

Crime and Punishment: How the Nations Came to Be

Genesis 11.1-9

Genesis 10 provides a ‘table of nations’ that came from the sons of Noah and filled the earth. But how did it happen? Gen. 11.1-9 tells the story: God confused languages at Babel, people were scattered, and nations were born – all part of God’s ‘master plan’ to save us.

Crime: Pride – the ultimate rebellion against God (1-4)

- *The way we were*: Same language, same lingo (1)
- *Birds of a feather*: All together in one place (2)
- *We did it our way*: Human ingenuity on display (3)
- *Making a name*: Security and significance without God (4)

Punishment: Confuse and Divide (5-9)

- Problem: Unbridled collective apostasy (5-6)
- Solution: Confuse language, confound understanding (7)
- Result: Scattered over the whole earth (8-9)

Wisdom and Hope from the Incident at Babel

A united sinful world leads to unbridled evil.

Nations are God’s way of limiting evil in a sinful world.

Great nations cannot defy God and long survive.

One day all nations and tongues will be united by Christ.



Digging Deeper

1. Most people who know the story of Babel think it is all about a tower. It isn't. The inhabitants of the land of Shinar planned to build a city with a tower *whose top will reach into heaven* (v4), but the real problem was their rebellion against God's plan for mankind. What did God want the descendants of Noah's sons to do (Gen. 9.1b)? What did they do instead (11.1-2, 4b)? Do you see a parallel between these actions and what Cain did in 4.17? What resulted from Cain's actions (4.19, 23-24; 6.5)? Why were the rebellious actions of the city of Babel so dangerous (11.6)? *For reflection: Today we have raised 'world peace' and unity to a level of highest virtue (e.g., the 'United Nations'), as if we only need to find unity to solve all our problems. What does the Babel story suggest about this kind of effort?*
2. Compare Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve (3.5, 22) with the motivation of the people at Babel (11.4, 6). What similarities do you see? What is the 'core sin'? Is this sin still with us today?
3. Ancient Babel (Babylon), the beginning of Nimrod's kingdom (10.10), was viewed as the 'center of the world' in its time, and its name meant 'gate of the gods' – it was where deities resided! Notice the irony in the biblical narrative: Gen. 11.9 tells us that it was called Babel *because there the Lord confused* (Heb. בָּבֶל, *balal*) *the language of the whole earth*. In their pride, Babylon thought of itself as 'the city of gods,' and built a tower 'to reach to heaven' to prove it. Nothing would force them to leave their city! But God *came down* (11.5) to see their city, and in a play on their name *Babel*, confused (*balal*) them, scattering them over the whole earth (11.8-9). *What is the warning here for we who live in the United States – a 'great nation' – today?*
4. This completes the *tôledôt* section of Gen. 10.1-11.9, the story of what happened to Noah's sons. The end of the story is bleak: Humankind is confused, scattered, separated from God and each other. There is no grace for the future, no hope for victory over the seed of the serpent. Or is there? Can you see a 'ray of hope' on 'the horizon of the plains of Shinar'? What is God doing?