

LECTURE VII

THE CONFLICT CONTINUES – MANKIND IN TOTAL REBELLION.

Chapters 9-11

What part does the Tower of Babel play in the unfolding of God's plan of redemption?

That is what we are going to look at now.

Now it is obvious that when we come to chapters 10-11, we have reached another major turning point in the history of humanity.

Now it is important to see that chapters 10-11 are closely related to chapter 9.

Chapter 10 is an explanation of chapter 9:18-19

GE 9:18 The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) ¹⁹ These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the earth.

Chapter 10 shows how the descendants of Noah's three sons and their families spread over the earth.

However, you will notice that the scattering only took place AFTER the Tower of Babel, which is recorded in chapter 11.

GE 11:8 So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹ That is why it was called Babelⁿ--because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

This means that **chronologically**, chapter 10 comes after chapter 11.

In other words, chapter 10 shows the result of God's judgment following the building of Babel.

Now, bearing this in mind, let us look in more detail at the events recorded in chapter 11.

Chapter 11:1 describes the world after the Flood, after Noah and his sons began to rebuild civilization.

Now our attention is drawn to a world totally different from what we know.

There are three things that marked humanity at this time in human history.

- ❑ **They spoke one language.**

Chapter 11:1

GE 11:1 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech.

Clearly Noah's most immediate descendants spoke the same language, before mankind was divided.

- ❑ **Consisted of One Race.**

Chapter 10 stresses this point where we see that all races have their origin in the three sons of Noah.

Paul in his sermon on Mars Hill in Athens goes back even further when he says:

"From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth". [Acts 17:16]

Another characteristic of this early civilization was

- ❑ **A determination to be independent and united.**

Here we have in effect a declaration of united independence.

Notice the progressive steps: -

Verse 2 they moved eastward and settled down.

Verse 3 they began a building project

Verse 4 they built a city
 they built a tower.
 they refused to spread over the earth.

They wanted to settle down, to work together and be united and as a celebration of their unity they decided to build a massive tower.

Their motive.

Go back to chapter 9:1 and 7

*GE 9:1 Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and **fill the earth.***

*GE 9:7 As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; **multiply on the earth and increase upon it.***"

God commanded them to spread over the earth; to fill it.

Yet, in spite of God's expressed command, the people of that time decided to settle down.

Notice chapter 11:4

4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

Here was a declaration of independence - IDI.

Chapter 10:8-12 provides us with the background.

GE 10:6 The sons of Ham:

Cush, Mizraim,ⁿ Put and Canaan.

GE 10:8 Cush was the fatherⁿ of Nimrod, who grew to be a mighty warrior on the earth. ⁹ He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; that is why it is said, "Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the LORD." ¹⁰ The first centers of his kingdom were Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Calneh, inⁿ Shinar.ⁿ ¹¹ From that land he went to Assyria, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir,ⁿ Calah ¹² and Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city.

Notice the amount of space that is devoted to one man, **Nimrod**, one of Ham's descendants.

His name gives us a clue to this man's character and influence – '*let us revolt*'.

He is mentioned as a mighty warrior on the earth, which literally read, '*the first mighty one on the earth*', which OT scholars interpret as the **first tyrant** upon the earth – he was the first dictator – perhaps he lead the revolt against God's rule.

'*Before the Lord*' = in full view of God – without fear of God – '*in your face*' kind of attitude.

Notice in **verse 10** that he built an empire for himself, a complex of cities that he ruled from his capital, Babylon.

It is interesting that Babylon became a symbol of man's rebellion and sin.

In the **OT** = the godless city and empire and in the **NT**, the godless system that resists God.

It is also obvious that there was a strong religious element here – **that Tower**.

Notice that they built it to reach the heaven = it was a tower dedicated to the heavens – they worshiped the angelic host, the stars.

The pattern, was of course, set by Adam and Eve and continued in Cain and his descendants, culminating in the Flood, and continued in these post-flood people.

Here was the setting up of the kingdom of the world, the kingdom of darkness – standing in direct opposition to the kingdom of God.

A new start has been made – but man is still affected by sin – Adam, Cain, Lamech, and Nimrod.

Although God made a new start what we see here is that that the kingdom of the worlds have again emerged.

These chapters serve as a **model** of man's rebellion and point to something that we can see throughout human history – a determination to live independently of God.

It shows that humanity left to itself, constantly and consistently turns away from God, refusing to live under his control, wanting to do its own thing, leading to chaos and misery.

But these chapters prepare the way for the unfolding of God's plan of salvation through one man, Abraham, one family, one nation – Israel and finally the Lord Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, the seed of the woman – the Redeemer.

FROM VERSE 5-8 WE ARE SHOWN GOD'S REACTION TO MAN'S DETERMINATION TO SETTLE DOWN AND UNITE AGAINST HIM.

God judges the kingdoms of this world.

He confuses their language and scatters them over the face of the earth.

This is clear in chapter 10, which shows the results of the scattering and the different nations that emerged from Noah's sons.

The confusion at Babel was permanent and effective.

When Noah's descendants refused to fill the earth, God intervened and scattered them far beyond Mesopotamia.

Why did God intervene?

Verse 6 "***nothing impossible***".

The limitless possibilities of a united and fallen mankind for evil caused God to act – judgment and grace.

Imagine the tyranny of a world wide dictatorship.

That is what God prevented.

He divided to reduce the evil.

God's judgment is in fact a demonstration of His grace to us.

GOD'S GRACE OVERCOMES MAN'S SIN.

Was this the end?

Did everything only end in confusion – chaos – division and separation?

Was there any hope for the future?

How could life now go on?

At this point we are pressed to ask: *'O Lord, what now? Will you leave the people whom you created to be scattered, confused and divided from you and from each other?*

O Lord, what now?

It is when we ask that question that we are ready for what **follows in chapter 12.**

We come to the unfolding of God's plan of redemption – preparing the way for the coming of Christ.

In him, God reversed the judgment of Babel, and through him God created a new community.

That is the essence of God's covenant with Abraham – that through him God would bless all the families of the earth [12:3]

Here is the answer to man's separation.

The answer lies in the unifying message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You see the counterpart to the judgment that dispersed mankind at Babel, resulting in language and race distinctions, was the healing of **Pentecost** in which language confusion was overcome and peoples 'from every nation under heaven' were joined in common faith and fellowship.

They returned home still speaking their native tongues, observing their ethnic social customs, and bearing the genetic characteristics with which they had come to Jerusalem.

But they also went away realizing as Paul would later say, 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus [Gal 3:28]

Here God was saying there is an answer to man's great divisions.

There is a way to bring unity in humanity, to bring a new society, through the Power of the Holy Spirit, that power that first brings us to God and then reconciles us to each other, on the basis of Christ's reconciling work. EPH 2:14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,

His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

And this is how Paul puts it in Galatians

GAL 3:26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Stott:

Jesus died and rose again to create a new reconciled community [reconcile to God and to each other – create one new man].

We are part of God's new society – the new humanity, God's kingdom amidst the kingdoms of the world.

Let's look at the new start in Genesis 12. Chapter 12 to 50 [Time BC 2165 – 1875]

God begins to create a people of his kingdom.

He chooses one man – he must leave his country – covenant – promises – seed and land encapsulate the kingdom.

The forming of this new people.

Genesis 12:1-9, Genesis 15:1-21

TITLE: A New Beginning

We have looked at Genesis 1-11 and we ended with tragic story of man's rebellion in **Chapter 11**, the building of the Tower of Babel, that symbol of man's rejection of God's rule.

Chapter 10 showed us the results of that rebellion – the scattering of the post-flood people over the whole earth.

Today we move on to consider **chapter 12**.

For the sake of clarity I am going to look at this passage under three heading:

Context of this chapter in Genesis

Significance of chapter 12 and the incident

CONTEXT.

Where does chapter 12 fit into the context of Genesis?

Genesis 12 records the calling of Abram – a story many Christians are familiar with.

Who was Abram?

Let us step back a bit.

Genesis 10, as I said, records the genealogy of Noah's three sons – Ham, Japheth and Shem, who was the next in the line of promise. [Remember 2 lines – the line of Cain and the line of Seth].

Genesis 11 verses 10-26 focuses on the line of Shem.

This is the 'Promised Line' [Adam – Seth – through to Noah – Shem – now Abram was descended from Shem – he was in the promised line although his father was a worshipper of other gods.

It is again significant how quickly the people of the kingdom were nothing but a small minority.

(Jos 24:2) And Joshua said to all the people, So says Jehovah, the God of Israel, Your fathers lived Beyond the River in times past, Terah the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods.

It is amazing how soon after Babel humanity lost a true knowledge of God (it can be lost in a generation).

Only a few retained some knowledge of the true God – Job and Melchizedek.

Although Genesis 12 refers to God's call, it is interesting that in Acts 7 we read that God actually called him while he was still in Ur – that is much earlier than chapter 12.

Where does chapter 12 fit into Genesis? There is no doubt that it is a crucial chapter.

Genesis 1-11 = the story of humanity's sinfulness.

We have seen that Genesis 1-11 is a story of how sin affected the whole of creation – the whole of the universe and the whole of humanity.

It begins with Adam's disobedience – moves on to his sons, which is clearly manifested in Cain who murdered his brother Abel.

From chapter 4 we saw how sin spread from father to son and reached a climax when the world was so wicked that God had to destroy the world in the flood.

In other words, sin spread from one man, through his family until sin was ubiquitous and endemic.

We saw that of the whole of mankind [not impossible that the population could be counted in billions] only Noah and his family (8 in all) were god-fearing.

God saved Noah and his family – was this the new beginning?

No! By the time we come to Genesis 11, mankind is again in total rebellion against God.

They refused to scatter over the whole earth as God had commanded – instead they settled down, built a city – established an empire and built a tower as a symbol of their might.

Chapters 1-11 show man's failure to live a life orientated toward God and it ends in chaos and confusion.

Chapter 1 – 11 is a terrible story of man's failure.

Chapters 1-11 cover a long period of time – thousands of years – even more, depending on your understanding of creation – it is not only 4000 years.

In chapters 1-11 we have God dealing with mankind as a whole.

We can sense that from chapter 12 there is a change – it marks a turning point.

From chapter 12, we hear no more about the nations of the world – those people scattered over the earth – it is as if they no longer exist.

What happened to them?

We have to read about them in secular history – about the rise of the great cultures – the Sumerian, the Hittite and the Egyptian cultures.

The whole focus is on a small group of people and it begins in chapter 12.

What is the significance of chapter 12 then?

SIGNIFICANCE OF GOD'S APPEARING TO ABRAM.

What is the significance of this chapter in the unfolding of God's plan of salvation?

Chapter 12 marks a turning point – notice that the period covered is much shorter – 280 years [Gen 12-50].

There is a narrowing of focus chronologically.

Chapter 12 marks a new beginning in Genesis.

Chapters 1-11 deals with the problem.

Chapter 12f deals with God's solution.

Much more space given to the solution than to the problem.

Chapter 12f – the rest of the Bible shows God's grace – God's great plan of salvation.

As far as Abram is concerned (only later is his name changed to Abraham after he was given the sign of circumcision = father of many), you will find that Abram and his calling are mentioned many times in the Bible.

[In Romans and Galatians for example and is used to teach key truths about salvation].

What is his role?

Just as one man, Adam brought sin and the curse, so we see how God choose one man, Abram whose offspring [seed] would bring blessing to the whole world.

We see the failure of man – but we see man’s failure overcome by God’s grace.

God is faithful and merciful – he did not abandon his plan to deliver man from Satan’s power, and sin.

Here we see how God puts into operation the promise he made in Genesis 3:15

(Gen 3:15) And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He will bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.

Let us look more closely at chapter 12.

What was happening here?

Read again verses 1-3

(Gen 12:1) And Jehovah said to Abram, Go out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house into a land that I will show you.

(Gen 12:2) And I will make you a great nation. And I will bless you and make your name great. And you shall be a blessing.

(Gen 12:3) And I will bless those that bless you and curse the one who curses you. And in you shall all families of the earth be blessed.

The focus is not on a call to discipleship – using Abram as a discipleship model that is to individualize this passage and to wrest it from its redemptive purpose.

Abram does not just stand before us in his individual capacity – but he has a corporate significance.

His call marked, as I said, a turning point in God’s dealings with mankind.

Up to this point, as I have already pointed out – God dealt with the mankind as a whole.

Now God, as it were, turns from mankind and focuses on one man – and his sons – Isaac, Jacob – one family and then one group of people.

By the end of Genesis – God is dealing with only 70 people, in the midst of the great civilizations of the world.

He uses the greatest civilization to protect his people, Egypt.

There they were, civilized, advanced, sophisticated and religious – but God left them in darkness.

But God was dealing with an insignificant group of people.

What is special about them? Nothing.

(Deu 7:6) For you *are* a holy people to Jehovah your God. Jehovah your God has chosen you to be a special people to Himself above all people that are upon the face of the earth.

(Deu 7:7) Jehovah did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people, for you *were* the fewest of all people.

(Deu 7:8) But because Jehovah loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn to your fathers, Jehovah has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you out of the house of slaves, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Abram was the next in the line of Promise.

In spite of man's sinfulness and rebellion, nothing could stop God's plan to deliver man from Satan's power.

The story of Abraham in the outworking of God's redemptive plan.

We are simply going to move chapter by chapter as we read the account of the story of Abraham, describing the events recorded.

We will then look at these events in the context of the story of redemption.

In other words, viewing these events within the context of salvation history.

To do this we will show how the NT viewed these events – specifically how the NT shows clearly that all these events all coalesce or merge in the life, death, resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As I have repeatedly said, if you isolate these stories from the theme of the Bible, you end up with unrelated stories from which you will only be able to draw some devotional thoughts and apply these stories moralistically [examples for us to follow].

If you isolate these stories from the God's progressive revelation from Genesis to Revelation, you will miss the whole point. So, let me repeat my goal in these studies is to give you the key to understanding the Bible as one big story.

I want to help you to understand the individual stories – to understand the Bible, to help you to read the Bible as God intended, not as have used it as a collection of stories, unrelated to each other.

Genesis 12:1-3

(Genesis 12:1) Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

(Genesis 12:2) And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

(Genesis 12:3) I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

(Genesis 12:4) So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

(Genesis 12:5) And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan,

This is a turning point in Genesis – we have seen the serious effects of sin.

Here we come to God's solution – how he will reverse the curse, how he will restore all things spoiled by sin.

In **chapter 10** we see the nations under God's judgment – scattered over the face of the earth – they are under the curse of sin.

Chapter 12 focuses on a reversal of this – Blessing the nations of the world.

[I have already mentioned that the reversal of Babel, is Pentecost – **Acts 2**].

It is through Abram that God planned to bless the nations.

The first step was a promise of a land and a seed.

[Significance of land – Eden – New Heaven and New Earth = Kingdom concept].

In spite of the fact that Abram is 75 years old and his wife, Sarai 65, he believed God's promise.

Now we have already seen the importance of a seed – go back to Gen 3:15

(Genesis 3:15) I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

We see the seed focuses on Seth and then Noah and then Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah, David, Solomon etc.

Every-time the promise would be ratified in a Covenant – we will see this in **chapter 15** of Genesis and the sign of the Covenant in **chapter 17**.

But it would ultimately it would be through the Lord Jesus.

You will see this picked up in **Matthew's genealogy**.

(Matthew 1:1) The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

(Matthew 1:2) Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

(Matthew 1:17) So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

(Matthew 1:18) Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

Matthew connects Jesus Christ to Abraham and David; with them God entered into a covenant.

Now turn to **Galatians 3** where Paul makes the connection with Abraham and his faith in God's promise of a seed and also making the connection with those who are the spiritual seed of Abraham, believers since Pentecost,

(Gal 3:6) Even as Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.

(Gal 3:7) Therefore know that those of faith, these are the sons of Abraham.

(Gal 3:8) And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations through faith, preached the gospel before to Abraham, *saying*, "In you shall all nations be blessed."

(Gal 3:9) So then those of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

(Gal 3:13) Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, [which God gave to show up the sinfulness of sin] being made a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed *is* everyone having been hanged on a tree");

(Gal 3:14) so that the blessing of Abraham might be to the nations in Jesus Christ, and that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

(Gal 3:16) And to Abraham and to his Seed the promises were spoken. It does not say, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, "And to your Seed," which is Christ.

So you see how crucial this event is in the unfolding of the story of redemption it represents the turning point – judgment/curse, blessing.

Thus God's Covenant with Abram was the First Step in the outworking of God's Plan of Salvation – Redemption.

God's plan of salvation concerns nothing less than the **Total Renewal of Creation.**

God's plan of salvation was to put creation in a position better than before – and that included man.

It is that plan that God progressively revealed and is unfolded in the OT – in action, in symbol, in word [Explanation], in ceremony and in ritual – all pointing to a coming Saviour, a Deliverer, the Eternal Son of God who would become man – the second or last Adam, if you like.

So what we have in **chapters 12-17** is the first step in the process to redeem all things.

Abram's call and the covenant God made with him then were crucial to his plan of salvation.

Let us move on **Genesis 12:10-26**

This records Abrams move to Egypt.

(Genesis 12:10) Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.

(Genesis 12:11) When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, (Genesis 12:12) and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live.

(Genesis 12:13) Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake."

(Genesis 12:14) When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.

(Genesis 12:15) And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.

(Genesis 12:16) And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.

(Genesis 12:17) But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

(Genesis 12:18) So Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?

(Genesis 12:19) Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go."

(Genesis 12:20) And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had.

What is the significance of these events?

- *Firstly it shows quite clearly that God did not call a man who was perfect or whose faith was exemplary or particularly strong.*

How honest the Bible is about the Old Testament believers.

We see here how Abram moves from faith to fear because of his circumstances.

In spite of God's promise, we see in **verse 10**, he did not trust God's provision.

And then we see he did not trust God's protection – he is afraid for his own safety because Sarai was so beautiful [at 65] without modern make up and Botox's.

So he works things out for himself – we see in **verses 11-13** he works out a plan of deception.

It is a plan to put Sarai at risk – he exposes her, he is prepared to do this to protect his own skin – that is what was happening – he does what Adam did, he did not protect his wife from the serpent.

And then in **verse 16** we see that he acquires wealth in a questionable way – through his deception.

- *Secondly, ultimately Abram's lack of faith was endangering the fulfilment of God's promises.*

We will see this repeated – how there are threats to the fulfilment of God's promise.

But what we see is how God, using weak, sinful and failing men, remains faithful – he fulfils the promises in spite of the weakness of those he called.

There are no heroes in the Bible – you realize that, so do not use them as examples for us to follow – God remains the hero.

Even the book of **Hebrews** does not focus on the strength of Abraham's faith, but on his faith, (Hebrews 11:10) For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Yes he was a man of faith, but that faith was mixed with moments of doubt – and we see that his faith developed over time and that is what the book of Hebrews speaks of in **chapter 11**.

- *Now what is interesting as well is that this story foreshadows the story of Israel and the Exodus.*

Do you see the parallels?

Jacob and his family move to Egypt because of a famine – there they prosper but are eventually enslaved but through plagues God delivers them and so they are on their way to the land God promised Abraham.