
Review: *From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.*

NOTE: This study does not include chapter 10 which describes how the human race continued after the flood and how God's blessing from Genesis 9:1 to be "fruitful and multiply" was fulfilled. It lists the descendants of Noah, the children born after the flood, to the 70th generation. Chapter 11 begins a second account by a different author recounting the same story as chapter 10 of how humanity divided into nations after the flood. This more colorful version of events also explains the diversity of people and languages.

DAY ONE

Read Genesis 11:1-3

1. Chapter 11 begins with a description of the world after Noah and the flood. How was the "whole earth" described in verse 1?
2. Diversity, however, was part of the creation story. Read Genesis 1:29-31 and summarize the amazing variety of creation and what God saw when he looked upon it.
3. A multiplicity of languages is part of our present day world. Comment on whether you think this is a hindrance or a benefit to society.
4. According to verse 2, the people of the earth migrated from the east. Having lived as nomads, they decided to build a community and settle on a plain in the land of Shinar. How might this change have affected their lifestyle and faith?

NOTE: The land of Shinar was a broad plain watered by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers located in ancient Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq). *Ignatius Study Bible*

5. In verse 3 we learn that the people who were formerly nomads and tillers of the soil, began to use brick and mortar to construct buildings. What does this tell you about their culture and civilization?

6. **CONNECTION:** Today, as we begin the story of the Tower of Babel, we learn that the sons of Noah shared one language as they sought to fulfill God's blessing to be "fruitful and multiply." Sharing a common language and a basic understanding are necessary for meaningful communication to take place between people. How can Jesus, as the focus and center of our lives, guide us to understand and speak with love and compassion to those around us especially when we don't share the same language? Can you share an example of how this has occurred in your life?

Read Exodus 4:10-12 and record verse 12. Begin your prayer today asking God to help you find the right words to touch the hearts of others.

DAY TWO

Read Genesis 11:4-6

7. Once they assembled their materials, the builders first planned to build a city. What would be the most prominent feature of the new city, and how was it described according to the first phrase of verse 4?

NOTE: Monumental architecture in ancient Mesopotamia was typically constructed of kiln-fired bricks. Bitumen is a natural tar used for mortar joints and weather sealing. The tower may have resembled one of the colossal mountain temples, or ziggurats, of ancient Babylon. These sacred elevations were thought to be points of contact between heaven and earth. *Ignatius Study Bible*

8. In the middle of verse 4, the builders stated that one of their motives for this massive building project was to "make a name for ourselves." To the ancient people, to name something was a power of the king and a name was the source of a person's character and reputation. Look up one of the following verses and record a phrase relating to this idea.

2 Samuel 7:8-9

Isaiah 63:12

Daniel 9:15

9. The builders stated that another motive for their project was fear of being scattered abroad the face of the earth if they did not build these things (end of verse 4). Was their fear realistic? What do you think was the real reason for their efforts?

10. In verse 5 we reach a dramatic turning point in the story when the LORD "came down to see the city and the tower." This ancient author frequently used words that described God in human-like terms. How does this help your understanding of the story or of God?

11a. After observing the mortals in the city, we hear the thoughts of the LORD. Complete the phrases below from verse 6.

Look, they are one people

and this is only the beginning

nothing that they propose to do

b. Explain why you think the peoples' behavior was a problem. (Refer to the Commentary, pages 31-32.)

12. CONNECTION: Today we read about an ancient people who built a city and tower, actions that alone are not sinful. Their work was based on the desire to make a name for themselves ignoring the supreme authority of God; yet without God, little good can be accomplished. In our own lives, when we realize that all of our talents and gifts have been given to us by God, and seek him in all that we do, much good can result. Share with your group one of the many gifts God has given to you, or given to another, and give an example of how the grace and power of that gift has helped others.

Read and record Romans 12:3. In your prayer today, seek God's will in using the gifts he has given you.

DAY THREE

Read Genesis 11:7-9

NOTE: Today we complete our study of chapter 11. Notice the change after verse 10: we are passing from one stage of history to another, from Primordial History (the time of our most remote ancestors) to Patriarchal History (the time of historical personages remembered by the people preserving the stories.) In chapter 12, we are approaching approximately 2500-2000 B.C., sometime after the invention of writing. For the Jews, the stories of the Patriarchs were far closer to their own experiences than the stories of the Flood or even more distantly, the story of Adam and Eve. The Jews trace their ancestry back to the Patriarchs whose stories are regarded as their national history. *Commentary*

13. In verse 7 the LORD continued speaking saying that he would confuse their language so that they will not understand one another's speech. What else did he do according to the beginning of verse 8?

NOTE: The dispersion that is feared by the builders in verse 5 will become the tragic result of their efforts. *Ignatius Study Bible*

14. Unable to communicate because of the confusion of language and scattered abroad, the people left off building the city (verse 8). This was probably not the only difficulty encountered by the city builders. What other problems do you think might have arisen from their inability to communicate?

15. Today we learn why this place was called Babel. What reason was given in the first part of verse 9?

16. The word *babel* or *babble* has become part of our language. Look up a definition in the dictionary and comment on why you think this word holds such meaning for us.

17. The confusion of language was symbolically reversed in the New Testament. Read Acts 2:1-13 and explain what you understand the spiritual significance of this to be.

18. CONNECTION: Today's lesson concludes our study of the Tower of Babel. We learned that the LORD stopped the people's efforts to build a tower by confusing their language and scattering them over the face of the earth. God wanted them to know that they could succeed only through his power. The LORD reminds us that if we strive to build "towers" we should avoid pride in our accomplishments and remember that he is the power behind any success we might have. What "towers" do we build in our lives? How can we ensure that God is guiding our efforts? Share some thoughts with your group.

In 1 Corinthians 10:31 we are reminded to "do everything for the glory of God." Write a prayer today asking God for better communication among families, neighbors and all people of the world.

DAY FOUR

Read Genesis 12:1-9

NOTE: Though this study will not cover the final verses of chapter 11, there is a transition made in its final verses. Genesis 11:10-26 details ten generations that stretch from Shem, the first-born of Noah, down to Abram, the first-born of Terah, by which the author shows that the Patriarchs stand in the line of Noah. In Genesis 11:27-32, Terah took his son, Abram, his son's barren wife, Sarai, and his grandson, Lot, to settle in the land of Canaan. In chapter 12 as the Patriarchal period of the Old Testament begins, God's plan for the salvation of man begins with the call of Abram.

19. When God called Abram, what was required of him? Record verse 1.

20. In return for Abram's call to leave all behind, the LORD made promises to him in verses 2-3. Briefly note what one of the following promises might signify to Abram.

I will make of you a great nation.

I will bless you and I will make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse.

21. In verse 3 the LORD went on to offer Abram the additional blessing, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Why might this last promise be especially important for us today?

22. Abram left on his journey as commanded by God. The seventy-five year old Abram took his wife, his nephew, Lot, and all their possessions with him to the land of Canaan (verses 4-5). Why do you think he responded to the call and promises of the LORD as unbelievable and fantastic as they sounded? See the Commentary, pages 34-35, to help with your answer.

NOTE: According to Genesis 11:28, Haran, Abram's brother and the father of Lot, died. This may explain why Abram took Lot into his household.

23. Though the land of Canaan was inhabited, the LORD had special plans for that place (verse 6). Record God's final promise and Abram's response (verse 7).

NOTE: Abram built a second altar and invoked the name of the LORD as he continued his journey toward the Negeb, a semi-desert land south of Judah (verses 8-9). In the ancient Near East, the building of altars marked sites as places of worship to honor a particular deity. The Book of Genesis takes for granted the existence of other gods worshiped by other peoples. The altars Abram built identify the sites as places holy for the worship of Abram's God and make an initial claim to the land.

24. **CONNECTION:** Today's lesson is about God's call and Abram's answer. God made Abram a wonderful promise, but in order to receive it, he had to abandon his old way of life and give himself completely over to God. This action by Abram is the first glimpse we have in Scripture of conversion. The first step to true conversion is a willingness to leave behind whatever prevents us from belonging entirely to God. Is God calling you to "go from" anything today so that you can journey further in your faith? Share some thoughts with your group.

Read Hebrews 11:8. Today spend some time in prayer reflecting on the faith of Abram and what God may be calling you to leave behind.

DAY FIVE

Read Genesis 12:10-16

25. Though Abram left his country to obey God's call, all did not go smoothly. A severe famine occurred in his new homeland and he went to Egypt to live (verse 10). Severe famine and hunger still exist in our world today. In his encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis challenges us to consider that, "Hunger is criminal; food is an inalienable right." (#189) What is one thing we can do to address this issue today?

26. When Abram and his family were about to enter Egypt, Abram spoke to Sarai about a problem he thought they would encounter. Summarize his concerns according to verses 11-12.

NOTE: From Genesis 17:17 we find that Sarai was ten years younger than Abram, for she was ninety when he was one hundred. In Genesis 12:4 we learn that Abram was seventy-five when he left Haran which would indicate that Sarai was then approximately 65. If several years have elapsed, Sarai might have been between the ages of seventy and seventy-five years old at this time.

27. So that things would go well with him, Abram instructed Sarai to say to the Egyptians that she was his sister so his life would be spared (verse 13). Given the real or imagined threat Abram faced, do you think there were any alternatives to this proposal? Record a brief comment to share.

NOTE: [This was] technically a half-truth, since Sarai and Abram have different mothers but share the same biological father (20:12). As a result of this tactic, Sarai is taken from Abram into the Pharaoh's royal harem. *Ignatius Study Bible*

28. When Abram entered Egypt, Abram's scheme worked to his advantage. Summarize the response of the Egyptians from verses 14-16.

29. It is interesting to note that this whole passage today was about Sarai, yet she was given no voice. Try to imagine what Sarai might have been feeling during this ordeal and comment briefly.

30. CONNECTION: Abram obeyed God and left his homeland to begin a new life. When confronted with his first crisis, he fled, schemed and lied. There is no mention that he sought God's will in this matter. He did not deny God but simply chose to deal with the situation using worldly wisdom. We, like Abram, can impulsively react to crises and challenges without thinking or praying and then ask God to bless our hasty decisions. What are some ways we can deal with the "famines" that occur suddenly in our lives today? Share some thoughts with your group.

Read and record Amos 8:11. Write a prayer today asking for the spiritual resources to prepare for the famines that may lie ahead in your life.

DAY SIX

Read Genesis 12:17-20

31. Because of Sarai's great beauty, Pharaoh took her into his house and dealt well with Abram, but this was obviously not the LORD's plan. According to verse 17, the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues. Why do you think God intervened in this way?

NOTE: Abraham and Sarah's sojourn in Egypt and encounter with Pharaoh foreshadows their descendants' experience. *NABRE*

32. There was no mention of how Pharaoh learned that the plagues were connected to Abram and Sarai, but somehow, he came to that conclusion. Complete the questions that he asked of Abram when he called him in verses 18-19?

What is this

Why did you not tell me

Why did you say, 'She is my sister

33a. At the end of verse 19, the Pharaoh tells Abram to take his wife and leave Egypt. How did Pharaoh follow up this command to ensure it was carried out (verse 20)?

b. Why do you think Pharaoh did not take more punitive actions but instead acted with mercy toward Abram when he discovered his deception?

34. Abram left Egypt "with all that he had" according to verse 20. List all the possessions Abram had acquired since he had arrived in Egypt (refer back to verse 16.)

NOTE: The many gifts in verse 16 constitute the bride price, the compensation to Abram as Sarai's brother, representing the family. Ideally, Abram should have returned them at the end, but the Pharaoh had his own reasons to send them away quickly, without waiting to sort out Abram's obligations. He cast them out, as another Pharaoh would later cast out Moses. *Miller* Perhaps this is how Sarai acquires Hagar, her Egyptian maid. *Ignatius Study Bible*

35. How would you evaluate the actions of the people in this story?

Abram

Sarai

Pharaoh

36. CONNECTION: Abram put his safety before Sarai's well-being by asking her to deceive the Pharaoh, but the LORD intervened. This does not justify Abram's immoral acts and the telling of white lies or a half-truth. As a result of Abram's lie, the unsuspecting Pharaoh suffers the wrath of God. Our relationships with God and others depend on truth, love and respect. When, if ever, do you think it is acceptable to stretch the truth or tell a little white lie? Share some thoughts with your group.

In John 8:32 we are told that "the truth will make you free." Today write a prayer asking Jesus to help you always to know the truth.

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