

The Tower of Babel

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[0:00] Well, this morning we're going to be looking at the Tower of Babel and the praise of Christ. And you might be thinking that the Tower of Babel seems like an out-of-the-way story.

I'm not sure how it applies to where I'm at. It's an interesting story, but I'm not sure where it fits into modern life. Well, if that's what you're thinking, let's begin just with a couple of questions.

Where do all the languages come from of this world and all the people groups? Why is there fighting now between Ukraine and Russia?

Why are there conflicts between countries of the world? Are languages and people groups the result of sin? Are they a good idea, full of potential for the glory of Christ?

Is it good that there are separate, independent political states, or is that a bad thing? What does God think of a monolithic super state?

[1:13] And then ask yourself this, is the same sin of Babel something that I find in my heart? Is the root sin in my heart?

Well, let's look at those things. Because I think as we look at them, we're going to see that the Tower of Babel has a lot more to do with our life than what we realize.

So let's begin by looking at Genesis chapter 10. Genesis chapter 10. Now the flood is over.

And we're not going to read Genesis chapter 10. I just want to point out a few things here. The flood is over. And now we have a big list of tribes, nations, languages, and peoples.

And if you were to count them, you would find that there are 70 of them, which is probably a symbolic number. If this isn't all, it's supposed to represent all of the nations.

[2:24] It's 7 times 10. And you notice that one of the distinctions that divides these groups of people is language. Look at verse 5. And this is something that you see three times, but we'll just look at verse 5.

From these, the maritime people spread out into the territories by their clans within their nations, each with its own language.

So chapter 10, it tells us that there's all these distinctions. But it's only in chapter 11 where we get the explanation of where these distinctions, how they came about, where they took place.

So chapter 10 comes first in our Bibles, but chapter 11 is actually the explanation of where all the nations and the languages and the peoples come from. So it's interesting that after the flood, God told Noah to be fruitful and to multiply.

So it was sort of like the creation all over again in a certain way. He told Noah and his family and the animals to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth. And then we have chapter 10, where you have these people multiplying and filling the earth.

[3:38] And it would seem like, wow, they obeyed. They did what God told them to do. It looked like a simple fulfillment of God's command.

It looked like obedience. But then chapter 11, verses 1 through 9, drops a bomb on us. It wasn't obedience at all.

It wasn't obedience at all that brought these things about. These people weren't spreading to fill the earth. Instead, they were clustering. They were sticking together.

And they weren't sticking together to make a nice little God-fearing society. They stuck together because they were proud. And they were self-sufficient.

And they were looking for self-glorification and self-salvation. So let's look at 11, verses 1 through 4. Now, the whole world had one language and a common speech.

[4:43] And as man moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly. And they used bricks instead of stone and tar for mortar.

Then they said, come, let us build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.

So the Tower of Babel is in direct rebellion to what God told Noah and his family and the peoples of the earth to do. Now, there's a couple of things going on here.

In the narrow picture, they want to build a city. And in that city, they want a tower that reaches all the way to the heavens. And I think it helps for us to, we have a tendency, or I have a tendency, and I can't imagine that this isn't something that you don't have.

But when I think of tower, I think of a skyscraper, right? I think of the Sears Tower, something long or high and skinny and really going up.

[5:55] But that, one, that wouldn't have been possible with the building materials they had. That's not what they were trying to do. That's how we think of towers. But they were talking about something like a pyramid or a ziggurat, something that, a stepped thing.

And so they weren't really planning on building a tall, narrow tower. This was going to be a mountain, a huge mountain, man-made mountain reaching to the heavens.

So imagine a city on a mountain or with a mountain reaching to the heavens at the center. Now, why do they want to do that?

Well, they want to make a name for themselves. They want attention. They want all eyes on them. They want people to see how great and good they are. They want praise. They want self-worship. So this is about self-glorification. This city is a temple to them, to man, to what we can do.

[6:59] It's about praise. And you notice it's about security. It's about salvation. It's about protection. Why are they building this city with a mountain, on a mountain?

So they won't be scattered over the whole face of the earth. Now, that's the narrow picture. But I want to put this, and maybe some alarm bells are already going off in your head.

Maybe some contrasts are already going off. So I want to put this incident in the broader biblical picture. Because this isn't just an interesting story about how languages began.

This is man's first grand attempt to do for himself only something God could do. This is man's first attempt at building an eternal city on a mountain.

Now, let's go to the end. Let's go to the book of Revelation. What comes out of heaven?

[8:05] It's a city. And it's a mountain. And it's God's eternal city on a mountain. Now, remember, throughout Old Testament history, Jerusalem had a name.

It was called Mount Zion. It was a city on a mountain. And it's where God lived with man. Well, Jerusalem comes full circle.

It comes down in fulfillment at the end. So the Tower of Babel is man's self-salvation project. It's man's attempt at bringing about the eternal state where heavens and the earth are one.

So the city of Babel, in the widest picture, is about man saving himself and bringing about a world where heaven and earth are one. After all, the city and the tower is going up all the way to the heavens.

Now, it's all about pride. It's all about self-glorification. It's all about self-dependence. It's about works. It's self-motivated, self-powered, self-dependent. And in the end, it's disastrous.

[9:12] And it brings God's judgment down. Now, I think what is really important is to see that chapter 11 in the Tower of Babel is, in some ways, the introduction of the whole narrative, the beginning of God's salvation project.

Because chapter 11 begins with the Tower of Babel, and it ends with Abraham and Sarah, a barren couple who are completely powerless, who are past the time of having children.

And God says, this is where my eternal city is going to begin. Not with you and your strength, but with two people who have nothing but my word to lean on.

And so, Abraham and Sarah is the beginning of God's eternal mountain city where heaven and earth are one. And it's the exact opposite of Babel.

It's humility. It's faith. It's God doing it. Because they can't do it. It's God getting all the honor. And the pride of man means nothing in the city of God.

[10:34] So, that's the sin of Babel. It's pride. It's disobedience. It's just straight-up rebellion. And it's ultimately a self-salvation project.

It's an alternative to the gospel. It's an alternative to Jesus Christ. It's an alternative to salvation by faith or through faith alone. It's man saying, I'll do it myself.

I don't need your heaven. I'll make one of my own. So, in some ways, it's Adam's sin all over again. Verse 5 says, But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. Now, that word men there is actually, literally, the sons of Adam. The sons of man were building. The sons of Adam were building. So, here you have Adam's sons doing what their father did. Rebelling. So, Adam was going to become like God on his own terms. And so were his sons building this tower of Babel. Now, look at what happens. Look at God's response. [11:41] He's not put off. He's not put on his heels. He's not worried. Instead, what does verse 5 say? Someone read that for me. But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building.

Okay. So, the Lord came down to see the tower and the building. Now, remember Psalm 113. He stoops to look down on the heavens and the earth. And so, here, in some ways, this is very humorous. If you read it in a certain way, I think it's meant to be a little bit humorous. So, the men have been working on it and working on it. And now they're starting to see their mountain and their city coming together. Their great tower coming together. And their hearts are swelling with pride at what they've done. They've got goals. They have plans. And they're doing it. And they're seeing all their work starting to pay off. And their city and their mountain is getting bigger and bigger. Nothing is impossible for them. [12:43] And they're saying, look at how high it is. Look at how big it is. Look how great this is. So, that's their view of their masterpiece.

They're on the ground looking up saying, wow, this thing is big. Now, what's God's view? He has to come down to see it. God, in a certain way, can't even see it from where he's at. It's so little. It's so insignificant. It's so far from heaven that God has to come down to get a good look at it. Now, obviously, that's a metaphor. It's supposed to be ironic. They're like, woo, it's so big. And God is saying, it's so small. I really can't even see it from where I'm at. And God comes down. And he brings it before himself. And he judges them. And he divides the languages. And he forces them apart. And now, in part, this is his judgment on them for their pride. [13:45] He thwarts their plans. How many times in Psalms does it say that? Kings have plans, and God thwarts them. He defeats his enemies. So here he is, thwarting their plans.

And so, in one way, this is God's judgment on men. But in another way, God's response is very gracious. It's painful, but it is gracious. He's keeping them from going so far into rebellion and in self-sufficiency that they would never need him. And if he doesn't stop them, they're never going to turn to his eternal city. They're going to just be happy with what they've done. And they're going to lose out forever on what he's going to do. And so, what does he do? In judgment, mixed with grace, he drastically limits their ability to cooperate with each other.

He gives them different languages. So he drastically increases the conflict and the tensions on the earth. So what we're seeing out there in our world, and what we've seen throughout history, all this conflict and tension, it's God's judgment, but it's also God's grace on man.

[15:02] So Iran versus Iraq. And North Korea versus South Korea. And 30 years ago, when it was the United States versus the USSR, now it's the pride of one group of people fighting the pride of another group of people.

And they keep each other in check. They keep each other in check. And so all the back and forth, all the misunderstanding keeps man from running straight into hell. It gives them a chance to pause, to think, this is not the way it's supposed to be. And is there something else out there? So he limits their global aspirations. Now, the question I want to ask is, how is this designed to glorify Christ? How is all this and all that we see out there in the world designed to magnify Jesus Christ?

Remember what we said a couple of weeks ago. When God permits something, he does it for a reason. God never acts whimsically, haphazardly.

[16:13] So when he permits a spectacular sin, like this one, this pride, this arrogant sidestep around the gospel, he knows exactly what he's doing.

Now that means that the peoples that we see and the languages that are in the world are not an afterthought. They are God's judgment on sin. And at the same time, they are designed by God to

glorify his son.

So, how does this spectacular sin and the division of all those languages serve to magnify the glory of Christ? I want to look at five different ways.

One, God's division of the world hinders the rise of a monolithic, anti-Christian state.

God's division of the world hinders the rise of a monolithic, that means one, anti-Christian state.

Now, if there was this monolithic, one anti-God state, it would have the power to simply wipe out all Christians.

[17 : 30] And we often think of the diversity of languages and cultures and political states as a hindrance to world evangelization. We think, if only we didn't have that language divide, if only we didn't have that cultural divide, then, really, the glory of Christ would spread so quickly.

But that's not how God looks at it. That's not the way God sees it. God is more concerned with human uniformity, where we're all the same, than human diversity.

Because we are far too evil to allow us to unite in one language with one government. So, the gospel of the glory of Christ spreads better, and it flourishes more, because of the 6,500 languages that there are left in the world.

And because of the almost 200 nations in the world. The gospel spreads better because of those things, not in spite of them.

So, the division of the world helps spread the gospel finally. It does not hinder it. Does that make sense? I think that's a totally different way of looking at things, isn't it?

[18 : 51] If there was just one nation, one country, yeah, in some ways, communication would be easier, but the evil would be so rampant. Secondly, now, someone might say, but isn't God going to, at the end of the days, the last days, allow a final global government?

to persecute Christians. And I think the answer is yes. In the last days, God will loosen the restraints that hold back this evil.

And Paul says, the man of lawlessness will come, and John in Revelation 13 says, the beast, which is this great anti-God government in service to Satan, will kill the witness of the church and persecute God's people everywhere.

In Revelation 17, John sees a woman, a great prostitute, and all the kings of the earth commit adultery with her, and her name is Babylon. Now, the tower they built was called the Tower of Babel.

That word occurs 200 times in the Old, about 200 times in the Old Testament. And in all but a few, it's translated as Babylon. So you see the connection.

[20 : 09] What God stopped from happening in Genesis, he will allow to happen in the end. And Revelation says, and Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes, was drunk with the blood of the saints, and the blood of those who bore testimony.

The question is, is why? Why does he stop at them, but allow it, apparently, to happen at the end? Why allow the nations to unite against God and against his people?

And I think the answer is to make the victory of Christ all the more glorious. To make her fall all the more devastating. We have the saying, the bigger they are, the harder they fall.

Now, you know, we see that in everyday life. So if my basketball team, the Argus Dragons, if we beat Bremen, that's good, I guess.

I mean, unless you're Meredith. But the point is, Meredith and Ryan, anyways, that's one thing. But if my team beats a huge team, well, that's glorious.

[21 : 29] That's something. The bigger they are, the harder they fall. And Revelation 18 says, her sins are heaped as high as heaven. Sound familiar? We're going to build this up to heaven, and her sins are heaped as high as heaven.

And she glorified herself, and she lived in luxury, and she says, I sit as a queen, and I am no widow, and morning I shall never see. And then the angels begin to say, whoa, whoa, oh great city, oh Babylon, city of power, in one hour your doom has come.

So it's no slow fall into decay for Babylon. It's no slow collapse for this eternal mountain city of man. Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea and said, with such violence, the great city of Babylon will be thrown down.

So Babylon's fall is Christ's victory. That's the point. So why does God allow it to happen? In order to give Jesus more glory at the end.

Now third, here's how you see the glory of Christ. What does Matthew 28, 18 and 19 say?

[22:54] It's the Great Commission. How does that begin? All? Yeah. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations. Yes, God judged man for their sin at Babel and threw them into confusion and into division.

But in the end, God magnifies his son as his son gains disciples of all of those nations. Not just in one nation.

His authority doesn't extend to just one nation. His authority goes into every nation. So his power and his authority is more glorious because there are different nations than if it was if there was just one.

So his authority is all the more glorious because we're kings of the earth have geographical boundaries to their kingdoms. They rule in this nation, but they have no authority in this nation.

[24:08] So Kim Jong-un, the leader of North Korea, total power in North Korea, total worship in North Korea. They're falling all over themselves to do whatever he says.

In our country, he's mocked. No authority here. Total authority there, no authority there. Jesus has no kingdom like that.

His kingdom, his authority, his power extends into every nation. And it's all the more glorious because his kingdom is not provincial. It's not just this one little area.

The nations are his inheritance. The nations are his inheritance. They have been given to him. They've been signed over to him. And he is taking possession of them.

He is taking them all. And that is glorious. That is glorious. That his authority goes into every nation. Now fourth, God uses the different languages to glorify the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[25:19] So not only the authority and the power of Jesus Christ, but the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It glorifies him. So who and what has the power to save both Jew and Greek?

It's the gospel. What has the power to save an Englishman and an Aborigine? It's the gospel. What has the power to save an Inuit in northern Canada and an Amhara in Ethiopia?

It's the gospel. And the gospel is reaping and bearing fruit everywhere it goes. I've told you this, or I've said this to some people anyways, but one of the best worship services I have ever been to was in Ethiopia at the International Evangelical Church.

And everywhere you looked, it was different kinds of people. There were Ethiopians there and there were Americans there. There were Koreans and Chinese and Kenyans. And there they were all over this building, different colors, different people, different backgrounds.

And we sang this one song called His Grace is Enough. They sang it, and I sang it, and we all sang it together. And it was a taste of heaven. To see, we're not all the same, and yet we have all partaken of this one grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[26:43] So the glory of the gospel is that it is not provincial. It is not a tribal religion. Islam is a tribal religion.

Ladies, if you want to be a serious Muslim, you better wear the hajib, the head covering, the style of the Middle East, if you're going to be a serious Muslim. It never rose above its tribal nature.

It's unity through uniformity. But that's not the gospel. The gospel is not unity through uniformity. The gospel is unity through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We all partake of Him. We all share in Him. And so He gets the glory when we're joined together. So if there was no diversity of languages and peoples, if the spectacular son of Babel had not happened, then the glory of Jesus Christ would be diminished.

It would not be magnified. It would be diminished. It wouldn't be a rainbow of many colors. It would be a rainbow of one color. And a rainbow of one color is not a very beautiful rainbow.

[27:52] But the gospel shines more brilliantly and more beautifully. And Jesus Christ shines more beautifully because it's being refracted through this prism of a thousand languages and hundreds of cultures.

and so that's why we have to be careful when we think about other cultures and we can't insist that people of different cultures worship and sing and act just like we do because that doesn't glorify Christ.

That reduces the gospel to this cultural thing and robs the gospel of part of its beauty. Now that's number four. Number five and this is where we'll end.

And this is last but it is not least at all. The praise Jesus gets from a multitude of languages is more beautiful because of the diversity.

The praise that Jesus gets from a multitude of languages and cultures is more beautiful because of the diversity. So listen to Revelation 5.

[28:58] You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth. Revelation 7. And after this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one can count from every nation and tribe and people and language standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb and they were wearing white robes and they were holding palm branches in their hands and they cried out in a loud voice salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

So where did this multinational culturally diverse different language people where did all this worship come from?

Where did the worship of heaven find its root? All the way back in the sin of the tower of Babel. God brought it out of Babel.

He turned the pride in the exaltation and the self-salvation of man and he worked it in such a way that all the pride and the glory and the salvation belongs to his son.

[30:22] And I hope this is beginning to stoke your faith. I hope this is shovelfuls of coal into the furnace of your faith because this is your God.

God he sees men joined in rebellion against him and he turns it in such a way that now it praises and glorifies him. He doesn't only take the best things he takes the very worst things and he brings them honor brings himself honor.

So he doesn't work just despite sin he works through the sins of man to exalt his son. And so two things two applications two things for you to go out and do.

One, put away fear. Put away fear. Our God reigns.

We have the right to be concerned no doubt but we have no right whatsoever to be paralyzed in fear and consumed with worry. Our God reigns.

[31:27] Number two, we should worship him. Worship him. Praise the Lord from the earth. You great sea creatures and all ocean depths lightning and hail snow and clouds stormy winds that do his bidding you mountains and all hills fruit trees and all cedars wild animals and all cattle small creatures and flying birds kings of the earth and all nations you princes and all rulers on earth young men and maidens old men and children let them praise the name of the Lord for his name alone is exalted his splendor is above the earth and the heavens we should praise him because he has done such a wonderful thing we are dismissed Thank you.