

The Written Account of the Generations of Shem

11: 10-26

Moses edited and compiled eleven family documents in the book of **Genesis**. The major structural word for **Genesis** is *toldot*, which means **the written account of**, or *this is what became of these men and their descendants*. The noun is often translated *generations*, *histories* or *descendants*. After the section on the written account of the sons of **Noah** from 10:1 to 11:9, we have the sixth *toldot*, **the written account of the generations of Shem**. **The previous toldot went from the blessing of saving Noah and his family to the curse of the Tower of Babel. Therefore, what this sixth family document tells us is what became of the descendants of Shem. And what became of the descendants of Shem was they went from the curse of the Tower of Babel to the blessing of the beginning of God's program. This toldot begins the second division of the book of Genesis and focuses on the development of the nation of Isra'el through four men: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.**

Shem had apparently kept the record from 10:1 through 11:9, covering the descendants of **Ham** and **Japheth** through the third generation after **the Flood** and some of his own descendants through the sixth. This included **the Tower of Babel** and the dispersion of languages, which apparently occurred in the fourth generation after **the Flood**, shortly before the birth of **Peleg**.²¹⁶

This *toldot* is really an introduction to the story of **Abraham**. This is the preface to the history of Isra'el. At this point mankind has been tested three times. He has been tested in the garden of Eden, tested by **the Flood** and tested at **the Tower of Babel**. So man was ready for a new start. Therefore, we now move from a universal history, to a national history. A transition from many families and lands, as mentioned in 10:5, 20, 31-32, to one family 11:20-26, 27-32, and one Land 12:1-3.

The meaning of the name **Shem** is *name*. And **two years after the Flood he became the father of Arphaxad**. **Shem** lived 600 years and **Arphaxad** lived 438 years. Each of the patriarchs presumably had as many daughters as sons, even though their names are not given. (It is at this point in his genealogy that the account in **Luke** adds the name **Cainan**. **Luke** did not come up with this on his own. It was also mentioned in the Septuagint and the Book of Jubilee. But more importantly, he was under the influence of **the Holy Spirit** as he wrote his

gospel. So, evidently, there was another line). Then **Shelah**, or *the sent one*, was born. **He** lived 433 years. **Eber**, which means *to cross over*, lived 464 years. Then **Peleg** was born. **His** name means *division*, and it was at **his** birth that the dispersion at **the Tower of Babel** took place. **He** lived 239 years. **Reu**, meaning *friend or neighbor*, was next and **he** also lived 239 years. Then **Serug** was born and lived 230 years. After **him**, **Nahor** was born and his name means *river*. **He** lived 148 years. Then **Terah** was born, and **his** name means *moon*. **He** lived 205 years. And finally, **Abraham** was born; **his** name means *exalted father*, and **he** lived 175 years. Therefore, there are ten generations in this account.

It is clear, in comparing **Chapters 5** and **11** that patriarchal longevity began to decline immediately after **the Flood**. **Noah** lived 950 years (about the same as his antediluvian forbears), but **Shem** lived 600 years, **Arphaxad** 438 years, **Peleg** 239 years, **Terah**, **Abraham's** father, lived 205 years, and by the time we get to **Abraham** himself, **he** lived "only" 175 years.

It seems evident that **the Flood** must have triggered this decline. The radiation-filtering vapor canopy had been destroyed, and both genetic (DNA) and somatic (body cell) mutations must have increased significantly. Though it would no doubt take a number of generations before the effect of mutations in the genetic system would have caused a significant impact on hereditary longevity, the increase in body cell mutations would have caused an immediate acceleration of the aging process. Other factors might have included the more rugged environment, inadequate nourishment in the food, inbreeding, or greater stress of living.²¹⁷

In addition, **Chapter 5** lists the line of Adam to **Noah**, or ten generations and then concludes with three sons of **Noah**: **Shem**, **Ham** and **Japheth**. **Chapter 11:10-16** traces the line from **Shem** to **Abram**, or ten generations, and then concludes with three sons of **Terah**: **Abram**, **Nahor** and **Haran**. **It is not said of any of the following generations in this chapter that they died, as it does of the first ten generations from Adam to Noah. The reason is that all those generations had died by the time of the Flood, which is the culmination of that section of Scripture. All these generations, on the other hand, were still alive when Abraham sought to lead man to the worship of the God of love, the account of which is the central feature of this section.**

There are only three generations from Adam to Isaac and Jacob. First generation was Adam to Lamech because Adam was living when Lamech was born. Then from Lamech to **Shem** because Lamech was living when **Shem** was born, and then from **Shem** to Isaac and Jacob because **Shem** was living when Isaac and Jacob were born. So, it is interesting to note that there were no gaps to account for "dinosaur years." The language simply does not allow for gaps and the billions of years needed for evolution.

We are about to enter a new section of **Genesis** in which we will read of individual patriarchs and their continuation of the divine promise. The call of **Abraham** was not by chance. **He** stood in a long line of those who received the blessing and promises of **the LORD**: Adam, Seth, Enoch, **Noah** and **Shem**. If you come from a line of faithful and devoted believers, you should pause right now to give thanks for their influence on your life. If that is not your background, pray that you will some day pass the torch of faith to others, who will also serve and please **ADONAI**.²¹⁸