

Genesis 11 The Tower of Babel

The tales of the garden, the brothers, the flood, the Tower of Babel ends our primeval history of how humans populated the world. Our four stories show a progression how humankind is derelict because man rebels against God. Following every story pride gets us in trouble, God offers a renewal of life and salvation.

Every time I study Genesis chapter eleven, I harken back to my second year in seminary. In my second semester of preaching I was assigned to preach on the Tower of Babel. I compared the Biblical Tower to the Arch that was currently being built in St. Louis.

Following what I believed to be a well thought out sermon, Ernest Nolte said in front of the entire class, “you flunk, do it over again.” Ernest thought my comparing the building of the arch in St Louis to the Tower of Babel would only stir up a hornet’s nest in the congregation.

Hopefully what I share with you gets me at least a C-.

Our story of the Tower of Babel is nearly as popular as Noah and the flood and Cain killing Abel. In reading Genesis 11 it appears the story is not in chronological order for the people are already scattered in chapter 10:18.

Genesis 11:1-4 Human Acts

While studying Genesis, especially the Tower of Babel, we need to remember this is not a scientific answer to why the people of the earth speak different languages. According to the text, the people all spoke the same language, one tongue, and they were able to act as a homogeneous community. They all understood

one another, there were no foreigners or outsiders in their community. Possessing one vocabulary, it was easy for them to throw themselves into a common project and do it in a very narrow way.

We must also remember that the “world” of ancient peoples was very much smaller than ours. Their world was limited to a definite area beyond which most of the local people never ventured. They saw the world as being flat.

Upon finding a place to settle they exhorted themselves to brick making. They used the best materials available and went about building a city and a great tower, building a “name” for themselves.

The sole motivation for these people was their human failure to secure their own future, isolated from those who did not speak and look like them. We are all tempted to be self-made by having a fortress mentality. We will use only our own resources to survive.

Genesis 11:5-9 God acts

These verses shift attention away from human action to divine action. God is alarmed with humankind’s actions to invade the heavens. He feared that this was only the beginning of what they might do in the future. God seems to be alarmed with a single language, a single culture fearing they will only fall in love with themselves. Hebrew scholar Bernard Anderson believes in Biblical theology and pluralism that without this it only leads to self-destruction.

God draws near not because he is near-sighted, but because he dwells at such tremendous heights and their work is so tiny. This is a satire on our doings.

People's greatest fear took place when God created diversity, confuses their language, disrupts their settled life, and sends the people scurrying in different directions. How we reacted to this year's Superbowl half time entertainment with Bad Bunny speaks loudly about us.

This spreading abroad is not a punishment but blessed by God. This babbling and spreading by God, is a blessing. God blows over the chaos, and a new life is offered.

God's creation was a beacon of Gods creative work and his intentions for humanity, but they had different ideas.

Genesis 11:10-32 9 generations are listed

Our tenth generation is of Shem, Abraham.

Our story concludes with God's judgment on humankind; there is no word of grace. Coming up with one interpretation of our story is impossible. The Tower of Babel is an ever-changing story.

Have no fear our other part of Genesis is about to take place.

Terah was the father of ABRAM

The name of Abram's wife was Sarai...good news is on the way

Current thinking of the Tower of Babel, prefers to see the story as "the Tower of the City." Empathies are steering away from pride and punishment interpretation to explaining of cultural diversification. It seems the tower of Babel is toppling over.

Genesis 12:1----50:26

Coming in our next session women appear having more influence, they are the foremothers of Israel. New life in Genesis begins in barrenness but through the journey of Sarah and Abraham our ancestral story is an exciting to read.

Dennis Siebert, let me know about my grade at genesis@mwt.net