

***For Whom Are You Building?
Genesis 11:1-9, April 14th 2024***

When Adolf Hitler rose to power in 1933, he declared the dawn of Germany's 3rd Reich and promised a 1,000-year, golden age. To showcase the grandeur of his new empire, Hitler enlisted Germany's most celebrated architects to build monumental structures across the country. One of the greatest of these works was the Congress Hall in Nuremberg. Built to rival the Coliseum in Rome, this massive stone amphitheater, twice the size of GSU's football stadium, would have been the envy of the world and the sight of great Nazi rallies and parades. But before the Congress Hall was finished, allied forces invaded Germany and crushed the Nazis. Hitler's 1,000-year Reich crumbled after only 12. Today, the Congress Hall stands unfinished and abandoned, graffitied and overgrown; an eerie monument not of man's power but of his pride.

A similar monument casts its skeletal shadow over our text this evening as we travel to the Land of Shinar to exegetically excavate the ancient ruins of the Tower of Babel asking: "*What happened here and why?*" As we consider the word of God together, we'll discover that the Tower of Babel still speaks today. *And what do these old bricks have to say? **Lasting glory can only be found in Jesus Christ.***

Let's start with a bit of **context**. In our last study, we considered the 70 nations from Noah & we wrestled with the question, "*Why is this list of strange names in the Bible?*" I showed you that this list is actually a road map of God's predestined course for human history... a course which came to a 3-way fork in Noah's three sons: the descendants of Japheth went W into Europe; the descendants of Ham traveled S into Africa; & the descendants of Shem moved E into Asia. Now, in Gen. 11, Moses turns back the clock to reveal the catalyst of that dispersion (**VI**).

Presumably, Noah lived with his sons and their families at the foot of Mt. Ararat where the ark had come to rest, until the great patriarch's death 350 years after the flood. During that time, Noah's sons sired a nation of people (estimates range from the 10s to 100s of thousands of people). It's certainly possible. Just look at those Andersons!

Like your family, Noah's family members all spoke the same language, (lit.-*they had the same words*). And at some point, probably after Noah's death, this Noahic Nation migrated in mass. But you may notice some ominous spiritual splinters sticking out of v2. "They migrated eastward." This description is as theological as it is geographical. In the OT, eastward movement oftentimes symbolizes spiritual departure from God. In Genesis 3 Adam was driven eastward out of Eden garden. In Genesis 4, Cain settled in the land of Nod, East of Eden. When Lot and Abraham part ways in Genesis 13, Lot journeyed east towards Sodom.

But here in Genesis 11, the entire human race traveled east and found a plain in the Land of Shinar (Iraq). That name should send a chill down your spine because the next time God's people are in Shinar is Daniel 1, as they are dragged there in chains by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. But in Genesis 11, they're led, I suspect, by the wicked Nimrod! **Gen10:9-10**. Nimrod, whose name means "let us rebel," was the Beast of Babel, the terror behind the tower!

Not only did the Noahic nation find a plain in Shinar, they "settled there." *Were they supposed to settle?* No! "Be fruitful and multiply & fill the earth and subdue it" (**Gen1:22 & 9:1**). But like their first father Adam, these people thought they knew better than God. So they did what was right in their own eyes. Instead of spreading as God commanded, they settled. There's your context: the entire human population is drifting away from the Lord under the command of a godless mastermind in high-fisted defiance to the will of God. ***What could possibly go wrong?***

There is a caution in these verses which we must heed: You are most tempted to forget God in self-reliance when you are strongest. At the peak of his career, the champion boxer Muhammad

Ali, whose catch phrase was “I am the greatest” boarded a plane. When the stewardess checked the cabin for departure she asked Ali to fasten his seat belt. “Superman don’t need no seat belt!” Ali replied. The stewardess fired back, “Superman don’t need no plane either.” The same pride, the same hubris hangs heavy in the air of our passage.

This Noachic Nation was united and strong. But it was then, at the summit of man’s strength, that he forgot the fear of the Lord & grew proud, like Uzziah who “when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction,” by playing the priest and burning incense to the Lord for which he was stricken leprous. *Are you enjoying a season of success and comfort? Has the Lord led you to a good broad land and established the work of your hand?* Beware lest you think too highly of yourself and your gifts like Nebuchadnezzar scanning the spires of Babylon, “Is not this great Babylon which I have built by my mighty power”? Beware the temptation to pride that success trails in it’s wake. Be on guard. Take every thought captive. Mortify your vanity. Cling to your God in humble gratitude, singing to him and preaching to yourself, “All that I am I owe to thee!”

Now that we’ve established our context we can move on to *the construction (3)*. The method of construction was cutting edge. This UTOPIA was to be built of bricks, synthetic stones made of kiln dried clay. These bricks were thoroughly burned to make them stiffer and stronger; able to bear greater weight for greater buildings for greater purposes and greater people. And they would be cemented with bitumen, or tar; a plentiful resource in the Middle East. Children, next time your parents drive past a construction crew paving a new road, roll down the window and smell that steaming asphalt. That strong odor is bitumen. This great city and tower would be built with bricks and bitumen, revolutionary Babylonian technology we still use today. How very kind of God to bless even fallen man with the brilliance to engineer and innovate; to harness elemental forces in his quest to fill the earth and subdue it.

But how does fallen man use his God-given brilliance? What is the motive behind his construction? He employs it for vainglorious evil (v4). “Let us build”. In Psalm 127:1, Solmon sang, “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” But a different song was being sung at the construction site in Shinar: “Let us build.” This city would not be built in prayerful dependence on God. These people didn’t want His help. This city would be built **BY man!** But it would also be built **FOR man!** “*Let us build ourselves a city and a tower with it’s top in the heavens.*” You see, man, not God would rule as king here. This city would not exist to serve God’s purposes but man’s purposes. This city would not be dedicated to the glory of God, but to the glory of man. And since mankind, then and now, has such an Everest-high estimation of itself, this tower that would be the crown jewel of the city skyline, would have a penthouse suite, “in the heavens.” It was to be the first skyscraper. The final line of this humanist manifesto summarizes all that came before, and reveals the hubris heart beating beneath and behind man’s ambition: “let us make a name for ourselves.” Let us show the world our godlike power by building a tower that will pierce the sky and puncture the heavens. And let us make all the world marvel at our great glory. Let us make them revere and remember our great name.

And you? Whose glory are you after? When your life on earth is done, whose name do you want to be revered and remembered? We’re all building something. The questions is: who’s it all for? For whom are you building? Students, why do you deny yourselves today’s fun and study so hard between your leaning towers of flashcards? Athletes, why do you discipline your body, sweat, and train so tirelessly? Professionals, why do work such long hours honing your craft, building your business, or climbing your ladder? Why do you hustle so hard? Parents, why do you pour your energy, your emotion, your very souls, into your children? For whom are you building? The fear of being forgotten haunts every heart in this room. We all want to be remembered. We want to leave a legacy. Our souls yearn for everlasting glory because, Ecc3:11, “the Lord has

put eternity into the heart of man.” While you may find some fading worldly glory on your own, the true lasting glory that you seek can only ever be found in Jesus Christ.

Shawn Johnson figured that out. Shawn Johnson was an American gymnast who captured the heart of our nation when she won gold at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. After mysteriously retiring weeks before the 2012 Olympics she said in an interview: “Jesus sacrificed his life on the cross so that when I stood [on that podium] & was given that gold medal, yes it was a wonderful thing but it’s not the end all be all. Yes-I can work my whole life to become the CEO of a company or to make money or to win more gold medals but it’s not the purpose in life. He will always be my greatest reward and my proudest reward. My name is Shawn Johnson and I am second.”

You see, she found true glory. Not in wearing her gold medal for the world to see her, but by throwing it at the feet of her Savior, Jesus Christ so the world might see *Him* and know *His* name. Friend, consider the labors of your hands & ask yourself, “Is this all for me or is it all for Jesus? Am I first or second”? Don’t you know it’s so good to be second to Jesus... because the good news of the gospel is that Jesus loves to share his glory with sinners he has saved! Peter says that when He comes again, he will give his people the “the unfading crown of glory!” Paul declared, “To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (**2 Thess. 2:14**). These Babylonian builders said, “Let us make a name for ourselves...” *but do you remember how Jesus taught his disciples to pray?* “Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” May our chief end, the obsession of our souls, and the deepest longing of our hearts be that our lives would cause God’s name to be hallowed not ours.

That brings us at last to, *the confusion*. *Can you hear the sound of construction? Can you see the city taking shape and the tower going up, up, up?* God certainly saw it (**5-8**). Notice the beautiful braiding of God’s attributes. In immanence, God’s hears and comes down to investigate. He is not distant and apathetic. He doesn’t rule the world by proxy through the laws of nature and chance. He’s immanent. But he’s also transcendent. He’s not like the capricious and impotent gods of the Greek pantheon. Jehovah is all powerful! At his command, humanity in all its pomp and power is defeated! “O father you are sovereign, in all affairs of man, no powers of death or darkness can thwart your perfect plan!” Though God would have been just to incinerate these seditious architects and their sandcastle city in a flash of atomic wrath, in sweet mercy he withholds justice & instead conquers them by confusing and scattering them.

Years ago, Jordan and I took to mission trip to Mexico. Beside our Mexican brothers and sisters we mixed concrete by hand and passing up a human chain in buckets up to 2nd story scaffolding. Despite my HS Spanish teacher’s best efforts, I couldn’t understand a word ... so I talked slow & loud English. Without a translator, it would all have been futile. After God confused the language of these people, they were forced to abandon their vainglorious quest and the tower, meant to memorialize man’s power became, instead a monument of his limitations and pride.

But in the fullness of time, God would begin to graciously undo the curse and gather those whom he scattered through the power of the Holy Spirit Gospel of his Son Jesus Christ... the universal language! **Acts 2:8-11** “And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes & Elamites & residents of Mesopotamia, Judea & Cappadocia, Pontus & Asia, Phrygia & Pamphylia, Egypt & the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, & visitors from Rome, both Jews & proselytes, Cretans & Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

These sinners saved by grace through faith in Christ from every tribe tongue kindred & nation are being gathered to another city-not built by human hands... where God’s name is hallowed.

Rev 21:22-27- You can know that your name is written in the Lamb’s book of life if you can say of him what John the Baptist said, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!” Behold the Lamb of God who has taken away my sins.