

Ten Generations

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In the Torah, [numbers](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cnchart.html) are used *deliberately* because they convey information. The [number](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cnchart.html) [ten](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cten.html) (10), for example, not only has a meaning: [**ten**](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cten.html) **is a unity made of parts**, but every list of [ten](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cten.html) items is *intrinsically* related to every other list of [ten](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cten.html) items. Thus, each list can add additional information and elaboration of whatever list we may be studying.

Every [number](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cnchart.html) has a story to tell based on the list being counted and the context in which it is found. For this reason, we find that in many languages, including [Hebrew](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Chebrew.html), the word for ‘counting’ and telling’ is the same, or shares the same root. In [Hebrew](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Chebrew.html) we have:

Verb: לְסַפֵּר

tell, narrate, trim, relate, recite.

Verb: לִסְפּוֹר

count, [number](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cnchart.html), account, score, tally.

In English, [one](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cone.html) who counts money in a bank is called a *teller*; and [one](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cone.html) who retells a story is said to *recount* the story. Thus, telling and counting are intrinsically related. Counting something shows that we value it and that it has a story to tell.

In this [study](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cstudy.html), I would like to examine the Torah’s list of [ten](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cten.html) names found in Bereshit (Genesis) chapters 5 and 11. Most folks find list of names to be very boring and they tend to skip over them. I have found that even the meforshim,[[1]](#footnote-1) the commentators, tend to do only cursory explanations for such lists. I get intrigued by such things because I think to myself, “what are they hiding?” I have found some very interesting and often mystical applications when I [study](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cstudy.html) such lists. So, please join me as I explore several boring lists of names.

# In The [Mishna](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Corallaw.html)

When the rabbinic composers of the [Mishna](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Corallaw.html) [studied](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cstudy.html) the [first](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cone.html) [eleven](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Celeven.html) chapters of Genesis, they observed certain structural similarities between Chapter 5 and chapter 11, which suggested to them a basis for periodization. They expressed their [teaching](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cteacher.html) in the pithy style of the [Mishna](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Corallaw.html):

***Avot Chapter 5 MISHNAH 2*** *[There were]* [*ten*](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cten.html)[*generations*](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html) *from* [*Adam*](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cadam.html) *to Noah,[[2]](#footnote-2) in order to make* [*known*](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cdaat.html) *what long-suffering is His; for all those* [*generations*](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html) *kept on provoking Him, until He brought upon them the waters of the flood.*

*[There were]* [*ten*](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cten.html)[*generations*](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html) *from Noah to* [*Abraham*](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cavraham.html)*,[[3]](#footnote-3) in order to make* [*known*](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cdaat.html) *what long-suffering is His; for all those* [*generations*](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html) *kept on provoking Him, until* [*Abraham*](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cavraham.html)*, came and received the reward of all of them.[[4]](#footnote-4)*

The opening portions of both sections of these Mishnayot simply note that the [number](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cnchart.html) of [generations](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html) between [Adam](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cadam.html) and Noah and between Noah and [Abraham](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cavraham.html) are the same, exactly [ten](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cten.html) (10), a [number](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cnchart.html) which is generally seen as constituting a unit. To the Mishnah this meant that our attention is being drawn to a similarity between the [two](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctwo.html) periods which then surprisingly leads to [two](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctwo.html) quite different personalities and [two](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctwo.html) very different outcomes. Using identical language to emphasize the similarity, the Mishnah proceeds to tell us that

The purpose of the biblical account is to inform us of God's patience or forbearance in that

While all these people continued to anger God. [ten](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cten.html) full [generations](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html) elapsed before God. as it were, decided to act. In the case of the [Adam](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cadam.html)-Noah period

"He brought upon them the waters of the Flood" In the case of the Noah-[Abraham](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cavraham.html) period

"[Abraham](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cavraham.html) our Father came and received the reward due them all."

# Rabbi Daniel Lapin’s Shiur

Rabbi Daniel Lapin shared the following understanding:

In Bereshit (Genesis) chapter 5 and 11, we read a whole list of names which represent each [generation](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html). The names tell us specifics about that [generation](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html). The names in those [ten](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cten.html) [generations](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html) are:

Bereshit (Genesis) 5: [Adam](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cadam.html), Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noach.

Bereshit (Genesis) 11: Shem, Arpachshad, Shelah, Eber, Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor, [Terah](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cstages.html), [Abram](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cavraham.html).

**The** [**Hebrew**](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Chebrew.html) **names associated with each** [**generation**](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html) **of chapters 5 and chapter 11, in Bereshit (Genesis),** **hint at the fundamental characteristics of that** [**generation**](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html) in the 250-year [journey](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cstages.html) up to greatness and then down to oblivion.

# 250 Year Civilizations

Rabbi Lapin goes on to note that some of the greatest empires of the past have exhibited a common characteristic: They all lasted approximately 250 years. This was based on the average age of a [generation](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html) being 25 years. This meant that in [ten](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cten.html) [generations](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html), or 250 years, that the empire would crumble.

The dates given below are largely arbitrary. Empires do not usually begin or end on a certain date. There is normally a gradual period of expansion and then a period of decline. The resemblance in the duration of these great powers may be queried. Human affairs are subject to many chances, and it is not to be expected that they could be calculated with mathematical accuracy.

The empires he noted are summarized below.

The ancient empire of [Babylon](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cbavel.html) was formed under Hammurabi (of the famous ‘Code’) around 1780 BC and it was finally sacked by the Hittites in about 1530 BC. This empire lasted 250 years.

Most regard 1492, when Spain evicted the last Moslem from the Iberian peninsula, as the start of the Spanish empire. Its natural ending can easily be seen to be about 1742 after the War of Spanish Succession which followed the death of Charles II. This empire lasted 250 years.

The Pax Romana, began with the rule of Augustus in 27 BC and pretty much ended when all illegal immigrants to Rome were granted citizenship in about 213 AD, about 240 years.

the Assyrian empire is 860 BC to 612 BC for a total of 246 years.

The Mamelukes and the Ottomans enjoyed dominance for 267 and 250 years respectively.

The pre-Communist Russian empire lasted from 1682 until 1916 giving them 234 years.

The British Empire? 1700 to 1950. [Two](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctwo.html) hundred and fifty years.

When using 25 years as the length of a [generation](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html), we can see that most empires last [ten](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cten.html) [generations](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html) and their [stages](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cstages.html) of development correspond to the meaning of the names in Bereshit (Genesis) chapter 5 and 11.

The Bne Israel were in [exile](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cgaluyot.html) in Egypt for 210 years.

# Sir John Glubb’s Observations

Sir John Glubb, in his epic book titled, “THE FATE OF EMPIRES and SEARCH FOR SURVIVAL”, made an observation similar to that of Rabbi Daniel Lapin. The following table summarizes his observations:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***The*** [***nation***](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cnations.html) | ***Dates of rise and fall*** | ***Duration in years*** |
| Assyria | 859-612 B.C. | 247 |
| Persia | 538-330 B.C. | 208 |
| (Cyrus and his descendants) |  |  |
| Greece | 331-100 B.C. | 231 |
| (Alexander and his successors) |  |  |
| Roman Republic[[5]](#footnote-5) | 260-27 B.C. | 233 |
| Roman Empire | 27 B.C.-A.D. 180 | 207 |
| Arab Empire | A.D. 634-880 | 246 |
| Mameluke Empire | 1250-1517 | 267 |
| Ottoman Empire | 1320-1570 | 250 |
| Spain | 1500-1750 | 250 |
| Romanov Russia | 1682-1916 | 234 |
| Britain | 1700-1950 | 250 |

Sir John Glubb’s observation suggests that empires last approximately 250 years and then they disappear into the pages of history.

The names of each [generation](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html) of Genesis 5 & 11 are provided because each [Hebrew](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Chebrew.html) [name](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cname.html) has a meaning which *identifies that* [*generation*](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html)*’s characteristics* in the cosmic pattern of [ten](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cten.html)-[generation](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html)-decline.

The [ten](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cten.html) [generations](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html), of Genesis 5, 11 might be briefly summarized as:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| [**Generation**](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html) | **Lapin’s Characteristic** |
| 1 | Bold breakout and conquest. |
| 2 | Commercial expansion. |
| 3 | Splendid buildings. |
| 4 | Widespread affluence. |
| 5 | Zenith and the best of days. |
| 6 | Extending influence beyond borders with money instead of military. |
| 7 | Rising political power of women and of the intellectual and academic elite. |
| 8 | Influx of foreigners. |
| 9 | [Eat](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ceating.html), drink and be merry. |
| 10 | Internal political and civic fracture. |

I have attempted to correlate these [ten](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cten.html) generational attributes with the [ten](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cten.html) sayings of [creation](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cbara.html) and with the [ten](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cten.html) [generations](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ctoldot.html) enumerated in sefer [Ruth](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cruth.html). In looking at the table, below, we can see that the sayings of [creation](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cbara.html) align nicely with the other genealogies, and each brings agreement that the [ten](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cten.html) are related to each other. The following table summarizes these names and their meaning:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Gen.** | **Names in****Genesis chapter 5** | **Names in****Genesis chapter 11** | **Names in** [**Ruth**](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cruth.html) **chapter 4** | **Meaning of the** [**Name**](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cname.html)**Genesis chapter 5** | **Sayings of** [**Creation**](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cbara.html) |
| 1 | [Adam](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cadam.html)(man) | Shem([Name](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cname.html)) | Peretz(Breach) | Bold breakout and conquest. | Then **G-d said**, "Let us make *man* in our image, in our likeness… Bereshit 1:26 |
| 2 | Seth(anointed) | Arpachshad(A healer; a releaser) | Chetzron(public square) | Commercial expansion. | **G-d blessed them and said**, "Be fruitful and increase in [number](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cnchart.html) and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds *increase* on the earth." Bereshit 1:22 |
| 3 | Enosh(man, person, mortal) | Shelah(petition, request) | Ram(high) | Splendid buildings. | And **G-d said**, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth *across the expanse of the sky*." Bereshit 1:20 |
| 4 | Kenan(possession) | Eber(to pass over) | Amminadab(my people are magnanimous) | Widespread affluence. | **And G-d** said…let them be [lights](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Clights.html) in the expanse of the sky *to give light on the earth*."Bereshit 1:15 |
| 5 | Mahalaleel(praise of God) | Peleg(to split or divide) | Nachshon(diviner) | Zenith and the best of days. | Then **G-d said**, "Let the land *produce* vegetation: [seed](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cflower.html)-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with [seed](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cflower.html) in it, according to their various kinds."Bereshit 1:11 |
| 6 | Jared(he descends) | Reu(friend) | Salmah / Salmon(outer [garment](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cgarment.html)) | Extending influence beyond borders with money instead of military. | And **G-d said**, "Let the water under the sky be [gathered](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cgather.html) to [one](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cone.html) place, and let dry ground appear." Bereshit 1:9 |
| 7 | Enoch(dedicated) | Serug(to be intertwined) | Boaz(swiftness) | Rising political power of women and of the intellectual and academic elite. | **G-d called** the expanse "*sky*."Bereshit 1:8 |
| 8 | Methuselah([one](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cone.html) who was sent) | Nahor(snort vigorously) | Oved(the [one](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cone.html) who works) | Influx of foreigners. | **G-d said**, "Let there be an *expanse between the waters* to separate water from water." Bereshit 1:6 |
| 9 | Lamech(to make low; Strong ManFor Humiliation) | [Terah](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cstages.html)(to wander) | Yishai(gift) | [Eat](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Ceating.html), drink and be merry. | **G-d said**, "Let there be light."Bereshit 1:3 |
| 10 | Noach(comfort) | [Abram](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cavraham.html)(exalted father) | David(beloved) | Internal political and civic fracture. | In the beginning **G-d created** the [heavens](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cheaven.html) and the earth.Bereshit 1:1 |

Rabbi Lapin then asked a very pertinent question:

***The United States is 244 years old. Do we only have*** [***six***](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Csix.html) ***more years?***

Have we learned from the Torah? Have we even learned from history?

I have explored the [connection](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cconnection.html) between other ‘tens’ and also the meaning of the [number](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cnchart.html) [ten](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cten.html) in the following papers:

10chart.docx

[Ten](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cten.html).docx

**\* \* \***

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1. roughly meaning "exegetes" [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Viz., (i) Adam; (ii) Seth; (iii) Enosh; (iv) Kenan; (v) Mahalaleel; (vi) Jered; (vii) Enoch; (viii) Methuselah; (ix) Lamech; (x) Noah; (Gen. V. 3-29). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Viz., (i) Shem; (ii) Arpachshad; (iii) Shelah; (iv) Eber; (v) Peleg; (vi) Reu; (vii) Serug; (viii) Nahor; (ix) Terah; (x) Abraham; (Gen. XI, 10-26). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. I.e., the reward which had been in store for the people of those ten generations and would have been given them had they not by their wickedness angered God and forfeited their share. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The division of Rome into two periods may be thought unwarranted. The first, or republican, period dates from the time when Rome became the mistress of Italy, and ends with the accession of Augustus. The imperial period extends from the accession of Augustus to the death of Marcus Aurelius. It is true that the empire survived nominally for more than a century after this date, but it did so in constant confusion, rebellions, civil wars and barbarian invasions. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)