

Genesis 11:1-32

by John Calvin

The sermon on Genesis 11:1-32 explores the themes of human pride, God's judgment, and the importance of humility in our relationship with Him.

Scripture: Genesis 11:1, Psalm 10:4, Proverbs 16:18, Isaiah 14:12, Romans 12:3, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5

Topics: "Human Rebellion", "Gods Judgment"

Description

John Calvin preaches about the Tower of Babel, highlighting the arrogance and rebellion of humanity in attempting to build a tower to reach heaven, seeking their own glory and defying God's authority. Despite their unity in language and purpose, God confounds their speech, scatters them, and frustrates their plans, demonstrating His power and judgment. The division of languages serves as a punishment for their pride and disobedience, showing that God will not tolerate human defiance. Through this event, we learn the consequences of rebellion against God and the importance of humility and obedience.

Transcript

1. And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.
1. Erat autem universa terra labii unius, et verborum eorundem.
2. 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.
2. Et fuit, quum proficiscerentur ipsi ab Oriente, invenerunt planitiem in terra Sinhar, et habitaverunt ibi.
3. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.
3. Et dixerunt quisqui ad proximum suum, Agite, laterificemus lateres, et coquamus ad coctionem: et fuit eis later pro lapide, et bitumen fuit eis pro caemento.
4. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.
4. Et dixerunt, Agite, aedificemus nobis urbem et turrim, cujus caput pertingat usque ad coelum, et faciamus nobis nomen, ne forte dispergamur in superficiem universae terrae.

5. And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.
5. Et descendit Jehova ut videret urbem et turrim, quam aedificabant filii hominum.
6. And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.
6. Et dixit Jehova, En, populus unus, et labium unum est omnibus ipsis: et hoc est incipere eorum ut faciant, et nunc non prohibebitur ab eis quod cogitaverunt ut facerent.
7. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.
7. Agite, descendamus, et confundamus ibi labium eorum, ut non audiant unusquisque labium proximi sui.
8. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.
8. Et dispersit Jehova eos inde per superficiem omnis terrae, et cessaverunt aedificare civitatem.
9. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.
9. Propterea vocavit nomen ejus Babel: quia ibi confudit Jehova labium universae terrae, et inde dispersit eos Jehova in superficiem universae terrae.
10. These are the generations of Shem: Shem was an hundred years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood:
10. Hae sunt generationes Sem. Sem filius centum annorum genuit Arphachsad duobus annis post diluvium.
11. And Shem lived after he begat Arphaxad five hundred years, and begat sons and daughters.
11. Et vixit Sem, postquam genuit Arphachsad, quingentos annos: et genuit filios et filias.
12. And Arphaxad lived five and thirty years, and begat Salah:
12. Et Arphachsad vixit quinque et triginta annos, et genuit Selah.
13. And Arphaxad lived after he begat Salah four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters.
13. Et vixit Arphachsad, postquam genuit Selah, tres annos et quadringentos annos: et genuit filios et filias.
14. And Salah lived thirty years, and begat Eber:
14. Et Selah vixit triginta annos, et genuit Eber.
15. And Salah lived after he begat Eber four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters.

15. Et vixit Selah, postquam genuit Eber, tres annos et quadringentos annos: et genuit filios et filias.
16. And Eber lived four and thirty years, and begat Peleg:
16. Et vixit Eber quatuor et triginta annos, et genuit Peleg.
17. And Eber lived after he begat Peleg four hundred and thirty years, and begat sons and daughters.
17. Et vixit Eber, postquam genuit Peleg, triginta annos et quadringentos annos: et genuit filios et filias.
18. And Peleg lived thirty years, and begat Reu:
18. Et vixit Peleg triginta annos, et genuit Rehu.
19. And Peleg lived after he begat Reu two hundred and nine years, and begat sons and daughters.
19. Et vixit Peleg, postquam genuit Rehu, novem annos et ducentos annos: et genuit filios et filias.
20. And Reu lived two and thirty years, and begat Serug:
20. Et vixit Rehu duos et triginta annos, et genuit Serug.
21. And Reu lived after he begat Serug two hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters.
21. Et vixit Rehu, postquam genuit Serug, septem annos et ducentos annos: et genuit filios et filias.
22. And Serug lived thirty years, and begat Nahor:
22. Et vixit Serug triginta annos, et genuit Nachor.
23. And Serug lived after he begat Nahor two hundred years, and begat sons and daughters.
23. Et vixit Serug, postquam genuit Nachor, ducentos annos: et genuit filios et filias.
24. And Nahor lived nine and twenty years, and begat Terah:
24. Et vixit Nachor novem et viginti annos, et genuit Thare.
25. And Nahor lived after he begat Terah an hundred and nineteen years, and begat sons and daughters.
25. Et vixit Nachor, postquam genuit Thare, novemdecim annos et centum annos: et genuit filios et filias.
26. And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran.
26. Et vixit Thare septuaginta annos, et genuit Abram, Nachor, et Haran.
27. Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot.
27. Et istae sunt generationes Thare. Thare genuit Abram, Nachor, et Haran: et Haran genuit Lot.
28. And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees.
28. Et mortuus est Haran coram Thare patre suo in terra nativitatis suae, in Ur Chaldaeae.

29. And Abram and Nahor took them 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.

29. Et acceperunt Abram et Nachor uxores: nomen uxoris Abram, Sarai: et nomen uxoris Nachor, Milchah, filia Haran patris Milchah, et patris Ischah.

30. But Sarai was barren; she had no child.

30. At fuit autem Sarai sterilis: nec erat ei filius.

31. And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.

31. Tulit autem Thare Abram filium suum, et Lot filium Haran, filium filii sui, et Sarai nurum suam, uxorem Abram filii sui: et egressi sunt sum eis de Ur Chaldaeae, ut pergerent in terram Chanaan: et venerunt usque ad Charan, et habitaverunt ibi.

32. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran.

32. Et fuerunt dies Thare quinque et ducenti anni: et mortuus est Thare in Charan.

1. And the whole earth was of one language . Whereas mention had before been made of Babylon in a single word, Moses now more largely explains whence it derived its name. For this is a truly memorable history, in which we may perceive the greatness of men's obstinacy against God, and the little profit they receive from his judgments. And although at first sight the atrocity of the evil does not appear; yet the punishment which follows it, testifies how highly God was displeased with that which these men attempted. They who conjecture that the tower was built with the intent that it should prove a refuge and protection if, at any time, God should determine to overwhelm the earth with a deluge, have no other guide, that I can see, but the dream of their own brain. For the words of Moses signify no such thing: nothing, indeed, is here noticed, except their mad ambitions and proud contempt of God. 'Let us build a tower (they say) whose top may reach to heaven, and let us get ourselves a name.' We see the design and the aim of the undertaking. For whatsoever might happen, they wish to have an immortal name on earth; and thus they build, as if in opposition to the will of God. And doubtless ambition not only does injury to men, but exalts itself even against God. To erect a citadel was not in itself so great a crime; but to raise an eternal monument to themselves, which might endure throughout all ages, was a proof of headstrong pride, joined with contempt of God. And hence originated the fable of the giants who, as the poets have feigned, heaped mountains upon mountains, in order to drag down Jove from his celestial throne. This allegory is not very remote from the impious counsel to which Moses alludes; for as soon as mortals, forgetful of themselves; are inflated above measure, it is certain that like the giants, they wage war with God. This they do not openly profess, yet it cannot be otherwise than that every one who transgresses his prescribed bounds, makes a direct attack upon God.

With respect to the time in which this event happened, a fragment of Berossus is extant, (if, indeed, Berossus is to be accounted the author of such trifles,) where, among other things, a hundred and thirty years are reckoned from the deluge to the time when they began to build the tower. This opinion, though deficient in competent authority, has been preferred, by some, to that which commonly obtained among the Jews, and which places about three hundred and forty years between the deluge and the building of

the tower.

Nor is there anything more plausible in what others relate; namely, that these builders undertook the work, because men were even then dispersed far and wide, and many colonies were already formed; whence they apprehended that as their offspring was daily increasing, they must, in a short time, migrate to a still greater distance. But to this argument we may oppose the fact, that the peculiar blessing of God was to be traced in this multiplication of mankind. Moreover, Moses seems to set aside all controversy.

For after he has mentioned Arphaxad as the third of the sons of Shem, he then names Peleg, his great-grandson, in whose days the languages were divided. But from a computation of the years which he sets down, it plainly appears that one century only intervened. It is, however, to be noted, that the languages are not said to have been divided immediately after the birth of Peleg, and that no definite time was ever specified. 321 It must, indeed, have added greatly to the weight of Noah's sufferings, when he heard of this wicked counsel, which had been taken by his posterity.

And it is not to be doubted that he was wounded with the deepest grief, when he beheld them, with devoted minds, rushing to their own destruction. But the Lord thus exercised the holy man, even in extreme old age, to teach us not to be discouraged by a continual succession of conflicts. If any one should prefer the opinion commonly received among the Jews; the division of the earth must be referred to the first transmigrations, when men began to be distributed in various regions: but what has been already recorded in the preceding chapter, respecting the monarchy of Nimrod, is repugnant to this interpretation. 322 Still a middle opinion may be entertained; namely, that the confusion of tongues may perhaps have happened in the extreme old age of Peleg.

Now he lived nearly two hundred and forty years; nor will it be absurd to suppose that the empire founded by Nimrod endured two or three centuries. I certainly, -- as in a doubtful case, -- freely admit that a longer space of time might intervene between the deluge and the design of building the tower. Moreover, when Moses says, 'the earth was of one lip,' he commends the peculiar kindness of God, in having willed that the sacred bond of society among men far separated from each other should be retained, by their possessing a common language among themselves.

And truly the diversity of tongues is to be regarded as a prodigy. For since language is the impress of the mind, 323 how does it come to pass, that men, who are partakers of the same reason, and who are born for social life, do not communicate with each other in the same language? This defect, therefore, seeing that it is repugnant to nature, Moses declares to be adventitious; and pronounces the division of tongues to be a punishment, divinely inflicted upon men, because they impiously conspired against God.

Community of language ought to have promoted among them consent in religion; but this multitude of whom Moses speaks, after they had alienated themselves from the pure worship of God, and the sacred assembly of the faithful, coalesce to excite war against God. Therefore by the just vengeance of God their tongues were divided.

2. They found a plain in the land of Shinar . It may be conjectured from these words, that Moses speaks of Nimrod and of the people whom he had collected around him. If, however, we grant that Nimrod was the chief leader in the construction of so great a pile, for the purpose of erecting a formidable monument of his tyranny: yet Moses expressly relates, that the work was undertaken not by the counsel or the will of one man only, but that all conspired together, so that the blame cannot be cast exclusively upon one, nor even upon a few.

3. And they said one to another 324 That is, they mutually exhorted each other; and not only did every man earnestly put his own hand to the work, but impelled others also to the daring attempt.

Let us make brick . Moses intimates that they had not been induced to commence this work, on account of the ease with which it could be accomplished nor on account of any other advantages which presented themselves; he rather shows that they had contended with great and arduous difficulties; by which means their guilt became the more aggravated. For how is it that they harass and wear themselves out in vain on a difficult and labourious enterprise, unless that, like madmen, they rush impetuously against God? Difficulty often deters us from necessary works; but these men, when they had neither stones nor mortar, yet do not scruple to attempt the raising of an edifice which may transcend the clouds. We are taught therefore, by this example, to what length the lust of men will hurry them, when they indulge their ambition. Even a profane poet is not silent on this subject, --

"Man, rashly daring, full of pride,

Most covets what is most denied." 325

And a little afterwards, --

"Counts nothing arduous, and tries

Insanely to possess the skies." 326

4. Whose top may reach unto heaven . This is an hyperbolic form of speech, in which they boastingly extol the loftiness of the structure they are attempting to raise. And to the same point belongs what they immediately subjoin, Let us make us a name; for they intimate, that the work would be such as should not only be looked upon by the beholders as a kind of miracle, but should be celebrated everywhere to the utmost limits of the world. This is the perpetual infatuation of the world; to neglect heaven, and to seek immortality on earth, where every thing is fading and transient. Therefore, their cares and pursuits tend to no other end than that of acquiring for themselves a name on earth. David, in the forty ninth psalm, deservedly holds up to ridicule this blind cupidity; and the more, because experience (which is the teacher of the foolish) does not restore posterity to a sound mind, though instructed by the example of their ancestors; but the infatuation creeps on through all succeeding ages. The saying of Juvenal is known, -- 'Death alone acknowledges how insignificant are the bodies of men.' 327 Yet even death does not correct our pride, nor constrain us seriously to confess our miserable condition: for often more pride is displayed in funerals than in nuptial pomp. By such an example, however, we are admonished how fitting it is that we should live and die humbly. And it is not the least important part of true prudence, to have death before our eyes in the midst of life, for the purpose of accustoming ourselves to moderation. For he who vehemently desires to be great in the world, is first contumelious towards men, and at length, his profane presumption breaks forth against God himself; so that after the example of the giants, he fights against heaven.

Lest we be scattered abroad . Some interpreters translate the passage thus, 'Before we are scattered:' but the peculiarity of the language will not bear this explanation: for the men are devising means to meet a danger which they believe to be imminent; as if they would say, 'It cannot be, that when our number increases, this region should always hold all men; and therefore an edifice must be erected by which their name shall be preserved in perpetuity, although they should themselves be dispersed in different regions.' It is however asked, whence they derived the notion of their future dispersion? Some conjecture that they

were warned of it by Noah; who, perceiving that the world had relapsed into its former crimes and corruptions, foresaw, at the same time, by the prophetic spirit, some terrible dispersion; and they think that the Babylonians, seeing they could not directly resist God, endeavored, by indirect methods, to avert the threatened judgment. Others suppose, that these men, by a secret inspiration of the Spirit, uttered prophecies concerning their own punishment, which they did not themselves understand. But these expositions are constrained; nor is there any reason which requires us to apply what they here say, to the curse which was inflicted upon them. They knew that the earth was formed to be inhabited and would everywhere supply its abundance for the sustenance of men; and the rapid multiplication of mankind proved to them that it was not possible for them long to remain shut up within their present narrow limits; wherefore, to whatever other places it would be necessary for them to migrate, they design this tower to remain as a witness of their origin.

5. And the Lord came down . The remaining part of the history now follows, in which Moses teaches us with what ease the Lord could overturn their insane attempts, and scatter abroad all their preparations. There is no doubt that they strenuously set about what they had presumptuously devised. But Moses first intimates that God, for a little while, seemed to take no notice of them, 328 in order that suddenly breaking off their work at its commencement, by the confusion of their tongues, he might give the more decisive evidence of his judgment. For he frequently bears with the wicked, to such an extent, that he not only suffers them to contrive many nefarious things, as if he were unconcerned, or were taking repose; but even further, their impious and perverse designs with animating success, in order that he may at length cast them down to a lower depth. The descent of God, which Moses here records, is spoken of in reference to men rather than to God; who, as we know, does not move from place to place. But he intimates that God gradually and as with a tardy step, appeared in the character of an Avenger. The Lord therefore descended that he might see; that is, he evidently showed that he was not ignorant of the attempt which the Babylonians were making.

6. Behold , the people is one . Some thus expound the words, that God complains of a wickedness in men so refractory, that he excites himself by righteous grief to execute vengeance; not that he is swayed by any passions, 329 but to teach us that he is not negligent of human affairs, and that, as he watches for the salvation of the faithful, so he is intent on observing the wickedness of the ungodly; as it is said in Ps 34:16,

"The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth."

Others think there is a comparison between the less and the greater, no if it had been said, 'They are hitherto few and only use one language; what will they not dare, if, on account of their multitude, they should become separated into various nations?' But there rather seems to me to be a suppressed irony, as if God would propose to himself a difficult work in subduing their audacity: so that the sense may be, 'This people is compacted together in a firm conspiracy, they communicate with each other in the same language, by what method therefore can they be broken?' Nevertheless, he ironically smiles at their foolish and hasty confidence; because, while men are calculating upon their own strength, there is nothing which they do not arrogate to themselves.

This they begin to do . In saying that they begin , he intimates that they make a diligent attempts accompanied with violent fervor, in carrying on the work. Thus in the way of concession, God declares, that supposing matters to be so arranged, there would be no interruption of the building.

7. Go to , let us go down . We have said that Moses has represented the case to us by the figure hypotyposis , 330 that the judgments of God may be the more clearly illustrated. For which reason, he now introduces God as the speaker, who declares that the work which they supposed could not be retarded, shall, without any difficulty, be destroyed. The meaning of the words is of this kind, 'I will not use many instruments, I will only blow upon them, and they, through the confusion of tongues, shall be contemptibly scattered. And as they, having collected a numerous band, were contriving how they might reach the clouds; so on the other hand, God summons his troops, by whose interposition he may ward off their fury. It is, however, asked, what troops he intends? The Jews think that he addresses himself to the angels. But since no mention is made of the angels, and God places those to whom he speaks in the same rank with himself, this exposition is harsh, and deservedly rejected. This passage rather answers to the former, which occurs in the account of man's creation, when the Lord said, "Let us make man after our image." For God aptly and wisely opposes his own eternal wisdom and power to this great multitude; as if he had said, that he had no need of foreign auxiliaries, but possessed within himself what would suffice for their destruction. Wherefore, this passage is not improperly adduced in proof that Three Persons subsist in One Essence of Deity. Moreover, this example of Divine vengeance belongs to all ages: for men are always inflamed with the desire of daring to attempt what is unlawful. And this history shows that God will ever be adverse to such counsels and designs; so that we here behold, depicted before our eyes what Solomon says:

'There is no counsel, nor prudence, nor strength against the Lord,' (Pr 21:30.)

Unless the blessing of God be present, from which alone we may expect a prosperous issue, all that we attempt will necessarily perish. Since, then, God declares that he is at perpetual war with the unmeasured audacity of men; anything we undertake without his approval will end miserably, even though all creatures above and beneath should earnestly offer us their assistance. Now, although the world bears this curse to the present day; yet, in the midst of punishment, and of the most dreadful proofs of Divine anger against the pride of men, the admirable goodness of God is rendered conspicuous, because the nations hold mutual communication among themselves, though in different languages; but especially because He has proclaimed one gospel, in all languages, through the whole world, and has endued the Apostles with the gift of tongues. Whence it has come to pass, that they who before were miserably divided, have coalesced in the unity of the faith. In this sense Isaiah says, that the language of Canaan should be common to all under the reign of Christ, (Isa 19:18;) because, although their language may differ in sound, they all speak the same thing, while they cry, Abba, Father.

8. So the Lord scattered them abroad . Men had already been spread abroad; and this ought not to be regarded as a punishment, seeing it rather flowed from the benediction and grace of God. But those whom the Lord had before distributed with honor in various abodes, he now ignominiously scatters, driving them hither and thither like the members of a lacerated body. This, therefore, was not a simple dispersion for the replenishing of the earth, that it might every where have cultivators and inhabitants; but a violent rout, because the principal bond of conjunction between them was, cut asunder.

9. Therefore is the name of it called Babel . Behold what they gained by their foolish ambition to acquire a name! They hoped that an everlasting memorial of their origin would be engraven on the tower; God not only frustrates their vain expectation, but brands them with eternal disgrace, to render them execrable to all posterity, on account of the great mischief indicted on the human race, through their fault. They gain, indeed, a name, but not each as they would have chosen: thus does God opprobriously cast down the pride of those who usurp to themselves honors to which they have no title. Here also is refuted the error of

those who deduce the origin of Babylon from Jupiter Belus. 331

10. These are the generations of Shem . Concerning the progeny of Shem, Moses had said something in the former chapter Ge 10:1: but now he combines with the names of the men, the term of their several lives, that we might not be ignorant of the age of the world. For unless this brief description had been preserved, men at this day would not have known how much time intervened between the deluge and the day in which God made his covenant with Abraham. Moreover, it is to be observed, that God reckons the years of the world from the progeny of Shem, as a mark of honor: just as historians date their annals by the names of kings or consuls.

Nevertheless, he has granted this not so much on account of the dignity and merits of the family of Shem, as on account of his own gratuitous adoption; for (as we shall immediately see) a great part of the posterity of Shem apostatized from the true worship of God. For which reason, they deserved not only that God should expunge them from his calendar, but should entirely take them out of the world. But he too highly esteems that election of his, by which he separated this family from all people, to suffer it to perish on account of the sins of men.

And therefore from the many sons of Shem he chooses Arphaxad alone; and from the sons of Arphaxad, Selah alone; and from him also, Eber alone; till he comes to Abram; the calling of whom ought to be accounted the renovation of the Church. As it concerns the rest, it is probable that before the century was completed, they fell into impious superstitions. For when God brings it as a charge against the Jews, that their fathers Terah and Nahor served strange gods, (Jos 24:2,) we must still remember, that the house of Shem, in which they were born, was the peculiar sanctuary of God, where pure religion ought most to have flourished; what then do we suppose, must have happened to others who might seem, from the very first, to have been emancipated from this service?

Hence truly appears, not only the prodigious wickedness and depravity, but also the inflexible hardness of the human mind. Noah and his sons, who had been eye-witnesses of the deluge, were yet living: the narration of that history ought to have inspired men with not less terror than the visible appearance of God himself: from infancy they had been imbued with those elements of religious instruction, which relate to the manner in which God was to be worshipped, the reverence with which his word was to be obeyed, and the severe vengeance which remains for those who should violate the order prescribed by him: yet they could not be restrained from being so corrupted by their vanity, that they entirely apostatized.

In the meantime, there is no doubt that holy Noah, according to his extraordinary zeal and heroic fortitude, would contend in every way for the maintenance of God's glory: and that he sharply and severely inveighed, yea, fulminated against the perfidious apostasy of his descendants; and whereas all ought to have trembled at his very look, they are yet moved by no chidings, however loud, from proceeding in the course into which their own fury has hurried them. From this mirror, rather than from the senseless flatteries of sophists, let us learn how fruitful is the corruption of our nature.

But if Noah and Shem, and other such eminent teachers could not, by contending most courageously, prevent the prevalence of impiety in the world; let us not wonder, if at this day also, the unbridled lust of the world rushes to impious and perverse modes of worship, against all the obstacles interposed by sound doctrine, admonition, and threats. Here, however, we must observe, in these holy men, how firm was the strength of their faith, how indefatigable their patience, how persevering their cultivation of piety; since they never gave way, on account of the many occasions of offense with which they had to contend.

Luther very properly compares the incredible torments, by which they were necessarily afflicted, to many martyrdoms. For such an alienation of their descendants from God did not less affect their minds than if they had seen their own bowels not only lacerated and torn, but cast into the mire of Satan, and into hell itself. But while the world was thus filled with ungodly men, God wonderfully retained a few under obedience to his word, that he might preserve the Church from destruction.

And although we have said that the father and grandfather of Abraham were apostates, and that, probably, the defection did not first begin with them; yet, because the Church by the election of God, was included in that race, and because God had some who worshipped him in purity, and who survived even to the time of Abraham. Moses deduces a continuous line of descent, and thus enroll them in the catalogue of saints. Whence we infer, (as I have a little before observed,) in what high estimation God holds the Church, which, though so small in numbers is yet preferred to the whole world.

Shem was an hundred years old . Since Moses has placed Arphaxad the third in order among the sons of Shem, it is asked how this agrees with his having been born in the second year after the deluge? The answer is easy. It cannot be exactly ascertained, from the catalogues which Moses recites, at what time each was born; because sometimes the priority of place is assigned to one, who yet was posterior in the order of birth. Others answer, that there is nothing absurd in supposing Moses to declare that, after the completion of two years, a third son was born. But the solution I have given is more genuine.

27. Terah begat Abram . Here also Abram is placed first among his brethren, not (as I suppose) because he was the firstborn; but because Moses, intent on the scope of his history, was not very careful in the arrangement of the sons of Terah. It is also possible that he had other sons. For, the reason why Moses speaks especially of them is obvious; namely, on account of Lot, and of the wives of Isaac and Jacob. I will now briefly state why I think Abram was not the first born. Moses shortly afterwards says, that Haran died in his own country, before his father left Chaldea, and went to Charran. 332 But Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Charran to dwell in the land of Canaan. 333 And this number of seventy-five years is expressly given after the death of Terah. Now, if we suppose that Abram was born in his father's seventieth year, we must also allow that we have lost sixty years of Terah's age; which is most absurd. 334 The conjecture of Luther, that God buried that time in oblivion, in order to hide from us the end of the world, in the first place is frivolous, and in the next, may be refuted by solid and convincing arguments. Others violently wrest the words to apply them to a former egress; and think that he lived together with his father at Charran for sixty years; which is most improbable. For to what end should they have protracted their stay so long in the midst of their journey? But there is no need of labourious discussion. Moses is silent respecting the age of Abraham when he left his own country; but says, that in the seventy-fifth year of his age, he came into the land of Canaan, when his father, having reached the two hundredth and fifth year of his life, had died. Who will not hence infer that he was born when his father had attained his one hundredth and thirtieth year? 335 But he is named first among those sons whom Terah is said to have begotten, when he himself was seventy years old. I grant it; but this order of recital does nothing towards proving the order of birth, as we have already said. Nor, indeed, does Moses declare in what year of his life Terah begat sons; but only that he had passed the above age before he begat the three sons here mentioned. Therefore, the age of Abraham is to be ascertained by another mode of computation, namely, from the fact that Moses assigns to him the age of seventy-five when his father died, whose life had reached to two hundred and five years. A firm and valid argument is also deduced from the age of Sarai. It appears that she was not more than ten years younger than Abraham. If she was the daughter of his younger brother, she would necessarily have equalled her own father in age.

336 They who raise an objection, to the effect that she was the daughter-in-law, or only the adopted daughter of Nahor, produce nothing beyond a sheer cavil.

28. And Haran died . Haran is said to have died before the face of his father; because he left his father the survivor. It is also said that he died in his country, that is, in Ur. The Jews turn the proper name into an appellative, and say that he died in the fire . For, as they are bold in forging fables, they pretend that he, with his brother Abram, were thrown by the Chaldeans into the fire, because they shunned idolatry; but that Abram escaped by the constancy of his faith. The twenty-fourth chapter of Joshua (Jos 24:1,) however, which I have cited above, openly declares, that this whole family was not less infected with superstition than the country itself. I confess, indeed, that the name Ur is derived from fire: names, however, are wont to be assigned to cities, either from their situation, or from some particular event. It is possible that they there cherished the sacred fire, or that the splendor of the sun was more conspicuous than in other places. Others will have it, that the city was so named, because it was situated in a valley, for the Hebrews call valleys ■■■■■■ (Uraim 337) But there is no reason why we should be very anxious about such a matter: let it suffice, that Moses, speaking of the country of Abram immediately afterwards declares it to have been Ur of the Chaldeans.

30. But Sarai was barren . Not only does he say that Abram was without children, but he states the reasons namely, the sterility of his wife; in order to show that it was by nothing short of an extraordinary miracle that she afterwards bare Isaac, as we shall declare more fully in its proper place. Thus was God pleased to humble his servant; and we cannot doubt that Abram would suffer severe pain through this privation. He sees the wicked springing up everywhere, in great numbers, to cover the earth; he alone is deprived of children. And although hitherto he was ignorant of his own future vocation; yet God designed in his person, as in a mirror, to make it evident, whence and in what manner his Church should arise; for at that time it lay hid, as in a dry root under the earth.

31. And Terah took Abram his son . Here the next chapter ought to commence; because Moses begins to treat of one of the principal subjects of his book; namely, the calling of Abram. For he not only relates that Terah changed his country, but he also explains the design and the end of his departure, that he left his native soils and entered on his journey, in order to come to the land of Canaan. Whence the inference is easily drawn, that he was not so much the leader or author of the journey, as the companion of his son.

And it is no obstacle to this inference, that Moses assigns the priority to Terah, as if Abram had departed under his auspices and direction, rather than by the command of God: for this is an honor conferred upon the father's name. Nor do I doubt that Abram, when he saw his father willingly obeying the calling of God, became in return the more obedient to him. Therefore, it is ascribed to the authority of the father, that he took his son with him. For, that Abram had been called of God before he moved a foot from his native soil, will presently appear too plain to be denied. We do not read that his father had been called. It may therefore be conjectured, that the oracle of God had been made known to Terah by the relation of his son. For the divine command to Abram respecting his departure, did not prohibit him from informing his father, that his only reason for leaving him was, that he preferred the command of God to all human obligations. These two things, indeed without controversy, we gather from the words of Moses; that Abram was divinely called, before Terah left his own country: and that Terah had no other design than that of coming into the land of Canaan; that is, of joining his son as a voluntary companion. Therefore, I conclude, that he had left his country a short time before his death. For it is absurd to suppose, that when he departed from his own country, to go directly to the land of Canaan, he should have remained sixty years a stranger in a foreign land. It is more probable, that being an old man worn out with years he was carried off by disease

and weariness. And yet it may be, that God held them a little while in suspense, because Moses says he dwelt in Charran; but from what follows, it appears that the delay was not long: since, in the seventy-fifth year of his age, Abram departed thence; and he had gone thither already advanced in age, and knowing that his wife was barren. Moreover, the town which by the Hebrews is called Charran, is declared by all writers, with one consent, to be Charran, situated in Mesopotamia; although Lucas, poetically rather than truly, places it in Assyria. The place was celebrated for the destruction of Crassus, and the overthrow of the Roman army. 338

Footnotes

321

Yet as the name ■■■■, (Peleg ,) signifies division, the probability is that the division took place about the date of his birth, and that the name was given him by his parents in consequence of that event. Now it appears that Peleg was born in the hundred and first year after the flood; see verses Ge 6:11-16. This, therefore, seems to set aside Calvin's calculations, doubtfully expressed, respecting the more recent date of the confusion of tongues. -- Ed

322

There is no repugnance, if it be admitted that the monarchy of Nimrod is mentioned by anticipation in the former chapter, in order that the course of the narrative might not be interrupted by a detail of the particulars of the confusion of Babel. And then, there is no need for the middle opinion which the Author proceeds to state, and which is encumbered with many difficulties. We may easily conceive that the Sacred Writer goes back, in the present chapter, to give a detailed account of events, which had been only slightly referred to, or altogether omitted in the preceding portion of the narrative. -- Ed.

323

"Nam quum mentis character sit lingua." The word character means the impression made by a seal upon wax, and the allusion here is a very striking one, though the force of it is not adequately conveyed by the term impress. The term in Greek is applied to Christ, and is there translated "express image." See Heb 1:3. -- Ed

324

"Dixit vir ad proximum suum," as it is in the margin of the English version. "A man said to his neighbor."

325

"Audax omnia perpeti

Gens humana ruit per vetitum nefas."

Hor. Lib. 1 Ode 3.

326

"Nil mortalibus arduum est

Coelum ipsum petimus stultitia."

Ibid.

327

"Mors sola fatetur

Quantula sint hominum corpuscula."

Ju5

328

"Sed prius admonet Moses, dissimulasse aliquantisper Deum."

329

"Non quod in ipsum cadant ulli affectua."

330

Hypotyposis, in rhetoric, a figure whereby a thing is described, or painted in such vivid colouring, that it seems to stand before the eyes, and to be visible or tangible, rather than the subject of writing, or of discourse. -- Ed.

331

■■■■, (Babel ,) is derived from ■■■■, (balel ,) which signifies to confound. See Schindler's Lexicon, sub voce ■■■■. The name Babel signifies, as Bishop Patrick says, "confusion; so frivolous is their conceit, who make it to have been called by this name, from Babylon, the son of Belus." -- Ed

332

There is evidently a mistake in the original, as it appears in the Amsterdam edition of 1671, and in the Berlin edition, by Hengstenberg, of 1838. Terah's name is here put instead of Haran's, thus, 'Thare paulo post dicet Moses in patria mortuum esse,' etc. The Old English translation has kept the name, and made nonsense of the passage; but Calvin's French version is right: 'Moyse dira un peu apres, que Haran mourut en sen pays, devant que Thare son pere s'en allast demeurer en Charran.' -- See Ge 11:28. -- Ed.

333

See Ge 12:4.

334

Supposing Terah to be 70 years old at the birth of Abram, and Abram 75 at the death of Terah; it would make Terah 145 years old when he died instead of 205, which is a loss of 60 years. The inference, therefore, is that Abram was not the first-born of the sons mentioned. See also Patrick's Commentary, who says, that Terah "was seventy years old before he had any children; and then had three sons one after another, who are not set down in the order wherein they were born. For Abraham's being first named doth not prove him to have been the eldest son of Terah, no more than Shem's being first named among Noah's three sons proves him to have been the first-born. For there are good reasons to prove that

Abraham was born sixty years after Haran, who was the eldest son; having two daughters married to his two brothers, Nahor and Abraham; who seems to have been the youngest though named first." Le Clerc controverts this view, but it seems the most free from objections. See, however, his Commentary on Genesis 12:1 and 12:4. -- Ed.

335

Another palpable numerical mistake in the Amsterdam edition, which is also perpetuated in that of Hengstenberg, is here corrected as the sense requires, and under the sanction of the French and Old English versions. In the Latin text it is: "Quis non inde colliget natum fuisse quum pater centessimum annum attigisset?" -- Ed.

336

Or at least nearly so. "Ergo Haran (si junior fuisset Abrahamo) eam genuisset nondum deceni (imo nec octo) annos natus." -- Lightfoot et alii in Poli Synopsi. See, however, Lightfoot's Hebrew and Talmudical Exercitations upon the Acts, in his Works, vol. 2 p. 666. Fol. London 1684. -- Ed.

337

Vide Schindler , sub voce ■■■■, col. 42, line 54; but it is doubtful whether any clear evidence of such a meaning of the word can be adduced. -- Ed

338

See Wells' Geography of the Old Test. chap. 6 sub fine, and D'Anville's Compendium, vol. 1 436. -- Ed.

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