

Genesis 11A (2011)

- Because I know how much you enjoyed studying genealogy last week in Chapter 10, I thought we should study some more
 - Actually, it was the Lord Who thought we needed more genealogy, since He included more genealogy in Chapter 11
 - But since we don't want to risk too much of a good thing, we'll save the genealogy for next week
 - And this week, we'll spend our time examining the story that leads into the genealogy
 - This story answers the question, "Why did men move outward across the earth as described in Chapter 10?"
- So today we learn about an incident, one instigated by a character introduced in Chapter 10 – Nimrod
 - And we are also going to take note of an important literary device often used by Biblical writers to draw our attention to important points in the text
 - It's called a chiasm, and I'll show you the chiasm in the text today

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

Gen. 11:2 It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.

Gen. 11:3 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.

Gen. 11:4 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, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

- I hope you remember from last week what we discussed concerning the relationship between Chapters 10 & 11
 - Chapter 10 was a zoom out on the dispersion of men after the flood
 - While Chapter 11 was a zoom in on the events that led to that dispersion
 - And to be more accurate, Chapter 11 also has a zoom out of its own in the second half

- In Chapter 10, we learned about Nimrod, a man who commanded a mighty city near Babel, in Shinar
 - Later he leaves and founds another city in Assyria
 - Why did he leave Babel?
- Then we heard of Peleg, who was born in the year the earth was divided
 - Why were mankind divided in Peleg's day?
- These questions are answered in Chapter 11
- The story of the dividing or dispersion of men begins with the issue of language
 - Moses tells us that all the earth, all men, spoke the same language in the beginning
 - Specifically, everyone had the same language and words
 - Language means the same tongue
 - And words means the same vocabulary
 - Understanding between men was perfect
 - As we've noted in weeks past, the names of ancient men going back to Adam had meanings
 - But they only had meaning in one language: Hebrew
 - Since these names were intended to convey meaning, and that meaning only made sense in Hebrew, we concluded that the first language of men was Hebrew
- In v.2 we hear of some group of people heading east into the plain of Shinar, or Mesopotamia
 - Who are the "they" here?
 - It must trace back to v.1, meaning the "earth" or all people
 - Noah's family and all their descendants are still living together
 - And they travel eastward back to Mesopotamia, to what would later be known as Babylon
 - This is the location of where the Garden once stood

- Perhaps at some point after the Flood, men thought back to life before the Flood
 - And to the place where they once knew God lived
 - So they set off to return home
- But then they arrive and find the Garden had long since been wiped out by the Flood
 - But they settle there none the less
- Then, they began to build and learn new techniques for building structures
 - Instead of building from stones and mortar, they made their own bricks from clay and straw, burning them or firing them to harden them
 - And using tar or bitumen, they then bound the bricks together
- Having obtained the materials and the desire to build, they now set their sites on an ambitious goal
 - Speaking as a united people, they declare they will build a city for themselves
 - And in the city will be a tower whose top will reach into heaven
 - And by this great work, they will make a name for themselves
- And in the end, they pursue this great work of human hands because otherwise they will be scattered abroad and separated throughout the earth
- As I'm sure you can tell there's more going on than meets the eye
 - First, you probably noticed the direction they traveled: East
 - And more than just going East, the families traveled to Shinar, to Mesopotamia
 - The beginning of sin and the stronghold of the enemy
 - Secondly, take a second look at the details of the story from a spiritual perspective

- The families of the Earth move back to their beginning place in defiance to God's commands
 - God commanded that the people of Noah multiply and fill the Earth
 - Instead, they stay together and move backward against God's decree
- Next, they begin to create building materials for themselves from the work of their own hands
 - Where before they relied on natural stone, now they set aside stone and create an artificial type of stone, a counterfeit
- Furthermore, they build a city and tower
 - The city was to be a way of obtaining a name for themselves
 - A name means a reputation, a testimony before others
 - And the tower was to reach into heaven
 - Notice, they didn't want to reach God or the Lord
 - They wanted to reach heaven, to the place of glory
- Can you see the bigger picture?
 - The sin of pride is still alive and well
 - Men are still being born in the likeness of Adam, in the likeness of sin
 - And man's sin nature inevitably produces desires and instincts that move us 180 degrees away from God's desires
 - Instead of heading westward according to God's direction, men retreat eastward to the Enemy's home territory
 - Instead of relying on God, men immediately seek to rely on the work of their own hands

- Instead of seeking the name of the Lord and the city of God, men made their own city to obtain their own testimony
- And instead of seeking to reach God through a faith in His word, they seek to reach heaven by the work of their hands
- Look at the world today and ask yourself if it is any different?
 - There is a constant race from barons of industry for the tallest skyscraper
 - Today it's in Dubai, maybe tomorrow in Malaysia
 - They are trying to make a name for themselves – trying to reach a level of glory in their own work

[Rev. 3:12](#) 'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the **name** of My God, and the **name** of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new **name**.

- Keeping in the mind that this story is historical truth, not merely a contrived story to teach a moral lesson
 - But the lesson is still the point
 - Our sin nature is just as strong as it was in the day of Nimrod
 - We instinctively seek ways to make our own way: in our physical life and in our spiritual life
 - Even as Christians, we may acknowledge the sovereignty and the authority of God in our lives, but yet we often still struggle to yield to His will
 - We would rather make a name for ourselves in the world than with the Lord
 - We would rather build something with our hands than rely on God
 - And the unbelieving world continues to live these lies every bit as much today as they did then

- It's notable that when John is given a vision of the end times in the book of Revelation, one of the visions is of the destruction of false religious practices
 - And in that vision, John sees this:

[Rev. 17:3](#) And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns.

[Rev. 17:4](#) The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality,

[Rev. 17:5](#) and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

[Rev. 17:6](#) And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly.

- This mysterious woman is called Babylon and she is the mother of all harlots
 - She is called Babylon, the name of this great city built in Nimrod's day
 - The name of the Enemy's home territory
 - She is called a harlot
 - A harlot is a prostitute
 - A person who counterfeits true love
 - Anyone who follows her is misled into a false relationship
 - Rather than becoming the Bride of Christ
 - She is the mother of harlots and the mother of all abominations on the earth
 - Every false, lying religion begins with her, and she is called Babylon
- This city, and the endeavor to build it, is the beginning of false religion, born in rebellion against the word of God
 - And from this start came all future abominations, for the enemy has been working in the sons of disobedience from the beginning

- The enemy would prefer the world believe there are many roads to Heaven
- And he works hard to create that impression
 - Whether it's Buddhism, Taoism, Confucism, Islam, Humanism, Paganism
- And they all follow the same pattern
 - False religion teaches self-seeking, like the families that went East seeking their own way
 - True faith says set aside our own desires and instead follow the Lord
 - False religion teaches that the work of our hands is the solution to our problems
 - True faith recognizes that our own work gains us nothing spiritually
 - We must depend on the work of God in Christ to save us
 - False religion teaches us to seek for heaven, and that with enough heaven we'll get there eventually
 - True faith says to seek for Jesus Christ, and He will find us and come to live in us, and change us and save us
- As we've learned throughout the story of Genesis, when men rebel, God answers with judgment tempered by grace

[Gen. 11:5](#) The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.

[Gen. 11:6](#) 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.

[Gen. 11:7](#) "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech."

[Gen. 11:8](#) So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city.

[Gen. 11:9](#) 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.

- The Lord comes down to see the city, we're told
 - Do we honestly think God needed to travel down from heaven to see the city?
 - Couldn't God see it just as easily from heaven? Or from anywhere?
 - Of course, and this reference is an anthropomorphism; assigning human behavior to God
 - But it makes an important point
 - While men were busy trying to reach heaven, they didn't even get close
 - God is still required to "come down" to see man's pitiful effort
 - It's been said that trying to reach God by your own effort could be compared to two people standing in the middle of Kansas trying to throw rocks at the North Pole
 - One might throw his rock farther than the other
 - But no matter who throws farther, both rocks fall way short of reaching the goal
 - This is the reality of human work
 - It cannot hope to reach the goal of perfection in God's presence
 - Our efforts will always fall so far short, that even individual differences between one another are meaningless
 - I might be closer to reaching Heaven than you are, but neither of us are even in Heaven's area code, much less in the neighborhood
- Secondly, notice that God refers to these builders as the "sons of men"
 - What Hebrew word do you think is being translated "men" here?
 - It's *adam*

- These are sons of Adam, men in the likeness and pattern of Adam
- Men born into sin and living accordingly
- Even in that reference, God makes clear these people are acting in their sinful nature
- So then God says that language is the key to this rebellion
 - A single language left sin unrestrained
 - There was no barrier to the sinful heart
 - God says nothing will be impossible for men
 - The meaning isn't that men could accomplish literally anything
 - God means that anything man's sinful heart could purpose to accomplish, together men would do it
 - So in grace, God determines not to allow such a situation to go unchecked
 - Speaking in the plural as the Trinity, the Godhead declares He will confuse their language, so that men lose the ability to understand one another
- Let's imagine for a moment what that must have been like
 - One moment, men speak and are understood; they hear another, and they understand
 - Men have never known another language, so they couldn't even appreciate the concept
 - Then suddenly words aren't words any longer
 - From the perspective of each person, nothing has changed in their own speech
 - They still speak and understand their own words
 - They probably don't even realize that their own speech is different from before
 - They still form words and they still understand their own voice

- But as they speak, others show puzzled faces, then quickly the looks turn to concern and then fear
 - Almost immediately, you realize that others are speaking in gibberish, as if they were playing a game
 - But then you see the concern and fear in their eyes and you realize it's no game
- As you desperately seek out someone you can understand, you stumble across an immediate family member and with great relief you realize you can understand one another
 - Slowly, small groups of people with like language begin to collect and band together
 - Still without an explanation, these bands of like language stick together so that some semblance of community is maintained
 - Some groups try in vain to bridge the communication divide, making hand signals and shouting while speaking slowly
 - But soon they abandon the effort, frustrated at the lack of progress and frightened about what the future holds
 - Work stops on the city, both because of the language barrier and because of shock and fear over their circumstances
 - Soon, mistrust and fear begins to set in, as each group wonders what the other groups are planning and worries about attacks
 - This leads men to migrate away from one another for safety
- This place earns its present-day name of Babel, which means confused language, as it does still today
 - Finally, God's will is done
 - The people scatter and begin to fill the earth
 - And the scattering of the language serves to mitigate against man's sinful nature
 - I don't think it's a coincidence that the world is moving back again toward a single language
 - Today, business and the internet is making English the one language of the world again

- And as the world begins to unite again in a common language, it's no coincidence that sin is being magnified
- This is another element of the last days and a precursor to the coming Tribulation on Earth
 - And it's also no coincidence that these days are marked by men building ever bigger cities and towers to their own name
- Remember I mentioned that Moses employs a wonderful literary device to reinforce the point of the story?
 - This story contains a chiasm, a stepping of thoughts in to a point and then back out again
 - The structure begins in verse 1 with the statement "all the earth had one language"
 - This statement is mirrored in v.9 but in an opposite form
 - The language of the whole is confused
 - From v.1 down to v. 5 we find separate statements that each find their compliment in verses 5-9
 - And in the middle is a single statement which has no compliment
 - That single statement is the turning point of the chiasm, where the pattern reverses
 - This laddering produces a visual effect of a "v" laid on its side, with the (turning) point facing to the right
- The purpose of a chiasm is to draw our attention to that turning point
 - In this case, our attention is drawn to the first half of verse 5
 - The Lord came down to see
 - While men were busy working their own plan by their own hands, the Lord came down
 - While men were united in sin and opposed to God, the Lord came down
 - As men worked in futility to reach heaven, the Lord came down
 - This is the story of the Bible

- While we were yet still sinners, the Lord came down
- And died for us on the cross