

# **In the Beginning**

## **The Tower of Babel**

*Genesis 11:1-9*

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# The Tower of Babel

## Scripture

Today, we conclude a series of sermons on Genesis 1-11 that I am calling, “In the Beginning.” I am preaching only six sermons on these 11 chapters. It is just an overview of redemptive history.

So far, we have looked at the Creation of all things in Genesis 1:1-2:3, the Fall of man into sin Genesis 2:4-3:24, Cain and Abel in Genesis 4:1-26, Adam’s descendants in Genesis 5:1-6:8, and Noah and the flood in Genesis 6:9-9:17. Today, I want to conclude this overview by examining the tower of Babel.

The account of the tower of Babel is one of two parenthetical accounts between the story of Noah and the story of Abraham. The story of Noah ends at the end of Genesis 9 with these words, in verses 28-29, “After the flood Noah lived 350 years. All the days of Noah were 950 years, and he died.” Chapters 10 and 11 of Genesis describe “the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth” (Genesis 10:1a). The generations eventually lead to Terah at the end of chapter 11, who is the father of Abraham (11:26). The rest of Genesis tells us about Abraham and his sons.

Now, as I said, the account of the tower of Babel is one of two parenthetical accounts between the story of Noah and the story of Abraham. These two parenthetical accounts are very important accounts and they are linked together. The first parenthetical account is about Nimrod in Genesis 10:8-12:

<sup>8</sup> Cush [the son of Ham] fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. <sup>9</sup> He was a mighty hunter before the Lord. Therefore it is said, “Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord.” <sup>10</sup> The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. <sup>11</sup> From that land he went into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and <sup>12</sup> Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city.

Nimrod was a kingdom-builder. Notice in Genesis 10:10 that the beginning of his kingdom was “Babel... in the land of Shinar.” That comment links to the second parenthetical account in Genesis 11 about the tower of Babel.

Let’s read about the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9:

**<sup>1</sup>Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. <sup>2</sup>And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. <sup>3</sup>And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. <sup>4</sup>Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.” <sup>5</sup>And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. <sup>6</sup>And the Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup>Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.” <sup>8</sup>So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. <sup>9</sup>Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth.**  
(Genesis 11:1-9)

## Introduction

A new movement has emerged from California’s Silicon Valley. It’s a combination of philosophy, faith, and science known as transhumanism. An article in *The Futurist* magazine describes transhumanism as “radical life extension and life expansion.” Those devoted to the movement “perceive the human body as a work in

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progress.” They believe that “evolution took humanity this far... and only technology will take [humanity] further.”

As for sickness, aging, and death? Adherents call all three “unnecessary hindrances that we have the right and the responsibility to overcome.... Our bodies, frail and unpredictable, are just another problem...to solve.”

The goal of the World Transhumanist Association is to transcend all human limitations. They believe the body is a machine; the brain, a computer. With quickly advancing technology, then, man can be “upgraded.” Transhumanists are convinced that one day artificial limbs will be more efficient than real limbs. Our brains will be vastly superior, too. Researchers have theorized that Einstein’s brain had no gap between the frontal lobes. Transhumanists hope to use technology in such a way that his “advantage” can be engineered for everyone.

It probably isn’t surprising to learn that transhumanists are also staunch supporters of cryonics. Ralph Merkle, a board member of the Alcor Life Extension Foundation, says, “People think cryonics is freezing the dead. That’s incorrect. We’re freezing the terminally ill. We want a second opinion from a future doctor.” In the future they hope to unleash the power of nanotechnology to repair failed organs and dying cells. They are convinced that these billionth-of-a-meter robots will be able to “go into a deceased body, repair the dead cells, and reboot the brain.” Merkle insists that “once we get the technology in place, dying goes away. It just doesn’t happen.”

Inventor Ray Kurzweil forecasts that right around the year 2030, cybernetic implants will greatly augment human intelligence, and all the world’s common diseases will have been cured. By 2040, we will see the rise of an artificial intelligence that is thousands of times smarter than all of humanity combined.

The overwhelming majority of transhumanists are atheists. Still, Tyler Emerson, a leader in the transhumanist movement,

says, “For those of us who don’t believe in God, this is a sort of religion.”

Another leader, Peter Thiel, adds, “Every myth on this planet tells people that the purpose of life is death. It rationalizes death. It helps them deal with it. Every temple is a tomb and every tomb a temple. If you have a set of technologies that radically changes the meaning of death, then that has repercussions for religion. These questions touch on our very humanity.”<sup>1</sup>

Transhumanism is just the latest in a series of challenges to God’s sovereign kingship of this world. The battle that began in the Garden of Eden between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent led to God destroying everything with a worldwide flood, saving only Noah, his family, and the creatures on the ark. But just four generations from Noah later, Nimrod began building a kingdom that was a challenge to the sovereign kingship of God.

## Lesson

God’s judgment in Genesis 11:1-9 teaches us that God overrules all human challenges to his sovereign kingship.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. Man’s Challenge (11:1-4)
2. God’s Inspection (11:5))
3. God’s Judgment (11:6-9)

### I. Man’s Challenge (11:1-4)

First, let’s look at man’s challenge.

Noah and his family spoke the same language, and so it is understandable that after the flood, **the whole earth had one language and the same words** (11:1).

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2009/may/4052509.html>.

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Moses then said in verse 2, **“And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.”** This area has been identified as being between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in southern Mesopotamia (which was later called Babylonia and is present-day Iraq). The phrase **“from the east”** could also be translated as “eastward,” which is more likely. “Eastward” in Genesis always means “away from God,” and that is what Moses wants his readers to know in this story. People were moving away from God.

In verses 3-4 Moses said, **“And they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.’ And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.’”** Twice in these verses the people under Nimrod’s leadership say to each other, **“Come.”**

Notice several features in verse 4. *First, they wanted to build a city.* God did not direct them to build this city. No, the people themselves decided that they were going to build a city for themselves. It was not the city of God, as Jerusalem was. It was instead the city of man.

*Second, they wanted to make a name for themselves.* They were concerned for their own reputation and glory. But, it was not only a desire for their own reputation, it was also a desire for independence. They were going to do all of this without the help of God. They wanted to have nothing to do with God at all.

*And third, they wanted a new religion.* That was the point of **“a tower with its top in the heavens.”** Commentator James Montgomery Boice notes that Martin Luther “says that the words ‘its top in the heavens’ should not be applied to the height alone but rather should be seen as denoting ‘that this was to be a place of

worship.”<sup>2</sup> And commentator Kent Hughes says, “The intent behind building ‘a tower with its top in the heavens’ was to join or displace God.”<sup>3</sup>

This is prototypical of every human religion. Man decides that he wants to join God or displace him. And so, in his arrogance and self-sufficiency, he builds his own religion that he believes will connect him to God.

People today do the same thing. They erect their own view of God and how to connect with him. Every religion in the world today has the same basic feature, and that is how people can reach up to God. But, they are wrong. The essence of true religion is that God came down to us in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ.

How do you relate to God? Are you trying to do good works so that you may reach him and be accepted by him? That will not work. You must believe in what God has done for you in the perfect works of Jesus. Only then will God accept you.

Well, how did God respond to man’s challenge?

## II. God’s Inspection (11:5)

Second, let’s see God’s inspection.

Moses said in verse 5, **“And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built.”**

I like Hughes’ comment on this verse. He says:

Here the satire peaks. The tower’s top was in the sky where God ostensibly dwelt. But this was Yahweh, the infinitely transcendent and incomparably super-eminent God of the whole Old Testament, of whom Isaiah declared, “It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a

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<sup>2</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 422.

<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 170.

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tent to dwell in” (40:22). This “Yahweh must draw near, not because he is near-sighted, but because he dwells at such tremendous height and their work is so tiny.”<sup>4</sup>

In comparison to God, the tower was so small that it was if God had to stoop down on his hands and knees to see it. The psalmist says of man’s challenge to God’s sovereign kingship in Psalm 2:4, “He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.”

God will not be mocked. He inspects all puny attempts to challenge his sovereign kingship. Let us never forget that.

### III. God’s Judgment (11:6-9)

And third, let’s observe God’s judgment.

**And the Lord said in verse 6, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.”** God was not troubled by what the people would do if they were to succeed. They would never overthrow him. Instead, God was concerned that their autonomy and self-sufficiency would harden their hearts against his word and his truth.

So, God said in verse 7, **“Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.”** Now, it is God’s turn to say, **“Come.”** God was going to shatter their unity and defiance against him by giving them multiple languages. That was an act of God’s judgment.

**“So,”** Moses said in verses 8-9, **“the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And**

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<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, 172.

**from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth.”** God’s judgment here was also an act of grace. God **dispersed** the people **from there over the face of all the earth**. God had told Adam, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28), and Noah, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Genesis 9:1). But instead of filling the earth, people were congregating and conspiring against God. In an act of grace, **“the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth”** so that they would obey his command.

We learn that God scatters the autonomous, the self-sufficient, and the self-reliant. God is the sovereign king, and he will not tolerate any challenge to his sovereign kingship.

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed God’s judgment in Genesis 11:1-9, we should remember that our salvation and our security lies in God’s sovereign kingship alone.

In his commentary on Genesis, commentator Kent Hughes notes that in 1986 the *Arizona Republic* carried this local profile by columnist E. J. Montini:

It is dusk. Gordon Hall stands at an overlook on his 55,000-square-foot mansion in Paradise Valley, a structure built by Pittsburgh industrialist Walker McCune and now owned and being renovated by Hall. He is 32 years old and a millionaire many times over. He stares at the range of lights stretching before him from horizon to horizon and breathes a deep, relaxed sigh.

The lights of the city are like the campfires of a great army to Hall, who sees himself as its benevolent general. They are like the flashlights of the world’s fortune seekers, and Hall is their beacon to riches. They are, for Hall, like the stars of the firmament. And he is above them.

He is worth more than \$100 million, he says, because it was his goal to be worth more than \$100 million before the age of

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33.... There are other goals. By the time he is 38, he will be a billionaire. By the time his earthly body expires – and he is convinced he can live to be 120 years old – he will assume what he believes to be his just heavenly reward: Gordon Hall will be a god.

“We have always existed as intelligences, as spirits,” he says. “We are down here to gain a body. As man is now, God once was. And as God is now, man can become. If you believe it, then your genetic makeup is to be a god. And I believe it. That is why I believe I can do anything. My genetic makeup is to be a god. My God in heaven creates worlds and universes. I believe I can do anything, too.”

He looks to the horizon, and then he looks behind him, where his great dark house seems to drift like a ship in the night sky.<sup>5</sup>

Gordon Hall’s self-delusion is just another expression of man’s challenge to the sovereign kingship of God. It began with Satan, who expressed himself in the Garden of Eden. And it expressed itself with Nimrod and the tower of Babel, and in countless other ways throughout human history.

But it never works. Gordon Hall was convicted in 2015 for orchestrating a \$93 million tax scam. He was previously convicted in a South Carolina Ponzi scheme, and he is scheduled to stay in prison until 2038.<sup>6</sup> Nimrod’s tower also never succeeded, and Babylon is identified in Scripture with opposition to God.

Friends, we should remember that our salvation and our security lies in God’s sovereign kingship alone.

Commentator James Montgomery Boice notes that in the account of the tower of Babel, we have seen two different uses of the word “come” in the story. The first was spoken *by man to man against God* (11:3, 4). The second was spoken *by God to God against man* (11:7).

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<sup>5</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, 167.

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.azcentral.com/story/money/business/2015/06/26/former-arizona-millionaire-gordon-hall-tax-scam-federal-prison/29316959/>.

The Bible, however, uses a third use for the word “come,” which is an invitation extended *by God to man for man’s benefit*. God says in Isaiah 1:18, “Come now, let us reason together...though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.” Jesus says in Matthew 11:28, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” And the Holy Spirit says in Revelation 22:17, “Come.... And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.”<sup>7</sup>

What happens when we respond to God’s invitation? It is just as he says! Our sins are washed away. Our burdens are lifted. And our spiritual thirst is quenched.

So, I urge you, if you have never done so, come to God today. Your sins will be washed away. Your burdens will be lifted. And your spiritual thirst will be quenched. Don’t delay. Come today. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expositional Commentary*, 425.

## **Mission Statement**

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## **Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz**

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons).
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