

## The Story of Babel • Genesis 11:1–9

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Ryan Perz • January 21, 2024

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A long time ago, people wrote and mailed letters.

They wrote physical letters in handwriting to friends and family.

Often they included some level of plans.

Those who were more conscious of God in everything would add two letters at the end, D.V.

It abbreviated the words: *Deo Volente* —Lat: God-willing.

There is a humility in saying DV when we make plans—written plans, thought out plans, spoken plans.

- As we pick back up in Gen, planning is a major part of this story—the Tower of Babel.

*\*What marks this story is that they intentionally left off DV.*

- One Point: How God can bring sudden and lasting judgment on human pride.

A few details about Chs. 10-11:

- Our text is sandwiched in between two genealogies—all of Ch.10, and part of 11.

### CH 10—Table of Nations

- Shows how all people of the world trace genealogy back to Noah—it's an extended genealogy of Noah's sons and where they migrated and populated.
- One important detail about Ch. 10 & 11: they are not in chronological order.
- This is evident in the references to diverse languages (v5, 20, 31).

Ch 11 is the why.

Why are there diverse languages—different people groups, countries, cultures?

*It was not strategic plans for the glory of God....it was God's judgment.*

The Bible does not answer every question we can ever have, but it does give us the *why* of some essentials.

Why are there different languages?

—Why do you have to learn Spanish to live in Latin America?

—Why does a pastor in training spend semesters studying to learn Hebrew and Greek?

—The passage can be broken into two halves: the arrogance of humanity, and the response of the LORD.

### **Arrogant Speech (1-4)**

- The speech is part of the plans in their hearts.
- There is nothing bad about planning; the Bible speaks much about it.

Yet *Wisdom* is needed.

\*Prov 16 needs to sit in the background when we think of planning:

#### **Proverbs 16:1–3 ESV**

The plans of the heart belong to man,  
but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.  
All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes,  
but the LORD weighs the spirit.  
Commit your work to the LORD,  
and your plans will be established.

Sadly, many forget that in their planning.

- Now it may seem that at first, their plans are not bad. But if we keep the whole story of the Bible in mind....it is.

Why? .....

- V.2 - Place of settling = The plain of Shinar is the same location of Ancient Babylonia, modern Iraq.

The LORD specifically commanded people to spread out—not cluster together (Gen 9:1; 1:28)

- You can't fill and populate the earth if you cluster in one region

If I told you to disperse and fill the church, but you all huddled in the church office...it's not going to work.

So we see that the people and plans are already not operating with God's Word as the foundation of their thinking and doing.

- The plans — build a city and tower

—The city would refer more to the defensive wall built.

—The tower: like a Mesopotamian ziggurat: a massive solid brick staircase structure.

Some viewed this as a way of easily accessing the gods.

(See Picture)

- The godless plans and actions become even more focused in v.4b.

Let us build a name *for ourselves*.

- › This is fundamentally what's wrong—exalting a name.

\*\*There is only one name that is to be exalted!

Name-exalting: that can take a couple of turns.

—It can be for the immediate reward. "People know who I am now. I matter now."

—Or, it can be a desire to be memorialized; "I want to be remembered...I want my life, work to be memorialized..."

But back to the plans.

You may not realize that something as simple as planning can show that you have a massive pride issue.

### **James 4:13–16 ESV**

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit” — yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

This is the origin of DV.

Are you planning without any thought of God?

- Yet there is also this issue of settling in, and not spreading abroad.

There is certainly an application here for the church/discipleship—G.C.

- The rest of Genesis is about the movement of God’s people (Abraham).

We have a tendency to want to stay put, settle, often for reasons of comfort.

Yet often God calls his people to go.

I remember a direct challenge in my own life.

Many of you know that I grew up in Pittsburgh...so did Reformed theologian R.C. Sproul.

R.C. Sproul “You can take the boy out of Pittsburgh, but can’t take Pittsburgh out of the boy”.

So here I was in 2008-09, thinking about what’s next after I graduate seminary. Making plans in my mind and heart.

I was on auto pilot to go back to Pittsburgh. Find a church; church plant...just get back close to the city I love.

I had very little D.V. in my thinking.

Then one day a professor challenged our class:

“Most of you after you graduate will target to be within a 100 miles of where you came from, where most of your family is from...to settle where it’s comfortable.”

It hit me: I just wanted to settle back to where things were comfortable.

By family.

That's what drove my planning.

Jesus had some words:

**Matthew 19:29 ESV**

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

That does not mean that everyone here needs to uproot. Many need to stay/settle. Rootedness in a community is good. We need godly people to stay put at TRB—roots of stability.

Yet for some, there is a direct call of Christ to uproot from the comforts; to not stay put, but to go somewhere else...for the sake of His name.

\*\*For some, it's an act of arrogance to plan on staying put and settling out of sheer comfort.

**Almighty Speech (5-9)**

- There is a major plot development in v5: The LORD comes down to see.
- This verse stands at the structural center (Ross outline), so it should grab our attention.
  
- The picture is that God is not impressed!

The Babel builders assumed that their tower would impress the gods, gain special access/protections.

The city and tower is puny...that the LORD must come to down to notice it.

- The judgment of God is breaking up the language —sowing confusion.

Language is such a unifying part of our existence. Speaking the same language, even dialects—you feel they are “your people”.

Or, we say, “Now, you are speaking my language....i.e. you get me”.

The Hebrew word for confusion is *Balal* —means to mix, confuse, baffle. For those who like puns, the LORD balal Babel.

—(v6) The point is not that we will see the potential of human undertaking...or that God's feels threatened.

The point is that God notices pride and where it can lead.

- › He can take sudden and swift action to unravel it.
- › In just a moment God can unravel our plans build on pride.
  
- There is also a sad irony in the judgment that we need to take note of: *The very thing the people wanted to avoid, is the thing that God brought upon them.*

We see the ironic judgment comparing Vs. 4 and 8.

V4: They sought to avoid being dispersed.

Guess what that judgment is...

V8: "So the LORD dispersed them".

*What's so striking is God's sovereignty.*

Even though they defied God's commands to spread out and fill the earth, God sovereignly sees that it will happen.

God had a way of making the stiff-necked, static people bent on arrogance and name-building...to move!

- › *No matter how much people try to defy and resist God, remember, his acts are always irresistible.*
  
- Finally, see the judgment is *lasting*.
- How do we know? For one thing, the 8 plus billion people in the world are not clustered in modern day Iraq.

You zip code is not tied Shinar, bur Irmo, Columbia, Chapin, etc.

SO here is a challenge—next time you encounter a foreign language you don't understand, think:

1. How God hates pride.
2. How far reaching his lasting his judgements are.

The judgment is lasting...but not irreversible.

*This gets to the heart of the story of Babel: There is both lasting judgment on pride, yet God also reverses his judgement on some through grace.*

### **Zephaniah 3:9–11 ESV**

“For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord.

From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering.

“On that day you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain.

Did you notice that it's not merely that God fixes the language problem...but the heart problem!?! (11b)

- In Acts 2, at Pentecost, we see this promise coming into fulfillment through the gospel of Christ—this is a unity and understanding of language.

(Pentecost is not for getting charismatic theology, but for showing how God reverses the judgment of Babel through his Son's work!)

- And to give the hope that everyone – tribes, tongues, peoples,, who call on his Name, shall be saved!

**Acts 2:21 ESV**

And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Main Point: God can bring sudden and lasting judgment on human pride.

"By such an example we are admonished how fitting it is that we should live and die humbly."  
(Calvin)

*We rarely hate our own pride the way we should.*

*We easily minimize our pride, excuse it, tolerate it.*

What would it look like if you committed this year to seriously pray about God uprooting pride?

What if you took Calvin's exhortation and made it a regular prayer to truly, by the Spirit live and die humbly?

To live and die humbly means we get our eyes off of self, and on to Christ.

**Matthew 11:29 CSB**

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

By God's grace, see the serious offense of pride before God....and let it go.

Look to and learn from our humble and lowly Lord and Savior.