

*First Things – Genesis*

**Genesis 11:1-9**

**“Por Que Usted No Entiende Mi Título”**

**I. A REBELLION THAT DEFIED THE GOD OF HEAVEN**

- A. Rebellion against the plan of God
- B. Rebellion against the position of God

**II. A RESPONSE THAT DISPLAYED THE GOD OF HEAVEN**

- A. His magnitude
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- A. The preview of this reversal
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1. In high school, I took three years of Spanish. Unfortunately, I failed two of those years.
2. Truth be told, I've learned more Spanish from watching *Dora the Explorer* with my children than I ever learned in Señor Olsen's Español class.
3. Though my Spanish is weak, I can still translate for you the title of my message. Por que usted no entiende mi título, means in English, why you don't understand my title.
4. The reason you can't understand my title has to do with the story recorded for us in Genesis 11.
5. The narrative of this passage is set in the city of Babel. Verse 9 explains, "*Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth...*"
6. The various languages of the earth can be traced back, in some way, to what the Lord did here in Genesis chapter 11.
7. With that being said, this passage is not so much about linguistics as it is about humanity and the way in which God relates to us.
8. We are reminded again in this story that though man is sinful and often rebellious, God still deals with Him as He works His will in this world.
9. The people of Babel sought to make a name for themselves in the building of their great tower, but in the end, it is the name of the Lord that is blessed and remembered throughout all generations.
10. Consider with me what is going on in the passage before us. First of all, we find here:

## **I. A REBELLION THAT DEFIED THE GOD OF HEAVEN**

1. As was the case with Nimrod in chapter 10, the rebellion of the people in this chapter is not immediately clear.
2. Verse 2 says of the people, *"And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there."*
3. Verse 3 tells us of their industriousness with building materials. There we read, *"And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar."*
4. Verse 4 tells what they did with the materials they made. On the surface it seems like an altogether innocent record, but a closer look reveals a rebellion against God.
5. Consider with me the rebellion of the people in this text. First of all, it was:

### **A. Rebellion against the plan of God**

1. Look again at verse 2. It says that as the population began to migrate towards the east, *"...they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there."*
2. The plain of Shinar was probably located in what is modern-day Iraq, and stretched all the way down to the Persian Gulf.
3. It was a fertile place, and the people apparently liked it enough to settle down there and build a city.
4. That seems like a perfectly good plan, except for the fact that it was an act of disobedience to the revealed plan of God.
5. Remember, when the door of the ark opened on the other side of the flood, God greeted Noah and His sons with a blessing and specific instructions for the future.
6. Genesis 9:1 says, *"And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth."*
7. The word "replenish" in that verse means "to fill", as it is translated in many other translations.
8. In other words, man was to spread out and populate the earth. That was God's plan for mankind and the planet.

9. Yet, here on the plain of Shinar, people are congregating and settling, rather than spreading out and filling.

10. Many times we too rebel against the plan of God when we find a place that is comfortable and pleasing to us.

11. For instance, the Lord Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow Him, but many are too comfortable on the couch to be carrying a cross anywhere.

12. Unfortunately, when the plan of God contradicts our comfort and our pleasure, we are too often rebellious against Him.

13. This rebellion was not only against the plan of God, but notice also that it was:

### **B. Rebellion against the position of God**

1. Look again the text, and notice verse 4. It says, *"And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."*

2. Literally, their plan was to make a tower whose top was to heaven, and in the process make a name for themselves. One writer explains the purpose of this tower as being to "join or displace God."<sup>i</sup>

3. This tower was supposed to reach to the heavens, but it was not built *for* the God of heaven. No, it was built for the men of the earth.

4. One of my favorite authors, D.A. Carson explains the seriousness of what is going on here. He writes, "...a lot of people think 'sin' is...just breaking a rule. What is at stake here is something deeper, bigger, sadder, uglier, more heinous."

5. He goes on to say, "It is a revolution. [Rebellion] makes me god and thus de-gods God."<sup>ii</sup>

6. Whenever we try to live for our self and for our own glory, we are rebelling against the God who made all things, including us, for *His* glory.

7. On the gates of the McCallie Prep School in Chattanooga is a line from a historic Christian document called the Westminster Catechism.

8. The line is the answer to the question, "What is the chief end of man?" The answer: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

9. Romans 1:21 describes the opposite of that statement. It says of rebellious men, "...when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened."

10. The city of Babel and its tower are a picture of what happens when men rebel against God, follow their own plans, and seek to build up their own names.

11. Whenever men do this, God is not impressed, and He is not idle either. With that, we see in this text not only *a rebellion that defied the God of heaven*, but we see also secondly:

## **II. A RESPONSE THAT DISPLAYED THE GOD OF HEAVEN**

1. There is a perfect balance in the way this story is told in Genesis 11. The second half of the story is a sort of mirror image of the first.

2. The hinge in the middle of the two halves is verse 5, which says, "*And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.*"

3. The first half tells what man did, and reveals some things about him. The second half tells what God did, and displays some things about Him as well.

4. Consider God's response in this text and what it tells us about Him. First of all, it displays:

### **A. His magnitude**

1. At Babel a large group of people decided to build a massive tower so large and tall that its top would touch the heavens.

2. To them, it was the biggest thing they could imagine, and yet, when God decided to look at it, He had to come down.

3. Again, verse 5 says, "*And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower...*" The picture there is really kind of humorous.

4. One writer says, "Their tower was so microscopic that the all-seeing omnipotent God had to come down to see. It was if God stooped down like a man on his hands and knees and lowered his face to the earth to see the great tower."<sup>iii</sup>

5. I am reminded of Psalm 2:4, which says, "*He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.*"

6. This story is told in such a way that it displays the magnitude of God in comparison to man. What is impressive to man is often rather insignificant to God.

7. Winston Churchill reportedly said not long before his death, "I am ready to meet my Maker. Whether my Maker is prepared for the great ordeal of meeting me is another matter."<sup>iv</sup>

8. I assure you, when we stand before God, it will be His magnitude that impresses us, and not the other way around.

9. In fact, it is the magnitude of God that makes the life of Jesus so amazing. That the God of immeasurable magnitude could be contained in a human body is the miracle of all miracles.

10. As we see God respond to this tower and these people, we are reminded of His magnitude. Notice further that displayed in His response is also:

### **B. His mercy**

1. When God comes down to see the tower and the city, He recognizes what is going on, and He says in verse 6, "*Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.*"

2. Now do not be mistaken by that verse. God was not intimidated by what He saw. He was not scared of men's abilities.

3. No, instead He recognized where this whole endeavor was headed. God saw that if they succeeded in building this tower, and making a name for themselves, they would only go further into their selfish rebellion, and in turn further away from Him and His will for them.

4. With being said, how God responds to them is yet another picture of His mercy towards man. Once again we are reminded that He is the God who does not wipe out rebels.

5. Though they were disobeying Him and defying Him, God judges them in a merciful way.

6. Notice verse 7. God says, "*Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.*"

7. What was the result of this scrambling of the languages? Verse 8 says, "*So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.*"

8. Notice this carefully. Even in His judgment of these rebels, God does what was originally His will for the world, and best for mankind.

9. In other words, away with this notion that the God of the Bible is some kind of cosmic tyrant, who cruelly and ruthlessly deals with men and women who disobey Him.

10. Yes, He is a God of wrath, but in history His wrath is tempered by His mercy so that even His judgment proves right and good in the end.

11. In Genesis 11, when God came down to see this tower and city, He displayed mercy in how He dealt with these people.

12. Likewise, may I remind you in the New Testament, when God came down among men in the person of Jesus Christ, He demonstrated fully His mercy toward those who have rebelled against Him.

13. There is one final thing I want to point out that relates to what is recorded here in Genesis 11. Notice not only that there is *a rebellion that defied the God of heaven*, and *a response that displayed the God of heaven*, but consider also that there will be:

### **III. A REVERSAL THAT DEFINES THE GOD OF HEAVEN**

1. In Genesis 11 mankind was divided into separate nations as a result of the dividing of the languages.

2. At this point in history, this was God's judgment upon men, and the means of carrying out His will on the earth.

3. Yet, as we read on in the Bible, we learn in the New Testament that is not the ultimate purpose of God for men to remain divided and separated.

4. In fact, Colossians 1:20 indicates that through the work of Jesus on the cross, God is going to reconcile (that is bring together) all things unto Himself.

5. In other words, there is coming a day when there will be a reversal of what happened here at the tower of Babel, and rather than separating men, God is going to bring them together in Jesus Christ.

6. Consider this reversal with me. First of all, I want you to notice:

### **A. The preview of this reversal**

1. At Babel, men and women were separated from one another because they could not understand the languages that were being spoken.
2. God separated people there by confusing their tongues, and causing them to be unable to understand one another.
3. In Acts 2, at the day of Pentecost we find a preview of how God is going to reverse this confusion of the languages.
4. Acts 2:4 describes how the early disciples of Jesus were gathered at Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. While there, they prayed until the Holy Ghost came upon them.
5. Verse 4 says, *"And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."*
6. Verse 5 of that chapter explains how there were Jews there from all over the world, who spoke all sorts of different languages.
7. Yet, verse 6 says, *"...the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language."*
8. Though God separated and scattered people at the tower Babel, His ultimate plan is to reverse that scattering and to draw people from every kindred, tribe, and tongue to His Son, the Lord Jesus.
9. In Jesus, and the preaching of His gospel around the world, we find a preview of the reversal of Babel. Yet, notice with me not only the preview of this reversal, but notice with me:

### **B. The promise of this reversal**

1. Toward the close of the Old Testament, we find a series of books that are called the Minor Prophets. They are not called minor because of their message, but because of their size.
2. In fact, though they are small, they contain a lot of very important truths, especially concerning God's plan for the last days and the end of time.
3. One of those Minor Prophets with a major message is Zephaniah. In Zephaniah 3:9, we find this promise: *"For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent."*

4. In Revelation 5:13, John tells us what He hears in one of His visions of the future. He writes, *"And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."*

5. The best I can tell, John hears all creatures praising the Lord Jesus, and it seems that they are all saying it in one, unified language.

6. My point is this; the day is coming when what God had to do at Babel, He will reverse among those who worship the Lord Jesus Christ.

7. In heaven, though the Church of the Lord Jesus will be made up of people from every kindred, tribe, and tongue, with one voice, and one language they will praise forever the One Lord who has redeemed them by His blood.

8. Several years ago, I went on a mission trip to the country of Nicaragua. On Sunday morning, we visited one of the local churches.

9. That morning a group of young people led the worship. I didn't know any of the songs they sang, or what they were saying.

10. Occasionally though, I would pick up on a word or two that I did know. One I immediately recognized was "Jesucristo".

11. Standing there, hearing His name, my eyes filled with tears. I knew that His name transcends language, and one day, His name will be praised in the pure language of heaven.

1. The story of the Tower of Babel and the dividing of the languages is yet another reminder of man's rebelliousness and sinfulness, and God's intent to work out His will in spite of it.

2. We are pointed here to the greatness of our God even in comparison to man's loftiest achievements.

3. We are also reminded of the mercy of God towards man, and of God's ultimate plan to bring all the things that sin has separated back together in the person of Jesus.

4. So for that reason I say, "Gloria a Jesucristo" and "glory to Jesus Christ."

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<sup>i</sup> Hughes, R. Kent, Genesis: Beginning and Blessing, (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 2004), p. 170

<sup>ii</sup> Carson, D.A., The God Who Is There, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010), *Amazon Kindle edition*

<sup>iii</sup> Hughes, R. Kent, p. 172

<sup>iv</sup> “Great Ordeal”, *anecdote.com*, accessed 2/4/11, <http://www.anecdote.com/index.php?aid=13603>