

NOACH/NOAH  
Bereshith/Genesis 6:9-11:32

Within our parasha this week, is the very brief account of the **Tower of Babel**. Although it is one of the more well known stories of the Torah, we will be digging for the **deeper nougats** to attempt to understand how the story points to the **awesome plan of the Almighty**. First, as the Torah presents it:

*Bereshith 11:1 Now the whole earth had one language (saphah echat - שִׁפְהַת אֶחָדָה) and one speech (ud'varim echadim - וּדְבָרִים אֶחָדִים).<sup>2</sup> And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east (qedem - קֶדֶם), that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there.<sup>3</sup> Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar.<sup>4</sup> And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."<sup>5</sup> But ה' came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.<sup>6</sup> And ה' said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.<sup>7</sup> "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."<sup>8</sup> So ה' scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city.<sup>9</sup> Therefore its name is called Babel, because there ה' confused the language of all the earth; and from there ה' scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.*

When the **Almighty comes down** to see what the people are doing, He is **not pleased**. His decision is to **break up the unity** among them, **scatter them** and **bring their building project to a halt**. But what is so bad with the **unity** that they have **established among themselves**? There is a clue in the first verse. We read that the **whole earth** had “**one language**” and “**one speech**.” Are these just **synonymous phrases**? Commentators suggest that the point being made is that there was a **common language plus a unity of thought**. And the **shared thought** was....**REBELLION** against ה'.

We gather **more support** for this idea of **rebellion** from the information in **verse 2** that says they “**journeyed from the east**” (qedem - קֶדֶם). The **Hebrew word** (qedem - קֶדֶם) translated as “**east**” has **more than a directional meaning**. It also points to things that are “**ancient**” or “**old**,” i.e. things pertaining to the **immortal Almighty**:

*Psalm 55:19 El will hear, and afflict them, Even He who abides from of old (qedem - קֶדֶם)...*

From the **prophet Micah**, we can **connect “qedem”** with the **Messiah**:

*Micah 5:2 " But you, **Bethlehem Ephrathah**, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me **The One to be Ruler in Israel**, Whose goings forth are from of old (qedem - קֶדֶם), From everlasting."*

And one more verse to point out that the **Messiah will indeed come from the “east”**:

*Matthew 24:27 "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.*

Thus **Chazal** interprets **Bereshith 11:2** to say that it was a “*journey away from the Ancient One*”; that is, a **distancing from יהוה**. In fact, the “*tower*” they build “*to make a name for themselves*” indicates that the **unity they had established was not in the interest of seeking the Almighty**. Let’s contrast that thought with what we find in **Proverbs**:

*Proverbs 18:10 The Name of יהוה is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe.*

Their **rebellious attempt** to “*make a name for themselves*” would **not be successful**. Just for a moment, before we go on, let’s read of the **perfect plan** of the **Almighty as He determines how a “name” will be made for a people**:

*Bereshith 12:1 Now יהוה had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you.<sup>2</sup> I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.*

**Abraham**, in contrast to the people who have “*journeyed from the east,*” will travel away from **Ur**, whose **location is near the tower of Babel**. During the course of his journey, **he will call upon יהוה’s “Name,”** thereby not **lifting up his own name**:

*Bereshith 12:7 .... "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to יהוה, who had appeared to him.<sup>8</sup> And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to יהוה and called on the Name of יהוה.*

Returning to the **tower**, let’s first understand the **location**. The **earliest known inhabitants of Mesopotamia** were the **Sumerians**, whom the Bible refers to as the people of the “*land of Shinar,*” associated with “*Nimrod*”:

*Bereshith 10:8 Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth.<sup>9</sup> He was a mighty hunter before יהוה; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before יהוה."<sup>10</sup> And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.*

The **city of Babylon** lies in the **land of Shinar** and its general location has never been disputed.

When “*יהוה came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built*” what (**physically speaking**) was it that He saw?

The **city of Babylon** was the **capital** of the ancient land of **Babylonia** in **southern Mesopotamia**. It was sprawled along the **banks** of the palm-lined **Euphrates River** about 50 miles south of modern

Baghdad, just north of what is now the **modern Iraqi town of al-Hillah**. It was a great metropolis of **wide broad avenues, high buildings, and great walls**. They had channeled the waters of the Euphrates into a **remarkable irrigation system**.

Quoting from [www.saudiaramcoworld.com](http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com):

“In digging out the **history of Babylon**, archeologists found that in every important ancient town in the land between the rivers there existed the remains of **tower-like structures called ziggurats**. They also discovered representations of stepped towers on seals, amulets, cylinders and bas-reliefs, as well as cuneiform texts giving the names and dimensions of the towers. Eventually, near what is now the village of Hilleh in Iraq, they uncovered the **ground plan of a particularly large tower**. It was **made of burnt bricks and was some 300 feet square**. Texts found in the ruins called it ‘**Etemenanki, the House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth**.’ The texts also told of its **restoration during the reign of Nabopolassar in 625 B.C.**, mentioned baked bricks, streams of bitumen, the counsel of Babylonian gods, and **some 60 years later, the conscription of foreign labor by the famous Nebuchadnezzar to continue the restoration**.

For thousands of years, **apparently, ziggurats were an integral part of Mesopotamian cities**, each differing from the other in detail like the cathedrals of Europe, but **essentially the same: massive cube-like blocks, with stepped-back upper terraces, and monumental stairways leading to upper sections from which spiral stairs ascended to the topmost platform on which stood a temple or shrine.**” (end of quote)

The tower known as “**Etemenanki, the House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth**,” may have been the **first pagan temple**. On the level topography of Babylonia, it would have been a **landmark visible for many miles**. In fact, **the ruins of this tower are still visible today**. Is this the **tower of Babel**?

Now let’s make a **deeper connection with this tower (House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth)** which is **in Babylon** (means “**gate of god**”) and a **story** that occurs a few chapters from now **with Ya’acov**:

***Bereshith 28:10** Now Ya’acov went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran.<sup>11</sup> So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep.<sup>12</sup> Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder (sulam - סֹלָמַיִם) was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of Elohim were ascending and descending on it. ....<sup>17</sup> And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of Elohim, and this is the gate of heaven!"*

The **Hebrew** word for “**ladder**” (sulam - סֹלָמַיִם) **only appears once** in the Hebrew Scriptures. **Robert Alter** suggests that it most likely **resembled a ramp**; akin to those found on **ancient Mesopotamian ziggurats** which often had **vast, multiple ramps with terraced landings**. The phrases “**its top reached to heaven**” and “**gate of heaven**” recall the **intentions of the tower of Babel**. According to **Sarna**, the **ancient ziggurat symbolized that gate between the heavenly and the earthly worlds**.

What is so interesting about **Ya'acov dreaming** of this **vertical bridge between heaven and earth** is that it is at the **very place where Isaac** (who pictured the sacrifice of the Father's only Son) was **nearly sacrificed**. Through **Ya'acov's prophetic dream** we see how the **connection between the earthly and the heavenly was meant to take place according to the Father's awesome plan!** Of course **that connection** would be **Yeshua** as pointed out by **John!**

*John 1:51 And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the messengers of Elohim ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."*

There is **nothing that man can do**, such as **construct a ziggurat**, that will **connect him to the Father**. Only **through Yeshua** can we truly **reach the Father**. A **manmade structure** is a **"house"** other than the **"house of Elohim"** (*Bereshith 28:17*) and is **built on shifting "sand"**!

*Matthew 7:26 "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand:<sup>27</sup> "and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."*

Let's take another look at **something Ya'acov did**:

*Bereshith 28:11 So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took of the stones (evenim - אֲבִנֵי) of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep.*

It has been suggested that the **"stones"** **Ya'acov took** and **"put at his head,"** were **from the altar upon which Isaac was nearly sacrificed**. In the **Bereshith 28:11**, **"stones"** is **definitely plural** (*evenim - אֲבִנֵי*). However, a few verses later, it appears that the **"stones"** have **merged into a singular "stone"** (*even - אֶבֶן*)!

*Bereshith 28:18 Then Ya'acov rose early in the morning, and took the stone (even - אֶבֶן) that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it.*

**Jewish midrash** understands this **"stone"** to be the **unity of all of Israel upon which connection will be made between heaven and earth**. Do you see how this **differs** with the concept of **reaching heaven by means of the tower of Babel?** The **Babel generation** was about **"unity plus manmade bricks"** where **Jacob's dream** is about **"unity plus Messiah!"**

Let's take a **closer look** at how the **ziggurat** or the **tower of Babel was built**. First consider **the soil** it was built on. The **Tigris and the Euphrates both dump silt during flood season**. The **sand constantly settles** and **building on it is like building on quicksand**. It has been discovered, however, that **ancient engineers** used a **very modern technique** to solve the problem. They laid down **alternating layers...first brick, then sandy soil laced with reed matting**. They formed huge terraces from these layers. The **bricks took the vertical load** and the **tough matting kept the structure from leaning to the side when it got wet**. Today we call this technique **building with composite materials**. **Archeologists have located over 20** of these **ziggurats** in the area, the first being built **over 4,000 years ago**.

Often **technology** leads **men towards arrogance**. Read again what the **people said and did**:

*Bereshith 11:3 Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar.*

Isn't it interesting that **in Babylon, there were virtually no "stones?"** (As a side note...**everywhere** you go **in Israel, there are "stones."**) If **Babylon represents every pagan religion**, then the lack of "**stones**" makes perfect sense. Therefore, **without "stones,"** they were **forced to apply technology** and their **invention** was the "**brick.**" **Immediately after this verse** we read that they wanted to build a "**city and a tower whose top is in the heavens.**" They were **challenging the Creator**. By using "**bricks and mortar,**" they could **make with their own hands something that appeared to be as strong as a "stone."** They were pleased! They had **figured out** how they could **build strong cities and towers by themselves**. **Babylonians considered mud** to be the **purest of substances**; therefore, it was used in the construction of these **towers which ascended toward heaven**, supposedly **bringing man closer to the gods**. What good was **יהוה** to them now?

**Brad Scott** in his articles, "**Bricks for Stones,**" gives us more insight on the **lessons we learn from "bricks"** (some editing - complete articles found at [www.wildbranch.org/Articles/index.html](http://www.wildbranch.org/Articles/index.html)):

"During one of our recent trips to Israel we were taken to one of many tels (a hill) near Jerusalem. As the tel leveled off at the top, there were **several very old ruins** of the small town left there. The walls were now only about four feet high and there was a **noticeable difference in the quality of the remaining structures that was highlighted by a dark chalk one**. This line marked out the end of the **original stone structure** and the **beginning of the more modern renovation made of bricks**.

What was so **obvious** was that the **bricks were crumbling away** atop the **still very solid stone**. I snapped some quick shots and then walked away from the group for awhile to ponder what my Father was saying to me at this moment. **Three words** continually spoke to me over and over again. "**This is restoration.**"

... the **tower of Babel**. This, I propose to you, is the **principle model** of the **difference between the God of stones and the god of bricks**.... **Bricks are made by mixing** clay, mortar and water. **Stones** however, are **created by God**. **When man is finished with bricks, every brick looks pretty much the same**. **Stones** come in **all colors, sizes and shapes, but yet they are all still stones**. We recall that **Kefa** (Peter) also reminded us of this in one of his epistles:

*1 Peter 2:1 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking,<sup>2</sup> as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,<sup>3</sup> if indeed you have tasted that Adonai is gracious.<sup>4</sup> Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by Yah and precious,<sup>5</sup> **you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to Yah through Yeshua the Messiah.***

We are **living stones** because **He is the Stone**. **Believers** can have **unity** (with **diversity** as portrayed by **stones**) **in the spiritual house** because they are **built on the Cornerstone of the House....not because they all look exactly alike**. **Bricks** are **not only manmade** and **formed by mixing**, but **bricks also begin to crumble through time**. When they **begin to deteriorate**, **masons** will use the most modern methods to **patch them back up**. A **foundation of stone**, however, will **stand firm** and **solid throughout time** and **when the bricks finally crumble away**, that **firm foundation**, laid down from the beginning, will **still be there**.

The more we **struggle to look the same**, the **more divided we become**. I propose to you that **religious systems are no different**. Stop and focus just for a moment on the following religions and see what first comes to mind. **Hare Krishna. Buddhism. The hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. Chasidism. Mormon missionaries. Islamic clerics. Bricks, bricks, bricks.** I propose to you that **you know you are in a religious system** when they try to wrestle you into **conforming to manmade images and appearances**. **WE** are told to **conform to the image of Messiah**, and so we are **not told what He looked like**. We know He wore tzitziot but are not told whether He wore blue and white, tied with knots of 10-5-6-5 or whether they were four inches long or four feet long. **What we do know** about our **Redeemer** is **His function and purpose**.

As one carefully peruses the commandments, ordinances and statutes revealed in the Torah, it soon becomes evident that **our Father is not always explicit in every detail**. We know we are to keep the Passover, but we are not told all the minutia of this feast. We are instructed that there was the lamb roasted with the blood applied to the doorposts, there was unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. We are not told to place them on a special plate or to add charoseth and parsley in salt water. I am submitting the following possibility: could it be that **because we are designed to be stones and not bricks that our Father can accept each one of His children's** unique responses to this feast? Is it possible that in some sense it is **alright** that we are **not all marching lockstep**? It seems to me that our Father knew from the beginning exactly what we are like. He knew that we would read His words, mix them with our various interpretations and then, primarily through guilt and ecclesiastical cohesion, make everyone else conform to our interpretation. According to **Yochanan (John)**, it is the **commandments of our Father that are not grievous**:

*1 John 5:2 By this we know that we love the children of Yah, when we love Yah and keep His commandments. <sup>3</sup> For this is the love of Yah, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.*

I propose to you that it is **our interpretation** of the commandments of God that are **grievous and burdensome** and not the commandments themselves. **All religious systems are about the business of conforming you to the system and not the Messiah**. This is **primarily accomplished by convincing the masses to conform to form (i.e. make bricks) and not conforming to function and purpose...."** (end of quote)

Scripture reveals that **all false systems of religion began** in the land of **Babylon** and **will meet with their final judgment in the end of days**. Note, however, that **before the final judgment occurs** the **enemies of the Lamb** will, like the **Babel generation**, be of **"one mind"** with the evil one. :

**Revelation 17:5** And on her forehead a name was written: **MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH...**<sup>13</sup> "These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast."<sup>14</sup> "These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful."....<sup>17</sup> "For Yah has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of Yah are fulfilled."<sup>18</sup> "And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth." **18:1** After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory.<sup>2</sup> And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "**Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen...**

And with a great "stone," the "great city Babylon" is "thrown into the sea" to be "found no more":

**Revelation 18:21** Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore."

The story of the tower of Babel concludes an important era. Since now the Almighty has brought about a **division between the nations**, there is **no longer any hope for a unified mankind with a heart for His service and direct leadership**. Now that there are **many nations**, there will be a **need for one nation** that can shine as the nation of יהוה and call upon only His Name. Thus our next parasha is the story of Abraham, the **first Hebrew**. A few generations later, the **family of Abraham** will evolve into the chosen nation of Israel. That nation, together with Yeshua as its head, will once again have the **power to unite all of mankind!** This is the **Father's plan**, and all of us must **strive for His kind of unity!**

**Mark 3:24** "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand."<sup>25</sup> "And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand."

**Shabbat Shalom!**

**Ardelle**