

Scattered!
October 11, 2015
Allen Power

Genesis 11:1-9

We have a favorite story about Annie when she was just a little girl of three or four. For a period of time when I would leave for work in the morning, she would send me off with the instruction: “Tell everyone about me!” Now, our daughter has grown up to be a kind and compassionate young woman. But when she was a little girl, she wanted to make a name for herself!

Is it wrong to try to make a name for yourself?

What about the fact that Proverbs 22:1 (ESV) tells us...?
A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches,
and favor is better than silver or gold.

How is “making a name for yourself” different from earning a good reputation? How are we seeing this play out before our eyes in the GOP presidential primary race with Donald Trump?

Have you noticed what causes Trump to attack a rival or a news pundit? It’s not their position on an issue. It’s if they say something that offends him. He forms his opinion of someone based on whether they’ve “been nice” to him.

Big idea: Since the dawn of time, men have thought they could outsmart God. But over and over, history has proven, when it’s man against God: God wins!

Genesis 11:1–9 (ESV)

The Tower of Babel

11 Now the whole earth had one language and the same words.
2 And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. **3** 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. **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.”⁵ And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built.⁶ 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.⁷ Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.”⁸ So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.⁹ 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.

- Verses one and two: It’s important to know some geography and history. The land of Shinar is a plain in the lower Euphrates-Tigris river system. It was called the “land between two rivers.” It lies from modern Baghdad to the Persian Gulf. Today we call it Iraq.
- The city they were building would become Babylon, the capital city of Babylonia. Babylon comes up again and again in scripture as the home of a people at war with God and the things of God. It eventually became a large empire that absorbed the nation of Judah and destroyed Jerusalem. Remember the story of Daniel? Interesting how history repeats itself!
- This area is known as the “Fertile Crescent.” The land was flat and water was plentiful. It was an ideal setting to become the “cradle of civilization.”
- Verse three: Since stone was practically nonexistent in Shinar, they invented a way of making kiln-baked bricks. They used the bitumen found in the region as mortar.¹ King James calls it “slime,” but it obviously refers to the black, sticky substance that boils up in this area. We would call it tar, asphalt, or pitch.²
- In itself building a city was not sinful. The sin came in the purpose: “so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered.”³
- Look at Genesis 9:1 and 9:7. **How were they disobeying God based on those verses?**

- Now go back to chapter eleven and look at the last sentence of 11:4: **What were they trying to keep from happening to them?**
- Their plan to build a tower wasn't just ambition, it was rebellion. God had commanded men to replenish the earth (9:1, 7), but they decided to settle down on the plain of Shinar where Babylon was located (10:8–10). This was deliberate rebellion against God's Word.⁴
- As one commentator writes: *They hoped that the tower would provide protection from another Flood or from enemies who might attempt to scatter them. So the tower pointed to man's attempt to glorify and fortify himself. The structure was a monument to lack of faith in God's promises and to disobedience to his command to spread over the earth*⁵
- God had not intended for Noah's descendants to concentrate their population in one area. He blessed them with fruitfulness so they might expand across the lands and fill the earth (9:1).
- They wanted to build a city (not wrong under other circumstances) but God had said to move and multiply. Their mission wasn't to build houses, it was to live in tents and keep expanding.
- Verse four says they wanted to "make a name" for themselves.
- Not all ambition is bad. **Can you think of a business person who was successful, prosperous, became well known and well respected, yet kept the focus on God? How was that person different than these folks in the plain of Shinar?**

Jeremiah 9:23–24 (ESV)

²³ Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord."

- Verse four: One commentator tells us: The sin of the Shinarites (people in a **plain in Shinar**) appears to be immense pride. This was open rebellion against God, an independence of God. Humility is often equated with trust and obedience, and conversely pride is related to independence and disobedience.⁶

In 1 Peter 5:5 (ESV) Peter warns us...

⁵ ...“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Proverbs 16:18 (ESV) says...

¹⁸ Pride goes before destruction,
and a haughty spirit before a fall.

- This is not just a history lesson. It's a prediction of the end of this world in the future. Nations are trying to unify in toward one world. (United Nations)
- The people in Genesis 11 wanted “to (1) maintain unity in opposition to God, and (2) make a name for themselves.” This points ahead to “the final opposition of man (and Satan) against Christ, centered in the Babylon of Rev. 17–18. Men will unite then in a world church and world political organization; they will be led by the Antichrist, the last world dictator; and their plans will be frustrated.”⁷
- In verses five through seven God comes down and confuses their language. The fact that God had to come down to deal with this puts in perspective as to who is in charge.
- Jonathan Nass writes: “*God always has to ‘come down’ to examine our anthill achievements built in the sidewalk cracks of his creation.*”⁸
- “God doesn't want them to understand one another's speech because man was created in the image of God so is incredibly capable. Man is an awesome creation with a fantastic mind and incredible abilities. Alone he's not much but put him with other people and they can pool their understanding, knowledge, insights, and capabilities. Because people can communicate or talk about it, nothing we want to do is impossible.”⁹
- Just think about all the progress made in our lifetime.
- Man has incredible capabilities. But we can't be left to our own devices.
- Verse seven: God coming down to intervene is not an indication that He felt threatened; it was an act of grace. How can that be?
How would God putting a stop to their plan actually have been for their own good?

Romans 1:28–32 (ESV)

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

- God “stops sinful mankind from trying to run their lives in their own fallen way (cf. Rom. 1–3).¹⁰ This was really an act of mercy as well as judgment, for had they persisted in their plan, a more terrible judgment would have followed.”¹¹

Jon Bloom summed it up well:

“We, who now have the benefit of observing a few thousand years of recorded history, should know better than our ancient predecessors. The technologically accelerated 20th century, and the thousands upon thousands of war dead we memorialize today, bear witness to how much evil can be unleashed when the best and brightest human minds put their heads together to build their Babels.” He goes on to say, *“God mercifully thwarts our pride-fueled plans in order to make us truly happy.”*¹²

- So God confused their languages and the building stopped. Notice He didn't destroy the tower; He simply confused their ability to communicate. Their speech had become a confusing “babble.” This is where we get that word: **Babel** (*bābel*) sounds similar to the Hebrew verb **confused** (*bālal*).¹³
- These verses show “God's absolute power in His swift judgment. What the people considered their greatest strength—unity—He swiftly destroyed by confusing **their language** (v. 7; cf. v. 9). What they considered their greatest fear—scattering (v. 4)—came naturally on them (**the Lord scattered them ... over all the earth**, v. 8; cf. v. 9). What they desired most—to make a name for themselves (v. 4)—ironically came to pass, for they became known as “Babel.”¹⁴

So, What's the Takeaway?

The late M.R. DeHaan II wrote:

*“Even though we are Christians, sometimes we get caught up in making a name for ourselves by climbing business, religious, or social towers that deny God His rightful place. If we do, we will eventually be brought down because God is still at the top.”*¹⁵

Here are some verses of scripture that underscore this concept for us:

Isaiah 47:10–11 (NLT)

¹⁰ “You felt secure in your wickedness.

‘No one sees me,’ you said.

But your ‘wisdom’ and ‘knowledge’ have led you astray, and you said, ‘I am the only one, and there is no other.’

¹¹ So disaster will overtake you, and you won’t be able to charm it away.

Calamity will fall upon you, and you won’t be able to buy your way out.

A catastrophe will strike you suddenly, one for which you are not prepared.

Proverbs 21:30 (ESV)

³⁰ No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord.

2 Corinthians 10:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Galatians 6:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Proverbs 3:5–6 (ESV)

⁵ Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

- The heart-searching question for you and me is this: Have I gradually started building some “towers” of my own?
- Is there any area in my life where I’ve begun to think that my plans make more sense than the plan God has revealed in His word?
- Have I drifted away from making God “famous” and slipped into making a name for myself? It’s easy to slide in that direction.
- It’s a slide that will end in disaster.
-

¹ Smith, J. E. (1993). *The Pentateuch* (2nd ed., Ge 11:1–9). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

² Utley, R. J. (2001). *How it All Began: Genesis 1–11* (Vol. Vol. 1A, p. 127). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

³ Elwell, W. A. (1995). *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* (Vol. 3, Ge 11:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

⁴ Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Ge 11:1–9). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁵ Smith, J. E. (1993). *The Pentateuch* (2nd ed., Ge 11:1–9). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

⁶ Ross, A. P. (1985). Genesis. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 44). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁷ Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Ge 11:1–9). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁸ <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/when-god-mercifully-ruins-our-plans>

⁹ [Lesson 10 - Want to Make a Name for Yourself? - K Arthur](#) Notes Precept Min.

¹⁰ Utley, R. J. (2001). *How it All Began: Genesis 1–11* (Vol. Vol. 1A, p. 127). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

¹¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Ge 11:1–9). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹² <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/when-god-mercifully-ruins-our-plans>

¹³ Ross, A. P. (1985). Genesis. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 44). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹⁴ Ross, A. P. (1985). Genesis. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 45). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹⁵ Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved