

PROBLEMS IN DATING THE BABEL JUDGMENT & THE FLOOD AS SEEN IN THE GENEALOGIES OF GENESIS 11:10-28 & GENESIS 5

We are now ready to consider the problem of the “When?” of the confusion of the tongues at Babel. Correlated with this “When?” is the “When?” of the Flood.

The Problem Simply Stated

Genesis 11:10-28 appears to be a chronological genealogy from the Flood to Abraham. By interpreting this as a strict chronology and by adding the years therein to the date of Abraham (which is relatively well established), one would find that the Flood had to occur in the 3rd Millennium B.C. Archbishop Ussher (1581-1656) followed this line approach: his dates are recorded in the margins of many King James Versions. But has God given us a strict chronology in the passage? We believe not for the following reasons.

- ❖ The name “Cainan” is omitted in the Genesis 11 account, but included in Luke’s genealogy of Mary. Compare Genesis 11:11-12 and Luke 3:35-36. Thus, there is at least one gap in the Genesis 11 genealogy and probably more as will be shown.
- ❖ There is a symmetrical pattern in the two genealogies (Genesis 5 and 11) of the godly lines included in these first eleven chapters of Genesis. In each case, there are 10 patriarchs listed with the tenth having three important sons.

Genesis 5	Genesis 11:10-28	Luke 3:35-38	
1 Adam	1 Shem	1 Adam	1 Shem
2 Seth	2 Arpachs	2 Seth	2 Arpachs
3 Enosh	3 (Cainan)-Lu 3:35-36	3 Enos	3 Cainan
4 Kenan	4 Shelah	4 Cainan	4 Shelah
5 Mahalalel	5 Eber	5 Mahalalel	5 Eber
6 Jared	6 Peleg	6 Jared	6 Peleg
7 Enoch	7 Reu	7 Enoch	7 Reu
8 Methuselah	8 Serug	8 Methuselah	8 Serug
9 Lamech	9 Nahor	9 Lamech	9 Nahor
10 Noah	10 Terah	10 Noah	10 Terah
(Shem, Ham, Japheth)	(Abram, Nahor, Haran)		Abraham

Should we exclude Cainan from the Genesis 11 account, we could add Abram as #10 to maintain the symmetrical pattern. This leads to several possibilities concerning their purpose:

- (1) Their main purpose is not to give us a strict chronology, but to show how God preserved and guarded the Messianic lines;
- (2) They may have been preserved this way for the purpose of memorization;

- (3) The preservation in this form may indicate the access of Moses to source documents containing this order.
- ❖ As in the case of Cainan, the term “begat” sometimes refers to ancestral relations. The term “begat” in English means a father-son relationship, but not always this in the Bible. The following examples are offered as proof.
 - Matthew 1:8 ...*Joram begat Uzziah* (Azariah) but the generations of Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah are omitted. See 2 Kings 8-14.
 - 1 Chronicles 26:24 *And Shebuel the son of Gershon, the son of Moses, was ruler over the treasures* in the days of David, but here we have 400 years of generations skipped over between Shebuel and Gershon.
 - Exodus 6:20, where Amram appears to be Moses’ father, but compare Numbers 3:17-19; 27-29 where the families of the Amramites along with Amram’s 3 brother (Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel) number 8,600 during the time of Moses. It is not logical that Amram was the actual father of Moses unless we are willing to grant Moses 8,600 living male cousins and uncles.
 - ❖ Further proof that the genealogy here is not to be taken strictly, that there are gaps, can be deducted from the fact that if it were strict, all the post-diluvian patriarchs including Noah would have been living when Abram was 50 years old; three who were born before the earth was divided (Shem, Shelah, and Eber) would have actually outlived Abram. See here Joshua 24:2,14-15 which would imply that were Noah alive in the time of Abram (which he was not), he would have apostatized (which he did not)!
 - ❖ Furthermore, the international scene of Abraham’s day as pictured in the Bible itself demands more years to develop than a strict chronology in Genesis 11 would allow.

By Strict Chronology

ca. 2100 B.C. – Birth of Abram
 ca. 2458 B.C. – the Flood
 ca. 2358-2119 B.C. – the Dispersion
 (Babel)

} But, the Bible implies that the world of Abram’s day, its cultures, civilizations, cities were ancient already; therefore, strict chronology does not fit the Bible account.

Conclusion

What then of the date of Babel and of the Flood? Can we know with assurance exactly when they occurred? Personally, I believe not. Involved in the answer to this question is the enormous problem of the antiquity of man which by no means has been solved either by the evolutionists or Evangelical scholars. Scholars simply do not have enough historical evidence or experience in this area... more questions are raised than are solved. God’s Word is true and given time, it will prove itself. **The science of scripture is far more authoritative than that of history or**

paleontology: Trust your faith to that which claims a lot rather than to that which claims less.

- Evangelical Christian scholars who advocate acceptance for the vast antiquity of the human race as postulated by modern anthropologists include Bernard Ramm, Byron C. Nelson, James Oliver Buswell III, Edward J. Carnell, and others. Basically, there are three schools of thought among these as to the date of the Flood:
 - Those who believe in a geographical universal food (B. Nelson) tend to date it several hundred thousand years ago.
 - Those who believe it destroyed all men, but was not geographically universal (J. Buswell III) would date it anywhere from 15,000 to 100,000 years ago.
 - Those who believe it destroyed only part of the human race (B. Ramm) date it less than 10,000 years ago.
- Evangelical Christian scholars who reject modern anthropological postulations for the antiquity of man tend to date the Flood anywhere between 5000 B.C. and 10,000 B.C. These include such names as R. Laird Harris, Joseph Free, J. Barton Payne, Merrill F. Unger, John Whitcomb, Robert Morris, and others.

Finally

It appears to me that it is very hazardous to stretch the genealogy of Genesis 11 to include all the “ages” that modern anthropology demands. Even though there are gaps in that account, it is not logical that they bridge a 100,000 – 200,000 year period. It appears the Babel judgment occurred in the days of Peleg (Genesis 10:25), possibly 1,000 years after the Flood. From Peleg to Abraham, we may allow another 4,000 years, thus totaling 5,000 years from the Flood until Abraham. Any more time allowed for this period stretches Genesis 11 to the breaking point.