

# The Book of Genesis

## Lesson 12

### *Chapter 11*

Chapter 10 lists the descendants of Japheth, Ham and Shem who were born after the flood to the sons of Joktan, a descendant of Shem. Joktan's older brother was Peleg and the next story in Genesis occurs during his life and most likely in the year of his birth.

After the people came off the ark, the LORD instructed Shem, Ham and Japheth to multiply and populate the earth; however, instead of moving apart to follow the LORD's instruction, they stayed together through three generations of Japheth, five generations of Ham and six generations of Shem. Living together, all the generations of all the families moved as one family down the Tigris River, stopping to establish villages along the way with Nineveh the most notable one. As they moved, the entire family abandoned the village to establish a new one further down the Tigris. Leaving the area south of the Mountains of Ararat, the family had traveled about 600 miles down the Tigris River to where the Euphrates River flows within 20 miles of the Tigris in what is known today as the Tigris/Euphrates Basin. The whole family crossed the basin and established a village on the Euphrates side that would assume the name Babel because of the next event in the Genesis story. It will become the great city of Babylon that the Bible will speak of throughout its pages even into the book of Revelation.

#### **Same Language**

**Genesis 11:1 Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words.**

About 98 years after the flood, the family was still speaking the same language used before the flood. Was there something wrong with speaking the same language? No. When the Scripture makes a distinction in the sentence, there is a reason. It says they "used the same language and the same words." What is the difference between the "same language" and the "same words"? Here is an example. Americans and British speak the same language; however, many of our words are used with different definitions. Not so with Noah's descendants; not only did they speak the same language; every word had one meaning. This passage signals that the whole family was moving in unison with its goals, desires, minds, thoughts and speech.

What language did they speak? Most likely it was the most ancient form of Hebrew. Why was it called Hebrew? It was the language that remained constant from before the flood and after the Tower of Babel with the descendants of Eber (Heber) for which the Hebrews would be named.

#### **City on the Plain in Shinar**

**Genesis 11:2 And it came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.<sup>3</sup> And they said to one another, "Come, let us make**

**bricks and burn *them* thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar.**

Traveling southeast with the flow of the Tigris River, the tightly held family of Noah reached the plain in Shinar. Crossing from the Tigris to the Euphrates, the family decided to create a new village at the edge of Shinar. Shinar was not the name of the place at that time; it was the name given to the area after the Tower of Babel event mentioned in this passage.

Although sand and clay were in abundance in the area, it was conspicuously void of stones for building. In order to build buildings, bricks were needed, so the family fired the bricks in the ovens much like bricks are prepared for homes today. How did they know they could fire the clay and sand and turn it into a hardened product? Thus far, the Scripture has not indicated that they knew how to fire bricks prior to this event; nevertheless, it seems reasonable that the process was used prior to the flood. It was most likely that the same process was already known for firing pottery with the discovery of one product leading to the creation of the other; however, we do not know which came first.

Tar was readily available in the area in the tar pits. Tar was used by Noah to waterproof the ark inside and out and, in this case, they used tar as mortar between the bricks of the buildings that they were erecting.

## **Tower to the Heavens**

**Genesis 11:4 And they said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *will reach* into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name; lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."**

By the time they arrived at the place that would later be called Babel, the family had grown and according to Genesis 10, Nimrod had become the leader of the family and it was his intent to build a kingdom.

Genesis 10:<sup>8</sup> Now Cush became the father of Nimrod; he became a mighty one on the earth. <sup>9</sup> He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a 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.

Even though Nimrod was the leader, according to the last part of this chapter, all of the patriarchs of the family, including Noah, Shem, Arpachshad, and Shelah were still alive as well as Ham and Japheth and their heirs down to the third and fourth generations. According to the genealogy of Genesis 10, forty-four males were alive at the time Peleg was born. The start of

building the tower of Babel probably occurred prior to the year of his birth and the LORD allowed the building to continue for a while.

Nimrod wanted the top of the tower to be in the heavens. A literal translation says in **Genesis 11:4** “And they say, ‘Give help, let us build for ourselves a city and tower, and its head in the heavens, and make for ourselves a name, lest we be scattered over the face of all the earth.’” The New American Standard that we use today says “**and a tower whose top will reach into heaven.**”

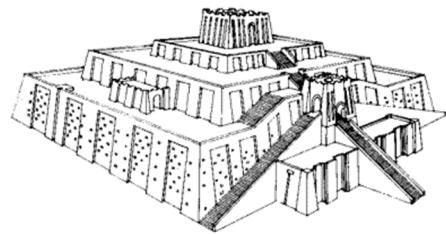
Obviously, their intent was to build the building with the top as high as possible. To do so, the structure would be built in layers as seen in the example provided. The task they were attempting was daunting. Every brick would be fired in a kiln and set in place. The base would need to be large and strong. The most ancient ziggurats known to man are found in this region of the world; however, only fragments of them exist today. An example of the ziggurat was discovered in Ur and in the past century it was restored. These structures were not only the centers of worship but also the place of civic events. Structures such as these were to be built by ambitious tribes throughout the world with the best surviving examples in Egypt and Mexico.

The purpose of the tower was to “**make for ourselves a name.**” The family was growing and it was the plan of Nimrod to make this tower a lasting impression on the people who built it. Every generation would see the tower and remember Nimrod.

The passage goes on to say “**lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.**” This sentence indicates the fear of the leaders that, as the family grew, it would be scattered over the face of the earth and Nimrod was afraid that he and his followers would be forgotten. Thus, the tower would make a name for him and his clan and they would always be remembered.

## Confuse Their Language

**Genesis 11:5** *And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. <sup>6</sup> And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup> "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."*



Reconstruction of the Ziggurat at Ur



Figure 26: Rebuilt Ziggurat in Ur

Notice that the LORD uses the words, “**the sons of men.**” The first time the Scripture uses a phrase like this is in Genesis 6:2 saying, “the daughters of men.” In the context of that passage, the LORD sees those men who were not worshipers of Him. The same is used in this passage to identify that Nimrod and his men were not building the tower as a place to worship to the LORD but for other purposes and possibly for the worship of manmade gods or perhaps no god at all. It was a structure to give honor and glory to themselves.

The passage says, “**now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them.**” The LORD was speaking of earthly things in this verse. If the people continued to stay together and complete this tower, it would prove that nothing would restrain them and they could imagine all sorts of things they could do out of the LORD’s will. They would build their cities with prepared bricks and tar and forsake the instruction of the LORD to inhabit the earth. They would discount any counsel from the sons of God who were still alive at this time including Noah, Shem, Arpachshad, Shelah and Eber, but the descendants of Ham were in charge of this project as well as the family in general; they did not want any godly advice. Under Ham’s leadership they were obstinate and self-willed, with no earthly power superior to them. In their minds, no one could restrain them from their evil intent and enterprises to execute their desires.

## **People Scattered Over Face of Earth**

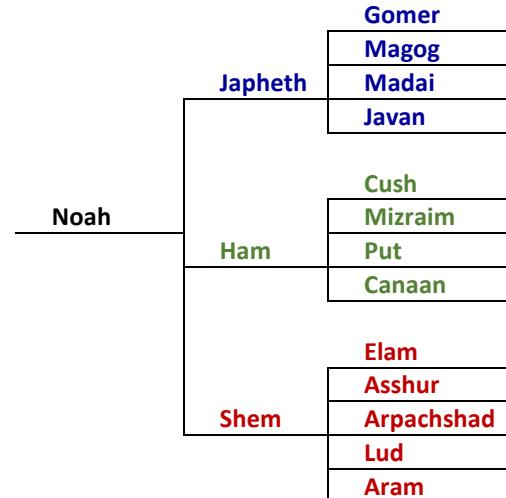
**Genesis 11:8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. 9 Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.**

Once again the LORD inserted Himself and His will into the lives of disobedient men and women. He did not send angels to keep them from the tower or destroy the tower with the people by water; rather, He simply caused them to speak a new language which only their immediate family members could understand. Picture this! One moment they were all speaking the same language with the same words and the next minute the men on the workline could not understand the person in front of them or the person behind them. No fire, no wind, no brimstone, no argument, no fighting, just confusion! Can you imagine how relieved each man must have been when he returned to his tent to find that his wife and children also spoke the same new language as he? Unable to communicate with the other major family groups, the clans of different languages began to move throughout the earth and settle to establish legacies that have lasted until today.

Where did the families go? Those details were provided in Genesis 10 in preparation for the telling of this event. A better question is, “How many different languages were established on the day of the Tower of Babel”? That answer depends on when the tower incident occurred. If the confusing of the languages happened in the year Peleg was born, only 98 years had

transpired since the flood. Peleg's father was the fourth generation from Shem. Surely, family members were left together with the same new language to establish a clan, but that cannot be proven. The following chart shows the first two generations of the sons of Noah.

In the details of Genesis 10, the families of Japheth, Ham and Shem moved together and it can be assumed that each had a new language after the tower of Babel. However, Genesis 10 also identifies the settlement location of each son of Japheth, Ham and Shem. Therefore, we can reasonably assume that each family of the three primary family units had a general language but different dialects among their sons. The family of Japheth moved to the Europe area; the family of Ham moved to Egypt and India; the family of Shem remained in the Mesopotamia area.



How many languages were established at the tower of Babel? Probably three major languages with 13 dialects initially.



Map 9: General Location of the Settlement of Shem, Ham and Japheth after the Tower of Babel



Map 10: General Location of the Settlement of Three Families after the Tower of Babel

From the original ancient Hebrew, all of the languages of the world have developed. Shem will maintain the ancient Hebrew and its derivatives will be known as the Semitic languages. Ham will take his new language into Egypt and India forming the Afro-Asiatic languages. Japheth will take his new language into Europe and develop the Indo-European languages. Over the hundreds of years that followed, with the conquering of nations across the world, these three families of languages that formed at the tower of Babel have cross influenced each other making it extremely difficult to definitely identify the original languages of Japheth and Ham.

## Genealogy of Shem

### Shem

**Genesis 11:10** **These are *the records of the generations of Shem*. Shem was one hundred years old, and became the father of Arpachshad two years after the flood; <sup>11</sup> and Shem lived five hundred years after he became the father of Arpachshad, and he had *other sons and daughters*.**

In Genesis 5, the LORD continues a list of the godly line of Adam starting in Genesis 11 with Shem and ending with Terah, the father of Abram (Abraham). Shem was 98 years old when the flood occurred and he became the father of Arpachshad when he was 100. Shem means *name* and it will be from his line that the “Name” above all other names will be born. Shem will live to be 600 years old.

### Arpachshad

**Genesis 11:12** **And Arpachshad lived thirty-five years, and became the father of Shelah; <sup>13</sup> and Arpachshad lived four hundred and three years after he became the father of Shelah, and he had *other sons and daughters*.**

Arpachshad was born when Shem was 100 years old. At the age of 35 he became the father of Shelah. Arpachshad means “Chaldean fortress” and his descendants would become the strongest of the nations of the world, the Assyrian Empire. He lived 438 years.

### Shelah

**Genesis 11:14** **And Shelah lived thirty years, and became the father of Eber; <sup>15</sup> and Shelah lived four hundred and three years after he became the father of Eber, and he had *other sons and daughters*.**

Shelah means “prayer” and he lived for 433 years. He became the father of Eber when he was 30 years old.

### Eber

**Genesis 11:16** **And Eber lived thirty-four years, and became the father of Peleg; <sup>17</sup> and Eber lived four hundred and thirty years after he became the father of Peleg, and he had *other sons and daughters*.**

Eber means “beyond” and he became the father of Peleg when he was 34 years old and lived to be 430 years old. From Eber on, his descendants would be called Hebrews and the language they spoke was also named after him. Its origin was in the original ancient language spoken in the world from the time of creation but not formally named until or after Eber’s adult life. Eber formed his own village, which can be found on many ancient maps.

## Peleg

**Genesis 11:18 And Peleg lived thirty years, and became the father of Reu; <sup>19</sup> and Peleg lived two hundred and nine years after he became the father of Reu, and he had other sons and daughters.**

Peleg means “divided” and according to Genesis 10:25, the world was divided during his lifetime. Peleg lived 239 years. Many commentators believe that the Tower of Babel confusion occurred in the year of his birth but that cannot be confirmed. However, Peleg was 30 years old when Reu was born. Surely the confusion at the tower of Babel occurred before the birth of Reu or the Scripture would reference the life of Reu for the division instead of Peleg.

## Reu

**Genesis 11:20 And Reu lived thirty-two years, and became the father of Serug; <sup>21</sup> and Reu lived two hundred and seven years after he became the father of Serug, and he had other sons and daughters.**

Reu means “friend” and he lived 239 years. He became the father of Serug at the age of 32.

## Serug

**Genesis 11:22 And Serug lived thirty years, and became the father of Nahor; <sup>23</sup> and Serug lived two hundred years after he became the father of Nahor, and he had other sons and daughters.**

Serug means “branch” and he lived 230 years. He became the father of Nahor at the age of 30.

## Nahor

**Genesis 11:24 And Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and became the father of Terah; <sup>25</sup> and Nahor lived one hundred and nineteen years after he became the father of Terah, and he had other sons and daughters.**

Nahor means “snoring” and he lived 148 years. He became the father of Terah when he was 29.

## Terah

**Genesis 11:26 And Terah lived seventy years, and became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran.**

Terah means “laggard” and according to Genesis 11:32. Terah lived to be 205 years old. At the age of 70, Terah began to have sons: Abram, Nahor, Haran. Abram was not the oldest of the boys even though he will be the most prominent. Genesis 12:4 indicates that Abram was 75

years old when he left the village of Haran after his father died. If that is true, Terah was about 130 years old when Abram was born whereby most scholars accept this to indicate the differences in their ages.

## Genealogy of Terah

**Genesis 11:27 Now these are the records of the generations of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran; and Haran became the father of Lot.**

With verse 27, the Scripture becomes specific about the family of Terah and especially the relationships of each person to Abram.

### Haran

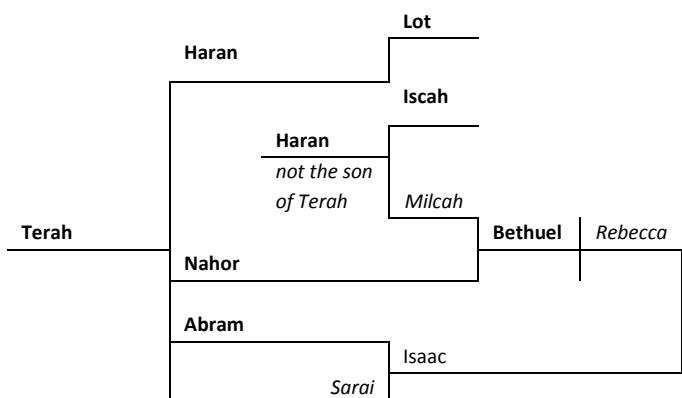
**Genesis 11:28 And Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans.**

Whether or not Haran was the oldest of the three sons we do not know; however, we do know that Haran died in the village of Ur, the capital of Sumer, which was a settlement on the Euphrates down the river from the Plain of Shinar and the village of Babel in an area that would become the Babylonian Empire.

### Wives for Abram and Nahor

**Genesis 11:29 And Abram and Nahor took wives for themselves. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah.<sup>30</sup> And Sarai was barren; she had no child.**

Genesis 20:12 indicates that Abram and Sarai were half brother and sister; Terah was their father but they had different mothers. A conundrum occurs next in this passage. Nahor's wife was **“Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah.”** This Haran was not the son of Terah; he was probably the namesake of the village of Haran in Upper Mesopotamia to which they moved after the death of their brother also named Haran. Because of the way this passage is written, we can assume that Milcah began having children soon after the marriage but Sarai did not, being barren until the birth of Isaac when she was 89 years old. She would die at the age of 127, before Isaac took a wife. Sarai is the only woman whose age is given in the Scripture.



## Move to Haran

Genesis 11:31 **And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there.** <sup>32</sup> And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.

Terah had made the decision to move the family to the land of Canaan after the death of his son, Haran. Leaving Ur, Terah, with Abram, Sarai and Lot journeyed up the Euphrates as far as Haran where they settled to make their home several hundred miles short of fulfilling their intention of entering the land of Canaan. We must notice the absence of Nahor in this passage. We can reasonably assume that Nahor had already settled in Haran, where he married his wife, the daughter of the namesake of the village of Haran. Whether Nahor was already in Haran or moved there later makes no difference, the daughter of his son would become the wife of Abram's son Isaac and she would be retrieved from the area of Haran for Isaac many years after the events of this passage occurs.<sup>36</sup>



The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the lives of Abram and Sarai. But more than that, Chapter 11 offers great insight into the lives at that time and why certain things were not mentioned by Abram, Sarai, Isaac and Jacob. A careful look at the following chart provides great detail to such thoughts. Why does Abram not ever mention the flood? Why does Abram never mention Noah or Shem? Why does Isaac never mention any of the details of the previous chapters? Did they know about those events? Surely they knew the entire history!

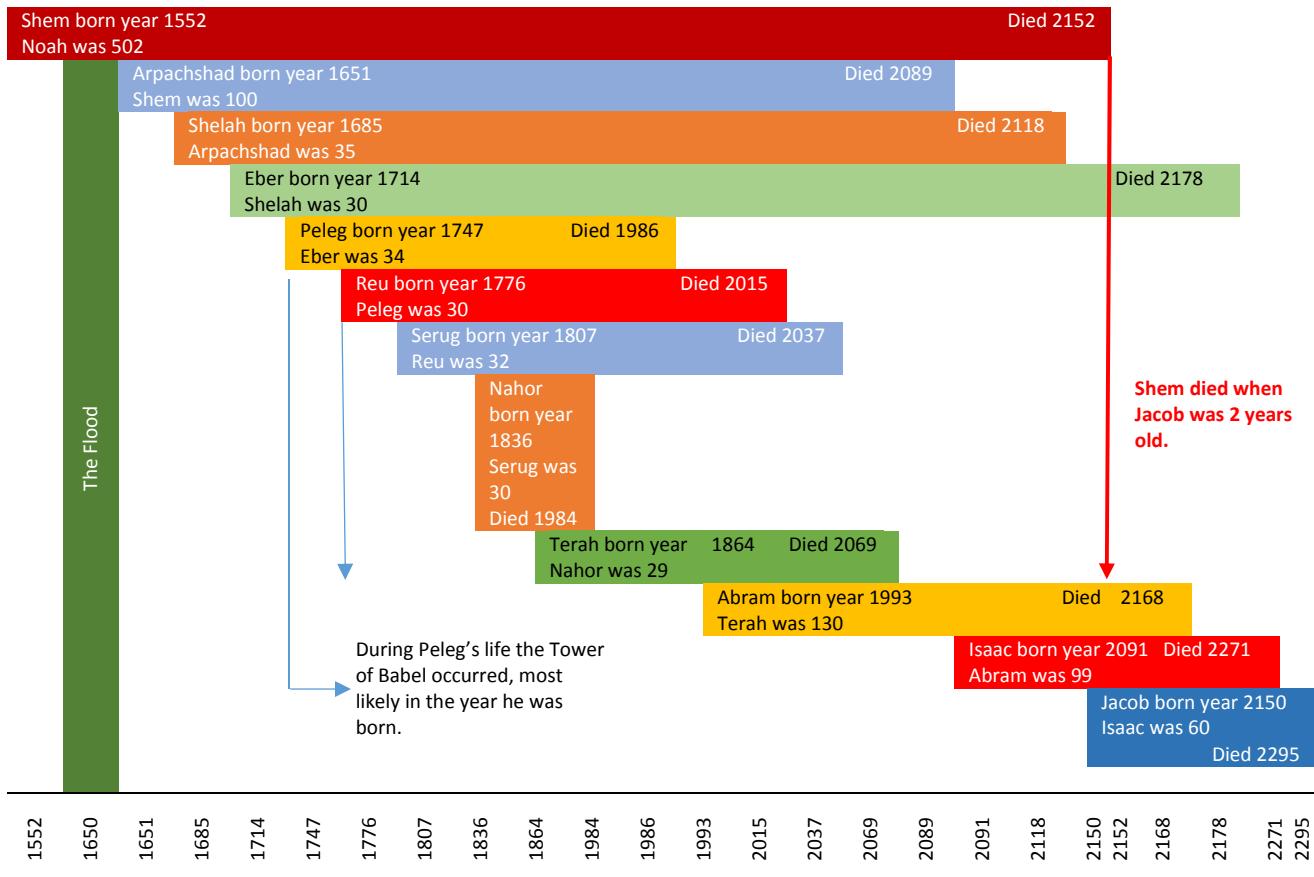
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<sup>36</sup> See Genesis 24:15

## Overlapping Lives of the Godly Line from Shem to Jacob

Years Counted from Year 1552 to Year 2295 after the Creation of Adam

Years Not Rendered in BC/AD Calendar Form



### Consecutive Years in order from 1552 to 2295

Information for Abram, Isaac and Jacob added that is not included in Genesis 11.

Table 2: Genesis 11 Information in Chart Form (not to scale)

Upon viewing the information found in Genesis 11 in the chart form above, we find some interesting facts.

1. Shem, who rode on the ark, lived until Jacob was 2 years old.
2. Abraham died at the age of 175, 16 years after the death of Shem.
3. Abraham knew all his father's ancestors back to Shem.
4. Abraham did not outlive Eber, considered the father of the Hebrew line.
5. Isaac was 61 years old when Shem died.
6. Jacob was 38 years old when Eber died.
7. Isaac could have met Shem, Shelah and Eber.
8. Isaac's wife, Rebecca, most likely knew Shem, Shelah and Eber because she was born and raised in the area in which they lived.
9. The tower of Babel event occurred between 1747 and 1876 years after the creation of Adam. Most likely, it occurred close to 1747, the year of the birth of Peleg or before he was 30 years old and fathered Rue or the Scripture would have said the confusion occurred during the life of Rue instead.