

Babel and the Merciful Judgements of God

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[0 : 00] Well if you have a Bible again, turn back with me to Genesis chapter 10. Genesis chapter 10.

This is post flood. God has just flooded the earth. He has judged all the peoples except for one family, Noah's.

After this Noah is left with his family, specifically his three sons. You remember they're named Ham, Japheth, and I just went completely blank on the other one.

Yeah, thank you. Ham has just been cursed in the previous chapter. Shem has been blessed. And so what we've done in reading that bit of genealogy prior to the Tower of Babel narrative, and looking just at the bit of genealogy afterwards, is I wanted to set that up in such a way that you see that this narrative is fit into a strange place in the Bible.

Why does Moses interrupt this genealogy with a narrative about the Tower of Babel? Why? You see that. If you look down at chapter 10, you'll see that there's a long genealogy.

[1 : 23] We only read a small portion of it. And then right afterwards in 11 verse 10, it picks back up with the genealogy. So really the question we're answering this morning is why?

Why is this account in the middle of a genealogy? Now like we said, Ham has been cursed. He looked at his father's nakedness and there's a lot of complexity there.

And he's been cursed and Shem has been blessed. And if you notice, the Tower of Babel narrative fits into Shem's genealogy. We read about Shem. We get Tower of Babel. It picks back up with Shem again.

Now one thing just let me say before we get into the text, this is not in chronological order. Okay, so if you look back at the very beginning of chapter 10, it says this, these are the generations of the sons of Noah after the flood.

And then if you look down at verse 5, from these the coastland people spread in their lands each with his own language. Now we come to 11-1 and it says everybody's got the same language.

[2 : 31] So did Moses make a mistake here? No, he's not writing a chronological account. We know that because he's stuck this narrative in the middle of two genealogies, right?

So he's trying to tell us something about the narrative in light of the bigger picture. Now if you flip with me and keep your Bibles open because we'll be flipping around a lot to make sense of this passage, come back with me to Genesis chapter 3.

And if you look down in Genesis 3 at verse 15, it says this, I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.

Now what's going on there is Adam and Eve have just sinned and God is cursing them. He's cursing the serpent specifically. And what he does there is he divides in the curse all of humanity into two divisions.

The seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. The offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent. And from that point on for the rest of the book of Genesis and for the rest of the entire Old Testament, God has offered us a way to read the Bible and to read all of history.

[3 : 47] And that's that there are only two types of people. They're not divided by ethnicity. They're not divided by language. They're not divided by any of the things that we usually divide people by.

They're divided by the people of God. The seed of the woman. The singular seed that would culminate in Christ himself on the one hand.

And on the other hand, the people of the serpent, the enemies of God. And what the book of Genesis does then is it categorizes. It makes distinctions and divisions.

In the very next chapter, you remember what happens. Cain and Abel. Cain murders Abel. And from the very beginning of the history of the world, we see that it is not by family descent that God's people are chosen.

Paul talks about that in Romans 9, doesn't he? He said, not all of Israel is Israel. Just because you're born of the line of Abraham doesn't mean you're one of his people. So there's a division here. [4 : 55] It's not by blood. Salvation doesn't come by who your mom or dad was. Being a part of the people of God does not depend on where you were born, when you were born, who your parents were.

But God said there are two peoples in this world. My people in the seed of the serpent. And so what Moses has done for us in the first 11 chapters is he's chronicled that account.

The division of the peoples. And if you go back and read through the book of Genesis, you'll see that 10 times in the book of Genesis, chapters begin with this little phrase. These are the generations of...

10 genealogies. More than any other book of the Bible. Why? Because he's accounting for you the line of the people of God. Who are the people of God?

And then of course the New Testament, right? Opens up with what? A genealogy. Matthew chapter one. This is the people of God. This is the seed of the woman.

[5 : 59] This is where Jesus came from. And so what this genealogical account in chapter 10 is doing in light of the tower of Babel narrative, is God, Moses writing inspired by God is showing us the division, how God protects his seed.

The people of God. Particularly Shem, who was blessed. Shem who would be made the father of terror. Terror who would be made the father of Abraham.

Abraham who would be the father of Christ. Right? Now, how do we know then that the actual account that's happening at Babel, and we're about to get to the text, don't worry, just hang with me here.

How do we know that the actual scene at Babel is about a division of God's people from those who are not God's people? Well, Abraham is born in Ur of the Caldees.

It says at the end of chapter 11. Ur of the Caldees is in Babel. So you'll see in a second, as God disperses the people of Babel, God's people, the seed of Christ, the line of Christ actually comes out of Babel.

[7 : 16] Ur of the Caldees, that's where Abraham was from, that's in Babel. And so we'll see that play out. This text is here to call us to attention and ask the question, who are God's people?

Now, what does that do for us? What does that have to do with us? There's just going to be two things I want you to see. We're just going to walk through the text verse by verse. There's going to be two things I want you to see. One, this is actually our story.

The sin committed here at Babel is a universal sin. It's your sin, it's mine. It is the natural disposition we are born into.

And secondly, I want you to see how God uses judgment to bring about redemption in the big picture of His history. So we'll just walk through the text quickly and highlight those things.

Now come down with me to 11 verse 1. The whole earth had one language in the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Sheenar and settled there.

[8 : 27] The land of Sheenar is in northeast Iraq, sorry, northeast Iraq, southern Syria, I think, right on the border there. And it's in a split of the river Euphrates.

It's a very fertile location, even still today. So it was the perfect place to settle if you're looking to build a great tower. So it says this, they found a plain in the land of Sheenar, they settled there, they said to one another, come let us make bricks.

Now you'll see that the passage is governed, it's structured in these let us statements. Let us make bricks, let us build ourselves a city, let us make a name for ourselves.

And then in verse 5, God comes down and says, sorry, verse 7, let us go down and confuse their language. And you see that Moses has given us this very clear division, let us, let us, let us, let us.

So let's look at the let us statements in regards to the people at Babel. Let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly. Let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves.

[9 : 43] What's going on here is that we're seeing a reversal of the way God instituted creation in Genesis chapter 1. God in Genesis chapter 1 gave what we often call the cultural mandate.

He created Adam and Eve, he created them in his image, and he said to them, take this creation, the soil, the plants, the animals, the fruit of the land, and be creators.

Do what I did. I made you. Now you take what I've given you and you go make things. Spread the garden. That was his command. So at the very beginning, as soon as God creates man, the first thing he gives them is a command law.

Don't be afraid of law. It's good. That was the first thing God gave. Be like this. Do this. Go. Take the fruit and spread the garden to all the world.

Right? That's the cultural mandate. And they reject that call, don't they? Well, that's the same exact thing that's going on here. They're taking the mandate that God has given. Disperse.

[10:58] Spread the garden. Make my fame, the fame of God to the ends of the earth. And instead they're saying, let us come together and make a tower to the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves.

This is the exact same sin that Eve committed in the garden. You remember when Satan came to her, he said, what has God said?

What did God tell you? And she said, well, he said, don't eat of the tree, lest we know evil. And he said, oh, you won't die. You won't die.

And then he asked her, do you want to be like God? Do you want to be like God? And what should she have said? I already am like God.

He created me in his image. He told me to create. He told me to take the dust and the fruit and the land and to spread the garden. I am like God.

[11:58] I already have all the gifts that God's going to give me. It's perfect. And instead she fell for it, right? What she did was she said, instead of being like God, I want to be God.

And you see, the sin that's going on here at Babel is they're saying, let us build a tower that we may climb to the heavens in order to what? Not to be like God, not to reflect God's image to all of creation, but to be God, to kick him off the throne.

There's no atheism happening in this passage. You see, no atheism here. The problem is not that they don't know God or that they don't believe in God.

The problem is they want to be divine. They want to be divine. Now Paul says in Romans chapter one that this is actually the same exact disposition we have.

That all men born into this world suppress the truth and unrighteousness. And as a consequence, what do they do? What do we do?

[13:09] We replace the image of God for the image of mortal man. Or he says it like this, we prefer the creature to the Creator.

What's happening here? What happens in the heart of every single person that's born into this world? Me, you, believer and unbeliever, is that our natural disposition is to suppress the truth by exchanging creator for creature.

We as the creatures want to be the creator. We want to be autonomous, self-made men and women. God, we don't need you to bring us up to the heavens. We'll build a tower out of brick.

You see the great reversal going on here? That it took the things that God made, brick, mortar, in order for them to even have an attempt at getting to the heavens.

A theologian, a Dutch theologian that lived in the States for most of his life named Cornelius van Til said it this way. He was riding in a train once and he was looking out and he saw a young girl sitting on her father's lap.

[14:33] She was angry with her father and she reached up at one point and slapped her father in the face. You've probably seen something like that before, maybe it's happened to you.

Dr. van Til said, is that not a picture of Babel? Is that not a picture of the human heart? We have to sit on God's lap in order to slap him in the face.

We have to use the bricks God gave in order to build a tower to the heavens. To even sin, we're dependent on him. What a great irony.

That's the autonomous nature of self-made men, that's who we are. That's what Paul says we are.

The root sin in Genesis chapter 3, the sin of all mankind is that we want to be divine.

Now, there's a great irony though in this passage. Come with me to verse 5 and we'll switch over to what God has done, what God has said. The Lord came down to see the city. Now, you're supposed to laugh at that. That's comedy, right?

[15 : 44] We're going to build a city to the heavens and sit next to God, kick him off his throne, right? And then it says, but the Lord had to come down to see the city. He can't see it.

It's not big enough. It's a feeble attempt, right? So he has to come down. Where is it? Where is the city? The Lord comes down to see the city in the tower which the children of man had built. And the Lord said, behold, they are one people. They have one language. And this is only the beginning of what they will do. Nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Just notice here before we come to the actual judgment.

That's an amazing statement that God makes. That if men want, there is nothing that they cannot do. In other words, the image of God has great power. If the image of God is to come together in a collective unity of sin, terrible things will be accomplished. Is that not a picture of our society? God is recognizing here that his creation has a lot of power. To sin or to make much of his name. Only two options.

[17 : 00] He says in verse 7, come, let us go down, confuse their language so that they may not understand one another's speech. Now, if you look back at the come, let us statements that they made, one of theirs was this, let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed. So the people at Babel already know what the judgment of God's probably going to be.

You see? They say lest we be dispersed, let's get to the heavens as fast as possible. And then God comes down and says, we will now disperse you. So how do they know?

Well, they know because they know history, right? This has been the punishment God has given from the very beginning. When Adam and Eve sinned, instead of receiving what God told them they would receive, you will die.

I said this in my last sermon when I was here. It says literally, you will die, die. You will surely die.

But what did they get? Well, they just got kicked out of the garden, right?

He said, lest you eat of the tree of life and this becomes permanent, you're kicked out. Dispersion.

Then in the very next chapter, what happens? Cain murders Abel. And what's his punishment? Dispersion, right?

[18 : 24] You will be a wanderer in all the land. And then the sons of God marry and defile the daughters of men. And God says, dispersion, I will wipe and blot out this people.

What are they doing here? They're seeing a pattern. God has dispersed man for sin before and it may happen to us. We better get to the heavens as fast as possible. You see, they know they're in sin. They know that judgment is coming.

They know that they're going to be dispersed unless they can go supplant God on his throne. Now, here's the great picture I want you to see. We've already said this disposition never stops.

It continues throughout all of history. Listen to what happens in Isaiah 14. King Ahaz is the king of Babel. Babel, the word Babel appears in the Old Testament almost 200 times.

And it can be translated two ways. Babel or Babylon, same city. This is quite a number of hundreds of years later. King Ahaz is sitting on the throne of Babylon.

[19 : 49] And this is what he says. King Ahaz has said in his heart, I will ascend to the heavens. Above the stars of God, I will set my throne on high. I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north.

I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will make myself like the most high God. And then here's the judgment. But you, Ahaz, will be brought low down to Sheol, down to the depths of the pit.

Hundreds of years later, the same people group, Babel, Babylon, the king is sitting on his throne and saying the exact same thing. I will make my name great. I will reach up to the most high, to the heavens.

Now, come back to this passage in chapter 11. And here's what I want you to notice. That the judgments of God are actually mercies. The judgments of God are actually mercies.

They're all wrapped up into one. Ever since Genesis chapter 3, Genesis chapter 4, Genesis chapter 9, Genesis chapter 11, every single judgment God has given man has been merciful. He never actually gave them what they deserved.

[21 : 06] And now he's saying, I will disperse you. I will confuse your language. Why? So that you may not collectively sin against me in such a way that God's people is lost.

You see, why did he kick Adam and Eve out of the garden? Lest they eat of the tree of life in the condition of curse be permanent. In other words, I'm judging you so that I can save you.

My judgments are actually divine mercies. If I didn't do this, you would die forever. You see? So God confuses their language in order that they can have salvation.

He separates Shem, the line of Christ, from the rest of Babel in order that we might have a Savior. And you can see that in the genealogical account in the very next section with Abraham.

Now, the story doesn't stop there. There has never been a person born into this world, not one person that got what they deserved.

[22 : 23] You understand? No matter who you are this morning, Christian, non-Christian, you have not gotten in this life what you deserved.

Namely, the wrath of God being fitted upon you. The only person that has ever experienced the wrath of God was the only person who didn't deserve it, Christ.

No one has ever gotten what they deserved, not even Jesus. He got what we deserved. When Christ came and he lived and he died and he resurrected and he ascended as substitution for our sin, what he brought on was the reversal of this curse.

Flip with me to Acts chapter 2 and we'll close in the New Testament this morning. Acts chapter 2. A lot of biblical studies and theologians will argue that Acts chapter 2 is actually the pinnacle, the climax of all of history. Jesus has risen, he has ascended into heaven, he has pronounced that he will give us the spirit, and then in Acts chapter 2 the spirit comes.

[23 : 48] Look with me at verse 1. The day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind. It filled the entire house where they were sitting.

It divided tongues as a fire, appeared to them, rested on each of them, and they were filled with the spirit. They began to speak in other tongues as the spirit gave them utterance.

So right now at this point they're speaking in different languages. Now look at verse 5. Now in Jerusalem there were devout men from every nation. Where do these men come from?

Where do these nations come from? Babel. So devout men from all the dispersions of Babel are together right here at the climax of history.

And at this sound the multitude came together and they were bewildered because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.

[24 : 47] Acts chapter 2 is the great reversal of the curse of Babel. Where is the reversal of the language division of Babel located? It's located in the church.

This is the making of Christ's church. What does that mean for us? We are a reversal of the curse. If you're sitting here this morning and you're a Christian, no matter what tribe, tongue, language, or people you have come from, you are one body, one family, one people.

This is an image of the garden unity that Adam and Eve experienced. Do you love to see every tribe, tongue, nation, language, people come to know Christ?

Do you want your church to look like that? This is the great reversal of Babel. Despite the sins of the people of God, the elect in Christ, God says, I will judge you, I will disperse you in order to save you in Christ and I will bring you back together in the form of the true Israel, the church.

[26 : 08] If you're not a Christian this morning, if you're here and you're exploring this Christianity thing, it's new, you don't know what to make of it.

You know that in your heart there's been a longing, a search for some type of salvation. It is not to be had by trying to build yourself a tower to the heavens.

The reverse of the message of the gospel of Christianity is that you can, by your own merit, build your way up to God. There is no transposing, getting across that Creator creature distinction.

Not by your works, not by the merit which you have done, but according to His judgment of mercy in Christ, He has saved us. If you're a non-Christian and you want to know what the Christian gospel is, the Christian message, it is that we believe that if you will repent of your sins and you look to the substitutionary work of Christ for salvation, He will forgive you.

You don't need a tower to climb to the heavens. You don't need a ladder. You don't need any of that. The great message is that by losing your life you will actually save it.

[27 : 34] By giving your life up for Christ you will actually gain life eternal. For Christians this morning, even though we are saved, saved from sin, beware of the desire in your heart to be divine.

It's called pride. It's called pride. If you're a person who experiences stress, anxiety, that's pride.

Not trusting in God. If you're a person who longs for their name to be made much of, that's pride.

That's the sin of Babel. That's the sin of Adam and Eve. That's our natural disposition.

There is a command in Scripture that without holiness we shall not see God. This passage is a call in some ways in looking to Christ for our justification to look and beware of our sin and that we may possess the holiness to see the Lord.

Now we'll end with this. Actually Acts chapter 2 is not the end of the story either. In the great picture of history there is a future coming. If you'll turn with me to this last passage and we'll just look at it for one minute and be done.

[28 : 57] In Revelation chapter 18, God is picturing for us what will be of the two cities.

The two types of people. The seat of the woman, the seat of the serpent, the city of Babel and the city of God. And I have 18 verse 1 says this. After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven having great authority and the earth was made bright with his glory and he called out with a mighty voice, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great.

The destination of anyone who places their hopes in themselves is to be a part of Fallen, Fallen, Babylon the great. But with hope in Christ, if you come over to chapter 19, the very next chapter, verse 6, Then John I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty pills of thunder crying out hallelujah for the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory for the marriage of the Lamb has come and has brought, has made herself ready. It was granted to her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

Babylon, the marriage supper of the Lamb. Those are the two cities. From Genesis 3.15 it was predicted it has been fulfilled in Christ and will be fulfilled when we are here.

[30 : 39] Revelation 19 it's coming. Which seat are you? Is your hope in your own self made governance or is it in the work of Christ?

God's exhortation to us today is to tear down the towers of idolatry and pride and hope in Christ Jesus and we will dwell with God. Let's pray.

Father we ask now that you would illuminate for us as Christians where our pride is, where our yearning to be divine and that you would rip it away.

And for non-believers this morning we pray that they would see that their natural disposition is to be against you and that their only hope is in the work of Jesus.

And we ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen. Alright well let's.