

A City of Confusion

Genesis 11:1-9

(preached Pine Grove 2/3/18; Sunday PM)

Introduction

In 9th grade, I walked into Mrs. Snow's class at Whitmire High School.

I was rarely intimidated in the classroom, but I was that day since it was my first day in French class.

It was 1988 and the only foreign language class offers at our tiny school was French, so everyone took it.

Mrs. Snow was a small lady with strict classroom rules and an even higher expectation of academic success..

She told us that we would leave 2 years of French with the ability to speak it fluently.

I had my doubts.

First, I had never taken any foreign language ever.

Second, I struggled with her English class, so I knew that success in French would be even more challenging..

However, I made it, and no in case you are wondering, I do speak French fluently and never have.

But I did survive French with Mrs. Snow and still have a handful of French vocabulary words tucked in my brain somewhere..

Mrs. Snow told us that learning a foreign language is one of the best exercises for the brain.

According to her and even experts today, learning a new language opens up dead areas of the brain and even extends brain health..

That may be true, but two years in French class was enough for me.

I even avoided some majors in college because of foreign language requirements..

In the end, the Lord has a way of humbling your heart because I signed up for seminary and ended up in two years of Hebrew and Greek.

Needless to say, my brain should be really healthy or really warped...

Not sure which, but I do know this..

Learning other languages is difficult and tiring...

So where does this pain come from?

Well, we find out tonight in Genesis 11:1-9 as we examine the origin of languages...

Now, origins are nothing new in the book of Genesis..

In fact, the word Genesis means “beginnings” and that is exactly what this first book of the Bible is about.

It about the beginnings of essentially everything in the world..

It provides the beginning of the universe.

The beginning of the sun, moon, and stars.

The beginning of the oceans and the continents.

The beginning of animals.

The beginning of birds and fish.

The beginning of man.

The beginning of marriage.

The beginning of society.

The beginning of sin.

The beginning of family.

The beginning of wickedness and corruption.

Two weeks ago in Genesis 10, we look at the beginning of geography and culture and nations through the descendants that came from Noah's 3 sons after the flood.

Remember, everyone has Adam and Noah in their family tree.

Adam is there because all people have descended from Him and Eve.

Noah is there because all people were destroyed in the flood except Noah and his 3 sons and their wives.

So the entire world that we see around us today resulted from one of Noah's sons..

If you remember, Noah's son Japheth had children that ended up spreading east and west and north and south from the Middle East.

Noah's son Ham had children that ended up settling south from the Middle East..

And then Noah's son Shem had children that ended up settling right there in the Middle East..

And so chapter 10 gave us the beginnings of the world's nations and regions and cultures by describing where Noah's sons settled..

But tonight is chapter 11, we are going to find out why Noah's sons went in all those directions..

And the reason behind their dispersion is going to give us another beginning in the book of Genesis...

And this is the beginning of languages..

Now, let me read the first 9 verses of Genesis 11 to us, and then we will go back and get a closer look at some of the details...

Genesis 11:1-9

1 Now the whole earth [a]used the same language and [b]the same words. 2 It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and [c]settled there. 3 They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. 4 They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." 5 The Lord came down to see the city and the tower

which the sons of men had built. 6 The Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they all have [d]the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be [e]impossible for them. 7 Come, let Us go down and there confuse their [f]language, so that they will not understand one another’s [g]speech.” 8 So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. 9 Therefore its name was called [h]Babel, because there the Lord confused the [i]language of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.

Tonight, we will look at this most important event in the Bible in 2 parts..

The first part we will call an act of rebellion in verses 1-4...

I. An Act of Rebellion (1-4)

As we come to chapter 11, we are roughly 100 years after the flood.

And those 100 years have been a time of great reproduction and child bearing.

Noah's sons and wives have been having children.

Those children have been having children..

Those children have been having children..

So when we get to verse 1 of chapter 11, we have a pretty substantial world population.

Now remember that the ark settled in eastern Turkey.

You can look at this map of the approximate location..

And we talked two weeks about the fact that Noah and his sons and their wives probably set up house in a nearby area so that could get busy being fruitful and multiplying..

Verse 1 gives us an important note about this growing group of people beginning to fill the earth..

They used the same language and the same words..

The Hebrew literally reads that they had one lip and one set of words..

In other words, everyone spoke the same language and used the same words..

And you may say, “well isn’t it receptive to say the same language and the same words.”

No, you can speak the same language and use different words..

For instance, we went to California and no one had any idea what a buggy was at Wal Mart..

And no one had any idea what sweet tea and grits were either..

Though they spoke English, they used different words...

Well, that wasn’t the case with this post flood population of people..

All spoke the same language and used the same words..

And notice what happens when everyone speaks the same language...

Verse 2..

2 It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and [c]settled there.

In other words, a common language results in a common community.

In fact, a common language is a necessity for a common community.

You don't hang out with people that have a hard time understanding you..

So these people took their language and headed east..

Now east of Turkey is Iran and Iraq..

And the growing population has that way and settles in an area called Shinar..

Here is a map of Shinar which is roughly modern day Iraq..

So the people come to this area and settle on a plain in Shinar..

Now the attraction of the area is the water supply.

The Tigris and the Euphrates flow through this area, making life possible..

If not, no one could survive this desert environment..

But the Tigris and Euphrates, this area become what is known as the Fertile Crescent...

And this growing population of people need water in order to continue expanding...

Now the key word of verse 2 is “settled.”

This group of Noah’s descendants decided to “settle” in Shinar...

Now what is the problem with this settling down?

Well, God had clearly told Noah and his sons in Genesis 9 to be fruitful and multiply and “fill” the earth..

In other words, God didn’t want settling for now.

He wanted people to spread and fill the earth..

However, the people settle in Shinar and they have one language and one culture and are one nation..

And here comes trouble..

Verse 3..

3 They said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.” And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. 4 They said, “Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”

Lots of interesting things to note here in this early civilization...

The first thing to note is that public cooperation doesn't lead to godly obedience..

We are told that there is strength in numbers but there is also disobedience in numbers as well..

These people are cooperating with one another in an effort to disobey God..

Reminds me of so many scenes today in statehouses of people cheering on the passing of abortion laws..

In world where people can't agree on much, you can always find agreement among people to disobey God.

The crowd is usually never right.

And certainly that wasn't the case right here on the plain of Shinar..

These people who had one language are now untied in one purpose, which is to oppose God's authority over them.

They don't want to fill the earth.

They want to settle and expand and build a city that makes their name great.

They have no plans to make God's name great.

This is the rebellion of man.

Now remember, it has been only 100 years since a worldwide flood caused by worldwide rebellion..

But man doesn't take long to find himself back in the gutter.

Though he knows the power of God to judge sin, he stills sins in God's face.

This is the ugliness of the human heart.

This is the depravity of man.

He will do anything to get out of obeying God.

And so man gets to work building a city tower that showcases the unity of the people.

Now look, how does a city and a tower keep them in one place?

Well, such ingenuity and cooperation will be a demonstration to others about what man can accomplish when he works together...

Sadly, if man were to put that ingenuity and cooperation together to further the name of God, the world would be a much better place..

Yet, man doesn't see it that way.

So this early culture sets out to make a name for themselves by disobeying God..

That is the the act of rebellion...

Let's now turn to God's Act of Judgment..

II. An Act of Judgment (5-9)

In verse 5, we read that the LORD came down to see the tower which the sons of man had built..

Obviously, God could see the actions of man from heaven..

But the language here is meant to remind the reader that the tower of man fell far short of reaching God in heaven..

God is not concerned with man reaching heaven and dethroning him...

God is not threatened by the works of man..

So he comes down and see the tower, and in verse 6, he warns of the threat of man-centered unity..

“Behold, they are one people, and they all have [d]the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be [e]impossible for them.

Again, this isn't an admission that man can be all powerful when he works together..

It is simply a warning that man can do some incredibly sinful things when they join together to disobey God..

Just consider Nazi Germany that Hitler united to kill 6 million Jews..

Just consider the Jews of Jesus day that united in their hatred of Him and sent him to his execution...

People are so sinful acting alone but they are capable of incredible sin when acting together...

So God acts in verses 7 and 8...

The first judgment is to confuse their language..

And not that verse 7 gives us more evidence of the trinity..

God says, "Let us go down and confuse their language..."

The Father, the Son, and the Spirit work together to confuse the one world language of the people..

In a sense, God acts of the tongue and the ears and the brain of these people..

Their tongues begin to speak different languages.

Their ears begin to hear different languages.

Their brains begin to process different languages..

And ultimately, the people that were united are now divided.

And there are divided by language..

Can you imagine waking in the morning and your wife and kids are speaking Portuguese?

What about walking in the Dollar General and everyone is speaking Chinese?

This would have a devastating effect on all sorts of things..

Not only is communication cut off, but so is any type of cooperation or mutual work or fellowship..

To not be able to talk to someone and hear them respond is frustrating and even a little scary...

This had to have been the case in the land of Shinar on this day.

Regular communication is no longer possible..

One language, one vocabulary is gone in an instant..

People who could take to one another are no longer able to do so..

But the judgment isn't over..

Verse 8..

8 So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth

God not only supernaturally confused the language, God also scattered the people all over the earth..

In other words, verse 8 is the story behind chapter 10...

God created languages and He then grouped people according to those languages and scattered them all over the earth...

And what was the outcome of confusion and scattering?

Look at the end of verse 9..

They stopped building the city..

There can no longer be progress where there is no longer cooperation..

And there can't be cooperation when there is no communication...

So the works stops in the land of Shinar and people scatter..

And Moses gives us a summary of these verses in verse 9..

9 Therefore its name was called [h]Babel, because there the Lord confused the [i]language of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.

What do we call the language of babies?

We call it babbling simply because we can't understand what they are saying...

Well, Babel is also the name given to this town because no one could understand all the languages spoken there..

The tower of Babel and the city of Babel are monuments to the sinfulness of man and the judgment of God..

But Babel is also the beginning of the languages and nations of the world...

Conclusion

Now, what can we take from these 9 verses?

#1 - Man's sinfulness cannot be hidden.

I know I hurt your feelings frequently but man is not good by nature.

In fact, man is sinful and broken and disobedient by nature.

Only 100 years after a worldwide flood, man is not engaged in worldwide rebellion..

You may think that you are a good person but sadly all you need is opportunity to display your incredible sinfulness...

These people had a great grandfather in Noah and grandfathers in his 3 sons that saw the devastation of sin.

Yet, they continued to disobey God's commands in refusing to obey God's command to fill the earth...

We are not good people only needing Christ to make us better.

We are bad people needing Christ to save us from our sin.

#2 - *Man's cooperation can be dangerous.*

I won't say that all cooperation is bad.

The church is called to unity and togetherness..

But by and large cooperation between people can be dangerous, especially in terms of sinful behavior.

I often warn people, young and old alike, that your friendships and your relationships as a believer are of utmost importance.

Very rarely can you oppose what the crowd is doing..

More often than not, people go along with the crowd.

That was clearly the case in Babel, where the people agreed to settle instead of fill the earth...

The saying there was "Let us build a city and a tower.."

You see, disobedience is often easier in groups..

People think they can hide their sinfulness within the group...

And that is a dangerous way because no one can hide from God..

Be careful of your company.

Obeys the Lord even if you are the only one doing it.

#3 - The world as we see it bears the marks of Babel.

It needs to be said here but the cultures of the world began at Babel.

Language, ethnicity, skin color finds its foundation in Babel.

As people scattered all over the world, language caused groups of people to gather together..

Cultures emerged based on a common language.

Food tastes emerged based on the area of the world that people settled.

Skin colors began to change as dark skin provided protections in places near the equator while lighter skin was the result of people settling more north with less sun..

The answers to the apparent races is the tower of Babel, but I remind you that there aren't any races.

All people are of one race, the human race began by Adam and Eve...

Babel simply helps us understand the various cultures we see in the world..

#4 - The world that is coming bears the marks of Babel.

You can't help but see the end of time right here in Genesis 11..

Where is the world headed today?

The world is headed back to Babel.

In fact, languages are disappearing as I preach tonight.

Most folks are moving toward English as a world language...

Most people are teaching it their children in non English speaking parts of the world..

But the world is also getting smaller in terms of communication.

Phones, internet, video calling is making the world much smaller..

But more importantly, the world is getting sampler is their agreement to disobey God..

More and more people are united in their opposition to the Scriptures...

As the 7 year tribulation breaks out, what will the AntiChrist do?

He will unite the world's economies.

He will unite the world's governments.

And he will untie the world's religions.

Globalism is a push back to Babel.

Sadly, globalism will win as the end approaches.

It is already winning..

So what are we to do in response to these truths?

#5 - Believers are called to make God's name great.

The issue at Babel was the issue that you struggle with every day.

It is the issue of self versus God.

The people of Babel wanted fame and notoriety by making a name for themselves..

But before we rush to judgment on them, we aren't any better...

Take a look at your heart.

What do you do to further your name compared to what do you do to further God's name?

Pride is a silent killer seen in social media posts and comments about what you have and what you have accomplished...

So many believers seem more interested in their name getting attention than they are in God's name getting attention...

Babel wasn't the first sign of man's pride, it was simply another example of it in the world..

Your job and my job is to promote the name of the Lord.

May God convict our hearts whenever we take to making a name for ourselves...

May God give us grace to make His name great in the world. LET US PRAY.