

Genesis 10.1-11.9 / FBC / 10.18.20

Introduction

- † **[1: tower painting]** Good morning! Can any of you speak in a language other than English? Anyone understand or read another language? Given the melting pot nature of our country, it is surprising how few of us are fluent in multiple languages. Of course, most of us struggle with English, but we should not let that deter us, because English is a notoriously difficult language.
- I admit, I didn't get much out of studying Russian for a year. I remember how to say one thing, and my Russian friends tell me I say it badly. I remember how to say "I love you, my very pretty kitty," because I used to say it every day to my cat. I remember the word for "woman," so I can say, "I love you, my very pretty woman" to soften up LeeAnn to do the dishes. One day in graduate school, a woman asked me out, and while we were having supper, she revealed that she was a Russian studies major. So I told her she was my very pretty woman, and she told me it was just like a man to learn foreign language pick-up lines. The date went south from there.
 - When I studied French for two years in high school, I found it interesting that thinking in French – with its different grammar and subtle differences in words – changed *how* I thought, compared to when I did so in English.
 - As I studied Greek and Hebrew, I noticed that these languages worked differently from each other and from English in many ways, reflecting and effecting different ways of thinking. There are similarities too, which show common descent or cross pollenization or interesting parallel development of the same language tools to solve the same communication problems.
 - Because the Greek and Hebrew texts contain subtleties that cannot be translated into English, I love studying the biblical text as it was written in these languages. I wish we all could do that together! I do try to bring some of these subtleties out in the sermons.
 - Ok, let's get back to Genesis, so we can finish our study of the first part of our story, about how God interacted with the family of Adam and the family of Noah. We have seen that God delivered Noah's family from the flood. Noah then worshipped God, but also fell into sin with drunkenness and indecent exposure. Now we will see what happened over the next few generations. If you can imagine Noah as your great-grandfather, we would be talking about your generation later in this passage.
 - I would rather show you maps than words, so open up your Bible to Genesis 10.1. I ask you for some grace: we have many Hebrew names, and I am not sure how to say them in Hebrew or English. Some might not read them, and it might seem boring to some, but it is all part of God's revelation, so I think we should read it. Hang with me, and we will get to more depth as we go.

[2: Japheth map] Genesis 10.1-5 NET: This is the account of Noah's sons Shem [שֵׁם], Ham [חָם], and Japheth [יָפֶֿתֿ]. Sons were born to them after the flood. The sons of Japheth [יָפֶֿתֿ] were Gomer [גֹּמֶר], Magog [מָגוֹג], Madai [מַדַּי], Javan [יָוָן], Tubal [תּוּבַל], Meshech [מֶשֶׁחַ], and Tiras [תִּירָס]. The sons of Gomer [גֹּמֶר] were Askenaz [אַשְׁכְּנַז], Riphath [רִיפָּת], and Togarmah [תּוֹגַרְמָה]. The sons of Javan [יָוָן] were Elishah [אֵלִישָׁה], Tarshish [תַּרְשִׁישׁ], the Kittim [כִּיֻּתִּים], and the Dodanim [דּוֹדָנִים]. From these the coastlands of the nations were separated into their lands, every one according to its language, according to their families, by their nations.

- † This is an interesting narration of genealogy: some descendants, like Gomer [גֹמֶר], are given as individuals, while others, like “the Kittim” [כִּתִּיִּים; which is plural in Hebrew] are given as a people group, no doubt descended from a man named “Kitti.”
 - Still others, as we will see in a moment, are given as a tribal name [usually those ending in “ites” in English translations], sometimes referring to the people of a particular city in Moses day.
 - What we find in this chapter is not a *simple* genealogy, but a table tracing the development of nations from the original family of Noah, as God blessed people with the fertility to reproduce.
- † According to the experts, Madai [מָדַי] became the Medes in northwestern Iran. Javan [יָוָן] occupied western Greece, especially the islands. Tiras [תִּירָס] is less certain, but we think they were one of the sea peoples from Greece or Italy.
 - Gomer’s [גֹמֶר] family were the Cimmerians, a nomadic people north of the Black sea who later overran much of Turkey about 700 years before Jesus was born.
 - Magog [מָגוֹג], Tubal [תּוּבַל], and Meshech [מֶשֶׁח] started out in Turkey.
 - Later descendants settled in Armenia, Cyprus, Rhodes, and Italy; generally speaking the descendants of Japheth [יָפֶֿתֿ] were north of the promised land, particularly in southern Europe.

[3: Ham map] Genesis 10.6-20: The sons of Ham [חָם] were Cush [כּוּשׁ], Mizraim [מִצְרַיִם], Put [פּוּט], and Canaan [כְּנַעַן]. The sons of Cush [כּוּשׁ] were Seba [שֶׁבָא], Havilah [חַוִּילָה], Sabtah [סַבְתָּה], Raamah [רַעְמָה], and Sabteca [סַבְתָּכָא]. The sons of Raamah [רַעְמָה] were Sheba [שֶׁבָא] and Dedan [דֶּדָן]. Cush [כּוּשׁ] was the father of Nimrod [נִמְרֹד]; he began to be a valiant warrior on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD. (That is why it is said, “[That person is] Like Nimrod [נִמְרֹד], a mighty hunter before the LORD.”) The primary regions of his kingdom were Babel [בָּבֶל], Erech [אַרְחַךְ], Akkad [אַכַּד], and Calneh [כַּלְנֶה] in the land of Shinar [שִׁנְעָר]. From that land he went to Assyria [אַשּׁוּר], where he built Nineveh [נִינְוָה], Rehoboth-ir [רְחוֹבוֹת עִיר], Calah [כַּלַּח], and Resen [רֶסֶן], which is between Nineveh [נִינְוָה] and the great city Calah [כַּלַּח]. Mizraim [מִצְרַיִם] was the father of the Ludites [לֹדִיטִים], Anamites [אַנַמִּיטִים], Lehabites [לֶהָבִיטִים], Naphtuhites [נַפְתּוּחִיטִים], Pathrusites [פַּתְרוּסִיטִים], Casluhites [כַּסְלֻחִיטִים] (from whom the Philistines [פְּלִשְׁתִּיִּים] came), and Caphtorites [כַּפְתּוּרִיטִים]. Canaan [כְּנַעַן] was the father of Sidon [צִידוֹן] his firstborn, Heth [חֶת], the Jebusites [הִיבוּסִי], Amorites [אַמֹּרִי], Girgashites [גִּרְגָּשִׁי], Hivites [חִיטִּי], Arkites [אַרְכִּי], Sinites [סִינִי], Arvadites [אַרְוַדִּי], Zemarites [זִמְרָדִי], and Hamathites [חַמָּתִי]. Eventually the families of the Canaanites [כְּנַעֲנִי] were scattered and the borders of Canaan [כְּנַעַן] extended from Sidon [צִידוֹן] all the way to Gerar [גֶּרָר] as far as Gaza [עַזָּה], and all the way to Sodom [סְדוֹם], Gomorrah [עֲמֹרָה], Admah [אַדְמָה], and Zeboiim [זְבוִיִּים], as far as Lasha [לָשָׁע]. These are the sons of Ham [חָם], according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, and by their nations.

- † According to the experts: the Mizraim [מִצְרַיִם] settled Egypt. Cush [כּוּשׁ] settled eastern Africa south of Egypt. Put [פּוּט] is where Libya is today.
 - Later descendants settled more of northern Africa, the Arabian peninsula, and Crete.

- Canaanite peoples settled the area between Egypt and Mesopotamia, from Sidon in the north to Gaza in the south, from the Mediterranean Sea to the fertile plain along the east coast of the Dead Sea. Why is the narrator so specific about the boundaries of this land? The narrator gives us this detailed information, because this is the land God will take away from the Canaanites to give to the Hebrews.
- Many of these named peoples were known to be repulsively sinful by Abraham's day. For example the Hittites, descendants of [חִתִּי] started in the area of Hebron, and offended the sensibilities of Isaac and Rebecca.

† **[4: mighty]** We saw last week that Noah prayerfully cursed the family of Canaan. He was right to doubt their character, but the curse did not come true right away.

- And whatever anger Noah retained for his disrespectful son Ham [חָם], it was one of his descendants, Nimrod, who rose up to be a mighty leader of people.
- For some reason, in the US we use the term “nimrod” to refer to someone who is inept. The Hebrew term describing Nimrod here, [גִּבּוֹר] means “mighty,” it is the same term for mighty as was applied to the Nephilim in Genesis 6.
- Nimrod was so legendary as a hunter, that his name was still spoken in awe during Moses' day. When the text says “He was a mighty hunter before the LORD,” it does not mean he was a godly hunter, it means even God noticed that he was a mighty hunter of distinction.
- Initially, Nimrod led a core of the people to build Babel, which we will discuss momentarily in Genesis 11, but here the text talks about after that, when people were spreading out. Against *whom* was Nimrod a mighty warrior? Against others in Noah's family, his own relatives, right?
- Eventually, Nimrod had a kingdom that spanned much of the middle east northeast of the promised land, including what later became Babylon and Assyria, the two nations that conquered the two halves of Israel thousands of years later.

[5: Shem map] Genesis 10.21-31: And sons were also born to Shem [שֵׁם] (the older brother of Japheth [יָפֶת]), the father of all the sons of Eber [עֵבֶר]. The sons of Shem [שֵׁם] were Elam [עֵלָם], Asshur [אַשּׁוּר], Arphaxad [אַרְפַּכְשָׁד], Lud [לֹוד], and Aram [אַרָם]. The sons of Aram [אַרָם] were Uz [עֹוז], Hul [חֹול], Gether [גֵּתֶר], and Mash [מָשׁ]. Arphaxad [אַרְפַּכְשָׁד] was the father of Shelah [שֵׁלָח], and Shelah [שֵׁלָח] was the father of Eber [עֵבֶר]. Two sons were born to Eber [עֵבֶר]: One was named Peleg [פֶּלֶג; which in Hebrew meant “separated” or “division”] because in his days the earth was divided, and his brother's name was Joktan [יֶקְטָן]. Joktan [יֶקְטָן] was the father of Almodad [אַלְמוֹדָד], Sheleph [שֵׁלֶף], Hazarmaveth [חֲצַרְמָוֶת], Jerah [יֶרַח], Hadoram [הַדּוֹרָם], Uzal [אוּזַל], Diklah [דִּקְלָה], Obal [עוֹבָל], Abimael [אַבִּימָאֵל], Sheba [שֵׁבָא], Ophir [אוֹפִיר], Havilah [חַוִּילָה], and Jobab [יּוֹבָב]. All these were sons of Joktan [יֶקְטָן]. Their dwelling place was from Mesha [מִשָּׁא] all the way to Sephar [סֶפֶר] in the eastern hills. These are the sons of Shem [שֵׁם] according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, and according to their nations.

† Peleg's [פֶּלֶג] name, meaning “division,” might refer to the tower of Babel incident in his day, which we will read in a moment.

- The experts tell us that most of these tribes settled from what is now Iran to Turkey; it seems likely that it was against these peoples that Nimrod was a mighty warrior.
 - Uz [עוֹץ] was the homeland of Job, but we don't know where it was. Joktan's [יֶקְטָן] descendants settled in Arabia.
- † From Eber's name [עֶבֶר] comes [עִבְרִי] meaning "Hebrew," which is what Abraham is called in Genesis 14.3.
- Eber [עֶבֶר] had two sons, Peleg [פֶּלֶג] and Joktan [יֶקְטָן]. From Peleg [פֶּלֶג] would come Abraham, and his family would become the Hebrews, also known as the nation of Israel.
 - As a Hebrew and Israelite, was born Jesus [יֵשׁוּעַ] the Messiah, also known as Jesus the Christ.

Genesis 10.32: These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations, and from these, the nations spread over the earth after the flood.

- † As far as I know, my ancestors were from all over Europe. My brother-in-law's family was from India. I have a good friend in South America, so probably a mix of European and native blood. Some of my friends trace their ancestors back to Africa or the Orient. You know what? We all are related: all our ancestors descended from Noah and his three sons.
- You are related by blood to the Central American refugees trying to cross our border; even if you don't want them here, you might pray for them; I am sure they have great need. You are related to the victims of terror this past month in Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo; many of their families are Christian, perhaps you should pray for them. You are related to the terrorists too; maybe you could pray for them to come to Christ.
 - At times, God makes much of national identities, judging whole people groups for their behavior, sometimes using whole nations for his purposes. But in Christ now, we remember that we were all created to be God's image bearers, we are all related by blood, and we all deserve judgment from God as people gone wayward from God.
- † Having given us this picture of the descent of the nations, the narrator now will return to the plot, because as it turned out, people did not spread out to fill the Earth like God commanded them to. Rather God had to force them into it. So let's read on and see how this came about.

[6: Shinar map] Genesis 11.1-4: The whole earth had a common language and a common vocabulary. When the people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar [שִׁנְעָר] and settled there. Then they said to one another, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." (They had brick instead of stone and tar instead of mortar.) Then they said, "Come, let's build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves. Otherwise we will be scattered across the face of the entire earth [as God told us to be]."

- † Ham's grandson, Nimrod, was leading the people. We saw earlier that he founded cities in the plain in Shinar, including Babel, which is the city in question here. So we have the people of a few generations after the flood, migrating eastward together into the fertile crescent of Mesopotamia.

- † Much later, in **Deuteronomy 1.28 NET**, the spies returned from the promised land afraid, saying among other things, that the Canaanites had “**great cities whose defenses appear to be as high as heaven itself!**”
- In **Jeremiah 51.53 NET** [God says] “**Even if Babylon climbs high into the sky and fortifies her elevated stronghold, I will send destroyers against her.**”
 - So here in Genesis 11, when it says they were building “a tower with its top in the heavens [or sky],” it was to be a monstrosity impressive thing. Perhaps the idea was to trespass on the greatness and domain of God, perhaps it was pursuing their pride instead of God’s commands.
 - **[7: tower]** Much later, in the same region, King Nebuchadnezzar followed ancient patterns to build his ziggurats. The one in the city of Babylon was 300 feet by 300 feet at its base – that is, a football field in length and another in width – and also 300 feet tall according to archaeological resources. That is the height of a 25 story building today!
 - That’s thirty-nine feet taller than the tallest building in Sarasota and more than twice the height of the tallest building in Bradenton! Tampa did not have a building taller than this until 1972! I know, it probably was not up to hurricane code and it had no plumbing, but still, this was pretty amazing for about 600 years before Christ.
 - Now remember, I said he followed ancient patterns. Were his ancient patterns from Nimrod’s day? It seems impossible, but here we have this biblical text. Whatever it was they were building in Nimrod’s day, it was astounding.
- † It was also offensive. For in contrast to God’s plans of a future city of Jerusalem with a Temple where people would worship God, these people were building a city and a monument to glorify themselves. Rather than be scattered throughout the Earth to spread God’s image as instructed, they hoped to found a civilization that would revere their accomplishment, praise their name.
- In their depravity, they were seeking meaning and validation apart from God and his revelation. They depended on technology and culture rather than revelation. To me, that sounds a lot like our society today.
 - Scholar Bruce Waltke wrote, “Today, self-idolizing humanity is storming outer space, hoping to subdue even the heavenly bodies, and through genetic engineering has the potential to clone and shape humanity according to its own imagination. What had historically been the prerogative of God alone has now come under the dominion of depraved humanity. The prospect is frightening” [183].
 - You see, there is nothing wrong with technology, culture, or cities with tall towers, but when we seek meaning and validation through them, when we depend on them instead of relying on God’s revelation, that reflects how corrupted is the human heart.
- † **[8: top line]** Earlier in our study of Genesis, we saw that people repeatedly have a choice to make, which we symbolize with our top line / bottom line graphic: we can honor God by responding to his revelation with obedience and faith, that’s what we call the top line; or we can pursue our fleshly goals with our fleshly methods on what we call the bottom line.
- God told these people to reproduce his image throughout the earth, so they could rule the earth as his stewards, reflecting his character and representing him here. They should have obeyed God’s commands and trusted that his path would lead to the optimal blessing.

- But they were tempted by their own fleshly desires: they wanted to stay together, and they wanted to build a name for themselves, to glorify their own name, rather than God's. So they did reproduce, but did not spread out across the earth; they chased pride, selfishness, self-glorification, instead of submitting to God; they trusted in themselves instead of depending on God. They took the bottom line.
- I wonder how often we make the same mistake without even realizing it. It feels natural to relate everything we experience to how it affects us. Whether we are talking about how we live, how we do church, or even how we relate to God in faith, it is all about what will make us happy, what will bring us enjoyment, what will make us feel good about ourselves. But God would like us to focus instead on glorifying him, serving him, blessing others in his name.

[9: scatter map] Genesis 11.5-9 NET: But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the people had started building. And the LORD said, "If as one people all sharing a common language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be beyond them. Come, let's go down and confuse their language so they won't be able to understand each other." So the LORD scattered them from there across the face of the entire earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why its name was called Babel [בָּבֶל] – because there the LORD confused the language of the entire world, and from there the LORD scattered them across the face of the entire earth.

- † There is literary irony here. First, in 11.1 the "whole earth" had one language and vocabulary, because the people were concentrated in one location, but in 11.9 God scattered them across the face of the "whole earth" with different languages.
 - Also, the people wanted a tower reaching to the heavens, but God had to *come down* to see it.
 - Yet God takes the tower seriously. If they were to succeed in such hubris [immense pride], then they would continue to defy God to glorify themselves with their accomplishments.
 - Remember, this is happening just a few generations after the judgment of the world in which God brought the great flood to wipe out all but eight people, because almost nobody was walking with God. Now here again the people are revealing their corruption.
- † There is a practical irony here also: the people wanted a tower and glory for themselves, but they failed to finish the tower and are remembered in infamy; they wanted to avoid dispersal, but God imposed it upon them; they wanted to determine their own fate, but when that went against God's plans, he stepped in to change their plans.
- † By varying their languages, God made it hard for them to understand each other, so they stopped working together and instead divided into clans by language, which we know from what we just read in Genesis 10 means they divided by family heritage.
 - A babel today is a confused noise from many voices. To babble is to mutter incoherently. In the Babylonian literature the city's name *bab-ili* meant "the gate of God," but in Hebrew the city name of Babel [בָּבֶל] sounds like the verb [בָּלַל], translated as "to confuse," and it retained that connotation down to our day.
 - So the people, who started unified under Nimrod, scattered across the earth. And those who did not scatter far enough got attacked by Nimrod in his mighty warrior phase!

- † In Acts 2, the coming of the Holy Spirit is marked by the original disciples speaking in diverse languages and being understood by natives of those lands. This marks the beginning of the reversal of this curse. We still have diverse languages, but we can now put aside fear, distrust, and ambition, to understand and unify with believers of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation; because it is with believers from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation that we will worship God in eternity.

Summary

- † **[10: Israel map]** All people are descended from common ancestors, back to Noah and his wife. God made them his representative image bearers and blessed them and their descendants with fertility to carry out their purposes.
- Because of sin, we became separated by language, race, territory, and politics. These differences are not sin, but they are a monument to sin.
- † Yet the divided nations all have a part in God's plan.
- God placed Israel in the center of the nations geographically, where these families intersect, because God's plan was to bless the nations through Israel.
- † From this scene in Genesis, Israel would learn that she would be a blessing to the world if she would trust and obey God, stay on the top line. Sadly, Israel ultimately failed to heed this lesson.
- Will we also? Jesus told his apostles in **Matthew 23.12 NET: "...whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."**
 - This is food for thought as we go about each day, making decisions about how to live and what priorities to have. Is life to be about us, about our desires, our priorities, our gratification? or is life to be about God, about God's desires, God's priorities, God's gratification?
 - Take a look at how you spend your time, how you spend your money. Pray about it. Repent, confess, and make changes as necessary!
- † **[11: chart]** There are many parallels between Adam and Noah. God created Adam in his image and made a covenant promise that his descendants would be God's image bearers. God delivered Noah through the flood into a renewed creation, and confirmed his covenant promise that Noah's descendants would be God's image bearers.
- Adam fell into sin, letting the serpent have control. Noah fell into sin, letting alcohol have control.
 - Adam's descendants became utterly corrupt. Noah's descendants became utterly corrupt.
 - God judged Adam's descendants with the flood. God judged Noah's descendants with division.
 - This is a turning point in the book of Genesis. The people are already walking apart from God again, now God has scattered them, but that will not improve them. God will have to make a new start with mankind again, but without destroying them first, since he promised not to.
 - That new beginning would be with the election of Abraham and his descendants to be a family of God's people, known as Israel. From Abraham would come the promised seed of the woman who would be the savior. And to that savior, [יֵשׁוּעַ], will come some from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation [Revelation 5.9; 7.9]. Let's pray . . .