

# Bible Studies

## The Tower of Babel



### Read Genesis 11v1-9

*Cush was the father of Nimrod, who grew to be a mighty warrior on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; that is why it is said, "Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the LORD." The first centres of his kingdom were Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Calneh, in Shinar. From that land he went to Assyria, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth Jr, Calah and Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city. Genesis 10:8-12*

This is an event that took place about 100 years after the flood. The name of the area where the city was build was Shinar, This plain is where Babylon was located. (Some of the modern language translations, drop Shinar and call it Babylonian.) Archaeology has shown that this area was one of the first centres of civilisation. Here in the plain between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers the Sumerian culture flourished. It is also significant that the best know of the extra biblical accounts of the flood, the Gilgamesh chronicles, come from this area. The Sumerians are credited with inventing writing.

### What did the people do when they reached Shinar? x3

#### Is it significant that they used bricks and mortar, rather than cut stone?

Some people think that bricks and mortar represents human effort, and Stone, Divine methods. Bricks are certainly inferior and less long-lasting, but in a plain they were readily available, stone wasn't.

*Then they said, "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 whole earth." Genesis 11v4*



#### Why did they want to build a city and tower?

#### Who's glory was the tower for?

#### How high was the tower intended to be?

The kind of tower they built was probably a ziggurat, a kind of a step pyramid used as a temple or place of worship. The ruins of several giant ziggurats still exist in modern day Iraq/Iran.



In the ancient world people believed in a three tier universe. The earth was like a flat disk, above it was an arch in which the gods lived, below it was another arch which was the underworld. (this was a pagan idea, it is not taught in the Bible). If they built a tower high enough they could physically reach heaven.

#### How likely were they to succeed?

#### Do you think this was their intention?

If it was, then it was architecturally ill-conceived, the mountains that surrounded the plain were higher than they could ever hope to build and yet they still did not reach the heavens.

Assuming they did believe they could physically reach heaven.

#### Did God fear they could succeed?

We cannot build a tower that reaches the upper atmosphere, they certainly couldn't. We also know the heaven is not physically located above the earth, it's an entirely different plane of existence. So if God knew this project was doomed to failure, why did He intervene? There must be more to it than just building a tower.

#### What was wrong with what they were doing?

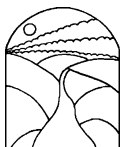


Their goal was to avoid being scattered. This was in direct rebellion to God's command to cover the earth Genesis 9v7, KJV

Secondly it was to make a name for themselves, instead of God. It was a refusal to worship and honour God.

Reaching heaven meant reaching God. They were going to do this through human means. They were trying to exalt themselves over and against God. to be independent of God and self sufficient. To make their own religion and reject God. Such a process is described in **Romans 1v18-23**. Consequently some people identify the tower of Babel as the birth of paganism and idolatry.

In Hebrew, Babel means *confusion*, but in the Sumerian and Greek versions of the name it means *gateway of heaven*. This name may speak of the tower or God's visit.



Just as there are accounts of a great flood in the myths of many of the worlds ancient cultures, so to there are accounts of a time when men lived in one village and spoke one language. Some of them include the story of an unfinished tower destroyed by the gods.

It has been speculated that, with the memory of the flood still recent, they want to build something that could, protect them from another flood. Side-stepping God's judgement, giving them the freedom to behave as they wished without fear.

**Would the tower have survived?**

## **The Tower of Babel today**



**What was the attitude of the people who build the tower?**

**Where is this kind of attitude seen in society today?**

Arrogance and a wilful denial of God seemed to mark their behaviour. One of the basic philosophies of today's society is *secular humanism*, while it contains much good, it glorifies man, makes him self-sufficient, and master of his own destiny, it has no place for God. It is the religion of our western world. It is a modern tower of Babel.

**What attitude should we have toward God?**

**How does today's society try to reach God, or to be more precise, side step God?**

Babylon, in Scripture, came to represent all that is evil, a culture opposed to God. Rev 17v5, 18v21.

**Can man reach God through human effort?**

Babylon stands for all manmade religion, attempts to reach God by our own goodness, good works or wisdom. All attempts to do so are futile. In the faith of the Bible, God reached out to man. What man could not do God did by sending his Son to earth to die on the Cross. God took the initiative. We call this grace.



The tower of Babel also finds it's way into Church life. Whenever we concentrate of building an empire, an edifice or a monument to our own achievement, then we are building Babel. When the structure becomes more important than the goal.

When our image is more important than God's work. Whenever we loose sight of God's will. Whenever people cease to be important. Whenever God's glory takes second place, we are building Babel. Anything we build for our own glory or out of pride is Babel.

*He said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" Daniel 4:30*

**Who's glory was Babel built for?**

**In what ways does the Church try to build a tower of Babel?**

**What is the danger when this happens?**

**Is this just a danger for big organisations or for churches and individuals?**

*Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. Psalm 127:1*

The problem is that often we deceive ourselves into believing that what we are doing is for God when really it is for us.

**How can we guard ourselves against this danger?**

## **The Outcome**

Man tried to go up, but God ended up coming down.

**What was God's conclusion about mans efforts?** Genesis 11v6

**What does this tell us about the power of unity, both for good and evil?**

**How is this kind of unity achieved?**

**Do you think there is a parallel in the incredible advances of our day?**



**What did God do prevent them continuing? x2**

In the end God got His way, by disrupting their language.

**Why did God choose this way to act?**

There is a contrast here with the day of Pentecost. On both occasions God gave new languages and scattered the people, at Babel it bought disunity, at Pentecost it bought unity and the glory of God.

**What were the effects of God's judgement?**

There is a parallel to this found in Acts, where God commanded the church to take the Gospel to all nations, but Jerusalem was just too comfortable, God had to send a persecution to scatter them.

**Do you think this is why God has allowed so many denominations?**