

I. The Tower of Babel

A. The Story

- A crash of thunder rumbled across the broad valley. The army of workers scarcely noticed. A storm was coming, and they hurried to finish their tower.
- From the rooftop deck above the glorious palace, the leaders of the people enjoyed an elegant party.
- But one in particular was worried. He was the third architect of the world's tallest building, and today was inauguration day. Hundreds of thousands of people were there. They swarmed the plaza below. Shops and taverns teemed with happy citizens. Today, they would christen their tower. Today, they would usher in the Age of Man.
- The architect looked at the storm in the distance. He wrung his hands. Thunder rolled across the valley floor, and winds grew stronger. Shopkeepers held onto their canvas awnings. Families dragged their kids inside tents and buildings to escape the coming storm.
- "I hope the storm turns away. We've worked so hard for the festival," the Architect said. He pulled his royal blue robe tightly around his wrinkled neck. "Quit worrying," his friend told him.
- Lightning streaked across the sky. A distant gong sounded, and workers pocketed their hammers and clambered down the steep tower. The plaza below buzzed, as its network of shops, taverns, and public baths, offered refuge. An icy wind roiled the clouds, though no rain fell.
- "We've waited three generations to christen our tower. We can wait another night," the friend said.
- The Architect answered, "But all the preparations would be wasted. Let's have the ceremony anyway."
- A crack of thunder settled the argument. High on the palace top deck, the leaders ducked for cover. A howling wind blew from the north. Debris swirled upward. Lightning lit the sky. Thunder rumbled. Earth itself quivered like a dying animal.
- The clouds, once grey, now radiated a faint, blue light. The heavy skies boiled as if phantoms battled. A thousand voices, like rushing waters, rose up, driving the leaders to their knees and sweeping away their frightened cries.
- The architect pulled himself against the mounting gale, rising to view the scene below. A blinding flash lit the sky, and a horrendous clap shook the palace. He recovered in time to see a jagged bolt of fire streak from the clouds to burst in a dazzling flash on the tower's highest point. The lightning bolt lingered an unusually long time – a finger from heaven touching the tower with devastating intent. The explosion sent red-hot bricks, like sparks from a blacksmith's hammer, flying in every direction.
- A fierce gust upended him. The architect fell hard and lay panting. Using his robe, he shrouded his face from stinging sand. The architect rose again to hazard another look. He fought to understand the sight. When he did, he gasped. Weathered hands clutched his heart and knobby knees trembled. A white-hot light sliced through his tower.
- Slowly. Deliberately. Like a hunter gutting his prey, an invisible hand bisected the massive ziggurat from top to bottom. The light inched downward, flinging sizzling mounds of rubble down the sides. What was done in generations was being undone in a moment. Unrelenting lightning lit the plaza and peals of thunder rolled. Tears streamed down the architect's face. A guttural cry rose from his chest. By instinct, he ran toward the stairway. *I must save my tower.*
- Rough hands seized him and would not let go. His own friends restrained him. He was confused.
- "Let me go!" he cried. "The tower... I must..." One blocked his way, pointing to the sky and shouting. Kuri heard his voice but could not make out his words. He looked to the skies. In years to come, he would shrink in fright at the memory.
- All across the rooftop his fellow leaders stared at the heavens in stunned confusion.
- Whether gods or devils, angels or demons, he couldn't tell. Massive beings, larger than the tower itself, wrestled in the heavens. Glowing, writhing, swimming in a chaos of vapor, the beings howled with the winds, and released fierce volleys of lightning. Faces contorted in agony, the titans vied for power while humans cowered below.
- And still the light severed the ziggurat. In moments, lifetimes of labor would be ruined.
- The architect crumpled to the floor. His legs huddled against him. The friend screamed into the architect's ear, but he found the words unintelligible. He released his sobbing friend, clambered to the rooftop's edge, and drew himself up against the sharp wind.
- He stood frozen. Baffled by the sight. The tower that had stood against the sky for a lifetime was gone – the tower that had oriented him in space and had given meaning to three generations. Toppled. Shattered by a pinpoint of light.
- Above, the battle raged, colossal spirits hurtling headlong against one another. Dragging each other apart. Clawing. Javelins of fire, arcing across the sky.
- The architect stood transfixed.
- With a ghastly sizzle, the light reached its base. What few blocks remained toppled to earth. Destruction complete.
- As if satisfied with its devastation, the white-hot light shot upward with a crackle and vanished in the clouds. With it, the warring apparitions disappeared, swallowed by the sky. A whoosh of air rushed across the earth. It overturned tents, collapsed a row of shops on the plaza's edge, and blew the stoutest men to the ground. Finished. History paused and silence reigned. The clouds hung dark and low.
- The leaders quivered in tight clusters, incapable of fathoming what had just happened. Some stared toward the vanishing point of light. Others helped one another to their feet, brushing away dust from their garments, standing up chairs, replacing fallen lanterns. From below a cry of fear welled up, as panicked inhabitants of earth's four corners dug out from collapsed tents and awnings. The leaders joined them. Weeping. Crying out. Cursing. Sobbing. The architect called for quiet, but no one listened. He found his assistant, a strong young leader, and asked him to silence the rest. The man replied with a puzzled expression.
- The Architect tried again, "I need you to quiet the leaders. My voice is not strong enough."
- The man shook his head and spoke. The architect heard his words, but they made no sense. Perhaps the young man's mind was damaged by a fall. The Architect found another leader helping someone from the floor. He asked, "Are you injured?"
- The man spoke gibberish. An onlooker stared at them both, eyes wide open. A torrent of words flowed from his mouth, but the Architect could not understand, and – by the looks of it – neither could anyone else. What force was at work?
- The Architect climbed on a table and shouted for silence. A hush fell over the scene. All eyes on him, he inhaled deeply, and spoke.

- “What we have seen, I have no words to explain. We must calm ourselves. It has never been more important to seek the good of the many...”
- One by one, the leaders interrupted, each one, manifestly unintelligible to each one. As realization dawned, their voices grew louder and more frantic. Hands gestured wildly. Loud voices cursed in syllables their hearers had never before heard.
- The baffled Architect surveyed the mounting frustration. He ran to the parapet and looked to the plaza below. Hordes of frenzied citizens below fought with equal futility to communicate with one another. Their collective babble grew louder by the minute.
- In the distance, the ruins of their tower lay in a heap, crackling, and popping from heat. Bodies lay in odd positions, broken and smoldering. A braying donkey snapped its tether and limped away, bucking against the air.
- Behind him, two elders scuffled – driven to near madness by the inability to understand or be understood.
- The architect slid to the ground and listened. Gibberish. Syllables without meaning.
- He spoke forth a few words. To himself, he sounded as he always had. By the sight of it, each leader felt the same way.
- What power did this? By what magic had the tongue of humankind become so utterly confused?
- The earth swayed and a distant corner of the palace collapsed. Garbled shrieks filled the air. In the sky, stars shot away from the plain called Shinar.
- And the world would never be the same again.

II. Message

- A. Welcome to Camp Neighborhood.
- B. From third grade on, I spent every summer at camp. I left the big city life behind, and my parent shipped my brother and me to the streams and lakes of beautiful Camp Awana.
- C. 123 acres of a city kid’s dream come true.
- D. By far, the best part was the campfires up on Campfire Hill. Every night, I’d sit there under the stars and hear the great stories of the Bible. David and Goliath. The Parting of Red Sea. Jonah and the Great Fish. Daniel in the Lion’s Den.
- E. I didn’t realize it then, but what an incredible heritage I received of Bible knowledge.
- F. I am very aware that many here today did not grow up hearing these great stories. We want to take care of that. I’ve said since the beginning of the year that this is a year of re-laying the foundations. So this summer, here at Camp Neighborhood, we are going to re-lay the foundations of the great campfire stories of the Bible. All summer long, we’ll transport you to a woodsy world under a starry sky and tell those great stories of the Bible.
- G. Welcome to Camp Neighborhood and to Campfire Stories, part one.
- H. I’ve told you the campfire version of the story.
- I. Now, let’s read it from the Scripture.

III. The Tower of Babel

- A. *Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. (Genesis 11:1, 2)*
 - 1. The time of this, is the dateless past. At least two thousand plus years ago.
 - 2. The Tower of Babel happened within a few generations of the Great Flood of Noah. These were the great great grandchildren of Noah and his sons.
 - 3. When Noah’s family came off the ark, God told them to multiply and fill the earth. The earth had been scoured by the flood, and now God wanted it replenished. (Genesis 9:1)
 - 4. But the people didn’t listen.
 - 5. They found a plain in the land of Shinar and dwelt there.
 - 6. Shinar is the plain of the great city Babylon, and Babylon and Babel are the same word in the ancient texts.
 - 7. Genesis 10:9,10 tells us the beginning of the kingdom of Babylon. The city was founded by a fierce warrior named Nimrod. He established a kingdom that included Babylon and Ninevah. Nimrod was a top-level predator, and a very bad man.
 - 8. Somewhere in the misty dawn of civilization, the whole world gathered, conceivably (though not certain) under Nimrod’s leadership, in the plains of Shinar, as one people, speaking one language, descended from one family and ancestry.
 - 9. God had told them to spread out, yet here they were united. Already in Genesis God has said, “The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Genesis 8:21). There’s rebellion baked into fallen human nature. We weren’t made that way, but we became that way.
 - 10. What did they do?
- B. *Then they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. (Genesis 11:3)*
 - 1. They had a sophisticated technology for building. And they had the raw materials they needed. The area was rich in asphalt, meaning tar. Instead of rocks, they made bricks, and baked them to make them hard.
 - 2. What was their goal?
- C. *And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.” (Genesis 11:4)*
 - 1. Picture a sophisticated culture in elegant tents and glorious surroundings. They sit in luxurious tents, and plan their future.
 - 2. God had told them to scatter.
 - 3. They went out of their way to ensure they would not be scattered.
 - 4. So they would build two things: a city and a tower.
 - 5. The City of Babylon would become one of the most enduring symbols of Anti-God, Anti-faith, false religion in the whole scriptural record.
 - 6. We are reading of its origins here in the first book of the Bible, in Genesis.
 - 7. Let’s fast forward to read of its ultimate destiny in the last book of the Bible, Revelation:

- a) *He gave a mighty shout, "Babylon is fallen--that great city is fallen! She has become the hideout of demons and evil spirits, a nest for filthy buzzards, and a den for dreadful beasts. For all the nations have drunk the wine of her passionate immorality. The rulers of the world have committed adultery with her, and merchants throughout the world have grown rich as a result of her luxurious living." (Revelation 18:2, 3, NLT).*
8. The spirit of Babylon is the spirit of anti-Christ.
9. They built a city which was basically a giant snub against God. Their culture, their values, their beliefs, their achievements, were all pointed away from God. Not necessarily evil, but something harder to spot.
10. You don't have to be evil to turn your heart away from God.
11. Just indifferent.
12. Just apathetic.
13. That's what's happening here. They build a civilization based on the false premise that humankind can achieve its potential by declaring independence from God.
14. So, they built a city.
15. And they also built a tower.
16. This tower would have been something like the great pyramids of Egypt, only centuries earlier. And in a different style. It was probably a ziggurat, a style that became common in the ancient world. A stepped up structure. Only this would be the tallest one in existence. The mother of all towers. They said, "a tower whose top is in the heavens."
17. There is a lot of conjecture about what this means.
 - a) Some take it to be the origins of star gazing, the zodiac, and the mother of all false religions.
 - b) Some take it to simply be hyperbole for a really, really tall tower.
 - c) Some take this reaching to the heavens literally — like a tower so the descendants of giants could climb up to heaven and attack God. I don't think so.
18. Some take it to be — and I would agree with this one — the origins of humanism. Humanism is the philosophy that humans are their own god.
 - a) Humanism rejects anything supernatural.
 - b) Humanism refuses to submit to the laws of God, declaring the laws of nature all that we need.
 - c) Humanism raises science to the level of religion. The Humanist manifesto says, "Humanists find that science is the best method for... solving problems and developing beneficial technologies."
 - d) Humanism treats religion as backwards and therefore dangerous.
19. The Tower of Babel is the ultimate symbol of human-centered religion. "Let us build a tower that reaches to the heavens," they said.
20. And, they said, let us make a name for ourselves. A name for ourselves. Let me pause here to mention that the Hebrew word for name is SHEM. We'll come back to that.
 - a) For our glory. For our fame. For our honor.
 - b) They worshiped the creation more than the Creator.
21. So they built a tower to their own honor, and for the glory of their own name.
22. So many people today do the exact same thing. Day after day, crafting a life with only marginal reference to God.
23. The consequence is everything we see today. Chaos. Indecency. Man's inhumanity to man. Corruption. Treachery. Deceit.
 - a) "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth."
24. But nothing is hidden from God. He's been watching all along. And at the right time, he took action.
- D. *But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. (Genesis 11:5, 6, NKJV).*
 1. Okay, boys and girls, let's learn our big word for today. Are you ready?
 2. It's the word "anthropomorphism."
 3. That means describing God in human terms so our tiny brains can understand him.
 - a) *Anthropomorphism: describing God in human terms so our tiny brains can understand him.*
 4. So the Bible talks about the eyes of the Lord, and the hand of the Lord, and the Lord changing his mind, or coming down to see something.
 5. This is language of accommodation. It is a kind of dumbing down of God so finite minds can understand him.
 6. God is omniscient. He knows all the knowable at all times. He knew what the people were doing and why they were doing it. The Bible describes it this way so we can follow.
 7. I like the way this is put.
 - a) Humans had just attempted to go up in their sin.
 - b) God now comes down in judgment.
 8. He sees the massive power of humankind. He's not worried for himself, he's worried for the human race.
 9. He knows that when humans make themselves gods, they are capable of unspeakable cruelty. The bigger we get, the more dangerous we get. This is the fallen human heart at work. Left alone, it's Lord of the Flies. It's the "City of Man." Mystery Babylon (Rev 17:5).
 - a) "Nothing they propose to do will be withheld from them."
 - (1) As apex predators, humans are the deadliest force on earth. We need to be under submission. We need to be under God. Once we become ultimate, we become dangerous. Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely.
 - (2) If you subtract God, watch out. If God is not your limit, there are no limits.
 10. And here's the most dangerous part of all. Subtract God, and you create a vacuum.
 11. Create a vacuum, and the devil rushes in (Luke 11:24-26).

12. The Tower of Babel has always been his goal. One united world in utter independence of God.
 - a) He is the god of this age (2 For 4:4).
 - b) He is the ruler of this world (John 12:31).
 - c) The whole world, and all its philosophies lie under the devil's sway (1 John 5:19).
 - d) He is the alt deity, the substitute god, the personal agent of rebellion against God, and he manifests himself in the most beautiful and seductive ways. He doesn't present himself as a false god. He presents himself as a beautiful philosophy.
 - (1) And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:14, NKJV).
 - (2) It seems so good. Everybody together. Everybody united. All are one. It's a trap. (Col 2:8).
 - (3) It's absolutely dangerous. It is the recipe for tyranny, and the recipe for the destruction of all that is sacred inside the human heart.

13. So God comes down and breaks up the party. This is an act of love and grace.

E. *"Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. (Genesis 11:7, 8)*

1. Can you imagine being there?
2. You say how's it going, and it's gibberish. You can't say anything to anybody... if language is the glue that holds people together, the glue has just been dissolved so completely, it can never be undone.
3. Linguists have a very difficult time explaining the origins of world languages. Most have followed an evolutionary model with trees and languages branching out.
4. But think of this. The Bible tells the most simple and comprehensive story of origins the world has ever known.
 - a) Creation — we were made by the hand of God, from nothing, for his glory, which is our highest good.
 - b) The Fall — freely chosen sin entered the world, and plunged us all under a curse. This is the origin of the giant pain machine.
 - c) The Tower of Babel — the division of languages and nations.
5. The best comparison I have is a submarine. A sub is divided into compartments. These compartments have water-tight doors — bulkheads. If one compartment floods, the whole ship doesn't go down.
6. That's why God split up humans. Nations, tribes, language groups. If one nation goes down, the whole ship doesn't have to go down.
7. One last verse, and I'll leave you with three lessons.

F. *Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. This is the genealogy of Shem: Shem was one hundred years old, and begot Arphaxad two years after the flood. (Genesis 11:9, 10, NKJV).*

1. We go straight from the Tower of Babel to the genealogy of Shem. Shem was the son of Noah.
2. Shem was also the recipient of the astounding prediction that God would dwell in the tents of Shem (Gen 9:27).
3. The many times great grand-father of Abraham, David, and Jesus.
4. The word Semitic comes from the name Shem.
5. The people said, let us build a Shem for ourselves.
6. God said, no. I will build a Shem... and his name will be Jesus... and he is the Savior and the Lord you need.

IV. Wrap up

A. *The BROKENNESS of life without God.*

1. The sin wasn't outright rebellion as much as indifference. Apathy toward God is the recipe for sadness in the heart.
2. No amount of planning or money can protect you from the emptiness you feel when God isn't central.
3. The city of man has a long, painful history of breaking people's hearts.
4. We are looking for a city with permanent foundations... a city whose maker and builder is God (Heb 11:10).

B. *The DANGER of false unity.*

1. I had a very nice talk with a Buddhist man, a Brahman — the highest cast. We were at a table full of people. Naturally, we had our disagreements.
2. At the end, he suggested that we pray together. He would pray to Buddha and I would pray to Jesus. I said no.
3. I said that our praying together would be false, because we bow the knee to a different God. It would be a false display of a false unity, and therefore deceptive, and I didn't want to be part of that.
4. This is probably as un-politically correct as anything I've said over the years, but it's a good thing sometimes when we are not united.
5. Want to know why?
6. Because truth is more important than unity.
7. And when unity comes at the expense of truth, it's going to suffocate your spirit.

C. *Our DEPENDENCY on God's Grace.*

1. In the tower of Babel, God divided people by making them speak different languages.
 - a) It was the miracle of the confusion of tongues.
2. After Jesus died on the Cross, and rose again, God united people in his name.
 - a) He poured out the Holy Spirit, and when they spoke in the confusion of tongues, God un-confused the tongues and they all heard the different languages as if it were their own.
 - b) And one day, in the future this is what we'll see:
 - (1) *After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:9, 10, NKJV).*