

The sermon

Intro

The tower of Babel. I remember hearing this story as a young boy (six?) at a CCD class in a Catholic church in Portsmouth, NH. Something happened in my heart that day that wouldn't come to fruition for another 18 years or so.

I didn't understand why a tall tower was so bad. But I did believe it was an actual historical event from that point on. Somehow I believed the Bible was true. There was one true God who created and ruled over all things and this God was related to Jesus in some way.

I believed facts about God, but I wasn't a believer. I didn't understand sin. I didn't know what Jesus' death and resurrection had to do with my sin. I wasn't trusting in Jesus for forgiveness of sins. I hadn't repented of my sins. I wasn't confident I possessed eternal life.

Sometimes God shines light in stages. Sometimes God's drawing process isn't instantaneous. I'm thankful for the light God gave that day.

Body

Passage Focus

We'll work our way through the passage. Step by step. We'll draw two major implications.

Explanation

READ 10:1

We're going to hear about the descendants of Noah's boys.

READ 10:2-5

These verses focus on Japheth's descendants.

In 10:5 the "*coastland peoples*" have spread out and have their own languages. Indicating 11:1-9 happens before 10:5. When we get to chapter 11, we're going back in time. People who lived along the coast (e.g., Mediterranean and Black Sea) came from Japheth.

READ 10:6-20

These verses focus on Ham's descendants.

Notable individuals, cities, and nations come from Ham:

1. Egypt (10:6, 13-14) = the world power where Israel would dwell for over 400 years.
2. Canaan (10:6, 15-19) = the promised land and the peoples that dwelled in the promised land before Israel.

From Canaan came Israel's enemies like the Jebusites (inhabitants of Jerusalem), Amorites, Girgashites, Hivites. The Canaanites consisted of multiple peoples. From Canaan came wicked cities like Sodom and Gomorrah.

3. Nimrod = a mighty hunter who possessed a kingdom, including major cities like Babylon and Nineveh.

Mighty likely means mighty in battle. He was a city builder who expanded his kingdom through violence.

4. Babel (10:10) = Babylon the city, located in modern-day Iraq.

5. ***“the land of Shinar”*** = the ancient name for Babylonia. The city Babel was located in the region of Shinar. Shinar became the Babylonian empire that deported/exiled Judah in the days of Nebuchadnezzar (605, 597, 586 BC).
6. Assyria (10:11) = the world power before Babylon. The people that deported the northern kingdom (Israel) in 722 BC. Assyria fell to Babylon in 609 BC.
7. Nineveh = became the capital of the Assyrian empire.

The point? Canaan, the land and the people, will play a major part in Israel's history. A lot of wickedness came from the line of Ham.

READ 10:21-31

These verses focus on Shem's descendants.

“for in his days the earth was divided” – 10:25

A reference to the tower of Babel.

The territory in which they lived extended from Mesha in the direction of Sephar to the hill country of the east. – 10:30

Here we're told where Joktan's (brother of Peleg) descendants settled after the scattering at the tower of Babel. The location is uncertain. It's believed to be located within modern day Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

READ 10:32

The earth was filled and nations were formed from the descendants of Noah's sons.

READ 11:1-9

Noah's genealogy is interrupted for the tower of Babel event.

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. – 11:1

We're going back in time. Before the peoples of the earth had their own languages.

And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. – 11:2

“migrated” indicates there was some movement after the flood. ***“settled there”*** indicates they were done moving. This was a problem because, after the flood, Noah was instructed to ***“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth”*** (9:1). They weren't filling the earth.

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. – 11:3

This agrees with archaeological evidence. Because of a lack of stone in the region, ancient peoples (4th millennium) in the region used both mud bricks and oven-fired/baked bricks. And they used bitumen/tar/asphalt to hold the bricks in place.

Those in Palestine had stone and mortar. Moses is explaining why these ancient peoples used different materials than the Israelites did, indicating Moses had access to information about ancient practices in distant lands!

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.” – 11:4

The people in Shinar plan to do two things:

1. They want to build a city.

2. They want to build a tall tower that reaches into the heavens.

Behind these plans lie two goals/purposes:

3. They want to make a name for themselves.
4. They don't want to be dispersed.

Building a city will allow them to dwell in the same place together.

Ziggurat

The tower may reflect the ancient Mesopotamian ziggurat: a temple complex dedicated to a particular god. The inner core was mud bricks, the outer core baked bricks. Secured and held together by bitumen. 150 x 200 foot base. 120 feet high. A city-tower. A shrine at ground level beside the ziggurat. An adjoining court that was the market and social center of the city.

The center of the city in ancient Mesopotamia was a massive complex dedicated to a false god. If this tower was a Ziggurat, idolatry was involved.

And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. – 11:5

When God looks at something, he evaluates it.

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. – 11:6

God has concerns about what he sees.

At this time they're "**one people**" and "**one language**" = they all speak the same language and they're a unified group. They're not divided. It's not **modern-day America**. No two-party system. No gridlock. No allegiance to the party line no matter what the policy is. No TV ads to make one another look bad. No spinning the narrative whatever way makes the opposing side look bad. They're all in agreement. We have unified humanity. And God doesn't like it!

God has concerns about what will be if the situation remains unchanged. The things "**they propose to do**" aren't good in God's assessment.

Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." – 11:7

God's solution? I'll give them different languages so they can't understand one another.

So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. – 11:8

The result? God succeeded. Inability to communicate ceased the building project. With the city project halted, the peoples moved to settle elsewhere. God gets what he wants: they scatter, the earth is filled. The people don't get what they want: no city, no tower, they scatter.

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. – 11:9

The word Babel is similar to the verb confused. Babylon becomes a picture of confusion. Babylon becomes a picture of evil mankind thwarted by God.

"there the LORD confused the language of all the earth" = an event in one place had worldwide effects. The diverse languages of our world stem from one event.

The point isn't the mechanics. The point isn't the geography. The point is God's negative assessment. The point is human sin. The point is God's intervention to accomplish God's will for humanity.

BIG PICTURE?

1. Wanted a name for themselves.
2. Wanted to do things their own way, not God's way.

That's the essence of fallen humanity: displacing God with ourselves!

Point 1: God isn't after unity for unity's sake

The people are of one mind. And God doesn't like it. Why? Because it's a **godless unity**. They want a name for themselves. Pride. So God divides a unified, prideful people. The pattern repeats itself in Scripture.

Israel's told to separate from the nations (see Leviticus 20:24-26; Deuteronomy 7:1-5). Can't eat their food = can't eat with them. Can't intermarry with them. Can't imitate their practices. Can't serve their gods. In fact, God separates Israel from Ham's descendants.

Jesus created division within Israel.

"So there was division among the people over him." – **John 7:43**

"And there was division among them." – **John 9:16** (healing the man born blind)

"There was again a division among the Jews because of these words." – **John 10:19**

Jesus came to bring division within families.

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." – **Matthew 10:34-35**

Jesus also came to bring **Godward unity**. Unity in himself. In **Ephesians 2:14-16**, Jesus achieved peace among Jews and Gentiles, ending their hostility, making them "*one new man*" by his death on the cross. In **Philippians 1:27; 2:2** uses the language "*one spirit...one mind...same mind*" to describe what he wants in the Philippian church = thinking the same things, having the same desires, same goals because of a common allegiance to Jesus.

In the new heavens and new earth, the scattered nations will be reunited in Christ (Rev 5:9-10; 7:9-10; 21:26), agreeing that "*Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!*"

God isn't pleased by an America unified in sinful practice and ideology. God isn't pleased by families united in godless aspirations. God likes godly dissent! Jesus came to divide. Jesus came to unite. As his disciples, sometimes we'll create division. Sometimes, we'll create unity. That's the natural consequence of an evil world system existing alongside people with allegiance to Jesus.

We don't intentionally try to create division. We try to commend the gospel through honesty, being trustworthy, hard work, being merciful, exercising self-control, etc. But if faithfulness to Jesus requires division, so be it.

Practical question: Am I okay with the division allegiance to Jesus creates?

Point 2: God isn't after a people seeking a name for themselves

Babylon, the evil world system opposed to God, manifests itself throughout the Bible:

1. The people of Babel in Genesis 11.
2. The vicious, destructive, prideful empire ruled by Nebuchadnezzar.
3. The Roman Empire (1 Pet 5:13; Rev 17:9, 18), full of sexual immorality and blasphemy and the blood of the saints (Rev 17:1-6).
4. The evil world system that comes to an end at the return of Christ (Rev 18:2-3, 10, 21-24; 1 John 2:15-17).

It's from this evil world system that the pursuit of a name for ourselves arises. The world tells us God is irrelevant. The world tells us our happiness is king. The world tells us happiness comes when we make a name for ourselves.

After a name for ourselves

1. Immodest dress; muscles.

Look at me. Tell me how good I look. Give me praise.

2. Fancy car, flashy clothes, promotion at work.

Look at my stuff. Look at my success. Tell me how great I am.

3. The preacher, Sunday school teacher, or ladies Bible study teacher who longs for applause and affirmation.

Am I after recognition/worship, or am I after moving people to glorify God? Is my agenda selfish or Godward? Am I okay if a guest preacher's sermon has more views than mine? Am I preaching to be recognized or to feed God's sheep?

4. Parenting for applause.

Am I parenting so that people will tell me how good a job I'm doing (parenting for applause)? Or am I parenting to raise up godly disciples who will flourish because of their devotion to God (parenting for God's glory and our children's good)?

5. The number one manifestation in the church might be not sharing our struggles with one another because reputation is number one, not the condition of our heart, not glorifying God.

Do we fail to share our struggles because we want a name for ourselves? What would people think about me if they knew who I really am? What would people think about me if they knew about my struggle with this sin? What would people think of me if they knew what was happening in my home? So we don't get marriage counseling. We don't confess our sins to one another. We don't share our struggles. We don't ask for prayer.

You have a loved one dying. You think I can't tell anyone how I feel. You have a child going astray and you're crushed. Can't let anyone know how I feel. Need people to think I'm strong. Maybe it would be better to let people know you have a heart.

Sometimes spiritual growth requires honesty and seeking help, not a cover-up to save face!

Practical question: am I more concerned about my reputation than my heart?

Gospel

There's two ways to live. For God or for yourself. For God or for the world.

The Bible teaches us the way to God is self-denial, following Jesus.

The Bible teaches us our problem is sin. Doing life our own way, not God's way.

The Bible teaches us Jesus came to die to rescue us from ourselves. By dying on a cross.

Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many so that whoever believes would be rescued from the wrath to come and have eternal life. Jesus also died to bring newness of life = a new heart with new desires.

If you wouldn't call yourself a follower of Jesus, do you recognize your sin, your brokenness, your lack of concern for God himself? If so, turn from your sins by trusting in Jesus. God is merciful. Tell us if you believe.

Does God honor those who seek a name for themselves? Genesis 11 says the answer is no.

READ 11:10-26

Shem's genealogy is resumed. Why these names? To resume Peleg's line. To get us to Abram (Abraham). Everything's been building to this.

After the fall, God promised there would arise a singular offspring of the woman (Eve) who would deliver a fatal blow to the serpent (Satan). That singular offspring is Jesus.

The genealogies divert and narrow to show us the line of Christ, the line of promise, the elect line: Adam → Seth → Noah → Shem → Abram. The line will narrow again in Genesis.

From Abram will come the Savior, the snake-crusher, Jesus Christ.