

The Babel Syndrome

Genesis 11:1-9

6-15-2025

the opening chapters of the book of Genesis contain a description of mankind's downward descent into sin.

At creation, God made man in His image.

At the fall, man tried to become like God.

As sin continued to run its course, by Genesis 11 and the building of the Tower of Babel, we find mankind trying to make God in our image.

Or, as Voltaire so famously put it, "In the beginning God made man in his own image, and man has been trying to repay the favor ever since."

This is what one writer referred to as God abuse or the Babel Syndrome

Institutionalized paganism which tries to either replace God or at least make him more manageable and controllable.

Gen. 11 begins, "*Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar.*" (Genesis 11:1–3)

After the flood, as man began to multiply and increase, they started moving east to find room to grow

They came to a large plain in Shinar, what became known as Babylonia or modern-day Iraq.

In the region of Egypt and Israel, rocks are plentiful and used for building

But as people moved east, rocks became scarcer.

Houses using mud bricks were easy enough to build and repair, but more important structures such as city walls and palaces and granaries needed something much stronger to hold up over time

It was here in Babylonia that archeologists have found evidence that people first started using kilns to bake bricks which made them far stronger, as sturdy as stone in fact

Tar or pitch was then used for mortar which not only held them together, but waterproofed them from the elements.

“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.” But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. 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. 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. 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.” (Genesis 11:4–9)

There are three aspects of the tower to consider, offences which led to the confusion of languages

I. It was first, a Tower of Disobedience

- Genesis 1:28 says when God created Adam he blessed him and gave him the instructions to be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.
- After the flood, Genesis 9:1 says God blessed Noah and instructed him to be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth
- And then again in Gen. 9:7, God told Noah to be fruitful and increase in number, multiply on the earth and increase upon it.

God gave specific instructions to spread out and fill the earth

Yet when they came to the plains of Shinar, they decided they'd rather stay together in one place

In open defiance of Gods instructions, in verse 4 they said let's build a city so we won't be scattered over the face of the earth

Let's build a tower that reaches up to the heavens and be visible for miles in every direction and would keep us together.

They preferred the safety and security of their own company to obedience to Gods command

There is a warning here for all Gods people

Jesus' words to his church were to go out and fill the earth with his love and the message of the gospel

The world is broken and lost without Christ and he commands each of us to go to all people and make disciples of all nations

Yet it can be too easy to retreat into our worship centers and churches where it is safe and comfortable

where we know each other and are surrounded with people just like us and won't be challenged by other viewpoints and lifestyles and politics.

planning events to take care of ourselves rather than reach the lost

waiting and expecting for others to come to us, rather than us going out to them

ignoring Jesus words in his parable of the wedding banquet where the master told his servants to go out and compel people to come in

Acts 1:8 he told his followers we are to bear witness to him in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth, but that won't happen if we don't go!

The fellowship of the saints is precious and to be highly valued, yet must not be maintained at the cost of the lost and obedience to our Lord

If we keep quiet and keep it to ourselves, putting up walls to protect ourselves and keep unwanted's out, are we not retreating into modern-day Towers of Babel, to keep us safe from a scary world and disobedient to our Lord

In the midst of the world's uncertainties and dangers, what faith would that require?

Why look to God for help if we only do what comes easy and that we are comfortable with and know is within our own reach and abilities?

And how will we ever grow if we are never stretched, because we only undertake things that come easy to us and are safe

Where we never allow ourselves to get in a position where we have to fall on the grace of God

The tower of Babel was a tower of disobedience where people wanted to close themselves off from the world rather than engage it

But it was also

II. It was a Tower of Pride

They said, Let us build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens, not just so they wouldn't be scattered, but they say right out, so that we may make a name for ourselves.

To make a name means to make a memorial, a monument to themselves and their ingenuity
It reveals that in their pride they were actually seeking glory and fame

In verse 6 God said that if as one people they were able to do this, nothing they plan will be impossible for them

In other words their pride and arrogance would continue to grow unabated
In such an environment, where would the need for God or faith be

Self-reliance so we can do as we please
God becomes the last resort when all else fails

They had come through the flood and are puffed up with a pride not in the God who created and saved them, but rather gaining glory for themselves

Becoming like the woodpecker that flew to the top of a tall tree and gave it three hard pecks on the side. At the very moment of his third strike, a bolt of lightening struck the tree and left it in a pile of splinters on the forests floor. The woodpecker had just barely escaped and flew to a nearby tree where it clung in terror and amazement at what had happened. It hung there for some time, too scared to move and waiting to see what would happen next. But after some time, nothing else happened. Everything was quiet and it began to chuckle to itself saying, Well, well, well, who would have imagined that just three pecks of my beak could have such power.

contrary to popular belief, God helps those who help themselves is not in the Bible
God's word says God helps those who cry out to him for help.

If you and I try to take glory for ourselves which belongs to God alone, are we not as foolish as the woodpecker and the people of Babel?

CS Lewis wrote, The essential vice, the utmost evil, is pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, and drunkenness are mere flea bites in comparison. It was through pride that the Devil became the Devil. Pride leads to every other vice. It is the complete anti-God state of mind...as long as you are proud you cannot know God. A Proud man is always looking down on things and people. And, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.

It is ironic that here they are trying to build a tower which would reach heaven to show how great they were.

Yet with a note of humor, in verse 5 it says that God had to come down in order to see it.

I had an Old Testament professor who said the picture is of God actually having to stoop down in order to see it.

And when you come right down to it, if you set them side by side, all the things we can take such pride in, our accomplishments and wealth, positions of power and authority, our accomplishments and abilities and what not, are really extremely small when compared to God. And all the science and technology and power people rely on and can take so much pride in in place of God, will never be able to satisfy or bring true happiness and contentment.

Babel was a tower of Disobedience.
It was a Tower of Pride.

III. And, It was a Tower of Idolatry

Built not to worship God but control him

The people said, come let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches the heavens. The sentence structure here indicates that their main purpose was not building the city, but the tower.

The emphasis is let us build a city and especially a tower.

For it is the tower of ancient cities which carried the greatest significance.

In the ancient world at that time, society was agricultural and people lived on the land not in cities.

Cities were the gathering place for trade and common protection.

The place for public events and administration.

The place for granaries to bring and store food.

And most importantly, the place for worship.

And because of the central place of religion in everyone's lives, all the buildings in one way or another connected with the temple.

In effect early cities were large temple complexes where people gathered for worship and to bring their offerings and sacrifices.

Generally, in the midst of these complexes, right next to the temple, were large tiered structures called ziggurats.

When the passage says let us build a tower this is what it's talking about.

The ziggurats were not the actual temple and apparently played no role in the worship itself, yet were dedicated to particular deities and were for their use only

multi-tiered they towered over all other structures in the city and looked like giant stairways, which in fact is what they were, even referred to as stairways or ladders of the gods where the high priest or priestess might go to confer with the god or the god would descend to receive his or her offerings

these towers reveal that mankind had now reached the place where since they couldn't become gods themselves, they were trying to remake God into their own image
little more than glorified men or women just with more power

AW Tozer pointed out, The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him

That's what the Babel Syndrome really is, developing ideas of God that are unworthy of him, warping him to fit our image

They believed the gods have needs and wants

They needed help to reach the earth and get back to heaven so these giant stairways were built
And because they were seen as just glorified men and women, they would get tired and need rest

so these towers would often contain a single room at the top, with a bed in it for the gods to rest when they grew tired on their long climb back into the heavens
and since they got hungry there was also a table set with food for them every day to refresh themselves when they grew hungry

since the gods had needs, they needed people to serve them and meet their needs, bring them sacrifices, food for the gods and offerings to pacify them

and because of their needs, many believed they could be manipulated and controlled through the sacrifices and offerings

unfortunately sometimes don't we have some of these tendencies

we tithe with the thought in the back of our mind that now God owes us, will be more likely to answer our prayers and bless us

or we agree to serve in some ministry thinking we will get brownie point with God

or make promises, that if God will only give us that raise or promotion, we promise to donate to the mission fund
if you heal me I will serve in some way

or we pray using the phrase, in Jesus name merely as a formula thinking it gives our prayers more power and chance of being answered
to pray in Jesus' name doesn't mean just closing our prayers with the words. It means to pray as he would pray in our situation, to pray according to his wishes and will rather than our own.

and if such things don't happen, we then blame him for not keeping his part of the bargain or become disillusioned thinking I tried God and it didn't work

just like the people of Malachi's day who said it is futile to serve God for what did we gain by carrying out his requirements?

As one writer put it, when we think we can manipulate God by praying in Jesus' name to achieve selfish purposes, our paganism is showing. When we claim promises as a means of making God do what we want him to do our paganism is showing. When we come to think we are indispensable to God because of the money we donate, the talents we have, the ministries we engage in, the worship we offer, our paganism is showing. When we treat God as a child to be cajoled or a tyrant to be appeased, the Babel Syndrome is surging in our veins. We want manageable God-lite. We want to be able to harness His power for our own benefit, no strings attached. Our society has confronted child abuse and spouse abuse, but this is God abuse.

A young boy named Tommy came into the kitchen where his mother was making dinner. His birthday was coming up and he thought this was a good time to tell his mother what he wanted. Mom, I want a new bike for my birthday.

Tommy was a real troublemaker, always getting in trouble and harassing others both at home and in school. With all the trouble he caused, his mother asked him if he thought he deserved to get a bike for his birthday. Of course, he told her he thought he did.

She had reached the end of her rope and really wanted to find a way to help her son change his ways. She had the thought that perhaps getting him to reflect on his behavior over the last year might help. So she told him to go to his room, think about

how he behaved and treated others, then write a letter to God telling him why you deserve a bike for your birthday. So Tommy stomped up the stairs to his room and slammed the door, sat down and began to write the letter to God

His first letter read, Dear God, I have been a very good boy this year and I would like a bike for my birthday. I want a red one. Your friend, Tommy.

He knew none of this was true and he had not been a very good boy that year, so decided to tear it up and start over.

Dear God, I have been an OK boy this year. I still would really like a new bike for my birthday. Tommy.

Again, he knew he could not send this letter to God so he wrote another.

Dear God, I know I haven't been a good boy this year. I am very sorry. I will be a good boy if you just send me a bike for my birthday. PLEASE! Tommy.

As he thought for a moment, he knew that even if this was true, this letter was not going to get him a bike. By now he was very upset but had a thought. He stomped back down the stairs and told his mother that he wanted to go to church. He looked so sad, she thought her plan had worked so she said, just be sure to be home in time for dinner.

Tommy then walked down the street to the church at the corner. He went inside and up to the altar. Then he looked around to see if anyone else was there. Not seeing anyone, he quickly bent down and picked up the statue of the virgin Mary. He slipped it under his shirt and ran out of the church, down the street, into his house and up the stairs to his room. He then sat down, pulled out another piece of paper and began to write his letter to God.

Dear God, I've got your mama. If you want to see her again, send the bike.

Because they had a distorted view of God, what the Babel Syndrome led to, was people saying they believed in God but then relying on Baal for their crops, the queen of heaven for their families, and political alliances for their security.

And in more recent times, people saying they believe in God but then turn to influencers to guide their futures, their 401(K's) for their fortunes, and popular psychology and social media for their mental health

At creation, God made man in his image.

At the fall, man tried to become God.

When that didn't work, at the tower of Babel, the fall was complete as mankind tried to remake God in their own image.

And we've been trying to remake him ever since

Yet despite all mankind's attempts, Jesus Christ remains the same yesterday, today, and forever, as Hebrews 13:8 says

The ancient of days without beginning or end

His love is never ending

And His grace and mercy without limit

And he invites us to come and rediscover what it means to truly be created in His image

To be restored and walk in fellowship with him as intended at creation