

# The Division of the Earth in Peleg's Days: Tectonic or Linguistic?

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## ABSTRACT

*In Peleg's days beginning 2247 BC (Ussher), the Earth split open in release of strain from Red Sea-floor spreading accumulated in the western margin of the northward creeping internally rigid Arabian tectonic plate; and simultaneously opened a chasm in the extended vicinity of what is now the Dead Sea's south bay. The split/crevasse filled with water of the Red Sea, and formed the ancestral Gulf of Aqaba/Elat — all of this contributing to the division of the language groups/nations in the Earth, but not being merely an extension of the Tower of Babel confusion of tongues.*

*This event, apparently continuing throughout Peleg's lifetime (239 years), may be a 'type' of other tectonic partitioning that was occurring in many regions of the world. However, this partitioning falls far short of the carving out of whole new continents, all of which had been accomplished during the Noahic Flood.*

## INTRODUCTION

There is a schism among Bible believers regarding the interpretation of the basic Scripture of this study, Genesis 10:25. Perhaps the most popular interpretation is that the division had to do entirely with God's apportioning various shares of the Earth's surface to the different language groups stemming from His judgment at the Tower of Babel.

By the use of the Bible's basic interpretative rule, Isaiah 28:9-10, and the scrupulous use of science, the unmarred truth can be known. The meanings of Peleg's name itself are highly significant to a full understanding and correct interpretation of the Scripture.

### IN PELEG'S DAYS THE LAND LITERALLY SPLIT OPEN; THE CREVASSE WIDENED AND FILLED WITH WATER OF THE RED SEA

'And unto Eber were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg; for in his days was the earth divided . . .' Genesis 10:25; compare I Chronicles 1:19. The meaning of the word translated 'divided', *palag*, is 'to split or divide'.<sup>1</sup> This word, 'divided' of Genesis 10:25, requires some further

interpretation because the word may be used figuratively or literally. To avoid a private interpretation (II Peter 1:20), application of the basic rule of Bible interpretation, Isaiah 28:9-10, is called for. Job 38:25 uses the very same word 'divided',<sup>2</sup> and thereby qualifies, with its context, to interpret the correlating word 'divided' of Genesis 10:25.

Job 38:25a records [God speaking] Who hath divided a watercourse for the overflowing of waters . . .'. Thus, the 'divided' of Genesis 10:25 is interpreted by correlative Scripture, Job 38:25a, as being involved with the splitting or dividing of the land, and the generation of a watercourse. Therefore the literal meaning of Genesis 10:25 is indicated as correct. When this basic rule of Bible interpretation, Isaiah 28:9-10, is followed in humility, 'Whom shall He teach knowledge? . . . For precept must be upon precept . . . line upon line. . . [for example, Job 38:25a upon Genesis 10:25] here a little, and there a little', there comes a confidence born of the rest and refreshing promised (Isaiah 28:12).

The context of Genesis chapter 10 is at least regional, and thus a splitting of the land regionally can be expected in the geologic record. The meaning of 'earth' is '*the earth*' (at large, or partitively a land): . . . *country, earth, field,*

ground, land, nations, way, wilderness, world<sup>b</sup> The regional context of the chapter indicates that 'partitively a land' is the most appropriate of the meanings of the 'earth' of Genesis 10:25. A biblical 'superstructure' is taking shape within which the geologic evidence can be fitted to take us to the truth of the 'division of the Earth' in Peleg's days.

### PELEG'S NAME RECORDS A TECTONIC-HYDROLOGIC EVENT NEAR THE TIME OF HIS BIRTH

The meaning of the name of Peleg itself is quite significant, since some ancient names reflect an event that took place at or near to the birth of the individual. 'Peleg' is word #6389 in the **Strong's Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary**: '*Peleg . . . the same as 6388; earthquake . . .*', and word #6388: '*Peleg. . . from 6385; a rill (that is, small channel of water, as in irrigation):- river, stream*'. (Emphasis added.) Thus, the name Peleg itself indicates that an earthquake occurred, opening an extensive crevasse that widened and filled (river: 'current' connotation) with water of the sea near the time of his birth. The 'at least regional' context of Genesis chapter 10, and the probable home of Peleg's family in upper northwestern Arabia<sup>4</sup> (re: brother Joktan, father of the Arabians), are guidance for arriving at the correct regional tectonic system that records such a profound event.

The elements of the correlating Scripture, Job 38:25a, are:

- (1) 'earth division' forming
- (2) a 'watercourse', and
- (3) 'flooding'.

These elements are collectively tectonic in type. Thus, the rifting of a region of the Earth partitioned by diastrophism of the Noahic Flood, inhabited by a people of Eber's descendants (Peleg, *et al.*), and not long removed from the Tower of Babel dispersion, are required by all applicable Scripture, including the basic one, Genesis 10:25, all properly compared. Into this biblical framework now is inserted the geologic evidence, stripped as far as possible of the postulation and conjecture of uniformitarianism.

### TECTONIC HISTORY OF THE SOUTHWESTERN AND WESTERN MARGINS OF THE ARABIAN PLATE

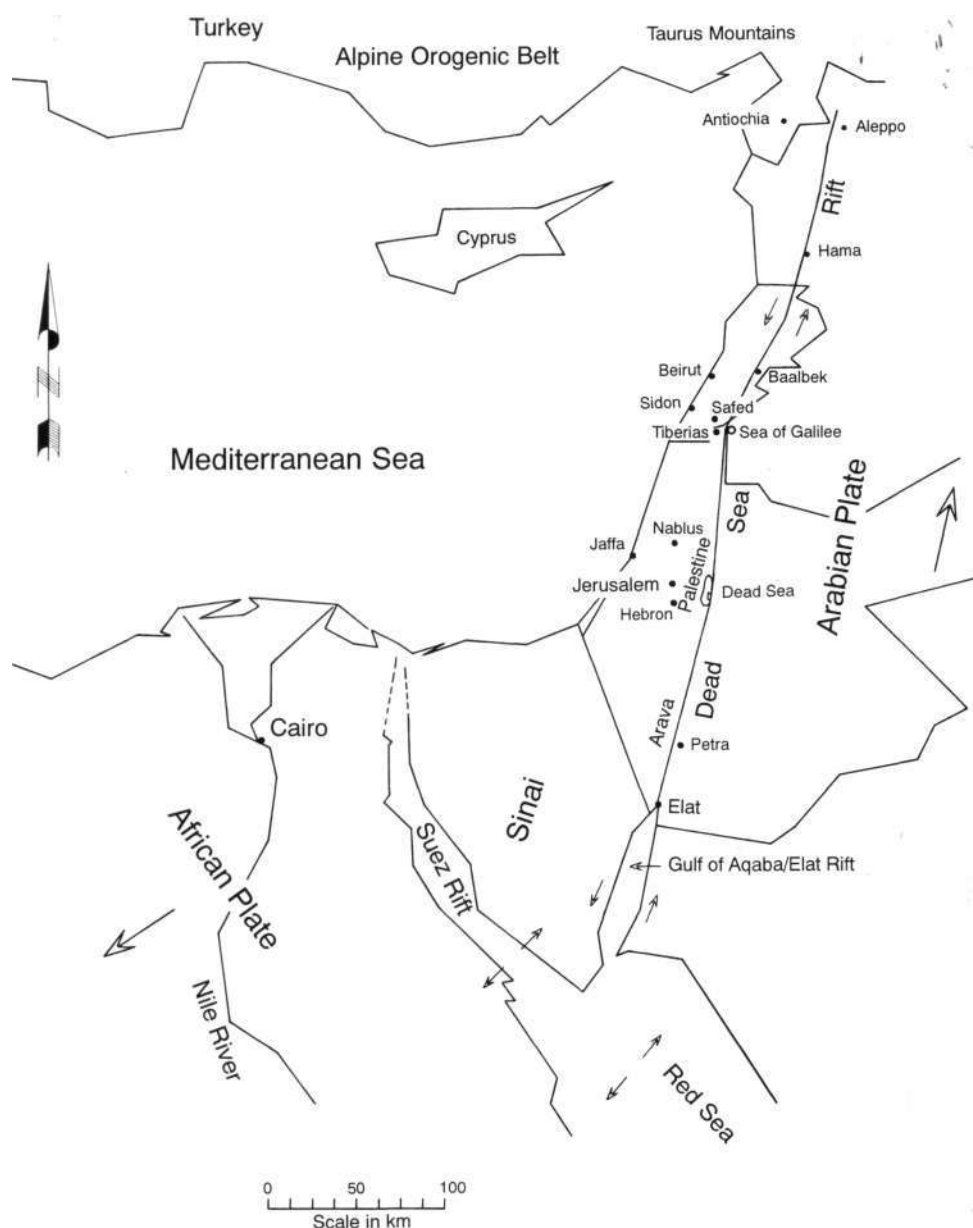
Plate tectonic theory places the opening of the Red Sea and its extensions, the Gulf of Aden and the Gulf of Suez, in the Cainozoic Era<sup>5</sup> in quite approximate terms timewise. The Dead Sea Rift is a name applied to the western margin of the Arabian plate<sup>6</sup> and includes, among others, the sections: the Dead Sea, the Arava, and the Gulf of Aqaba/Elat. At the southern end of the gulf it joins with the Red Sea Rift. Because of its innate rigidity, any movement of the Arabian plate's southwestern margin in spreading of the Red Sea basin is paralleled by a corresponding

predominantly horizontal movement of the elastic deformation type along the Dead Sea Rift. Thus, creeping movement at the Red Sea margin of the plate usually results only in increasing the tension/compression on the rocks of the Rift, which react in an elastic manner, and no wrenching movement occurs.

Quennell<sup>7</sup> interprets the Gulf of Suez (see Figure 1) as being a remnant of the original ancestral Red Sea basin. Raymo<sup>8</sup> places the opening of the Gulf of Aden, and its companion, the Red Sea, in the Cainozoic (interpreted here as late Flood). The original Sinai-Palestine-Arabian block appears to have moved everywhere parallel to its African border in the reach of the ancestral Red Sea: the sea's northwesterly extent now carries the name, the Gulf of Suez. By the end of the Noahic Flood, the tectonic activity associated with the breakup of the deep (Genesis 7:11), which involved land (Ezekiel 31:4,15) and sea (Job 38:8) in mountain-building and worldwide catastrophic sedimentation, had established the great fracture line of the western margin of the Arabian plate (see Figure 2, Stage 'A'). Some restricted amount of down folding and faulting had occurred intermittently northward to the Sea of Galilee region where much crustal shortening had been taken up by extensive faulting and folding, and more of the same in adjacent Syria and Lebanon (interpreted from Quennell<sup>9</sup>).

Through exhaustive research it is possible to identify the last catastrophic movement of the Rift, 45 km<sup>10</sup> (Figure 2, Stage 'C'), as being that of the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, etc., and the cities of the plain (Genesis 19:24-25). Quennell identifies a total of two great tectonic movements of the Rift: the 45 km movement and an earlier, greater, 62 km movement that progressively opened a great chasm (now mostly filled by sediment) in the extended vicinity of what is now the Dead Sea's south bay. Based on research regarding the territory occupied by Peleg and other descendants of Eber (Joktan, Midianites, *et al.*), which includes the area around the Gulf of Aqaba/Elat, and based on the chronology of history, the division or splitting open of the land in Peleg's days in a great crevasse that reached the Red Sea and became a watercourse (Job 38:25a interpreting) is systematically assigned to the 62 km catastrophic movement (Stage B).

Since Peleg's name reflects the occurrence of a significant earthquake near the time of his birth, 2247 BC, the approximate date of the initiation of the rifting is given. Quennell<sup>11</sup> in his 'Stage B' map (see Figure 2) plots a rifting movement extending northward from the ancestral Red Sea, inland about 175 km (109 miles), and opening a great crevasse up to 16 km (10 miles) wide along that distance. Because of a counterclockwise rotation of three degrees by the Arabian plate relative to the Sinai-Palestine block, the sides of the crevasse moved apart obliquely. According to the meaning of Peleg's name as already noted, the splitting of the land through the sialic crust adjacent to the ancestral Red Sea on the south initially produced a very narrow channel quickly flowing with sea water (Peleg's 'rill'), and



**Figure 1.** Plate tectonic setting of the Dead Sea Rift. Redrawn from Z. Garfunkel, I. Zak and R. Freund, *Active faulting in the Dead Sea Rift*, Figure 1.

further movement apart increased the channel and flow to that of a 'river' (see meanings of Peleg's name above).

The Scripture provides a limit on the time required to reach the dimensions measured above from Quennell's 'Stage B' map. Notice Genesis 10:25 records '... in his days was the earth divided.' Peleg was born c.2247 BC; as shown, this is the approximate date of the earthquake that likely coincided with the initial movement along the great fracture line, reaching far northward, that became the Dead Sea Rift as longitudinal wrench faulting began. Peleg lived 239 years, so this becomes the approximate limit in time during which the crevasse, which became the ancestral Gulf of Aqaba/Elat, expanded from the size of a flowing rill to

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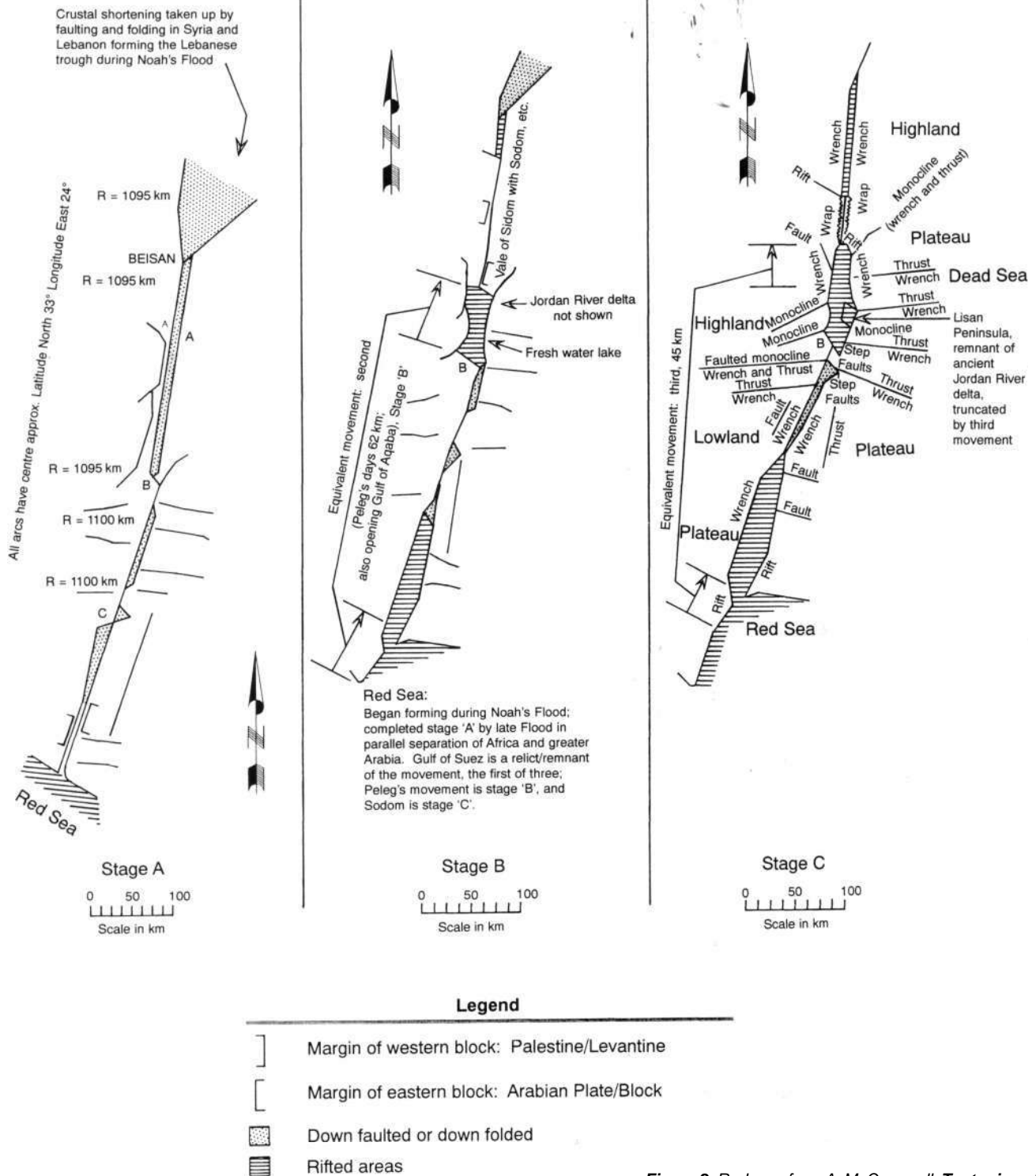
that of a river (10 miles wide). Then, having filled, the flow stopped in this immediate area.

Since the initiation in Noahic Flood times of rifting and spreading of the Red Sea basin, the rigid Arabian plate has moved northerly as indicated by the largest arrow of Figure 1 (redrawn from Garfunkel, Zak and Freund<sup>12</sup>). Also note the smaller arrows that indicate the Red Sea basin spreading, which continues. Its width collectively records three great tectonic movements of the Arabian plate as previously discussed. Being a spreading type of rift, the Red Sea basin's movements would be expected to be relatively gradual and unnoticed, perhaps betrayed by an occasional earth tremor. Very much in contrast, the corresponding wrench faulting movements along the Rift at, and inland of, the ancestral Gulf of Aqaba/Elat would be expected to be catastrophic, as progressively increasing elastic strain between the rock masses on either side of the Rift, that were pressed together tightly (colloquially 'locked up'), was suddenly released. The slippage was essentially a single great northerly movement of the Arabian plate, occurring over a span of

circa 239 years and measuring 62 km total slippage at the ancestral Dead Sea of Peleg's time. The opposing Sinai-Palestine block is believed to have remained stationary in this movement.

This catastrophic scenario is not without more recent devastating, recorded, examples. Quoting the **American Journal of Science and Arts**:

*'During these shocks, large chasms and openings are made in the ground through which smoke and flames are seen to issue. ... In violent earthquakes the chasms are so extensive that large cities have in a moment sunk down and forever disappeared, leaving a lake of water in the place. Such was the fate of Euphemia in Calabria*



**Figure 2.** Redrawn from A. M. Quennell, *Tectonics of the Dead Sea Rift*, Figure 8.

[ball of the "foot" of Italy] in AD 1638, as described by Kircher, who was approaching the place when the agitation of the ocean obliged him to land at Lopizicum: "Here (says he) scenes of ruin everywhere appeared around me; but my attention was quickly turned from more remote to contiguous danger, by a deep rumbling

*sound, which every moment grew louder. The place where we stood shook most dreadfully; after some time, the violent paroxysm ceasing, I stood up, and turning my eyes to look for Euphemia, saw only a frightful black cloud. We waited till it had passed away, when nothing but a dismal and putrid lake was to be seen where the*

city once stood".<sup>13</sup>

Another well-documented event (circa 1471 BC) is God's judgment of the rebellious Hebrews led by Korah in the wilderness, as recorded in Numbers 16:31-35. The mechanism of God dealing with the rebellious people is by a great earth movement producing a tension fissure of a magnitude that could swallow up at least 15,000 people (compare Numbers 26:5-11). The Scriptural account is characteristically condensed. Details can be safely added as suggested by Numbers 16:34. Landslides along the rim of the great fissure must have rapidly enlarged the opening extending into the abyss, carrying down the rebels, and threatening the lives of the people standing away from Korah and the rebels: thus, the flight of all Israel, round about, from the abyss. 'The earth closed upon them [the rebels]: and they perished' (Numbers 16:33).

This was a catastrophic tectonic event occurring clearly within the 12 hours light of a day. Thus, it is proportionally, as regarding the degree of devastation, on a par with the more extensive tectonic event that was the opening of what is now the Gulf of Aqaba in Peleg's time. It illustrates the instinctive reaction of people to great earth movements: to flee to safer ground, which on competent rock would not be so far. Their natural desire would be to return to their homes and rebuild. But in the time of Peleg's years, the devastation came again and again so frequently that the inhabitants along the section of the Rift that is now the Gulf of Aqaba/Elat must have fled eastward (at least those on the north and east of the chasm) on the competent Arabian plate, which would have sustained the lesser devastation because of its competency.

Quennell's structural map<sup>14</sup> along the Dead Sea Rift suggests, by the occurrence of lesser parallel and skewed faulting, that a life-threatening zone lay along a strip up to 30 kms wide contiguous on the east to the Rift (a great wrench fault), and along the western margin of the Arabian plate. The Rift valley and its immediate environs must have remained uninhabited until the sustained violence quietened after Peleg's death (c.2008 BC) and the delta of the Jordan River (now El Lisan, a truncated relict) began to be inhabited by the Canaanite people of the cities of the vale/plain of Siddim: Sodom, Gomorrah, and the others (Genesis 10:19).

### **EARTH DIVISION, FORMING WATER BODIES, IS BUT ONE OF THE SEVERAL MEANS BY WHICH THE LANGUAGE GROUPS/NATIONS WERE DIVIDED IN THE EARTH AFTER THE NOAHIC FLOOD**

Contrasting with the literal Earth division by watercourse in Peleg's day, is the Lord's division by apportionment of various segments of the Earth's surface

to the different language groups/nations resulting from the Lord's judgment at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 10:5,10:32 and 11:7-9). This division, '... the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue ... in their nations' (Genesis 10:5) is translated from the Hebrew word '*parad*'<sup>15</sup> that has no water-related meaning.

Genesis 10:32 utilises for 'divided' the Hebrew word<sup>16</sup> ' "*cachar*"; *from #5503; profit (from trade):- merchandise*', all meanings of which are unrelated to water. Thus, the merchandising incentive, bonding a language group around an economy based on the exploitation of God-partitioned resources, was another means of the several by which the language groups (or nations) were divided in the Earth after the Flood. Genesis 10:5 then makes reference to God's general programme of division (or partition) of the nations in the Earth; whereas, Genesis 10:25 (Peleg) and 10:32 are two of several other methods He employed to accomplish that end.

By avoiding any private interpretation (see II Peter 1:20) of Genesis 10:25, and applying the Bible's basic rule of interpretation, Isaiah 28:9-10, the truth of the Scripture is found in this instance, as in so many, in its literal meaning (as commonly understood) and context.

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16. Ref. 1, #5504.

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