

Osaka International Church

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Series: Beginnings #16

Title: The Towers Men Build

Scripture: Genesis 11:1-32

I. Introduction

Good morning! Last week we briefly discussed the genealogy of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth in Genesis 10, and we were reminded that we are all brothers and sisters of the same human family, created by God. God loves all nations, and the Bible is given for all, so that all might know Him and be saved through faith in Jesus. However, Jesus, as the son of Mary, was born into a particular family line. So, in Genesis 11, after the story of the Tower of Babel, the genealogy of Shem is repeated and expanded because it leads to Abraham and to Jesus. In Genesis 10, God's general love for all peoples is revealed. And in Genesis 11, the specific family line leading to Jesus our Savior is recorded. All this has a purpose in God's plan. As **Psalm 67:2** says, **"that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations."**



We can find a few other interesting things in Genesis 10 as well, and **Genesis 10:8-10** gives us a good introduction to today's message. **"Cush was the father of Nimrod, who grew to be a mighty warrior on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; that is why it is said, 'Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord.' The first centers of his kingdom were Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Calneh, in Shinar."** Just from these verses, it may not seem obvious, but Bible scholars generally agree that Nimrod was not a hunter of animals, but of men. Nimrod seems to have been a powerful warrior who defied God by killing those who opposed him and who established his own kingdom in opposition to God's kingdom.

Babylon and Babel are different forms of the same name, and Nimrod, the founder of Babylon, is probably also the one who decided to build the Tower of Babel. Shinar is an ancient name for Iraq, and in Iraq the location of Babylon is well-known. In this photo, the ruins of Babylon are clearly visible. However, these ruins are from a much later time period, about the time of Daniel the prophet. If there are any remains of the Tower of Babel, they are probably buried far below, underneath many layers of more recent ruins. Let's read Genesis 11:1-9.



II. Scripture Reading Genesis 11:1-9 (NIV)

[1] Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. [2] As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. [3] They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. [4] Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth." [5] But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. [6] The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. [7] Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." [8] So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. [9] That is why it was called Babel--because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

III. Teaching

The builders of the Tower of Babel made bricks, baked them thoroughly, and then cemented them together with tar. Some people are surprised to realize that brick construction was used for very tall buildings until quite recently. In 1930, the tallest building in the world was the Chrysler Building in New York City. It

is a brick building. At 319 meters, or 77 stories, the Chrysler Building is still the world's tallest brick building. If you want to build a tall tower, brick is a good choice. We do not know how high the people at Babel intended to build, but with brick the potential was there for a very impressive tower. However, we don't know for sure, but their tower may still have been quite small when they quit working.



But why did the people begin to build the Tower of Babel in the first place? **Genesis 11:4** tells us, **"Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.'"** Two reasons for building the tower are given. The first is pride, **"to make a name for ourselves."** And the second is to, **"not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."** Sadly, both of these reasons directly opposed the will of God. In **Genesis 9:1**, God had commanded Noah and his children to, **"fill the earth."** This means they were supposed to spread out and populate all lands. But in Babel, instead of honoring God's command, the people were united in their effort to glorify their own name and to build their own reputation. Nimrod was named well; his name meant, "rebellion," and the Tower of Babel speaks of his rebellion against God.

The first part of the story of the Tower of Babel tells us what man proposed to do; the second part tells us how God responded to man's plan. This two-part structure reminds me of **Proverbs 19:21**, **"Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails."** The Lord's purpose was for the people to spread out and fill the earth. When the people refused and made their own plans, the Lord took action and His purpose still prevailed.

In **Genesis 11:6**, **"The Lord said, 'If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.'"** The Lord saw that the people were united in rebellion. If nothing was done, the people would continue to rebel against God without limit. So the Trinity God decided to take action to prevent united rebellion. **Genesis 11:7-8**, **"Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city."**

By the way, have you ever noticed what **Genesis 10:25** says? **"Two sons were born to Eber: One was named Peleg, because in his time the earth was divided."** "Peleg," means, "division," and Peleg was given this name, **"because in his time the earth was divided."** The time periods of Genesis 10 and 11 overlap, so this verse is probably intended as a marker to tell us when the languages were confused and the people were scattered.

The confusion of the languages probably did not occur at the individual level, but rather at the family or tribal level. In Genesis 10, 72 families were named; and so, in Genesis 11, we can imagine 72 families, each speaking a unique language, spreading out across the globe. Why did God want them to spread out? Well, one reason may have been to prevent rebellious leaders, like Nimrod, from seizing power and controlling all the people. Long distances and different languages isolated people groups from one another.



Even with modern transportation and instant communications, still today, language and culture differences, and national borders limit the influence of powerful leaders and prevent mankind from joining together in rebellion against God. God's ways are wise. The proliferation of languages actually helps to protect us from evil by limiting the influence of evil leaders.



Of course, the barriers of languages, nations, and cultures also create a challenge for us in spreading the gospel. Learning a new language and culture takes effort. It is like scaling a high wall. This adds to the challenge of the missionary task of preaching the Good News to all nations. We are continually challenged, who will scale the walls to take the Good News of Jesus to the other side?



IV. Closing

As we close for today, I want to challenge all of us to examine our own lives. Are we meeting the challenge of scaling the walls to share the love of Jesus with others? Sometimes the walls are high and ancient, like divisions between languages and cultures. But sometimes the walls are smaller things, like social customs that say we should not speak about religion in public, and family attitudes that are hostile toward the gospel. What are the walls that God wants you to climb over in order to share His love?

And what about towers? The 16th century painter Pieter Brueghel painted the Tower of Babel like this. You probably aren't building any towers that look like this. But actually, many things can become towers of pride or towers of rebellion in our lives. If we commit the same sin over and over, it is like adding bricks to build a tower of rebellion in our heart. Some people think, "Oh, it is only a small sin." Maybe so, one brick is also small. But what happens when you pile them up?



Also, anything we do to make a name for ourselves can become a tower of pride. One person's tower might be their bank account. They pursue money; they want to pile it up higher and higher. Another person's tower might be education. They want to rise to the top of the academic pile by getting the best grades and receiving the top degrees and honors. Education and money are not bad things; they are good things. But what is the attitude of the heart? If we are trusting in human effort instead of in God, then even good things can become towers of pride or rebellion in our lives.

We each need to ask ourselves, "What towers am I building in my life?" And, "Why am I building them?" There is nothing wrong with building towers, if our motives and purposes are right. But if we have been building towers of pride or rebellion, then we need to repent of our sins and change our ways. We need to either stop building, or we need to change our heart and find new and better reasons for building. We need to work for the glory of God, not for our own reputations. Let's pray.

V. Closing Prayer