

Text: Gen 11.1-9

Our story this afternoon involves the famous tower of Babel. You know this story. As we work through it, we want to discern what the people after the flood were doing wrong.

As we understand what they did wrong, we can learn something about our own human nature as well.

Read Gen 11.1-9

One of my favorite commentators is Tom Constable. I've noticed that he is one of those who *love* chiasms. He sees them more frequently in the text than I do.

However, in this case, he outlines this story chiastically. I can see the rationale for outlining it this way, even if Moses didn't purposely create such a device in the text. I think Constable's outline breaks down a little bit in the middle, so here is my offering, based on his:

One language in the earth (1)

They settled there (2)

They said to one another (3a)

Come, let us make bricks (3b)

Come, let us build a city and a tower to make a name (4a)

Otherwise we will be scattered (4b)

The Lord came down to see what men built (5)

Behold they are one people (6a)

Having begun, nothing will be impossible to them (6b)

Come let us go down and confuse them (7a)

They did not understand one another (7b)

The Lord scattered them from there (8)

Confused languages over the whole earth (9)

We need to consider one other structural detail in the text.

Gen 10 ends with the genealogy of Shem. We see it working its way down to Eber in v. 24, and v. 25 mentions Eber has two sons.

It is during the days of Peleg that the earth was divided, then the genealogy focuses on his brother Joktan — all the way to the end of ch. 10.

Now look at the rest of chapter 11, after the tower of Babel incident — we have a genealogy again. Shem's genealogy. But this time when it gets to Eber it follows Peleg's line with no mention whatever of Joktan.

And Peleg's line gets us to Abram at the end of the chapter. This structure is no accident.

Proposition: God rules over man's affairs, whether man accepts God's rule or not.

I. The anti-God movements of men (1-4)

A. The unified language of men (1)

1. The unified language not in itself a problem
2. It was the "unified talk" of the language that created a problem

The talk, as we will see, opposed the command of God to spread out through the earth.

B. The movements of men to the east (2)

1. The movement is away from Ararat towards what would become Babylon
2. The implication is that men found this land suitable, and settled there (without dispersing further)
3. Which line were these men from?
 - a. Nothing in the text suggests anything about their lineage directly
 - b. It might seem that these were at least Semitic peoples, given the place in the genealogies we mention
 - c. The implication of universal judgement of all men suggests, however, that these are all the descendants of Noah
4. Their very movements are a failure to obey

C. The ambition of the men to build (3-4)

1. To build a city
2. To build a tower

3. To build a name

One commentator points out that the technology of brick making first developed in Babylonia, then spread throughout the world. Using wordplays in Hebrew, God's ridicules their building, which stands in for his ridicule of their polytheism and ambition.

II. The over-man movements of God (6-9)

A. God understands man's objective (6)

B. God acts to confuse and scatter them (7-8)

1. They could no longer speak with one another

2. They stopped their building project and scattered

C. Their works came to be known as Babel (9) and they went "from there"

1. The Babylonians considered their name to mean "gate of the gods"

2. The text has word play with the word for confused → "*bālal* (very similar to *babel*)

3. They sought a name; God gave them an name: confused

4. Ironically, no one is named in this account, but when we come to the end of Peleg's line in this chapter, Abraham becomes a man who is given a name in history over all the other names in these chapters

God is in control, which brings us to the central verse of the passage:

III. God's oversight of all man's works (5)

A. The verse begins with a "disjunctive" – not translated – "but the Lord..."

1. Highlights God's objection

2. And God's intervention

B. God's intervention makes plain the puny efforts of man

1. They were building to "reach into heaven"

2. God came *down* so he could have a closer look at their tiny tower

P^s 2.1-4 Why are the nations in an uproar And the peoples devising a vain thing?² The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,³ “Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!”⁴ He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them.

3. The very works of men are perishable like men

- a. Hebrew for sons of men: “*běně hā’ādām*” (sons of Adam)
- b. The full clause says, “which the sons of men had built” — in Heb, it is this: “*bānû bēně hā’ādām*”
- c. The play on words (*bānû bēně*) suggests their building is as mortal and perishable as they are

This is true of all the building of mankind — it eventually breaks down into ruins.

C. The point for us

1. God sees our works, whether we live for God or for ourselves
2. God is much bigger than our works, we must
 - a. Acknowledge his sovereignty
 - b. Recognize our dependency
 - c. Order our spirits under his Glory, and worship and obey HIM

Conclusion:

Proposition: God rules over man’s affairs, whether man accepts God’s rule or not.

You will not escape God’s authority.

You will do better to love God and serve him than to imagine you can build a name for yourself apart from God.