

To God Alone Be The Glory

It's good to imagine what it was like for the people whom the Lord confused at the Tower of Babel. Listen in on this imaginary conversation between two men, Eber and Hul.

Hey, Joe! Bring up another load of those kiln dried bricks. And fetch us some more of this tar-ry asphalt. Eber, do you really think this tower will last for a thousand years? Arphaxad seems to think so, Hul. Even though he's been experimenting with different techniques for just over a hundred years, he says Noah and his son Ham learned the secrets of construction that could last longer than a life-time, and you know how long people lived before God destroyed them in the Great Flood over a hundred years ago. In a way, Eber, I'm glad our pokey hod-carrier, Joe, is taking his sweet time bringing up the next load of bricks—just look at the beauty of this valley we found. Our grain harvesters say the soil in this valley is so fertile they don't need even half of us to work the fields. That leaves the rest of us to make bricks for building this tower. We are going to be famous for years to come. And this valley is big enough to hold our ever-increasing population for hundreds of years. Yeah, but don't you think the LORD is going to be just a little upset with us? After all, he did make it clear that he doesn't want us to remain all clumped together. Nah, he hasn't said anything to us directly since right after the Great Flood when he set the rainbow in the sky and told Noah that he would never destroy the earth with another flood. He's probably not even paying attention to what we're doing. Just look at how long we've been getting away with working on this project. He won't notice until the top of our tower reaches all the way up into the sky near his throne. Besides, I think

spreading out all over the face of the earth is a stupid idea. Yeah, what does God know anyway? Where is that blasted hod-carrier with our bricks and asphalt. Echad vay-o-shed. Yah-so-va-vay-nee. What did you say about me? Did you just say I'm so vain? What about you? You're the one who's been boasting about how fast you can lay brick. Shillow-shev o-yayv o-hell. Don't cuss at me that way. If you want your trowel why don't you just ask for it, instead of pointing and speaking gibberish. Shlomo Jerushalayim Moshe Shamayim Yo-mam. Leave my mother out of this. What's gotten into you? Do you want me to keep working with you or not? Ba-achah al col penay Ha-aretz Shaphat. Don't you give *me* any lip. In fact I'm leaving. [Stomp, stomp, stomp. (quieter)] Honey, where are you? O good. I'm glad you're packing our things. We've got to get out of here! Everybody's going crazy. First of all, Eber and I were working on the tower when he started talking to me in gibberish. Apparently he couldn't understand a word I was saying either because his face turned forty shades of angry red. He looked like he was going to pick up a brick and hit me. So I left. On the way home, I saw Uz, Gether and Meshech headed for the hills in that direction with all of their belongings, speaking a different kind of gibberish. And Elam and Aram were headed in another direction shouting what must have been obscenities at a group off to their left. I guess our tower did not escape the LORD's notice after all. Oh, we should have known better than to rebel against him...

That's one way to imagine what happened the day the Lord visited the Tower of Babel. These nine verses of Genesis 11 do more than just explain the origin of all the languages in the world. They gives us a

glimpse into the mind of God and how he deals with man's rebellion. But if you're ready to jump on the judgmental wagon and say, "Serves those people right for rebelling against God," then you've missed the point of the sermon text. Although Babel demonstrates God's resolve to react when rebellion gets out of hand, **BABEL SHOWS THE LORD'S LOVING PURPOSES.**

How can that be true? Well, let's get all our facts straight without any embellishment. Everyone in the world all spoke the same dialect of the same language because at least 100 years before the Tower of Babel incident, God had sent the Great Flood which wiped out wicked mankind—all except for eight people. After Noah and his family came off the ark, the Lord told them to be fruitful and multiply and fill up the face of the earth. This they proceeded to do. But in short order the people forgot the lesson that God taught by the flood: he expects all of mankind to toe the line on his commands. If he says, "Fill up the face of the whole earth," that does not mean, "Stop in the fertile valley of Shinar just because it looks like a great place to live." It would have been fine if a small clan of people had stayed there while the rest had moved on. But the people decided to do the opposite of what the Lord had said. That's rebellion. And that's important for us to learn. It doesn't matter how harmless it seems to do something our own way. If God says to do it such and such a way, the matter is not up for discussion. When God speaks, it's not time for pouting or stamping our feet or acting like God was talking to someone

else. Immediate and joyful obedience is called for. Most of us agree with that principle... until it comes down to our very own area of weakness. If you're honest with yourself, you know what your weakness is without me making a list of the possibilities. And you know how you like to make excuses to allow yourself to indulge your weakness.

Some would argue: "Come on! At Babel the people merely wanted to make a name for themselves, you know, leave their mark on the earth. Harmless, right?" No. When the Lord said, "Fill up the earth," he wanted an earth filled up with people who know his reputation as the Savior-God who preserved Noah's life from destruction in the Flood and who promised to send a Savior to crush the head of our enemy Satan. But the people were saying, "We don't want to make a name for God. We want to make a name for ourselves." It is always a big deal when people say, "Glory to me in the highest."

Now if you were God, what would you have done to these willful, forgetful, rebellious people? Wipe them out? Maybe, with some ironic justice, let the tower collapse on all of them? That's not what God did. Although God is definitely just, he is also loving. And **BABEL SHOWS THE LORD'S LOVING PURPOSE.** You see, whenever Genesis uses the term "God," it is emphasizing the power and almightiness of the one who created. And whenever Genesis uses the term "the LORD," it is pointing us to the "God of free and faithful grace, who deals with his

people in love.” Look at the text carefully and you will see that it is not “God” who goes down and confuses the languages. It is “the LORD” who does so and who scatters the people across the face of the earth.

BABEL SHOWS THE LORD’S LOVING PURPOSE. Consider the reasons the Lord decided to confuse (*bavel*) the languages. In the text the Lord says, “*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.*” At first it sounds like God was trying to slow the people down, keep them apart so they won’t invent telephones and cars and skyscrapers until the 19th and 20th centuries. But put the words back into the context of the people’s rebellion, and we can understand the Lord’s words the way he intended. “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this *evil*, then nothing *evil* they plan to do will be impossible for them.” Now do you see the Lord’s loving purpose in confusing the languages? He was separating the people so they wouldn’t feed off of each other’s sinful ideas. And that plan has been quite successful until the 20th century when many, many people are now working hard to break down cultural barriers for the sake of trade (i.e. money). And now with fast travel and lots of money and telecommunications, if you want to find other people who like your particular sin, it’s not hard to find them. There’s probably a website or an app to help you converse. And if you’re looking for new ways to have the kind of fun God would disapprove of, you don’t have to travel far: I’m told there’s plenty of shenanigans happening right here in Lake City. Or you can have video of

sinful behaviors beamed into your house by internet, cable, or satellite.

Up until the 20th century, cultures had greater difficulty exporting sinful behavior. People in one culture might not mind if you put a curse on your enemy, but they would never try to lure someone’s spouse away. In another culture they would think it terrible to steal your belongings, but bribery and extortion were expected. By confusing the languages, the Lord kept the weaknesses and sins of one culture from infecting the rest of the world. This slowed down the progress of evil. Why is that so important? Because doing evil always brings misery and sadness. Too much alcohol or drugs or nicotine or shopping causes misery and sadness. Stealing, lying, unfaithfulness, porn, disrespect, worry—you name a sin that you do—it causes misery and sadness. The Lord doesn’t want us to suffer such consequences. That’s why he confused the languages at the Tower of Confusion. **BABEL SHOWS THE LORD’S LOVING PURPOSE.**

Perhaps you’ve seen the same kind of loving purpose in your life. You’re just about to do some certain sin, and the loving Lord sends an interruption. He’s trying to confuse (*bavel*) your sinful nature, to separate you from that wrongdoing. He doesn’t want you to suffer.

Yes, the confusion itself at the Tower caused its own kind of misery and sadness, especially in the short run for those who had wickedly rebelled against the Lord of grace. It was sad when they had to leave behind loved ones and could not rely on

the strength of larger numbers. Since then there have been many bloody conflicts because people could not understand one another. But in the long run, there has been less suffering from wickedness in the world.

What's in the Tower of Babel for us? We could learn the lesson that if we rebel against God, we should expect him to send us some discipline to wake us up. But we would do better to see the Lord's love at the Tower and then to teleport to the Cross. See, the Lord didn't just want to slow down the progress of evil so that there would be less misery for mankind. He wanted to remove the *consequence* of evil from his creatures. So instead of letting us suffer the misery for our sins in the place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth forever, Christ graciously took all that misery on himself. If the Tower of Babel shows us the Lord's loving purpose, the Cross of Christ and the empty tomb show us the Lord's loving purpose even better.

But now that we've catapulted ourselves from Babel to Easter, it's only a hop, skip and a 50-day jump to Pentecost. Do you see the connection between Babel and Pentecost? At Babel God made people speak in different languages to *keep* them from understanding each other so that they would separate. At Pentecost, God made the disciples speak in different languages to **allow** people from other parts of the world to understand the disciples so they would come together and unify through

their common faith in Christ, the resurrected Savior. On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit began to undo what God did at Babel, because now, in Christ, there is no reason for nations to remain apart and at odds with one another. We need to come together with believers from all nations in order to say, "Glory to God in the highest," and to share the Savior with everyone else.

If Babel shows the Lord's loving purposes, Pentecost shows them even better. The same Holy Spirit, who added 3000 souls to the early church on Pentecost, is the same one who acts today to bring people into his family. He wants all people to be saved, and today's Gospel lesson teaches us that He wants to work through our witness. Yes, the Babel incident teaches that, if we rebel against God's will... if we make excuses for not filling our part of the face of the earth with the good reputation of the Savior-God, we should expect him to send discipline on our church. But that would not motivate us very well to spread God's Word. Instead may we be impressed by how far God's grace would go to rescue people like us—interrupting our wrongdoing, sending a Savior to pay for our rebellions—now that's great motivation to fill the earth, especially our corner of it here, with the glory of God's goodness. May the Lord's loving purposes move us to obey him in every aspect of life, especially so others may learn of him.