

Genesis 11:1-10

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[0 : 00] All right, well, turn back with me in your Bible to Genesis chapter 11, Genesis chapter 11. This text is, it's post-flood.

God has flooded the entire earth at this point. The only people that remain are Noah and his family. Noah has three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

The population is probably quite small. When our passage opens in chapter 11, it says that they're located in the Shinar Valley.

The Shinar Valley is, it's a valley that meets in the point of a mountain range, but it also meets at the base of a fork of the Euphrates River. Today it would be in northwest Iraq.

Yes, northwest Iraq. It's where Babylon was built, as you can tell by the name Babel. And that land, that area, is very fertile.

[1 : 15] It's great for farming. It's got plenty of good minerals and things for making mortar and the things that we read in the text.

So that's the context. Post-flood, low population, Shinar Valley. This passage, unlike some in the Bible, in the Gospels, this is also really important.

Sometimes topography and locations and distances can open up meaning. And that's one thing that's going on in this passage tonight.

Where people are, where they've been, where they're going, is actually really important for this text. So I want you to just flip over one page. Well, in my Bible, it's flip over one page and look at chapter 10, the start of chapter 10.

And you'll see that the start of chapter 10 reads like this, these are the generations of the sons of Noah. And then if you flip back and look at verse 10 of chapter 11, you see that it says, these are the generations of Shem.

[2 : 23] And so the Tower of Babel narrative is fit, oddly, in the middle of a genealogy. Moses is writing the book of Genesis and he's listing the sons of Noah.

And all of a sudden we get a break and smack the Tower of Babel story. And then he picks back up with genealogy again.

Now that's really important. The question is why? Why does he do that? Why would he interrupt the genealogy for a story like this?

And if you look even more closely, you'll see that in the first part of the genealogy, he lists the genealogy of Shem, one of his sons. But then again in verse 10 of chapter 11, he repeats it. Shem's genealogy again. Except this time it's in more detail. He not only lists the sons of Shem, he lists all the numbers. How many were born to this guy, how old they lived, things like that.

[3 : 32] So one of the things we'll be doing in looking at this text tonight is answering that question. Why is this text in the middle of a genealogy? Now, I'm going to go ahead and say what I think the reason is from the outset.

And I think the reason is this. It's rooted in something that's going on in the whole book of Genesis. If you turn with me briefly to Genesis chapter 3 verse 15.

Genesis chapter 3 verse 15. It says this. This is God talking to the serpent. He's cursing the serpent at the fall.

And he says this. I will put enmity between you and the woman. Between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head.

And you shall bruise his heel. Now, if we were doing a close study of Genesis chapter 3. It would reveal that that curse that God gives to the serpent. Is actually the centerpiece of that passage.

[4 : 36] When he says, I will divide all of mankind in two. There will be the seed of the woman.

And the seed of the serpent. The seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head. While the serpent strikes at the seed's heel. Right? You know the passage well. What that passage does. Is God is saying. There are two types of people in this world. The seed of the woman. And the seed of the serpent. And what the book of Genesis does. Is it follows that line. And so ten times after that. In the book of Genesis. We have genealogies. Ten genealogies. In the book of Genesis. These are the generations of dot dot dot. And every single time these genealogies appear. [5 : 34] They divide. They divide. Between two types of people. The seed of the woman. And the seed of the serpent. Now.

In the prior chapter. To chapter 11. You remember. You may remember that. Ham. Had gone in. In some inappropriate way.

The details are not clear. And committed a sin. Against his father. And against God. And. Ham is then cursed. And.

In all that. The point is this. Shem. Is called. In verse 26. Of chapter 9. Blessed. Blessed. Blessed. Be the Lord. The God of Shem. And let Canaan. Be his servant. And then. Japheth is blessed. May God. Enlarge. Japheth. So right there.

[6 : 31] What we have is a division. Between the sons of Noah. Ham on the one hand. Is cursed. Shem and Japheth. Are blessed. And Ham's son.

Of course. Is Canaan. Is Canaan. All right. So. We're almost done. With this little initial. Genealogy bit. I know it's kind of like. Ugh. But if we get it.

Grounded. Then the rest of the text. Really does make more sense. So almost there. One. Couple more things. It's Ham. The cursed son.

Of Noah. That goes and builds Babel. That's what the text says. In chapter 10. It's Ham. The cursed son. But it also says.

In chapter. Towards the end of chapter 10. That. Shem's family. Starts to migrate. To the east. To the east.

[7 : 25] Where Babel is. And we know that. Not only because of. Chapter 10. Verse 30. But. In chapter 11. When. Abraham is called. Out of the land.

He's called from. Ur of the Chaldees. Abram is a son. Of Shem. And Ur of the Chaldees. Is right. Next to Babel. In fact. Even farther east.

And so. Here's what's going on. When the sons. Disperse. Ham goes. His sons go. And start to build Babel. But.

At some point. The sons of Shem. Migrate. To Babel. And that's where. Abram comes out of. Okay. So.

What we have there. Is we have this mixture. We have the son. Ham. Who was cursed. Building. This tower. We have the son. Shem.

[8 : 20] Who was blessed by God. The seed of the woman. Chosen. Chosen. Before the foundation. Of the world. And he's mixing. He's.

Starting to fall. You see. And so. One of the primary things. That God is doing. In the tower of Babel narrative. In the middle of these genealogies.

Is he's separating. He's showing us. The line. That is blessed. And of course. Who is Shem's son. Going to one day be.

Christ. Christ comes from the line of Shem. So this. Historical narrative. Really roots us. In the historical development.

Of the Old Testament. And it does more than that. And we're going to see that. Okay. So. We've got that on the table. Okay. Now we're going to. Dive into the text.

[9 : 13] We're going to dive into the text. So look down with me. And you'll see this pattern. Emerging in the text. The text has.

Four. Come. Let us. Statements. Three of them are spoken. By the people at Babel. One of them is spoken. Spoken by God. And we're going to look at those. So it says this.

The whole earth. Had one language. And the same words. And as people migrated from the east. They found a plain. In the land of Shinar. And settled there. And they said to one another.

Here it is. Here's the first one. Come. Let us make bricks. And burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone. And bitumen for mortar.

Come. Let us make bricks. And burn them thoroughly. So far. In that first. Come. Let us. Statement. We don't. We don't see anything. That strikes us.

[10:11] As obviously sinful. Right? I mean. There's nothing in that statement. About. Come. Let us make bricks. You know. We don't. We don't initially say.

Oh. They made bricks. Sin. Right? There's nothing there. That triggers us to that. But if you keep going to the next verse. It highlights the first one.

Verse four. Then they said. Come. Let us build ourselves a city. And a tower. With its top in the heavens. Okay. So. So. Now we know.

Why they've done the brick thing. In the previous verse. They want to build a city. That's top. Goes to. The heavens.

In other words. What they're saying is this. We are a completely autonomous civilization. We are self-governing.

[11:07] We make our own bricks. We build a tower to the heavens. We don't need God. Let us build for ourselves a city.

It's a motivation of autonomy. The point is this. God. Given boundaries are being crossed. If you remember back to Genesis chapter one. When God said.

Let us make man in our own image. And he did that. He creates Adam and Eve. In his own image. He gives them commands. Immediately. That's the first thing he says to them. Are commands. Laws. But the laws are also blessing. He says this. You remember them. Be fruitful. And multiply. Subdue the earth.

And have dominion over it. We call this. In theology. The cultural mandate. God mandated. That they multiply. That they fill the earth. That they take the garden of Eden.

[12:07] And spread it. To make the fame of God's infinite holiness. Spread everywhere. Like we talked about this morning. What's happening here at the Tower of Babel.

Is there's a reversal. Of God's mandate. From Genesis chapter one. The image of God. The people who bear his image. Are rejecting that image.

They're saying. We will not multiply. We will not spread. We will not be dispersed. We will stay here. In one location. And be autonomous.

There's a reversal. We will not. We will not. There's a reversal. There's a reversal going on. In other words. They're saying. God. We are not bound. By your limits.

The limits of the heavens. That does not constrain us. We will. We will get there. With our bricks. And our mortar.

[13:04] It would be wrong. Here to. Look at this text. And say. This is. This is an early form. Of atheism.

Happening. It's not atheism. They're. They're not saying. I don't believe in God. They're saying. No. God. I know you're there. I'm just rejecting you.

It's like this. A guy from. A theologian from the States. Once said it this way. As he was riding on a train. He looked out. And he. He saw a little girl.

Sitting on her father's lap. And she was angry. And she reached up. And she slapped him in the face. And he thought to himself.

What a picture. Of man. We have to sit on God's lap. To slap him in the face. You see. We have to take the creation.

[14:02] That God gave. And use it. To try to slap God in the face. We must sit in his lap. To do it. That's what's going on here.

In Babel. The third. Statement is this. And this is really. Relevatory. Let us make a name. For ourselves. In verse four. Let us make a name.

For ourselves. Lest we. Be. Dispersed. Over the face. Of the whole earth. This is a societal. Rejection. Of God as creator. And man as creature. They want a reversal. Now we've seen this before. Haven't we? You remember in Genesis chapter one.

What happened with Adam and Eve. Eve is in the garden. And the serpent comes. And the serpent. Tempts Eve. And what does he say? Do you want to be like God?

[15:02] Do you. Do you want to be like God? Eve? And what should she have said to him? I already am like God. What do you mean?

Do I. Do I want to be like God? I am like God? I am like God. He created me in his image. I bear his image. And what Satan did was he said. Do you want to take God's place?

Do you want to pull God down so you can sit yourself on the throne? And of course she fell for it. That's the same exact thing that's going on at Babel. That's the same exact thing that happened when Cain killed Abel. That's the same exact thing that happened prior to the flood. And in Romans chapter one. Paul tells us that's the same exact thing that every single human being born into this world. wants to do. We want to be divine.

[16:09] And that's why Paul says we exchange the glory of God for an image made of man. We want the image.

Right? We want the idol. See, I don't think what we should do is come to this text and just merely say, you know, this looks like the society we live in today.

Not to say that it doesn't. I think there are parallels. But I think what God's asking us to do is come to this text and see that the desire at Babel to reach the tops of heaven so that we can make a name for ourselves is a universal desire in every single human being's heart brought about by sin. Oh, I want a name for myself. I want to be God. I want to be God. Now, finally, the final thing they say there in the middle is this.

There's a corporate insecurity. They say, let's build this tower up to the heavens lest we be scattered.

[17:22] Lest we be scattered. Now, why is it that they say that? Lest we be scattered. Well, because they know who God is.

They know Yahweh. They know what He's done. How has God judged mankind prior to this text? Well, He's scattered them.

When Adam and Eve are kicked out of the garden, or when they sin, what happens? They're booted. They get kicked out of the garden, gates shut, scatter. When Cain kills Abel, what is the punishment?

You remember? Go roam. Scatter yourself from your family. Roam the land. And when the flood comes, that's an ultimate scattering.

God says, these people are corrupt. I will scatter them. And He floods the earth. Now, then we have a change of scene in the text.

[18:27] A change of scene. And this is supposed to be humorous. Ironic. If you look at verse 5, it says this. The Lord came down to sea.

You see the irony there? We're going to build a tower to the heavens. We're going to take the place of God. And then, when God gets involved, He has to come down.

He says, I can't see it from heaven. Where is it? Where is it? There's an irony here. God can't see it. Now, we know that this text is not literally saying God somehow had to strain His eyes.

But sometimes the Bible talks like that in human terms so that we can understand. He's pointing out the fact that this tower, you know, it's not a skyscraper.

They just didn't have the ability to do that. It's not even close to the heavens. They're totally incapable of accomplishing this task. Listen to Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 14 to King Ahaz.

[19:41] You said in your heart, I will ascend to the heavens. Above the stars of God, I will set my throne on high.

I will sit on the mount of assembly in the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will make myself like the Most High.

And then Isaiah says this to him, But you will be brought low, down to Sheol, down to the depths of the pit. King Ahaz was the king of Babylon.

King Ahaz's kingdom set in the very exact spot that the Tower of Babel was being built some few hundred years earlier.

Still, Babel, Babylon, throughout the Old Testament, represents this desire in man to ascend to the heavens, to take the place of God.

[20:47] And Paul picks up on it in Romans chapter 1 and says, This is my heart. This is our heart. This is our heart apart from Christ. To be God.

This is what it is to be in Adam. It's to yearn for divinity that it's not ours. To yearn for a divinity that destroys the distinction between creator and creature.

All right. So what's the result? What's the result? The result is that we move in this passage from order to chaos.

From order to chaos. Look down with me at what God says, starting in verse 6 again. The Lord said, Behold, they are one people.

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. Now this is an incredible statement God makes. [21 : 50] What God is saying here is that His creation has an unusual, compared to the rest of creation, power.

He says, look, if we let them continue to do this, nothing will be impossible for them. And what He's saying there is that the image of God in man is very strong.

That man has been given a gift from God to be like Him. With the power to create and to cultivate and to subdue, as it says in Genesis chapter 1.

And when this power, the image of God in man, is used wrongly, sinfully, poorly, it devastates. It brings people down with it.

And that's what's going on. Shem, the blessed son of Noah. The line of the family that will give birth to Christ. He's there.

[22 : 55] His sons are there. This is happening to them. They're being sucked down to the depths of despair. They're replacing the image of God for some idol.

And so God says here, look, we're going to take care of this. We're going to do something about it. And then here's the final come, let us statement. Come, verse 7, let us go down and there confuse their language so that they may not understand one another's speech.

So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth. And they left off building the city. Now, like we said a minute ago, expulsion from the land has been a common judgment in the Old Testament prior to this.

And what is revealed here is something that speaks to us today about God's character. And that's this.

God's judgments are also God's mercies. God's judgments are also God's mercies. Now, what do I mean by that?

[24 : 09] In Genesis 3, again, when God kicks Adam and Eve out of the land, there's a verse at the very end of that chapter that says, In other words, God's saying, Adam, Eve, I'm pushing you out of the garden so that you don't eat of the tree of life.

And if you, because if they ate of the tree of life, the state that they had found themselves in, a state of curse, would be stamped eternal. You see, God's judgment to them, the curse, is a blessing.

We know that to be the case even more because what was the punishment to be if they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? You shall surely die.

And in the Hebrew there, it actually says, you shall die, die. And we translate that as surely die. But God literally repeats the word twice.

Die, die. An eternal death. And then when it comes to time for curse, He doesn't give that to them. He protects them.

[25 : 26] He says, I'm going to push you out of the garden so that you don't make this permanent. I'm going to give you the promise of the seed of the woman. So that one day, in Christ Jesus, the seed of the woman, you can return to the garden.

And that's the same thing that's happening here. Lest these people destroy themselves, we must disperse them. God's judgments are mercies.

We have never in this life been given what we deserve. Never. We deserve death.

We've broken the law. We are under wrath. And God has given us mercy. There's only one person in the history of the world that has been judged without mercy.

And that's God Himself. Christ. He's the only one that has ever received in this life what He actually... Not what He deserved, but what we deserved.

[26 : 37] Now, we'll end with this. We'll bring this history down the line right to us.

And we'll close. The completion of the story of Babel is actually part of our eternal hope. It's part of our eternal hope.

You see, the story doesn't stop in verse 9. Right? Like, the genealogy starts back. We get to Shem. We get to Abraham.

We get the covenant. We get to Christ. But Babel is actually specifically reversed in our history.

If you turn with me to Acts chapter 2. Acts chapter 2. Acts chapter 2. Why do we study the Old Testament?

[27 : 50] Why do we study passages like this? One of the reasons is that this is your story. This is my story. Abraham is my father.

Abraham is your father. And this is about us. This is what God did for our family prior. And this is what He did in fulfillment. Acts chapter 2 verse 1.

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind. And it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

And divided tongues as a fire appeared to them. And rested on each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And they began to speak in tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together. And they were bewildered because each one was learning, hearing them speak in his own language.

[28 : 52] And they were amazed. How is it that we are able to hear each one in his own native language? You see, what happened at Babel, the judgment God gave at Babel, in the dispersion by way of language and people groups, is reversed at Pentecost.

Because of what Christ did in the death and resurrection, in creating the church, in calling the church out of the world, He has now said, look, I'm bringing this people back together.

Look, one of the things we can take from this passage today in 2014, is that we sitting in this building are a product of the reversal of Babel.

And that means some things very practically. That means that we should be international Christians. Loving the fact that there are people from every tribe, tongue, and nation being called by the gospel.

Are we embracing that truth? Are we embracing that truth? For non-Christians, if there's any non-Christians today, if you're a skeptic and wondering about this Christianity thing, what I want to offer you is this.

[30 : 14] What Christianity teaches and what the gospel teaches, what Christ has taught and done, is that the way of salvation, which is what you're seeking and probably why you're here tonight, the way of salvation is not to be had by building your own autonomous tower, by trying to stack your works and your accomplishments, to try to build some tower up to the heavens.

It can't be done. The gospel message is this, that the only tower, the only ladder, the only way to get to God, the only way to be saved, the only way to fill the hole in happiness that's missing out in your life, is the work and person of Christ Jesus.

What he's done in dying and resurrecting for sin. That's the only way. And if you're a Christian tonight, I think one of the things that Tower of Babel calls us to do is this, beware of your independence.

Beware and ask yourself, am I living autonomously, even though I am a Christian? Is there evidence of utter dependence on God tonight in your life?

Is there an evidence of that? Now, before we conclude, the story actually doesn't even stop in Acts chapter 2.

[31 : 59] And the story hasn't stopped here, or in the church as it stands right now. If you flip to the final verse we'll read, in Revelation chapter 18.

Like we said earlier, the story of Babel continues through the Old Testament because Babylon is the fulfillment, the continuation of Babel.

Now that is reversed in part because of the work of Christ in Acts chapter 2. But it's not completely demolished yet. It's not completely demolished yet.

If you look at Revelation chapter 18, after this, after this, I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory.

And he called out with a mighty voice, and here's the good news, fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great. Fallen, fallen is the Tower of Babel.

[32 : 58] Fallen, fallen is human autonomy. That's coming. That's coming. That's the hope we talked about this morning. It's coming. And if you look at chapter 19, verse 6, and compare these two, this is what's replacing it.

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude. That's the same phrase that was used in Acts chapter 2. Like the roar of many waters, and like the sound of mighty pillars of thunder. That's the church singing out to God, crying out, saying, Hallelujah, for the Lord our God, the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult, and give Him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come.

That's the hope we have. The ultimate reversal of Babel will be in the second coming of Christ. So, my prayer for us today is that, in the meantime, while we wait, that we would be completely dependent upon Him for help, hope in the glory of God, that we would be able to persevere unto that day when we as the great multitude are standing there at the throne room, singing with one voice, no more separation, the church together, before the throne, at the coming of our Lord Jesus. Let's pray that that would be true of us. Let's pray. Father, we ask now that You would give us eyes to see these great connections that You've given us in the Bible.

[34 : 40] We can look back at the Old Testament, we see our own story, we see Abraham, we see Babel, we see these things. Father, we thank You that You made covenant with sinners, and that that is being fulfilled, has been fulfilled in the work of Christ, and will be fulfilled in His second coming.

Lord, we rest and hope in those truths. Lord, help us now in this life while we wait for such a great reversal as the separation of Your family across the world in languages and ethnic groups and all these things.

While we wait, that we would be completely dependent upon You, upon Christ's work, upon the Word, upon prayer, that we would persevere to the end and see this day.

Help us, O Lord, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. All right. Well, let's praise God one last time tonight together.

We'll sing Psalm 30. Psalm 30, verses 1 to 5. And that's on page 34. And we'll sing it to the tune of St. Andrew.

[35 : 55] St. Andrew. Angus will lead us. Let's stand together and worship God. Amen. St. Andrew.

Joan pres ■■■■■■■■ NAICS to me. You did not let my glory rejoice and triumph on thee.

Lord, all in me I pray to you. A glory storm I have.

O Lord, you brought me from the grave and saved my soul from death.

You hold holy heart sing to the Lord, sing and with joyful voice.

[37 : 31] When you recall his holy name, you will be holy name, and praise him, and rejoice.

and rejoice. Mercy, and peace.

From God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, be with you all, both now and forever. Amen.

Amen. Amen.