

A Tale of Two Cities

Delivered: February 25, 2024

Scriptures: [Genesis 11:1-9](#)

Genesis 11.1-9

1 Now the whole earth had one language and one speech.

2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there.

3 Then they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar.

4 And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”

5 But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.

6 And the Lord said, “Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.

7 Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.”

8 So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city.

9 Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

Intro

This is very popular passage in [Genesis 11](#). A group of ambitious builders attempt to build a tower that crosses into heaven, but instead, their efforts result in the scattering of their people and the confusing of their language. But as I studied this passage this week, I realized the real story is not so much the tower that they were building...it’s something else.

Before we get to what I think is the real meat of this story, I want to point out 4 things from this passage:

the land where this story takes place,
the bricks they built with,
the name they tried to make for themselves,
and the language.

v2 - The Land of Shinar

2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there.

This area is significant. The plains in the land of Shinar would become Babylon ([Daniel 1.2](#)). Babylon; the city that captured God's people in the 6th century BC and burned His temple. Babylon; the city in Revelation that represents the wickedness of the world's system. So here we have in [Genesis 11](#) the first mention of what will become a very significant place in the biblical narrative, the story of Israel, and the end times clash between light and dark.

v3 - Bricks

3 Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They had brick for stone

There were no stones in this part of the world, so these people were smart enough to build their own stones made of clay. They were using the elements of this world to build something that they intended to use to touch God's world. This is what religion does; man builds a system that makes sense to him using the resources that he has at his disposal, and he intends for his system to allow him to do the impossible...bridge the chasm between our world and God's.

v3 says that they made bricks as stones. Man makes bricks, God makes stones. Man builds his house out of his man-made bricks, and God builds His house out of...living stones. We have to make sure we are building His house His way and not our way.

v4 - A Name

4 And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”

“Make” a “name” - This is exactly what God says to Abram in the next chapter,

2 I will bless you and make your name great” (Genesis 12:2).

The striking difference between these two stories lies in how the “name” is made. The people in Babel were going to make a name for themselves. Using their efforts, their brilliant ideas, and their man-made building materials, they were not just going to build a tower, they were building a reputation. They wanted to be known in the earth. They wanted the fame of what they did to spread. God may have told Noah “be fruitful and fill the earth with image bearers,” but these early Babylonians wanted to fill the earth with something else...the fame of their name.

The irony is, we don’t know one single name from the people of Babel.

When we try to make a name for ourselves we are in danger of falling under the judgement of the Lord, because we are operating in pride, and **James 4:6** tells us that God will resist the proud. That’s what these people in the plains of Babel came up against... God resisted them. But when we humble ourselves, and seek to make His name great, then we are coming into alignment with His purpose in the earth, and all of the resources of heaven are now at our disposal.

Paul writes to the Philippians that as a result of Jesus’ humility in emptying Himself,

9 God also has highly exalted Him (Jesus) and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (**Philippians 2.9-11**)

When we humble ourselves, resist the temptation to make our name great, and seek to exalt the name of Jesus, then we are partnering with what God is doing in the earth...and impossible things become our reality.

v6 - Language

6 And the Lord said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.

God confused the language of these people and caused them to be scattered.

But He promises in [Zephaniah 3.9](#),

"I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord."

That's exactly what happened in [Acts 2](#), God pours out His Spirit and the first thing that happens is a unification of language...a supernatural understanding of what is being said. The secondary consequence of that unified language of the Spirit was a drawing together of different tribes, tongues, and languages into the church...the scattering of [Genesis 11](#) is now undone in [Acts 2](#) as God begins to draw all men and women to Himself;

"All who believed were together and had all things in common...continuing daily with one accord (*unity*) in the temple, & breaking bread from house to house..."
(Acts 2.44, 46).

That's what began in [Acts 2](#), and it is still continuing today. God is pouring out His Spirit and drawing all people to Himself...in Christ. Outside of Him there is only scattering and division and confusion. But in Him there is unity and peace and family.

v4 - A City

4 And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city..."

Like I mentioned earlier, I don't think the real story of [Genesis 11](#) is the tower, it's the city.

[St. Augustine](#) wrote a book in the 5th century called *The City of God*. The point of his book is that history is the story of the struggle between two cities - the city of God and the city of man. There is a cosmic clash between those who would build the earthly cities of this age (to make names for themselves) - and God, who is building an eternal city for the age to come.

“Come, let us build a city for ourselves...a place where our names will be memorialized in the earth...a place of self-sufficiency and protection, a place where we aren't dependent on God for our needs, it will be a place where we can trade amongst ourselves and prove our self-reliance.”

The thing is, God had told Noah to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth ([Genesis 9.1](#)). That was the divine directive that God had given man after the flood. And these people in the plains of Babel rebelled against the covenant blessing that God made with Noah and said,

"No, we will not scatter and fill. We will consolidate and build up."

The filling of the earth with image bearers required too much dependence on a God who they didn't understand. So rather than trusting in His blessing of multiplication and life that comes from obedience to YHWH, they organized. **And their reasons for rebelling against God have become every generations reason for not trusting in what God says.** They reasoned among themselves that if they do what God has asked them to do then they won't be nearly as well off as they will be if they do what they think is best. So they attempted to build something in the earth that was magnificent, and would surely give them fame and stability - but it was void of God; unless the Lord builds the house they labor in vain ([Psalm 127.1](#)).

The whole idea of this city was a manifestation of the demonic ideology that says God is not necessary. The tower reaching through to heaven was just the rally-ing cry...the flag pole and the anthem to pull the people together and give them a sense of purpose. It was to them what Lenin's tomb is to communism...the symbol to unite and define them. But the real crux of this story is not so much the tower, it's the city. **The city is always the issue.** In fact, in the book of Genesis, the city tends to be a metaphor of self-reliance and rebellion against God. For example; the first builder of a city in Scripture is Cain ([Genesis 4.17](#)). The first murderer had it in his heart to draw others together with him and become self-reliant.

When Lot separated from Abram, he chose to go to the city...that godless place of perversion and injustice called Sodom.

And these people in [Genesis 11](#) are literally building the foundations of Babylon.

There's nothing wrong with a city...but there is something wrong with THAT city, built on THAT foundation of pride and self-sufficiency. Babylon isn't just a city...it's an entire civilization built as a means of organizing life apart from God...it represents a demonic system that is set up against God and His purpose in the earth. It's not that God is against cities, but He is against anything that causes people to live their lives separate from Him.

God's City - Jerusalem

See, God has His own city, but it's a city that He builds His way. It's a city that has it's own culture and language. It's a city designed according to a heavenly pattern, built by kings and priests and prophets. **In this age that city is Jerusalem**, the city that God has made a covenant with and called His own ([Ezekiel 16.8](#)), His eyes are always on that city ([Deuteronomy 11.12](#)). Jerusalem is a lightning rod in the earth in every generation because God has determined for that city to represent something of the age to come... what [Revelation 21:9-11](#) says is the NEW Jerusalem, the HOLY city...a city like no other. The Jerusalem of today is supposed to point us to the New Jerusalem of tomorrow. And that city, the NEW Jerusalem, is so precious to God that Scripture calls that city the Bride, the wife of the Lamb;

9 Then one of the seven angels...came to me and said, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife."

10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. ([Revelation 21.9-11](#))

What Babylon is to evil principalities of darkness, Jerusalem is to the kingdom of God. [Revelation 17.1](#) calls Babylon "the harlot." If Jerusalem is the bride of the Lamb, one could say Babylon is the bride of the serpent.

These men in [Genesis 11](#) weren't just building a tower, they were building the foundations of everything that is opposed to God and summed up in one city, Babylon.

Reaching Into Heaven

It's ironic that the original intent in building this city was so the people of Babel could build something that reached up to heaven. It's ironic because the Babylon of **Revelation 17–18** actually accomplishes this. **Revelation 18:1-5**,

1 After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory.

2 And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!

3 For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.”

4 And I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.

5 For her sins have reached up to heaven.

What the people of Babel couldn't do in **Genesis 11**, future generations accomplish with the sin of their lives. That's what sin does, it accomplishes something so horrible...and it constructs a city of rebellion so foul and anti-Christ, that it actually builds for Babylon her tower that reaches up to heaven.

But righteousness builds a city, too. And those who are now made righteous by the blood of the Lamb, they know that the testimony of their lives is building the glorious city of God. It's not a city for this age, it's a city built for eternity. And the righteous know that they are just sojourners in this life...they know that, like Abraham, they are not at home here...they are awaiting a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (**Hebrews 11.10**). If the sin of the world builds a city that is the dwelling place of demons and a prison for every foul spirit (**Revelation 18.2**) then we can also say that God is using the righteous lives of His sons and daughters to build up for Himself the holy heavenly city of glory. **The question for us tonight is which city are we building with our lives? Are we building bricks for Babylon or setting living stones in the heavenly Jerusalem?**

How to Dwell in This Heavenly City

1. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem (**Psalm 122.6**). Jerusalem is intended to be a witness in the earth, in every generation, of the heavenly Jerusalem that will one day be established on earth as it is in heaven. **Isaiah 62.6-7** says,

"I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest till He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

Give Him no rest until He establishes Jerusalem as a praise in the earth. It's no wonder that Jerusalem is the most contentious real estate on the planet...there's a cosmic battle for control of Jerusalem, and the witness that comes from that city. Pray for the peace of that city, that once again Jerusalem mirrors the glory of God and the Prince of Peace.

2. Each person who has ever lived must make a choice. Will we build and live in Babylon or Jerusalem, will we join ourselves to the harlot or the bride? Live as if your citizenship was in heaven, not in this world. King David wrote in **Psalm 39.12**,

"I am a stranger (in this world) and a sojourner."

This word "sojourner" means a temporary resident, a guest. As born-again followers of Jesus, our home is not here in this life, we are temporary residents awaiting our heavenly home. Paul writes in **Philippians 3.20**,

"Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we eagerly wait for the Savior."

He tells the Ephesians that we are PRESENTLY, "seated with Christ in heavenly places" (**Ephesians 2.6**) even though our feet are on this earthly place. He tells the Colossians that they have been raised with Christ, so,

"keep seeking the things that are above" (**Colossians 3.1**).

The point Paul is consistently making is this place is not your home, you are a visitor.

Have you ever visited another country? Have you ever felt that feeling of not being at home in the place where you are? When we lived in Iraq, it was real clear that we were guests in a foreign land. We lived there, but our citizenship was in America; meaning our culture, our language, our values, what felt normal and what felt foreign...all of those things were part of our internal make up because of the land that formed us, not the land where we spent our time. We were in Iraq on assignment, but Iraq did not define the

culture of our home. In fact, we were there to infect the system of Iraq with our culture of the kingdom. That's what we as followers of Jesus are to do...transform Babylon into Jerusalem.

John writes in [1 John 2.15](#),

"Do not love the world or the things in it."

We are to be in the world but not of the world. Jesus says in [Matthew 5:14](#) that we are the light of this world. We are the salt of the earth. As family members of the bride of Christ, which [Revelation 21](#) says is the city of God, the church is God's agent of representation and change in the world. So transform anything that is building blocks for Babylon into foundation stones for Jerusalem.

But to do that, we have to know where our citizenship is. We can't build with bricks made of this earth; meaning we can't do things the way the world does it and try to call it holy, it's not...it's profane.

We've spent the past few weeks talking about the marks of the cross and the scars of the new Jesus people; when we hold on to offense and settle for the world's definition of rest and wisdom, we are building bricks for Babylon. But when we choose to walk in humility and forgiveness and rest and heavenly wisdom, we are choosing to dismantle Babylon and demonstrate a city whose builder and maker is God.

We are here as ambassadors of a king who is seated on a throne in heaven with scars on His body. When we choose to live our life like He lived His, the we build His city...and we hasten the day when that Man on that throne in that heavenly city becomes established here on earth as it is in heaven. Until that day, our assignment is to transform anything that doesn't look like His world into something He can recognize when He comes. That begins in our own lives as individuals as we choose to live in love and humility and preference for others and sacrifice and service...choosing to walk in the way of the cross. If we can do that as individuals then in it will transform our home, then transform our street, then transform our neighborhood, then our community, and so on...until the glory of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea.

Saint Augustine penned these words that he would declare over new converts before they took communion together, “Your hope must not be in this world, but in heaven. Your faith must be firmly directed toward God. What you do not see here, but believe, you will see there, in heaven, where you will rejoice without end.”