

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

“The Tower Of Rebellion”

Genesis 11:1-32

Introduction

Story of Joe:

I had a remarkable conversation this week with a guy I met while playing tennis at the park. We spoke for quite some time about spiritual things and in particular about Jesus Christ

Two things he said struck me, both because of his honesty as well as his insight:

1. He wants to know that his life had a purpose – that he has a reason for being here.
2. He wants to leave some sort of lasting legacy – a memorial to his existence.

As I considered my conversation with Joe, I realized that we all want the same things. We want to know that our life matters – that we have a purpose for being here – and that our life will have a lasting legacy and impact on human history.

Men have a tendency to want to be memorialized by great achievements: The building of great buildings, the discovery of a cure for disease, being inducted to some sports “Hall of Fame”, or (my favorite) eating more hotdogs in 5 minutes than any other human being.

Women on the other hand, most often seek a lasting legacy not through human achievement, but through relationships – specifically through the raising and nurturing of children (which, by the way, is one of the greatest human achievements).

In Genesis chapter 11, we have an early effort on the part of man to doing something great – something significant, something lasting with their lives. It was this drive for significance that prompted them to want to make a name for themselves.

But as you might have already guessed, God’s path to greatness is quite different from man’s:

1. If you want to be great, you must be the least and the servant of all - Matthew 20:26
2. If you want to save your life, you must lose it - Luke 9:24
3. If you want to be first, you must be last - Mark 9:35
4. If you choose friendship with the world you become an enemy of God - James 4:4

I The Post-Flood Conditions

A. The whole world had; [Verse 1]

1. One language
2. A common speech

Now there is nothing wrong with a common language. It is not evil or even the cause of evil. Potentially, a common language could have drawn men and women

together in the worship and work of God. Instead, it was perverted to promote disobedience and rebellion against God and His plans.

Zeph 3:9 “Then will I purify the lips of the peoples [give the one common language], that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him shoulder to shoulder.”

B. The people of the world were **spreading** out [Verse 2]
In ever-increasing concentric geographic circles – populating the face of the earth.

1. Some were moving eastward

a. They found a plain in Shinar

An alluvial plain lying between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. These people were descendants of Ham, because in Chapter 10 we were told it was the Hamites who settled in the land of Shinar of Babylonia (modern-day Iraq).

b. They **settled** there

Settling in the valley of Shinar was an act of disobedience. God had specifically commanded mankind to spread out and fill the earth (Genesis 9:1,7), not to congregate and establish cities.

Illustration: The Early Church

The early church was commissioned by Jesus Christ to be His witnesses in ever-increasing concentric geographic circles.

Acts 1:8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Instead, they remained comfortably congregated in Christian fellowship in Jerusalem. God remedied their disobedience with a great persecution recorded for us in Acts 8:1 when “all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.”

II The Plan Of Men

A. To build a **city** for themselves [Verse 3-4a]

Urban life has not been presented in a favorable light so far in Genesis:

- Cain built a city and named it after his son Enoch (Genesis 4:17).
- Nimrod, a descendent of Ham, was also an empire builder (10:9-12). In fact, most scholars believe that Nimrod was the leader in the movement to settle in Shinar and build this city with its tower.

1. Out of baked brick and tar

Archaeology has revealed that this type of kiln-fired brick and asphalt construction was common in ancient Babylon." (Morris)

Application:

We have to be on our guard against building anything for ourselves.

Psalms 127:1 “Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain.”

Instead of building some legacy for ourselves, we would be wise to consider the example of Abraham who “was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” (Heb 11:10)

Bottom line: We can either build our own little cities and empires in this life, or we can enjoy the city “whose architect and builder is God.” The choice is yours!

B. To make a **tower** that reaches to the heavens [Verse 4b]

Babel = [Bab-ili] “The gate of God” or [Ba-lal] “Confusion”

Most biblical scholars agree that the tower of Babel was an astrological observatory for the divining of wisdom through the reading and interpretation of the stars and their constellations. And as I mentioned in our study of Genesis chapter 10, astrology and many cultic practices trace their origins back to Babel. But ultimately, the origin of all rebellion is found in Satan himself.

Illustration: Satan

As we are told in Isaiah 14:12-14, Lucifer said, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.”

C. To make a **name** for themselves [Verse 4c]

Name = Shem = “A mark or memorial of individuality”

Richardson says this about the Tower of Babel:

“While rebellion, pride, and unbelief are evident in the story, the underlying problem is one of fear. The hatred of anonymity drives men to heroic feats of valor or long hours of drudgery; or it urges them to spectacular acts of shame or of unscrupulous self-preferment. In the worse forms it attempts to give the honor and the glory to themselves, which properly belong to the name of God.”

Much of what man does on this earth is a monument to his intense insecurity. Behind the facade of achievement, accomplishment, bravado and self-assurance is the haunting fear that our lives will soon be forgotten.

Illustration: King Solomon

Ecc 2:4-11 “I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds

and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well—the delights of the heart of man. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.”

Like Solomon, the men of Babel began to look at work as the cure rather than the curse. They believed that the work of their hands could assure them of some kind of immortality beyond the grave. But human endeavor is never satisfying, never ultimately fulfilling. Only work, which is done for the Lord and in His strength, brings lasting satisfaction. It is also the only kind of work that God will reward.

D. To not be **scattered** over the face of the earth **[Verse 4d]**

In Genesis 1:28 and 9:1 God specifically told Adam and Noah to, ‘Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish (literally, ‘fill’) the earth.’ In direct disobedience to this command, Noah’s descendents built Babel and the tower to prevent the very thing God intended – the rapid worldwide population of the earth.

Application:

In the last days the scripture clearly teachings that there will be a One World Government and a One World Religion whose city center is referred to as Babylon the Great. Today we already have a concerted effort to bring all the world’s governments together under the United Nations as well as an effort to bring all the world’s religions together.

** [Read the letter from the Baha’i faith](#)

The drumbeat for spiritual unity or ecumenism is getting louder by the day, but it will be at the cost of biblical truth.

III The Intervention Of God

A. The Lord **came down** to

1. The city they were building
2. The tower they were building

They imagined that the top of their tower would reach the heavens, but from God’s celestial perspective, their gigantic structure was so tiny that it was barely a visible dot on the earth. In a clear point of satire, it was so small that God had to make a special trip to earth just to be able to get a better look at it.

Gen 18:20-21 “Then the LORD said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.”

B. The **assessment** of God [Verse 6]

1. If they have unity as a people ...
2. If they have unity of language ...
3. Then **nothing** they plan will be impossible

What is behind God's attitude here? Is he jealous of man? Is God threatened by this tower of mud and tar that these men have built? Is He afraid of losing control of man or of the world? Not at all!!

Ps 2:1-5 "Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath."

God is not afraid of or intimidated by man. Rather, because of His great love for man, He knew that man's folly must not go unchecked or it would lead to the faulty conclusion that mankind has some sort of limitless potential apart from God.

Application:

That's the dream that to this day is being touted by leaders from across the globe. If we could only come together racially, politically and spiritually we would have unlimited potential to achieve greatness.

All the while, most people are ignorant of the fact that this progress toward a One World Government and a One World Religion is setting the stage for God's final judgment.

C. The directive of God [Verse 7]

1. Let us go down and **confuse** their language

Let us = A clear reference to the Trinity

Gen 1:26 "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness ...

Gen 3:22 "And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."

What we see here is not so much a punishment being meted out as a demonstration of God's mercy. God, in dividing man both linguistically and geographically, put a check on the power of his fallen nature.

Illustration:

I find it extremely humorous that the United Nations, whose ultimate objective is a One World Government, cannot even meet together without translation headsets. Don't tell me that God doesn't have a sense of humor!

D. The result of God's actions [Verse 8-9]

1. They were scattered over the face of the earth

These people had built a tower and a city in order to not be scattered. But because of their rebellion against the Lord, the very thing they feared most came to pass.

Luke 1:51 "He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts."

2. They stopped building the city

Job 5:12 "He thwarts the plans of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success."

The project came to an abrupt halt and became a perpetual reminder of man's monument to sin. In fact, the ancient Greek historian Herodotus [5th century B.C.] said the tower of Babel still stood in his day and he had seen it.

3. They were obligated to return to God's plan

Ps 33:10-11 "The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations."

IV The Genealogy Of Abram

A. The account of Shem to Terah, Abram's father [Verse 10-26]

Points of similarity between the genealogies of Gen 5 and Gen 11:

1. 10 names in each list (Adam to Noah) and (Shem to Abraham)
2. Last name has three sons (Noah: Shem, Ham, Japheth) and (Terah: Abram, Nahor, & Haran)
3. Each list mentions how long a person lived before bearing children
4. Each list mentions how long a person lived after bearing a child
5. Both lists begin the same "the generations of" (5:1 – of Adam - 11:10 – of Shem)

Points of dissimilarity:

1. The life-span is greatly reduced
Gen 5 – average is 912 years (not counting Enoch) Gen 11 – average is 317 years
2. The age of bearing children is reduced *Gen. 5* - 155 years, *Gen. 11* - 49 years

B. The account of Terah in Ur of the Chaldeans [Verse 27]

1. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran [Verse 28-32]

Abram is arguably the most famous man of the Old Testament, and certainly one of the most influential men of history. The book of Genesis covers more than 2,000 years and more than 20 generations; yet, it spends almost a third of its text on the life of one man, Abram.

Acts 7:2-4 makes it clear the call of Genesis 12:1-3 came to Abram while he still lived in Ur of the Chaldeans. When he received this call from God, he was only

partially obedient, because he took his father Terah with him to Haran, even though the Lord called him to go from Ur by himself.

The name **Terah** means, "delay"; the name **Haran** means "parched, barren." When Abram was in partial obedience, delay and barrenness, just what we experience in times of partial obedience, characterized his life.

Heb 11:8-10 "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

Conclusion

The drive for significance, purpose and greatness is a God-given passion. But, like other passions, it will only find its ultimate fulfillment when pursued in God's way.

Are you at all like my new friend I met at the park:

1. Do you know God's purpose for your life?
2. Are you investing your life in a legacy that is eternal vs. temporal?

If you can't answer these questions with absolute certainty, I encourage you to give careful consideration to the lessons from Genesis chapter 11.

1. If you have never accepted God's gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ:

a. Repent of your sin

Repent = Metaneo = "To think differently and to change course."

Romans 3:23 "... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Acts 3:19 "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord ..."

b. Reconcile with God

Reconcile = Apokatallasso = "To put right a broken relationship"

1 Peter 3:18 "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."

c. Realign your heart to God (your loyalties and allegiance)

2 Cor 5:15 "And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."

2. If you are a Christian I want to encourage you to fully surrender your life to Jesus Christ. You will not be able to finish well unless you are willing to yield the throne of your heart to the Lordship of Jesus Christ!
- a. If He is Lord, you will daily yield your life to Him for His glory and purposes.
 - b. If He is Lord, you will obey His commands – finishing His work
 - c. If He is Lord, you will follow the teaching and modeling of Jesus Christ.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”

Hebrews 12:1-3 “... let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” He finished well, so that you could finish well!

If that is your desire, I want you to stand where you are so that I can pray for you.