

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 8/20/2000 Brad Brandt

## Genesis 11:10-32 "Watching God's Plan Unfold"\*

Proposition: In Genesis 11:10-32 we see God's plan unfold in two ways.

An Important Question: Why should we study the Old Testament?

1. We discover who God is.
2. We discover what God's standard is.
3. We discover our desperate need for a Savior and what God did to provide one.
  - I. We see God's plan unfold in the account of Shem (10-26).
    - A. The account teaches us about God's people.
    - B. The account teaches us about God.
      1. God doesn't just see *Humanity*.
      2. God sees *humans*.
  - II. We see God's plan unfold in the account of Terah (27-32).
    - A. We're told about Terah's family (27-30).
    - B. We're told about Terah's decision to move (31-32).
      1. He left Ur.
      2. He intended to go to Canaan.
      3. He settled in Haran.

Application: We learn some important truths about God...

1. God has a plan to form a people for His glory.
2. God's plan covers the details of our lives.
3. Nothing takes God by surprise.

In the beginning, God. The first four words of the Bible are staggering in their implications. Seven months ago we began to explore the wonderful significance of those words as we embarked on a journey through the first eleven chapters of the Bible. This morning, we've arrived at the end of our trip and our series in Genesis 1-11.

Genesis 1-11 is foundational to everything else we believe and do. It's the prologue to the book of Genesis, to the Pentateuch, and to the Bible as a whole. We are in big trouble if we ignore Genesis.

But that's what our society has done, ignored Genesis. In fact, it's not just Genesis, but the entire *Old Testament*.

I believe that one of the problems plaguing us these days is what I'll call "Old Testament illiteracy." A lot of people don't know what God has revealed in the Old Testament, and might I add, don't see a *need* to know what's in the Old Testament.

I've heard people refer to it as the "old Bible." "Why read the Old Testament when you've got the New Testament?" is a common, unspoken (if not spoken) attitude.

Yet I'm convinced that our "Old Testament illiteracy" is taking a toll. Perhaps you're wondering why we've just devoted seven months to an Old Testament book like Genesis, so allow me to address this important question...

### An Important Question: Why should we study the Old Testament?

Here are three reasons. First of all, in the Old Testament...

1. *We discover who God is.* According to the Old Testament, who is He? He is the Creator and Designer of all things (Genesis 1:1). By the way, the New Testament writers assume we know what the Old Testament teaches about God. God is Creator, and as such He is deserving of honor from all that He created. He created us, and since He did He knows what's best for us. Secondly, in the Old Testament...

2. *We discover what God's standard is.* God revealed His standard at Mount Sinai. It's a high standard. It's called the *Torah*, the Law. God's Law is God's standard.

God is perfect. And if you want to know what the perfect, holy God expects of us, you need not wonder. He gave us a standard. God's Law, as stated succinctly in the Ten Commandments, reveals His expectations. Thirdly, in the Old Testament...

3. *We discover our desperate need for a Savior and what God did to provide one.* Have you ever wondered why it's possible to share the good news of Christ with someone, only to see them shrug their shoulders and respond, "That's nice, but no thanks. If this Jesus-thing works for you, fine, but I'm okay just the way I am."? How can a person be callused to the good news of Christ?

For starters, there's the problem of depravity (as seen in Gen 8:21). We are born dead in our sins. Until the Spirit of God works in the heart of a depraved sinner, there will be no response.

But there's another problem. If a person doesn't know God's Law, he won't see why he needs a Savior. Quite frankly, until I see a need, why would I want to change? Indeed, I'm not going to change.

Yet the Old Testament reveals our desperate need for a Savior. In the Old Testament we discover what God is really like, that He is *holy*. And in the Old Testament we discover what God's standard really is. It's high, so high we cannot attain it and for certain have fallen short of it. We are in desperate need. If we don't know the Old Testament, we won't understand just how desperate our need is.

Furthermore, in the Old Testament we discover the plan God set in motion to provide a Savior for us. It's there we see the story of redemption begin to unfold. We see the story of how God chose one man, Abraham, and gave Him an unconditional promise. "I'm going to bless you," the Lord told Abraham. "I'm going to bless the entire world through you (Gen 12:3)."

Was Abraham the Messiah? No. He, just like the rest of us, was a sinner in need of a Savior. He, too, had his faults (like lying). But he believed God and trusted in God's promises, and God credited it to him for righteousness.

And in time, God did send a Savior into the world, a descendant of Abraham named Jesus, just as promised and just as the Old Testament predicted.

Yes, we need the Old Testament. And this morning we need to give careful attention to the second half of Genesis 11. Quite honestly, the text before us is one we might be inclined to skip over. It's just another bunch of names, isn't it? We could brush past it--and if we did it would be to our own loss. There's no such thing as "filler" in God's Word.

Why did God record Genesis 11:10-32? The immediate context, of course, is the account of the tower of Babel in verses 1-9. Babel shows us the danger of trying to reach God in the wrong way. It doesn't work. We can't reach God by building a tower. We can't reach God by doing *anything*. We need Him to reach us.

If sinful people are ever to reestablish a right relationship with God, God must take the initiative. Which is exactly what He did. And Genesis 11:10 and following puts the spotlight of what God did to reach sinners like us. In Genesis 11:10-32 we see God's plan unfold in two ways.

### I. We see God's plan unfold in the account of Shem (10-26).

Let's listen to the text: "This is the account of Shem. Two years after the flood, when Shem was 100 years old, he became the father of Arphaxad. <sup>11</sup> And after he became the father of Arphaxad, Shem lived 500 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>12</sup> When Arphaxad had lived 35 years, he became the father of Shelah. <sup>13</sup> And after he became the father of Shelah, Arphaxad lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>14</sup> When Shelah had lived 30 years, he became the father of Eber. <sup>15</sup> And after he became the father of Eber, Shelah lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>16</sup> When Eber had lived 34 years, he became the father of Peleg. <sup>17</sup> And after he became the father of Peleg, Eber lived 430 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>18</sup> When Peleg had lived 30 years, he became the father of Reu. <sup>19</sup> And after he became the father of Reu, Peleg lived 209 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>20</sup> When Reu had lived 32 years, he became the father of Serug. <sup>21</sup> And after he became the father of Serug, Reu lived 207 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>22</sup> When Serug had lived 30 years, he became the father of Nahor. <sup>23</sup> And after he became the father of Nahor, Serug lived 200 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>24</sup> When Nahor had lived 29 years, he became the father of Terah. <sup>25</sup> And after he became the father of Terah, Nahor lived 119 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>26</sup> After Terah had lived 70 years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran."

What do you see in verses 10-26? It's a genealogy, yes, a list of names. But what kind of list is it? And why did God preserve yet another list of names in Genesis (we've already seen two, one in chapter 5 and another in chapter 10)?

He didn't do it simply to satisfy our curiosity. Rather, Genesis 11 gives us some vital details we'll need to know in order to understand the amazing story of God's redemptive work. In effect, this account teaches us about two subjects...

A. The account teaches us about God's people. Verse 10 states that this is the "account of Shem" (or, "These are the generations of Shem," as the KJV translates it). And in this account, the author of Genesis, Moses, identifies ten names for us.

But why? Remember, when Moses wrote this he was in the Sinai wilderness with two million, just-freed, Hebrew slaves. What were they doing there? The Israelites were preparing to enter the Promised Land. They'd just left Egypt and were heading for Canaan.

But who were they really? Though they'd lived in Egypt for the past 400 years, they weren't Egyptians. And though they'd soon be living in the land of Canaan, they certainly weren't Canaanites. Who were they?

They were *God's people*. This is key. God wants His people to know who they are and whose they are. That's what Genesis 11 is all about. God wanted His people, the Israelites, to know who their identity. In effect He told them, "I've been preparing for this day for a long time, since the days of Shem and before." The heritage of God's chosen people goes back, way back, to *Shem*.

Who was Shem? Shem was one of Noah's sons. To be more specific, he was the son concerning whom Noah delivered this amazing prediction (Gen 9:26-27), "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem. May God extend the territory of Japheth; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave."

The line of Shem is the line of promise. And Genesis 11 records that line for us. It shows the connection between Shem and Abram (later to be known as "Abraham").

The truth is, this is not just *another* genealogy. If you'll compare this genealogy with the one in Genesis 5, you'll notice some similarities *and* differences. Genesis 5 shows the connection from Adam to Noah, whereas Genesis 11 picks up with Noah's son, Shem, and climaxes with Abram. Like the Genesis 5 genealogy, the one in chapter 11 consists of ten names. And both genealogies are repeated again in the same order in 1 Chronicles 1.

But there are noteworthy differences, and here's a key one. The most significant phrase in Genesis 5, "and he died (5:5, 8, 11, 17, 20, 27, 31)," is absent from the formula in Genesis 11. In chapter 11, Moses records the person's name, how old he was when he became a father, how many years he lived after the child was born, and that he had other sons and daughters. But there's no mention in verses 10-26 of the phrase, "and he died."

Why not? Didn't they die? Yes, every one of them did. But there's no need to state the obvious any more. In Genesis 5, Moses wanted to make the point that Paradise is gone, and that the inevitable consequence of Adam's sin is rampant in the world. *It's appointed unto man once to die.*

But by the time we reach Genesis 11, *we know* sinners die. We know the consequences of sin. We've seen the Flood in chapters 6-8. We've seen the scattering of sinful people at Babel in chapter 11. We know that sin has consequences, the ultimate consequence being *death*.

And did you notice how the lifespans are getting shorter? In Genesis 5, we see people living to be nearly 1,000 years old. But what about in Genesis 11? Shem lives 600 years, Arphaxad 438 years, Peleg 239 years, and Nahor 148 years. What's happening? People are dying at younger and younger ages. Sin is beginning to take its toll.

We are living in a dying, decaying world.

Is there hope? Indeed, there is! And in Genesis 11 God's Word shows us what God did to bring hope to the world.

In recent weeks I've been meditating on a fabulous verse, Isaiah 30:18. As you may know, it was the prophet Isaiah's job to warn his people that God was going to judge them for their sins. Judgment was coming and it would be severe. Isaiah records his "woe" in the first seventeen verses of this chapter.

But does God delight in judging sinners? Listen to Isaiah's answer in 30:18, "Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!"

My friend, even when we've blown it, there's hope. No matter what we've done. Why? Because God is not only just, but *gracious*. He longs to be gracious to sinners. That's why in eternity past He mapped out a rescue mission to reach and restore rebels like us.

And what He mapped out in eternity past, He's carrying out in the present. Right on schedule, just as planned.

That's what Genesis 11 is all about. We're seeing the record of the unfolding plan of God. In the account of Shem, we see how God worked in the lives of people to bring hope to the world. So in the account of Shem, we learn about God's people. There's a second subject we learn about as well.

B. The account teaches us about God. Quite honestly, we could spend a lot of time probing the details of this genealogy--many commentators do--and miss a vital truth. What truth? A truth about God. Here it is...

1. *God doesn't just see Humanity.* That is, Humanity with a capital "H." Rather...

2. *God sees humans.* He sees and cares about *individual* people. And He mentions some of their names for us right here in His Word: Shem. Arphaxad. Shelah. Eber. Peleg. Reu. Serug. Nahor. Terah. And Abram.

Do you ever feel lost in the shuffle of life? Beloved, ponder this truth. God knows you. He knows *you*. And He has a plan for your life. He created you so you could enjoy Him and glorify Him forever.

Yes, sin has separated you from God, but still He is mindful of you. He has designed a plan to restore unworthy sinners to Himself. God knows you, and you can know Him personally. How? By placing your faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

But why can Jesus save us? What makes Him so unique? Here's the answer. He's the fulfillment of God's plan. How do I know that, especially in this day when we're told there are many ways to God? I know that because God *wrote down* His plan before He *fulfilled* His plan.

Where? In the Old Testament. The Old Testament points to Christ.

Are you a student of the Book? Are you a student of the *whole* Book? Do you have a regular plan to study God's Word? It's been said that dusty Bibles lead to dirty lives.

In 1991, the Barna Research Group reported that in a typical week, only 10 percent of Americans read the Bible every day. Gallup polls confirm those findings. One survey found that 82 percent of Americans believe that the Bible is either the literal or "inspired" Word of God. More than half say they read it at least monthly. Yet half couldn't name even one of the four gospels. And fewer than half knew who delivered the Sermon on the Mount.

It's possible to be *under* the Word, but not *in* the Word. When you come to church, you're *under* the Word--that's great. But are you *in* the Word the rest of the week? I want every one of you to know the joy of being in God's life-changing Word. And don't forget the Old Testament!

We've seen God's plan unfold in the account of Shem. There's more. Next...

## II. We see God's plan unfold in the account of Terah (27-32).

Who was Terah? The genealogy ended in verse 26 by mentioning a man named Terah who had three sons. In the following section Moses elaborates by giving us "the account of Terah (27)." We're told two things

about Terah...

A. We're told about Terah's family (27-30). "This is the account of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. <sup>28</sup> While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> Now Sarai was barren; she had no children."

If Genesis 1:1 to 11:26 gives us the history of humanity as a whole, Genesis 11:26 begins the history of a single family, a family God chose to be the means of His redemptive plan. From Genesis 11:27 onward, the spotlight will be on a man named Abram.

Here we're introduced to the father of the main character. Terah had three sons, Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

Concerning Haran, we're told three things. First, he had a son named Lot who will show up later in Genesis. Second, he died prematurely while living in Ur--what happened to him, we're not told. And third, he had two daughters, Milcah and Iscah.

Verse 29 indicates that Terah's other two sons also married, Abram to Sarai, and Nahor to Milcah. In fact, Nahor, married his orphaned niece (Milcah was Haran's daughter), apparently after Haran died.

Gordon Talbot remarks, "Marriage to such close relatives may have taken place because these men did not want to marry pagan women around them. Marriage to close relatives had been fairly common in early generations, so it would not have the same stigma that it has in our times."

The text provides a final piece of family news in verse 30 that will prove to be pivotal in the story-line to come. Sarai was barren.

So there's Terah's family. In verse 31 something happened that changed Terah's family--and the world--for evermore. A decision was made. Terah decided to move.

B. We're told about Terah's decision to move (31-32). "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. <sup>32</sup> Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran."

Terah made a decision that involved the following three phases...

*1. He left Ur.* Ur was apparently quite a city. It was located halfway between Bagdad and the Persian Gulf, and was a center of culture and commerce. It was also a place of flagrant idolatry. The moon god, *Sin*, was worshiped there.

One day Terah took his son Abram, his grandson, Lot, and his daughter-in-law, Sarai, and left Ur. Why? Why did Terah leave Ur?

We're not told. Did it have something to do with Haran's death? Maybe. Maybe it was simply prudence. Historians tell us the Elamites destroyed the city of Ur around 1950 B.C. Maybe Terah was simply getting out of town to save his neck.

Genesis 12:1 indicates that God told Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you." In Acts 7:2 Stephen says God gave Abram that message while he was still in Mesopotamia, before moving to Haran. We can assume that God's call to Abram influenced Terah to leave Ur, too.

But for whatever reason, Terah decided to leave Ur.

That was phase #1. Here's phase #2 of his decision...

2. *He intended to go to Canaan.* Don't miss that. The text specifically says Terah's intent was to go to Canaan. Why Canaan? Again, we're not told. What we are told is that he never made it. Instead, he opted for phase #3...

3. *He settled in Haran.* By the way, in the Hebrew, the city of Haran is spelled differently than the name of Terah's deceased son, Haran.

For some reason, when Terah arrived in Haran, he settled down. Why? Maybe he just wore out physically and couldn't go any further. Maybe he just like Haran. After all, Haran was a prosperous caravan city in the 19th century B.C. Maybe the decision to stay in Haran had to do with Terah's heart.

There's an interesting statement in Joshua 24:2-3 that may help us. There Joshua said this to the Israelites, "Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River [that is, the Euphrates] and worshiped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants."

Did you catch that? Joshua said that Israel's forefathers worshiped other gods while in Ur. They were pagans. They worshiped false gods. That included Terah--and Abraham, too, in my estimation. In time, Abraham turned from his false gods and became a worshiper of the true, living God.

What about Terah? Both Terah and Abram left Ur, but did Terah *really* leave?

Realize this. Ur was probably located at the southern end of Mesopotamia (in southern Iraq), while Haran was in the northern end of it. Yes, Terah moved from Ur and went 550 miles away, but he was still in his home country. And know this. The moon god the people worshiped in Ur was also worshiped in Haran.

I get the sense that though Terah got out of Ur, Ur never got out of Terah. And because of that his decision to go to Canaan never materialized. He didn't finish the course.

Derek Kidner comments, "Terah...lost the will to persist; in Hebrews 11:9, 10 the lesson is drawn that only faith will stay the course. So the chapter [Genesis 11] brings the primeval history to a doubly appropriate close, with man's self-effort issuing in confusion at Babel, and in compromise here. On his own, man will get no further than this."

Beloved, what I'm about to say next is sobering. Hell will be full of people who had enough religion to be dangerous. Maybe I'm wrong about Terah. Maybe he stayed in Haran for legitimate reasons. But if you think you are going to heaven because you "prayed a prayer" once, but in your heart you still love this world as much as you did before you prayed that prayer, you are in serious danger. Titus 1:16 warns of people who claim to know God, but deny Him by their actions.

It's inevitable to be *in the world*, but if the world is *in us*, we're kidding ourselves. God is holy, and we're to be holy, too. In fact, if we are Christians we will be holy for the Holy Spirit lives in us. Our hearts and lives will be different than before we met Christ.

Now let's apply Genesis 11 to our lives...

Application: We learn some important truths about God... I'll mention three...

1. *God has a plan to form a people for His glory.* Something strikes me by its absence in Genesis 11:10-32.

The Lord's name is not mentioned even once. All we see are a bunch of people's names.

Where's God? He's there! He's just behind the scenes. What's He doing? He's fulfilling His plan, the plan He designed in eternity past, the plan He enacted in time through a man named Abram, and the plan He fulfilled ultimately through Abraham's descendant, Jesus. Yes, know this. God has a plan.

2. *God's plan covers the details of our lives.* The loss of a child. A family move. A barren woman. A half-completed decision. God's plan is comprehensive.

Ponder that truth. What are you facing right now in life? May I encourage you with this thought. God is working out His plan, a plan that extends to the very details of our lives. Will you trust Him? Will you submit to Him?

"But I'm too weak," you say. Yes, we are weak. We don't even have the ability to trust God on our own. That's why we need Christ and a growing relationship with Him. Christ fulfilled the plan of God in our place. He died for our sins. He rose again and will come into your life if you will repent and believe in Him.

Are you weak? Remember, He is strong. Call upon Him today. And remember this.

3. *Nothing takes God by surprise.* Nothing just happens. It's all part of the unfolding plan of God.