



First Baptist Church Selmer

FIRM FOUNDATION • THE TOWER OF BABEL • GENESIS 11:1-9; JAMES 3:6 • 9/17/2023

MAIN POINT

God is sovereign, working out His purposes through people who resist Him, as well as through those who obey Him.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Have you ever traveled to a country that spoke a different language than you?

What are some of the specific challenges you encountered when trying to communicate?

What simple tasks suddenly became difficult because of the language barrier?

Communication is something that we easily take for granted. If you are shopping, you can ask a worker where the item you are looking for is located. You can ask where the bathroom is. Even our money is a form of communication. When you are in a foreign country with a different currency, it is difficult to figure out what something costs or even if you are receiving the correct change!

At the Tower of Babel, God confused the languages of the people so that they could not communicate with one another. If not speaking a language means it is difficult to find a bathroom, buy milk, or make change, imagine how difficult it would be to try to build a building together!

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 11:1-4.

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. 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.'" (ESV)

What were the goals of the people when they settled in the land of Shinar?

What is wrong with the goals that they set for themselves?

Soon after the flood, the descendants of Noah and his family moved East and settled in Shinar, which in itself is not a problem. However, their two stated goals gave the Lord cause for concern. First, they said they wanted to build the tower to make a name for themselves. The problem with this is, our purpose on earth is to magnify the name of the Lord, not make a name for ourselves. This passage subtly implies the pride that the builders had in themselves and in their creation.

Another problem is that the people were building in order to keep from being "scattered over the face of the whole earth." After the flood, "God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth'" (Genesis 9:1). God's stated will was for the people to fill the earth; their plan was to stay in one place instead of filling the earth as God intended. There appears to be two problems with the people at Shinar: pride and disobedience.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 11:5-9.

5 "And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. 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.' 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." (ESV)

Why would it bother the Lord that “*nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them*”?

Why would the language curse still be in effect today?

What does it say about mankind that it might be better for us to have difficulty understanding one another?

The account of the Tower of Babel comes right after the account of the flood. Before the flood, the judgment on mankind was that *“the LORD saw that man’s wickedness was widespread on the earth and that every scheme his mind thought of was nothing but evil all the time”* (Genesis 6:5). In this passage, the “plan” of the people was to make a great name for themselves. Since the beginning of Genesis, we have seen that plans and schemes of mankind have been towards evil and not for good. God’s judgment on the plans of mankind indicates that if God had allowed them to continue in their plans, it would have had disastrous consequences for them.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 3:6

6 “And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.” (ESV)

Why is the tongue such a dangerous thing?

How can the Babel account be a warning for us today?

James teaches us that our words are indeed powerful. The people of Shinar were using their words for their own harm, so in order to limit that damage, God sent them their separate ways by confusing their speech.

Though God judged the world by confusing language, we know that through Christ God is going to restore all people by making them one kingdom again. When we become Christians, we submit ourselves to the kingship of Jesus. We become a part of a body of believers; our goal is no longer to *“make a name for ourselves,”* but to give God the glory in everything that we do. Furthermore, when God restores all things the language curse will

no longer be necessary because every word we say will be said for the glory of God and not for our own.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How can we be more intentional to guard the words we speak this week?

How can we be sure to use our words to bring God glory instead of using them for our own?

What kinds of speech should we avoid?

PRAYER

In a time of group prayer, ask the Father to help us use our words for His glory. Pray that we will be convicted when we indulge in gossip or use our words in any way to build up our pride or hurt others. Close by asking God to help us cooperate with one another in such a way as to bring glory to Him rather than to ourselves.

COMMENTARY

| GENESIS 11:1-9

11:1. The Tower of Babylon incident occurred earlier than at least some of the events of chapter 10 since the whole earth still had the same language and vocabulary (10:5,20,31).

11:2. The land of Shinar corresponds to ancient Babylonia and includes the region of the cities of Babylon, Erech, Accad, and Calneh (10:10).

11:3. Unlike the original readers' homeland of Israel, with its extensive quantity of limestone building material, the people of Babylonia used oven-fired bricks.

Archaeological excavations have confirmed that ancient inhabitants of the land used asphalt for mortar.

11:4. The people's pride and ambition is expressed in three different ways: (1) the fivefold use of the first-person pronouns—us (twice), ourselves (twice), and we; (2) their desire to build a tower into the sky, thus giving them access to "the heavens," the domain of God; and (3) their attempt at self-glorification—let us make a name for ourselves. Because they

did it to avoid being scattered over the face of the whole earth, all their efforts amounted to a rebellion against God and His command to fill the earth (9:1).

11:5. In spite of their best efforts to elevate themselves to God's domain, the Lord still had to come down to look over the city and the tower. Human attempts to achieve glory, which belongs to God alone, always fall pitifully short.

11:6. God's concern that nothing the people might plan to do would be impossible for them does not express a divine fear that humans might someday become as powerful as God. Rather, it conveys dismay that people, unchecked, would undertake extraordinary deeds of evil and defiance.

11:7. Perhaps the most dramatic Hebrew wordplay in the Tower of Babylon episode involves the deliberate reversal of sounds between verses 3 and 7. Human beings created brick—a word which contains the sound sequence l-b-n in Hebrew—to rebel against God. In response, God created confusion—a Hebrew word containing n-b-l—to reverse the evil human plot.

11:9. Most English versions refer to "Babel" here, but this is the same Hebrew word translated "Babylon" throughout the Old Testament. The connection between the words "Babylon" and "confused" constitute another of the many instances of wordplay in this chapter. The Lord's action had two positive outcomes: first, because it confused the language of the whole earth, it ended the possibility of large-scale evil ventures; second, it caused humanity to scatter over the face of the whole earth, thus bringing people into compliance with God's command to fill the earth (9:1).

| JAMES 3:6

3:4-6. The tongue is a small part of the body but has tremendous power and influence of speech—for good or bad. James pointed out a small fire could start a raging inferno that engulfs a huge forest. In the same way, uncontrolled speech can be almost unlimitedly destructive. The Greek word translated "corrupts" means "stains" or "soils" and has a further sense of contaminating. The tense conveys continuous action: Uncontrolled speech goes on contaminating the whole body—the total personality. Also, such speech sets the course of life on fire. The phrase "the course of life" (literally, "the wheel of life") likely refers to a person's span of life from birth to death. Uncontrolled speech cuts a path of destruction throughout a person's entire lifetime.