

GENESIS 11:10-32 (INTRODUCING ABRAHAM)

In the past few weeks, we've left the flood and Noah behind and then we traveled to Babylon to see how the world moved away from God and towards a system of false religion.

This week the Bible backs up to a date before that time to list the line of Shem and about half way through the list of names, it catches up with the story of Babel when we get to Shem's great, great, great grandson Peleg. Eventually today, we'll arrive at the great hero of our faith named Abram or Abraham.

Before we jump into the Bible, let me tell you about the land of Ur where some of Shem's descendants moved to, which is south of Babylon. It's the land that Abraham was called out from and by the time he left, false religion had completely taken over.

It was a city of Mesopotamia midway between the modern city of Baghdad and the head of the Persian Gulf. In ancient times the Euphrates River flowed near the city walls and because it controlled the outlet to the sea, it was favorably located for the development of commerce and for attaining political dominance.

It was the principal center of worship of the Sumerian moon god Nanna. There are three known dynasties from the area and from their earliest days they had set up their own deities.

The oldest dynasty, which goes back to the time of the flood itself, built a temple to the goddess Ninhursag. It was from this land that Abraham received his call to leave with his family and go to a land God would grant to him and his descendants forever, the land of Canaan which today is known as Israel.

Introduction: The names we'll go through in the next 30 minutes or so are listed with almost no commentary at all, but they're important for a few reasons. First, they continue to establish the line of people who will eventually become the people of Israel leading to Jesus.

They also continue to provide dating for the age of the world. We know when things have happened and so we can tell both how long ago this people lived and how long from the creation they lived.

These verses, like others we've looked over, are the only such records on the face of the earth. And yet, curiously, they are included in the most printed document in human history – the Holy Bible. God surely works in wondrous ways!

Text Verse: Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad.”⁵⁷ Then the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?”⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” John 8:56-58

From the beginning, Jesus was and He always will be. Even before the great man of faith, Abraham, existed, Jesus Christ is. The entire Bible speaks of the Person and work of Jesus, so...

May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. The Generations of Shem

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.

This is now the fifth set of generations or genealogies that the Bible has given us. So far we've seen the generations of the heavens and the earth in Genesis 2; the generations of Adam in Genesis 5; the generations of Noah in Genesis 6; and the generations of the sons of Noah in Genesis 10. Now we further refine God's workings in human history by looking at the generations of Noah's second son, Shem.

The Flood of Noah ended in the year 1657 AM and so Shem was 100 years old in the year 1659 AM when his son Arphaxad was born. After Arphaxad was born, Shem lived 500 years and so he died in the year 2159 AM.

If you notice from the time of Shem on, the lives of the people get progressively shorter and each of their first recorded children will often come at an earlier age as well. Shem is the last person to live to 600 years of age. He lived long after Abram was born, which was 10 generations later... Amazing.

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.

Arphaxad was born in the year 1659 and he had Salah in the year 1694 AM. Arphaxad died in the year 2097 at 438 years of age.

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.

Salah was born in the year 1694 AM and he had Eber in the year 1724 AM. Salah died in the year 2127 AM at 463 years of age.

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.

Eber was born in the year 1724 AM and he had his son Peleg in the year 1758 AM. Eber died in the year 2188 AM at 464 years of age. He is the last person who would live to be more than 450 years of age and in fact, he is the last one who would even live beyond 300 years. Man's years drop quickly after the flood.

The name Eber means "One from beyond" or "He who crossed over" and his name is where the term "Hebrew" comes from. Eber was alive at the time of the divisions of languages and he certainly was the father of the family line that maintained the original language of the earth which we call Hebrew today.

Because his name means, “He who crossed over” and it’s recorded that his descendants lived in Ur which is on the opposite side of the Euphrates from Babylon, it’s probable that he and several generations of his descendants moved away from Babylon to Ur some time after the time of the Tower of Babel.

The reason why I say this is that In Genesis 14, we will see the word Hebrew used for the first time in the Bible when speaking about Abraham. He is the man who “crossed over” the Euphrates and away from the area of Babel.

It’s likely that Eber was with him because he lived until 2188 and Abram was born in 2009 – 179 years before Eber died. So this group of people, with this special language, the Hebrew language, crossed over the Euphrates as directed by God’s divine hand.

And in Joshua 24:2 we read that Abraham’s father who will be introduced later, lived on the other side of the Euphrates and worshipped other gods –

“And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Your fathers, *including* Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods.’”

Abraham being a Hebrew certainly crossed the Euphrates with several generations of his fathers, including Eber.

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.

Peleg was born in the year 1758 AM and he had Reu in the year 1788. Peleg died in the year 1997 AM at 239 years of age. He died 191 years before his father Eber and 9 years before his great, great, great grandfather Noah. Yes, Noah was still alive at this time.

Peleg is the last person in this line of Shem who was mentioned in the generations of the sons of Noah in Genesis 10. He was listed with his brother Joktan, and Joktan’s sons were mentioned, but not Peleg’s.

Joktan is no longer relevant to the story and so this line in Chapter 11 focuses on Peleg and those who come after him. It is he, not Joktan, who is an ancestor of Jesus.

Peleg's name means "division" and during his lifetime the nations were divided. From the time of Peleg on, the world is going to move out in many directions. And the languages will be as varied and difficult to understand by others as they are to this day.

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.

Reu was born in the year 1788 AM and he had his son Serug in the year 1820 AM. Reu died in the year 2027 at 239 years of age.

²² Serug lived thirty years, and begot Nahor.

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

Serug was born in the year 1820 AM and he had his son Nahor in the year 1850 AM. Serug died in the year 2050 AM at 230 years of age.

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.

Nahor was born in the year 1850 AM and he had his son Terah in the year 1879 AM. Nahor died in the year 1998 AM at the age of 148. This was 22 years before his father Serug and 8 years before his great-great-great-great-great-great grandfather Noah.

Yes, Noah was still alive in the 9th generation when Abraham's father Terah was born and even when Nahor died. The environment of the post flood world is obviously much harsher on humans than it was before the flood.

And this harshness has a cumulative effect, transferring down the line. We know this because Noah lived 350 years after the flood and each generation lived less than the one before. So whatever affects us is something that transfers to the next generation.

Noah outlived many of those who came after him and the incredible thing to me is to think about all of the trouble and turning from God that had come about since the flood.

All the people had to do was to go up to Noah and ask him if the story about the flood was true. He was related to them all, so all they needed to do was “go ask grandpa.”

But the Bible shows us that people like Nimrod rejected this and went out fighting against God and trying to do things their own way. And is this really any different than us? We have photographs and movies about the holocaust in Germany and yet there are people in almost every country that deny it happened.

Nobody denies that America used two atom bombs on Japan and yet something which has much more evidence, from the same time frame, is denied. If you go to Japan today, there is almost no trace of the atom bomb’s destruction and what is there could be blamed on a fire or a normal aerial attack, but no one denies it occurred.

If you go to Germany, not only are there memorials and photographs but the concentration camps are still there and the ovens are there. Everything is there for anyone who will simply open their eyes, and yet people deny it happened.

This is a very sad human condition called peanutheaditis and it didn’t just exist in the early post flood world, but it continues on to this day. Peanutheaditis can be defined as the denying of that which is certain and in the face of overwhelming evidence.

Another good example of peanutheaditis concerns the modern state of Israel. There is more than abundant evidence that there never was a group

of people known as the “palestinians.” In fact, all you need to do is read the book, Innocents Abroad, by Mark Twain to know this is true. And you can read it right on line for free.

He documented his travels through the Holy Land in 1869 and marks out how many people lived there and what the people groups were. This was before the modern state of Israel and even the Zionist movement and so it is completely unbiased.

It shows without a shadow of a doubt that the land of Israel didn’t have the volumes of so called “palestinians” that they claim nowadays. And there are plenty of other historical records about the land and the people to verify the truth of this matter.

There also never was a palestinian government, palestinian money, or any other way to connect the palestinians to the land. But this doesn’t matter to people who hate the Bible and hate the truth.

Instead of believing the truth, they allow the terrible affliction known as peanutheaditis to direct every thought and every action of their lives.

There is a cure for peanutheaditis though. It’s not a terminal disease by any stretch. Rather, all one needs to do is to read and believe their Bible, follow Jesus obediently, and open their eyes to the truth of history, and reject the lies of the world.

I hope each person here will pursue the remedy for peanutheaditis all the days of their life and will remain healthy, happy, and content that we can know truth, we can reject lies, and we can stand firm on the surety of God and His gospel message which tells us about Jesus His Son.

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

Terah was born in the year 1879 AM and from this point, the Bible dating can get confusing and you really need to dig to figure things out. Abram is listed first in this verse, but he is not the oldest son. We know this because

the eldest, Haran, died back in their hometown of Ur. I'll explain this a little bit later.

Abram is actually the second son of Terah and once again we see God's guiding hand in the process of Divine Election. We saw it when Adam's oldest son Cain was replaced by Seth and we saw it when Noah's oldest son Japheth was replaced by Shem.

The pattern continues with Abram replacing Haran and it will continue all the way through the Bible, leading us to a greater knowledge of the Person of Jesus Christ.

Verse 26 ends the generations of Shem and leads us into a new section of the biblical account, which is our next main thought of the day...

II. The generations of Terah

²⁷ This is the genealogy of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran begot Lot.

This is now the sixth set of generations that the Bible has given us – the generations of the heavens and the earth; the generations of Adam; the generations of Noah; the generations of the sons of Noah; the generations of Shem, and now those of Terah.

One of the things I try to do when going through verse by verse like this is to remind people that there are keys to understanding the Bible and how things will develop. We just talked about one of those keys – seeing the second son replace the first. This is the key of Divine Election.

In the verse we just read, we see Terah and then three of his sons listed. Right after that, it says, "Haran begot Lot." Because Lot is mentioned like this, we can guess that we will be seeing him again, and the chances are that he will show up again in a significant way.

Because Lot is introduced now, it is a good time to mention that he very well may be older than Abram. Most people who have read the story of

Abram and Lot know that he is Abram's nephew and we normally associate nephews being younger than their uncles.

But Abram's older brother Haran was 60 years older than he was and so it's likely that Lot was older than him as well. In fact, studies of the way these two guys interact have some scholars convinced this is the case.

²⁸ And Haran died before his father Terah in his native land, in Ur of the Chaldeans.

Haran was the oldest son of Terah. I said I'd explain how I knew that a little later, and a little later isn't yet. So you'll have to wait till... a little later. Here, however, we see that Haran died in Ur before the family left.

Before we go on, we can look back on some great parallels between the line of Adam to Noah before the flood and the line of Noah to Abram after the flood. Some of them are pretty cool.

Noah rose above the waters of the flood. And Adam was created out of the land which was brought out of the waters of creation.

Adam ate of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil which caused a curse on his seed, just as Noah was drunk by the fruit of the vine which ended in a curse on his seed.

Cain was a builder and the first to organize a culture on earth before the flood and he did it in the land east of Eden which was around where Iraq is today. This culture was separated from God and led to overall wickedness in the world.

Nimrod was a builder and the first to organize a culture on the earth after the flood and he did it in the land which is around where Iraq is today. This culture was separated from God and led to overall wickedness in the world.

Noah was the tenth man from Adam and was saved from the world of physical death by flooding waters. Abram was the tenth from Shem and

was saved from the world of spiritual death in flame – the meaning of Ur where he came from is light or flame.

The Bible says there will be two destructions of the world – one by flood and one by fire.

The world into which Adam was created was given the great lights of the sky for signs and for seasons. The world into which Noah arrived was given the rainbow as a sign of the covenant.

In Genesis 5, before the flood, the 10 generations of Adam are given from Adam to Noah. This genealogy ends with the listing of Noah's three sons – all of whom would have an important impact on the rest of the Bible story.

In Genesis 11, after the flood, the 10 generations of the sons of Noah are given, from Shem to Abram. This genealogy ends with the listing of Terah's three sons – all of whom would have an important impact on the rest of the Bible story.

These parallels aren't at all obvious and they have to be searched for. They're put here to show us that there is a divine hand behind the writing of these accounts and that He is in control of all things.

So let's stop here, for just a minute and think about that. If God has been in control of all of these things even down to the minutest details, then shouldn't that make us feel better about the things that are getting us down in life right now?

Why should we assume that God, who was in charge of every detail of the pre-flood world and the post flood world, right up to the time of Abram should somehow stop being in control of it during our own lives. The big question during the attacks of 9/11 was "Where is God in all of this?"

The answer, if you follow these accounts like we are, is that He was right there and completely aware of everything that happened to every person that it happened to. And that same God is still in control when you wake up

and wonder how you're going to pay your bills or what will happen to the family problem you're facing.

God isn't unaware of your trials and He asks you to not worry about things that seem hopeless or out of control. Going through these names, and dates, and ages, and places might seem to make your head hurt, but here are two things for you to consider –

First, I'm the one who had to sit down and type all of this up. So it's really not all that bad for you.

And secondly and more to the point, God gives us these minute details to show us that He really does have His hand on the ages and on the people of the world. And He has His hand in every single detail to show His immense wisdom and greatness.

Never feel like you're just an unwanted grain of sand on an infinitely long beach. No matter how many grains of sand there are, He is tending to and aware of each and every one of them.

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.

The two remaining sons of Terah both married their own relatives. Abram married his half sister Sarai. We learn later in Genesis that she was the daughter of his father Terah, but they had a different mother, meaning Terah had more than one wife.

Nahor on the other hand married the daughter of his oldest brother Haran. And then we have another daughter of Haran mentioned, Iscah. Remember, what I've said a jillion times – when a person is mentioned like this in the Bible, even if it's only once, their name is important to something else in the Bible.

Iscah means “on who looks forth” and because her name is mentioned only once with no other known significance, most scholars – and I mean most

going back thousands of years – say that Iscah and Sarai are the same person.

This is a cheap way of resolving the problem and it doesn't resolve it at all. Iscah is not Sarai and Sarai is not Iscah. It's very clear they are two people.

The reason why she is mentioned is that she is most probably Lot's wife. If you know the story of Lot and the destruction of Sodom, the destroying angels told him, "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed."

And then we read...

But his wife looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

Iscah, or "Jessica" in English, means "One who looks forth." Instead of living out her name, she looked back instead and became the seasoning for many curry dishes in the Middle East.

³⁰ But Sarai was barren; she had no child.

By the time these pilgrims are ready to leave Ur and head towards the Promised Land, Abram and Sarai had been married long enough to know that Sarai was barren. It's probable that others in the family already had children, but there were none for Sarai.

And just like the introduction of people's names, verses like this will always lead to something interesting later in the Bible. For those of you who know the story of Abram and Sarai, you know that her being barren will affect the course of human history in enormous ways and it continues to affect it to this day.

She is the first person mentioned who is barren, but there will be many more in the pages of the Bible. When a statement like this is made, it will inevitably lead to a happy resolution and to a demonstration of the greatness and glory of God. Stay tuned in the weeks ahead to the wonderful story of Abram and Sarai...

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.

Off goes the family, escaping the flame of Ur and heading for spiritual renewal in the land that God will lead them to. On the way to Canaan... they stopped.

The reason isn't given, but they stop in a place called Haran and we can guess that when they stopped, Terah their father knew he couldn't go on, maybe because he was just too old. Instead of going any further, it seems they established a foothold in the land and called it Haran after their dead son and brother.

Abram wouldn't leave this place until Terah died. Only after that would he continue on to the land he was promised to come to. If you think about it, there are people all around the world that are symbolically a lot like Terah.

They come to know that there is a Promised Land and they start their journey towards it, but they never make the commitment to complete the journey. It's sad too, because God doesn't make it hard on the lost soul.

He makes the call and waits for the response. When He receives it, He ushers them the rest of the way to glory. All the work is done and He only asks that we receive it by faith. But so many, like Terah, see it only from a distance. They never make it to the place God intends for them... very sad.

³² So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran.

Terah was born in the year 1879 and he had his son Abram in the year 2009 AM. Terah died and Abram was called to move to the land of Canaan in the year 2084 AM. Terah was 205 years old at his death and he is the last person to live over 200 years of age and believe it or not Shem is still alive at this point.

A bit earlier, I said that Abram was the second son of Terah and that I'd explain that later. Well, later is now. It's a bit confusing, but Genesis 12:4 says that Abram left Haran to go to the Promised Land when he was 75 years old.

His father Terah would have been 130 when he had Abram in the year 2009. But Terah was 70 when he had his first child. That means that Haran, the oldest son, was 60 years older than him.

The funny thing about this is that we actually need the New Testament to confirm this. Without Acts 7, we could only speculate, but in Stephen's speech in Acts 7, it says this –

Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, **when his father was dead**, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell.

Only when Terah died did God call Abraham to move. Next week, we'll actually start into the account of Abraham's call and his move to the land of Canaan. He is one of the greatest heroes of faith in the Bible and yet he faced plenty of failures and failings just like we all do.

But God uses real, fallible people for His purposes and He always carries them to a happy end. Don't forget this as you go home today. Yes you have troubles and your own shortcomings, but God can and will use you as you submit to Him and His leading.

The Generations of Shem and Terah

Shem was 100 when he begot is son named Arphaxad
It was two years after the flood
After he begot Arphaxad five hundred more years he had
And other sons and daughters received his life blood

Arphaxad lived 35 years and he begot Salah his son
And then Arphaxad lived 403 years more

He added other sons and daughters before his race was run
And then Arphaxad stepped through eternity's door

Salah lived 30 years and then came Eber – a baby boy
Salah then added on another 403 years just like his dad
During that time, more children came to give him joy
And he kicked off at 433 thinking life wasn't that bad

Eber was 34 when along came Peleg which means "division"
And we continue to follow the line recorded with such precision

After having Peleg Eber lived 430 years more
And he had other children before knocking on heaven's door

Peleg lived thirty years before he begot Reu his son
And then another 209 years Peleg continued to live
And during Peleg's time, came many languages instead of just one
And so the people spread out as if having gone through a sieve

Reu's son Serug came when he was aged 32 years
When he saw his son he was surely filled with joyful tears

After Serug arrived, Reu live 207 years more
And other sons and daughters were added to his store

Serug lived 30 years and begot Nahor, Abram's grandpa
And then Serug lived 200 years after that birth
And other sons and daughters Serug in his life saw
And he kicked the bucket after 230 years of mirth

Nahor had his son Terah when he was just 29
And little Terah probably made Nahor's face shine

And other sons and daughters Nahor did add
And he died at 148 thinking life wasn't that bad

Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran in the land of Ur

And Haran begot Lot which made him happy for sure
But Haran died in his native land
And then Abram and Nahor took wives from their kin
Abram married Sarai and Nahor took Milcah's hand
Back then marrying your family wasn't a sin

Milcah's dad was Haran and she had sister, Iscah by name
And Abram's wife Sarai was barren, she had no child
But the barren woman would be the one of great fame
When someday on her womb God finally smiled

So Terah took Abram and Lot and Sarai his daughter in law
And they headed out for Canaan, from Ur they did withdraw

And when they came to Haran, they dwelt there
Until the time that Terah closed his eyes and died
He was 205 years old when they said his funeral prayer
And in the ground of Haran his body does abide

This is the line of Shem and the line of Terah too
These lines that lead to our Lord and Savior Jesus
They are recorded for us to carefully read through
Because God recorded them for especially for us

Hallelujah and Amen...