

| PORTION | DATE        | HEB DATE        | TORAH          | NEVIIM         | RENEWED       |
|---------|-------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| Noach   | 2 Nov. 2019 | 4 Cheshvan 5780 | Gen. 6:9-11:32 | Isa. 54:1-55:5 | Luke 17:20-27 |

Last week's Torah portion Beresheet, we read about the creation of the world, Adam and Chava's brief stay in Gan Eden, murder of Chevel by Qayin, the sons of Elohim, and the reason for Noach's favor by Hashem. The Noach's generation is known as the Generation of the Flood.

Today, we will discuss about the Generation of the Dispersion in chapter 11 who were the builders of the Tower of Babel. The core of it all is who is Nimrod, the true purpose of building the tower, and how does it apply to us today.

On the surface, the building of the tower does not seem like a terrible thing. And the sins of the Generation of Dispersion, as opposed to those deeds of the Generation of the Flood, are not really spelled out specifically. Rashi cites a discussion of our sages: Which sins were worse? Those of the Generation of the Flood or those of the Generation of the Dispersion? The former did not stretch out their hands against Hashem, whereas the latter stretched out their hands against Hashem, to wage war against Hashem.

Chapter 11 begins with, "And the whole earth was of one language and of one speech." (v. 1) "One language and of one speech" is translated from Hebrew words, "אֶחָדִים, דְּבָרִים" (*devarim achadim*). It also means 'uniform' or 'one' language. It also signifies 'sharp words.' The Midrash explains that they spoke against the 'Unique One' of the world and the people came with 'one' scheme and said, "Hashem has no right to the upper regions. Let us ascend to the sky and wage war with Him."

The Midrash states that "the people said, 'once every 1656 years the sky totters as it did in the time of the flood. Come and let us make supports for it.'" In other words, they wanted to be ready for the next flood. The Noach's flood occurred 1656 years after the Creation. So, they believed that another flood will occur after 1200 years later. During the period after the Flood and until the Tower of Babel, it has been 400 years. So, they still had another 1200 years to go. Thus, why did they start to build the tower so early?

In a literal sense, their intention to build the tower was so that they won't be "scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." (v. 4) Thus, they wanted to build the tower to prevent another flood. Again, they still had another 1200 years before another food begins. And the question still remains, why now?

The core of the story begins with Nimrod. It is written, "And Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before יהוה, therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before יהוה." (10:8-9) The beginning of his kingdom was Babel in the land of Shinar. Nimrod means 'we shall rebel.' He was a grandson of Ham, father of Canaan, the line which Noach cursed to be slaves. His goal, as we shall learn later, that he wanted to be a total master over people, even over Hashem. Thus, he made himself king over the entire generation as verse 9 states, "He was a mighty hunter."

The Book of Yasher and the Midrash said that Nimrod achieved the position of kingship through the garments of Adam, the very garment which Hashem Himself fashioned for Adam and Chava before banishing them from Gan Eden (3:21). They possessed special qualities which enabled the wearer to achieve domination over all the animals. When Nimrod wore them, all the beasts of the field came and bowed before him. And the people thought it was his own power, but in actuality it was only his clothes. Thus, he manipulated the people and they made him a king, a ruler over them.

Nimrod said to the people, "Let's build a city and dwell there, lest we be scattered. And we will build a big tower there, and climb up to heaven, and make a great name for ourselves." In Proverbs 30:21, it says, "Under three matters the earth trembles." The first is because "a servant when he reigns," meaning Nimrod.

There were other mighty men before Nimrod. There were the sons of Elohim and Nephilim. But Nimrod was the first to turn being a mighty man into a profession. R' Hirsch uses the word גִּבּוֹר (*gi-bor*; mighty) that Nimrod wasn't a hunter of animals but a *gi-bor* who hunted and caught men. He lured his fellow men in by using Hashem's name. At first, he cloaked his domination under the ruse of it being pleasing to Hashem, and then demanded recognition of his power in the name of Hashem, but then he himself became a god. He was the first to misuse the name of Hashem. Therefore, he was a "mighty hunter."

It is written, "And they said to each other, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar." (11:3) The valley of Shinar did not have any stones or mortar. So, the bricks were to them for stones, and the clay was to them for mortar. The Scripture is telling us that they did not need Hashem or His help. They joined forces not only to overcome that limitation, but to master nature, and not only to master nature, but to subdue Hashem and any need for Him.

As a community focused on seizing complete control, they thought that they would be invincible. They dedicated themselves to making something that would serve as a perpetual reminder of the power of the community over the individual. Nimrod set up what he sold as a model community. A common phrase that we all recognize, "All for one and one for all." But without Hashem, with the elimination of the Divine image in which each individual man was created, there is no community. There is only exploitation.

The sages teach us that when a stone, hoisted and raised towards the top of the tower, inadvertently slips and falls to the ground, everyone would stop their work and wail and cry bitterly for the setback and delay in completion. But when a fellow worker fell to his death, everyone kept right on working without pausing for a moment. So, their goal was to cast the kingdom of Heaven from them, and Hashem let them. Thus, this is the meaning of Psalms 2:4, "He who is sitting in the heavens laughs, יהוה mocks at them."

Under Nimrod's leadership, the people of this generation sought 'to prevent another flood' Their real intention was to banish Hashem from their live and from the earth altogether. They said, "You [Hashem] stay up there. We stay down here. We don't need you." Therefore, the building of the tower was a war of wills...their will against Hashem's. They were united in their decision to build one city, with all in agreement that not one person be willing to give themselves over to do Hashem's will. Their goal was to ignore Hashem altogether. They reasoned that if there would not be one man in the entire world who was prepared to do Hashem's will, they would succeed in banishing Hashem from the earth. And, therefore they would never be another flood because He would have no influence in this world. He would sever His connection on this earth. So, the tower was a symbol of unity that they are against Hashem.

But understand this: the real reason for getting everybody to move in to Babel was to quash every individual's identity and aspiration, to ensure total mind control, that there should not be even one man on earth who accepted Hashem, as did Noach in his time.

In Noach's time, they reasoned, Hashem administered His justice on the earth, and kept up His relationship, His influence, with the world, as it were, for the sake of His relationship with Noach, whom He entrusted with the continuation of life on earth after the flood. Thus, the Midrash teaches that they sent after Avraham to join them, to try and enlist his support and win him over to their way of thinking. They knew that he was

a truly righteous who only lived to do Hashem's will. They were initially afraid that he would ruin everything. And that on his account Hashem would still want to be involved with this world. But ultimately even though Avraham obviously refused to join them they were no longer concerned, because they reasoned that since Avraham has no child, no heir to continue his spiritual path, his relationship with Hashem is only temporary, and the same regarding Hashem's relationship with the world. This is the meaning of the interpretation they said '*devarim chadim*' (sharp words) against Avraham.

So why did they build it now, at the end of the second thousand years, way before the time when according to their calculations another flood could be expected? The Ramchal explains: this was a special destiny-charged time in human history. It was a time of putting down roots. Before the sin, Adam was indeed a very lofty spiritual being. He was a different level of man. As a result of his action in the Garden, Adam descended greatly and his spiritual nature was dulled, and he descended to a lower level. And with him, all of humanity. But these were formative years, populated by great, massive souls, who had the potential to elevate all humanity.

Hashem was still presenting the people of this generation with the opportunity to rise to man's former level, to uplift all of humanity, to regain their lost status. This was for a limited time in Hashem's wisdom. It was up to the generation of Dispersion to plant humanity's roots. They were living at an influential time in the development of human history. They had immense potential, but once again, they made bad choices. They wanted all the power and control for themselves. They wanted to make sure that humanity's course without the presence of Hashem in the world. Therefore, it was imperative for them to unify now and make sure not one person would be interested in serving Hashem. They wanted to steal the Divine Influence of blessing in the world and rerouted it through their own twisted egos. They wanted to make a name for themselves. They wanted the enslavement of mankind to false values. They wanted the destruction of individuality. They wanted the deification of false leaders.

The Torah portions we read and study remind us that we are not in control of our lives. We need to appreciate and recognize our own limitations. We especially need to appreciate Hashem in our lives. Like Noach, we need to acknowledge that we are people in Hashem's world, in Hashem's plan, who need Hashem, who desperately want Him in this world, and who live by boundaries and rules. This is how we take our place and reflect the Divine image in which we were created.