

SCATTERED!

Genesis 11:1-9

Following the flood and the reappearance of dry land, God established a covenant with Noah and all living creatures. In that covenant they were told to be fruitful, multiply and abundantly populate the earth.

In the latter part of chapter nine the record relates an incident in which Noah had become intoxicated from the fermented grapes that had grown in a vineyard he had planted. That led to a situation in which his son Ham had shown disrespect for his father, but Shem and Japheth had exercised discretion and had honored their father by what they did.

That incident (after Noah sobered up and discovered what had happened) was followed by an immediate declaration by Noah regarding his sons and their future. He blessed Shem and Japheth and predicted bad things for Ham. We might wonder if this pronouncement from Noah caused the outcome of what happened to the descendants of his sons or if Noah was simply reading their character traits and was making a conclusion that such traits would predictably lead to the outcomes he pronounced.

In the tenth chapter we find a record of the descendants of the sons of Noah in a list of several generations after them. There is an interesting feature of Moses' treatment of the descendants of Ham. In the list of nations there is an interruption starting in verse eight and continuing to verse 12. These verses do not deal with the general movements of peoples and nations, but with one particular descendant of Cush, named Nimrod, who is said to have been the founder of the first world empire. Here is the first place in the Bible where the word "kingdom" occurs. The word is used, not of God's kingdom (as it is later), but of this first rival kingdom, that of Nimrod. This was obviously of great importance to Moses, for a related interruption occurs in the first nine verses of chapter 11, in the story of the tower of Babel.

Chapter ten describes where the various descendants of these sons of Noah were found after the scattering or dispersion that is recorded in chapter 11. We could say that chapter ten tells us the outcome and chapter eleven tells us why and how.

United by a Sinful Purpose – 11:1-4

¹Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. ²It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn *them* thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. ⁴They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *will reach* into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." Genesis 11:1-4 (NASB95)

The appearance of the first city [built by Nimrod] after the flood, can be related to the story of Cain and Abel, when Cain went out and built a city. That act illustrated the hunger of humanity to come together for companionship, even though they were not really ready to do it (as they still, obviously, are not ready to live together successfully in cities as evidenced by the high crime and murder rates in large cities). God's ultimate intention is to build a city for man and we see this in chapter twenty of the Revelation. Those who are close to God (such as Abraham) look for "a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." But man was not yet ready for that.

Now there they were, again ready to build a city to satisfy the desires of body and soul. Cities are centers of commercial and business life where all the needs of the body can best be met. Also, cities are centers of pleasure and culture, where all the desires of the soul can be satisfied: desire for beauty, art, and music and all the ingredients of culture.

The tower, on the other hand, was designed to satisfy the spirit of man. Here we see, reflected in these two things, a fundamental understanding of the nature of man as body, soul, and spirit. All are to be satisfied in these two elementary provisions, the city and the tower. A number of years ago, archaeologists discovered the remains of large towers (ziggurats) that these early people had built. They were built in a circular fashion with an ascending staircase that terminated in a shrine at the top, around which were written the signs of the zodiac. Obviously, the tower was a religious building, intending to expose man to the mystery of the heavens and the greatness of God (or god). That, perhaps, is what is meant here by the statement that they intended to build a tower with its top in the heavens.

They were impressed by its greatness architecturally. It was a huge thing for the men of that day to build and they apparently thought of it as reaching into heaven. But they also unquestionably were thinking of it as a means of communication with the spiritual world and maintaining contact with their god. God was not to be left out in the city of man. He was there, represented by this tower which represents a form of religion. Religion is simply mankind's attempt to undo the effects of the broken relationship caused by sin.

However, the heart of the matter is made clear in these words, "let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." Though there is a desire among humans to be close to other people, another force is also in operation that causes people to become isolated and have less real community when they "huddle together" in large concentrated population centers. It seems ironic that there is more sense of neighborhood in a farming community where the houses are a mile apart than there is in a high-rise apartment complex in the heart of a big city where people live side-by-side.

There is a basic concern among many of us that if we become "scattered" that we will be unknown, unhonored, unsung, and inconsequential. This concern may be a driving force for the "social media" explosion that we see happening today. The paradox of getting too close and that causing more separation is seen here also. Some people attempt to share everything about their lives (every article and picture they come across, what they had for supper, and their opinion on everything) and that drives others away. The fear of being scattered caused these early people to build a tower and a city. The ultimate motive is expressed in these words, "let us make a name for ourselves."

From that day on this has been the motto of humanity, "let us make a name for ourselves." I am always amused to see how many public edifices have a plaque somewhere on the building with the names of all the public officials who were in power when it was built: the mayor, the head of public works, etc. "Let us make a name for ourselves," is a fundamental urge of a fallen race. It reveals one of the basic philosophies of humanism: "Glory to man in the highest, for man is the master of all things." That is the central thought of humanism, glory to mankind.

The fact that this was a religious tower – and yet built to make a name for man – reveals the real motive behind most religions. It is a means by which man attempts to take for himself the glory of God. This helps us to understand the power of religion as it has pervaded the earth and permeated our culture ever since. It is a way by which man seeks to take part of what rightfully belongs only to God. This idea of man encroaching on what is reserved for God is the same idea that was developed in the story of the serpent's temptation for Eve to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. That area in the center of the garden was reserved for God.

From a practical standpoint, the structure that the people of Babel built was doomed to failure because of what they used to construct it. First of all, they used bricks rather than stones. Bricks are

more likely to crumble under heavy loads and from absorbed moisture that could freeze in extreme weather. The second error they made was in using tar rather than mortar to hold it all together. Tar has a property of being amorphous or can flow or move if sufficient pressure is applied to it. We see this in some street intersections where the asphalt gets distorted from cars braking at a stop sign and literally creating a wavy surface on the road. Their ziggurats eventually collapsed under their own weight. The lesson for us is that we need to be careful in what we include in building the church and in building up ourselves in our faith. The use of man-made ideas and principles are like brick that will crumble under its own weight and tar that moves when impacted by outside forces.

The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* has the following:

Written Babylonian accounts of the building of the city of Babylon refer to its construction in heaven by the gods as a celestial city, as an expression of pride (*Enuma Elish* VI, lines 55-64). These accounts say it was made by the same process of brick-making described in verse 3, with every brick inscribed with the name of the Babylonian god Marduk. Also the ziggurat, the step-like tower believed to have been first erected in Babylon, was said to have its top in the heavens. This artificial mountain became the center of worship in the city, a miniature temple being at the top of the tower. The Babylonians took great pride in their building; they boasted of their city as not only impregnable, but also as the heavenly city, *bā-ili* ("the gate of God").

The Babylonian god Marduk is thought to be connected to Nimrod. The language structure of that region sometimes has the first letter of a name as a prefix that is a designation of sorts. Also, there were no vowels in the language. So Nimrod would become NMRD and if we drop the first consonant of Nimrod's name (and take the others M, R, D) we will have the basic root word of the god of Babylon, whose name was Marduk, and whom most scholars identify with Nimrod. In the Babylonian religion, Nimrod (or Marduk) held a unique place. His wife was Semiramis. (In Cairo, Egypt, the Semiramis Hotel is named after this woman.) Marduk and Semiramis were the ancient god and goddess of Babylon. They had a son whom Semiramis claimed was virgin-born, and they founded the mother and child cult. This was the central character of the religion of ancient Babylon, the worship of a mother and child, supposedly virgin-born. You can see in this a clever attempt on the part of Satan to anticipate the genuine virgin birth and thus to cast disrepute upon the story when the Lord Jesus would later be born into history.

Reviewed by God – 11:5

⁵ The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. Genesis 11:5 (NASB95)

This verse is seen by some to be a disparaging comment on the efforts of the people of that region to make themselves great. They took pride in the great height of their tower supposing that it extended to heaven and yet Moses' account indicated that it was so far removed from reaching to heaven that God had to "come down" to even see it. Of course we realize that God, in His omniscience, already knew what was happening since nothing is hidden from Him.

This should be a lesson for us as we become prideful in our accomplishments that results in our comparing what we may do versus what other people have accomplished. Such pride results from using the wrong standard for our comparison. The standard is not another person. The standard is Jesus Christ. We are not called to build great monuments for our glory, but we are called to do everything to and for the glory of God.

Earlier, we observed that the tower built from bricks and tar had a fatal flaw that would cause its collapse. Do we see anything in the outlook and philosophy of our nation that might be a built-in flaw or a change in philosophy that will lead to the collapse of our country? One change that has developed over the past several decades is this idea that we are no longer a Christian nation and the blatant denial that it was intended to be founded upon principle found in the word of God.

If we look at the private communications of the founding father of the nation, we find that

they saw the hand of God or divine Providence as the guiding force and power that enable this nation to be established. They realized that the precepts upon which our nation and government were founded could only work for a “moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” In less than a hundred years (in 1863) we had changed our thinking from the idea that we were “a nation that was of God, by the principles and power of God, and for His purposes” to thinking that were “a nation of the people, by the people and for the people.”

Scattered by Confusion – 11:6-9

⁶The LORD said, “Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them.” ⁷“Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.” ⁸So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. ⁹Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth. Genesis 11:6-9 (NASB95)

God intervened in what was developing on the plain of Shinar. Genesis 11:5-9 describes how He intervened. God performed a miracle in the minds and vocal cords of the builders. He confused their language so that now, instead of speaking together and working together, their words brought confusion and an inevitable (because it was divinely appointed) scattering of these people over the earth.

Let’s look at God’s Council versus man’s council: There are several interesting features of this part of the story. The first is a second use of the word "come." Earlier the builders had used this word for the calling of their council: "*Come*, let's make bricks.... *Come*, let us build ourselves a city" (vv. 3, 4). But now God uses the same word (come) as He assembles His heavenly council and moves to confuse their language: "*Come*, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other" It is a way of saying that God always has the last word.

It has been a little more than one hundred fifty years since the declaration that “this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.” Today, we find that we have declared that we are no longer a “nation under God” and we have distorted the idea of “freedom” to mean murder of unborn human life, perverted marriage relationships and do anything you want to do without any thought of responsibility or accountability. In making these changes we are beginning to see real evidence that our nation may indeed be vulnerable to “perishing.”

We have seen the beginning and practice of total confusion of our language so that we must speak in politically correct terms, that good is interpreted as evil and evil is declared to be good. It is becoming more and more evident that we do not understand each other. We may be living in the same geographic area and have better means of communication but we are more separated from each other than we have ever been. Also, those who are in positions of leadership who should be attempting to unite us are only driving us farther apart. We have become the city of Babel.

The Babylonians wanted a city. Their city could not stand. But God provides His people with a city with foundations that will endure forever. God has His own plans for a city that is connected to the heavens. That city is called the New Jerusalem. In this city we will have a “coming together” at God’s invitation. In this city God will eliminate the confusion in the languages. We see an earnest of this promised inheritance in the birth of the church and the “language phenomenon” that happened on the Day of Pentecost.