

The Tower of Babel

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[0 : 00] Let's turn together to Genesis chapter 11 and read from the beginning of that chapter once again, page number 9, Genesis chapter 11.

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 bricks for stone and bitumen for mortar. And 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 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 that they may not understand one another's speech.

[1 : 03] So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of the whole earth. And they left off building the city. Therefore, its name was called Babel because the Lord confused the language of all the earth.

And from there, the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth. I'm sure that many of us are fascinated, like me, about the question, who are we?

What are we? What are we like? We belong to the human race, whatever our color or our language or our culture is, whatever part of the world we come from.

And although there's a huge diversity of types of people in the world, we are all human beings. We have a distinct identity as human beings.

And the study of what we are like or what humankind is, it's called anthropology. I hope I'm not patronizing anyone. We all know that, I'm sure.

[2 : 13] Anthropology is the study of our behavior, what we do in certain circumstances, how we behave in certain circumstances, and how one culture differs from another in how they do things, whether that's a regular routine or whether it's a time of war or a time of crisis or whatever.

And I guess, again, I'm being very simplistic, but we don't have time to go into this in any detail. There are two ways in which you can study humankind.

One is to simply go somewhere and just watch. And that's how anthropologists work. They go to some village in the depths of South America, for example, and they'll go and stay there and they'll go and sit and they'll watch the way people interact with one another, their tribal customs and all that kind of thing.

And then they'll write a thesis about it. And of course, the whole study of anthropology is absolutely fascinating. If any of you read National Geographic, you'll find just hundreds, thousands of articles of how people live in various parts of the world.

The other way of studying humankind is to listen to what the manufacturer says. Just like you get to know any piece of equipment, the best person, the person who knows that piece of equipment better than anyone else, whether it's a car or a ship or an airplane, is the manufacturer.

[3 : 44] And the one who knows humankind more than anyone else is the manufacturer or, as we would say, the creator. And that's why the study of humankind, and I'm not arguing with those who want to study people, groups everywhere all over the world, but the problem is when it stops there and when we refuse to go to the manufacturer to find out why we do things, what lies at the root of human behavior.

And in order to do that, you absolutely have to go back to the source, which is, of course, the Bible that tells us that we were created at the beginning of time in the Garden of Eden, that we are sourced in two people, Adam and Eve, and we were created in the image of God.

One of the reasons I have a great difficulty with evolution is for this reason, that the Bible tells us that we are completely different.

We are completely unique as men and women, as the human race. And those who believe in evolution, they want to persuade us that we have evolved from animals, from species that were less than human beings.

Now, the problem I have with this is that the Bible tells me that God reached a certain point in his creation process at which he took the step of creating Adam and Eve to be different, could be completely unique, and to bear the image of God.

[5 : 26] Now, I would have to ask somebody who believes in evolution, how do you square that up with the idea that we evolved from lesser beings or ape-like beings?

At what point do we bear the image of God? Does that mean that there's some kind of subhuman being that half bears the image of God? Not at all.

The Bible is absolutely clear that mankind or humankind bears the image of God, and there was a particular moment in the creation process.

Now, I'm not saying there aren't questions about Genesis 1. There's lots of discussion points about Genesis 1, and real genuine questions that arise out of the chapter itself.

But when it comes to the creation of humankind, you cannot argue, if you believe in the Bible, I don't believe you can argue that we evolved from lesser beings because God made a special, specific point of creating humankind when he said, let us make man in our own image and in our likeness.

[6 : 34] I would also have to say, at what point in the evolution process did we acquire our soul? If we are to believe, as the Bible teaches, that man or humankind is body and soul, and that this is what makes them different from the animal world, I would have to ask, at what point in the evolutionary process did we acquire, did God start giving these subhuman beings a soul?

At what point did they become human? And, of course, there is no answer to that because I believe it simply didn't happen. God created us to be man and woman and to bear the image of God, and that is a clear teaching in Genesis 1.

Now, of course, there's a whole discussion area here, and perhaps some of you would like to come back with some questions or whatever, and that's okay. I want to move on, though, to centuries.

I don't know how long this was after the flood. The flood is described for us in Genesis 6, when the world, because it had become a broken world, had become so corrupt that God had no alternative but to put the world out of his sight, to destroy the world as it was known at that time.

And he did so by means of a flood. But he saved one particular family, Noah and his wife, and two of every kind of animal in the ark.

[8 : 05] And these were to be God's recreation or recreation of the human species. He didn't recreate them from nothing, but he preserved them, I perhaps should have said, through the flood in the ark.

And Noah and his family became the source family then for all other families that subsequently were born in the world. Genesis chapter 11 tells us about how the world progressed from that moment.

And to me, it's a pivotal point. There's three things I'd like us to consider about this chapter. Because I believe that here we have God coming down to intervene in humankind's affairs in a very specific way.

This is a pivotal moment in God's dealings with humankind. Here God is taking it upon himself at a particular moment in time to stop the world, as it were, to stop the course of mankind, to prevent them from progressing in the course that they had decided to take.

And he is changing things forever. Now, I'd like to ask, why is it that he does that? There must be some good reason why God intervenes in such a marked, specific way.

[9 : 23] And I'd like us also to look at the fact that there is another time in the Bible when God makes a similar intervention. This time, instead of scattering people all over the face of the earth, he brings them back and he creates a unity that had never been from the point of Genesis chapter 11.

So God, in Genesis chapter 11, disperses the human race all over the world. He forces them to disperse all over the world. In Acts chapter 2, as we read earlier, he reverses that process and he brings people from all over the world to form a unity which had never been seen before with and throughout mankind.

And God, having done that in Acts chapter 2, I'd like to ask the question, why? Why was it that God once again intervened in the course of mankind history in order to bring them back?

So there's two things. We've got a lot of work to do this evening. I want to cover that in as little time as possible. I want us to look at three things in Genesis chapter 11. I want us to look, first of all, at the genius of humankind's invention.

The genius of humankind's invention. I'd like to look, secondly, at the arrogance of humankind's intention.

[10 : 54] And thirdly, I'd like us to look at the supremacy of God's intervention. The intelligence of man's, or the genius of man's invention.

The arrogance of man's intention. And the finality or the supremacy of God's intervention. I don't know if you've noticed in this chapter, it's the kind of chapter, of course, that you read about and you think, well, it's the Bible's way of explaining the diversity in language.

Of course, if you don't believe in the Bible, and I hope there's no one here in that position, but if you don't believe in the Bible, then you'll probably be of the view that language all evolved.

Again, it kind of evolved from one root language. But as far as the Bible is concerned, that's not the case at all. There came a pivotal moment in the history of humankind when language, instead of being one language, whatever that was at the very beginning of time, we don't know, it became several languages.

Now, no doubt, from that point, that these languages, they evolved themselves into different languages, and they became the thousands of different sub-languages and groups.

[12 : 20] It's another interesting study. But this chapter tells us that in the beginning, there was only one language. And of course, again, that agrees with the story of Noah and indeed the story of Adam and Eve.

We don't know what that language was, and it's foolish to speculate as to what it might have been. But this chapter tells us the circumstances behind the diversity of human language, and it was an act of God.

After all, that shouldn't be surprising because language is a particular human function, and it reminds us and expresses the fact that we were made in the image of God.

It separates us from the animals. The reason why animals do not talk to one another and try as we might, they simply don't talk to one another. There may be communication of a sort, but there is no conversation.

And the reason for that is they're not made in the image of God. The reason why we talk to one another is because we are made in the image of God. We were designed to be social beings, and that social interaction means that we converse with one another.

[13 : 37] It's an essential part of our social being because God is social being. He is Father, Son, and Spirit. Now, here's what happens in Genesis chapter 11.

This is a pivotal moment in the progression of humankind's history. It's one of these moments that you can miss very easily.

It's the moment when humankind discovers the brick. Now, you may smile at that, but I can tell you that was their way or their moment of inventing the transistor or electricity.

It was as significant then as the discovery of electricity is in our generation. We don't know when the wheel was invented.

We don't know when the axe was invented, but these were all pivotal moments, moments which defined the course of human history from then on and which progressed man's ability to overcome this world and to possess this world and to make use of the resources that were at his disposal.

[14 : 58] And here is one of those moments. Come, let us make bricks. Somebody somewhere discovered that you could do something different than work with mud or wood or stone.

Here was something which was a hard substance and could be fired and could be shaped and could be hardened and could be used therefore to build a wall and once you start building a wall then what's the limit?

The sky's the limit. And the first thing that I discover from this chapter 11 is the genius of humankind's invention.

The genius that was to go on and was to build the machine, whatever that first basic machine was. The genius that was to go on and discover transportation, whatever that first form of transportation was.

Horse-thrawn carriage or chariot or whatever it was that was to discover the sword and the boat made of wood that man was going to, I guess the ark was a boat that had already been discovered.

[16 : 14] They were going to go on. They were going to discover how to build houses made of brick. They were going to discover how to shelter themselves from the elements, from the snow and from the wind and from the rain.

They were going to build two-story houses and eventually they were going to have plumbing in their houses. Did you know, by the way, that when Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldees, his house in Ur of the Chaldees had plumbing in it.

That's what they discovered about Ur of the Chaldees. And through the centuries, humankind was going to go on to discover the great things and to invent the great things that we know and that still blow us away when we think of the frightening ability of humankind to pretty much do whatever he wants.

When God says nothing will be impossible for him, he actually meant that. We can travel to space.

We're now talking about traveling to Australia in 45 minutes. I can talk to an iPhone and ask what restaurant is down the road and it will tell me in a voice that will recognize my voice and my question.

[17 : 45] It will just answer the question there and then. It's a machine. The next great frontier is breaking down the barrier between humankind and machine.

Getting a machine to reason and to think and to talk and to listen to work out. Is there anything that is impossible for humankind?

Cloning sheep? Manufacturing life? Cloning humans? Who knows?

The genius of human invention. Now you would think that if mankind and all things being equal if the world had not become a separate world from God when they invented the brick humankind would have said would have been content with building houses.

They could have built magnificent houses. They could have built artistic houses. But instead of that they chose and that was a very significant moment in the history of humankind when he chose to use his new invention not just for his well-being but for the displacement of God.

[19 : 05] Because the second thing you see in this chapter is the arrogance of man's intention. There were three objectives behind this statement that's made.

Let's look and read it again. Verse 3 they said to one another come let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly and they had brick for stone and they had bitumen for mortar.

Verse 4 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.

Can you see those three areas in what they said of arrogance sheer unadulterated arrogance. Let us build first of all let us build a tower with its top in the heavens.

Now you and I know all about what towers are like in today's world there are some magnificent towers in some of the great cities in the world Tokyo and London and Paris and New York and I guess that the primary reason for building these towers is because in a city you don't have a great deal of land so you have to build upwards in order to create office space and of course these towers are magnificent monuments to the genius of human invention there's no doubt about that at all but that's not what you have in this chapter you have a statement that wants to not only to meet with God you see the heavens where it was the place where they thought that God dwelt and they had by this time dismissed the idea of God I guess that for hundreds of years God had been silent they had seen very little evidence of his judgment and so as we have they became accustomed to life by themselves and they decided that they would go up and see themselves and to make sure that there wasn't a

[21 : 27] God and when they reached the heavens they would not only see that he wasn't there but that they would displace him by setting themselves up as God that was their intention they wanted also to make a name for themselves because once you displace God once you take God out of the picture then all that is left is you and me Francis Schaeffer said once that this chapter was the first statement ever of humanism humanism is where someone has decided that there is no God and so we can resolve all our issues and we can discover everything that there is to discover just through the process of human science and human knowledge and we can resolve all our problems through that technology through medicine and education we can put the world to right but as far as God is concerned they have dismissed him out of the picture the idea is of course that we have outgrown

God there's nothing new about that even in this so-called primitive world in Genesis chapter 11 they had they felt that they had outgrown God the idea that God in the Bible had no idea about the kind of issues that we that we care about global warming human rights transportation how to meet a growing population in the world with the world's resources what room is there in those questions for God well I would say that God is the very first place you go to with those questions and if you want to find an answer to those questions then you find that answer in God but the prevailing view in our world today and particularly the place in the world where you and I live is that God is resigned to the pages of human history to medieval history and if you go around today saying that you still believe in the Bible don't be surprised at being laughed at and being scorned and marginalized and treated like a complete idiot there's nothing new about it but as soon as you displace

God what you're really saying is that we are the masters of the universe that we are the rulers of our own destiny the deciders of our own destiny and that God has no more place he was only a figment of the imagination of a bygone age but the third thing the third objective of this was to was to build a city you'll notice so that lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth now do you notice what they're saying there earlier on in Genesis God had told Adam and Eve to go into all the earth and to disperse to scatter through all the earth and to subdue it but here is this crowd of people and they don't want to do that they rather would like to stay in the same small area and become more and more populated and live not as a scattered people but as one unit in a city now that tells me that humankind is basically insecure the reason that we are so insecure is because we have lost our identity and you'll never get that identity back truly you will never find out who we are who I am and who you are until we find a root and our identity in God because our identity rests in

God it was God who manufactured us and created us and gave us a name and here are those people they say let's do away with God and make a name for ourselves you can't do it you end up just closing in on yourself you become insecure and unsure of your future and who you are and what's right and wrong and what your purpose is and basically you end up destroying yourself because you've lost that identity that respect that self-respect that God created us to have and I tell you this that when and as we in the 21st century dispense with the need for God we are dispensing with ourselves because if you take God out of the picture then all we are are blobs of chemistry with no significance with no value with no name with no identity we're kidding ourselves on

God is all that we have to make us what we are and it is nonsensical to pretend and to believe and to want him not to be there it's not without reason that the psalmist said it's a fool that has said in his heart there is no God it doesn't make sense for there not to be a God the only explanation in which we come together in which we have any significance in this world as a human race is God our maker and our creator so there's these three things then these three ways in which they completely disregarded

[27 : 48] God's authority and in actual fact when God is quite interesting I see the time is going past so I'll just touch on this very interestingly I hope what God's response was in verse 5 the Lord came down to see the city notice how there is an irony in God's intervention in which he first of all he comes down to see see they're desperately trying to get up to him and that is an impossible dream for them because no matter how high they're going to build this completely nonsensical tower it's never going to be high enough to reach God they're completely wasting their time and so God is almost saying I'll save you the trouble and he came down to where it was the greatest of ease in a moment of time

God comes down to see the city and the towers like a king simply glancing at his creation and his realm and then the Lord said look at the sovereignty of the word of God he says behold they are one people they all have one language and this is only the beginning of what they will do now some people read that as an act of God's judgment that God when he dispersed the people and sent them all the way through the earth because all of a sudden they discovered that they weren't speaking the same language I don't know how suddenly and when in the day that was I can only imagine their utter shock when they woke up one morning and they tried to speak to one another and they didn't understand a word that they said there's something humorous about this he that sits in heaven shall laugh that's what the psalmist said there's something utterly humorous and ironic about God's actions the ease in which he simply speaks the word and just like

Genesis 1 he speaks this massive change that was to take place in human society so that all of a sudden they woke up one morning and they discovered they couldn't understand each other I hope that God had the mercy to keep families together I'm sure he did but certainly on the other side of the camp couldn't understand a word that they were saying that wasn't God's judgment that was God's mercy believe me if God had wanted to act in judgment he would have destroyed them I'll tell you why I know that it was mercy because if they had stayed together then they would have become so corrupt and so evil that it would have ended up like Genesis chapter 6 where God saw that the world the evil in the world had become so gross that it left him no alternative but to destroy the world repented God that he made the earth why was that because they were all together they were all winding each other up and tempting each other and influencing each other and year after year it was getting worse and worse and the morality of the world was sinking lower and lower and lower they were all together but if they're all separate if some societies decide to become worse then

God will deal with them but other ones other societies will be different and so there is hope for the human race only if they are dispersed and that's why God acts in mercy to make sure that they separate and scatter over all the earth to preserve the human race it was an act of sheer mercy on his part now I want to go to the second time and I'm only going to spend a couple of minutes on this perhaps I should have spent far more on this one because this is the message of hope and promise in the gospel in Acts chapter 2 there are these disciples these few disciples meeting together all in one place and all of a sudden something amazing happens once again God comes down to where they are to see what is happening and this time his visit results in entirely the opposite of events because around them in

Jerusalem that day are men and women from all different parts of the world and they've all come together for one reason and that is to celebrate the Passover but in so doing they make a discovery that they never expected when they set out on that journey they discovered that the Messiah had come and that God had sent his son into the world who had died as the sacrifice for their sin and as they heard the message of this Jesus who had a few days earlier been crucified on a Roman cross but three days afterwards had risen from the dead and as the disciples his followers began to publicize and make known to the streets and the people of Jerusalem what had happened something happened that they never expected a power came upon them that they had never experienced in their whole lives a power that one in the first instance verified the truth of what they were hearing that this

[33 : 39] Jesus truly was the son of God and that his coming into the world was God's way of redeeming us back to himself restoring us back to himself in the gospel and as one by one these men and women heard the gospel in their own language why is it that God gives this gift to the disciples why is it that God again overrules just as he had done in the opposite way in Genesis chapter 11 he had overruled the affairs of humankind so that they couldn't understand each other so he does the opposite in Acts chapter 2 he overrules the affairs of the disciples so that everyone no matter where they come from and no matter what language they speak they're all able to understand and they're understanding this one message that Jesus the son of God rose from the dead triumphant over death and he offers and promises new life to those who come to him in faith that's the most important message in the world so important that God fixed it for them that they were all of a sudden miraculously able to hear this message at one time and it's a message that God wants you to hear more than anything else tonight two thousand years later it's the only message that will draw people from every nation and tribe and tongue and culture together and has already done so and it's a message that does so by drawing us first and foremost to God himself because that's what needs to happen to a cruel and a lost and a sad and a broken world tonight and it's in that condition because we have become separated from God but the gospel says that God has reversed it through Jesus

Christ and in Jesus one by one each one of us individually as we come to him in faith can be reconciled to God we can know God for ourselves personally we can know his forgiveness and his promise of everlasting life in Jesus Christ by coming to know this Jesus who rose again from the dead and it's got God's stamp of approval on that message so you can believe it you can believe it with confidence you can give your life to that message you can come as you are here tonight to Jesus let's pray him he he he he he he he he