

Lesson 5

A giant staircase to heaven The tower of Babel, from Genesis 11

The Jesus Storybook Bible - pgs.48 - 55

It is interesting that there are two reasons given for the building of the first skyscraper. In Genesis 11:3 the builders say, “Let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” So “they used brick instead of stone.” This means there had been some form of technological advance over previous methods of building. It meant that they could build a much taller building than had ever been made before. They wanted to demonstrate their new talents/discoveries.

But there is a second, deeper reason for their project. Verse 4 records the builders saying, “So that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.” This is a deliberate attempt to use technological and cultural production not for the glory of God’s name, but for their own self glorifying ends. Their desire was to maximize their own power and autonomy, to become independent of God. Yet this very statement in verse 4 shows radical insecurity.

They need to “make a name for themselves” through their accomplishments because they feel like they lack a name, like they don’t know who they are. “To get a name” in the Bible is to get what we call an identity. God, of course, constantly names people in the Bible. When he names Adam, Abraham, Israel, and even Jesus, he refers to what he has already done or what he is going to do in their lives. When God tells someone “what I have done/will do is your name,” he means that his grace in their lives should be the defining factor.

Our security, our priorities, our sense of worth and uniqueness — all the things we call identity — should be based on what God has done for us and in us. This means that if we do not have a name, if we are insecure and have to “find who we are,” we have either no grasp or an inadequate grasp of what God has done. The people of Babel seem to be getting their identity from the greatness of their personal accomplishment/technology, and the size and power of their group.

First, the grandiose statement “a tower that reaches to the heavens” means that they are assigning spiritual value to their work and accomplishment. They are getting significance and power from their work when they ought to be getting it from God. It is fair to say that they are saving themselves through their work, trying to get to heaven without God.

Secondly, the desire to “not be scattered over the face of the whole earth” seems to mean that they also got a name from being gathered into a large group. They got a sense of power and greatness from the size and wealth of their city and of their people. They will feel they have a name if their nation or tribe is great and powerful.

While the first way of identity comes from making an idol of one’s talents and accomplishments, the second way of identity comes from making an idol of one’s group. The tower is a symbol of how we seek to be our own saviors through our personal and social accomplishments.

Memory Verse

Genesis 6:5

"The Lord saw that the human heart was only evil."

***Lesson taken from *The Jesus Storybook Bible Curriculum*, written by Sally Lloyd-Jones and Sam Shammas.

If you do not have a copy of The Jesus Storybook Bible, we will have them for purchase in Cranmer Hall for \$10.