

ORIGINS

"THE BEGINNING OF WORSHIP"

GENESIS 11:1-9

This Week's Core Competency

Trinity – I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God—father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2 Corinthians 13:14 *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

How we see God and how we see ourselves go hand in hand. One glimpse of the LORD "high and exalted" to whom seraphs sing "holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory," moved Isaiah to cry out, "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Isa 6:1-5). That same high view of God prompted the psalmist to write, "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" (Ps 8:3, 4). A high view of God goes with a right view of man.

Conversely, a high view of man goes with a wrong view of God. This is made evident in Genesis 11:1-9, which describes the futile attempt of Noah's proud descendants to make a permanent name for themselves by building a city tower that reached "to the heavens" (v. 4). Over the centuries that followed the flood, Noah's sons multiplied and their descendants steadily migrated southeast from the

*The more the gods become like men,
the easier it is for men to believe the gods.
When both have only human appetites,
then rogues may worship rogues.*

— C. Miller

mountains of Ararat (in the area of ancient Urartu, now part of eastern Turkey, southern Russian, and northwestern Iran) toward Shinar (in the area of Sumer in southern Mesopotamia) where they found a suitable place to settle. Once they settled, they built a step-tower now known as a ziggurat. Nebuchadnezzar built one of these in Babylon much later. About his ziggurat one commentator writes: "In Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, in the area of Markuk's sanctuary known as *E-sag-ila*, 'the house of the lifting up of the head' (Kraeling, 'Earliest Hebrew Flood Story,' p. 282), there was a seven-story tower with a temple top that was known as *E-temen-anki*. This structure, measuring ninety meters [295.3 feet] by ninety meters at the base as well as being ninety meters high, became one of the wonders of the world (Cassuto, *Commentary on Genesis*, vol. 2, pp. 227-30). The tower was a symbol of Babylonian culture and played a major role in other cultures influenced by it (Gressmann, *Tower of Babel*, pp 15-19). The first such towers must be earlier than Nebuchadnezzar's, for his were rebuildings of ancient patters" (Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 238). In fact, the Tower of Babel must be "much earlier" (239).

Ziggurats were not community centers; they were sacred spaces off limits to common people, and although the top of the structure was designed to accommodate a god, the ziggurat itself was not a temple. The god's temple was typically next to the step-tower. These observations regarding later ziggurats have led to the following conclusion regarding the first one: "The Tower of Babel project is a temple complex featuring a ziggurat, which was
cont. pg. 2

designed to make it convenient for the god to come down to his temple, receive worship from the people, and bless them" (John H. Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis*, 374). With that in mind, it's easy to see that the "Babelites" had a wrong view of humanity and a wrong view of deity. They were too big, their god too small.

Most interpreters identify the sin of the tower builders as *pride*, "let us make a name for ourselves" (11:4 ESV), *disobedience*, God commanded them to fill the earth (9:1, 7) but they refused to be scattered (11:4), or *both*, which likely had something to do with it. One looks to the ziggurat for a clue to their offense. He writes: "With the development of urbanization people began to envision their gods in human terms. People were no longer trying to be like God, but more insidiously, were trying to bring god down to the level of fallen humanity . . . The needs and nature of the deities who would make use of a ziggurat stairway and be served in such ways reflect the weakness and distortion of deity brought about by the Babylonian anthropomorphization of the gods [i.e., viewing God in human terms]. It is this system of religion that was an outgrowth of the urbanization process as it unfolded in Mesopotamia, and it is this system that had as its chief symbol the towering ziggurat. The offense in this passage, then, is to be found in the beliefs that resulted in the project and what it stood for in the minds of the builders. It went beyond mere idolatry; it degraded the nature of God by portraying him as having needs" (Walton. 377). The following familiar quote has been attributed to Mark Twain, George Bernard Shaw, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau: "God created man in his own image. And man, being a gentleman, returned the favor."

For Discussion

For some Christians Bible study is like bird watching—a nice thing to do but hardly necessary. For them a casual glimpse at a robin or a jay every now and then is more than enough. It seems to me that nothing could be farther from the truth. Too bad, Genesis 11:1-9 likely fuels their opinion. What do you think?

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Genesis 11:1-9

1 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. 2 As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

3 They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. 4 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."

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. 9 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.

Cf., another translation

The whole earth had a common language and a common vocabulary. 2 When the people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. 3 Then they said to one another, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." (They had brick instead of stone and tar instead of mortar.) 4 Then they said, "Come, let's build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves. Otherwise we will be scattered across the face of the entire earth."

5 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the people had started building. 6 And the LORD said, "If as one people all sharing a common language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be beyond them. 7 Come, let's go down and confuse their language so they won't be able to understand each other."

8 So the LORD scattered them from there across the face of the entire earth, and they stopped building the city. 9 That is why its name was called Babel--because there the LORD confused the language of the entire world, and from there the LORD scattered them across the face of the entire earth.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Underline "one language" in v. 1.
- * Underline "common speech" in v. 1.
- * Circle "Shinar" in v. 2.
- * Bracket "make bricks" in v. 3.
- * Bracket "bake them thoroughly" in v. 3.
- * Circle "city" in v. 4.
- * Bracket "to the heavens" in v. 4.
- * Box "so that" indicating *purpose* in v. 4.
- * Double underline "make a name" in v. 4.
- * Double underline "not be scattered" in v. 4.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 5.
- * Box "so" indicating *result* in v. 7.
- * Circle "Babel" in v. 9.
- * Box "because" indicating *reason* in v. 9.

day 2 EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Compare Genesis 10:1-32 and 11:1-9. The events of which chapter come first *chronologically*, and what makes you think so?
2. Verse 1 seems like an odd way to begin a chapter, but in this case not so much. Why so?
3. "Shinar" (v. 2) refers to Babylonia. How does that affect your *expectations* for the rest of the story?
4. Put the Babelites' two-fold *purpose* for building the city-tower in your own words.
5. Put how humanity had gone wrong in your own words.
6. Explain the *irony* of verse 5.
7. Verse 6 makes it sound like God is opposed to human progress. What do you think?
8. God's obstruction of the Babelites' construction has a comic quality. How so?
9. **Discussion:** According to 10:25, the earth "was divided" in the time of Peleg, a descendant of Shem (cf., 11:16-17). Talk about what happened.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Reading in *context* is fundamental. In order to better understand Genesis 11:1-9, it needs to be read in connection with chapter 10. On the relationship of the two, one commentator writes: "The modern interpreter finds the juxtaposition of the table of nations (chap. 10) and the tower of Babel story incongruous. On the face of it, they offer two incompatible accounts of the origins of the nations and their different languages . . . The table of nations, unique in world literature, paints a basically positive, or at least neutral, picture of the relationships between the nations. All are linked genealogically to the sons of Noah, so all men are ultimately brothers of each other. Were that the end of the story, the reader would conclude that the sons of Noah lived in brotherly concord, fulfilling God's command to fill the earth and subdue it. The very much shorter tower of Babel story corrects this interpretation. Mankind is seen organizing and arrogating to himself essentially divine prerogatives: he builds a tower to reach to God's dwelling in heaven; he tries to make himself a name and he schemes on his own account. Whereas God wanted man to fill the earth, he seeks to congregate in one town, Babel. And it is in Babel that the LORD confuses human speech, so that all the descendants of Noah can no longer live together and cooperate on anti-god projects. The tower of Babel story is the last great judgment that befell mankind in primeval times. Its place and function in Gen 1-11 may be compared to the fall in Gen 3 and the sons of God episode in Gen 6:1-4, both of which triggered divine judgments of great and enduring consequence" (Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1, Genesis 1-15*, 242).

The Tower of Babel story has been divided into five scenes (Wenham, 235); four scenes (Waltke, 175-76); three scenes (alternate, Wenham, 236); and two scenes (alternate, Waltke, 176). Dividing into three seems best. The first scene clearly contains the peoples' words and actions (vv. 1-4). The second scene marks the turning point in the story (cf., "but") as God inspects the city-tower under construction (v. 5). The third scene clearly contains the LORD's and actions (vv. 6-9).

After the flood, the whole world spoke the same language. Scene one opens by explaining that as people multiplied they migrated from the mountains of Ararat to Babylonia where they decided to settle. There they built the prototype ziggurat, a step-tower like the one Nebuchadnezzar later built in the city of Babylon. By this time, people were "full of themselves." They said to themselves, "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" (v. 4). Their secular urbanization project had religious overtones. Not only did the tower give people access to the heavens, more importantly it gave their god access to the earth. About their view of God reflected in the later view of Israel's Canaanite neighbors, one commentator explains: "Of course, the pagan polytheism in the ancient world is not unique to Babylon. It is the heritage of all of Israel's neighbors. That is exactly the point: This diluted view of God becomes ubiquitous. At the core of this view is the belief that the gods have needs. Worship and human response to the gods in general are directed toward meeting those needs. The gods need to be fed, clothed, and housed. They are pampered, patronized, and manipulated. The heart of paganism is not found in the perversity of rituals but in the degradation of deity. When gods are distinguished only by their power instead of by their character, transcendence and autonomy, they become like puppets filled with nitroglycerin—make them do whatever you want however you can, but be careful not to jar them too much or they may explode" (Walton, 380) (cf., Ro 1:21-32).

The heavy irony of scene two contains an obvious twist of humor. The text says, "But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building" (*italics added*). One commentator says it all. "This tower which man thought reached to heaven, God can hardly see! From the height of heaven it seems insignificant, so the LORD must come down to look at it! 'He sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers' (Isa 40:22)" (Wenham, 240).

The closing scene describes a most ingenious obstruction of the people's construction. Since their cooperation was fueled by their common language, a fact reported in verse 1, all God had to do to frustrate their efforts was to confuse their language, no biggie for God. He quickly put an end to their headlong rush to destruction by making it impossible for them to understand one another. Once he did that, scattering to the four winds by language group was the people's only option. Calling the place "Babel" involves a play on words. One commentator explains: "The narrator parodies Akkadian *bab-ilu*, meaning 'gate of god,' with its Hebrew phonological equivalent *babel*, meaning 'confusion.' Babel likely refers to the city of Babylon (cf. 10:10, with the same Hebrew word). The mention of

Shinar (10:10; 11:2) and Babel/Babylon connects this city and its tower with Nimrod's anti-god kingdom. Nimrod built cities that replicated the original Babel and its ziggurat" (Waltke, 181).

By way of review: "The primeval history reaches its fruitless climax as man, conscious of new abilities, prepares to glorify and fortify himself by collective effort. The elements of the story are

timelessly characteristic of the spirit of the world. The project is typically grandiose; men describe it excitedly to one another as if it were the ultimate achievement—very much as modern man glories in his space projects. At the same time they betray their insecurity as they crowd together to preserve their identity and control their fortunes" (Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, 118).

The Message of the Passage

The LORD put an end to humanity's initial experiment in urbanization and apostasy by confusing their language, leaving them no choice but to scatter across the face of the earth.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 "living questions" to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your answers to the following *living* questions:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 1 **one language** Lit., "one lip." The figure of speech *metonymy* here refers to that associated with it.
- v. 1 **common speech** Lit., "one words." "They are entirely unified by language and vocabulary" (Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis*, 178). "Having 'one language' makes this narrative prior to chap. 10, when the various nations of the world were established, each with their different tongue (10:5, 20, 31), a situation already intimated by the narrator in 11:1" (Wenham, 240). According to 10:23, the "earth was divided" in the time of Peleg; this likely occurred because God had confused people's language (11:7) and had scattered them across the earth (v. 8; cf., v. 4). "The point of contact between the two chapters appears to be the birth of Peleg (and thus his naming) in Genesis 10. At that point the incident of chapter 11 may have happened, causing the people to spread out into the earth until they settled in their tribes as described in chapter 10. Chapter 11 is the cause; chapter 10 is the effect" (Ross, 243).
- v. 2 **Shinar** "This refers to the whole of Mesopotamia" (Waltke, 169). Some restrict its location to Babylonia (Wenham, 223), i.e., Sumer in southern Mesopotamia associated in the Old Testament with Babylon (Walton, 372).
- v. 3 **bake them thoroughly** Lit., "and burn for burning." "Houses in Israel typically used stone for the foundation and mud brick for the superstructure. Burnt-brick technology was never developed because it was unnecessary. In contrast, the alluvial plains of southern Mesopotamia had no stone available. Anyone using stones had to transport them many miles, an expensive proposition. As a result, as early as the late Uruk Period at the end of the fourth millennium B.C., we see the development of kiln-fired brick. Furthermore, as the text indicates, the usual mortar used with kiln-fired brick was a bitumen-based mastic. This combination of baked brick and bitumen mastic made for waterproof building as sturdy as stone. The time required to fire the bricks and to procure the bitumen made this an expensive procedure. As a result, only the most important buildings were constructed with these materials. That leads us to a consideration of what precisely was being built" (Walton, 372).
- v. 4 **city with a . . .** Lit., "city and a tower" (ESV). Perhaps the two words are a hendiadys, i.e., "city tower." "Cities in the ancient Near East were not designed to be lived in but were intended for religious and public purposes . . . Here with reference to Mesopotamia, which did not have the defensive stone watch tower of Canaan, [tower] designates the Mesopotamian ziggurat. The ziggurat was a massive and lofty, solid-brick, staircase structure. It was an inseparable part of the city, and *sometimes the temple complex was the entire city*" (Waltke, 179, italics added; cf., Walton, 372). "The ziggurat was a structure that was built to support a stairway. This stairway was a visual representation of that which was believed to be used by the gods to travel from one realm to another. It was solely for the convenience of the gods and was maintained in order to provide the deity with the amenities that would refresh him along the way. At the top of the ziggurat was the gate of the gods, the entrance into their heavenly abode. At the bottom was the temple, where hopefully the god would descend to receive the gifts and worship of his people . . . In summary, the Tower of Babel project is a temple complex featuring a ziggurat, which was designed to make it convenient for the god to come down to his temple, receive worship from the people, and bless them" (Walton, 374).
- v. 4 **the heavens** "This humanly created mountain gave humanity access to heaven (28:17) and served as a convenient stairway for the gods to come down into their temple and into the city. For example, the ziggurat at Larsa was named 'The House of the Link Between Heaven and Earth' and the most famous ziggurat of all, at Babylon, 'the House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth.' The ziggurat culminated in a small shrine at the top, often painted with blue enamel to make it blend with the celestial home of the gods" (Waltke, 179). "Archeologists have discovered nearly thirty ziggurats in the general region, and texts mention several others. The main architectural feature was the stairway or ramp that led to the top. In a small room at the top a bed was made and a table set for the deity. Ziggurats range in size from sixty feet per side to almost two hundred feet per side" (Walton, 373).
- v. 4 **name** "These city builders are futilely attempting to find significance and immortality in their won achievements (see 6:4). The Babelites earn for themselves the ignominious name 'Confusion'" (Waltke, 179).
- v. 6 **nothing . . . impossible** "The potential for calamity is dangerous to the race, and God will prevent it. They will nullify the purposes of God in favor of their own purposes, which are within reach. They will be at liberty for every extravagance if they can think only of their own confederation" (Ross, 246). Put differently, the potential for corruption is heightened by their confederation.
- v. 9 **Babel** "Babel (Babylon) called itself *Bab-ili*, 'gate of God' (which may have been a flattering reinterpretation of its original meaning); but by a play of words Scripture superimposes the truer label *babal* ('he confused'). One of its glories was its huge ziggurat, a temple-crowned artificial mountain whose name, Etemenanki, suggested the linking of heaven and earth. But it was her sins that 'reached . . . unto heaven' (Rev. 18:5) (Kidner, 119).
-

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

This summer Pantego kids have been memorizing Psalm 100. Those who memorize the entire Psalm (only 5 verses) will be treated to a special surprise on August 3rd. This is a beautiful Psalm of worship to our great God. From our text this week, it appears the descendants of Noah forgot who God was in their lives. Instead of honoring and glorifying Him, they were striving to make a name for themselves. They believed they could reach God on their own terms and according to their own means. It sounds really arrogant but sometimes you and I do that too. We strive to do better, make a name for ourselves, sometimes by doing spiritual things. Only God is good and worthy of worship. He alone deserves our affection and adoration. Use the next five days to go through this Psalm verse-by-verse. Make sure kids understand the meaning of each verse. (1) God is over all the earth. He is powerful and deserves our shouts of joy. (2) Worship is service to the Lord and we should enjoy it. (3) We belong to God. He created us and nothing can separate us from him. He loves us. (4) We should be thankful for who He is and all He has done. (5) He is good, loving and faithful and will be forever. Praying your family experiences meaningful moments of worship together this week!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Ge 10-11:9

1. Chapter 10 lists the names of many men. Who are they descendants of?
2. Why did the people want to build a tower?
3. What did God do?

What Do You Think

The Bible says the people wanted to "make a name for themselves". They wanted to do something that made them look great instead of God. In what ways do people do the same thing today?

What R U Going To Do

Psalm 100 is a beautiful Psalm of worship to our great God. Try to compose your own psalm or poem of praise to God this week. It doesn't have to rhyme, just let it come from your heart. Bring it to church to share with others!

MEMORY TIME

Core Comp

Trinity - I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Memory Verse

Ps 100:5 - For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC ____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** _____ **Think** _____ **Do** _____

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

Tom Bulick (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for twelve years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Pantego Bible Church. He and his wife Ruth have been married forty-five years and have one son, Zach.

Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



8001 Anderson Blvd.
Ft. Worth, TX 76120
1-866-PANTEGO
Fax 817-275-6403
www.pantego.org

The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.