



## WEEK EIGHT: Genesis 11:1-9

### Sermon Outline:

**Key Text(s):** Genesis 11:1-9 (but also including 9:18-10:32)

We have come to the final section of the prologue to the biblical narrative and have learned quite a bit about the main character and the tension that will drive the narrative. After creating the world and inviting humanity to participate in his purposes, his image-bearers chose self-determination apart from their Creator. The results have been devastating to God's purposes and, in the previous narrative, he brought the unravelling work of humanity to its logical conclusion and un-created the world in the flood. The waters of the flood, we learn, have not cleansed the human heart, yet the Lord is committed to his creation purposes and promises never again destroy the world by flood. We are left with a suspicion that human behaviour will devolve again and a lingering question about what God will do about it when it happens.

Our suspicion is confirmed almost immediately when Noah (9:20-27) gets drunk and lies naked in his tent. His youngest son, Ham sees it and tells his brothers who enter the tent and cover their father's nakedness. Awakening from his drunken stupor Noah curses Ham's descendants. In only a few verses we have another story about foolishly taking fruit, nudity, cursing, and family conflict.

At this point the narrator introduces another genealogy; the table of nations. This reaches past the final story of Babel to the very precipice of the story of Abram (where the action really begins). It refers to the situation after Babel (see "languages" in 10:5, 20, 31 and the division of the world in 10:25) and prepares us for the story to come in three ways. First, it indicates that it is the family line of Shem that the Lord has chosen from its position as the last of the lists (which is confirmed when this line is picked up again in 11:10). Second, it introduces many of the nations that we will encounter in the story: Assyrians, Babylonians, Canaanites, Hittites, Jebusites, etc. Third, the total number of names and nations (excluding the cities that Nimrod built and the Philistines who are an afterthought) is seventy. This is a number of completion and is the same number of Jacob's descendants who enter Egypt (Genesis 46:27; Exodus 1:5). Abraham's descendants are presented as a microcosm of the whole world.

After this brief interlude – which also demonstrates God's ongoing commitment to his purposes and promises of blessing – we come to the last story in the prologue. This final story is carefully constructed with the actions of God once again in the middle of the action. The story is set somewhere in the genealogy that preceded. (As an aside, this tells us that God has decided not to destroy since the nations continued to develop and grow after it!)

As people moved east (in the prologue the direction away from God – 3:24; 4:16) they stopped at the Shinar and determined to build themselves a city and tower that reached to heaven in order to make a name for themselves and to keep them from being scattered.

There are several hints about what makes this seemingly innocuous action worthy of judgment. First, while God's mandate was to fill the earth, yet they have stopped doing so – and have stopped doing so in order to no longer be scattered. Second, the city and tower to heaven are not merely tall buildings. In the ancient near context the tower is almost certainly to be understood as a ziggurat; a temple complex that the Babylonians called the 'gate of heaven'. This appears to be another attempt (along with Eve and the sons of God) to seize the prerogatives of God. This is seen in the third part of the declaration: they would make a name for themselves. A name, as we have seen in Genesis 1-11 is not just a label, but is associated with the very identity, nature, and essence of that which is named. In the wisdom literature a "good name" is associated with wisdom, godliness, and success in life (Prov. 3:4; 22:1; Ecc. 7:1). The people here are seeking the good life and to define themselves without reference to God. It is an act of defiance to the purposes of God – we are right back to the pre-flood condition!

In the middle of the story God acts. He comes down to see this great tower and, seeing it, declares that if humanity is capable of this kind of opposition to his plans and purposes there is no end to what they might do. To short-circuit this (similar to his statements about the tree of life or the intermixture of the sons of God and daughters of men) he confuses their language and scatters them throughout the world.

From a storytelling perspective this leaves us hanging. There is an act of judgment but without a corresponding act of grace (that we have become accustomed to). Furthermore, humanity's rebellion has been slowed down, but not arrested – what will God do!?

It is, however, where this last story leaves us - where God envisions a unity under his purposes and a scattering of humanity into all the world, humanity instead united against him and are now scattered in confusion.

The church can be seen as the Lord's counter-plan to Babel; a diverse people, united under his purposes in the world as revealed in Christ Jesus. They are scattered/sent into every corner of their world to represent his kingdom priorities wherever they go – so that God might have agents of his love, mercy, and purpose in every household, neighbourhood, school, business, office, café, sports club, etc.!

We are at the end of the prologue, but there is one more text we need explore – the call of Abram. In this text we see the plans and purposes of God take a new direction!

## Questions to Ask

NOTE: The questions below are arranged into two sets. The first three are very open, allowing for wide exploration and discussion. The second set are more specifically tied to the sermon. Use one, both, or a mix of the two depending on your group.

1. What stood out to you in this sermon?
  2. What questions do you have about this text? [If you meet prior to Wednesday, you can access the Big III question portal and ask some of these questions there.]
  3. What might the Holy Spirit be inviting you to do in response?
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4. We continue to seek meaning through unity with others outside of God's plans and purposes. What are some of the things we seek to unify around and how are they aligned (or misaligned) from God's plans and purposes?
  5. The church is ultimately united under God's purposes to fill the earth with his reign and rule. These purposes imply beliefs (e.g., about Jesus) and behaviours (e.g., mercy, justice, worship). We can allow these beliefs and behaviours divide us. How can we foster greater unity around God's purposes?
  6. We are sent to be God's representatives wherever we are. Consider the activities and places you were last week. Where was it easy to be God's representative? Where was it difficult? How does this truth change the way you might "be" in those places this week?

## A Prayer to Pray

Pray that as a community of faith we might be unified under God's purposes revealed in Jesus and take that purpose everywhere we go.

## Readings to Read This Week

The following readings are the next five in the annotated list of readings to discover the big picture of the Bible. You can find the annotated part in the Life Group Resources page on our website.

- Luke 4:1-13
- Luke 4:14-21
- Luke 4:38-43
- Luke 5:17-26
- Luke 7:1-10

## A Mission Commitment to Reflect on

One of our strategic priorities is Community Engagement. This has a number of broad focuses, but one of them is evangelism. This series in Genesis is a broad introduction to the story that leads to Jesus. Is there someone in your life who you might invite to listen to these sermons, attend a service with you, or who might even join your Life Group?

## A GBC Initiative to Promote/Celebrate

Each week we will provide you with a key aspect of our community news that we would encourage you to remind your Life Group about.

1. September is the beginning of our focus on the work and ministry of Hopefield. We also seek to raise \$35,000 to fund a two-day a week trauma counsellor (focused on DV). You might want to pray for the work of Hopefield as a focus over the month of September.