

Week 9

MAKING A NAME FOR THEMSELVES

Genesis 11:1-9

.....
*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."*

.....
(Genesis 11:4, ESV)
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Introduction

One of the most significant root level idols that many of us have is the god of "human approval." What others think of us often functions as the true lord or master of our lives. If this is an issue for you, you will often be wondering what others thought of you, how you came off, whether you said something stupid, how you looked, and you will be on a constant self-public-relations campaign. If human approval is your god, you will lie, deceive, and give up freedom in order to get the love and affirmation you crave. Your greatest nightmare will be rejection, and you'll live with the constant fear of not measuring up. As a result, others will often feel smothered and burdened by the weight of having to constantly prop up your fragile ego. You'll lack the courage to risk your popularity and take a stand for what is right. In the heat of the moment, your desire to have human approval will trump your desire to obey God and you'll sell out.

In reality, all of this is just a way of trying to make a name for ourselves. We want to be valued and affirmed, and we will do whatever it takes to receive the praise we want and "need."

Well, as Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes, there is nothing new under the sun. This yearning to make a name for ourselves is as old as humanity. The story of the Tower of Babel is a story of people seeking to make a name for themselves. Eager to neglect the commands of God and driven by pride, these first Babylonians set out to get famous for their incredible technology and skill. But God will not give his glory to another (Isa 48:11).

May this study open our eyes to the folly of pride, and remind us that we have God's approval in Christ—and that is all we need.

Investigation

Read Genesis 11:1-9.

1. What was the motivation behind building a tower?
2. Think back to the commands that God gave to Adam and Noah (Gen 1 and 9). How is the drive to build the Tower of Babel in direct rebellion against those commands?
3. What was the Lord's concern in Genesis 11:6?
4. Read Acts 2:1-13. This is the only other "Table of Nations" in the Bible besides Gen 10-11. What is the only real solution to the "curse" of Babel?

Implication

1. Why do you think human beings are so driven to “make a name for themselves”?
2. Have you ever had a time when you were trying to make a name for yourself and the Lord “confused your languages”? What happened? What have you learned from it?
3. In what ways should the gospel bring down ethnic and cultural divides within the church?
4. What things are you currently trusting in to “make a name for yourself” or convince yourself of your value? How can you address this issue with the gospel?

Other Issues

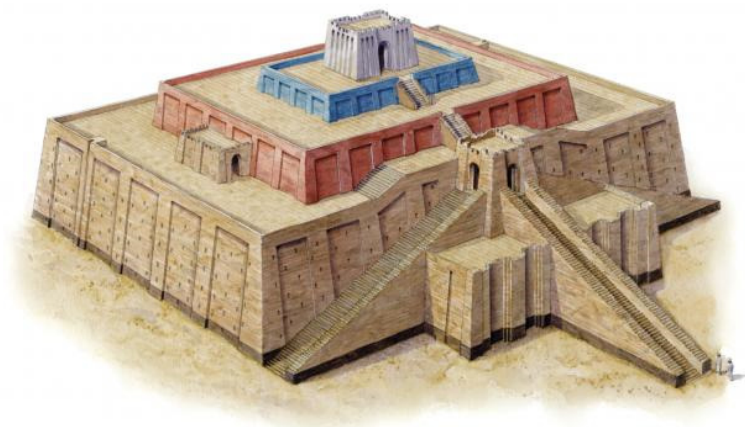
How is God’s intervention at Babel a blessing and a curse?

In one sense, this was of course a terrible judgment. But on the other and, God’s intervention leads to even greater diversity of culture and language than the designers of Babylon wanted. Thus the scattering and disunity of humanity, which on the one hand is a fruit of sin, leads to the further diversifying and enriching of humanity, which is of course a blessing.

Have we noticed yet (in the mark of Cain, the sending of the flood) that God always finds way to put mercy into his judgment? This is why Luther says that Judgment is “God’s strange work.”³⁷

What were they really building at the Tower of Babel?

They were likely building a Ziggurat. Ziggurats are monumental temple-towers found throughout the area of ancient Mesopotamia. They were commonly built of sun-dried mud and straw bricks held in position with bitumen as mortar. Stairways ascended to the top of these structures, where a small temple/shrine sat on the summit. The illustration depicts the Ziggurat of Nanna at Ur, which was constructed during the reign of Ur-Nammu (c. 2113–2095 b.c.). Its area covered 150 x 200 feet (46 x 61 m), and its height was 80 feet (24 m). It is commonly believed that this type of structure was being built in the Tower of Babel episode (Gen. 11:1–9). The text indicates that the builders of Babel had discovered the process of making mud bricks and that they employed “bitumen for mortar” (v. 3). Based on that invention, the builders decided “to build . . . a tower with its top in the heavens” (v. 4).



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³⁷ Keller, 89.

Sermon Notes