



## Genesis 10:1-11:26

### PRAY

Earlier this year it was announced that from 2010 that it would be compulsory for children between the ages of 7 and 14 to learn a foreign language in school. Most of us will be learning one already with French, German and Spanish being the most popular ones chosen by schools.

But why do we need to learn another language in the first place? Why after all are there different languages (6912 different ones according to Ethnologue)? It would be a lot easier if everyone just spoke English!

The answer to this question is found in this next section of Genesis. At the start of Genesis 9 God reissues the command '*Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth*' to Noah and his sons. When we look at Genesis 10 we see that this has happened. Noah's sons and their wives have had children, and their children have had children and so on and this has led to the earth being filled. Look at the summary verse at the end of the chapter. Verse 32: "*These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their lines of descent, within their nations. From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood*".

In Genesis 10 we have a list of the descendants of the three sons of Noah, listed by individuals, places and tribes. This list isn't a complete list of everybody. If you were to count them up there are 70 in total. The number 70 is symbolic of a number that is complete and large, so this list in chapter 10 is meant to be understood as representing the whole known world. It is there to show God's concern for all people as in this chapter no people or tribe is given priority over another; and we see God's kindness as He allows all these different nations to spring up and increase in number, even though the hearts of every human is sinful.

As well as showing us that people have been fruitful and the earth has been filled, Genesis 10 also hints that all is not well in the world. In this list two individuals are singled out. In verses 8-12 we are told about Nimrod who is described as a mighty warrior and hunter who set up the wicked and immoral Babylonian and Assyrian empires that were later to become cruel enemies of the Israelites. Nimrod was a tyrant whose name means 'we shall rebel' which is what happened at one of the cities he built Babylon or Babel.

The other individual singled out is Peleg, one of Eber's two sons in verse 25. We are told that during his lifetime the earth became divided. We also see in verses 5, 20 and 31 that Noah's family has been divided according to the clan or nation they were part of, or the language they spoke.

People have been fruitful and the earth has been filled, but they have also been divided, they are not one big happy family. This explains why nowadays when it comes to sport; we especially enjoy England beating Germany, France, Argentina and Scotland at football. And off the pitch this has led to all the racism, war and conflicts which we see going on all over the world.

At the start of Genesis 11 we have a flashback to an event that happened during the lifetime of Peleg, in one of the cities founded by Nimrod at a time when humanity was united. This event explains why the earth is divided and why there are now so many languages in the world.

### 1. United humanity...

During the time that Noah's sons had been fruitful and had many children, humanity was still united. We see this unity in verse 1 "*the whole world had one language and a common speech*". Then again in verses 3-4 where we read that they worked together in order to make lots of bricks which they used to build a city with a tower. It might have Nimrod who was in charge of this building project!

But Genesis 11:1-9 tells us two things about this united humanity. The first thing is that they rebelled against God.

### ...rebelled against God (11:1-4)

This rebellion was seen in a number of ways:

In verse 2 we are told that '*men moved eastwards*'. We've already seen in Genesis that moving eastwards is moving further away from the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve sinned they were placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden. When Cain was punished by God he went to the land of Nod which was east of Eden. Moving eastwards is moving away from God's rule and blessing.

But this rebellion is much clearer in verse 4. They say to each other "*Let us build a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens...*" They wanted to invade heaven so that firstly they could make a name for themselves and secondly so that they would not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.

They wanted to be famous. This united humanity wanted to find significance in their own achievements. They built this tower (which might have been a Mesopotamian ziggurat) so that they could say '*look how good we are, we've been able to get into heaven through what we have done*'. This is ultimately a desire to be like God. Like Adam and Eve, they wanted to be number 1 and live the way they thought was best, which was by sticking together and not spreading out.

This goes against God's good command that He gave firstly to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28, and then repeated to Noah and his sons in Genesis 9:1. God has said that fill the land, spreading out is a good thing, but in rebellion united humanity says let's stick together!

This attitude of the people in Babel is still around today. Space exploration is done for the glory of mankind. Medical research is done to show how clever people are. The Titanic when it was built was a great symbol of human achievement that one of its builders boasted that 'not even God could sink this ship'.

If you are living your life in a way that says 'I don't need God' you are repeating the sin of united humanity at Babel. If the reason you want to do well at school or in the other things you do is for the sole purpose of showing off to people about how good and clever you are, you are like the people of Babel, trying to make a name for yourself and rebelling against God. That's disobeying God's Word which tells us that we created to glorify God, to make God's name great and to show the dependence we have on God for life by the way we live. The sin of Babel is pride, taking the credit that God deserves, because everything in this world that we accomplish is only because of God's enabling and sustaining of us.

Firstly we see that united humanity rebelled against God, with the city and tower symbols of this rebellion. The second thing we learn about united humanity is that it was divided by God.

### **...divided by God (11:5-9)**

In verses 5-9 we see how this division takes place. It begins with God coming down from heaven to see the city and the tower, to investigate what's going on. Of course God could see the city and tower from heaven, he sees everything. But by describing it this way, Moses shows how pathetic this tower was. It's so small that God has to come down from heaven in order to see it.

As God sees what's going on, He concludes that if humanity continues to be united, they will only use this unity to continue in their wickedness and rebellion against Him, so God acts in judgment. We read again in verse 6 that the source of their unity is the one language they spoke, so to stop humanity continue with this united rebellion, God confuses their languages, and from that moment there became the need for history GCSE's and travel phrase books.

What happened to the tower? A few years back I was chatting to one of my friends about this and I said to him that I had been told in Sunday school that God destroyed it with a bolt of lightning. He told me that God sent a worm that ate the foundations of the tower so that it collapsed. Neither of these are right. The Bible tells us here that because of God's judgment in confusing the language, people were no longer able to work together and this led to the end of the building project and it was left standing unfinished like Spanish holiday apartment. The unfinished tower became a reminder of human rebellion along with the name of the city Babel which means 'confusion'.

Once again, we see that people cannot get away with their rebellion against God and their disobeying of God's good commands. One writer put it this way: '*From Babel to Belteshazzar, from Herod to Hitler, God has demonstrated repeatedly that it doesn't pay to rebel against His Will*'.

God's Will was that people would be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. This is what united humanity did not want to do. They didn't want to spread out; they wanted to stay together in one place. But they can't stop God's plan from happening, and in His judgment of confusing the language of the world, people are divided into groups by the languages they spoke and were scattered over the earth. This is what is described in Genesis 10. Sin does not frustrate the will of God as God uses judgment to fulfil his plan for humanity.

When we go abroad and have difficulty communicating with people, that should remind us that God will judge human sin and rebellion. As we are cheering that England has beaten another country at football, we should remember that God will judge human sin and rebellion. When we hear about conflicts on the news between countries, it's a reminder that God will judge human sin and rebellion. The effects of judgment of Babel that we see around us should ultimately remind us that God is going to judge human sin and rebellion by sending people to hell to face His anger forever and ever.

But is there any good news? The pattern we've seen before in Genesis is one of sin – judgment – grace, and in Genesis 11:1-9 we see man's sin and God's judgment, but are there any signs of God's grace?

Back in Genesis 10 we read that two sons were born to Eber, Peleg and Joktan. In chapter 10 we told who Joktan's descendants are and then the next thing that happens is the Tower of Babel story. But in chapter 11 verse 10 we have another genealogy which focuses on who Peleg's descendants are. This genealogy finishes with the three sons of Terah which includes Abram, and in Abram we see God's grace. With Abraham comes the beginning of God's plan to bless the world by uniting humanity that was divided at Babel through Christ. Divided humanity united by Jesus. The genealogy is the serpent-crushing line that began in Genesis 3:15. It continues to be preserved. When Abel died God replaced Abel with Seth. When God destroyed the world by the flood He preserved Noah, and in the judgment at Babel He preserves the line through Eber's son Peleg who leads to Abraham and ultimately to Jesus.

## **2. Divided humanity...united by Jesus**

In Genesis 12 we are told that God is going to bless all the peoples on earth through Abraham, and partially he did. But later on in Abraham's life God made it clear to him that the ultimate blessing will come through his offspring (Genesis 22:18) which the New Testament tells us is Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:8, 16).

Jesus' final instruction to his disciples was to go and tell people from all over the world the gospel. In order to do this Jesus gives His apostles the ability to speak in other languages so that everyone can hear the gospel, the good news that through Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection we can become part of a new united community under God's rule. On the day of Pentecost we read in Acts 2 that people from all over the world hear the wonders of God in their own language. The confusion has gone, Babel starts to be reversed and will one day be complete when Jesus returns and all of God's people will be united in heaven around the throne King Jesus praising Him because He has saved them from God's judgment.

Let me finish by reminding you of the big ideas of Genesis 1-11 that I want you to remember. Moses wrote down these words to teach God's people how they were to live under His rule and blessing as they waited to enter God's place as preparation for how they were to live once they got there. It teaches us how we are to live now as we wait for Jesus to return and unite His people forever in God's place, the new heavens and new earth.

We are repeatedly told about human sinfulness and rejection of God so that we know really and truly what we are like. When we are told about the sin of Cain, the wicked immoral people of Noah's day, the godless Nimrod and Babelites, we should see these as examples of what we are like.

We are repeatedly told about God's judgment to show how serious sin is. Adam and Eve's sin got them kicked out of the Garden of Eden and they were no longer able to enjoy the blessing of living there. The sin of Noah's generation was the reason why God flooded the earth destroying every living thing, and the rebellion against God that took place at Babel caused the earth to be divided. Ultimately they are to remind us that our sin will lead to punishment in hell.

But throughout we see God's grace as He preserves a chosen people, the offspring of the woman, which begins with Seth and goes through to Noah via Peleg to Abraham and ultimately will include people from all over the world. Within this chosen people will be one who is a serpent-crusher, who will defeat Satan once and for all, who will be a comforter and undo the curse God has put on creation and who will be the offspring through whom the whole world will be blessed. That person is Jesus and all those who put their trust in Him will become a member of God's family, the offspring of the woman and will be rescued from the punishment they deserved for their sin and be blessed as they spend eternity in God's place, the new creation.

The important question is: 'How are you going to live now?' Are you going to choose life by trusting in Jesus and His death and resurrection for forgiveness of your sins, or are you going to live whatever way you think is best? Whichever one you choose decides where you will spend eternity after you die!