

DATE: June 1, 2008

TEXT: Genesis 11: 1-9

TITLE: "Genesis IX: The Tower of Babel"



This morning I am concluding our study of the first section of Genesis. I have decided, since I will be out of town a number of weeks this summer, we will take a break from our study of Genesis and resume the study of the patriarchs in September.

We are looking at the last section of what is called the pre-history in Genesis. This is not to say the events did not take place in history... it just means we are unable to put definitive dates on the events. What has been the overall theme of these first 11 chapters of Genesis? Imagine the situation of the men and women who first read Genesis. Moses was writing this history. The people were in the wilderness. They had been in the wilderness for many, many years. They had spent their entire lives in slavery in Egypt. They were preparing themselves for many years of warfare as they entered the promised land. The primary purpose of these first 11 chapters was to answer this question: Why is there so much suffering and pain and evil in the world? These Israelites in the wilderness were in the midst of suffering and pain and evil. But isn't that also

our situation? Do we not have the exact same question? Why is there so much suffering and pain and evil in the world? Again and again we have seen this question answered. Again and again we have seen that humanity, when given the chance to choose between the path of obedience to God and the path of disobedience have chosen the path of disobedience. We saw this truth in the story of Adam and Eve. We saw this truth in the story of Cain and Abel. Even last week in the story of Noah, we saw Noah and his son Ham choose a path of sin and disobedience. This morning we once again see the same theme, but this time on a societal level.

We are now a number of years away from the flood. The world has repopulated itself.

The people moved away from Mt. Ararat and settled in the plains of Shinar. This is now present day Iran and Iraq. This is also the original location of the Garden of Eden. I will share two lessons this morning.

Lesson # 1 Notice the great sin of this society. This sin of independence from God.

Genesis 11: 4 states...

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

This is the period of time when Nimrod was the leader of the people. Nimrod built the great city of Babylon. The society had become egotistical and secular. Although they had a belief in God, they had corrupted that idea of god into something they desired to worship. The building of the tower was to point to themselves. They desired to “make a name for ourselves.” They were seeking to build a religion with Babylon at the center. It was a man-made religion.

I believe this is still the great danger of our society. Individuals want a god. Individuals and societies desire to worship a power greater than themselves. What often happens is that humanity creates a religion and a god that requires humanity to be good, work hard and strive to be acceptable to god. The *Pulpit commentary* put it this way...

The great tower was only a symbol. The people knew they could never build a tower literally up to heaven. This was the tragic mistake of the human race: they undertook to build a great tower in reaching up to God, a religion of works and self-effort. They thought themselves capable of reaching god on their own, thought they were good enough and righteous enough to reach god by their own works and efforts.

A works-based religion is never a true religion.

Lesson # 2 Notice, once again, that God came down to man to reveal Himself. *Geneses 11:5,7*

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.

In Hebrew there is intentional irony in this passage. As the people were building this stupid tower to reach God, God came down and encountered them. The only way to encounter a living god is to allow Him to touch your life. We can never be good enough. We can never be religious enough. All we can do is surrender and receive His grace. I purchased a few months ago the complete sermon set of Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon was a great, great preacher in London in mid to late 1800's. Allow me to share with you his application of this text. Spurgeon writes...

But I know you will go away, many of you, and try to build up your own Babel tower, to go to heaven. Some of you will go one way to work, and some another. You will go the ceremony way: you will lay the foundation of the structure with infant baptism, build confirmation on it, and the Lords Supper. "I shall go to heaven," you say; "do not I keep Good Friday and Christmas-day? I am a better man than those dissenters. I am a most extraordinary man. Do I not say more prayers than any one?" You will be a long while going up that treadmill before you get an inch higher. That is not the way to get to the stars. One says, "I will go and study the bible, and believe right doctrine; and I have no doubt that by believing right doctrine I shall be saved." Indeed you will not! You can be no more saved by believing right doctrine than you can by doing right actions. "There," says another, "I like that; I shall go a believe in Christ and like as I like." Indeed you will not! For if you believe in Christ he will not let you live as your flesh liketh; by his spirit he will constrain you to mortify its affections and lusts. If he gives you the grace to make you believe, he will give you the grace to live a holy life afterward. You can not believe in

Christ unless you renounce every fault, and resolve to serve him with full purpose of heart.

Spurgeon then goes on to give an illustration of surrender to Christ. I will not quote it because it is lengthy and the old English is difficult, but it is a wonderful illustration so I will paraphrase it.

There is a captain of a ship that is sailing the seas. He also has on ship his 9 year old son as a cabin boy. One day the boy was following a monkey and he climbs up to the highest point on the tallest mast. He soon realizes that he is unable to get down. It is impossible for him to get down. If he lets go he will plummet to his death on the deck below. His father looks up and sees his son's plight. He knows no man can reach his son without breaking the mast and plunging everyone to their death. Spurgeon then goes on to say....

The captain called for a speaking-trumpet; he put it to his mouth and shouted "Boy, the next time the ship lurches, throw yourself into the sea." The poor boy looked down at the sea; it was a long way; he could not bear the idea of throwing himself into the roaring current below. So he clung to the main-truck with all his might, though there was no doubt that he must soon let go and perish. The father called for a gun, pointing it up at him, said, "Boy, the next time the ship lurches let go, or I will shoot you!" The boy knew his father would keep his word; the ship lunched on one side, over went the boy splash into the sea, and out went the brawny arms of the sailors after him; the sailors rescued him.

Now, we like the boy, are in position of extraordinary danger, by nature, which neither you nor I can possibly escape of ourselves. Unfortunately, we have got some good works of our own, like that main-truck, and we cling to them so fondly that we never give

them up, we shall be dashed to pieces at last. He, therefore, says, “sinner let go thine own trust, and drop into the sea of my love.” Must the weapon of destruction be pointed directly at you? Must you hear the dreadful threat—“he that believeth not shall be damned” You must do it, or else you perish! Let go your hold! That is faith!

The Lord comes down to us. Stop building your tower of Babel. Stop clinging to the mast. Let go and trust in God. Stop building a religion that you are comfortable with. Let go and trust in God. Stop working and rely on God. Let go and trust in God. That is the message of Moses to the Israelites in the wilderness; that is the message of Moses to you and to me.

Come to the table of the Lord, but not as an act of achievement; come as a act of surrender.

AMEN