

JANUARY 4

Genesis 10 & 11

Today is all about genealogies. Yeah baby. I am sure that this is your favorite part of the Bible. If you have speed reading skills, you probably applied them to today's reading as well as to the genealogies of Genesis 5.

A straight forward reading of the genealogical material in chapter 5 and other Old Testament passages would lead us to conclude that a relatively short period of time (1656 years, to be exact) passed between the creation of the earth and the flood. (In fact, a 17th century Irish churchman named Bishop Usher took all of the Old Testament material and calculated that the earth was created in the year 4004 BC. That is pretty ridiculous! One of his students, Dr. John Lightfoot, even concluded -- I have no idea how -- that the creative act took place at about 9 o'clock in the morning on the 9th day of October in the year 4004 BC! (Coincidentally, that was the same day and time that the school year began at the school in which the good Bishop taught!) While I suppose that all of this is possible, you need to realize that the main job of the Scripture writers was not date-fixing, and that there are some curious 'gaps' in other Old Testament chronologies that make us pretty shaky when we are trying to fix dates. Beyond this, the term for 'son of' can also be understood as 'descendant of' as in Matthew 1:1 - *Jesus, the son of David, the son of Abraham*. There were 1000 years between each of these generations, yet Biblical writers legitimately used 'son of' to designate the relationship. Perhaps the same is true in Genesis genealogies.

The Bible certainly does not mislead us about times and dates, but it is not written in such a way as to make it easy for us to always be able to pinpoint them. If this subject interests you, you will want to do some more reading on the chronologies of the Old Testament and the peculiar gaps that do exist. One place you might want to begin your study would be in the little book called Genesis in Space and Time written by Francis Schaeffer. There are some very short but good explanations given in that book.

Genesis is the Greek word for "beginnings." So the book of Genesis is literally "the Book of Beginnings." Its first eleven chapters, that comprise the first of its two major divisions, are given over to telling us about the beginning of our universe and the human race. Moses, whose hand we believe God used to produce this remarkable book, is not attempting to give us a detailed scientific account of all that occurred. In fact, he absolutely ignores a great many questions upon which our inquisitive 21st century minds would love to speculate. He doesn't even deign to tell us when this occurred, and while there are some good reasons for questioning the prevailing scientific opinion that the earth is billions and billions of years old, it would be wrong for us to get hung up on that debate in this study. What the writer of Holy Scripture is wanting to do in the first eleven chapters of this "Book of Beginnings" is to give us an overview in very broad brush strokes of how everything began and how man came into being, and what happened to create the

fracture of relationship between humanity and God that so affects the life of every man, woman, and child upon the earth.

Dr. William Albright, one of the greatest figures in the field of archeology in the 20th century, wrote: "It stands absolutely alone in ancient literature without a remote parallel even among the Greeks...(it) shows such remarkably modern understanding of the ethnic and linguistic situation in the modern world, in spite of all its complexity, that scholars never fail to be impressed with the author's knowledge of the subject." (1. W.F. Albright; Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands; New York, NY; Funk and Wagnalls; 1955; p. 70.)

The names in chapter 10, many of which were not otherwise known until recently, are now nearly all known from other ancient documents. Little bits of history, long forgotten except by the writer of the Bible, are now confirmed by archaeological discoveries in the Near East. One example of this is the fact that Nineveh was established just as Genesis 10:1 says, by the rulers of Babylon. That had long since been forgotten. Only recently has it been reestablished and confirmed by extra-Biblical literature.

From where did the different nations and ethnic groups come? Only the Bible among all of the ancient records of the world gives us a credible historical answer.

After you did your speed-reading in chapter 10, I am sure you slowed up a bit to read about the fourth and final big event in the first section of Genesis, the story of the Tower of Babel as told in Genesis 11.

This event also finds remembrance in the ancient tablets unearthed in archaeological digs in Sumerian sites. One translated tablet carries this inscription: "The erection of this tower highly offended all the gods. In a night they threw down what men had built and impeded their progress. They were scattered abroad and their speech was strange."

When Noah and his sons emerged from the Ark, God's first command to them was a restatement of what he had first said to Adam and Eve: "*Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth.*" But almost before we know what is happening, the descendants of the flood survivors are saying, "We don't want to do that. In fact, let's build a city here with a great tower - a monument to our grandeur and our greatness. We'll form a society that we want on our terms so that we do not have to be dependent upon God or anyone else." What a crass statement of human independence; an attempt to be autonomous from God - humanism in the extreme!

God's response to that declaration of independence is recorded in chapter 11, verse 7, "*Let US go down,*" He says, (like the note we made at Genesis 1:26, this is probably a reflection of the tri-unity of God, a communication within the Godhead), "*and confuse their language.*"

What God is telling us here is that the most basic difference between people is not the color of their skin or their race, or the nation they represent. What the Bible is telling us is that language is the key to the divisions among mankind.

Even more importantly, and we must not fail to note it, the division between other people here is the result of sin. Think for a moment. All of the relational divisions we have seen in Genesis - between God and man, between Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Cain's line and Seth's line, man and nature, and even between nature and nature, are now the divisions between nations with linguistic, cultural, and racial differences. All of these divisions are rooted in the same source, the sin of man. Sin always divides. Sin always creates adversarial relationships. Sin always leads to confusion. Sin always introduces hostility in relationships. No wonder sin is such a terrible thing.

The rest of Genesis 11 contains yet another genealogical list - the generations of Shem, whose descendant Abraham will dominate the rest of the Book of Genesis and in fact, the rest of the Old Testament. The descendants of Shem are later known as the Shemites or Semites and the Semitic people are still known by that name today. (Unfortunately, in the U.S., the term is best known by the oft-used reference of anti-semitism.

Congratulations! You have finished now the first major division of the Book of Genesis and you will remember that it contains four major events: the Creation, the Fall, the Flood, and Babel. The most significant characters introduced to us in these eleven chapters - God Himself; Adam and Eve in the Garden; Cain and Abel, the brothers; Seth, the son born to replace the murdered Abel, and his godly descendants. In the descendants of Seth, we noted particularly Enoch, the prophet; Methuselah, his son; and then Noah, who found grace or favor in the eyes of the Lord; his sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth; and then Terah at the very end of chapter 11 who becomes the father of Abram.

This is Mark Ashton reminding you that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God and is your best weapon in defeating your enemy. Peace be with you.