

# Carnal Confidence Confounded

Genesis 11:1-9

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## Introduction:

Last week in our sermon series on the book of Genesis, we came to chapter 10, the table of the nations.

- There we have an account of the sons that were born to Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth,
  - and of how their descendants were divided by families, languages, lands, and nations.
  - In other words, some by kinship, some by language, some by where they settled, and some by political affiliation.
- In reading this account, we saw that certain things are highlighted...
  - One is that the whole earth was populated from Noah's three sons—this of course, because everyone had perished in the flood and so of course they all spoke the same language.
  - Another matter that was given special attentions was the career of Nimrod—a tyrant who established a rebellious kingdom—including Babel itself which are going to read about today—and also Nineveh.
  - We also saw that Shem's descendant Eber was given special consideration as the unusual comment was made that Shem is called the father of all the children of Eber...
    - And the detail is given that one of Eber's sons, Peleg, was so named because the earth was divided in his days (Gen 10:25).
      - The name Peleg means divide...
      - And this is the harbinger for chapter 11...

Chapter 11 opens by telling us about the division of the earth (the peoples of the earth) that occurred in the days of Peleg.

- We have the account of that in Genesis 11:1-9 which is the portion we will be looking at today...
- And then you have a full genealogy of Peleg showing that Abram (or Abraham) descended from him in the remainder of chapter 11...
  - And of course it is this Abram and his descendants that the rest of Genesis is concerned about because it was to them that the son who would bless the world with salvation was promised.
    - But we will get to that in future weeks...

This week let's look at the divine record of how the earth was divided in the day of Peleg according to Genesis 11:1-9.

- Please give me your attention as I read this portion of God's word to you now...
- Genesis 11:1-9—This is God's holy Word.

**Genesis 11:1-9:** Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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.” <sup>5</sup> But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. <sup>6</sup>

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. <sup>7</sup> Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” <sup>8</sup> So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. <sup>9</sup> 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.

May the LORD bless the reading of His holy Word.

We can be reasonably confident that this dividing of the people at Babel is the event spoke of that occurred in the day of Peleg according to Genesis 10:25.

- We might have reason to question what is meant since it says that the *earth* was divided were not for the way Genesis 11 opens the account of the division of the people in verse 1...
  - Because Gen 11:1 says that the whole *earth* had one language and one speech.
    - Here, it is very clear that the word *earth* refers to the *people of the earth*, and that leads us to safely presume that when Gen 10:25 tells us that Peleg was named Peleg because the *earth* was divided in his days, the world *earth* is also referring to the *people of the earth* (not to land masses).
  - This becomes all the more likely when we consider how the style of Moses in Genesis is almost always to introduce an important person or subject by an enigmatic statement about that person or subject in the previous chapter.
    - For example, Seth is introduced as replacing Abel in Genesis 4:25, and then all of Genesis 5 is devoted to his genealogy...
    - And in that genealogy, we are told at Noah’s birth in 5:29 that he was named Noah because he would bring rest in some way...
      - and then the next three chapters are devoted to how God preserved the whole world through Noah.
    - So here in Gen 10:25, we have this enigmatic statement that the earth was divided in the day of Peleg, and then, sure enough, we have the account of that division in chapter 11.
      - On top of this is the fact that the verb *palag* is used in Psalm 55:9 for a division of languages...

Seeing that the dividing of the inhabitants of the earth occurred in the days of Peleg enables us to have an idea of when it happened...

- For we can ascertain from the genealogies that Peleg was born a century after the flood—101 years to be exact.

- It is likely that either an oracle was given at his birth announcing the division and that is why he was named Peleg...which means division,
- or that the division occurred at the time of his birth—perhaps on the very day of it—and that he was named for the event.
  - That is the most likely because his naming is not presented as an oracle.
  - From this we conclude that Babel probably occurred 101 years after the flood...at his birth

Well let's look at this account of the division of the people of the earth.

- We have here an important lesson about the danger of human pride and self-sufficiency—and its offensiveness to God and of how it can blind us all.
  - It shows us a vivid example of groupthink and of the maxim that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.
  - It assures us that those who exalt themselves will be abased!
    - There is no place for confidence in the flesh, or for carnal security, in the world that God made—especially as fallen creatures.
- So let's look at this account and see what we can learn.

## I. First, look at how human pride and carnal security arises!

A. We see that things go well for this fledgling population.

1. All the inhabitants of the earth are enjoying unity with each other.
  - Gen 11:1 says: **“Now the whole earth had one language and one speech.”**
    - Everyone, as we would expect, shared a common language.
  - And it seems to mean everyone who was alive on earth—we see that whole mass of them are apparently moving about together as nomads—
    - because verse 2 says,
      - **“And as they (*the whole earth* of verse 1) journeyed...”**
        - We suppose that they were looking for a good place to live...
    - As the whole earth is there, we can assume that Noah and his sons and the next three generations are there—perhaps 80 households all together—
      - That is about what they would have been when Noah's great grandchildren such as Salah and Nimrod began to bear children—children such as Eber (the father of the Hebrew people)...
  - And as they are staying together, we can assume that they are getting along okay with each other.
    - Perhaps Nimrod as a young father is starting to show his hunting skills at this time and starting to gain the admiration of the whole family.
    - No doubt, they found security and joy in each other's company.
      - When we are getting along, and relying on each other (which is right and good in itself) we can start to trust in our own human ability (which of course is *not* good if we do not trust God).
      - We should spur one another along to do that!

2. And verse 2 goes on to tell us that they came to a lovely spot where they decided to dwell...
  - It says,
    - **Gen 11:2: “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.”**
    - This is one of the great flood plains that was formed by the flood—a very fertile place...
      - This is in the area that is part of the Fertile Crescent to this day, and a plain like this, soon after the flood, would have been especially rich and fruitful.
  - In any case, you can see that chose to settle there—out of all the places they had been...so it was apparently a fine place!
    - We would note that at this time, they were still enjoying long life—it may even have been that no one had died since the flood—
      - Lifespans begin to decrease, but the first three generations appear to have lived for about 400 years...
        - This was a mercy to give the fledgling little family stability as they multiplied.
      - But it appears that they were enjoying a good deal of peace and prosperity.
3. Verse 3 shows that upon settling, they began to develop technology...
  - **Gen 11:3: 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.**
  - When technology develops, it indicates that the people are enjoying more than a bare living—
    - They have plenty of food so they are able to develop new things—and as the land here did not have a lot of stone, but had plenty of clay and asphalt deposits, they learned to use these for building.
  - So in this, they are like our society—filled with plenty—enjoying the many comforts of life, and advancing with new technology!

TRANS> So everything was going along quite nicely for them...they were unified, they had found a great place to live, and they were flourishing there.

B. But it is now that godless ambition starts to rear its ugly head!

1. It can be seen in what they say to one another...in verse 4...
  - **Gen 11:4: 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.”**
  - a. Now when you first read that, it might not seem like such a bad thing!
    - They are prospering and they simply want to build a city as their numbers are multiplying...
    - They can begin to specialise—they want to become a great and prosperous city and live together in the harmony they are enjoying.

- You can see their enthusiasm as they encourage each other—“come, let us build...”
  - They are considering all that they can accomplish with their new technologies—just as we do—it is a very engaging thing...
  - Ambition fills people with energy...isn't it true?
    - Children, don't you find it much easier to move snow to build a snow fort or a snow man than to clear your driveway?
      - Don't you tire way easier when it is the driveway...
      - Or when you do your math as opposed to when you are learning a new game on the computer?

TRANS> These guys were fuelled by their ambition...

- b. But we are shown that there is nothing innocent about this at all!
  - Not in this case!
    - How do we see that?
  - 1) Primarily we see that by looking at the way God responds to their building project and by what He says about it!
    - a) His words in verse 6 are, **“nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them!”**
      - In other words, their ambition has blinded them and it has left them without restraint!
      - They will say, “We can do anything! We can do whatever we want! We have the resources! We have the technology!”
        - And they do not remember that it is only God who prospers them and gives them success.
    - b) This is the way we are too...
      - We measure what we can do by our resources instead of by what God wills...
      - The very time that we ought to be full of thanksgiving because God has given us an abundance is the time that we start to feel self-sufficient and as if we do not need God!
      - It is really quite insane...
        - We can't handle blessing without getting proud—without forgetting the LORD who gave us what we have—not so we would forget Him, but so that we might praise His name!
    - c) And when this kind of pride and ambition arise,
      - (i) We start to disregard God's commandments—we start to oppress our neighbour—
        - When God's law tells us that we should not do something, such as sleep with someone we are not married to...
          - we say, “Why can't I? I can do whatever I want. What's wrong with it?”

- (ii) We get so cocky that we start cursing when things don't go the way we want as if we were in the place of God who alone has the right to curse and bless...
  - We say "damn you" when anyone displeases us and "damn it" when anything displeases us.
- 2) We can also discern the see the wrong that the people of the earth were doing by looking at the fruit that grows out of these roots...
  - Where does their ambition and their building lead them?
    - We can see what Babylon became...
    - These are the beginnings that will grow up to be all that Babylon was—a godless, proud, self-sufficient society that thinks they do not need God!
- 2. Let's take a look at the foundation stones of Babylon that are found in vs 4—at the corrupt roots—we can see that they are corrupt:
  - **Gen 11:4: 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."**
  - There are three corrupt foundation stones here...
    - a. First there is the stone of idolatry—seen in the plan to build a tower whose top is in the heavens...
      - We know where the building of such towers led in Babylon—
        - Their ziggurats were like mountains where they were able to establish their high places—their shrines and their altars...
        - They supposed that by doing this, they could gain influence with the gods...they could get closer to them...
          - They could enter into council with the gods in heaven!
      - That is what idolatry does—it tries to gain control over God—to gain influence with Him by manipulation.
        - Sometimes one god will be played off of another, or a god will be offered something he needs from man and bargained with.
        - All this instead of looking to God for mercy!
      - Idolatry begins when we try to approach God in our own way...
        - By worship that He has not commanded or appointed...
        - Or by setting up images of Jesus or the saints or God supposing we will get closer to Him in this way...
        - Or by approaching Him on the basis of our own works instead of by the blood of Jesus Christ in whom alone we have forgiveness.
      - A tower into the heavens was the beginning of this kind of idolatry.
        - All we have to do is look at Babylon and see what it became...
        - The great temple of Marduk at Babylon was called "the uplifted head" because it was man lifting himself into the heavens.

- b. The second foundation stone of godless Babylon is found in the statement, “let us make a name for ourselves.”
- This is the desire to attain greatness—to become great!
    - That is not to be our focus—we are created by God for God.
    - We are to exalt His name, not our own name!
      - He is the one who gives us all that we have!
      - If He wishes to make our name great, we should not be concerned about that—but it is not for us to make our name great.
  - Calvin comments that those who are filled with this kind of ambition can never worship God or be good neighbours.
    - That is so true—for we set ourselves in competition with God and instead of trying to glorify Him, we try to get glory to ourselves.
      - And instead of serving others, we use them to advance our own purpose and glory.
    - Such ambition is the runaway desire to exalt our own name when our great concern should be that our names are written in heaven.
      - That is what Jesus told His disciples when they rejoiced that the demons were subject to them...
        - They thought, “We can do anything now!”
        - But Jesus said, “Do not rejoice that the demons are subject to you, but that your names are written in heaven...”
  - This ambition was the great sin of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon.
    - He is the one who said, “Is this not great Babylon which I have built?” And the LORD brought him down and took the kingdom from him because he did not give the glory to God.
- So the first foundation stone of godless Babylon is idolatry and the second is ambition...
- c. And the third foundation stone is security in the flesh...
- It is seen in the phrase, “**lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.**”
    - They supposed that their security was in staying together and building this city...
    - Instead of looking to the LORD for their safety, they looked to each other and to their schemes!
      - Though big nations and big businesses are proud, they are also filled with fear.
      - The kings of Babylon always had to watch their backs—they had to watch out for disloyalty in their courts—and they went to great lengths to insure their own safety...
        - That is what the people at Shinar were starting to do—to trust in the flesh instead of in the LORD.

- Godless fear causes leads men to try to protect themselves at all costs!
    - How many murders, thefts, lies, sexual sins have been committed by men trying to protect themselves!
    - How many wars have been fought, how much oppression has ensued by men who wanted to make themselves secure.
      - So much violence in communist regimes—because of the fear of dictators...
    - Even great Solomon married many idolatrous women in order to make alliances with kings—for the security of his kingdom!
  - And how many in an effort to prosper at work have resorted to lying...to make more sales...or to please the boss...
    - How many young people have disobeyed their parents because of insecurity of losing their friends...
    - How many Christians have denied Christ to avoid persecution...
    - How many have ignored the Sabbath in fear of displeasing their families?
  - It is a great delusion to think that you can keep yourself safe!
    - The person who is in the greatest danger of all is the person who is not resting in Jesus Christ.
    - If eternal life is not secured to you in Him, you are in serious peril.
      - You can be sitting on hoarded riches that should have been tithed and in control of nations with massive fortresses all around you and well equipped armies...
        - but if you are not secure in Christ, it is just a matter of time until you will come to total ruin!
3. Beware of this deadly spirit of Babylon!
- This sin is often undetected by those who live in it...
    - Their ambition completely blinds them—they are so focused on what they can do that they completely forget the LORD...
    - They forget about eternity, and they forget that even in this world, it is He alone who gives them the power to get wealth and He alone who sustains them.
  - Do not go through life with such blindness!
    - The Devil would ensnare you in this way if he could...
    - The world will try to rope you in to the way of Babel...
      - **Come and 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!**
      - It is a strong appeal—do not let it draw you in!
        - Do not let it blind you and put you into a spiritual slumber!



## II. Now let's look at God's response to man's pride and carnal security!

### A. Though we are blinded by our pride, He sees it clearly!

1. We are told that He comes down to see what the sons of men were doing...
  - Verse 5 says:
    - **Gen 11:5: "But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built."**
  - This is the turning point in the history of mankind!
    - The whole earth—all the people upon the earth—were on the pathway to become all that godless Babylon became...
    - They were all pumped up about what they were doing—it felt so good—so secure—so great and advanced...
      - They were reaching into the heavens where God is!
2. But the LORD comes down to see what they were doing...this wonderfully drips with irony...
  - God has to come down to see it.
  - Of course He knew what they were doing all along—but He is seen having to come down and find this little tower—this little city—this little building project...
    - It must be down there somewhere—
      - Oh yes—there it is...
  - How short they had come of their goal to reach into the abode of God!
    - How he laughs at their childish ambition!
    - What were they thinking!
      - The heaven of the heavens cannot contain Him!
      - He sits above the circle of the earth and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers.
      - The nations are less than the dust on the scales before Him!
  - False religion always has incredibly small views of the LORD.
    - Let us be humbled before the great God who made us and who alone is able to save us!
    - What can we offer to Him?
      - It is gratuitous mercy that we need—
        - not towers or cathedrals!
        - not great works that we have done!
        - not great faith, but great mercy!

### B. When the LORD looks at what they are doing He concludes that they need to be restrained.

1. As we have seen, here were the roots of a very godless culture.
  - If they go on like this, they will be completely blinded by their ambition to the point of no return—as Babylon always is!

- That is the meaning of verse 6...
  - **Gen 11:6: 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.”**
- The LORD points out how their unity and their success had blinded them so as to think they can do great things in their own strength...
  - Doesn't that happen to you?
  - If everyone is yielding to you and you have lots of resources, do you think about God anymore?
    - You could—you should—but do you?
    - I bet you tend to think of Him more when you are weak and running short—that's when you realise you need Him—
      - And of course you should realise it then—but you should also realise it when He is prospering you.
      - Don't let His kindness ruin you—as it was ruining these poor souls only a hundred years after the flood.
        - They were all going down the tubes together...
- 2. He determines that He will go down and confuse their language.
  - See His resolution in verse 7—in council with Himself He says...
    - **Gen 11:7: “Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.”**
  - a. What a great way to deal with the problem...
    - He will remind them that even language is His gift...
      - They were taking everything for granted as if they had it by their own cleverness or power...in themselves...
      - So the LORD shows them that even the ability to speak to each other is from Him—
        - He gave us language in the first place, and He can take it away and make us like babbling idiots before one another.
    - He might have sent a dragon or a great storm or earthquake,
      - but instead He strikes them at their natural ability that they thought they had full control over...
  - b. This is a great act of both judgement and mercy!
    - 1) It is judgement because the LORD punishes them and puts them in their place.
      - They did not notice Him as the One who had been taking care of them all this time and prospering them,
        - So now they are made to remember Him as the one who punishes them.
      - They suffered a great loss here...

- Never again—or at least not until God reverses it—will men be able to work together without language barriers...
    - The sweet unity they had enjoyed—and the prosperity that came of it—will not be crippled.
  - But it must be—because God’s honour was being denied...
    - He is a holy God and a God of great jealousy who will not give His glory to another—certainly not to puny men...
    - Nor will He allow men to go on with such unworthy thoughts of Him without straightening out the record...
      - The proud must be abased—God’s glory demands it.
  - If you think it is not right for God to do this—if it seems selfish to you—it is because your own thoughts of God are too low...
    - You are comparing Him with the likes of us—it is so wrong for any man—however great he may be—to demand honours to himself—
      - but for God—it would be wrong for Him not demand such honours—
        - It would be a great defect in the universe—it is a great crook that must be straightened out...
        - The glory of God demands judgement on human pride.
          - This is lost on our society because we imagine that God is like us—that is the pride of Babel in us.
- 2) But it is also an act of great mercy for God to stop these men!
- a) How dreadful it would have been if the LORD had let the whole world go on in the direction they were headed!
    - We know where that was—it was what Babylon became!
    - It was bad enough that some went there—but what would have become of us if all the people of the earth had gone there!
  - b) But God’s promise holds true!
    - He said that He would put enmity in the hearts of the woman’s seed against the serpent...
    - He will not abandon the world to go to spiritual ruin!
      - He comes and He rescues us!
      - His mercy divides His people from apostasy!
        - Division is a bad thing in itself, but it is a wonderful thing when it keeps us from joining with the world in apostasy!
  - c) Praise the LORD for restraining us—
    - even if it means division and persecution from the world so that we will not be drawn into the world!
    - even if it means broken family and loss of friendship!
      - It is a great mercy because it keeps us from all becoming Babylon!

3. Look at how the LORD completely reverses their efforts...how He totally stops them from going on in their blindness...
  - Verse 8 and 9 tell us...
    - **Gen 11:8-9: So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. 9 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.**
  - a. First, they wanted to build, but now the building is stopped.
    - They were intoxicated by each other...all supposing that they could make this mountain that would bring them closer to God...
      - It was a matter of group deceit and there was no one to tell them otherwise...
      - They were all following each other like sheep and nobody thought to ask if this tower was a way that God had appointed to get closer to Him.
      - Nobody bothered to ask if He had authorised them to do this and if not, what business they had to do it.
    - God might have raised up a prophet to stop them, but instead He confused their languages...
      - What a great miracle this was.
      - This was surely the division of what we call the major families of language from which we get languages that show no relationship to each other...
        - Of course many dialects have developed since then, but this was when the major divisions were begun.
    - And it did stop them in their tracks.
      - They were humbled, they had to stop and see that God did not approve of what they were doing.
      - I find that the thing that people are most blind about is whatever way they have worshipped God with their people...
        - Whatever traditions they have—whether appointed by God or not—they will hardly entertain even the possibility that they might be wrong.
        - In Israel, they would not remove the high places—in our day, we must have our songs and our musical instruments, our altars and our robes, our holy days that God did not appoint, our advent wreaths—
          - all sanctioned not by God but by our traditions—by the herd—no one stopping to ask what God says about it.
          - But here He stopped this building of a high place in the plains of Shinar.
  - b. Secondly, they wanted to make a great name for themselves...

- Here was ambition—not of one individual against another—but of a much worse kind...
    - Blind group ambition—all encouraging each other along—all supposing themselves to be moving toward greatness.
  - Well they got a name all right—a name to memorialise them, just as they wanted...well, not quite!
    - The name they had was *Babel* which means gate of God—that is what Babylonian cities thought themselves to be...
  - But here Moses gives us a play on words with the word *confusion*, which sounds like *Babel* in Hebrew—it is *Balel*...
    - So the meaning *confusion* is assigned to these people and their city!
    - They got their name all right, but it is not a great name!
- c. Thirdly, they had wanted to do all this lest they be scattered, but you see that verse 8 and 9 both point out that they were scattered.
- This is how the division of the families of the earth we saw in Genesis 10 came about...
    - They were in blind group rebellion and they were confident in each other—that was why they had to be broken apart.
      - You can see men in an army—following a corrupt leader who is abusing civilians—they all start to join along with the group and nobody stops to think—
        - It seems okay because the group is doing it together and nobody is stopping them.
        - Factions in such cases are good things...breaking them up.
      - It is helpful even to have denominations in the church—not that we should want to—but they keep us from all blindly following error—we make each other stop and think.

**Conclusion:** What a disaster it would have been if He had not scattered them apart!

- And do you remember what we saw last week in Acts 17?
  - He did this that they might seek the Lord.
    - **Acts 17:26-27: And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;**
- That is the important thing—that we stop in our tracks and consider what God says—what He wants.
  - Don't wait until He brings judgement—don't go blindly along with Babel, following the herd as so many are doing today in the west...
    - Reading into the scriptures the blindness of groupthink
    - Babel is very deceptive—very intoxicating

- Do not let her draw you in—the call is to come out of her!
- The call of scripture is to come out of her lest you be judged with her.
- Revelation 18 says:
  - **Rev 18:1-4: After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.” And I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.”**