

## Genesis Chapter 11 Notes (Defenders Study Bible by Henry Morris)

**11:1 *one speech.*** Literally, “of one lip and one set of words”—that is, one phonology and one vocabulary, the same language as spoken by the antediluvians. This may well have been the Hebrew language, or some similar Semitic language since the primitive records were transmitted through Noah and Shem and since it is very unlikely that either Noah or Shem were participants in the rebellion and judgment at Babel.

**11:2 *from the east.*** The phrase may mean “eastward.” It is also possible that, as the people migrated from Ararat, they first went farther to the east, and then turned back westward until they came to the plain of Shinar (Sumer). This fertile valley so reminded them of Eden that they named its two rivers (Tigris and Euphrates) after two of the Edenic rivers.

**11:2 *land of Shinar.*** The reference to Shinar ties back in to Genesis 10:10, reminding us that the leader of the population by this time was Nimrod, “the mighty tyrant in the face of the LORD” (Genesis 10:9).

**11:2 *dwelt there.*** Their decision to “dwell” here in one location was in defiance of God’s command to “fill the earth” (Genesis 9:1,7). God’s design was to have a multiplicity of local governmental units (Genesis 9:5,6; Acts 17:26,27), but Nimrod purposed to establish a one-government dictatorship under himself. When Shem’s son Asshur settled in a separate location, Nimrod quickly took it over (Genesis 10:11).

**11:3 *Go to.*** Literally, “give”—indicating a council had reached a decision concerning various possible courses of action and was now pronouncing its decision.

**11:3 *for mortar.*** The first decision was to develop a brick-making industry, with kiln-baked clay bricks and asphalt from the nearby pits as mortar. This would enable them to plan and develop strong, permanent buildings.

**11:4 *a tower.*** A second council, no doubt soon after the first, reached the firm decision to stay permanently in the Babel metropolx, erecting a strong capital city with a great central tower symbolizing its unity and centralizing its culture. This tower became the prototype of all the great ziggurats (stepped towers) and pyramids of the world.

**11:4 *unto heaven.*** The words “may reach” are not in the original. The tower was undoubtedly promoted as a great religious monument, dedicated “unto heaven.” Its top would be used for worship and sacrifice, and the rank and file probably felt at first that its beauty and grandeur would honor God. Almost certainly the walls and ceiling of the shrine at the top were emblazoned with the painted representations of “man, and...birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things” (Romans 1:23), which depicted the universal signs of the zodiac. This remarkable system was probably originally formulated by the antediluvian patriarchs to depict the primeval prophecies of the coming Seed of the Woman and God’s ultimate victory over Satan in a permanent record in the stars themselves (see note on Genesis 1:14). Under Nimrod’s subtle corruption of God’s truth, however, this “gospel in the stars” was soon distorted into astrology, and evolutionary pantheism, then into spiritism and polytheism, as people gradually ceased worshipping the true God of heaven and turned to “the host of heaven,” the fallen angels.

**11:4 scattered abroad.** The intent of the leaders of this rebellion was flagrant rejection of God's command.

**11:5 came down.** God was well aware of all that was transpiring, but was long-suffering, allowing ample time for repentance. The expression "came down" is figurative, indicating the rebellion had now gone too far and required divine intervention.

**11:6 one language.** In God's judgment, the main problem was the unity of the people; the one most effective way of thwarting unity would be to prevent communication.

**11:6 nothing will be restrained.** Nimrod, with direct access to demonic intelligence and Satanic power, would be invincible without divine intervention. No doubt there was a faithful remnant (e.g., Noah, Shem), but these were helpless without God's action.

**11:7 Go to.** A council in heaven (perhaps mocking Nimrod's councils—note Psalm 2:1-4) decrees the confusion of tongues. This act is clearly supernatural, involving the divine creative power which Satan could neither duplicate nor reverse.

**11:7 confound their language.** In some inexplicable manner, God altered the brain/nerve/speech apparatus of the Babylonian rebels to give each family unit (possibly the seventy families of Genesis 10) its own distinctive vocabulary/phonology complex. With all this, however, they all remained truly human, unchanged in basic thought processes or moral character. Further, their distinctive languages were still sufficiently alike that they could, with time and much effort, learn to speak each other's languages. For some time to come, however, they could no longer communicate and, therefore, they could no longer cooperate. They were thus forced to obey God's earlier command to scatter abroad and to fill the earth with different nations and governmental units.

**11:8 scattered them abroad.** The tower had been completed and was actively in use, but the city was still unfinished. Probably all families except that of Nimrod himself departed from Babel, leaving him and his immediate family the burden of developing his own tribe at Babel as best they could. These probably became the Sumerians. The others scattered into various regions as already described in Genesis 10, some eventually developing great civilizations. This account, originally written by Shem (Genesis 11:10), is reflected in somewhat distorted form in the legends of other nations, including a tablet excavated at Ur. There is no better scientific theory to date for the origin of the various families of languages. All such theories seem to point to an origin in the Middle East.

**11:8 they left off.** In addition to the Babel tablet found at Ur (see note above), an inscription purportedly made by Nebuchadnezzar (sixteen centuries after Nimrod) on the base of the remains of a tower in Borsippa (a Greek word possibly meaning "tongue-tower"), some seven miles southwest of Babylon, claims that he (Nebuchadnezzar) was rebuilding the base of the ancient tower of Babel.

**11:9 Babel.** The Hebrew word *babel* means "mixed" or "confusion." It was associated by the writer with the "babble" of sounds which was the last memory held by all who scattered from the city. The word "babble" is an example of onomatopoeia, a word that imitates an actual sound, and thus is essentially the same in all languages. The name Babel, therefore, does not really mean "gate of God," as its later apologists claimed, but "confusion."

**11:9 all the earth.** As the people scattered, each family gradually became a tribal unit, and each had to develop its own distinctive culture as best it could. Each for a time would have to live by hunting and

gathering, residing in caves or temporary shelters. The stronger families would occupy the best nearby sites (e.g., the Nile valley), while others would be forced farther away. Although they were all familiar with the arts of agriculture, animal husbandry, ceramics, metallurgy, construction, navigation, etc., each family would require time, population growth, and discovery of sources of metals and building materials. They all had known how to write, but now, with a completely new speech, each tribe would need to invent an entirely new written language, and this would require still more time and ingenuity. Within a few generations, however, all these attributes of “civilization” had surfaced all over the world, even on distant continents. As populations grew, some tribes eventually reached into every part of the world. In some instances they traveled by land bridges (e.g., Bering Strait, Malaysian Strait) which existed for perhaps a millennium during the Ice Age which followed the Flood. In other cases, they established colonies through sea exploration (e.g., the Phoenicians). All carried essentially the same Babylonian culture and religion with them, unfortunately, so that Babylon is called in the New Testament “THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS (that is, “idolatries”) OF THE EARTH” (Revelation 17:5). At the same time, they also carried a faint remembrance of the true God and His promises, especially remembering the divine judgment of the great Flood in their traditions. Each retained knowledge of God, and could see enough evidence of Him in both the creation and their own natures (Romans 1:20; 2:13-15; John 1:9) so they were inexcusable in their almost universal descent into the religious morass of evolutionary pantheism, astrology, spiritism, polytheism and, finally, atheistic materialism.

**11:10 generations of Shem.** This marks the termination of Shem’s tablet. Apparently Terah (Genesis 11:27) acquired the ancient records at this point, and continued them.

**11:10 hundred years old.** Evidently Japheth was born one hundred years before the Flood (Genesis 5:32; 7:6). Shem was evidently a few years younger than Japheth (called “the elder” in Genesis 10:21). Ham was still younger. He was called Noah’s “younger son” in Genesis 9:24.

**11:10 after the flood.** Apparently none of Noah’s sons had children before the Flood, possibly because of the universal violence and their concentration on building the ark.

**11:13 four hundred and three years.** It is obvious, by comparison of the genealogies and chronologies in Genesis 5 and 11, that the longevity of mankind began a steady decline after the Flood. Undoubtedly the vast climatological and physiographical changes caused by the Flood were the main natural causes of this. The protective vapor canopy was gone (see notes on Genesis 1:6; 7:4), the rich soils were gone, mutations were increasing in the inbreeding populations, and the general environment was much more rigorous. No doubt it was also providentially ordered that, in the post-Flood world, life-spans should settle at around seventy (Psalm 90:10).

**11:14 Salah.** Luke 3:36 inserts the name “Cainan” between those of Arphaxad and Salah. This name is also found in some of the Septuagint manuscripts (though not the earliest), but it is not found in either Genesis 10:24 or I Chronicles 1:18, in any of the Masoretic manuscripts. The weight of evidence favors the Hebrew text with Cainan’s name having accidentally been later inserted by careless scribal copying from Genesis 5:10 and/or Luke 3:37. The inclusion of essentially the same genealogy, with no suggestion of any omitted generations, in Genesis 10:21-25 and 11:10-26, I Chronicles 1:17-28, and Luke 3:34-38, including chronological data in the second, at least places the burden of proof on any who (for archaeological reasons) would maintain there are significant gaps involved.

**11:16 begat Peleg.** If there are no genealogical gaps in Genesis 11:10-17, then the numbers add to 101 years from the Flood to the birth of Peleg right after the Dispersion. In view of the longevity of the

times, plus the high advantages implicit in large families, as well as God's command to multiply rapidly, a quite reasonable population growth model will indicate at least one thousand mature adults on the earth at the time of the Dispersion, and possibly many times this amount.

**11:19 *two hundred and nine years.*** There is a sudden drop in longevity here, from 464 years for Eber to 239 years for Peleg. This is the most likely spot, therefore, for a genealogical gap in the record. However, this sharp decline may also be explained by the traumatic changes in living conditions caused by the confusion of tongues and the resultant migrations and struggles. The close inbreeding since the Flood, aggravated further by the Dispersion, would also contribute to an increased mutational load carried by the population, and this would tend to further reduce the life-span. In any case, even if genealogical gaps do exist (in either Genesis 5 or Genesis 11, for that matter) they could only involve a few generations at most; in no case could they be stretched sufficiently to accommodate the evolutionist's imagined million-year history of man.

**11:26 *begat Abram.*** Abram presumably was the oldest of Terah's three sons. However, when the same type of notation had been used for Noah's three sons (Genesis 5:32), the first-named son was not the oldest, so Abram could possibly have been younger than one or both of his brothers.

**11:27 *generations of Terah.*** This statement seems to conclude Terah's tablet, which thus consisted solely of the genealogical records from Shem to himself (Genesis 11:10-27). If there are no gaps in the genealogies, Shem lived until after Terah's death, so Terah could easily have gotten the earlier tablets from Shem. Likewise, he could easily have transmitted them later to Abraham, or even to Isaac, since he lived until Isaac was thirty-five years old (see Genesis 11:26,32; 21:5), assuming Abram was his oldest son.

**11:27 *Terah begat Abram.*** Isaac is apparently the author of the next *toledoth*, and he seems to have keyed his record back into Terah's simply by repeating the conclusion of the latter.

**11:27 *Haran.*** The names of both Nahor (named after his grandfather) and Haran are associated with cities in Mesopotamia (Genesis 24:10; 28:10). Haran died when relatively young, evidently while visiting his father back in Ur (Genesis 11:26 28,32). His son, Lot, soon became attached to his Uncle Abram.

**11:28 *Ur of the Chaldees.*** Ur was an old and prosperous city in the days of Abram, Archaeological excavation has revealed a great library which has yielded thousands of clay tablets. Contrary to outmoded theories of cultural evolution, practically everyone knew how to read and write long before Abram's day.

**11:29 *took them wives.*** Nahor married his niece, and Sarai was Abram's half-sister (Genesis 20:12), a daughter of Terah by another of his wives. Close marriages were not yet genetically dangerous and so were not prohibited until the Mosaic law was established. Perhaps they were even desirable in those families who still worshipped the true God, in order to maintain a pure faith.

**11:31 *the land of Canaan.*** Evidently Terah, as well as Abram, had received God's call to go to Canaan, but Terah went north to Haran instead, perhaps intending to go on to Canaan later, after settling his deceased son's affairs in Haran. Abram also had received God's call while still in Mesopotamia (Acts 7:2,3), and so he and his wife set out with Terah. However, Terah never left Haran, eventually even joining in its idolatrous practices (Joshua 24:2,14,15).

**11:32 died in Haran.** According to Genesis 12:4, Abram left Haran for Canaan when he was 75 years old, which would have been 130 years before Terah's death, if indeed Abram had been born when Terah was 70 years old, or soon after (Genesis 11:26). Yet Stephen, in Acts 7:4, says Abram did not leave Haran until his father was dead. Probably Stephen was suggesting that Terah, though still alive physically, had "died" as far as God's will and calling to him were concerned, using the terminology he knew Christ had used in advising a young man in a similar situation (Matthew 8:21, 22). Otherwise, Abram would have to have been born when Terah was at least 130 years old—a very unlikely circumstance in view of the special miracle required for Abram himself to have a son when he was only 100. In any case, by the time of Abram's departure, even if Terah were only 145 years of age at the time, there would have been at least 267 years since the Dispersion. This was more than adequate time for the great civilizations of the ancient world (Egypt, Babylonia, etc.) and for a large population to have developed (as much as 300 million would be a reasonably possible number by this time, though it was probably much less). Along with the tremendous growth of civilization and population, there was a corresponding rise in both materialism and idolatrous evolutionism, so God finally called Abram again, instructing him to delay no longer in leaving his kindred to establish a new, God-fearing nation through which God would accomplish His purposes (Genesis 12:1-4).