

Cracked

Genesis 10-11

Central Idea: Our motives must be pure and honoring to God or our actions will be frustrated.

Introduction

Today we come to the completion of the first part of Genesis which so far has told us incredible accounts of the earth in an almost mythological time. Rest assured, these events are historical. But after the flood, this event of the Tower of Babel, along with the Table of Nations and genealogy, bring us into the more recent times of Abraham.

Many scholars suggest that pride is the first sin, the reason that Adam and Eve fell into sin. We know for sure that pride is the sin of the Babylonians in our passage today. The Bible is clear on this point, but what is interesting is the way in which God is beginning to deal with entire societies now, rather than on an individual basis. Let's take a look at what happened in Babel!

Text – Genesis 11:1-9

¹ Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ² And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." ⁵ And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. ⁶ And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." ⁸ So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹ Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

- I. Some people desire fame and unity (vv. 1-4).
 - A. Our abilities put us at risk for pride.
 - i. The account of the Tower of Babel is arranged quite specifically in a certain literary order. Right before it, in chapter 10, we have the Table of Nations, essentially a tracing of what nation came from what part of Noah's family.

- ii. Then after the Tower narrative, we have another genealogical section, the sons of Shem. This fits the pattern from Genesis 4-11 of Geanealogy → Narrative → Genealogy. That is why the account is placed here.
- iii. However, chronologically, the Tower of Babel account most likely happened close to the releasing of Noah and his family from the Ark. It is at that time that everyone had the same language.
- iv. The Table of nations is purely for an accounting of all the sons of Noah and where their descendents ended up. Sometimes it's about people, other times about places and nations. But it shows how the nations came about from Noah's children.
- v. Although the genealogies and Table of Nations are interesting in their own right, I want to focus on the reason for the nations to separate, which is given in the Tower of Babel episode.
- vi. So as we enter the story of Babel, we find that people have remained centralized. Remember that both in Adam's time and in Noah's time right after the flood, God's command was to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth.
- vii. But these people rather than filling the earth gathered into one place. They sought security and fame. We know they wanted to be famous because they say, "Let's make a name for ourselves."
- viii. They begin to learn to make bricks, and they perfect the process. This gives them a boldness to now do something with the bricks, like build a city, perhaps with a tower that stretches to heaven, God's abode.
- ix. You can actually see in their speech the idea of not dispersing or filling the earth, as God had commanded. These people in their growing abilities now think that they can make up their minds to do what they want rather than what God wants.
- x. This idea of building a city was not wrong. But wanting to make a name for themselves and be able to access God's abode in the heavens was wrong. Their little bit of ability gave them courage to be arrogant.
- xi. Arrogance is the issue at the Tower of Babel. The people come to a central location, have all one language so that they are united and can communicate, and they decide to do the most arrogant thing, to build a way to go to where God dwells.
- xii. **Application:** Our abilities are wonderful gifts from God. He gives each of us unique giftings, and these are useful to us. But we must always be focused on how we can use these gifts to glorify God. When we begin to think that we made our abilities what they are, or trust in them more than we seek God, then we will find that they fall way short of our

expectations. We must find ways to use our abilities for God's good purposes!

- B. Our teamwork can work for good or evil purposes.
- i. There's something powerful about teamwork, and the Bible is no stranger to the power of working together. In fact, on many occasions, it is suggested as a wise idea!
 - ii. Ecclesiastes says that one man might win a battle, but two will subdue someone and a cord of three strands is not easily broken (4:12). Moses talked about the ability of one man in battle to put 1,000 down, but 2 men could put 10,000 down (Deut 32:30)!
 - iii. Teamwork is an important catalyst for great success. Everyone knows that working together makes the job easier, distributes the work, and gives us great joy to work with others on a project.
 - iv. When the Babylonians begin to build, they put their common language and their abilities to work and they begin to produce a formidable city with a giant tower toward heaven, just like they had planned.
 - v. One of the most intriguing parts of this narrative is what God says about their unity and teamwork, that nothing will stand in their way if they are disciplined and focused enough (v. 6).
 - vi. Think about that for a moment. Even God knows the power of teamwork! He says that nothing will be out of reach for them in the end of verse 7. It's almost an echo of what God says about the man and woman in the garden before He forbids them from eating from the tree of life again.
 - vii. There seems to be an unlimited potential in humans to do incredible things, things that we might not even be able to imagine. But God limits humanity when evil is the goal.
 - viii. But the key is not what we can do, rather what we want to do with that potential. Here, the people in Babel want to use it for wicked means. They want to rival God in their architectural prowess. They want to reach God on their terms.
 - ix. There are so many people today that still try to do this, build their own way to God, or reach Him on their terms. They want to decide everything in their relationship with Him. They want to be in charge.
 - x. **Application:** But Jesus is not Lord if we are arranging the details of our walk with Him. He must be in charge, not us. He must come to us and use us as He wills, not as we will. The very idea of God on our terms is antithetical to who God is. We must come to Him in humility and He must direct our steps.
- II. God desires humility and obedience (vv. 5-9)
- A. God preserves us as a Father.

- i. Some would look at this text and say, “God is such a prude! He doesn’t let the humans do something wonderful for achievement and advancement. He holds them back.”
- ii. They would suggest that God confused their common language out of fear that they would actually rival Him! He must react and do something to keep them human and Him God!
- iii. But this is not what is represented in the text. In verse five, no matter how high the humans build their tower to reach Him, it is still not high enough, for god has to go down to see what they are doing.
- iv. Even at the highest heights, humans are still humans. While we were made with God’s image, we will never be God. That is His place alone. We can try to reach Him on our own, but we will not get close unless we allow Him to reach us.
- v. So the humans can’t even get close to God’s abode in all of their building. Instead, God is not some selfish prude trying to keep humans from recognizing their potential to be divine. He is acting as a father to discipline His creation.
- vi. This is an open and shut case. The Babel builders have already given their goals, to reach the heavens (God’s dwelling) and to keep from scattering over the earth (God’s command), not to mention their arrogance in wanting to make a name for themselves.
- vii. God is once again reacting to their desire to sin, not limiting them from reaching god-like potential. He is not afraid they would be like Him or take His place as God.
- viii. Some look at the phrase, “Nothing they purpose to do will be impossible for them now” (verse 7c) as God’s fear of being one-upped, but that’s not it at all. God’s actually limiting them because their unbridled sinfulness will cause another situation that He would have to start over.
- ix. Unity is a powerful tool for human beings. It can make us incredibly productive. But it must be unity in a cause that honors God, not a selfish and arrogant attempt to be something we’ll never be.
- x. God stems the tide of the wickedness in human hearts in this passage. He acts as a father trying to preserve righteousness in His creation, not as a scared autocrat.
- xi. God is keeping them from themselves in this act, not preserving His godhood. So He comes down to preserve them from becoming as wicked as they did in Genesis six before the flood.
- xii. The idea here is to limit human ability and unity because it would be used to sin more, and put them in another place of judgment before it is time for that.

xiii. **Application:** God's always got our best interest in mind. He is always working for our good. He is not someone trying to hold us back. He is someone trying to make us holy. We Bristol under His tutorship and under His hand, but it is always to benefit us when He steps in. He grooms and prunes us like leaves on a tree, so that we don't grow to a place of complete sinfulness. His hand is not for striking but for saving!

B. God prepares us for obedient unity.

- i. God's redemptive response to the sinful desires of the Babylonians is to confuse their languages, so that they cannot communicate in unity with one another anymore.
- ii. This of course forces them to find others with their same language, and language becomes a barrier for them, so they begin to leave the place and disperse in their own nations, lands, tribes and language groups.
- iii. God's dispersion here is meant to slow down the reactive ability of sin in the human heart. The tower and city remain unfinished. The goals of reaching God's place, arrogantly making a name for themselves and staying in one place all are changed by God's one act.
- iv. In a rare happening, the play on words is almost perfectly preserved even in English. There's a play on words between Babel, the name of the place, and the word in Hebrew for confuse. It comes through in English because babbling sounds like Babel.
- v. God introduces diversity as a redemptive approach. It forces the people to do what was originally ordained, to disperse and fill the earth. When gathered in one place in unity, their own divisive desires would have brought another judgment like the flood, but God stems the tide of their lust for power and godhood.
- vi. **Illustration:** Like a parent who must discipline their children, and sometimes just keep things from them because they will be dangerous or harmful, God does the same thing here. There are topics and issues that children must mature before they can process such things. A parent must know the right timing and must hold back discussion of certain matters until a child is ready to understand them. God does this here, providing a way for unity to only be achieved when human hearts are pure in Him. Otherwise, they would destroy themselves and would incur His final judgment.
- vii. Interestingly, there is already a time in history where God reversed the diversified languages in favor of a common language in unity. In Acts 2, at the Day of Pentecost, God uses speech in another redemptive way, but He reverses what He did in Babel.

- viii. The disciples of Jesus are all gathered together in one place, and it happened to be during a major festival in Jerusalem, so many from out of town were there.
- ix. God changed their tongues so His glory could be proclaimed to the foreigners visiting for the festival! He gave them the baptism in the Holy Spirit so that they could speak His glories to these people they could not otherwise communicate with!
- x. In God's timing, when we are pure before Him, He indeed causes a unity to happen among us so that His power can go forth. When we all seek the unity of the Holy Spirit in brotherly love, God restores that unity so that we can reach our potential for Him!
- xi. **Application:** God wants you to be united with others in His purposes. When we join with Him in His power and Spirit, we can experience the power of unity in our church and in our world. We can be used by God to show others His kingdom, rather than building our own kingdoms, to exhort His name rather than make one for ourselves, and to humbly serve Him and others rather than try to take His place.

Conclusion

The Tower of Babel has a couple of purposes in Scripture. One purpose is to explain exactly how the nations came about, why they separated out and filled the earth. It also is very helpful in showing us what the power of unity can do, and the danger of wrong motives in our unity. Although unity is a powerful thing, it can be used for evil purposes and accelerate the time of judgment. God wants us to be unified, but in a way that brings the very best for us rather than a way that quickens our judgment and destruction.

Action Points

- We must always check our motives when we want to do something. Are we being selfish, arrogant, or disobedient to God's commands? These kinds of desires will be thwarted by our loving Father so that we do not destroy ourselves!
- God will bring us into unity to serve Him and to advance His kingdom, rather than our own. God wants to use us to our full potential, but if our motives and intentions are not pure, He cannot use us. We must be aligned with His greater and holy will!