

GOD'S AMAZING PLAN, MAN'S AMAZING PRIDE GENESIS 10-11

Discussion starter – Share an instance when you thought your plan was best, but later you realized that you were mistaken.

Goal of this lesson – To show God's plan for the world to be filled, man's resistance to this plan and the consequences.

GOD'S COMMAND – Genesis 1: 28, "*God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."* Genesis 9: 1, "*God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.'*"

THE TABLE OF NATIONS – Genesis 10: 1-32

Introductory note: It is important to realize that Chapter 11 comes before chapter 10 chronologically. The Bible uses a method called "the hour glass structure," starting generally and then explaining the specifics.

It may be that the descendants of Japheth and Ham are mentioned first in order to set the stage for the descendants of Shem, from whom came Abraham and eventually Jesus. So the writer talks about all the people of the world and then talks about the Semites from whom the people of Israel came.

Many say that the sons of Japheth became the indo-Europeans, Aryans, Greeks, and Romans and are characterized by being intellectuals and good in science and philosophy.

Then possibly the Hamites became the Egyptians (Mizraim means two Egypts), Ethiopians (Cush), maybe Libya (Put), the Babylonians, and maybe even the Chinese (from the Hittites and Sinites). They were characterized by their technical skill and pioneering spirit.

The Semites then would include the Jews, Arabs, Ammonites, Moabites, Elamites, Assyrians, Midianites, Edomites, Arameans and others. Three of the world's largest religions come from this group: Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

It is important to realize that all of these gifts represented by these three different groups could be used for good or evil. We must always choose how we will use the gifts God has given us, either for good or bad.

It seems that the writer is describing the nations that came from the sons of Noah so that he could lead up to Abraham and how God would bless him and his descendants. The Canaanites are probably mentioned in a little more detail as a prelude to the story of God giving the land of Canaan to Israel.¹

Nimrod, a descendant of Ham and son of Cush, is described in more detail. His name means "we will rebel" and he may be one of the ones Genesis 6: 1-4 talks about. It says he was a "*mighty warrior*" and "*mighty hunter before the Lord.*" As one writer said, "Nimrod's violence is thus linked to the violence that brought on the divine judgment of the flood."² So, the comments about him may not mean that God really approved of him, but simply that he was known to be a "great hunter" in the eyes of the world.

When we look at Gen. 11: 1 we see that the place where the people wanted to build the city and tower was in Shinar. This was in Mesopotamia which corresponds to modern day Iraq, northeastern Syria,

¹ Allen P. Ross, "The Table of Nations in Genesis 10", *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138 (1980) 22-34.

² Paul Kissling, *Genesis – The College Press NIV Commentary* (Joplin, MO: College Press pub. 2004) 365.

southeastern Turkey and some parts of southwestern Iran. Genesis 10: 10 says this was the place of one of Nimrod's "kingdoms" where he built the cities of Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Calneh. So, if this is true, he probably took part in the prideful attempt to make a name for himself by building the tower of Babel "to reach the heavens." In other words, he led a rebellion against God. **He is a prime example of someone who is independent, resourceful, intelligent, and self-reliant, and because of this, did not think he needed God.** Later God himself chose a man and made his name great. **One who trusts God to make a name for him is very different than one who tries to make a name for himself.** The Bible says, "*For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends*" (2 Corinthians 10: 18).

We are reminded of what Jesus said in Mark 8: 36, "*What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?*" And also Proverbs 3: 5, "*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*"

Chapter 10 ends with this statement, "*These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their lines of descent, within their nations. From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood*" (Genesis 10: 32).

Why not trust God with your life and seek to follow his plan? He will direct your steps and will write your name in the Lamb's book of life.

THE TOWER OF BABEL – Genesis 11

At this time the whole earth had one language, but we need to remember that chapter 11 goes back and tells the story of how there came to be many languages as chapter 10 describes. So, chapter 11 is chronologically before chapter 10.

As we mentioned, they settled in the plain of Shinar. In Genesis 9: 1 God told them to fill the earth. However, in their own wisdom they decided to settle down and be together. Also, as we said earlier, since Nimrod first built cities in the area of Shinar according to Genesis 10: 10, he may have participated in the building of the tower of Babel, but we do not know for sure, since the names of the people who built the "tower" and "city" are not mentioned (chapter 11).

There was nothing necessarily wrong with them building a city, or even a tower, but the problems was that their motives were not pure. When the people said, "*let us build*" and then later God said "*let us go down*" (v: 7) we see that that God met their arrogant statement with his own statement. They seemed to be emphasizing the "us" in an arrogant way. We need to realize that we can do nothing without God's help. We also need to realize that God did not really have to "go down." These kinds of statements in the Bible are called anthropomorphic statements where things that man would do are attributed to God in order to communicate with us better.

They wanted to make a "**name**" for themselves and "*not be scattered over the face of the whole earth*" (v: 4). They were wrong in thinking this way. God did not want them to spend their energy trying to make a name for themselves. This is the secular way of trying to be somebody in the eyes of the world. We often expend much energy in trying to make a name for ourselves. **This whole attempt of theirs to make a name for themselves was in contrast to what God said to Abraham later in Genesis 12: 2 when he said he would make Abraham's name great.**

When they said they did not want to be scattered over the face of the earth this was in direct opposition to God's command in Genesis 9: 1 that they fill the earth. They thought their way was better than God's way. **This is the core of sin. We begin to think our way is better than God's way just like Adam and Eve in the beginning when they thought eating the fruit from the tree was better than not eating it, even though God told them not to.**

Also, their desire to build the tower to *"reach to the heavens"* was misguided. God is everywhere and we do not have to build a physical object to climb up to reach him. Paul said later in Romans 10: 6,7 that we should not think in terms of ascending into heaven to bring Christ down, but rather we need to realize that the word of God is near us and in our hearts. So, these people who built the tower of Babel had a false view of God. This may have been influenced by others who built ziggurats to reach the gods. It is an example of following the culture more than following the true God.



Well preserved ancient ziggurat located

Genesis 11: 5, *"But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building."* There seems to be a bit of irony here because God could have easily seen from heaven what they were doing.³ The implication is that what they were doing was so small in God's eyes that he had to come down to see it. From the upper story perspective God was not impressed at all with what they were doing. Men are good at impressing themselves and others on this earth, but sometimes fail at impressing God. We need to look at our lives and be sure that we are seeking to please God more than men. Sometimes what is honored in man's eyes is despised by God. In Luke 16: 15 Jesus said to the Pharisees, *"You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight."*

Genesis 11: 6, *"The Lord said, 'If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.'"* At first it seems like God is worried about man's power, but maybe this is about God preventing further escalation of evil. Maybe it is an act of grace rather than of self-defense. God knew the nature of man and so wanted to prevent evil from getting to the point where he had to destroy the world again.⁴ One of the biggest deceptions satan throws at us is to make us think that God is holding back on us and not giving us something we want that we think is good. This is the core of how satan tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3: 5). The question is, *"Do we trust God to be loving, just, not a respecter of persons, and one who gives us what we need, not what we want?"*

Genesis 11: 7 - God continued and said, *"Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."* The "let us" is in contrast to the "let us build" of the people. The great contrast is between God's plans and man's plans. Man needs to align himself with God's will and not expect God to endorse everything he wants to do. Obviously, to the people, this seemed harsh and unnecessary, but from the upper story perspective it was an act of grace because God was preventing them from going forward in their pride. **Often, we do not see what God is doing when we are in the middle of it.** One of the greatest prayers we can pray is, *"God please open my eyes so that I can truly see what is going on now in my life."*

³ Kissling, 383.

⁴ Kissling, 383, 384.

Once Jacob, who was Abraham's grandson, had a dream at a place called Bethel about how God would bless him and his decedents. After he awoke this is what he said, *"When Jacob awoke, from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.' He was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven' "* (Genesis 28: 16, 17). Something big was going on and Jacob sensed it deep in his spirit. God wants us to be aware of his presence and constantly be looking for what he is doing. It is very interesting also that Jacob used the phrase *"...this is the gate of heaven"* because ancient ziggurats were considered to be gates to heaven and the people who were building the tower of Babel wanted to build it to reach the heavens.

Actually, the word Babel in the Akkadian language means, *"gate of God."* But God wants his presence to be known more like Jacob experienced than like the people who were building the tower of Babel. We do not find God in a titanic (huge) human enterprise.⁵ We find him in the quietness of the morning, in meditation on his word, in prayer, in daily discernment, holding a child, serving someone in need, and through his grace and mercy we feel in our times of need. **What do you think God is doing in your life right now that you may not fully understand?**

Genesis 11: 8, *"So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. Despite their reluctance to obey God's command in Genesis 9: 1 that they "fill the earth," God made this happen anyway. **God will see that his plan is carried out either with you, against you or in spite of you.** Pharaoh, at the time of the Exodus, is a good example of someone who did not want to follow the plan of God, but God accomplished his purposes by freeing his people from bondage anyway.*

Concerning *"the City"* one writer described it this way, *"The 'city' as used in this passage may be being used typologically of any human scheme to attempt to create a life without the Creator of all life. The city stands for the human hubris (pride) which produced it. As one of the great cities of the ancient world, the judgment on the city of Babel is a judgment on 'civilization' whenever such a civilization is based on its own autonomous values and is sustained by violence and the mistreatment of others."*⁶ We need to remember that, *"the greatest human achievements cannot solve the deepest human problems."*⁷

It is extremely important that we do all we can to be sure that we live in humility and obedience to God in order that we can be salt and light in our society. David Kinnaman put it well when he said, *"Being salt and light demands two things: we practice purity in the midst of a fallen world and yet we live in proximity to this fallen world. If you don't hold up both truths in tension, you invariably become useless and separated from the world God loves."*⁸ God wants us to be out there among the people of the world, but he also wants us to be discerning about how to live holy lives in the process. We need to understand that being around unholy people is not a sin. The sin is when we have pride in our own goodness thinking we are better than others or when we give up and sin with the world instead of helping the world change. Jesus said that we should go to all the world and share the good news, but he also said *"Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God"* (Matthew 5: 8).

Genesis 11: 9 – *"That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth."* The word Babel stands for Babylon. So, it is the tower of Babylon where Nimrod went to build a city according to Genesis 10: 10. In the Bible Babylon always stood for nations and people who had sin, pride, and arrogance. The tower was

⁵ This phrase "Titanic human enterprise" is From a footnote in the NIV Stud Bible, 22 under the comment on Genesis 11; 22.

⁶ Kissling, 384.

⁷ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2006) 202.

⁸ David Kinnaman, *Unchristian What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity and Why It Matters* (GR Michigan: Baker Books, 2012).

built by the people to bring unity but it really brought confusion. They thought of it as the gate of God, but God revealed it as the gate to hell. When humans try to save themselves by their own power they will always fail and their failure can very well lead to final destruction. One writer said, "*The irony of this event is that what men most desired would have destroyed them, and what they most dreaded would prove to be a part of their deliverance.*"⁹

As we try to apply this story to our lives we need to think of how we sometimes try to make God smaller than he really is. Let's think of these three ways.

1. We make him smaller by giving allegiance to other powers besides God. The people who built the tower probably built it for the "gods" not for the one true God. But we can also give allegiance to other powers by worshipping our own monuments like: success, power, money, possessions, education, false religions, and idols of our own making.

2. We make him smaller by restricting his separateness as if he had needs and we can make him obligated to us. Sometimes we try to be good so we can save ourselves. We think if we are good people, God is obligated to save us. It is like the people who built the tower thinking that by their own efforts they could obligate the gods to be close to them.

3. We make him smaller by seeking his power for our own selfish purposes. The people who built the tower were seeking to use the power of the gods to make a name for themselves not to become godly people.¹⁰

A great article on six ungodly monuments we can see from this story:

A Monument to False Religions

There are at least six ways in which the tower of Babel was a pattern for all succeeding manmade religions.

1. The tower was a monument to salvation by works.

The people who built the tower were not all atheists; their great-grandparents had survived the Flood just 100 years before! Their basic plan was to build a tower from earth to heaven, and they labored under the pretense of wanting to be closer to God. The devil designed that this tower should be a subtle substitute for Jesus, who is the ladder from heaven to earth (John 1:51). Every false religion has in its root the error of Babel-that man can save himself by working from earth upward. But in reality, salvation is the result of God's initiative. John 3:16 says, "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.*" And in Ephesians 2:8, 9, the Bible declares: "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*"

2. The tower was a monument to human pride.

The primary objective for the true Christian should be to bring glory to God's name. Jesus told His disciples, "*After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name*" (Matthew 6:9). In contrast, the people's declared purpose for the tower was "let us make a name for ourselves" (Genesis 11:4, NKJV). The very word "denomination" means to unite under a name, and we know that many church denominations were brought into existence so leaders could "make a name" for

⁹ Bob Deffinbaugh, "The Unity of Unbelief (Genesis 11:1-9)," <http://bible.org/seriespage/unity-unbelief-genesis-111-9>.

¹⁰ John H. Walton, "Genesis," *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001) 384-387.

themselves. The Bible tells us, "*Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.*" Proverbs 16:18. Pride was where both the devil and the Babel builders fell.

3. It was a monument to mankind's disobedience and defiance of God's will.

Immediately after the Flood, "*God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth*" (Genesis 9:1). They had clearly been commanded to disperse throughout the world and repopulate the earth. The confederacy at Babel was founded in rebellion to God's specific command. The people believed that there was strength in numbers and resisted God's plan because it would have weakened their power. God had placed the first family in a garden, but the Babel builders, like Cain (Genesis 4:17), chose to build a city. Like many today, they did not believe that God is very particular regarding obedience.

4. It was a monument to human achievement.

The wisdom, technology, and techniques employed in the construction of this colossal edifice were state of the art for the day. When completed, it was hoped the majestic tower would be dazzling to behold and thus bring glory and attention to the designers and engineers. In other words, they sought to direct people's attention away from God's creation to the works of man. Even today, many are willing to overlook the false teachings and glaring inconsistencies of a religion because they are attracted to the magnificent temples, churches, and cathedrals that house them.

5. It was a monument to disbelief in God and His word.

God had given a clear, binding covenant and had sealed it with a rainbow, saying, "*The waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh*" (Genesis 9:15). But the Babel builders doubted God's word. One objective in the construction of the tower was to build higher than the prior flood level and to provide a retreat in the event that God would renege on His promise and once again flood the world. Rather than trusting God to protect, provide, and preserve them, they put their trust in a tower, in Nimrod, and in city walls.

6. It was a monument to heaven on earth.

Time and time again man has sought to create a kingdom on earth that does away with God and the need to turn from sin. By the time of Nebuchadnezzar, the city of Babylon had grown into a full-blown earthly counterfeit for God's new Jerusalem. It had great walls, a square design, hanging gardens in the center to mimic Eden's glory, a dazzling abundance of gold, and an immense river flowing through its center. Babel (and later Babylon) was mankind's feeble attempt to duplicate heaven and enjoy the new Jerusalem on earth without forsaking his sins. In contrast, God's children "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10).¹¹

¹¹Doug Batchelor, "The Tower of Babel,

<http://www.bibleprophecytruth.com/topics/mediaviewer.aspx?IT=IR&IID=354&LNG=en>