

A Genealogy from Shem to Abraham

Genesis 11:10-32

Genesis 11:10-32 – *“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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. ²² Serug lived thirty years, and begot Nahor. ²³ After he begot Nahor, Serug lived two hundred years, and begot sons and daughters. 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. ²⁶ Now Terah lived seventy years, and begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. ²⁷ “This is the genealogy of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran begot Lot. ²⁸ And Haran died before his father Terah in his native land, in Ur of the Chaldeans. 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. ³⁰ But Sarai was barren; she had no child. 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. ³² So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran.”*

Background Notes

Genesis 5 gives us a genealogy from Adam to Noah, and Genesis 11 gives us a genealogy from Noah to Abraham. Now the big question is: Are these “tight” chronologies, or genealogies? **Chronologies** do not have time gaps. **Genealogies** may skip some generations - they may go from grandfather to grandson, for example. If the genealogies of Genesis 5 and Genesis 11 are tight chronologies, then Creation Week was about 4000BC, about 6000 years ago.

The genealogies of Genesis 5 (before the Flood) and Genesis 11 (after the Flood) sound like chronologies because **years are given**, and thus calculations can be made. There are other genealogies in Scripture that do not give the years, and it is quite obvious that some generations have been skipped. But in Genesis 5 and 11 years are given.

However, even though years are given in these genealogies, and they certainly sound like chronologies, we must allow for the possibilities that there may be a few gaps. **But not too many!** That is a major point! You cannot stretch out the genealogies of Genesis 5 and Genesis 11 and squeeze in all the years you want - no way! That would distort the whole biblical chronological framework.

In the genealogy of Jesus Christ in the gospel of Luke, the name Canaan is inserted between Shelah and Arphaxad (3:36). So it appears that the genealogy of Genesis 11 may have skipped at least one generation. So while there may be a gap or two in the Genesis 11 genealogy, there are certainly not enough gaps to fit in thousands of years, as some people would like to do. No way! There may be a few gaps, but not many.

You might think we have a problem, because this genealogy leaves us with only a few hundred years between the Flood and Abraham. I don't think that is a problem, as we'll see in our doctrinal points.

Doctrinal Points

1. There is enough time between Noah and Abraham for widespread repopulation.

If Genesis 11 is essentially a chronology, then there were only a few hundred years between the time of the Flood and Abraham. Is that enough time for civilizations to develop, in view of the biblical data?

According to Scripture, by Abraham's time there was an Egyptian civilization. Genesis 12 says that Abraham went down to Egypt, and Pharaoh and an Egyptian civilization were already in place when he arrived. And there has to have been a Hittite civilization by Abraham's time, because Abraham bought a tomb for Sarah from Ephron the Hittite.

Is a few hundred years enough time for these civilizations to develop? Yes, there is enough time between Noah and Abraham for widespread repopulation. Here are some reasons why there's no problem:

- a. The Tower of Babel was like a jumpstart that accelerated the birth and growth of the nations. We believe that the Tower of Babel came in Genesis 11:16: "*Eber lived thirty-four years, and begot Peleg.*" Genesis 10:25 says that the earth was divided in the time of Peleg, and this likely referred to the dispersion of people at the time of the Tower of Babel.

b. There are no written records that force us to put more than a few hundred years between the Flood and Abraham. The Ebla Tablets from Syria, for example, are very old, but they could easily have been written soon after the Tower of Babel.

c. A lot can take place in a few hundred years. Our country is only a little more than 200 years old, and a lot has happened in 200 years! So a few hundred years is not too short a time span.

d. In addition, when people try to insert thousands of years between the Flood and Abraham, population statistics are messed up. By setting up equations, you can calculate what the population would be today, if you start with a specific number of people, and estimate the size of the average family, and years for an average generation. Starting with Noah and his three sons, and using conservative estimates, and using the years given in the Bible, the equations give a population for today that is exactly what the earth's population is today! However, if you put in more than a few hundred years between Noah and Abraham the calculations are thrown way off, and you end up with a population much greater than what is today, even taking into account wars, plagues and pockets of zero population growth.

So there **was** enough time between Noah and Abraham for widespread repopulation. But now the bad news!

2. There is enough time between Noah and Abraham for widespread apostasy.

"Apostasy" is turning away from God and from the truth. Noah and his family were believers in the one true God, but by the time of Abraham it seems that the whole world had turned away from God to idolatry. Joshua 24:2 says, "*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.*" So Abraham was called out of a world of idolatry.

There certainly were a few exceptions to the widespread apostasy of Abraham's day. Remember Melchizedek, the priest of the Most High God at the time of Abraham (Genesis 14)? And remember Job, who probably lived in patriarchal times? But with very few exceptions, the world at the time of Abraham was given over to idolatry. How was this possible, in such a short time - just a few hundred years?

It doesn't take long for people to depart from God. In fact, it happened in one generation, right after the death of Joshua. Judges 2:10-13: "*When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. They forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.*"

Parents - that should be a warning to you. Teens - that should be a warning to you. Within a few generations after Noah, the world had turned to idolatry! Even after the Tower of Babel and God's intervention there, most of the scattered peoples did not turn back to the one true God. They continued in their apostasy. This is backed up by what archeology has discovered about the pagan religions of the ancient nations. There was enough time between Noah and Abraham for widespread apostasy.

Practical Application

God's will for your life may come in stages.

We all want to know God's will for our lives, and there's a lesson in Genesis 11 about God's will for our lives. God's will for our lives may come in stages. When you put all the Scriptures about the call of Abraham together, including what Stephen said in Acts 7, it seems that God led Abraham from Ur to Canaan in stages. The first stage was from Ur in the Mesopotamian Valley to Haran at the top of the Fertile Crescent.

Leaving Ur was not easy. It was quite a test of Abraham and Sarah's faith. Archaeologists have discovered that Ur was a well-developed and wealthy urban center. But Abraham obeyed God and left Ur, even though he didn't know exactly where he was going (Hebrews 11:8). After some time in Haran, the next stage of Abraham's pilgrimage was from Haran to Canaan, as we will see in Genesis 12. So you see, God's will for Abraham and Sarah unfolded in stages.

God's will for *your* life may unfold in stages, too. God's will for my life was to go through a stage of graduate school and then a stage of working as a research engineer before going on into the ministry full time. God's will for you may be to go to another country or another culture to spread the gospel, but "a stage of hard work" may come first in God's will for your life – a stage of proving and preparing yourself on the home front.

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