

Genesis 11:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

Analysis

So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to b... This passage belongs to the primeval history section (Genesis 1-11) which establishes universal truths about God, humanity, sin, and divine purposes before focusing on Abraham and Israel. These chapters answer fundamental questions about human origins, the spread of wickedness, God's judgment, and the preservation of a righteous remnant.

Recurring patterns emerge: human sin escalating from individual disobedience to societal corruption, divine patience followed by judgment, gracious preservation of a remnant, and covenant promises ensuring redemptive purposes continue. The genealogies connect historical persons, demonstrate the fulfillment of divine promises (blessing and multiplication), and trace the line leading to Abraham and ultimately Christ.

Key theological themes in this section include:

1. sin's destructive progression affecting all humanity
2. God's righteous judgment while preserving mercy
3. human pride and autonomy opposing divine sovereignty
4. cultural development as both blessing and potential idolatry
5. God's sovereign plan advancing despite human rebellion.

These narratives provide the necessary context for understanding God's calling of Abraham and the covenant promises through which all nations will be blessed.

Historical Context

The primeval history (Genesis 1-11) parallels ancient Near Eastern traditions including Sumerian King Lists (pre-flood longevity), Akkadian flood traditions (Atrahasis, Gilgamesh), and Mesopotamian city foundation myths. However, Genesis demythologizes these traditions, presenting monotheistic history rather than polytheistic mythology. The genealogies connecting Adam to Noah to Abraham provide historical framework absent in pagan myths.

Archaeological evidence confirms ancient urbanization (chapter 4's cities), agricultural development, metallurgy, and musical instruments emerging in Mesopotamia's early history. The Babel account reflects Mesopotamian ziggurat construction (stepped pyramid temples), particularly in Babylon. Linguistic diversity requiring explanation was obvious to ancient peoples, making the Babel narrative culturally relevant.

For Israel in covenant with Yahweh, these chapters explained their relationship to surrounding nations. All peoples descended from Noah, but Israel descended from Shem through Abraham—chosen for blessing all nations. The flood demonstrated God's justice and mercy: judging wickedness while preserving the righteous. This pattern would recur throughout Israel's history, assuring them that God's covenant faithfulness endures despite judgment on the wicked.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What theological truths about Babel emerge from this passage?
2. How does this passage challenge modern cultural assumptions about identity, purpose, or morality?

3. How does understanding Christ as the ultimate fulfillment illuminate this passage's meaning?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּפְּץ	יְהוָה ה	אֶת־ם	מִשָּׁם	עַל	פְּנֵי י
scattered them abroad	So the LORD	H853	from thence	H5921	upon the face
H6327	H3068		H8033		H6440
כָּל	הָאָרֶץ	וַיִּחַדְּלוּ	לִבְנֹת	הָעִיר:	
H3605	of all the earth	and they left off	to build	the city	
	H776	H2308	H1129	H5892	

Additional Cross-References

Luke 1:51 (Parallel theme): He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

Deuteronomy 32:8 (Parallel theme): When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.

Genesis 10:25 (Parallel theme): And unto Eber were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg; for in his days was the earth divided; and his brother's name was Joktan.

Genesis 10:32 (Parallel theme): These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations: and by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood.