

THE GOSPEL PROJECT

THE STORY BEGINS

GOD THE CREATOR

The Creator Slows the Spread of Evil

Today's lesson takes us to a very old story – one that we might believe has no real significance in our lives today other than letting us know how the diversity of human languages came into being. However, like all other stories from the Word of God, it is living and active and we will find that what happened is applicable to our lives today. Four great events are recorded in **Genesis 1-11**: God's creation of earth, the sin of man, the Flood, and the confusion of languages at the Tower of Babel. In these events we see a recurring pattern – God's goodness versus man's disobedience. These chapters reveal that when mankind disobeys God, the LORD judges sin, and then in His grace makes a new beginning.

As we study the story of Babel, keep in mind that the advent of diverse languages is not an afterthought to man's sin by the Creator. As the biblical drama unfolds from Genesis to Revelation, we see God's plan appearing continually. We read in **Philippians 2:10-11 (ESV)** ¹⁰ *so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,* ¹¹ *and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* The sin of Babel will eventually lead to the global glory of God's Son – Christ lays claim on every language and every culture – all authority belongs to Jesus. Just before His ascension, Jesus said in **Matthew 28:18 (ESV)** ... *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*

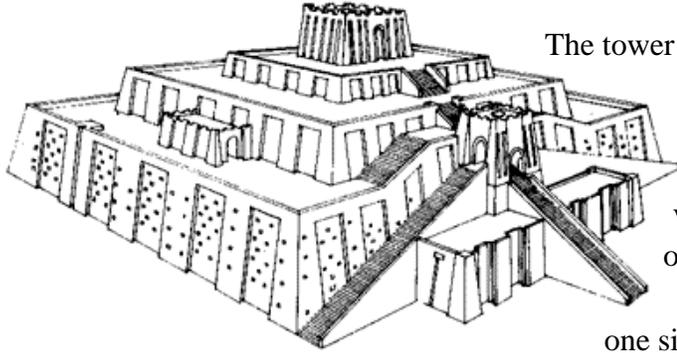
This series passes over the "Table of Nations" provided in **Genesis 10**, The Table of Nations explains how the new "first family" the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth spread over the land fulfilling what the LORD had commanded them to do in **Genesis 9:1 (ESV)** ¹ *And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.* However, their obedience to this command of God did not actually happen until the LORD confused their speech at Babel in chapter 11. Three times in **Genesis 10** (verses: 5, 20 and 31) Moses mentions the different languages of the descendents of the three sons of Noah. **Genesis 10:31 (ESV)** ³¹ *These are the sons of Shem, by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations.* Verse 5 mentions the languages of Japheth and verse 20 mentions the languages of Ham. The ancestral line of Shem will be followed throughout the Old Testament. In fact, next week, we will begin a unit on Shem's descendent, Abraham, whose bloodline will eventually lead to the coming Redeemer God had promised to Eve.

The Tower of Babel account where the languages were confused as told in **Genesis 11:1-9** is a "flashback" to the family records found in **Genesis 10**. **Genesis 10** tells us of the different languages while **Genesis 11** tells us how the different languages originated.

God sees our prideful plans and disobedience.

Read Genesis 11:1-3 (ESV) 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.

Babel was settled by Nimrod, a descendent of Noah’s son, Ham. **Genesis 10:10 (ESV)** ¹⁰ The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.



Reconstruction of the Ziggurat at Ur

The tower was constructed of brick, because there was no stone in the area. What they began to construct compares to the ziggurats built later for the pagan Babylonian religion in that area. There are remains of one ziggurat in Ur (Ur was Abraham’s hometown). It was a pyramid consisting of three terraces of diminishing size as the building ascended, topped by a temple. Converging stairways on one side led up to the temple. The outside of the structure was built of fired bricks and bituminous mortar, just like described in the construction of the Tower of Babel. It was not the building project at Babel that God was displeased with; it was the disobedient and prideful attitude of the people’s hearts.

Read Genesis 11:4-5 (ESV) 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.

The people said, *let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens*. Their leader, possibly Nimrod himself, was encouraging the people to create their own world empire. The fact that everyone spoke the same language at that time in history would have added to the ease of consolidating the people under one world ruler especially if they all remained in the same location.

The power struggle at Babel is reminiscent of how at the end of the age when the LORD’s timing allows, there will be one monolithic world government headed by the final Anti-Christ who will be dethroned by Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. This earth will not be free of confusion until Jesus the Messiah sets up His earthly kingdom. **Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)** ⁶ ... *the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*.

The tower builders were laying aside Elohim’s command to spread out replacing the Creator’s instructions with their own personal plans. Their efforts were not for the glory of God but to make a name for themselves. Their ugly “Me – Me - Me” attitude reflected the heart of the fallen angel, Lucifer, and his five “I will” statements as described in **Isaiah 14**. The tower builders said: *let us make bricks – let us build ourselves a city and a tower – let us make a name for ourselves – lest we be dispersed over*

the face of the whole earth. Seeking to stay in one place was in direct opposition to the LORD's plan for mankind to fill the earth with His family.

And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. Pastor John Piper says, "God's coming down shows His Holy Scorn of human pride." We know that our God is All-Seeing. He did not have to move closer to actually see the tower. The LORD's coming down is a picture of the insignificance of man's efforts – most especially the human effort to rise up to the same level with God Almighty.

Okay, now let's visualize how the folks' disobedience then at Babel relates to us in the here and now. Consider a command that Jesus, the One who has all authority, gave to His disciples (yes, that includes us): **Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV)** ¹⁹ *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* ²⁰ *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Since our command from Jesus is to **go** and **make** disciples, why are we so willing to sit in our "own ziggurats?" Oh, excuse me, we like to refer to the place we are sitting so comfortably as "church." The problem is when we are just sitting we are not being obedient to the Great Commission to go and make disciples – to fill the earth with a family that knows Jesus.

And besides just sitting idly in church we also have the tendency to build personal "towers" for our own benefit. There may be nothing wrong with actual "towers" but when the towers are built for the wrong reasons, they become like the Tower of Babel built on our own pride, our desire for fulfillment outside of God, our selfishness. We must guard against constructing personal towers of Babel which are created by the presence of the sin of pride in our lives. Human conceit thinks "let's go up." And heaven's answer is for God to come down! Remember how God came down to the Garden and confronted Adam and Eve with their sin? What will the Lord find you doing if He comes down to you? Wouldn't it be wonderful if He found you and me going and making disciples with the intent of enlarging the family of God instead of staying and building our own little ziggurats so we can feel good about ourselves?

God judges our attempts to build our own kingdom.

Read Genesis 11:6-7 (ESV) 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."*

Here again we have an early reference to the Triune nature of God. The LORD said *let us go*. God is speaking this to Himself – the Father – the Son and the Holy Spirit of God went down together to earth to confuse the language of men.

There are a great many who say that languages developed gradually. But God said He confounded their language so that right then, while they were in the middle of building an object of their pride, they

suddenly could not understand each other. Even though God “confused” the languages at Babel, there was order to it. From what we have already learned in chapter 10, the separation of languages came by distinct family groups. It was not like a husband and wife and parent and child suddenly began using different words – the division came by families. **1 Corinthians 14:33 (ESV)** ³³ *For God is not a God of confusion but of peace...* God sometimes does use confusion to humble people and keep us from uniting against His will. So if we are trying to accomplish something that is bringing about too much confusion, we do well to check with God to see if our plans are pleasing to Him. I have noticed over the years that when our personal plans are ordered by God they have a unique way of falling simply into place. **Psalms 37:23 (ESV)** ²³ *The steps of a man are established by the LORD, when he delights in his way.*

In every generation, God always saw hearts that were tender towards Him – Abel and Seth in the second generation – Noah in his generation. Undoubtedly there were those who sought God’s way during the Tower incident. The LORD knew if humans continued as one people group, much of the earth would be left uninhabited, and these children of men would do harm to the children of God. Once again, we find a wonderful example of God’s mercy. There was no flood to destroy the people – just a simple little language change to break up a power group! Unity is good only when we are unified in seeking and doing the LORD’s will.

God causes our idolatrous plans to fail.

Read Genesis 11:8-9 (ESV) 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.*

The confusion of languages at Babel stands in direct parallel to another day recorded in the New Testament – the Day of Pentecost where we find that the gospel was preached in all the languages that were understood by the people there. J. Vernon McGee comments, “On the Day of Pentecost, God gave His answer to the Tower of Babel. God is saying to mankind, ‘I have a gospel and a message for you, and I’m coming to you with the gospel in your own language.’” The good news of Jesus Christ is for everyone. **Revelation 7:9-10 (ESV)** ⁹ *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,* ¹⁰ *and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*

God the Father communicated His Word of Love for us through His Son. **John 1:14** *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* Let’s take God at His Word and trust Jesus!