

## Genesis: The Book of Beginnings

# The Tower of Babel

### Genesis 11

The world unites to rebel against God and build the famous Tower of Babel. This is the city and kingdom that Nimrod founds before going on to build others, and it became the enduring symbol of rebellion against God (10:8-12). It looks like faith has disappeared and nothing can stop the builders and their idolatry. But then God comes down and scatters them. G.K. Chesterton said, “Christendom has had a series of revolutions and in each one of them Christianity has died. Christianity has died many times and risen again; for it had a God who knew the way out of the grave.” Babel dies, but something else rises.

#### ***Making a Name***

The earth has “one lip and one words” (v1), likely meaning the same religion and language (cf. Zeph. 3:9). It appears that not just the descendants of Ham have gone east, but at least some of sons of Shem, idolatrous Hebrews, have joined them. Like Adam and Eve, Cain, and Lot, people go east to get away from the Lord. They find a nice flat place called Shinar (Sumer) and settle there rather than spread out and fill the earth as God commanded Noah (9:1). There’s no good stone like in Palestine, so they bake bricks and use mortar, toilsome labor done by men rather than the god’s who build tower in the *Enuma Elish* (v3). The goal is to reach into heaven and establish a name to prevent them from being scattered (v4). They think they are great and want to cement that greatness by grabbing something God has not given, just like Adam and Eve, Cain, Lamech, and the sons of God (3:6; 4:8, 23-24; 6:1). They don’t gladly bear the name of God, which is what the Third commandment is all about, but set out to make their own. Idolatry is not just wrong, but tragically stupid because every gift comes down from God. He wants to bless us. When we clutch for gifts the Giver hasn’t given, we lose. When we lift ourselves up, He humbles us. When we humble ourselves, *He* lifts us up (12:3).

#### ***From Babel to Babble***

Consumed with their own greatness, the omniscient God still has to squint to see the city and tower (v5). God both makes fun of the tower and takes it seriously at the same time (vv6-7). Everything the Babylonians strive for is frustrated. They are united in speech but will now be confused and unable to work together (v7). They settle together but are now dispersed (v8). They build a city that is now abandoned mid-project (cf. Lk. 14:28ff.). “Babel” means “gate of god”, but in Hebrew *bll* means “confusion”, like our “babble.” It is a great comfort that God frustrates the evil work of men. Adam and Eve couldn’t eat from the tree of life, Cain was a wanderer, and we have three branches of government. The Tower of Babel goes down in history as the quintessential failure to finish. God wants the world filled with people worshiping Him, not huddled up worshipping themselves, so out they go (v9). It’s an enormous comfort that great evil is futile, and the Lord is on the throne reigning and ruling.

#### ***The Reversal of Babel***

The idolatrous dream of a united nations comes and goes, but the true reality of God’s kingdom has begun. Zephaniah: “For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering” (3:9-10). Pentecost is the reversal of Babel when the languages of the nations aren’t eliminated but invaded by the gospel (Acts 2:8). This work continues today. The Church is all about Jesus, “for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). He calls us to take His name, and it doesn’t matter what family, culture or nation we’re part of. The ten generations of Shem show God working and planning to bless all the nations, even as Abram emerges from moon-worshipping idolaters (Josh. 24:2; Gen. 11:10-32; 12:1-3). Bear and exalt the name of Jesus Christ and join the nations walking out of Babel into the new Jerusalem with all their glory (Rev. 21:10, 24-27).

## NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

### Today's Passage: Genesis 11:4-9

4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." 5 And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. 6 And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." 8 So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. 9 Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

1. What are the builders of the Tower of Babel hoping to accomplish (verse 4)?
  - A. The whole earth one language v1
  - b. settle there v2
  - c. said to one another v3
  - d. come let us make bricks v3
  - e. let us build v4
  - f. city and tower v4
  - g. Lord came down v5
  - f' city and tower v5
  - e. that man had built v5
  - d. come let us confuse v7
  - c. one another's speech v7
  - b. scattered from there v8
  - a. confused language of the whole earth v9
2. The Bible is often funny because God is funny. This passage is a chiasm (k-eye-asm) with the point (like a spear!) in verse 5. What happens in verse 5, and why is it funny?
3. The builders are rebellious against God. What happens to their efforts to build the tower (verse 8)? What happens to our work when we rebel against the Lord?
4. Draw a picture of the Tower of Babel (really tall) but incomplete as the builders can't understand each other.

### Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

*Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth.*  
—Genesis 11:9