

Exegetical Notes – Genesis 11:10-32

“From Shem to Abram”

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(Once again, humankind has shown its propensity to wander away from God. In just a few generations from the flood, God’s judgment fell (see Genesis 11:1-10). The sin of humans brought God’s judgment on the earth. The truth is that people are not capable of living in God’s world God’s way. They fail to trust and obey. The truth is that God judges mankind for its rebellion but is faithful to His word (see Genesis 9:1-18). This time, as He promised to Noah, God did not destroy the earth in judgment. Before the flood, because of his faithfulness to God, God picked Noah and Noah’s family to carry on the line of humanity after His judgment fell. This time, after God’s judgment falls at Babel, God picks one faithful man, Abram, to carry out His purposes. It all funnels down to one man. God will work with this man because this man trusts God and seeks to obey Him.)

Verse 10a

This is the account of Shem’s family line.

- Because God is God, even before it happened, God knew that the people who populated the world after the flood would turn away from Him and follow their own ways. They would cease to trust God and obey Him.
- From among Noah’s three sons, Japheth, Shem, and Ham, God had picked Shem, the second born, to carry on the faithful example set by Noah. God does not pick Shem because of Shem’s goodness. He picks Shem because He picks Shem. Why he did not pick Japheth, the first born, is unknown. God is sovereign lord over all because He created the world and all that is in it. His choice of Shem is His choice. Humans must trust that God knows what He is doing and bend to His choice.
- As far as things go with Shem, his choice by God is an act of grace. Shem is not perfect. Noah was not perfect (see Genesis 9:18-28). It is not to them that glory goes, but to God who continues to be faithful to His word throughout time.

Verses 10b-26

Two years after the flood, when Shem was 100 years old, he became the father of Arphaxad. ¹¹ And after he became the father of Arphaxad, Shem lived 500 years and had other sons and daughters.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁶ After Terah had lived 70 years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran.

- Ten generations are listed from Shem, the son of Noah, to Abram, Nahor, and Haran. There is no record of if or how God was working among the people of the earth during those generations. Apparently, God was silent during this time. The Bible is marked by times when God is silent.
- However, even during these silences, God is working His plan. After 10 generations, the man God has chosen appears from the line of Shem, Abram.

Verses 27-30

²⁷ This is the account of Terah's family line.

Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. ²⁸ While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth. ²⁹ Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milkah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milkah and Iskah. ³⁰ Now Sarai was childless because she was not able to conceive.

- Terah, the father of Abram, is of no special interest in the story other than that he is the father of Abram.
- Haran, one of Terah's sons, died before his father.
- Abram and his brother, Nahor, both married. Abram's wife was Sarai. She was considered barren and the two had no children. Nahor's wife was named Milkah. She was the daughter of their brother, Haran, who had died.

Verses 31-32

³¹ 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 Harran, they settled there.

³² Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Harran.

- Terah's intention was to move from Ur of the Chaldeans to the land of Cana. We do not know why. He took his son, Abram, Abram's wife, and the son of his deceased son, Lot, with him. Apparently, Nahor resolved to stay in Ur of the Chaldeans with his family.
- While it seems that God was silent through all this time. We will see that even during His "silence," God was working His plan.
- But on the way to Cana, Terah came to a spot he liked and changed his plans. He named the place, Haran, after his deceased son, and decided to remain there.

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