

APPLICATION

Avoid being a part of a group that has proud, egotistical plans. Build a legacy by faithfully obeying God's word and laying up treasure in heaven, not on Earth by selfish human enterprise.

Read Genesis 11:1-9

- What stood out to you the most in this week's sermon?
- What keywords and statements do you see in this text?
- What 'Towers of Babel' have you built in your lifetime? What endeavors have you done for your own name's sake and reputation? What have you done for God's name's sake?
- Why do you think nothing is impossible for a people who are unified in language and direction and motivated by pride and fear? What other examples in history can you think of?
- What major lessons can be learned from this story?

Inductive Bible Study

Many parts of the Bible have a special pattern or structure. These patterns help us see the important ideas. In the Tower of Babel story, the literature structure is called a *Chiasm*. It is shaped like an hourglass, with the middle verse as the focal point.

- a) The whole world had one language vs.1
- b) They "said" ... "come let us" vs.3
- c) The Lord came down vs.5
- b') The Lord "said" ... "come let us" vs.6
- a') The language of the whole world was... vs.9

For Parents: Biblical parenting doesn't have to feel stressful. It can actually be fun! Try this: have a tower-building game with your kids. Use Legos, blocks, or couch cushions. See who can build the biggest and best! Then use the opportunity to tell them the story of Babel. Tell them that God is a good God, and he loves them and wants them to build and create for him, not themselves. Teach your kids that everything they do is for God's name's sake because they are his namesake. They are to do as best they can on homework, sports, and friendships but also remember that God is way bigger than all their accomplishments. Their identity is found in him, not in their successes.



Tower of Babel • Session 10

After last week's three-chapter-long flood narrative, we come to the fourth primeval story in Genesis, the Tower of Babel. Yet, it's only eleven verses! These few verses though have a deep lesson for us.

In these four stories of Genesis, we learn lots of deep truths. They each give us a picture of something dangerous in our world. For Adam and Eve it was the serpent and forbidden fruit. This story is about misguided human endeavors. These early stories also show us how God interacts with humans in various situations. In The Fall narrative, God curses them. In the Babel one, he scatters. Perhaps the most serious of all the lessons for us, is how each of us can fall if we aren't careful. For Adam and Eve, the desire to be like God led to their disobedience and fall. A very similar message rises here in the Tower of Babel story. We see the nature of our own hearts when they give way to our own human determination for our own security and elevation. The result of this is pride, abuse of power, and division.

In this story we see a portion of humanity decide to build a city with a tower that reaches the heavens. Mankind is wanting to make a name for itself and is afraid of being scattered (Genesis 11:4). Man's pride and insecurities motivate this foolish endeavor. God won't have it! Just how much of the population of the world was involved is not known but the results would affect the entire world regardless. What is perfectly apparent is God's clear judgment against, yet again, another human attempt to rule our world as our own masters. Babel is inviting us to reflect on the meaning of human community, human achievement, and human pride.

BIG IDEA: Having come out of the flood, and for the first time, humanity introduces corporate idolatry in an attempt to build their own kingdom rather than God's kingdom.

I. *The Foolishness of Babel*

Babylon throughout the Bible is always depicted as a great yet errant kingdom. "Babylon in ancient times was the seat of power and the center of the ancient world. The mighty towers of the Babylonian ziggurats were widely known. Thus, from the perspective of human achievement, Babylon was the summit. In fact, the word 'babel' for the Babylonians meant 'the gate of the gods'" (Holmen Commentary).

How ironic this story in Genesis eleven is then! For the Hebrews, the word babel means 'mix up'. The writer of this ancient story has in mind the goal of showcasing the significance of this great perspective 'mix-up'. Humans far too often mix up their own towers and accomplishments and God's actual heavenly court.

More ironic still, this great 'gate of the gods', this great tower of man's accomplishment, is not so great at all. It is built of bricks and tar, not stone and mortar. Its very materials are bound for quick decay. Moreover, it is so small that God has to come down to see it (Genesis 11:5). In this one little line, we are informed that the transcendent God is also the imminent God who responds to man's actions. Here in this tower of man's pride, we see the hints of political power and technological achievement, both of which are allied with and motivated by a sense of corporate insecurity.

II. *Men build and create for their namesake*

How easy it is to fall into this temptation? It looks and feels like what we were created to do: to build and create and steward resources. But couple that with the pull to grasp at divinity and the concern of personal security, and this becomes a fool's endeavor. The root of sin is rebellion and the assertion of human autonomy without God. That work given in the garden to build and create becomes disastrous when directed by the faulty motivations of pride and fear. It is a disastrous tale of our foolish idolatry.

The story of Babel, like the other stories of Genesis, shows us in vivid detail the micro patterns of our own hearts. *The prerogative of the people in this story is making a name for themselves.* Later we will see God promise Abram that He, God, will make Abram's name great (Genesis 12:1-3). God is the one who does this, not us. This is God's power not theirs! We must be careful to not develop an ungodly, independent attitude like those whom God found despicable at Babel. The insecurity of being scattered and the desire for earthly immortality are a sign we are decedents of Babel, not Abraham.

III. *Do everything for the Lord's namesake*

When it comes to the work of our hands and building kingdoms, businesses, and homes here on Earth, we are told to do this all for the Lord (Colossians 2:17, 3:23). It is his name that is to be great, not ours. It is out of thanksgiving, not fear, in which we are to act. Though even those who think they are working for the Lord may not know him or actually be doing his will but their own (Matthew 7:21-23).

"As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see what is above you" (C.S. Lewis Mere Christianity).

The story of the Tower of Babel stands as a sad description of the fracture of an idolatrous community and a breakdown in fellowship with God. It is a story of a failure in communication, of growth in isolation, and division in confusion. It all results from a communal failure to live dependent on God.

Instead of living humble lives of stewardship we often get sucked into the whirl of striving to reach the heavens and solidify a name for ourselves and our offspring. Does this carry a warning that we too need to hear today? How can we make sure we aren't building our own Towers of Babel? Let us be motivated by the 6800 languages of the world we hear around us to stay humble and true to the Lord!

