

# Human ambition to create a godless city

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Date: 09 June 2024

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[ 0 : 00 ] So chapter 10, verse 32. These are the clans of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies in their nations, and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.

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.

And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of man had built. 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. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so they may not understand one another's speech.

[ 1 : 20 ] So 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 from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth. Well, good morning, everyone. Please pray with me as we come to God's Word.

Lord God, you are the blessed. God, help us to believe that, that in you is deep joy and fulfillment, that you have this in yourself, and that you are the fountain of all blessing.

Father, I pray that our time in your Word would help us see you as you really are. Lord, expose our sin, and I pray that because I know that when you do that, you only do it to bless us.

So please make us ready to see our own hearts. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Well, our passage today covers what's called the Table of Nations, chapter 10, genealogy.

[ 2 : 43 ] And then we've got this little story about a city and a tower. And the phrase, the whole earth, is repeated five times in that story. So what I'm getting at is our passage today is about the whole earth is in view.

We've got all the families of the world in view. And then from chapter 12, next week onwards, we're going to zoom. The rest of the scripture, or Old Testament, zooms right in on one family.

Now, why should you and I care about this very ancient attempt to build a city and a tower?

I've seen a yawn already. Like, why should we care? I'm going to give you two reasons.

There's probably way more than this, but I can see two very big reasons. Just consider its placement in Genesis, what we've seen so far. So blessing.

[ 3 : 48 ] Blessing and curse is what the theme of Genesis is about. Blessing is about deep fulfillment in life. That's what the word captures, deep fulfillment.

Who doesn't want that? Now, how big a problem does humanity have in attaining deep fulfillment, blessing? How big is our problem?

Imagine if our problem as humanity is so big that God has to wipe the slate clean and start again with one righteous man, a totally new beginning.

Isn't that what we saw with Noah last week? He wipes the slate completely clean. It's a view of the problem we have that goes way beyond the solutions we hear all the time.

Education is going to help us find fulfillment. If only the economy. We controlled that.

[ 4 : 51 ] Being more inclusive as a society. We need more rules. We need less rules. We need more religious activity. We need less. We need global cooperation.

We need research. We need technology. But none of that even comes close. If the flood really is true, you need to wipe the slate clean. Those solutions, oh, they're not going to work. But we can go a step further here with Babel. How deep must our problem be if even after this total fresh start, the human race goes right back to the same problem? Sin and curse and death. Human race just goes straight back to it. Not even the flood fixed it. The placement of Babel after the flood should make us desperate to hear what God's plan is to bless the world.

[ 5 : 58 ] It should make us really question any human ideas of how to bless the world.

So that's the first reason we need to understand Babel. I'm going to give you a second one. Is if we understand the story arc of the whole of the Bible.

If someone asked you what's the Bible about, one legitimate, I think there's a few different angles you could answer that question from. One legitimate theme you could trace is the story of two cities. The city of man versus the city of God. The name Babel here, every other time in the Old Testament, except for chapter 10 and 11, ESV translates it Babylon.

What do we see in Revelation? What comes just before that new heaven, a new earth, and the new Jerusalem coming down, that garden city?

[ 7 : 08 ] What happens just before then? Chapter 18 of Revelation. Babylon is finally destroyed. But there's two responses to that.

Some people are weeping. They are weeping because all their wealth, all their hopes, all their home is gone. They're weeping.

But then the citizens of the heaven, they're rejoicing. When Jesus calls us to carry our cross, he's saying, we're to die to the world.

We're to let the world consider us nothing. He's saying, come to me. Come outside the city.

Follow me. Or Hebrews 11. Who doesn't find Hebrews 11 encouraging? Like this great cloud of witnesses of faith in God.

[ 8 : 14 ] That chapter is saying, what's faith about? All these people from Abraham, or early in Abraham, Abel onwards, they had opportunity to find their home here in the city of man, to find prosperity and security here.

But they didn't. They wanted a better city. The whole Bible, faith in Jesus, is about coming out of the city of man, putting your hope in the city of God.

So there's a second reason we really need to understand Babel. Not even the flood. It shows us how desperate our condition is. And the whole point of the Bible is to show us the city of man versus the city of God.

Okay. So let's, hopefully that's enough. If that's not enough, I'm not sure what else I can say to encourage you to come with me into chapter 10 and 11.

What's chapter 10, the table of nations, about? I'm going to suggest three primary things we see here. The first thing is, don't miss, like we didn't read it, but if you were to skim it or read it in, we read it in a small group, don't miss the forest through the trees, or for the trees.

[ 9 : 52 ] Families is repeated here. All the tribes, all the languages, all the nations, lots and lots of families, but they all have their origins in three sons of Noah.

So remember the big picture. Chapter 10 is saying the whole world is one family. Now that's a radical claim.

It means if you have prejudice against another ethnicity, if you have pride in your own culture, listen to chapter 10. Do you see humanity as one family?

Because there's been many regimes through history as we know who treat one people group as subhuman.

And the Tower of Babel chronologically comes before chapter 10. Babel explains the diversity. I think the purpose of that, you're going to have to, someone tell me another answer, but the answer I can come up with, why would Moses arrange it like that?

[ 11 : 07 ] I think it's so that when we get to Babel, the mindset we see at Babel is the whole world. The whole world has this mindset. It's going to look very different in each culture, but it's the same fundamental issue.

So we see one family with one mindset at Babel. We see this family in chapter 10 is hopelessly divided. Have you tried to speak to someone where you just, you have, you can't speak their language, they can't speak yours.

it's really hard to relate, isn't it? Even if you want to, it is so hard to relate. Body language, cultural assumptions, you can cause offence and not mean to.

Like, it's so hard to be unified. And we're afraid. Someone different to us, we're afraid. And the nations described here, they go to war against each other.

The picture we get in chapter 10 is humanity is deeply divided. So Babel explains why that is the case today.

[12:31] The third thing we see in chapter 10, so one family hopelessly divided. The third thing we see is Genesis is tracing blessing and curse. So Noah's blessing and curse of his three sons in chapter 9 who do we see are the families of Ham.

It's not good news. Canaan, which become the promised land of Israel. And we get, we focus in on one individual which should make us sit up.

We're in a genealogy here. The focus is on nations and people groups and then this one individual was focused on Nimrod. God. Now my small group have bribed me with chocolate to say he's Alpha Chad.

I have no idea what I just said. I'm hoping it's appropriate that I'm pretty sure I know what it means. It means he's the Alpha.

He's the Alpha male. He's the Alpha male. He's a mighty hunter before the Lord. Mighty is repeated.

[13:42] He's mighty. Now in context it's probably more likely saying he's mighty facing the Lord.

He is in opposition to the Lord. His rule seems to be might equals right.

Power is what matters. Power will bring blessing. Power sets the agenda. Power sets the values in society. This is Nimrod.

He creates the first kingdom at Babel. Babylon. He builds Nineveh if we know Old Testaments this is not sounding good.

Egypt the Philistines comes from Nimrod. A warning is here. The prosperity, the power, the greatness they're coming from Nimrod for all their strength.

[14:50] Don't be lured to it because they're under God's curse. blessing. So we trace curse and we also trace blessing.

If blessing is going to come to the world, it's got to come through God's chosen family. Not because of any good in them, but because he chooses them.

So we follow Shem. we come to Eber, which apparently is where Hebrew comes from. The name of Hebrews, Eber, Hebrews, and Peleg.

It's in his day that the Babel separation happened. This is the line of promise. This is where blessing is going to come from. So we've got one family in chapter 10, but hopelessly divided and in conflict. And we've got Nimrod's rebellion. Don't be fooled by it. Yes, there's power. Yes, there's blessing, not blessing, but yes, there's prosperity in Nimrod's kingdom, but it's under curse.

[16:09] All right, let's go to the Tower of Babel. what's the big deal? What's the big deal about building a tower?

Like, Cain murdering his brother. Okay, that's clearly immoral. Lamech murdering a youth.

Okay, that's pretty awful. Mankind before the flood is full of violence. We see the immorality. But here we've got a story about new technology, bricks and a new kind of mortar.

We see human cooperation, unity, to do something great together. We see the desire to remain together, socially stronger, an identity together.

together. We see even a desire to connect to the heavens. What's wrong with any of these things?

[17:14] I think it's a really clever story. I was really worried about preaching this because I'm just like, I can't see what's wrong at first. I think it's like Jesus' parables.

They seem so innocent, but you reflect on it for a bit more, it gets under your skin. It subverts any assumptions you have about what sin is.

If we see the depths of sin at Babel, I think we'll see it everywhere. We'll see it in every culture, we'll see it in our own society, you'll start to see it in your own heart motives, you'll see it even sadly in the church, you'll see it, dare I say, in evangelical reformed churches sometimes.

You'll see it, if we see it at Babel. So they're afraid, they're afraid of being nobody important, they're going to be socially weak, spread out, and so they decide let's congregate, this is a congregation.

The commentator used that term, I thought that was great, this is a congregation, but it's a congregation, I can't even say the word, in rebellion of God's plan.

[ 18 : 42 ] God blessed Noah, 9 verse 1, God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

And led by Nimrod, no, we're going to stay here. Let's stick together. God's goal at creation of filling the earth with his people to glorify him, it's unchanged, but this group don't want that.

They want to stay a homogenous group. God wants diversity. And their goal is to make a name for themselves.

God is going to graciously bless Shem.

Babylon will make a Shem and bless myself, ourselves. I want to know I'm valuable. I want to know I'm worthwhile.

[ 19 : 54 ] I'm not this nameless cog in the wheel, a number. I'm distinct. I've got a purpose. We are somebody. The city of man, this city is proud.

It's thinking that by what they can do, they can give their own purpose, value, lasting significance. Let us make.

They think they can do it. Their goal is for their identity, their importance. It's pride. But doesn't that pride show us how insecure they are?

They don't know who they are. They need to make a name. They need to find their importance, create their importance.

It actually shows how insecure they are. They're afraid. So that pride actually shows a really deep insecurity.

[ 21 : 10 ] beauty. Now, I think in another culture, this is going to look different to us here, what it looks like, what might look like today.

I'm going to give a few suggestions. In another culture, it probably matters more whose family you belong to. Are you bringing honour to that family or shame?

it's going to look different in different cultures. I think others pin their identity and their value in patriotism, nationalism. I'm not quite sure that's our problem here in Australia.

We're too individualistic, aren't we? In the West here, we're about individual achievement, aren't we? we want our name high up on that research paper that's being published, even if you did very little work.

From what I hear in uni research land, it's pretty ruthless. People give, everyone and I go into, I like the Australian orchestra, I can't even remember the name of it, but you get this list of people, patrons, people give enormous amounts of money, I think, just to have their name there.

[ 22 : 41 ] Obviously, they must love the orchestra to some degree, but people are willing to give amazing amounts of money for their name, or to be on a building or something. We want to know that lots of people socially care about us, that they're relying on us, that they think we're wonderful.

We need our children to make us look like a great mum and dad, that I'm as good as Bandit and Bluey. I need my kids to make my name great, to behave well.

We can be ruthless climbing the corporate ladder, we can offer our sacrifices at Bunnings, all envying each other's homes.

Why do we need bigger and more pretty homes? Why? I suspect it's for the image we present, right? The cars we drive.

I need that church's soccer, second division, little tower of Babel. And I will yell at the ref and push and shove to get it.

[ 24 : 11 ] My biggest problem every week preaching is what you will think of me, this tower of Babel is what if we work hard enough, earn enough, achieve enough, we can bless ourselves.

It's proud, it's all focused on self and it betrays how insecure we are. It's godless, it's not about God. So many centuries later, in Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian Empire, in the middle of all the important cities, there was apparently towers that were called ziggurats, I'm not sure if I'm saying that right, but all the commentators are talking about it, seven stories, 90 metres high, it's meant to look like a man-made mountain.

And at the top level, so it's kind of this stepped in, you go higher and higher, at the top is clad in silver, and that's where the worship happens. That's where you worship the gods.

And what's the point of that? It's a gateway to heaven. We're creating a gateway to heaven. Now why? It sounds okay, let's connect with the gods, right?

[ 25 : 39 ] But the point is we're coming halfway through our sacrifices, we're going to bring the gods down and guarantee blessing. It's through their achievement, their sacrifice, we can create this

gateway of heaven and guarantee blessing, that the gods will bless us.

In other words, it's an attempt to control your world. it's an attempt to control God. So the Tower of Babel can look, it looks religious, it is religious.

Our prayers, our giving of money, our service, our Bible knowledge, it can be just to make your name great, or it could be using God to get some other blessing rather than God himself.

It's trying to control God. It looks very religious, but it's false religion, not true religion. See, the Tower of Babel, it helps us see the depths of sin, what sin is.

It's not only behaviour, immorality, it's just the visible fruit. Sin is, it's more than being selfish.

[ 27 : 08 ] I don't like that definition of sin, because we ought to seek blessing. Seeking blessing in God is the most selfish thing you can do.

I don't like selfish as a definition of sin. That's my little hobby horse there. Sin here is pride.

It's not just boasting, sin. Pride is a focus on self. It's reliance on self to glorify self. And the flip side of pride is ungodliness.

It's got nothing to do with God, or at least you're just using God. Sin is pride. Sin is godlessness. sin is sin.

Another way to put it is Babel is man's attempt to build our own Eden. It's we want the kingdom blessings, we just don't want the king.

[ 28 : 18 ] Now in light of Genesis chapter 1, what we've seen, it's in our creator that we live and move and have our being. Acts 17 talks about it.

We owe our allegiance to him. And Babel says, no, you can be self-dependent. Let us make. In light of Genesis 2, what did we see there?

The best thing about Eden, what was it? The best blessing was that God was there, intimately involved. He wants his home with us. Him providing everything, us depending on him, and glorifying his character.

That's the best thing about Eden, is he is there. But Babel says, no, I'm going to seek my glory. I can create fulfillment, deep fulfillment, without God.

God. God Babel is the repeat of Adam and Eve.

[ 29 : 28 ] It shows us that we're still believing Satan's lie. The whole world is believing Satan's lie, that God is not good, that to glorify his name is not the life of deep fulfillment.

it's a lie. We think God doesn't want to bless us.

He does. He is totally committed to blessing. So I think we've got to ask, is God threatened?

They've got this tower. Is God threatened? Because it sounds like he is. It sounds like God's the one who's insecure. Anything man can do will be possible. Is he threatened? He's not.

He has to come down to even see this tower. You go up in a plane, you don't have to go too high.

It's the tallest buildings or whatever, the biggest landmarks, they become a dot.

[ 30 : 34 ] I have to come down to see this thing. You build a kingdom on earth, God's got to come down to find it. He's not threatened.

Our little towers of Babel, they don't reach heaven. They don't control him. He's got to come down and see it. He remains God. And he confuses the world.

He strikes at the godless unity. Now, this confusion, maybe it was gradual. I'm not sure.

It might have been just slowly not understanding each other and separating, which eventually turned into different languages. Or maybe it was immediate. Maybe it was a divine just immediately babbling, not making sense.

But he scatters. If you hear the term scatters in the Bible, it's a picture of judgment. And why does he do it?

[ 31 : 42 ] It's not because he's threatened. He's not threatened. Like, read Psalm 2. The nations rage and plot against. He's on his throne.

He's not threatened. I think we see here that he strikes at the godless unity to prevent worse judgment, to keep his promise not to flood the world again.

He's prolonging his judgment because he knows if working together, this pride left unchecked would provoke him to wrath.

I think we also see that he strikes at this because you are not staying here. I'm going to bless the whole earth. And he's determined to keep his plan to spread.

And so he forces it. I think of Acts 17 where Paul says to the Athenians that God has put people in their different places, in their different countries at certain times.

[ 32 : 55 ] God's love. And the purpose, he says, is it so that they might find God. He's not far. He's actually got good purposes in this.

But we also see at the Tower of Babel that there's no grace, there's no token of grace here. There's no message of hope here. You don't have the clothing of Adam and Eve after their sin. You don't have the mark of Cain to preserve him.

There's no message of grace here. There's no rainbow. So I think it's a loud message to us that man's attempt to control our world, to bless ourselves, is under curse.

It's not possible. It's to find deep fulfilment in your own efforts. Our world is under curse. It prepares us for where salvation is going to come from.

[ 34 : 02 ] It's not from us. If it's going to come, it's got to be from God. And it prepares us for him to make a new family, a family that he creates through Abraham.

Salvation is from the Jews. He creates a new family. But we read the Old Testament, Israel too became proud false worship, rebellious, and they too are scattered in exile.

The answer finally comes in God coming down again in John chapter 12. Let me flick over there. John chapter 12. John John's gospel, this is the first time that Greeks, so non-Jews come.

They want to meet Jesus. And when these Greeks come, Jesus' response is, now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

This is the time of the cross. It's the nations coming to meet Jesus that Jesus knows his cross is imminent.

[ 35 : 35 ] And listen to what he prays. He says, now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But for this purpose, I have come to this hour.

Father, glorify your name. At the cross, he is the one man, one human being who ever lived to glorify the Father.

He's the only secure person. He is willing to lose the whole world to glorify the Father. He is deeply fulfilled in the promises of God.

And he takes the curse that we should receive for our little towers of Babel. I think another theme we see in this passage is all those little attempts to climb up to God.

He has to be lifted up. on the cross. Or as Hebrews talks about, he dies outside the city. And he says the purpose of his death will draw all people to myself.

[ 37 : 04 ] He's going to gather. He's going to reverse Babel. to be able to see in Acts chapter 2. The new community filled with God, the Holy Spirit coming down to fill us because we trust in Jesus.

What do we see there? Lots of people see it as a reversal. All these nations listed, it's the next genealogy of the table of nations. And what happens? We can understand each other.

But what are we hearing? We're hearing them praising the works of God, not the works of what you've done, what Jesus has done. I want to quote Tim Keller.

I'm pretty sure I've quoted this before, but it's a good quote. The fulfillment we've been looking for in work, in building skyscrapers, in having wonderful spouses, in having lots of children, in making money.

The blessing we've been looking for is actually in the face of God. It's knowing that Jesus shares his name with me.

[ 38 : 26 ] I'm already named. What have I got to prove? He's given me that name. We've got purpose in serving him.

All we do for him has everlasting fruit. Wow. And so that frees us.

Anything we're doing, whether it's parenting or business, it frees us to serve. We're not trying to build a tower.

We're trying to put the focus on Jesus and truly serve the people serving. So can I finish with two questions for us to reflect on?

What little towers, and they are little towers, what little towers is God telling you to let go of? What will you do?

[ 39 : 33 ] In which city do you believe will give you deep fulfilment? The city of man, what we can do, or the city of God, what Jesus has done?

Jesus is saying, come to me, come outside the city. Will you pray? Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Lord, your promise of a new heavens and a new earth, that new Jerusalem with your name written on our foreheads, access to the tree of life, a healing for the nations, all the nations bringing their glory in to that new Jerusalem.

We'll have no more need of temple because you were there Lord, that you promise that to us, that you guarantee it because of what Jesus has done.  
Help us to long for that day when we will be there so that we will be salt and light here and now.  
Pray this for your glory and the salvation of many and our deep fulfilment in you. In his name, amen.  
to a At moment, when the-