

GENESIS 11:1-9 (THE TOWER OF BABEL)

Universal translator, Star Trek, Google, Bing
Wycliffe Bible Translators – adapt it

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come. Matt 24:14

Introduction: Within just a short 100 year period after the Flood of Noah, the world had walked away from the knowledge of what happened and had not only rejected God and the lesson of recent history, but they had actually come together to work against Him and establish their own society and religion apart from Him.

Text Verse: “Whom will he teach knowledge?
And whom will he make to understand the message?
Those *just* weaned from milk?
Those *just* drawn from the breasts?
¹⁰ For precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept,
Line upon line, line upon line,
Here a little, there a little.”
¹¹ For with stammering lips and another tongue
He will speak to this people, Isaiah 28:9-11

May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. A Tower to Heaven, verses 1-4

¹ **Now the whole earth had one language and one speech.**

Two terms are used here to assure us that everybody on earth understood each other. The first is “language” which is the Hebrew word *saphah* and means literally, lip. Everyone had the same lip.

The second word used is “speech.” The Hebrew word is *devarim* which means “words.” It may interest you that this word, *devarim*, is the Hebrew

name of the fifth book of the Bible – Deuteronomy. If that seems odd, it's because the Hebrew name for biblical books is often the first main word in that book.

In the case of Deuteronomy, the book begins with “These are the words...” or *elleh ha'devarim*... And so the word *Devarim* is given as the title.

Genesis = Bereshit = In the Beginning
Exodus = Shemot = Names
Leviticus = Vayikrah = And called
Numbers = Ba'midbar = In the wilderness

Anyway... the whole earth had one language and one speech. The reason that two terms are given here, language and speech, is because they make up the two major parts the understanding of our communication. The **words** are the substance of the language.

If I write, “Charlie, go park the car in the yard,” anyone who **reads** those words and understands them will know what I mean. But there is another part to language and that is the spoken part. If I'm from Boston, a Floridian will think I've completely abused such a simple sentence when I say “Chahlie, go pahk the cah in the yahd.”

The spoken part, or the lip, is how we **speak** the words, how we form our mouth, how we use the air and the muscles of our mouth, and so on. It includes all of the matter of the speech that comes from our heads and then proceeds past our tongues and lips. So the Bible is telling us that the whole world once had just one language and one way of speaking that language.

This should seem completely obvious if you think about it. Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their three wives were the only people on the ark and they obviously spoke the same language and they had one lip, or one way of “parking the care in the yard,, Charlie.”

Whether you believe in Noah or the Tower of Babel or not, the same thing will be true even with evolution. There was a point when there was one

language on the earth and only one. From a biblical perspective, I will be as bold as I can be and say that this language was certainly Hebrew.

This is the original language of the world, it was the language that God spoke to Adam, and it is the same language that continued on through one group of people and which gets its name from the great great grandson of Noah, whose name was Eber.

This language was lost for all intents and purposes at the first exile of the Jewish people, where Aramaic became the spoken language of the Jews. But it was resurrected for common use after more than 2500 years by a guy named Eliezer Ben Yehuda.

It is the language of Israel and the Jewish people today and it will be the language spoken around the world in place of English in the millennial reign of Christ. If you believe some reports, Hebrew was even proposed as the language for America at its founding.

This wouldn't surprise me a bit, but God's plans come in His timing and it will occur at some point in the future. The wee little book of Zephaniah, right towards the end of the Old Testament tells us this –

“Therefore wait for Me,” says the LORD, “Until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination *is* to gather the nations To My assembly of kingdoms, To pour on them My indignation, All My fierce anger; All the earth shall be devoured With the fire of My jealousy. ⁹“For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, (or a pure lip) That they all may call on the name of the LORD, To serve Him with one accord. Zephaniah 3:8, 9

The day has come for the pure language to be restored to the nation of Israel and someday it will be, I am certain, the universal language of the world, like English is now. When Jesus comes back and sits among His people, He will speak Hebrew.

² 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.

Depending on which version of the Bible you use, you may or may not have a correct translation in this verse. I use the NKJV for my sermons and what you just heard... is wrong. If you use the King James Version, the New King James Version, the English Standard Version, or some others, it will say, "as they journeyed from the east" instead of "As men moved eastward..." That is the NIV.

The NIV and some others got it right. Both options are possible from the Hebrew which is *be-nah-se-am miqeddem* but we do know from the Bible which is correct. First, the mountains of Ararat, which are the focus of the last main narrative, is west, not east of the plain of Shinar, which is in the area of Mesopotamia.

And secondly, the exact same term is explained elsewhere, such as in Genesis 13:11... coming soon to a sermon near you.

As they traveled eastward, they came to the plain of Shinar. The land of Shinar is the same area that Cain dwelt in before the flood and it is the same area which has been in complete spiritual opposition to God, both actually and symbolically, from that time all the way through to the end of the Bible.

It is where false religion got its foothold with Cain and where it will rise up again in the verses ahead. And even to this day, the area is a hotbed of false religion and fighting against God and against God's people. And it is also the place where Israel was sent when they were disobedient to His word.

We read this in the second verse of Daniel chapter 1 – "And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god."

The word Shinar is mentioned 7 times in the Bible and the last time it's used is prophetically speaking of a date which is future even to us now. This, in Zechariah chapter 5 –

⁵ Then the angel who talked with me came out and said to me, "Lift your eyes now, and see what this *is* that goes forth." ⁶ So I asked, "What *is* it?" And he said, "It *is* a basket that is going forth." He also said, "This *is* their resemblance throughout the earth: ⁷ Here *is* a lead disc lifted up, and this *is* a woman sitting inside the basket"; ⁸ then he said, "This *is* Wickedness!" And he thrust her down into the basket, and threw the lead cover over its mouth. ⁹ Then I raised my eyes and looked, and there *were* two women, coming with the wind in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between earth and heaven. ¹⁰ So I said to the angel who talked with me, "Where are they carrying the basket?" ¹¹ And he said to me, "To build a house for it in the land of Shinar; when it is ready, *the basket* will be set there on its base."

It's important to follow the story we're looking at today in order to understand everything that is coming on us in the future, including all the trouble and woe in the book of Revelation.

³ Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake *them* thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. ⁴ And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *is* in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

Two verses, in a seemingly obscure passage about people who lived over four thousand years ago, which point to every false religion that has ever existed or that will ever exist until the Lord Jesus returns and puts an end to them. Let's read them again –

NOW LET'S BREAK IT DOWN – Then they... the impetus for false religion – the ideas and thoughts of men. Then they said to one another... the idea comes from a person and he says it to another person and they agree on the terms. Yeah, that sounds like a good idea. Let's do it!

^{3 (cont)} **Come...**

Yeah man! Here we go, let's work on this idea.

³ (cont) **Let us make bricks...**

We are going to make something with our own hands. (Do you see where this is going yet?)

And bake them thoroughly...

Ha'vah nil-be-nah le-vah-nim v'nis-re-phah lis-re-phah (21 sec). We have a little rhyming in the words... almost like they're doing something naughty –
“

We'll make these bricks
And we'll bake these bricks
We'll bake them through and through
And we'll get to heaven... Yes, that's what we will do
“Not only will we make bricks, but we'll put them through the fire, just like a sacrifice that we should have made to God.”

³ (cont) **They had brick for stone...**

Brick for stone. Who made the stones? God did. Who made the bricks? Man did. Do you see the difference? Let me take you forward to what God told the Israelites concerning the altar of sacrifice –

²² Then the LORD said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. ²³ You shall not make *anything to be* with Me—gods of silver or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves. ²⁴ An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you. ²⁵ And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it. Exodus 20.

Moses repeats this in Deuteronomy 27 before the Israelites went into the Promised Land. And in both Joshua 8 and 1 Kings 6, we see the Israelites care in following this procedure – once at Mount Ebal and once when building the Temple in Jerusalem. The temple in Jerusalem did use cut

stone, but it was done in the quarry and no iron tool was used at the site of the temple.

Do you see the significance of all of this yet? Let's go on.

³ (cont) **And they had asphalt for mortar...**

This is a mineral pitch, which, when hardened, forms a strong cement which is commonly used in Assyria even to this day. It forms the mortar found on the burnt brick reaching back into antiquity.

The people weren't just making their own bricks to work their way back to heaven, they were uniting them in an attempt to reach God. You may not see the symbolism, but every brick is a false religion and every one of them is being united against the truth of God.

⁴And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens..."

The people rejected God's way of approaching Him and decided that they could make up their own way to get to God. Have you ever heard the term, "All paths lead to God?" This is where it started. But God has and always will reject this. Man doesn't work to God, God comes to man.

Let's go back over these verses and clarify what is happening here. The people have moved east – away from God's presence, just as man was cast east out of Eden and Cain moved further east of Eden to the Land of Nod, the land of wandering.

And this is just as the disobedient Israelites were cast out of God's presence... to the east – to Shinar, the place which symbolically represents exile and banishment from God's presence.

In this land which is apart from God, the people have determined that their way to God is the right way and have begun to build a tower to heaven – to the throne of God itself...working their way to heaven. This is exactly what every false religion on earth – every one of them has in common – works-based salvation.

And not only is this a type of works based salvation, but it is a type of what we call in modern terms “ecumenicalism.” This is an attempt to unite supposed Christian sects into one cohesive unit. At the same time, these are uniting with non-Christian religions in what we call religious pluralism.

A tower is being built, right before our eyes where all world religions are being brought together as equal in power and equal in truth. The only religion which is unacceptable is a religion which is intolerant of untruth; the one with the exclusive claim... the only one God accepts – Christianity.

“My Son is the only way – there is no other.”

The Tower of Babel is again being built, right before our eyes, and the United Nations is the largest force behind this tower of confusion and chaos.

It doesn't matter where you go on this planet or what religion you look at, it will ultimately be a religion of working to please God. But the Bible, from the first page to the last proclaims that God does the work to reconcile us to Him. There is one way and one way alone to be right with God. And works are not involved. Paul sums it up in Ephesians chapter 2 –

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God,⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

⁴ (cont) **Let us make a name for ourselves...**

The people of the world and every false religion looks for their own glory, no matter how piously they seem to do it, this is the goal – “I, even I, have earned my salvation. I have done the deeds. I have merited God's favor. I.” But the Bible teaches a vastly different lesson –

“Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. 11 For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it; For how should My name be profaned? And I will not give My glory to another.” Isaiah 48:10-11

And again –

Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised

In the city of our God,

In His holy mountain.

² Beautiful in elevation,

The joy of the whole earth,

Is Mount Zion *on* the sides of the north,

The city of the great King.

³ God *is* in her palaces;

He is known as her refuge. Psalm 48:1-3

^{4(cont)} **Lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.**

We will build the tower. We will reach the heights. We will be like God and we will be gods. And we will unite so that our efforts will be united. Our deeds will collectively rule the world and from this spot we will be the rulers.

Whether it is a false religious religion like islam or mormonism, or a false political religion, like communism or progressive liberalism – the goal is always the same – shun God and work out our own salvation.

Progressive liberalism? You mean America's democrat party? If you don't believe this, just read the writings of Hillary Clinton or Barak Obama. Their own words testify to their true intentions.

One other idea about building this tower to heaven comes from the writings of the ancient Jewish historian Flavius Josephus. Not only were they defying God by attempting to work their way to Him, but they were also attempting to defy Him should He ever presume to go back on His word about flooding the earth again.

He says that their intention was to build a tower so tall that any floodwaters couldn't cover it. The materials used bear this out. They used burnt brick cemented together with bitumen, or asphalt to keep it

watertight. Anyone inside of it would be safe, just like Noah was in the ark. They're building their own little ark...

This then is an example of not believing the very words and promises of God because God promised to never flood the world again. And just like the Tower of Babel supposedly protecting from another worldwide flood, we have an exact repeat of this in our modern society in the lies about global warming.

"We need to act because the world will flood." You hear it on the news everyday. "We need to save ourselves. We cannot trust God's word which states that this will never happen again."

Every twisted thought of man – whether it is murder of the unborn, promoting vegetarianism in order to save the wildlife, or fighting against capital punishment of killers, the reason behind it is always the rejection of the truth of God's word. Always.

II. Unless the Lord Builds the House, verses 5 & 6

⁵ But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.

The Lord came down... Before the flood, a different type of terminology was used. Before the flood there was still a place where the Garden of Eden was located. Before the flood, the Lord talked with Adam, with Eve, and with Cain. Before the flood there were cherubim who guarded the Garden of Eden.

Before the flood, He spoke with Noah in several different ways and He established a covenant with him. And before the flood, the Lord is the one who shut the door of the ark. But after the flood, Noah went out of the ark and it says nothing about the Lord opening the door.

After the flood, Noah built an altar at the top of the mountain of Ararat and the smoke of the offering soared even higher to reach the Lord. His presence since the time of the flood is symbolically on high and now the

Lord descends to bring about judgment and inflict discipline on those who have so quickly and so shamefully been disobedient to the commands they were given through Noah.

The omniscient Lord of creation is coming down “to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.”

Just think how the Lord comes down to visit every new building that we erect for whatever false religion pops up. And every time, His visitation is the same – “I’m sorry, this isn’t the way. Can’t you get something so simple, so tender, and so heartfelt right?” I have done it all and all you need to do is simply accept it by faith.”

⁶And the LORD said, “Indeed the people *are* one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.

It is true... man is created in God’s image and is capable of amazingly great things. But the things we do and the things we make can ultimately have only one of two end purposes – either the glorification of self or the glorification of God.

If it is for self, it is a futile attempt at achieving immortality. If it is to glorify God, then it will truly, in some capacity, be a work of eternal significance. The Bible says in the 127th Psalm –

¹ Unless the LORD builds the house,
They labor in vain who build it;
Unless the LORD guards the city,
The watchman stays awake in vain.

² *It is* vain for you to rise up early,
To sit up late,
To eat the bread of sorrows;
For so He gives His beloved sleep.

The Lord came down and looked upon the work of the men in Shinar and He was displeased. A little over 2000 years later, the Lord accomplished His own great work... and it was marvelous –

¹⁰ Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him;
He has put *Him* to grief.
When You make His soul an offering for sin,
He shall see *His* seed, He shall prolong *His* days,
And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.

¹¹ He shall see the labor of His soul, *and* be satisfied.
By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,
For He shall bear their iniquities. Isa 53:10-11

III. A World of Confusion, verses 7-9

⁷ Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

Come let Us... once again, the nature of God is brought into the pages of the Bible. Yes, there is one God, but He refers to Himself here in the plural, "US", just like He did in Genesis 1 and in Genesis 3, and just as He will in Isaiah chapter 6 and in Zechariah chapter 12 and elsewhere in the Old Testament – and just as He will do throughout the entire New Testament.

Come let Us. Come let Us go down and confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

The most effective way of getting people to quit a task is to simply throw that task into confusion. God confused the language of the people in which way? He did it by their lip, their speech, not by their words. And this explains why all the way back in verse one the idea of the language of man was divided into two concepts.

As the people were working, their speech became confusing to one another to the point where one person would ask for a brick and the other person would bring a stick; one would ask for some clay and the other would ask, "What did you say?"

In no time at all, fights broke out, people killed each other, and decided to pick up their family and bail out of the great task they had set out on.

Here then is a miracle of God which disperses the people of the world and which caused devolution from one culture and monotheism to a cacophony of cultures and a world rife with religious beliefs which encompass the earth even to this day.

But by another miracle of God, the world's people are reunited in the family of God and all speak in one religious voice, not as individuals, but through God's manifestation of Himself in the Person of Jesus. He is the true Universal Translator for everyone who has been reunited into God's family through His shed blood.

This is never more evident than what occurred in the book of Acts, chapter 2 –

¹ When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. ² And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. ⁵ And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. ⁷ Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans?" ⁸ And how *is it that* we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God." ¹² So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "Whatever could this mean?"

In 3 more weeks, we will again celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit and the uniting of all believers under one Head. Regardless of our physical looks, our cultural backgrounds, or our languages, God has accepted us as His own through the work of Jesus and the powerful sealing of the Holy Spirit.

⁸So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city.

In Genesis 10, we read about Eber and his sons. One was named Peleg and we read this about him – “for in his days the earth was divided...”

The entire reason why that description of him was included was to tell us that the people of the earth were divided at the time that he lived. It wasn't a division of the lands of the earth into continents. Instead it was a division of the people of the world by their speech.

As they moved out into the world with their increasingly distinct languages, they developed written languages to assist them in their lives and to keep their cultures tied together. One of my favorite of all written languages is the Korean alphabet.

Despite looking complex, like Chinese or Japanese, it is actually one of the simplest to read languages of all. Speaking it is another matter, but to learn to read it, if taught properly, is a cake walk.

I attended a Korean church for several years and wanted to learn to read it, so I went on line and tried several sites, almost giving up because Koreans do not know how to teach Korean.

But then I clicked on a site developed by a... yes, by a Jewish guy. His instruction allowed me to read Korean within a few days. I still don't understand it well, but I can read it.

It was originally developed by Korea's great King SeJong who lived in the 1400s. It is a masterful piece of both artwork and functionality and is beautiful in its simplicity and ease of use.

⁹ Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

Just as in verse 8, the credit for the dispersion of the people is given solely to the Lord. It is He who directs the winds which blow across the nations and through time and it is He who fashions the changes in everything, from the transformation of the caterpillar into a butterfly, to the number and size of the nations on the earth. He is in complete control of everything that happens around us.

The city the people left behind was called Babel, which means confusion and the explanation is given right in the same sentence, “because the Lord confused the language of all the earth.” And spiritual Babylon is the city of confusion even to this day.

In the place where religion is developed by man, there is confusion. In the place where people attempt to please God through their works, there is confusion. And in the place where God’s word is disregarded or distorted, there is confusion.

God has given us His word and His word reveals His Son, Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ reveals the unseen Father – nothing confusing there.

Apart from this revelation, there is only confusion and disorder, but when we open our eyes and our hearts to the truth of God’s word, confusion is replaced with right thinking. Anger is replaced with peace. And discontentment is replaced with the hope of a better life at the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Tower of Babel

Now the whole earth had one language and one speech
And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east
That at last to the plain in the land of Shinar they did reach
And the people dwelt there, from the greatest to the least

Then someone said, "Come, let us make some bricks"
"And let us bake them thoroughly, through and through"
They had brick for stone, and clay was used in the mix
And they had asphalt for mortar to bind the bricks two by two

Another said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city"
And also a tower who's top to heaven it will reach
Let us make a name for ourselves, to be scattered would be a pity
Let's start building now, I know you understand my speech

We will work our way to God
And by our deeds heavenly streets we will trod

We will reach the highest heights
And we ourselves will be gods.. shining like heavenly lights

But the Lord came down to see the city
And to view the tower built by the sons of men
And He shook His head knowing it was a pity
They'd rejected Him and His glory, once again

And the Lord said, "Indeed the people are united as one"
"And one language they all have to share in their task"
If this is what they begin to do and what they have already done
Then nothing they intend will be very far from their grasp.

Come, let Us go down and their language we will confuse
That they may not understand one another's speech
So the Lord scattered them, giving their plan the blues
And they ceased building the city, the goal no longer in reach
Therefore its name is called Babel and confusion rules the place
Because the Lord confused the language of the human race

And from there the Lord scattered them to all corners of the earth
And the Lord filled the world with many types of speech
Across the globe man has gone, spanning its entire girth
And also across the globe, man does the gospel teach

And the gospel unites us all to the glory of the Lord
As we wait on His return as promised in His word

Until He comes we live by faith in the promises He's made
And continue on in His strength and resting in His shade

Hallelujah and Amen...

Next week's sermon is Genesis 11:10-32, Introducing Abraham