

# **BABEL: THE RISE OF BAD THEOLOGY**

**Genesis 11.1-9**

The opening chapters of Scripture show us God's good design and humanity's rejection of God's plan. Humans spiral away from God as sin grips the created order.

Despite human rebellion, God revealed Himself as one who graciously comes down into the human predicament to offer mercy and salvation.

## **The Problem: Bad theology emerged at Babel**

The problem was not the development of technologies to build cities, but rather the use of these technologies towards godless ends. We can distinguish God's good structures from their use in corrupted directions (Cf. Wolters, *Creation Regained*).

The people build a tower to make a name for themselves (Genesis 11.4). Their construction represents an upward climb to God so that he might take notice of them.

Archaeologists have discovered about 60 ancient ziggurats in Mesopotamia. These are structures with step-like features symbolizing human ascent to placate the gods. Babel is at the fountainhead of false worship.

This episode is a manifestation of human arrogance. The people plan to manipulate God to procure favor. They think they can make God obligated to notice them. They have envisioned a pliable, weak god.

The legacy of Babel appears on a regular basis. We all think we can control God. What things do I need to do to procure God's favor? Or the reverse, what have I done to offend God and deserve this hardship?

## **The Punishment: God scatters the people of the earth**

God knows that the trajectory of humans is towards their own destruction. This false and enslaving theology will only be perpetuated (Genesis 11.6). God frustrates their design and interrupts their ungodly association (Genesis 11.7-8).

God's intervention at Babel was an act of grace. God's judgment saved the people from themselves.

The narrative of Babel uses the phrase "the whole earth" five times (Genesis 11.1, 4, 8, 9 [x2]). In their effort to make a name for themselves by having a place of unity, they refused the divine command to "fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1.28). They rejected the cultural mandate.

God's dividing of languages creates diversity and sets the stage for a mission to "the whole earth".

### **People of every tongue are redeemed in Christ**

We worship the sovereign God of the universe who does not respond to our manipulation. We cannot go up to Him. He has come down to us in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus (2 Corinthians 8.9).

The confusion of languages in Genesis 11 points to its reversal at Pentecost when people from every nation "hear...the mighty works of God" in their own tongues (Acts 2.1-11).

In his vision of the eternal state, John says "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the lamb" (Revelation 7.9).

**Key Idea:** Let's make God's name great

### **Application Questions:**

In the fine hymn "All My Hope on God is Founded", one stanza reads:

Pride of man and earthly glory,  
Sword and crown betray his trust;  
What with care and toil be buildeth  
Tower and temple fall to dust.  
But God's power, hour by hour,  
Is my temple and my tower.

How does this poetry relate to Genesis 11.1-9?

Explore the tension in the human heart between the fallen desire to "make a name for ourselves" and the redeemed calling to "do everything to the glory of God" (Matthew 5.16; 1 Corinthians 10.31; 1 Peter 4.11).

How does Acts 2.1-11 reveal God's plan of scattering the nations?