

GENESIS

The story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis Chapter 11 is an important story in the early chapters of the book. However, we need to remember that God did not place that story here because of the tower itself. So, if it's not solely about the tower, then what is the purpose? We will be pursuing the answer to this question in this lesson, i.e., why is the story of the Tower of Babel in the Bible?

Our first step will be to consider both the tower and the people of Babel. If you do any research or study about the tower, you will discover many theories regarding (1) where it was built, (2) its construction, (3) its height and dimensions, and (4) its purpose.

What does Genesis Chapter 11 tell us about each of these four things?

1. Where was the tower built? (see Genesis 8:4 as well as Genesis 11:1-2)
 - a. ANSWER: Scripture tells us that the Ark came to rest in the mountains of Ararat. These mountains are located in eastern Turkey. (see Genesis 8:4) Then, in Genesis 11:2 we read that, "as people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there." Shinar is a reference to Babylonia, an area mostly located in modern day Iraq, situated between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. Many scholars believe that it was the forerunner of Babylon, which began as a political and religious center and one would eventually become the great city of Babylon.
 2. What material was used to build the tower? (see Genesis 11:3)
 - a. ANSWER: People used baked bricks to build the tower and "tar for mortar." Baked mud bricks were common for construction, particularly towers, as you need something that will withstand the great pressures placed on successive layers as the tower is built. I am including a picture with Dr. Carol Kobbs the co-director of the Tall el-Hammam excavation at the site of the ruins of Sodom. In the picture, I am holding a baked mud brick that probably weighed close to twenty-five pounds.
 3. What was the height of the tower at the time that God confused their language? (see Genesis 11:4-5)
 - a. ANSWER: When you examine the text, you will notice that the reader is never told how tall the tower actually was. We are only told that their desire was to build a "tower that reaches to the heavens." So, in fact, we don't know how tall the tower was, and we don't actually know if they had gotten very far at all. We only know that they were building it when God "came down" to see what they were building. (Genesis 11:5)
 4. What was the purpose of building the tower? (see Genesis 11:4)
 - a. ANSWER: Scripture tells us they wanted to build a tower, "that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise, we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."
 5. Let's refresh our memory here. Do you recall what God's intended purpose was for the survivors of the Great Flood, i.e., the descendants of Noah and his sons? (see Genesis 9:7)
 - a. ANSWER: God intended for Noah, his sons, and their descendants to "be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it."
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Wes Husted & Dr. Carol Kobbs (co-Director of Tall el-Hammam excavation). Wes is holding a 25-lb mud brick, similar in consistency to those probably used in the construction of the Tower of Babel.

So, we see from the above passages that the people were attempting to avoid doing God's will, which was to have them multiply and fill the earth. Instead, they were building this tower as a way of keeping everyone in one central location and not "scattered over the face of the whole earth." (Genesis 11:4)

Continuing our study:

6. What did God observe when, "the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building?" (see Genesis 11:5-7 and 1 John 2:16)
 - a. ANSWER: He saw that their common language was creating pride in them, so that they would believe that they could do anything. i.e., that nothing would be impossible for them. They had the pride of life referenced in 1 John 2:16. In that verse, John tells us that this pride comes from worldly thinking—relying on man's wisdom and not God's.
7. God knows that confusing their language will rid them of their worldly pride. Read Genesis 11:7. Who is identified as having confused their language? How does that description compare to what is asserted in Genesis 11:8-9? In verses 8-9, who is the source of confusing their language?
 - a. ANSWER: Verse 7 informs us that the LORD was speaking (see verse 6), but it reads, "come, let us" confuse their language. We see the use of this plural pronoun as well in Genesis 1:26. In that earlier passage, when God is creating mankind, it reads, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness..." Deuteronomy 6:4 reads, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one." In the New Testament, Jesus stated, "I and the Father are one." These are all references to the triune being of God the father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All (the Trinity) were present at the confusion of the languages.
8. After their language was confused, did anyone scatter them, or did the people scatter on their own? (see Genesis 11:8-9)
 - a. ANSWER: Again we observe that "the LORD scattered them..." Many believe that "LORD," when spelled with all capital letters, is a reference to the Trinity and includes Jesus' presence. Note that John 1:1-5 tells us that Jesus was present from the beginning of all creation, and even before that. Furthermore, God, the Trinity, is eternal with no beginning or end. Creation occurred through Jesus..."Through him all things were made" and that "without him nothing was made that has been made."
9. Where does Genesis 11 tell us that all of the people, who are now speaking many languages, went when they were scattered? Did this affect the language of the whole world? (see Genesis 11:9)
 - a. ANSWER: It is interesting to note that even with the confusion of languages, the LORD had to scatter them, as man still did not want to do God's will. We know, however, that God's will is always accomplished, in spite of man's false wisdom and pride. So, we see in this scripture that the LORD "scattered them over the face of the whole earth," and not just the area in Mesopotamia. The scripture says that they were scattered over the "face of the whole earth," and that "the LORD confused the language of the whole world." This is why many scholars believe today that languages can be traced back to a central origin.

In summary then, we can see that this lesson entitled the Tower of Babel isn't about where it was built, or how high it was, or the date on which the event happened. In fact, it is worth noting that the LORD did not destroy what they had built, neither the tower nor the city. This lesson is about following God's will and not man's. It is about seeking out the LORD's wisdom and not mankind's. While endless debates will continue regarding the veracity of the tower story, how high it was, what shape it was, or how big it was, these arguments are only a smoke screen. We know from what we see around us today that the story is real, and that what is important for us as believers to see is that mankind's desire is, and has always been, to put itself above God.

We also see that God is unchanging, and His word will always accomplish His will. Isaiah 55:11 tells us that "...my word that goes out from my mouth; it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Furthermore, Jesus tells us that he is not of this world. As followers of him, our challenge is to keep ourselves from the ways of this world and to be constantly seeking his will.

We have seen in this lesson that rebelling against God brings judgment. This is as true today as it was in the days of Tower of Babel.

Have a great week, everyone!

In Christ, **Wes**