

The Story of Salvation from Genesis to Jesus
The Tower of Babel
Genesis 11:1-9
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How does the story of the Tower of Babel fit into the Story of Salvation? We've covered the story of Creation and the Fall, the story of Cain and Abel, then the story of Noah and the Flood, and those were pretty easy to understand. But how important could building a tower be compared to such huge events described in the book of Genesis like the Fall and the Flood? In fact, why is this story even in the book? What is its purpose?

OK, it helps to explain why we all speak different languages, but one could come up with theories about that phenomenon without this story. Is it simply to tell us why some of us speak English, others speak French, Spanish, or Japanese, or is there something else? Is there a bigger story here? What's the purpose of story of the Tower of Babel? Those are some of the questions as we approach this text.

Let's go back to Noah. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. Ham had sons, one of whom was Cush. Cush was the father of Nimrod, who was described in Genesis 10 as "*a mighty warrior on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord.*" Nimrod was the great grandson of Noah. According to the verses that follow, one of the centers Nimrod established was Babylon, and in Babylon they built the tower of Babel. All of this information is helpful in getting the big picture of what was going on.

First of all, let me talk about Nimrod, the mighty warrior/hunter. He is described in chapter 10. At first glance, you don't see a problem. He's a hunter. That could mean that he was a good provider for his family. It could mean that he went out into the woods with his bow and arrow, shot some deer, brought the meat home, and they ate well. Maybe he even shared with his neighbors, since he was so good at it. "*He was a mighty hunter before the Lord.*" It sounds like a good thing. Maybe he saw his skill as a gift from God and maybe he hunted "before the Lord" as a way of blessing God who in turn blessed him.

But there may be more to it than that. The history of antiquity tells us that men became kings because they were known for their hunting skills. Wild animals were a constant threat to people's safety and welfare. So, kings would form hunting parties and their men would go hunt down bears, lions, tigers, or whatever else was threatening the area. Men became known for their bravery, courage, and skills in regard to hunting. That was true of David: I Sam. 17:34 "*But David said to Saul, 'Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, 35 I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. 36 Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. 37 The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and*

the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.'
Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you."

Those same men who were not afraid to tackle wild animals, under the leadership of their king hunted down other enemies, men from other tribes who had wealth, land, or women. Thus the wording in Genesis 10:8, "...*Nimrod, who grew to be a mighty warrior on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord.*" He was a hunter/warrior!

Now the term, "*before the Lord*" sounds like a good thing, but linguists say that it had a very dark meaning. "Before the Lord, meant "*before the face of the Lord*" – as in the term "*in your face*" – or in opposition to the Lord. The name "Nimrod" literally means "*let us revolt*".

So, Nimrod the Revolter was the warrior/hunter/ruler guy who built Babylon, Nineveh, and several other cities mentioned in verses 10 – 12. Both Babylon and Nineveh became well known as pagan cities that stood in opposition to God's people, the Israelites.

Those who know languages better than I do say that the word Babylon means "*Gateway to God*". Nimrod the Revolter was not a godly man, but don't think that Nimrod the Revolter/Warrior was trying to get rid of God. He was not an atheist. He built a city and called it Babylon, which means "gateway to God". It might be said that he was very religious. Most people in the world are religious. God made us religious. It's in our nature. Atheism is, frankly, not very popular – even in America. Nimrod the Revolter was religious.

But religion doesn't make us at peace with God. Religion sets up rules and regulations about how to approach God. However, if those rules and regulations are man-made and not divinely inspired, they don't help. In fact, those rules and regulations even attempt to control God – to put Him into a box, as it were. Religion can keep God at a safe distance. If religion is a practice of going into a building, going through certain rituals and once you have done that you can go back to your old way of life because you have "paid your dues", then religion doesn't help you change your life. In the days of Jesus, pagan religions allowed men to go to pagan temples and engage in temple prostitution, which enslaved girls for that purpose. Once they paid their dues and went through their rituals, they could go back to normal life, as bad as they came in. You can build a temple, a city, or a tower to reach the heavens – to reach God - but that doesn't mean it will connect you with God.

That seemed to be the purpose of the tower. It was to be a gateway, a bridge, a connection to God, initiated by those who lived in Babylon. Genesis 11:3 quotes the builders as saying, "*Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly...come let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens...*" If God lived in heaven and we lived here on earth, then what was needed was a bridge – a tower and a stairway to connect us with God. That would connect us with God, it would unite us, and it would give us a really good name. "*Come let us build ourselves a city, with a tower*

that reaches to the heavens; so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the earth.”

If we do this we won't be scattered, we will be united! Here's the hope: We will be the center of the world. People will come to us. They will love our city, they will love our tower, they will love us because we have built a stairway to heaven and have connected with God. It won't make any demands on people. Oh, maybe we'll ask for some donations to maintain the tower, but it won't make any big spiritual or moral demands on anyone. They will love our religion. And, we won't be scattered, we will be united.

God said, not so fast! He cursed the city and the world with the confusion of languages. They could no longer even talk to each other. They would not be united, in fact they would be scattered because they couldn't communicate with one another.

The sin is the pretense of religion, but its real goal is pride! “We will make a name for ourselves.”

Contrast that with real religion.

Jeremiah 7

1 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 2 "Stand at the gate of the Lord's house and there proclaim this message:

“ 'Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the LORD. 3 This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. 4 Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!" 5 If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, 6 if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, 7 then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever. 8 But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.

9 " 'Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, ^[a] burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, 10 and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe" - safe to do all these detestable things? 11 Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD.

The Israelites in Jeremiah's time had no problem with religion. They could go to the temple, go through certain rituals and then oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. They could steal, murder, commit adultery and commit perjury.

That also happens with Christian religion. I don't know if any of you have seen the movie The Godfather. I don't recommend it. I actually have not watched the whole thing. My son had rented the movie and was watching it. I entered the room when it was on. I'm offended by violence. I hate violence in movies. Watching violence is not what I do for entertainment. I think watching blood and guts being spilled while eating popcorn and sipping soft drinks is weird. But it was on, so I watched a bit of it. I saw the scene where there were flashbacks to a young couple entering church. The husband was

a member of the Mafia. They were having their baby Christened while one of his hit men entered a building and shot a man, who was getting a massage, in the face. He killed a man, but he was careful to have the baby Christened.

Jeremiah 7 says: 9 " Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, ^[a] burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, 10 and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe"- safe to do all these detestable things? 11 Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD.

Nimrod was religious. He built a city to be the gateway to God. The tower that followed was an obvious next step. The city that claimed to be the “gateway to God” needed a tower that would serve as that gateway. But, Nimrod was a mighty hunter/warrior. The Jewish Talmud (a record of rabbinic discussions pertaining to Jewish law, ethics, customs and history) says that Nimrod was "a hunter of the souls of men." He was religious. The tower was a manmade gateway, a stairway, or bridge to God. They could have a form of religion – albeit manmade and not at all from God. The hope was that it would unite all the people, keep them from being scattered, and make a very big name for the city of Babylon. God said, “It isn’t going to work. I’m going to cause you to have much confusion. You won’t be able to understand each other. You will all be speaking a different language.” It was a terrible curse from which we continue to suffer. I’m reminded of that curse every time I go into a foreign country where a different language is spoken. I feel united in many ways with Christians there. But, I feel separated by language.

Thousands of years later God Himself came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. He suffered and died on a cross on a hill called Calvary. In so doing, He did for us what we could not do for ourselves. He created a bridge to God. It is not a physical bridge, not a stairway built with stone; it is a spiritual bridge that spans the gap between a Holy God and sinful man.

It is a bridge that will change your life. If you put your faith and trust in Jesus, if you allow Him to come into your life by the power of the Holy Spirit, you can have your sins forgiven, and it will change your life.

Let us pray!

Lord Jesus, forgive us of our sins. Help us to trust in you and not our own efforts. Please do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Cleanse us of our sins and help us to live for you. For eternity’s sake! Amen.