



FIRST LIGHT CHURCH

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Date: 9/24/23

Series: Genesis

Text: Genesis 11:1-9

BIG IDEA: Pursuing greatness without God leads to confusion.

ICEBREAKER: If you could learn any languages, what would they be?

CONTEXT: We are entering into another well-known passage from Genesis about the Tower of Babel. In Chapter 10 we were given a list of genealogies from Noah's three sons and where they were dispersed, along with their different languages. Now we will see what led to their dispersion, along with a repeated theme of mankind choosing autonomy apart from God.

PASSAGE: Have volunteers read Genesis 11:1-9.

DISCUSSION:

1. How does verse 2 go against God's command from Genesis 9:1,7?
2. What do verses 3-4 teach us about both the means and motivation of people?
3. What is dangerous about man's plans in verse 4?
4. How do you see people in your life trying to make their name great?
5. What was God's concern with what was going on? Was He threatened by them or protecting them?
6. Why does pursuing greatness apart from God always lead to confusion?
7. How did God address man's rebellion? Why do you think it worked?
8. How were God's actions like the discipline of a loving parent?
9. How does verse 9 show us that God will ultimately accomplish His plan?

APPLICATION:

10. How are you tempted to make a name for yourself?
11. How do you try to control your own destiny, rather than trusting the Lord?

K4 CONNECTION: We live in a world where people are more and more pursuing autonomy and independence from any sort of authority, especially God. In the same way that God lovingly engaged people in the midst of their rebellion, we, too, must engage with our neighbors and show them a better way to live. Greatness apart from God will always lead to confusion, which is why we want to encourage everyone to pursue Jesus to discover what greatness really means and looks like!

CARE AND PRAY:

- Take a moment to confess to the Lord the ways you are trying to live independent from Him.
- Share any prayer requests.

COMMENTARY

[v.1] The opening description of the whole earth having one language indicates that the present episode is not placed chronologically after the events narrated in ch. 10, which specifically mention nations and languages. This incident, however, may have occurred during the broad period covered in ch. 10, especially if it is linked to the naming of Peleg in 10:25.

[v.2-4] Come, let us build ourselves a city ... and let us make a name for ourselves. The Babel enterprise is all about human independence and self-sufficiency apart from God. The builders believe that they have no need of God. Their technology and social unity give them confidence in their own ability, and they have high aspirations, constructing a tower with its top in the heavens (11:4). Contrary to God's plan that people should fill the earth (e.g., 1:22, 28; 9:1, 7), the city-building project is designed to prevent the population from being dispersed over the face of the whole earth (11:4). By showing God's continued interest in His creatures, this episode provides the setting for the call of Abram out of this very region, to be the vehicle of blessing to the whole world.

[v.5-8] With irony, the narrator points out that it was necessary for the Lord to come down in order to see the city and the tower (v. 5). Acknowledging the potential danger of a unified, self-confident humanity (v. 6), God intervenes by confusing their language so that they cannot understand one another. This has the desired effect of dispersing the people throughout the world (vv. 8-9).

[v.9] This verse links the name of the city, Babel (Hb. babel), with the verb balal, which means "to confuse, to mix, to mingle." But babel is also the name used in the OT for the city of Babylon. As a city, Babylon symbolizes humanity's ambition to dethrone God and make the earth its own (see Revelation 17-18).

Commentary taken from the ESV Study Bible Genesis 11:1-9

WHERE'S THE GOSPEL

The spread of humanity was God's will from the beginning (1:28), but the effects of sin (including mankind's forced exile from Eden) meant that this dispersion occurred in ways that God did not intend. In the account of the Tower of Babel, we see once more what it looks like for sin, rather than obedience, to fuel the spreading of humanity.

In Genesis 11 humanity becomes wickedly united in its defiance of the Creator. God decreed to make humans in His image, saying "let us make . . ." (1:26). At Babel, however, humans use the same expression ("let us make . . ."; 11:3) to seek to displace God's glory with their own glory. The three episodes of human fallenness in Genesis 2-11 are: Adam and Eve in Eden, the generation of the flood, and the generation of Babel. This third episode is the most violent, as fallen humans here seek to determine their own destiny (11:4). In each case God's judgment is not final, and His judgment reveals His gracious purposes for and patience with humanity. Each episode is not catastrophic, but instead opens up new possibilities. God gave Adam and Eve the promise of a coming deliverer (3:15). With Noah, God confirms His commitment to His created order. The story of Babel leads to the story of Abraham, which reveals God's commitment to all the families of the earth (12:3).

In the story of Babel, there is obvious warning of the inability of human effort to reach God. It thus becomes an early doctrinal signpost of the nature of redemption. God actively intervenes, through

the confusion of languages, to stop this human striving toward Him. However, these language differences are reversed by the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 at Pentecost, and they are made to be fully harmonious in the great song of the Great Day of heavenly gathering “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9). God’s grace enables His people not only to reach Him, but to do so in unity and not by mere human capacity.

The Babel account also repeats the narrative pattern of a return to chaos (see the note on Gen. 5:1–6:8) prior to the focus on God’s redemptive provision through another family—this time the family of Abraham.

Commentary taken from the ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible Genesis 11:1-9