

“Now the whole earth had one language and one speech” (Genesis 11:1).

According to Genesis 11:1, there was a period in history when the entire human population shared a universal language. In addition, every human being shared a “common speech” or “arrangement” with regard to that language. This suggests that the diverse range of dialects, accents, and regional speech patterns that we are familiar with today did not exist in that era.

For example, those who live within the United Kingdom and the United States generally employ English as a common language. Nevertheless, it is often easy to identify someone's geographic origin simply by listening to the way he or she speaks that language. Our accents and speech patterns may also reveal if we've lived in a city, suburb, or rural area, and if we grew up in the north, south, east, or west.

These accents, dialects, and vocabularies sometimes make it difficult for people to understand one another, even when they speak the same language. However, this did not pose an issue in that era, for everyone spoke the same language in the same manner as everyone else. This made communication easy, even for those who had never spoken to one another before.

“And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there” (Genesis 11:2).

The name Shinar means “country of two rivers.”⁽¹⁾ Here in Genesis chapter eleven, those two rivers likely refer to the Tigris and the Euphrates,⁽²⁾ both of which exist today. This suggests that the plain of Shinar was located in the general vicinity of modern-day Iraq, where these rivers flow. This region is frequently linked to Babylon or Chaldea in the Biblical Scriptures, and we'll resume our look at this area when we are introduced to a man named Abram later in this chapter.

This decision to settle in Shinar is significant in light of God's directive to Noah (and the people of this chapter by extension) to “...**increase in number and fill the earth**” (Genesis 9:1). The rationale behind that decision (at least in part) will become clear as we consider the events to will follow.

(1) H8152 shinar *Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew Lexicon* <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h8152/kjv/wlc/0-1/>

(2) “Shinar.” Dr. William Smith, *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville TN. See <https://www.studydrive.org/dictionaries/eng/sbd/s/shinar.html>

“Then they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.' They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar” (Genesis 11:3).

Stone was widely used as a building material among many ancient cultures. Other civilizations made use of sun-dried clay bricks that simplified the construction process and offered greater structural stability. However, those who dwelt on the plain of Shinar opted for a more advanced path.

Notice that these individuals elected to use “**oven-fired bricks**” (HCSB). This indicates that these builders were using construction materials that were hardened in a kiln or furnace. With this in mind, we can say that these construction workers clearly sought to create something that was built to last.

These builders also used tar (or asphalt) as a cementing agent for this building project. While there were other materials that might have served this purpose, tar had the advantage of being waterproof. We'll see why these builders might have been interested in that quality shortly.

But for now, let's ask this question: what was the purpose behind this choice of building materials? Well, that answer comes next...

“And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth'” (Genesis

11:4).

In considering this passage, there is someone who is notably absent from this building program. To help identify that individual, let's consider Genesis 11:4 once again, this time with an emphasis on the focus of this building project...

“And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth'”

So, who is missing from this construction plan? That “missing person” is God. You see, this proposal reflected the interests of a group of individuals who...

1. Wanted to make a name for themselves.
2. Held no apparent concern or recognition for their Creator.

At best, this architectural venture served the egocentric ambitions of those who sought to erect a monument to themselves. At worst, these individuals were driven by a sense of arrogance and contempt in an effort to build an edifice that symbolized their lack of respect for their Creator

Unfortunately for them, Someone had other plans.

“But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built” (Genesis 11:5).

There is a humorous aspect to this passage, for we're told that God had to “come down” to inspect this building project that was designed to “***reach into the heavens***” (***Genesis 11:4 AMP***). But in reality, there was nothing funny about this venture.

First, let's consider what this construction project said about those who seeking to build it. We can begin with a look at their stated ambition to “...***build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens***” (***NIV***). If we were to rephrase this statement in contemporary terms, we might understand their meaning to be this: “*We'll get to the heavens on our own- we don't need God.*”

These builders also had a clear motivating factor: “...***let us make a name for ourselves***” (***ESV***). Instead of focusing on their Creator's agenda, they elected to create something that would serve as a legacy to themselves.

Their final objective involved creating a permanent structure that would relieve them of the necessity of scattering “...***all over the face of the earth***” (***GW***). This may help explain why these builders chose to use hardened bricks and tar-based mortar. Those construction materials were suitable for anyone who sought to erect a permanent dwelling.

However, there's another possible explanation for this choice of building materials. You see, these components represent the kind of environmentally resistant and waterproof materials that someone might use if he or she was concerned that God might initiate a second Great Flood.

It's worth considering the fact that Noah's Flood occurred just a few generations prior to the events that took place here in Genesis chapter eleven. Perhaps this monumental building project was motivated in part by a secondary concern: “*If God decides to flood the world again, next time we'll be ready.*”

“And the Lord said, “Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them” (Genesis 11:6).

This verse may leave the impression that God somehow felt threatened by this construction project. But

the reality was just the opposite. It seems as if these individuals were under the mistaken notion that they could ascend to the heavens through their own efforts. However, God had a different agenda, and this ambitious building project was little more than a sand castle from His perspective. Although God could have obliterated this project in an instant, He decided instead to illustrate the futility of this ambitious undertaking.

Without the constraint of a language barrier, everyone was free to collaborate and work together to accomplish virtually anything they sought to do. But if that collaborative ability suddenly vanished, it would become difficult to accomplish much of anything- and that's exactly what happened according to Genesis 11:7-8...

“Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.’ So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city.”

So, in the end, this unified construction project became a catalyst that forced this great mass of humanity apart from one another. In other words, this building plan became exactly what these builders sought to avoid.

“Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth” (Genesis 11:7-9).

So it appears that those who possessed the ability to communicate with one another eventually formed their own distinct sociological groups. One source interprets this stage of human historical development in the following manner...

“A similar pattern of cultural development seems to have occurred over and over again. As a tribe migrated to an unexplored region, it would find a suitable location ... and then try to establish a village. Although members of the tribe certainly knew many useful arts... they could not use them right away. Veins of metal had to be discovered, mined, and smelted; suitable clay... had to be found for making bricks and pottery; animals had to be bred; and crops had to be planted. All of this might take several years.

In the meantime, the tribe had to survive by hunting, fishing and gathering fruits and nuts. Temporary homes had to be built of stone, if available, or timber, or even in caves. Remains of these original occupation sites naturally suggest to evolutionists a 'stone age culture,' but actually they reflect only a very temporary situation.

As soon as materials for ceramics and metals could be found, the 'stone age' at the site was succeeded by a 'bronze age' or 'iron age.' The 'village economy' was quickly succeeded by 'urbanization' as the population increased and suitable building materials were developed.” (1)

(1) Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record* pg. 275

“This is the genealogy of Shem: Shem was one hundred years old, and begot Arphaxad two years after the flood. After he begot Arphaxad, Shem lived five hundred years, and begot sons and daughters” (Genesis 11:10-11).

Genesis 11:10-32 contains a lengthy genealogy that offers a detailed family history of Noah’s son, Shem. These family histories tell us that human life expectancies were becoming progressively shorter as time went on. In fact, every individual listed in Genesis 11:10-32 enjoyed a much shorter lifespan than those who lived before the time of Noah’s Flood.

For example, Noah’s life covered a span of 950 years, while his son Shem lived for 600 years. While

600 years represents an impressive lifespan, Noah still outlived his son by three and a half centuries. Genesis 11:24 then goes on to mention a man named Terah. Terah represented the ninth generation following Noah, and he lived to age 205, or 745 years less than Noah.

So how do we explain this reduction in life expectancy? Well, it seems that the earth's pre-flood environment was more favorable for human life than the environment that followed. The result was that people aged less quickly prior to the Flood. This meant that their lives could extend for as many as eight or nine centuries.

This genealogy also leads to the introduction of one of the most important people in Biblical history...

“This is the account of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth.

Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milcah and Iscah. Now Sarai was barren; she had no children. Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there” Genesis 11:27-31).

Many of these details may seem unimportant now, but they will have a significant impact on anyone who seeks to honor God today.