

GENESIS 11: THE TOWER OF BABEL

I. OVERVIEW

- A. Tower of Babel
 - i. People migrated west and settled in Shinar
 - ii. Made bricks and mortar for a tower reaching to heaven
 - a. Called it Babel
 - i. Founded by Nimrod, hunter of men
 - a. Recreated conditions from before the flood
 - b. They were afraid of being dispersed
 - iii. So God dispersed them
- B. Genealogy of Shem
 - i. 10 generations to Abram
 - a. 10 represents God's authority
 - i. 10 generations from Adam to Noah
 - b. No death announcement for each family member
 - c. Until Sarai is mentioned as barren
 - ii. Abram's family and their wives
 - a. Brother Haran
 - i. Nephew Lot
 - b. Brother Nahor
 - i. Named after grandfather
 - ii. Wife Milcah
 - iii. Nahor will be important later in the book
 - c. Wife Sarai
 - i. Barren

II. STRUCTURE OF V. 1-9

- A. Chiasm¹
 - i. Each phrase in first half has a mirrored phrase in second half
 - ii. Until it reaches the middle – creates shape of V on its side

¹ Armstrong, Stephen. "Genesis 2011 - Lesson 11A." *Verse by Verse Ministries*, 31 July 2011, versebyversemministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_11a. Accessed 10 May 2023.

- B. The **whole earth** had **one language** – v. 1
 - i. **Settled there** – v. 2
 - a. **Said** to **one another** – v. 3
 - i. **Come, let us** make bricks – v. 3
 - a. Let us **build** ourselves – v. 4
 - 1. A **city and a tower** – v. 4
 - a. And the Lord came down to see – v. 5
 - 2. The **city and the tower** – v. 5
 - b. Which the children of men had **built** – v. 5
 - ii. **Come, let us** confuse – v. 7
 - b. That they **may not understand one another** – v. 7
 - ii. **Dispersed** from **there** – v. 8
 - C. **Confused** the **language** of **all the earth** – v. 9
 - D. Brings attention to the statement – “The Lord came down”
 - i. Even in man’s sin, the Lord comes down
 - E. **Orange** shows the contrasts before and after the Lord came down

III. WHOLE EARTH – V. 1

- A. God commanded them to fill the earth in Genesis 9:1
- B. Instead they came together and built a city²
 - i. Are cities bad?
 - a. Cities are man’s way of providing deliverance for himself
 - b. Instead of trusting in God’s deliverance
 - c. They enhance both positive and negative aspects of humanity³

IV. FROM THE EAST – V. 2

- A. Or, journeyed east
 - i. Into exile

V. BRICK AND MORTAR – V. 3

- A. Just like Israelite slaves made brick and mortar
 - i. They sought freedom but in so doing they enslaved themselves

² Guzik, David. “Study Guide for Genesis 11.” *Blue Letter Bible*, 2018, www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/genesis/genesis-11.cfm. Accessed 10 May 2023.

³ Mackie, T. & Collins, J. (Hosts). (2023, May 08). A Symptom Of Human Violence [Audio Podcast]. *BibleProject Podcast*. Bible Project. <https://bibleproject.com/podcast/symptom-human-violence/>

- ii. They became Egypt
- B. Bitumen – used as pitch in the ark⁴
 - i. Made city waterproof to protect against future flood⁵

VI. TOWER – V. 4

- A. Beginning of false religion⁶
- B. Humans spent all history trying to get to God in heaven.
 - i. Pagan religions build shrines on high places
 - ii. Many Christians believe we're saved so we can go to heaven when we die
- C. Only one Man ascended to heaven before God
 - i. Daniel 7:13-14 ***"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.***
- D. Instead, God comes to earth
 - i. Holy of holies
 - ii. Jesus
 - iii. Indwelling Spirit
 - iv. New Jerusalem

VII. NAME – V. 4

- A. Reputation, authority, character
- B. We are presented with a picture of what people do immediately after the flood - from Stephen Armstrong at Verse By Verse Ministries:
 - i. Instead of heading westward according to God's direction, men retreat eastward to the Enemy's home territory
 - ii. Instead of relying on God, men immediately seek to rely on the work of their own hands
 - iii. Instead of seeking the name of the Lord and the city of God, men made their own city to obtain their own testimony

⁴ Guzik

⁵ Guzik

⁶ Armstrong

iv. And instead of seeking to reach God through a faith in His word, they seek to reach heaven by the work of their hands⁷

VIII. SEE – V. 5

A. God is not passive

- i. He intervenes when man goes too far
 - a. Adam and Eve, Nephilim, tower of Babel

B. Jeremiah 23:23-24 ***“Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD.***

IX. NOTHING THAT THEY PROPOSE TO DO – V. 6

A. Consider the horrors humans are capable of

- i. Imagine what they could do with one language led by hunter of men

B. God's actions come from mercy rather than judgment⁸

C. Now imagine what a modern globalized society is capable of?⁹

X. US – V. 7

A. Trinity or divine council?

- i. In context of forming nations
- ii. God comes down with council of spiritual beings
- iii. Confuses languages, disperses them, assigns council member to each language group
- iv. Daniel 10:12-13 ***Then he said to me, “Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia,***

XI. UR OF THE CHALDEANS – V. 28

A. Gives location

- i. Chaldeans didn't live there for another 1,000 years
- ii. Previously inhabited by Sumerians

B. Wealthy city

⁷ Armstrong

⁸ Guzik

⁹ Guzik

C. Abram's family likely very wealthy

- i. Probably not worshippers of Yahweh
 - a. Joshua 24:2 *And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods.'"*

XII. CANAAN – V. 31

A. Moved from east to west

- i. Out of exile

XIII. HUMANS HAVE ALWAYS THOUGHT THEY COULD TAKE ON GOD

- A. Psalm 2:1-3 *Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."*
- B. One final empire will stand against Jesus but they will be destroyed
 - i. Psalm 2:7-9 *I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."*

XIV. POINTS TO JESUS

- A. The Lord came down – v. 5
- B. Shem's line through Peleg
 - i. Introduces Abram

XV. QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

A. How have we tried to make a name for ourselves apart from God?

B. How has God come and confused those plans in His mercy before they were finished?

C. How do you think God felt about people immediately turning to wickedness right after the flood?

D. Why did God need to come down to see what people were doing?

E. Why do you think people only dispersed and filled the earth after their language was confused?

F. Is God bothered or concerned about the rage of the nations against Him?

G. Abram stopped halfway to Canaan in Haran. What happens when we only obey God halfway?

XVI. FURTHER STUDY

A. What reward does Jesus promise to those who stay faithful and trust in His word in Revelation 3:12? How does this contrast to what men did at the tower of Babel?

B. What is the mystery revealed about Babel in the harlot Babylon in Revelation 17:4-6?

C. In what way were the events on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-12 a reversal of the judgment on mankind in Genesis 11?

D. How does Paul recommend using the gift of tongues among other believers in 1 Corinthians 14 in order to avoid the confusion created by the multitude of languages at Babel?

E. Compare and contrast the tower of Babel with the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:9-22:5. What are the similarities? What are the differences? What is the role of the nations in the New Jerusalem?
