

The Tower of Babel

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 March 2012

Preacher: Don Coleman

[0:00] Okay, what I was saying is you're curious about this sheet.

! I overheard someone, I think it was Tom, saying he hoped that was a misspelling. We'll get to that here in just a minute. It's not a misspelling, but I'll explain it to you by and by.

But let's go ahead and begin by turning to Genesis chapter 11. Chapter 11, and I'm going to read verses 1 through 9 very quickly.

And then we'll work our way through these verses here. Now the whole earth had one language and one speech, and it came to pass as they journeyed from the east that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there.

Then they said to one another, Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly. So they had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower, whose top is in the heavens.

[1:11] Let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth. But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, Indeed, the people are one, and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do.

Now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

So the Lord scattered them broad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore, its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth, and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

So that's the narration portion of chapter 11, and then you'll notice in verse 10, and then through to the end of the chapter, it's another genealogy. And I'll just go ahead and mention the genealogy there is the genealogy of Shem, I mean, what the Bible's going to do there is lead us all the way to Abraham.

And so from this point on, the focus is going to be God's chosen people, Israel, through Shem, through Abraham, and on from there.

[2:31] So I'm not going to study the genealogies there, but just to let you know that we get here to the end of verse 9, chapter 11. That'll be the end of our studies of Genesis 1 through 11.

And so this is the final message. Where are we going to go next time? I don't know yet. So pray for me as I decide about that. Now, you might, though, be thinking, you know, Brother Don, there are more than 11 chapters in the book of Genesis.

You know, why don't we just keep on going? Well, look how long it's taken us to get through 11 chapters. But also, I would tell you that the first 11 chapters are crucial.

They're key. And that's why the focus has been those 11 chapters. The book of Genesis, you know, is literally a book of beginnings or book of origins.

And by the way, the word Genesis, that's what the word Genesis means. Beginnings, origin. And so the crucial study, crucial to our study of Genesis, is then the first 11 chapters of the book.

[3:43] And that's why we focused on that. They are, you know, I'm sure, the most hotly contested and intensely debated chapters.

And why? Well, because the first 11 chapters of Genesis provide the divine revelation of the origin of all things. And because it does that, or in that, it provides for us, if we will believe it, a complete and true worldview.

I use that terminology, worldview. A worldview is pretty important. And there are various worldviews that dominate our culture, the world today.

But I hope that you have a biblical worldview. That means when you look at the world, the things that are going on in the world, the way people behave, decisions made, and the way things are, that you interpret it correctly by interpreting it through the eyes of Scripture.

And that's a worldview. And so, the first 11 chapters of Genesis give us the right worldview. Now, think about it. We have in these 11 chapters, just the first 11 chapters of the Bible, we have the origin of the universe.

[5:05] That's an important biblical worldview, to look at our universe and be in awe of it and know, because you're looking through Scripture, that God created it all. That's a worldview of our universe.

And so, in these 11 chapters, we have that, the origin of the universe. We have the origin of time, space, matter, light. We have the origin of the solar system.

We have the origin of the atmosphere, the atmosphere that we take for granted every single day.

We have, in these 11 verses, or chapters, we have the origin of all life, all life, all kinds of life, from the microscopic to, you know, the big whales and elephants and so forth.

We have the origin of all life, the origin of man, within these 11 chapters. Out of that, we have the origin of marriage. If you're going to have a biblical worldview, when it comes to marriage, then you need to look through the eyes of Scripture and know that marriage was the very first institution.

And it wasn't created by man to answer the problem of adultery. It was created by God. In the very beginning, He performed the very first wedding. That's in these chapters.

[6:20] We have the very first, or the origin of the family. We have the origin of civilization, culture, government. We have the origin of farming, as a vocation, animal husbandry, metallurgy.

Remember when we studied those passages? The origin of poetry, music. Did you know all this was in here? It should, because we've been through it. But also, on a negative light, but still we need to see this, we have the origin of sin in these 11 chapters.

And with it, the origin of guilt. And yet also with it, the origin of redemption and forgiveness. And now when we get into chapter 11, I guess the last two origins that we have described for us, we have the origin of nations, or I should list them in the right order, the origin of languages and nations.

That didn't exist before chapter 11. And it's interesting understanding how God brings that about. And that's what these verses are all about.

Then when you get into chapter 12, which we're not going to study, again, we have the origin of God's chosen people, from whom the original word of God and the living word of God, the Savior of the world, will one day come.

[7:46] And so, from chapter 12 on throughout the entire Old Testament, the focus is on Israel and God's chosen people. All right, now, chapter 10 gives us a snippet of detail, just a little snippet of detail about the spread of mankind on the entire earth.

Now, you know, we didn't spend a lot of time really delving in to the, you know, the, the nation, the, the spread of nations, the table of nations.

That's the term I was trying to remember. I gave you a handout for that, but it, it really didn't go into a lot of detail. But chapter 10 is what, what gives us just, just little glimpses of the spread of mankind through the sons of Noah and where they settled and likely settled and possibly settled and, and the way the population is today.

We have some indications about, you know, how they got there and from whom they descended and so forth. That's all in chapter 10. But then when you come to chapter 11, you're really going back and we find out then how all of this came about in chapter 10.

So we're digressing a little bit and chapter 11 explains what brought about the spread of mankind. All right. Now that's kind of an introduction.

[9:13] So let's look at it. I've already read it, but I want to read it verse by verse now. Verse one. Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. All right. That's how it began.

So, I mean, obviously everyone spoke the same language. You didn't need anybody to tell you that. That's exactly what it says. The Hebrew literally reads this way.

One lip and one kind of words. Because you would read that one language, one speech. You'd say, well, that's just two ways of saying the same thing. Yes.

First, I just have something I need to tell you. Just a minute. And I don't know if this was on the prayer list or not, but Bill, our neighbor was telling us that the pastor at First Baptist, have you mentioned that?

We have prayed for him before. He's in serious trouble. Our neighbor goes there and I told him we'd pray for him tonight. It's for the pastor at First Baptist and he's having to take the clue.

[10:09] He's got a, he now has a blood clot. You know that? I hadn't heard anything like that. Have you, Tom? So they're having, that's Jordan. Yeah. He's, they're trying to dissolve a blood clot that he has with Coumadin and stuff.

Anyway, he's, you know, he's just, he can't have any surgery until that's done. Anyway, it's just really serious. He's in bad shape. Yeah. And if I could just, I just need to give you this message. Thank you. Well, I had heard that he was having further problems.

I hadn't heard anything that seriously. That you hadn't heard anything about that? He has not been in the pulpit for some months or weeks. No, he has. One of their long-time members died. He was a father of one of my officers who said, I went for a general and she'll hand with anybody for a general.

He was just, he looked like a rest of the general. He's a runner. He's a jogger. Well, we need to keep him in our prayers. We've prayed a number of times with staff and at the association prayed for him.

Okay. Alright, one lip and one kind of words. And that means one language. One lip means a language. And one kind of words means one set of vocabulary is basically the meaning there.

[11:52] Now, what language was it? Well, we don't know. Now, there are some scholars who argue that it was Hebrew. And maybe it was. I don't know, but there's just no way to know that.

I mean, there are those Hebrew scholars and I've even had some in seminary who made an argument that Hebrew is so different that it must have been a heavenly language.

That maybe when we get to heaven, we'll be speaking Hebrew. I don't know. Of course, that's coming from a Hebrew scholar. And of course, he'd want, you know, the dominant language to be Hebrew because he's the only one who can speak it unless you're a Jew.

Alright. Anywho, we don't know what the language was. Verse 2, and it came to pass as they journeyed from the east that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and they dwelt there.

Alright. Twice we have, or three times we have they. Who are they? Well, that's pretty easy to figure out too. We're talking here about the sons of Noah, Ham, Shem, and Japheth if they're still alive and that's debatable and we'll get to that here in a minute.

[12:59] We're talking about their wives and all their children and grandchildren and great-great-great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren however far we may go out and that's debatable.

We'll get to that in just a minute. That's who they are. Now, the question is when was this? You say, well, I don't care. Well, I'm going to tell you anyway or at least I'm going to have you think about a couple of things.

What I mean is how long after the flood did this migration of the entire population take place? We're assuming the came east it said as they journeyed from the east the ark landed on Ararat and population started to take place spread there or multiply there and then at some point they migrated east to this place called Shinar the land of Shinar probably in Mesopotamia and so when did this happen?

How long after the flood? And I'll say that's difficult to know. In fact, we don't know for sure. Some scholars say probably around a thousand years.

It may have been a thousand years and they have different reasons why they come to that conclusion. There are others and this is rather interesting and I'll just throw it out there to you and you can decide for yourself.

[14:27] Some scholars say probably a hundred years. That really no more than a hundred years after the flood the population however big it was then migrated east to this land of Shinar and those who hold that point to chapter 10 and verse 25 to an interesting passage there insertion there in the lineage and the genealogy and they say that this reference in chapter 10 verse 25 is to the confusion of the languages of Babel.

Now what does it say? Genesis 10 verse 25 says to Eber who by the way was the father of the Hebrew people chapter 11 verse 15 gives us that information so to Eber were born two sons the name of the one was Peleg for in his days and here's what it says for in his days the earth was divided.

Now according to this theory Peleg was well this is not theory he certainly was born a hundred years after the flood we can count that up we know that the name Peleg and this is even suggested in the way that it's worded there the name Peleg means division means division whatever that division was and many and I would say reliable scholars argue that this division was not geological or geographical that is it was not what some have supposed to be a dividing of the continents now there is that theory it's very plausible and those who hold to that may be right but these scholars say it's not talking about a division of the continents you know the idea being that after the flood there was just one continent and then for whatever the cause was that there was you know spreading out of the continents and you know you can look at the globe today and see how they probably could all fit together and so forth continental shifting but they say that's not what this is talking about rather it was it was the dividing of the population in reference to what we have described for us in chapter 11 that's going to take place at the Tower of Babel so I'll just throw that out to you you can consider that there are very good scholars who say that this division was some kind of cataclysmic thing that took place maybe a big meteor hit the planet caused the globe the planet to shift on its axis and caused some divisions and so forth whatever and then there are those who say no this is just simply a reference to

Babel okay alright so 100 years or 1000 years whichever it was and you can pick after the flood the population of the earth however large it was and even if it was 100 years it could be quite large the population of the earth was still basically one family one very close knit family and one one nation we could we could refer to it in that sense one just one nation and they were all speaking the same language and they were all living in one place now what happened well verse three then they said to one another come let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly they had brick for stone and they had asphalt probably some kind of tar or whatever it was for mortar alright anything wrong with that nothing wrong with that nothing wrong with having the same language that was not the sin nothing wrong with building things certainly nothing wrong with that but next we see their sin verse 4 and they said come let us build ourselves a city and a tower whose top is in the heavens let us make a name for ourselves lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth alright here is the implication or the mention of their sin their rebellion their you know their most likely rejection of the one true God and the worship of pagan gods very likely gods of their own making alright so that's a reference to that now this would be this is a good time or at this point to point out why I gave you this handout what I do with mine

I lost it here it is I got it because I want you to notice in this in these nine verses the symmetry that is there and there's a reason for that so I don't want you to get confused and get too much too bogged down in this but even without what I'm going to explain to you here in just a minute it's pretty easy to see if you just think about it that verses one through four has a certain focus and verses five through nine another focus now they go together but there's a shift in focus the shift is from man in verses one through four to God in verses five through nine so in verses one through four you have the action of man what he's doing and then verses five through nine you have the actions of God in verses one through four you have man building building up he's up into the heavens you know but then in verses five through nine you have

[20:29] God coming down or actually tearing down what man is building up and verses again you can look at it this way verses one through four certainly reveals man's rebellion against God and then verses five through nine reveal God's retribution against man his reaction to man only this time he's not going to destroy them instead of destruction as in the flood this time it's going to be dispersion he's going to divide them going to spread them out and so God is going to scatter mankind all over the earth through the confusion of their languages and the ultimate creation of multiple nations now let's see how that plays out and that's what this is for and the word is pronounced chiastic and it comes from the Greek letter chi and that's basically what a chi looks like it just looks like an x and if you'll notice

I've even put some lines on there so you can see how that fits and a chiastic structure is one where everything from the beginning and everything at the end moves to the center brings the reader to the very central focus it's a chiastic structure it's a literary type of device that a lot of Hebrew writers use now sometimes they're really hard to see and then when you see them you say well so what this one's very easy to see and I think you'll agree with me when you look at the handout that I gave you and the purpose for a chiastic structure is to place emphasis on the most important point the most important point in the text that's why they use this kind of writing style or literary device and

the most important point is always in the middle it's always right there in the middle of the chi the middle thing and everything moves to that most important point in a sense everything hinges on that main idea and in this particular case that would be there in verse five but the Lord came down that is the center of this pattern this symmetry this chiasmus that Moses is using it's leading us there so God is then the key character in this narrative that that's what is telling us at the very least and God is at the center of all the parallel items or elements in the story and that's what gives the story symmetry and so God is at the center of all that's going on here and when God puts himself in the middle of things things change and that's what we get from this I think now let's take each parallel element and see how they work together and bring us to that most important point A on your sheet here A verse 1 the whole earth had one language and one speech alright that's that's

A in this chiasmus and the idea there of course is man was unified under one language and one vocabulary on the other side the parallel thought is verse 9 on the opposite end of the chapter the Lord confused the language of all the earth those are parallel ideas in the first case man is speaking one language on the compliment side the parallel to that the Lord confuses that language alright so the idea there is suddenly the people could not comprehend one another they couldn't comprehend consequently what did they do they stopped their work couldn't build the tower they couldn't carry on any construction if they couldn't communicate with one another they were scattered everybody parted and went their own ways and I think it's implied that you know that not everyone had a different language there were similar languages and they grouped together went one way and the others that spoke the same could communicate they went their way and so you have the spreading of mankind and the forming of nations all around this world and so at the first we have one language at the last we have many languages and the creation of the nations that's the first parallel thought we see and we move further to the center

B verse 2 and it came to pass as they journeyed from the east that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and they dwelt there or settled down there so the entire population of the earth is together in one place Shinar the opposite side the parallel thought is in verse 8 so the Lord scattered them abroad from there you see the parallel the symmetry there over the whole face of the earth and why did God do that well Genesis chapter 9 verse 1 tells us that God commanded!

[26:09] Noah and his family to be fruitful and multiply and do what? populate the earth or fill the earth he said and by the way the same instructions he gave Adam and Eve almost identical alright so you have those two parallel thoughts we're moving toward the middle first we have one language now many languages we move further they settled down there and God spread them out from there and then we move to see verse 3 they said to one another that is they had one language so they could speak to one another and not only that but we know that they could conspire and devise anything they wanted to do because they could communicate with one another the parallel thought is in verse 7 second part of verse 7 that they may not understand one another's speech alright so here they understand one another and then after God gets in in the mix here now they cannot understand one another and so what they were able to do in verse 3

God now made impossible they could communicate with one another before and therefore all their since now they could not communicate with one another all their rebellious plans were had come to naught you see the parallel thought we're moving to the middle and then D verse 3 they said to one another come let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly they had brick for stone and they had asphalt for mortar and but the idea the key phrase there is come let us and by the way that's repeated in verse 4 come let us build ourselves and it's somewhat repeated later in that verse let us make a name for ourselves alright us us us clearly a statement of independence and a statement of self reliance we don't need God anymore and so it's a statement of rebellion and how does God respond well there's the parallel verse in verse 7

God says come let us go down I mean that's an exact parallel there see the symmetry now it's a clear reference to the trinity right come let us very much like what God said back in Genesis chapter chapter 1 and alright so here's the same thought a man said come let us do thus and such and God said well come let us go down and do thus and such now I skipped verse 6 because verse 6 really gives us the reason why the Lord came down and the Lord said indeed the people are one and they all have one language in that this is what they begin to do now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them and we'll get to the meaning of that here in just a minute alright now we're moving to the center E verse 4 then they said come let us build ourselves literally build ourselves up

because they're going to build up into the clouds up into the heavens so man decided to build himself up the parallel thought verse 5 third part of verse 5 which the sons of men had built now in that case

God is saying let's go down and see what the sons of men have built so we have man building and God coming down to see what he built those are parallel thoughts God though had come down to see it didn't he come down to see what they had built alright F verse 4 second part of verse 4 a city and a tower whose top is in the heavens let us make a name for ourselves lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth alright now the clear implication there is that they were building a tower to exalt themselves very likely they were exalting their pagan god as well and so the tower they built was for the purposes of pagan worship certainly not the worship of the one true god they rebelled against him and you know they were very proud of their tall tower let's make a name for ourselves build it up into the heavens they were very proud of their tall tower and I don't know how tall it was probably by our standards it was not we wouldn't call it tall but it certainly was for them and they were very proud of their tall tower whose top was in the heavens well what about god let's go to the the parallel thought is in verse 5 second part of verse 5 where god said he came down to see the city and the tower there's the same phrase city and the tower alright so man says let us go up that's self exaltation let us make a name for ourselves and god says let us come down that's self condescension condescension so man built a tower whose top reached up into the heavens but god had to come down even to see the top of it so you see the contrast there so no matter how high man exalts himself god still has come down to see him to meet him alright now that brings us then to the center we've come all the way to the middle of this text middle of this chiasmus and the central truth is verse five but the lord came down that's what the reader or the writer rather is bringing us to this is the key point now let me then speak a word that should mean everything to us if we'll think about it

I've already mentioned the word I've already said it but here's the word condescension that's not a word we use every day but that is exactly what the bible means when it says the lord came down condescension we need to see that one phrase isolated from everything else god condescended that is he came down to man here's the real lesson in this verse without the condescension of god we would not know anything about him without the condescension of god we would not have his word because even the word the bibles that we have today are a result of his condescension revealing himself to man without the condescension of god we we would all be lost and doomed and damned forever!

[33:23] if god had not condescended without the condescension of god there would be no jesus there would be no cross there would be no sacrifice for sin there would be no salvation there would be no hope without the condescension of god see listen the incarnation is all about the condescension of god god becoming a man one of my favorite songs by squire parsons and uh i don't know if you've ever heard him sing but one of my favorite ones is it has this line in it when i could not come to him he came to me that's condescension now i've said that to say this that verse five which is again is the central truth of this passage that's where everything is leading us to that phrase is all about the gracious condescension of god you might be thinking gracious how so i thought this was all about god's judgment here judging the people for their sin and confusing their language and allowing them to be spread how is this a gracious condescension well if god had not condescended here that is stepped in at this point if he had not done that the human race would have been doomed would have been doomed at this point at the very least if things had been allowed to continue as they were going god would have had to destroy the world again now he promised never to do with the flood he'd have to pick another method and so god is gracious here verse 6 and i said we get back to verse 6 it's the key to understanding this look at verse 6 and the lord said indeed the people are one that is they're one group they're unified and they all have one language and this is what they begin to do what is it they begin to do build a tower for purposes of making a name for themselves as a one as one unified body worshipping pagan gods they are unified one group they have one language and this is what they begin to do to build a united front of sin against god united that's what what's going on here and what does god say next he says now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them that doesn't mean that they could just do anything it means in regard to their rebellion and their acts of sin and steps of sin and their mounting up greater unified barriers of sin against god whatever they devise in their sinful crafty minds they'll be able to do it because they're all together here they all speak one language there's going to be any confusion everybody's going to go along with it you know that's what god is saying

here now can you imagine the danger of this for mankind let me just think about it one nation not multiple nations just one one language one vocabulary one government one world leader one culture one religion and all of that independent of the one true god yahweh god can you imagine a world that has that kind of thing right now i think we probably could

can you imagine our world today consisting of one nation living under the leadership of one world ruler and being forced to participate in one false religion not just here where we live but all over the planet can you imagine that kind of thing can you imagine let's just make it more specific can you imagine there being one nation in the world can you imagine a bin laden ruling that world that nation i know he's dead but someone like that and can you imagine sharia law being the law of the land everywhere and can you imagine islam being the only legal religion in the world that's just one example we could go back a few years and say well what if the only there's only one nation and it's nazi germany and there's only one ruler and it's hitler there's only one religion and it's arianism which is really just evolution and you have no choices other than that or we go forward and there will be a day when there will be one ruler the antichrist but can you imagine that so the lord came down lord came down and the lord acted to preserve his creation this is a gracious act of god a gracious condescension because if he had not intervened at this point we would have been doomed and his plan of redemption would have would have come to an end and so he stepped in he condescended god came down not only to preserve creation but specifically to preserve his chosen seed through whom the messiah would one day come and so he said come let us go down and there confuse their language that they may not understand one another's speech so the lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of the earth and he brought man's self destructive plans to a screeching halt at this point and so that's why

I say this is a gracious condescension of god and that's what the reader is bringing us to or the writer is bringing us to that central truth that is a profound truth not just for this particular instance in scripture but in the big picture to consider the condescension of our of god without which we would never know him and we would be doomed but Thank you.