

Genesis, Part 12

The Tower of Babel

The last session closed with a long list of the genealogy of Noah. There is more to come in this session. Before we get to that we will conclude the Age of Human Government with the Tower of Babel and the confusion of the one language then shared by all descendants of Noah.

Like previous and future dispensations, this age began with blessing and man given a test, this time it was could man find righteousness through human government whose authority was delegated to mankind by God. And like other dispensations, it ends with man failing that test and God administering justice and discipline for that failure.

This short tale in chapter 11 brings the history of the period before the patriarchs to a horrifying conclusion. The new start given to the human race by Noah had already been jeopardized by his drunkenness and Ham's indiscretion, and in the Table of the Nations, the effects of the curse on Ham's descendants have already been hinted at. Human sinfulness now burst all limits as man tried to trespass on God's realm by building a sky-scraping temple. This prompted another great judgment affecting the whole human race.

The paragraph in Genesis 10 which describes the exploits of Nimrod has been linked in Jewish tradition with the tower of Babel episode recounted in Genesis 11:1–4. The linkage has some Biblical support in the fact that Nimrod was the founder of the city of Babel. In any case, both paragraphs depict the rebellion of the nations against God.

The Conspiracy of Nimrod (Gn 10:8–12)

The text furnishes scant information concerning Nimrod. He was a descendant of Cush, a Hamite. The Biblical record thus agrees with data from the ancient history of Mesopotamia which furnish evidence that the region was first ruled by a non-Shemitic people. Nimrod began to be (i.e., set out to be) a mighty one (gibbor) in the land (10:8). The term tyrant captures the intention of the original. Nimrod's very name is an

encapsulation of his lifestyle. His name means, “Let us revolt.” He must have been a ruthless ruler who was opposed to all existing order. Nimrod was especially noted as “a mighty hunter before Yahweh” (10:9). One of the royal responsibilities of kings in ancient times was to keep the wild animal population thinned out so that citizens would not be threatened. The text may refer to this function. The documents, however, also speak of ancient kings hunting the men of a city, capturing them, and carrying them off into slavery. The word “hunter” does not refer to the hunting of animals, but rather to the hunting of men. He did this “before (liphne) Yahweh,” i.e., in opposition to Yahweh. The Septuagint rendered, “a mighty hunter against the Lord.”

Nimrod was a grandson of Ham through Cush, and his name means “rebel.” He was a mighty tyrant in the sight of God, the first dictator. He was the founder of the Babylonian empire and the organizer of the enterprise that led to the construction of the Tower of Babel.

Nimrod was an empire builder. He started his rise to power in Shinar, in the lower Mesopotamian river valley. He gradually extended his influence over (or possibly built) Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh. Nimrod eventually expanded his influence into Assyria where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth, Calah, and the great city of Resen (10:10–12).

The Construction of Babel (Gn 11:1–9)

For some time after the Flood, the human family was of one language and dialect. Eventually, the descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth migrated south and east into the land of Shinar. They were a nomadic people. At some point, however, they decided to build a city, and especially a tower. Since stone was practically nonexistent in Shinar, they invented a way of making kiln-baked bricks. They used the bitumen found in the region as mortar.

Nimrod was a grandson of Ham through Cush, and his name means “rebel.” He was a mighty tyrant in the sight of God, the first dictator. The word “hunter” does not refer to the hunting of animals, but rather to the hunting of men. He was the founder of the Babylonian empire and the organizer of the enterprise that led to the construction of the Tower of Babel. History informs us that Nimrod and his wife devised a new religion

built around “the mother and child.” We see Babylon opposing the people of God throughout the Bible, culminating in the “Great Babylon” of Rev. 17–18. (Details to follow.)

God had commanded men to replenish the earth (9:1, 7, 9), but they decided to settle down on the plain of Shinar where Babylon was located (10:8–10). This was a deliberate rebellion against God’s Word. They journeyed “from the east” which suggests that they were turning their backs on the light. They decided to unite and build both a city and a tower. Their purposes were to (1) maintain unity in opposition to God, and (2) make a name for themselves. This entire operation is a fore-glimpse of the final opposition of man (and Satan) against Christ, centered in the Babylon of Rev. 17–18. Men will unite then in a world church and world political organization; they will be led by the Antichrist, the last world dictator; and their plans will be frustrated. It is interesting to note that today the world is rapidly moving toward the “one world” concept, thanks to the United Nations and other international alliances.

With this spectacular architectural feat, they hoped to make a name (i.e., reputation) for themselves. The tower pointed to man’s attempt to glorify and fortify himself. The structure was a monument to a lack of faith in God’s promises and to disobedience to his command to spread over the earth.

Gen 11:1 Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. 2 And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3 And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. 4 Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.” 5 And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. 6 And the Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.” 8 So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. 9 Therefore its name was called Babel,

because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

Yahweh came down to see the city and the tower (11:5). This in no way implies that the Lord was unaware of the actions of his children. Rather God is here making a judicial investigation worthy of that One who is scrupulously fair in his dealings with mankind. His verdict was that the project had to cease. The people were united in their ungodly purpose, and this was only the beginning of their rebellious plans (11:6). The Godhead decided to confound the languages of the workers, thus making it impossible for them to work together. This was an act of mercy as well as judgment, for had they persisted in their plan, a more terrible judgment would have followed. The name “Babel” comes from a Hebrew word which means “gate of God.” The description of God’s action here explains the origin of the languages of mankind.

The judgment upon the tower builders was that their language would be confounded. The resulting confusion caused the various language groups to scatter across the face of the earth. The building project came to an abrupt halt. The place was called Babel, “confusion,” to commemorate this judicial act of God (11:7–9). This judgment ends the third dispensation, the Age of Human Government.

Mystery Babylonian

We looked at this in detail in our study of Revelation, so this will be a somewhat abbreviated version.

History informs us that Nimrod and his wife devised a new religion built around “the mother and child”. It is called Mystery Babylon, a title given to a pervasive and perverse system of false religion that focuses on idolatry. This religion was at the core of the Tower of Babel. It is Satan’s system designed to deceive mankind and make it difficult to identify God’s true plan for mankind.

Mystery Babylon is first and foremost a religious system, but it is so intertwined with the economics of the Tribulation that it will also be seen as an economic system. Babylon is also a city. Mystery Babylon, the religious system, that began in the time of Noah before the construction of the Tower

of Babel, is still with us today and will reach its peak of power during the Tribulation.

Mystery Babylon, of course, comes out of that ancient city named Babylon in what is modern-day Iraq. It was originally called Bab-El, later Babel, and eventually Babylon. Bab-El means “gate to God” and Babel means “confusion”. The founder of Bab-El was Nimrod or Nimrod-bar-Cush (Nimrod the son of Cush). He was the son of Cush who was the son of Ham, the son of Noah. Noah brought Ham through the flood, but evidently, Ham also brought with him some of the beliefs of the culture that God destroyed with the flood, namely idolatry. Ham begat a son named Cush, “the black one,” and he became the father of Nimrod, the apostate leader of his generation.

Nimrod founded Bab-El and constructed a tower, the Tower of Babel. It was built with sun-dried bricks and slime for mortar, which represents an imitation of the truth, rather than with stone and mortar, which represents a solid foundation and building method. This is depicted in Genesis as an act of human pride and a rebellion against God.

Babylon became prominent under Hammurabi (1728-1686 BC) and experienced its greatest glory under Nebuchadnezzar about 600 years before Christ. The story of the city and the empire have been deciphered from thousands of cuneiform tablets unearthed by archeologists.

Ancient lore tells us that the wife of Nimrod was the infamous Semiramis, The First. She was reputed to be the foundress of the Babylonian Mysteries and the high priestess of idolatry. This religious system spread in various forms to the entire world and is still with us today.

The system is built on that promise in Genesis 3:15 concerning the seed of the woman, where God tells Satan, “I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring (seed) and her offspring (seed); he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” This was the first mention of a promised redeemer from God. That promise was an obvious threat to Satan’s continued control of Earth and mankind, thus he had to find a way to stop it. One such attempt was by having Cain kill Abel who was the firstborn and the potential fulfillment of the seed promise to Eve.

That didn't work; Eve bore Seth. Satan had other plans, one being this Babylonian Mystery.

Tradition claims that Semiramis bore a son whom she declared was miraculously conceived, and when he was presented to the people, he was received as the promised deliverer. His name was Tammuz, and it was the worship of Tammuz that Ezekiel protested in the days of the Babylonian captivity. The worship of Tammuz is also seen in the worship of Baal, which is another offshoot of Mystery Babylon.

The rites of worship were secret and only initiates were allowed instruction. The purpose was to deceive mankind so they would not recognize the true seed of the woman, and to discredit the legitimacy of Christ and the Cross. Some atheists today will point to this and say Christians merely adopted pagan beliefs.

From Babylon, the mysteries spread to all surrounding areas as the mother and child cult with practices that were disgusting and immoral. Jeremiah tells us (Jer 7:16-18; 44:15-19; 44:25) that the women made little round cakes for the "queen of heaven".

The image of the "queen of heaven" and the babe in her arms was seen everywhere, and idols depicting the mother and babe have been found around the world. Everywhere the symbols were the same, though sometimes with different names according to local languages. It was ...

- The mystery religion of Phoenicia, and they spread it in their travels.
- Ashtoreth and Tammuz of the Phoenicians became
- Isis and Horus of Egypt, and that became
- Aphrodite and Eros of Greece then
- Venus and Cupid of Italy
- And many other places

In about 1,000 years, it became the religion of the world. There were countless lesser mysteries linked to the mother and child theme and were part of the system of idol worship. Among them...

- The establishment of a celibate priesthood and nuns
- Doctrines of purgatorial purification after death
- Salvation by numerous sacraments

- Priestly absolution
- The sprinkling of holy water
- The offering of round cakes to the queen of heaven
- Dedication of virgins to the gods was also sanctified prostitution
- Weeping for Tammuz for 40 days before the great festival of Ishtar, when it was said she received her son Tammuz back from the dead. (“Easter” is a transliteration of Istar.) It was taught that Tammuz was slain by a wild boar and brought back to life. All this was practiced long before Christ.
- To Tammuz, the egg was sacred, depicting the mystery of his resurrection.
- The evergreen was set up to celebrate his birth during the winter solstice.
- A yule log was burned with other observances. Christians adopted the winter solstice and yule log to celebrate the birth of Christ.
- The sign of the cross originated with Mystery Babylon, symbolizing the idea of a life-giving principle and as the first letter of his name.

None of this originated with Christianity! This is the system that God called Abram out from when he was told to leave his home and go to the land He would show him. It is the same cult that Israel was in constant conflict with. Under Jezebel, a Phoenician princess, it was grafted into what was left of the religion of Israel in the northern kingdom in the days of Ahab and was the cause of Israel going into captivity. Baal worship was the Canaanitish form of this system. Baal was the sun god, the life-giver, and identical to Tammuz.

When the city and temples of Babylon were destroyed, the high priest and his temple priests fled with their vessels and images to Pergamos where the symbol of the great serpent was set up as the emblem of “hidden mysteries”. This is charged against the church at Pergamos in the letter to them in Revelation 2:12-16. “Balaam” and “doctrine of the Nicolaitans” mentioned there are references to forms of idol worship that came out of Mystery Babylon.

Crowns in the shape of a fish head were worn by the chief priests of the Babylonian cult to honor the fish god, Dagon. The crowns bore the word “Pontifex,” which means “bridge,” “bridge builder,” or “keeper of the bridge,”

symbolic of the “bridge” between man and Satan. It originated as a title used by religious leaders of the Babylonian cult in the Roman Empire and was later adopted by the Roman emperors as the Latin title “Pontifex Maximus,” which means “Major Keeper of the Bridge.” This title was used up through the time of Constantine the Great. The same title was later used by the bishop of Rome. The pope today is called the “pontiff,” which comes from “pontifex”.

When the teachers of the Babylonian mystery religions moved from Pergamum to Rome, they were influential in paganizing Christianity and the source of many so-called religious rites that have crept into ritualistic churches. It was a common practice in the Roman Empire, once Christianity became the state religion, that when heathen tribes were defeated and captured as the empire extended its borders, the tribal chief was forced to profess Christianity and be baptized. Following that, the entire tribe was forced to profess faith in Christ and be baptized. This forced “profession” of faith was generally meaningless and brought many into Christianity who were not true believers. As a result, many of the idolatrous practices of these heathen religions were also brought into Christianity. One example is that these new “converts” were used to having idols to worship which were noticeably absent in Christianity at that time. These new heathen “converts” asked where were the gods and “heroes” of their “new faith” that they could worship them. Thus the many icons and images of “saints” came into being in churches all over Christianity to satisfy this “need,” and idolatry entered the faith.

If you haven’t figured it out by now, the main personifications of Mystery Babylon in modern history are the Roman church, the Eastern/Greek/Russian Orthodox church, and the Church of England with their many offshoots. During the Tribulation we will see an amalgam of what is left of these denominations and nominal Christians in Protestant churches all rolled into one ecumenical monster that in no way represents the truth.

Revelation tells us this Mystery Babylon is “drunk with the blood of saints and the martyrs of Jesus”. How does that apply to the apostate Christian church? Some examples include ...

The Inquisition — also called the “Holy Office” instituted by Pope Innocent III and perpetuated under Gregory IX required members to inform against heretics. Anyone suspected of being a heretic was subject to torture without knowing the accuser. The proceedings were secret. The inquisitor pronounced the sentence, and the victim was turned over to civil authorities to be imprisoned or burned at the stake, and his property was confiscated. This inquisition claimed vast numbers of victims in Spain, France, Germany, and the Netherlands. Between 1540 and 1570 900,000 Protestants were put to death, not to mention the Jews who were required to become “believers” and be baptized—or die.

Rome strongly opposed the Reformation. Between 1513 and 1531 there were 25 different translations of the Bible, which had not been allowed by the Pope. Charles V in the Netherlands established the inquisition there and ordered all Lutheran writings destroyed, prohibited religious meetings where the Bible was read, and decreed death by fire for the Anabaptists. You could not read the Bible for yourself; only the church could tell you what it said! By one sentence of the Inquisition, over 100,000 were condemned to death and massacred. Some of those were slowly roasted to death. The Protestants united under William of Orange and revolted, eventually winning independence.

In France, the Huguenots demonstrated earnest piety and pure lives in stark contrast to the scandalous lives of the bishops and cardinals. The Pope ordered their leaders exterminated, and then he struck a medal to celebrate the occasion. Catherine de Medici, the mother of the king and an ardent Romanist, ordered the Huguenots massacred and, on Aug 24, 1572, 70,000 Huguenots were killed.

In Bohemia in 1600, of a population of 4,000,000, 80% were Protestant. When the Hapsburgs and Jesuits had done their work only 800,000 remained — and none were Protestants.

In Spain, the reformation never made much headway because the Inquisition was already there and very active. Arch-inquisitor Torquemada, a Dominican monk, in 18 years, burned 10,200 and condemned to perpetual imprisonment 97,000. Victims were usually burned alive in the town square, as part of a festival. From 1481-1808 there were 100,000

martyrs and 1.5 million were banished. Spain enriched with tons of New World gold entered the 16th century as the most powerful nation in the world. During the 16 and 17th centuries, Spain was busy extinguishing its literary life and put the nation almost completely outside European civilization. That was a product of divine judgment for their atrocities, and it brought them from the top of European society and culture to the very bottom.

And when John saw her he “marveled with great amazement” (Rev 17:6). He expressed his great amazement at what he had been shown and how it could happen. This false religious system will be what is left after the rapture of the church. What will drive this movement for unity among seemingly diverse and even conflicting theologies? Fear? It will come together in the void left by the departure of the true Church and the Holy Spirit’s indwelling ministry. It will be manipulated by Satan for his purposes. It will be a major force in politics and even finance, supporting and even driving the building of the power base of the Antichrist.

Rev 17:4 The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. 5 And on her forehead a name was written:

MYSTERY,
BABYLON THE GREAT,
THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE
EARTH.

She is a harlot, which is Bible-speak for idolatry — chasing after “other gods” other than the one true God. She is dressed in the regal colors of purple and red and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls. She carries a golden cup full of her abominations. This all suggests the power wealth and prestige she will enjoy during the Tribulation, at least for a while, until Antichrist turns against her and establishes himself as a god.

This is the religion established by Nimrod and represented by the Tower of Babel.

Back to Genesis

Gen 11:10 This is the genealogy of Shem: Shem was one hundred years old and begot Arphaxad two years after the flood. 11 After he begot Arphaxad, Shem lived five hundred years, and begot sons and daughters.

12 Arphaxad lived thirty-five years, and begot Salah. 13 After he begot Salah, Arphaxad lived four hundred and three years, and begot sons and daughters.

14 Salah lived thirty years, and begot Eber. 15 After he begot Eber, Salah lived four hundred and three years, and begot sons and daughters.

16 Eber lived thirty-four years, and begot Peleg. 17 After he begot Peleg, Eber lived four hundred and thirty years, and begot sons and daughters.

18 Peleg lived thirty years, and begot Reu. 19 After he begot Reu, Peleg lived two hundred and nine years, and begot sons and daughters.

20 Reu lived thirty-two years, and begot Serug. 21 After he begot Serug, Reu lived two hundred and seven years, and begot sons and daughters.

22 Serug lived thirty years, and begot Nahor. 23 After he begot Nahor, Serug lived two hundred years, and begot sons and daughters.

24 Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and begot Terah. 25 After he begot Terah, Nahor lived one hundred and nineteen years, and begot sons and daughters.

26 Now Terah lived seventy years, and begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

This genealogical record traces the line from Noah's son Shem to Abram. Earlier Moses had traced the families of the earth that came from Noah's three sons (chap. 10), explaining how they came to be scattered around the earth (11:1–9). Here he directed attention again to the Shemites.

The genealogy of Shem is a "vertical" genealogy designed to show legitimate ancestry. This type was often used in the ancient world to establish the authenticity of a king or a dynasty. The list in verses 10–26 shows the straight line of Shem, who was blessed, to Abram, thus authenticating God's handing down the promised blessing to Abram. The main contribution of this passage is the linking of Abram with the line from Shem. The ancestry of Israel lies here.

Unlike the genealogy in Chapter 5, the list in 11:10–26 does not tally the total number of years of each person and does not close each section with the words “and he died.” Genesis 5:1–6:8 stresses death before the Flood; 11:10–26 stresses life and expansion even though longevity was declining. The mood of chapter 11 is different from the earlier genealogy. This is because verses 10–26 trace the lineage of Abram—who was to be blessed by God—back to Shem, the son of Noah who was blessed by God (9:26). Abram lived roughly two millennia before Christ.

Terah’s Descendants

Gen 11:27 This is the genealogy of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran begot Lot. 28 And Haran died before his father Terah in his native land, in Ur of the Chaldeans. 29 Then Abram and Nahor took 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. 30 But Sarai was barren; she had no child. 31 And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram’s wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there. 32 So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran.

Terah had three children: Haran, Abram, and Nahor. Abram is named first in 11:26 because of his spiritual preeminence, but it would appear that Haran was Terah’s firstborn. Before this family left Ur of Chaldee on its journey of destiny, Haran died. The Biblical narrator thought it noteworthy that Haran died before his father. In the normal course of life, sons should bury their fathers, not vice versa.

Abram married Sarai his half-sister (Gn 20:12). Nahor married his niece Milcah (11:29). Later the Law of Moses would outlaw the marriage of those who were closely related.

With Abram, God made a new initiative in the history of redemption. After setting forth the antecedents of Abram’s call, the faith walk of this great man of God is narrated.

We will begin that next session.