

## Tower of Babel

**GE 10[8]** Now Cush became the father of **Nimrod** (Marduk); he became a **mighty one** on the earth.  
[9] He was a **mighty hunter** before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a **mighty hunter** before the LORD."  
[10] And the beginning of his kingdom was **Babel** and Erech and Accad and Calneh, in the land of **Shinar**.  
[11] From that land he went forth into Assyria, and built **Nineveh** and Rehoboth-Ir and Calah,  
[12] and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city.

**GE 11:[1]** Now the **whole earth** used the same **language** and the **same words**.  
[2] And it came about as they **journeyed east**, that 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 used brick for **stone**, and they used tar for mortar.  
[4] And they 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**; **lest we be scattered abroad** over the face of the whole earth."  
  
[5] And the LORD **came down to see** the city and the tower which the **sons of men** had **built**.  
[6] And the 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**, that they may not understand one another's speech."  
[8] So the LORD **scattered them** abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city.  
[9] Therefore 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.

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### Statistics:

19 Questions one man derived from the Tower of Babel. 13 are about "us." The sermon was actually quite good, historical and evangelical.

What do you think the purpose of this story is?

How to act Does God want **us** to protect our lives and interests? Or does He want **us** to lay it down?

How to act How does the idea of preservation help or contradict God's call for **our** lives?

How to live Do you think God wants **us** to live securely? Is security the number one priority?

Does **our church** and its culture belong to **us**?

How to act Why would a **Christian** be willing to sacrifice comfort and security?

How to act How is **our** attitude different than the culture around **us**?

How to act How do we know if **our** works are a product of God working through **us**?

How to act Can **you** die to self (or sacrifice your lifestyle) without God honoring it?

How to act What happens if I don't see fruit in **my** works?

How to act How **do** I seek fulfillment?

How to act When is God glorified by **our** success?

How to act When is God not glorified by **our** success?

How to act Does [**our**]failure ever glorify God?

How to act Why does utopia without God always result in oppression and tyranny?

How to act Is it possible to have a godless world of peace?

How to act Why do unrestrained desires harm people?

What makes Christianity different from religions?

What makes Christianity different from religions?

↑(15) questions were in some way or another about "how to act." The question is, does the story of the tower of Babel require 83% of our time on how we are to act?

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## Introduction:

Almost one year ago our nation suffered the worst single day of war on American soil since Abraham Lincoln was president. Two towers, the second tallest buildings in North America, were leveled to the ground in an image that reminded our entertainment-saturated culture more of the movie *Independence Day* than a real war. America as a nation has suffered great loss, has grieved, and has rightly gone to war to avenge this wrong. She is also confidently boastful that she will **rebuild** and come out as a nation stronger than ever. It is this rugged, individualistic spirit that has defined who we are as a people. In an interesting commentary on our times, it was this same attitude which more than 3000 years ago desired to be autonomous, free from anyone's control – including God's. In our case we will rebuild without God (or rather, with the gods of all the peoples). In their case they would build for the first time without God. This attitude was responsible for the destruction of another tower in ancient mankind's most prehistoric past.

The Tower of Babel is a story that has captured the imaginations of people in profound ways. One bible dictionary states it is "*one of the most evocative images in the entire Bible—a spectacle of creaturely aspiration toward deity that finds its counterpart in the mythological story of the Titans who tried to supplant Zeus and were punished by being hurled into Tartarus.*"<sup>1</sup> The story has great theological lessons. Another commentator said, the Biblical account of the Tower of Babel "*provides a striking contrast between human opinion of its self-achievements and God's viewpoint of such endeavors. Human cooperation, when it is fueled by autonomy and directed towards self-interest, is shown by the story to be shallow, impotent hubris (pride, presumption).*"<sup>2</sup>

**Literary features** Every child in the land knows this story, told with its magnificent literary craftiness. I want us to get a feel for some of the literary brilliance of the story of the Tower of Babel because it will show you in a remarkable way how it is that God uses the story to completely mock and destroy the foolishness of mankind. Like a light but razor sharp sword, the words, the style, the imagery quickly wield a swath of destruction to all human imaginings that we are capable of ever reaching up to God through **autonomy** (ourselves), combined with **power** (let us build), **prestige or fame** (make a name), **religion** (its head in the heavens), **culture or science** (a tower), **economics/urbanization** (a city), or **industry** (bricks) all of which are represented in the story.

The story is built upon a literary device called a chiasm. These were used by oral cultures that passed down stories from generations to generations. The device helps you to remember the story better. Think of the word ABBA as a way to represent a chiasm. In mathematical terms the first line is the same as the last and the second line is the same as the third. Normally we wouldn't feel the need to show a chiasm in a sermon, for we even had a rather large one in Daniel and the lions' den. But this one is important because it shows in a clever way that everything that man tries to **construct** without God and in defiance of God – God, point for point, **deconstructs** and destroys all attempts at their finishing their evil plans.

- A "The Whole world had one language (v. 1)
- B "There" (v. 2)
- C "Each other" (v. 3)
- D "come, let's make bricks" (v.3)
- E "Come, let us build ourselves: (v. 4)
- F "a city, with a tower" (v.4) *Lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth (v. 4)*
- G "The Lord came down" (v. 5)**
- F' "The city and the tower" (v. 5)
- E' "that the men were building" (v. 5)
- D' "Come, let us . . .confuse" (v. 7)
- C' "each other" (v. 7)
- B' "from there" (v. 8)
- A' "the language of the whole world" (vs. 9) *And... the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth (v. 9)*  
Matthews, NAC, p. 486.

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1 Ryken, Leland; Wilhoit, James C.; Longman III, Tremper, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press) 2000, c1998.

<sup>2</sup> Matthews, NAC: *Genesis 1-11*, p. 446.

The center of the chiasm and thus the story is the phrase “the Lord came down.” From 11:1-4 we have been viewing the tower from the point of view of the people building it. But now, the point of view shifts from the earthly human perspective to God’s far off heavenly perspective. In verse 5 we see the utter stupidity of people thinking that what they are doing (that is their attempts to reach up to God) is in any way significant to Him. With utter sarcasm, we see that this huge, magnificent, extraordinary, brilliant plan to build a great city is so small and insignificant to Almighty God that he has to symbolically get off his throne and come all the way down to tiny little earth just to see this scrawny undersized little project. From this point out, God systematically destroys everything that the people are attempting to do with the end result being confusion and scattering over the earth.

The story is also filled with many words that sound the same and yet play off of each other. For example, the word Babel (which means confusion) plays off of the word balal which also means confusion. God is going to confuse their autonomous ungodly unity and the only name they gain for themselves is exactly the opposite of their hopes: Babel, confusion. To the Babelites, “Babel” originally meant “**gate of the gods,**” but all they get for their efforts is confusion and dispersion. What men build up, God tears down.

We also find many literary keys that lead us both backwards in the history of redemption. The reader’s mind is brought to many different places and times. We are taken to **Eden** and the expulsion of the Garden **in the east** (11:1, 9). The city and tower are built in the land of Shinar, where the post-flood named rivers “**Tigris**” and “**Euphrates**” were located. We **wander** in the **path of Cain** who finally **settles** down and **builds a city** (11:2,4). We see hints that the people didn’t like the **doctrine of election** even way back then. God had chosen the line of Noah’s son **Shem** (GE 9:26-27 He also said, “**Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem. May God extend the territory of Japheth; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave.**”) to bring forth the promised seed. The word shem is the Hebrew word “name.” God is going to make a name for himself by choosing the deliverer to come from the line of Sham: the name. At Babel, we find the people wanting more than anything else to make a “shem,” a name for themselves without God (11:4). Of course, the only name they make for themselves ends up being “Babel” meaning confusion. Their united defiance brings nothing but confusion and dispersion. We are also reminded of the **days before the flood** when **mighty men**, men of renown (**men of name**) (6:4) caused God’s anger to be so kindled that he destroyed all living flesh from the face of the earth, for Nimrod the architect and builder of Babylon and the tower was a mighty (the text tells us three times – 10:8-10) man.

### **NIMROD AND ANTICHRIST**

Not only does the story look back at the continual walk in the footsteps of evil, but it also looks forward. In the person of Nimrod, introduced in 10:8, we see hints of the future Antichrist. Nimrod was the architect and builder, king and ruler of Babylon and the city and tower built in the plains of Shinar. **Nimrod:**

- 1) **Nimrod:** Means “**the Rebel.**” **Antichrist:** is called “**lawless one**” (2 Thess 2:8).
- 2) **Nimrod:** **Mighty** one/hunter: **Antichrist:** Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan with **all power** and signs and lying wonders” (2 Thess 2:9).  
Perhaps the **lying wonders** will include magnificent **structures** and miracles, not unlike Babel.
- 3) **Both** seek to establish a world empire.
- 4) **Nimrod:** **King of a kingdom** (Gen 10:10). **Antichrist:** Dan 11:36: **king of a kingdom**
- 5) **Nimrod:** would make a **name.** **Antichrist:** “**Exalt himself above all** that is called God, or that is worshipped” (2 Thess 2:4).

### **ONE WORLD:**

If Nimrod is truly a type of Antichrist, then probably his city and religion at Babel is a type of that **one world religious system** of the future that seeks to set itself against the knowledge of God. Just this week I received an email from the PCA stating, “**America’s Roman Catholic bishops and leaders of Reform and Conservative Judaism have issued a joint statement affirming that the Jewish people should not be targeted for conversion to Christianity. According to Associated Press, the declaration is made in a document called “Reflections on Covenant and Mission.” It states that, “While the Catholic Church regards the saving act of Christ as central to the process of salvation for all, it also acknowledges that Jews already dwell in a saving covenant with God.”** Speculating about “types” of events and people

that are yet to come is of course difficult and should be entered into with extreme caution, especially in our times where every days newspapers headlines are seen by some as fulfillments of prophecy of the end of the world. Nevertheless, it is fascinating to notice in our day a revival of paganism that is not only novel to our nation on a wide scale basis, but is sweeping across most of the world. This paganism is quite reminiscent in spirit to what was going on at Babel.

### TOWER:

Many people have the idea that the tower of Babel was so terrible because primitive, naïve prehistoric (unevolved?) man was trying to build such a tall structure that they could literally climb up into heaven to dethrone God. Thus, they think that the problem was building a tall building. Others think that the tower was built as a means of escaping another flood, if the gods so decided to punish man in the same way again. Neither one of these meanings is correct. If the people were trying to escape the flood, they would have built the tower on the highest mountain they could find rather than in the low lying plains of Shinar, probably in modern day southern Iraq. The purpose of the tower was also probably not height, but rather *"The builders in Shinar banded together for a common ecumenical purpose... to provide a common religious center as a rallying point, lest the people be scattered. The builders of the tower were in open defiance to God's command ("fill the earth" Gen 9:1)." Besides, the problem was both the city and the tower, and the city was certainly not as tall as the tower.*

Now, it will help our understanding of the text immensely if we can figure out exactly *what is* going on here, for this is the reason that God scattered the people. If the only problem was that they were building a tall building, then most of the world is probably 10 times more guilty, for every continent in the world has hundreds of buildings that would dwarf the tallest building ever erected in antiquity. Why hasn't God destroyed us? The reason is that the problem was not height, but the **religious function** of the building. The key phrase is literally, *"let us build for ourselves a city and tower, and its head in the heavens."* The tower was probably *"a ziggurat-an astronomical observatory for use in divination and occult mastery of the universe."*<sup>3</sup>

Why do modern commentators think that the tower was a ziggurat, a religious tower and city? For many reasons. **First**, the tower was built by the Babylonians. *"The Bible traces all false religions to Babylon and this is the only element in the description of the early Babylon that can have this meaning."*<sup>4</sup> **Second**, *"the essential identity of the various gods and goddesses of Rome, Greece, India, Egypt, and other nations with the original pantheon of the Babylonians is well established. [In fact], Nimrod himself was apparently later deified as the chief god ('Merodach' or 'Marduk') of Babylon."*<sup>5</sup> **Third**, the term **"to reach"** the heavens is not in the Hebrew, as I already said. Rather, the text reads that the head or top is "in," "on," "with," or "by" the heavens (all possible translations of the Hebrew preposition). Following Boice, I believe that the top was *"dedicated to the heavens as a place of worship or even that it had a representation of the heavens (a zodiac) upon it."*

It is a curious fact that many of the ancient megalithic monuments of the world (Stonehenge in Britain, the Pyramids and the Sphinx in Egypt, Machu Picchu in Peru, Teotihuacan and other Mexican Pyramids, Angkor Wat in Cambodia, massive underwater structures/cities around the world, Easter Island's mysterious heads, the Nazca lines in Peru etc. were/are all astronomically aligned to the points of the compass and/or many of the different constellations as they appeared in antiquity.<sup>6</sup> Every one of these structures had some sort of religious connection to them, and they all seem to have been astrological in nature. Even more startling, some of the sites (perhaps most of them) are gigantic city structures whose entire complex was designed to be a reflection of the heavens. For example, the three pyramids are perfectly aligned in size and position to emulate Orion's belt, right down to the milky way galaxy as reflected in the Nile River. The Sphinx was aligned to the constellation Leo at the time of its building. Leo is of course, the lion as is the Sphinx.

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<sup>3</sup>Ryken, Leland; Wilhoit, James C.; Longman III, Tremper, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press) 2000, c1998.

<sup>4</sup> James, Boice, *Genesis 1-11*, 422.

<sup>5</sup> Morris, quoted in Boice, 422.

<sup>6</sup> See Graham Hancock, *Fingerprints of the God*.

Another interesting phrase in our text reads “They used brick instead of stone” in the building of the tower and city. All of the ancient megalithic monuments in the past were made of stone of such huge proportions that it is truly inconceivable how early man could have moved them, let alone place them without the use of heavy equipment. Apparently, the people at Babel also wanted to use stone, but they could not because there was none around in the plains of Shinar. Thus, they baked bricks and put them together with tar. Archeology has shown that it was at Babel that brick making was first introduced to the world after the flood.

When we consider that not only did the pantheon of gods and brick making originate in Babylon, so did astrology and the zodiac, it is not a far stretch to think that these other ancient structures around the world were built as smaller versions of Babel after the dispersion of the Babelites, to try to bring about the religious significance of Babel. And what was the significance? The purpose of a ziggurat was to be a meeting place of heaven and earth, a mirror if you will where **this evil physical world could be left behind** as a soul fled to the imperishable immortal heavenly/spiritual world. The ziggurat had to be a reflection of the heavens. Its top (and perhaps in the very ancient structures the whole building) had to be dedicated to one or another god. The gods were represented by the stars. Escaping this world was done through sacrifice, through emulating the heavens, through worshipping the stars (demons/demigods) and through gaining secret/hidden knowledge of the ancient ones.

Now, if this was the true meaning of the tower and city at Babel, and if Nimrod was trying to set himself up as god, much as antichrist will do, then we can see just how evil one world religion truly is to God. It is an offense to him. It is an abomination to his Son. It is a mockery of the work and death of Christ. It is a blasphemy of the highest order and much of our world is falling head over heels in love with it in the forms of meditation, yoga, transcendentalism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Wicca, environmentalism, ecumenicism, unity without the Spirit of God, astrology, psychic hotlines and so many other things that all have this one purpose in common: to destroy all objective truth claims that Christianity makes to being the only way to God. Or rather, the only way that God comes to us, since we cannot even make our way to him.

I hope that all of you parents and kids alike know just how dangerous and demonic things like astrology, eastern religions, and psychic hotlines are already, so let me focus on a couple of others for just a moment, because we can see how they come straight out of our text. First, consider who was at the tower of Babel. It was “the whole world.”

**Whole Earth:** This shows us that the Tower of Babel incident takes place before the nations are dispersed which we read about in chapter 10 of Genesis. It also tells us that the people were refusing to obey God’s command given to Adam and restated to Noah, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth” (Gen 9:1). Apparently they thought that if they stuck together that they could defy God and his commandments better than if they were apart. We also see from the text that they had **One Language and the same words**: This shows us that it was probably not that long after the flood. So that any of you skeptics can have even more evidence that this was a real place, consider the account of one language recorded in ancient cuneiform tablets from Babylon. For example one partial tablet states:

. . . . them? the father . . . .  
. . . . of him, his heart was evil,  
. . . . against the father of all the gods was wicked  
. . . . of him, his heart was evil  
. . . . Babylon brought to subjection  
. . . . and great **he confounded their speech**.  
. . . . Babylon brought to subjection<sup>7</sup>

Another account of says,

139. Once upon a time there was no snake, there was no scorpion,  
There was no hyena, there was no lion,  
There was no wild? dog, no wolf,

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<sup>7</sup> George Smith, *Chaldean Account of Genesis*, p. 160

- There was no fear, no terror,  
 140. Man had no rival.  
 In those days, the lands Subur (and) Hamazi  
 Harmony-tongued? Sumer,...
145. The **whole universe**, the **people in unison?**,  
 To Enlil in **one tongue** . . . .
150. Enki, the lord of abundance, (whose commands are trustworthy,  
 The lord of wisdom, who understands the land,  
 The leader of the gods,  
 Endowed with wisdom, the I[ord] of Eridu,  
**Changed the speech in their mouths**, [brought?] **contention into it**,  
**Into the speech of man that (until then) had been one.**<sup>8</sup>

Theologically, what is significant about one world, one language, and one speech is the word “one.” There was a terrible ungodly spirit of ecumenicism. Ecumenicism is “promoting cooperation and better understanding among different religious groups; aimed at universal unity.” Today, as I already showed, many in the Christian church are trying to have unity with those who are not united to Christ. After the World Trade Centers were brought down our nation had a national day of prayer. Represented at this day of prayer, in a once Christians church – the National Cathedral – were Billy Graham along with a Catholic Priest, a Jewish Rabbi, a Muslim, a Buddhist, and a Seek. What an affront this must have been to almighty God who will not put up with the worship of idols. But, even within our own churches unity often means “stop fighting with me and agree with my position.” Or it means “can’t we all just get along?”

Biblical unity and ecumenicism is the ability to be Christian and to fight the faith together with others who are of like mind. That means you have to have a common set of beliefs and doctrines that are recognizable enough to people that they actually know what you believe. The ecumenicism at Babel was exactly the opposite. It was a defiant attitude against God to “fill the earth” and increase.” “This act of arrogant defiance resulted in disbandment.”<sup>9</sup> All attempt at world unity whether it be through worshiping mother earth and the environment or simply letting each person have their own private religion that we “tolerate” is perhaps the most hideous form of rebellion I can imagine. But ,like Babel, while we seek unity all we are getting is confusion.

We have seen that negatively, Babel shows us the future Antichrist and spirit of the world to defy God with one giant fist in the sky through their own religious system. Positively, it sets the table for Abraham. The genealogies before the tower include all three sons of Noah, including Seth. But it traces only the non-elect line of **Joktan** before it tells us about the flood. After the flood the genealogy continues but this time through the elect line of **Peleg** down to the time of **Abram**. The story brings us to the place where we wonder how it can possibly be, if man is left to do it himself, that the promise made to Eve for a seed that will crush the serpent, can possibly be fulfilled. Up to this point in Genesis, there has been no sign that man is capable of bringing this to pass himself. In fact, he seems to be doing everything in his power to prevent this from happening! And so we see in the story the need for God to reconcile the world to himself, in the midst of their rebellion and hatred towards him. God will make good on the promise given to Eve and the blessings given to Noah’s sons. The human condition is so completely terrible, even after unimaginable judgment, that the only hope will be for God to *come down*, not to scatter as he does at Babel, but to gather in his chosen people, choosing an elect lineage that will bring salvation to the entire world.

Not only does Babel lead the way for the coming of Abram, it also anticipates the eschatological work of Christ and coming of the Holy Spirit for the whole world as we are shown in the book of Acts. Acts chapter 2 is a remarkable passage of Scripture. One commentator says, “**Luke pictures the church is the undoing of Babel, an island of reconciled humanity where people once again understand each other.**” In Acts we learn just why Christ said, “**But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you**” (John 16:7). Notice the following:

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Noah Kramer, The “Babel of Tongues”: A Sumerian Version in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood*, 1994, p. 279, 281.

<sup>9</sup> Matthews, *NAC Genesis 1-11*, 474

**Babel:** At Babel we are told that one world settled into one place, the plain of Shinar. (11:1-2)  
**Pentecost:** On that remarkable morning we are told “they were all in one place.” (Acts 2:1)

**Babel:** Is the story of confused tongues, where God makes one tongue become many. (11:1, 9)  
**Pentecost:** Tongues of fire came to rest on each of them. (2:2)

**Babel:** Took place in Babylon [Babel is anti-Jerusalem].  
**Pentecost:** “There were staying in Jerusalem” (Acts 2:5)

**Babel:** “From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood.” (10:32)  
**Pentecost:** God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven” (2:5)

**Babel:** When God came down, he confused their language and their name became Babel, Confusion/bewilderment. (11:9)

**Pentecost:** When they heard the sound, they were bewildered (6), utterly amazed (7), amazed (12) and perplexed (12). In other words, Luke tells us four times in this short passage that they were confused.

At 2:6 Συγξέωμεν (sugxeo) = confound/bewilder (NT)

Ge 11: συγγέωμεν (sugxeo) = confound (LXX)  
בָּלַל (BLL) = MIX, MINGLE, CONFUSE (Hebrew)

Ge 11:9 Σύγχυσις (sugxeo) = confusion  
בָּבֶל (bbl, Babel) = confusion

**Babel:** They are building their own kingdom.  
**Pentecost:** They are building God’s kingdom.

**Babel:** Their kingdom was trying to open a gateway to heaven (this is what Babel meant to them) via their own methods and accent to God.

#### **On worship:**

By the way, as my brother has noted about this event, “It seems to me that their building was a form of self-righteousness. God is never pleased by our arrogance and self-righteousness. So, again, God was not angry at technology, He was displeased by man’s efforts to reach Him apart from Christ. If the Regulative Principal is correct, and God really does not accept worship which He has not explicitly commanded, then we have to be certain our worship falls into that which He has commanded, otherwise, we’re striving to reach Him on our own. Which is legalism. We add to God’s law in order to please Him, not realizing we are displeasing Him.”

**Pentecost:** The kingdom was established by God himself and the gateway to heaven (Babel) was opened via the Holy Spirit and God’s descent to us.

**Pentecost:** The many languages are all heard as one. “How is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?” (2:8)

**Babel:** The one language is turned into many. (1:9)

**Babel:** Want to stay together and are scattered.

**Pentecost:** They are gathered together in order to be scattered.

(But even those in the church are not willing to scatter any more than those at Babel were. Thus, we are told that God once again intervenes in Acts 8:1 “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.” Much has been made of this fact by scholars. The church was no better than Babel, though certainly their motives for staying together were different than their forefathers at Babel. But, even here, it takes God’s mighty hand to force the people to scatter back around the world in order to fulfill the task of preaching the gospel to all nations.)

## Conclusion:

The tower of Babel is the story of a **united ancient world** that in spite of great wrath poured out on their ancestors through the flood, were still unwilling to submit to God's and his ways. What a remarkable comment on human depravity this is! The tower of Babel is also the story of **our modern world**, filled with pride and an autonomous spirit that cries "I did it my way." The tower of Babel is also **your story** - and **my story**, for each one of us had a great great great grandfather who was there at Babel in full rebellion. You are found hidden in this text as your pride and autonomous spirit is shown to you through their actions. This is the first part of the text's application to you. See how different this sort of "application" is from "how to do" applications which are nowhere to be found in the text? The application is the knowledge of who you really are as shown to you by your grandparents behavior. Don't leave this spot too quickly because it makes you uncomfortable, for the only way that you will know what it is about yourself that needs fixing is if you look at yourself in the mirror long enough to see it.

Do not look for your application in horizontal, temporal, linear application bridges that you cross by your own self effort in a delusion where you think that you can make sure that you do not become like these awful people because you practice the right steps, the right "how to's." **You already are like these people** and nothing you can do will ever change that. This application is really just the law as shown to you in Babel. If you do this, you will now be ready for the second application. You are ready for the vertical application between you and your God. But you must remember to think of the vertical as **God come down** to earth, **not you going up** to God, which was the very sin of Babel. The vertical is God entering into history, advancing in ever increasing increments his kingdom on the earth and bringing to pass his plans for the future so that we literally have the kingdom in part here with us now.

We saw how God came down to the people to see (because what they were doing was so puny and insignificant to God) what they were doing. That was the center point of the entire story. But God also came down to these people in a way that you might not have considered before. God's coming down and confusing the language was actually a gracious thing to have done for them and for us. Notice, he didn't wipe them all out again, though he could have. Instead, he stopped the sinful city from being built, thus hindering a one world religion from completely erasing all knowledge of God on the earth. He stopped the people from permanently disobeying the command to fill the earth, which was their intention. Now they have to obey the command. This in turn allows for the nations to inherit the parts of the world that God had planned for each one from all eternity.

**"the Most High gave the nations their inheritance,  
when he divided all mankind,  
he set up boundaries for the peoples"** (Deut 32:8).

**"From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us"** (Acts 17:26-27).

Not only does God scattering the people show his common grace (as the scattering makes the people seek God or as Augustine said make them realize the hole shaped vacuum in their lives), it also allows for him to fulfill the promises made to Eve and to Noah and others. Now, a seed can be born, but even now it is only by through the promised line of Shem's son Peleg, the elect brother of Joktan who becomes the father of Abram. Now, the promise to Abram (which is a distillation of the promises already made to earlier people) that he would be heir of the world (Rom. 4:13) and that the nations would be blessed can come about. Listen to one commentator: **"The covenant promises are so irrevocably fixed that, if necessary, God himself will make it possible for the conditions to be fulfilled so that the land can again be possessed."**<sup>10</sup>

The history of Isreal shows that they continually wander as far from fulfilling the promises as they possibly can. And the history of God continually shows that he has patience with them and brings them back ever time, even after the captivities. But no man is ever found who can bring these promises to completion until God himself once again enters into history as a man to see that they become fulfilled. But even Christ as a physical man cannot provide the sort of change that must take place in our wicked hearts by himself. He

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<sup>10</sup> David Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel: One Covenant or Two*, 95.



knows this and so himself says that it is better for him to leave and send another, who is also God, to give the life of Christ and to provide union with Christ to all those who believe in him.

This is the significance of Pentecost. And Pentecost, as we have seen the reversal of Babel. The vertical dimension of the story is thus to be seen as a gracious act of God to thwart our sin. It is also to be seen in God glorifying himself by making absolute certain that his promises to you and to me will not be hindered by any rebellion of mankind. We do **not come to our own city**, to **Babel** to rise up to be like god. Rather, we see that we as the church are **brought to God's city** from around the world, **Jerusalem** (which reminds us of the heavenly Jerusalem). We are allowed to hear God's plans for us through the gospel rather than allowed to continue making our own plans for ourselves that only result in our confusion. And we are sent away with power, sometimes even through persecution in order that our own stubborn wills do not repeat the sin of our fathers at Babel and in order that people now in fact actually will seek and reach out to God and his Son Jesus Christ through the message of the gospel that he give us to proclaim. God has truly seen to it that no plan of his can be thwarted. And he will bring many nations together to worship him, no matter how much it costs him. Zephaniah 3:9 says this: *"For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent."*

Amen.

When we come to a text like this one and the majority of our insights are ethical and horizontal in nature (how should I be different from those evil people of which I certainly not one), we risk turning the living text of which we the 21<sup>st</sup> century church are an interconnected later "chapter" into nothing but nice stories with happy or unhappy endings. We must realize that we cannot learn our identity as either humans made in God's image, humans fallen and ruined, or humans redeemed and justified by isolating texts from each other or from ourselves.

We in this room are not better than those at Babel. We are the same. We are human. We are fallen. We are sinful. The only thoughts of our hearts are like theirs, "only evil all the time." But even as you learn about yourself from the text and hear God's demands for you in the text (which are separate things not to be confused with each other) and make good horizontal application from what they did many years ago to what you should or should not do today, I

There is a method for unlocking the history written in the Bible. The stories and events depicted in the Old Testament are often reversed, reiterated, repeated or redefined in the New Testament. Applying this concept facilitates interpretation of the Bible and greatly enhances its dramatic impact upon the reader. With this in mind, a parallel can be drawn between Genesis 11:1-9 and a significant event found in the Book of Acts. This event is accepted as the beginning of the Church Age. However, the two events are inversely correlated. In Acts, the disciples of Jesus are at work bringing converts into the Christian church. Jesus Christ's promise of the Holy Spirit to the believers (Luke 24:49; John 14:26, 15:26, 16:7; Acts 1:5, 8) is about to manifest. God then acts to unite His followers in the proper fashion: When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from Heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them (Acts 2:1-4 NIV).

When the resurrected Christ sent the Holy Spirit to the disciples it confirmed that the "stairway to heaven" sought by the ancients had been established. However, this gateway was not accomplished by human initiative or effort but by the supernatural power and grace of God. The timing and purpose were of God's determination, not of the people. The Book of Acts details the marvelous accomplishments by the Christians empowered by the Holy Spirit.

And not only were their spirits united, but the language barrier was broken. The disunity initiated by the scattering at the tower of Babel has begun to be reversed and this time God gets the glory: Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed,

they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Capadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs--we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues! (Acts 2:5-11 NIV).

The Apostle Peter preaches in Acts 2:14-41 sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all who were attending. There is debate whether the tongues were actual foreign languages or a supernatural understanding (Acts 2:8, 11). Barclay argues against the manifestation of foreign languages in this event (21-22). The Tower of Babel is extremely significant to the epic of the Bible. The story is much more than God indiscriminately interrupting an insignificant building project. The Tower of Babel marks the origins of the nations of the Earth. Will its mistakes be repeated by future generations?