study for easy comparison.

The similarity of these two genealogies also seems to indicate a similarity of pattern in the events and lives of those listed.

Noah is the tenth generation from Adam.

Abraham is the tenth generation from Shem.

Genesis 1:28 – Adam is commanded to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

Genesis 9:1 – Noah and his sons are instructed to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

Genesis 3 – Adam falls and curses his descendants.

Genesis 9 – Noah falls and curses his descendants.

Genesis 6 – The descendants of Adam descend into rebellion.

Genesis 11 – The descendants of Noah descend into rebellion.

Genesis 7 – The Creator intervenes to stop mankind.

Genesis 11 – The Creator intervenes to stop mankind.

Genesis 6 – The Creator picks one man, one line, to rescue the human race.

Genesis 11 – The Creator picks one man, one line, to rescue the human race.

Within this pattern we see an apparent cycle of thought. In the stories from Adam to Noah and from Shem to Abraham it seems as though the cycle is simply repeating itself. While at first they may appear to be the same, in truth, there are differences. One significant difference has to do with the ages at which people die. Prior to the flood it was not uncommon for people to live for 800-900 years. After the flood we see the age of death diminishing. This would seem to indicate that man's condition is worsening with each revolution of the cycle. We should also note, however, that the age at which people give birth is also changing to accommodate the early deaths. Thus, we may see this as signaling that time is not a circle but an ever-shortening spiral.

What is important to understand in these genealogies and their comparisons is the calling upon the children of Israel. Just as Noah and his descendants were to be the means of rescuing the human race through the judgment of the flood, so too are the descendants of Shem through Abraham to be the means of rescuing the whole human race. Again, we see that there is to be no elitism in this calling. We witnessed earlier that Shem is a descendant of Noah, who is descended from Adam. The same is true for every other people, culture, and tongue on the face of the whole earth. We should never forget our lineage. It is interesting that while the Gospel of Matthew traces the heritage of Yeshua back to Abraham, the Gospel of Luke takes his genealogy all the way back to Adam.

We too must remember where we came from. We too must learn to look at every human being as a brother or sister. We must never become boastful of our knowledge of Yeshua or the Torah. What YHWH has endowed us with, revealed to us, and called us for is to be a humble witness to our brothers and sisters. We are to be a light to the NATIONS; therefore, the yoke of Torah that we bear is not for our own salvation but for that of the nations. We should never forget that we too came from such a background. Our heritage also is from among the nations of idol worshippers. Joshua boldly informs us that Abraham's father Terah was an idol worshipper.

Joshua 24:2 And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith YHWH Elohim of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other elohim.

Our pagan past is revealed even in the very names of our ancestors. Nahum M. Sarna writes,

Sarai—The name, changed to Sarah in 17:15, means “princess” in Hebrew but “queen” if based on Akkadian sharratu, a term used for the female consort of the moon-god Sin, the principal god of Ur.²⁰

Milcah—The name, as vocalized, is a variant form of Malcah, “queen.” Akkadian Malkatu is a title of the goddess Ishtar, who was known as the “Queen of Heaven,” daughter of the moon-god Sin. Nahor married his niece, the orphaned daughter of his departed brother Haran. The gand-daughter of this marriage was Rebekah, who became the wife of Abraham’s son Isaac, as told in 24:24, 27.²¹

To fulfill our calling we must never lose sight of our responsibility to the people of the earth, our brothers and sisters. While we struggle to overcome the great diversity of cultures, customs, and languages, we should never forget our common ancestry. We must never arrogantly seek to elevate ourselves over others because of what the Creator has blessed us with. Instead, we must humbly walk out our faith before our brothers and sisters as a light to the nations. Nor should we lose sight of the fact that our unity is to be in Messiah, not in human traditions, customs, cultures, or industry. We must never confuse uniformity of human tradition with unity in Messiah. To elevate our particular customs, practices, and even languages above those of others is nothing more than trying to make a name for ourselves by building a Tower of Babel!

²⁰ JPS The Torah Commentary, Genesis, Nahum M. Sarna, Jewish Publication Society, Pg. 87

²¹ JPS The Torah Commentary, Genesis, Nahum M. Sarna, Jewish Publication Society, Pg. 87

Genesis 5:1-32 This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that Elohim created man, in the likeness of Elohim made He him; ²male and female created He them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created. ³And Adam **lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat** a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth: ⁴and the days of Adam **after he had begotten** Seth were eight hundred years: and **he begat sons and daughters:** ⁵and all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: **and he died.** ⁶And Seth lived an hundred and five years, and begat Enos: ⁷and Seth lived after he begat Enos eight hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters: ⁸and all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years: and he died. ⁹And Enos lived ninety years, and begat Cainan: ¹⁰and Enos lived after he begat Cainan eight hundred and fifteen years, and begat sons and daughters: ¹¹and all the days of Enos were nine hundred and five years: and he died. ¹²And Cainan lived seventy years, and begat Mahalaleel: ¹³and Cainan lived after he begat Mahalaleel eight hundred and forty years, and begat sons and daughters: ¹⁴and all the days of Cainan were nine hundred and ten years: and he died. ¹⁵And Mahalaleel lived sixty and five years, and begat Jared: ¹⁶and Mahalaleel lived after he begat Jared eight hundred and thirty years, and begat sons and daughters: ¹⁷and all the days of Mahalaleel were eight hundred ninety and five years: and he died. ¹⁸And Jared lived an hundred sixty and two years, and he begat Enoch: ¹⁹and Jared lived after he begat Enoch eight hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: ²⁰and all the days of Jared were nine hundred sixty and two years: and he died. ²¹And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah: ²²and Enoch walked with Elohim after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: ²³and all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: ²⁴and Enoch walked with Elohim: and he was not; for Elohim took him. ²⁵And Methuselah lived an hundred eighty and seven years, and begat Lamech: ²⁶and Methuselah lived after he begat Lamech seven hundred eighty and two years, and begat sons and daughters: ²⁷and all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine years: and he died. ²⁸And Lamech lived an hundred eighty and two years, and begat a son: ²⁹and he called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which YHWH hath cursed. ³⁰And Lamech lived after he begat Noah five hundred ninety and five years, and begat sons and daughters: ³¹and all the days of Lamech were seven hundred seventy and seven years: and he died. ³²And Noah was five hundred years old: and Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Genesis 11:10-32 These are the generations of Shem: Shem was **an hundred years old, and begat** Arphaxad two years after the flood: ¹¹and Shem lived **after he begat** Arphaxad five hundred years, and **begat sons and daughters.** ¹²And Arphaxad **lived five and thirty years, and begat** Salah: ¹³and Arphaxad lived **after he begat** Salah four hundred and three years, and begat **sons and daughters.** ¹⁴And Salah lived thirty years, and begat Eber: ¹⁵and Salah lived after he begat Eber four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters. ¹⁶And Eber lived four and thirty years, and begat Peleg: ¹⁷and Eber lived after he begat Peleg four hundred and thirty years, and begat sons and daughters. ¹⁸And Peleg lived thirty years, and begat Reu: ¹⁹and Peleg lived after he begat Reu two hundred and nine years, and begat sons and daughters. ²⁰And Reu lived two and thirty years, and begat Serug: ²¹and Reu lived after he begat Serug two hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters. ²²And Serug lived thirty years, and begat Nahor: ²³and Serug lived after he begat Nahor two hundred years, and begat sons and daughters. ²⁴And Nahor lived nine and twenty years, and begat Terah: ²⁵and Nahor lived after he begat Terah an hundred and nineteen years, and begat sons and daughters. ²⁶And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran. ²⁷Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot. ²⁸And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees. ²⁹And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah. ³⁰But Sarai was barren; she had no child. ³¹And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. ³²And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran.

Genesis 10:21-31 Unto Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the brother of Japheth the elder, even to him were children born. ²²The children of Shem; Elam, and Asshur, and Arphaxad, and Lud, and Aram. ²³And the children of Aram; Uz, and Hul, and Gether, and Mash. ²⁴And Arphaxad begat Salah; and Salah begat Eber. ²⁵And unto Eber were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg; for in his days was the earth divided; and his brother's name was Joktan. ²⁶And Joktan begat Almodad, and Sheleph, and Hazarmaveth, and Jerah, ²⁷and Hadoram, and Uzal, and Diklah, ²⁸and Obal, and Abimael, and Sheba, ²⁹and Ophir, and Havilah, and Jobab: all these were the sons of Joktan. ³⁰And their dwelling was from Mesha, as thou goest unto Sephar a mount of the east. ³¹These are the sons of Shem, after their families, after their tongues, in their lands, after their nations.

Genesis 11:10-26 These are the generations of Shem: Shem was an hundred years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood: ¹¹and Shem lived after he begat Arphaxad five hundred years, and begat sons and daughters. ¹²And Arphaxad lived five and thirty years, and begat Salah: ¹³and Arphaxad lived after he begat Salah four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters. ¹⁴And Salah lived thirty years, and begat Eber: ¹⁵and Salah lived after he begat Eber four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters. ¹⁶And Eber lived four and thirty years, and begat Peleg: ¹⁷and Eber lived after he begat Peleg four hundred and thirty years, and begat sons and daughters. ¹⁸And Peleg lived thirty years, and begat Reu: ¹⁹and Peleg lived after he begat Reu two hundred and nine years, and begat sons and daughters. ²⁰And Reu lived two and thirty years, and begat Serug: ²¹and Reu lived after he begat Serug two hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters. ²²And Serug lived thirty years, and begat Nahor: ²³and Serug lived after he begat Nahor two hundred years, and begat sons and daughters. ²⁴And Nahor lived nine and twenty years, and begat Terah: ²⁵and Nahor lived after he begat Terah an hundred and nineteen years, and begat sons and daughters. ²⁶And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

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