**July 22, 2020 | A Study on Chapter 11 of the Book of Genesis**

**The Tower of Babel**

Chapter 11 begins with the statement that the whole world had one language and a common speech.  Last week we discussed verse 10:31 which indicates that the descendants of Shem had their own language.  Bob Deffinbaugh, a writer for Bible.Org believes that this describes the Semites *after* the Tower of Babel.  The Bible does not always progress in a strict chronological order so events occurring in chapter 11 could easily precede what is described in chapter 10.  Verse 2 contains the seemingly innocuous statement “as men moved eastward” (KJV “as they journeyed *from* the east” indicating traveling in the opposite direction)  This would suggest a sort of herd mentality to move as a group perhaps seeking new frontiers.  Our country experienced that in its early years as there was a migration west.  The saying “Go west young man” is often attributed to Horace Greely, however those words appeared in an editorial by John Soule 14 years before it was used by Greely.  Going eastward held no promise since that land had already been settled and there was the natural barrier of the Atlantic Ocean just beyond.    These early clans were pulled in an easterly direction which could be viewed as turning away from God as Cain did when he went out from God’s presence east of Eden.  For Adam and Eve, the barrier to the Garden of Eden was on the eastern side, preventing their re-entry (3:24).  When Lot and Abraham separated, Lot chose to go east (13:11).  When the Israelites went into Canaan, two and one half tribes chose to remain east of the Jordan River (Num. 32:1-5).  Even if they traveled west from their previous migration, it seems that the initial movement was toward the east.  Traveling back west to the plain of Shinar was not a turn back to God, rather they were drawn by the fertile ground of Babylon in an area which is north of Baghdad in modern Iraq.  Estimates of the population at that time range from 30,000 to 250,000.

Verses 3-4 are devoted to the construction of the Tower of Babel although it is not specifically named as such.  First we see that unlike the mountains where they previously lived, stones were not available so they made bricks out of clay.  They used tar for mortar and for waterproofing as they may have feared another flood.  Matthew Henry wrote that they would trust a tower of their own making rather than the promise of God not to destroy the world by a flood again.  The building of the tower had the following stated goals:

1.      A tower reaching to the heavens

2.      We might make a name for ourselves

3.      We would not be scattered over the face of the earth

A tower reaching to the heavens would make them like God.  Last week we studied Nimrod who was probably the leader of this folly.  As we discussed, he may have been a type of antichrist and a desire to be like God would be consistent with that.   We also see they wanted to make a name for themselves.  Often people are concerned with their legacy, wanting to be remembered even revered after their death.  Some want the recognition while still alive so they can enjoy the adulation.  For some, the fame is purchased rather than earned.  It is common for wealthy donors to demand buildings be named after them so they can get credit for their gifts (see Matt. 6:3).  Finally, their desire to not be scattered over the face of the earth was in direct conflict with God’s instructions to Noah to replenish the earth.  As we discussed in our study of Revelation, there are Old Testaments events that are counterparts to events that would happen later or will happen in the future.  The reason that the effort to build this tower and city was detestable to God was that it was an attempt to establish a world religion/government similar to what John envisioned in his revelation.  Following is an excerpt from my notes on chapter 17 of Revelation:

*As we have discussed, Satan imitates God with his version of the Trinity and here he has his version of the church.  It would seem to be a world wide religion that has its center in a future Babylon.  During the Tribulation, God’s 144,000 servants have God’s name on their foreheads.  The woman on the beast has the name mystery on her forehead as well as the name Babylon, the mother of prostitutes.  Babylon itself was an early center of false religion.  According to David Guzik, the Babylonian religion was founded by the wife of Nimrod (a great-grandson of Noah), named Semiramis. She was a high priestess of idol worship, and she gave birth to a son who she claimed was conceived miraculously. The son, named Tammuz, was considered a savior. It was also said that Tammuz was killed by a wild beast and then miraculously brought back to life. Baal was the local, Canaanite name for the Babylonian.  Another example of Satan imitating God.*

God’s reaction to the effort to build the tower is to confound their efforts by confusion of language and causing them to scatter to other areas of the earth.  Imagine a contractor trying to build a house using numerous subcontractors who each spoke a different language and the contractor spoke yet another language.  The result might be an abandoned project which is what happened with the tower.  They could not complete it because they were not able to communicate with one another.  It was the opposite of the Day of Pentecost where different languages were spoken yet each man could understand everything that was spoken.  Matthew Henry pointed out that God was actually merciful in moderating the penalty.  They deserved death but God only banished them from this region.

The remainder of the chapter is devoted to reciting the generations that followed Shem eventually leading to the introduction of Abram who would be the father of the Jewish nation.