

Text: Genesis 11.10-12.1

As I got started working on this text, I thought, “here we go, another genealogy, how am I going to weave this into the Bible story?”

Despite those misgivings, there are a lot of interesting details to be found in looking at these names, comparing them to other lists, and thinking about what God is telling us about the human story.

Let’s set the scene by recalling a few facts about the story so far.

- God created everything, including Adam and Eve, and everything was “*very good*.”
- Adam fell into sin, the earth was cursed, and the nature of man changed from the state of innocence to the state of depravity.
- In the first generation of Adam’s sons, we find Cain rising up and killing his brother Abel.
- This sets the course of mankind: a kind of competition between the many who follow Cain and the few who step into the line and ways of Abel, that is, the sons of Seth.
- Even the sons of Seth are affected by Cain’s corruption until just one in that line becomes the hope of the world, Noah.
- With his sons, Noah escapes the judgement of the Flood, but we find they bring their depraved nature with them and problems follow the flood, culminating in the tower of Babel.

Now we are ready to pick up the story again.

We are going to read bits of the text as we go along. Before I give you a proposition, I’d like to give you a couple of observations from commentators.

“The purpose of this genealogy in chapter 11 is to connect Abram to Noah, and to give background information essential for understanding the story of Abram that follows.”¹

“One of the significant changes in the *emphasis* that occurs at this point in Genesis, is from *cursing*, in the primeval record, to *blessing*, in the patriarchal narratives.”²

¹ Constable, Gen 11.10.

² Constable, *Expository Notes*, Gen 11.27.

Proposition: With the genealogy of Genesis 11, a corner is turned from the confusion, chaos, and judgement that sin produces to the hope, order, and redemption that God's promise produces.

I. Key features of the Genesis 11 genealogy

A. The resumption of the ages of fathers and sons (see Gen 5)

Read Gen 11.10-15

1. This emphasizes life, rather than death
2. The progression of life brings us right to Abram (Abraham) in v. 26ff.

Abraham is the father of the faithful, a massively significant person in the story of salvation.

B. The genealogy is a "vertical list" rather than a "horizontal list" as seen in Gen 10

"This genealogy starts with Noah's son Shem, whom God blessed, and it concludes with Abram, whom God purposed to bless. This is the line of Israel's ancestors. It is a 'vertical' list, of the type used in the ancient Near East to document legitimate claims to thrones or inheritances."³

1. Key names in this genealogy

- a. Shem (who is blessed by Noah)
- b. Eber (from whom the term "Hebrew" derives)
- c. Peleg (the distinguishing father of this list — compare Joktan, 10.26)
- d. Terah
- e. Abram (who becomes a blessing for the whole earth)

Babel brought confusion and judgement, but five generations later, Abram arrived: here is God's intervention and the beginning of redemption.

³ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Gen 11.10.

C. Other interesting features of the list

1. The shortening of lifespans

“An extensive statistical analysis of the life-spans of the patriarchs, as given in Genesis Chapter 5 and 11, shows that statistically the life-span can be considered constant before the Flood, while after the Flood the data can be fitted by an asymptotic exponential decay curve.”⁴

- a. Whitcomb and Morris suggested what was called the canopy theory, where the flood brought about environmental change causing a shortening of lifespans

My understanding is that most creation scientists today think this theory isn't correct.

- b. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that there is a significant difference in pre-flood and post-flood lifespans

2. Eyebrow raising questions from the genealogies

a. Arphachshad

Gn 10.22 The sons of Shem *were* Elam and Asshur and Arphachshad and Lud and Aram.

Gn 11.10 ¶ These are *the records of* the generations of Shem. Shem was one hundred years old, and became the father of Arphachshad two years after the flood;

- 1) It appears Arphachshad is Shem's third son
- 2) All Shem's sons were born after the flood
- 3) Unless there were twins, it would seem almost impossible for Arphachshad to be born two years after the flood

But this is another instance of a non-firstborn son taking the place of a (possibly) failed firstborn

⁴ William L. Seaver, “A Statistical Analysis of the Genesis Life-Spans,” *Creation Research Society Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1983): 80.

b. The “missing man” found in Luke

Lk 3.35-36 the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Heber, the son of Shelah,³⁶ **the son of Cainan**, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech,

- 1) There are a lot of complicated details that accompany this
- 2) One: the name is present in the LXX, but the ages are all different
 - a) If we follow the ages in Hebrew text of Genesis, some unique facts emerge
 - i) Shem lived 35 years *after* the death of Abram
 - ii) Shelah lived 3 years after the death of Abram
 - iii) Eber lived 64 years after the death of Abram
 - iv) All the others in the line died before Abram, but all *during* the lifetime of Abraham

“Also, it is concluded that as for the life-spans reported in Genesis Chapter 11, the data in the Masoretic text are the authentic ones; those in the Septuagint have been tampered with. Moreover, it is statistically unlikely that there are gaps in the genealogies in Genesis Chapter 11.”⁵

- b) It does seem that the LXX changes the numbers to avoid this situation
- 3) One unsupported theory: Eber must have been a kind of prophet, naming his son Peleg, meaning “division,” prophesying the judgement of Babel

No biblical data supports this theory, but if the Heb ages are correct, Eber lives longest past Abram – might support the idea

⁵ William L. Seaver, “A Statistical Analysis of the Genesis Life-Spans,” *Creation Research Society Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1983): 80.

- 4) The missing man: supplied by Luke under inspiration, therefore he must fit somehow

Various solutions but nothing definitive.

- a) One possibility: the LXX is working from an older Hebrew text now lost

(possible, but zero evidence)

- b) Another: Luke is working from a long-held tradition outside both the Heb. Genesis text and LXX Genesis text

i) Cainan was omitted from the Heb list because disqualified in some way

ii) Luke is recording, however, the human line of Christ and includes Cainan for accuracy

Again, possible, but no evidence

In any case, God is working in this family to bring us to Abraham, and through him to the hope of the world

II. The hope of the world, represented by Abraham (11.26-12.1)

Read 11.26-12.1

A. The line from Shem to Abraham is short

“However, according to 11:10–26, just five generations after Peleg, whose lifetime according to 10:25 saw the confusion of languages at Babel, Abram arrives. As 12:3 will declare, it is through him that all the families of the earth will be blessed. Man is not without hope. The brevity of this genealogy is a reminder that God’s grace constantly exceeds his wrath. He may punish to the third or fourth generation but he shows mercy to thousands (Deut 5:9; 7:9).”⁶

1. If Shem lived throughout Abram’s life
2. If Eber truly was a prophet

⁶ Wenham, Genesis 1-15, pp. 253-54, cited in Constable, *Expository Notes*, Gen 11.10.

3. Could Abram have learned his faith in the true God from these patriarchs?

B. The point of arriving at Abram: the Abrahamic covenant, Gen 12

1. The promises to Abram result in blessing for the world
 - a. Land
 - b. Seed
 - c. Blessing

On the Land, the Nation grew, to be the birthplace of the Son, who would bless the world

2. The long line of failures could not defeat the promises of God
 - a. God's first salvation promise

Gn 3.15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."

- b. Human disaster could not thwart God's promise
 - 1) Cain murdered Abel, God gave Seth
 - 2) Cain's line overwhelmed Seth's line, Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord
 - 3) Noah's sons lifted up their hands against God, God confused their tongues

None of these things thwart God's purpose in the prophecy about the seed of the woman (Gen 3.15)

Conclusion:

At the end of these generations, we find that:

God Spoke to Abraham

Gn 12.1 ¶ Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you;

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