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Let Us Build a City and Make a Name for Ourselves

11: 1-4

Let us build a city and make a name for ourselves DIG: Why did the people of Shinar build that tower? What was their real motivation? Why is such unity wrong? What is Humanism? Who was Nimrod and what did he start? What is the inevitable fate of all such man made schemes?

REFLECT: What is the lesson here for empire-building? For human ambition? For who to follow? Is that also true for pastors or messianic rabbis?

As might be expected, the survivors of the Flood spoke only one language. **Now the whole world had one language**, the Hebrew literally means *of one lip, a common speech and* vocabulary (**11:1**). As we have already seen, that **language** was Hebrew, as all names were Hebrew names prior to this chapter. In addition, all the word plays have only made sense in Hebrew. This chapter explains why the dispersion of **Chapter 10** took place.

As men moved eastward from Ararat and the Armenia-Turkish area, **they found a plain in Shinar and settled there (11:2)**. Their descendants eventually moved to **Shinar** (an ancient name for Babylonia) and settled there. It was there **they** decided to rebel against **Elohim**. Led by **Nimrod**, his fellow rebels decided to build a city and a tower in order to make a name for **themselves** as well as to demonstrate **their** sense of unity. **They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly."** **They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar (11:3)**. If **they** had been living in Palestine, they would have used **stone** and **mortar** as building materials, but since **they** were in Babylonia **they** used **brick** and **tar**. There was very little **stone** available for use in building in ancient Mesopotamia, as the brick structures routinely excavated by archaeologists in that part of the world so vividly illustrate.²⁰⁴

Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city." This was the counsel

of the princes, to make Nimrod king over the whole human race. This desire to **build a city** existed even before the Flood. **Cain was building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch (4:17b).** Here again we have **the building of a city** connected with **those** who were evidently apathetic toward **God**. At first it was not so much wickedness as it was indifference. **He** was not in **their** life. But, as is always the case, from indifference soon came rebellion. Whenever a religious system glorifies humanity, it takes the focus off of **ADONAI** and turns **their** focus inward. It is not long before **they** minimize **the LORD** and make **Him** nothing. Culture, civilization, intellect and progress are all gifts from **God** to us. And when **people** are yielded to **ADONAI** **they** become a blessing. But when **they** are not handed over to **Elohim** who gave them in the first place, but are kept for mankind's own power and authority, **they** lead **people** further and further away from **Him** and become a curse.²⁰⁵ A self-reliant society, under the power of a gifted leader, would be a society no longer dependent upon **God**. This was **Nimrod's** aim.



In addition, **the people of Shinar** wanted to **build a tower that reaches to the heavens (11:4a).** The great **tower** would dominate **the city**, both architecturally and culturally. It would serve as the focal point of the political and religious life of the population, and would be a symbol of **their** unity and strength.²⁰⁶ The Hebrew name Babylon is **Babel, which** means *the gate of God*. **The Tower of Babel was not a monument to the one true God, but to prideful mankind. It reveals man's arrogant, defiant, rebellious attitude against ADONAI. And because they wanted to shut God out, His name is appropriately absent from this section.** Therefore, the Babel of the earth is set against the Jerusalem in heaven; the city of man opposed to the city of **God**. True unity is based upon **the LORD** and upon spiritual life in **Him**. **There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to one hope when you were called - one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:4-6).**

What was **their** real motivation? **So that we may make a name for ourselves.** This was nothing more than open rebellion against **Elohim**. Humility is often equated with trust and obedience, and conversely pride, as seen here, is related to independence and disobedience.²⁰⁷ The desire to **make a name** for oneself also existed before the Flood. **The Nephilim were heroes of old, men of renown (6:4).** At its most basic element, this is humanism and comes from the wrong motivation. Humanism starts with mankind putting self in the place of **the LORD** and eliminating **Him** from the center of our lives. Humanists do not believe in **God**. **They** become a god unto **themselves**. **They** believe that everyone has the right to determine **their** own destiny. **They** believe in situational ethics and have no concept of absolute authority. **Their** desire is to force **God** to bend to **their** will and are **wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight** (see the commentary on **Isaiah, to see link click Bi - Woe to Those who are Wise in Their Own Eyes**).²⁰⁸

This prideful human achievement was nothing more than a return to Adam and Eve's effort to **be like God (3:5)**. **Their** ultimate desire, led by the Adversary, was to **ascend above the tops of the clouds** and **make** themselves **like the Most High (Isaiah 14:14)**. **In the pride of their** hearts they wanted **to say: I am a god (Ezeki'el 28:2)**. And by doing so **they** would be emulating **their** father the devil, who **will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up on ADONAI's Temple, proclaiming himself to be God (Second Thessalonians 2:4)**.

But their goal was thwarted and they were **scattered over the whole face of the earth (11:4b)**. This was, of course, an act of rebellion against **God** in opposition with **His** Covenant with Noah (**9:1** and **7**). Confusion is always the inevitable fate of all such man made schemes.

At the Constitutional Convention of 1787, Benjamin Franklin quoted the King James Version of **Psalms 127:1** when he said: **Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it.** He then continued, "I firmly believe this, and I also believe that without **His** concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel."