

Genesis 11:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

Analysis

And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let u... This passage belongs to the primeval history section (Genesis 1-11) which establishes universal truths about God, humanity, sin, and divine purposes before focusing on Abraham and Israel. These chapters answer fundamental questions about human origins, the spread of wickedness, God's judgment, and the preservation of a righteous remnant.

Recurring patterns emerge: human sin escalating from individual disobedience to societal corruption, divine patience followed by judgment, gracious preservation of a remnant, and covenant promises ensuring redemptive purposes continue. The genealogies connect historical persons, demonstrate the fulfillment of divine promises (blessing and multiplication), and trace the line leading to Abraham and ultimately Christ.

Key theological themes in this section include:

1. sin's destructive progression affecting all humanity
2. God's righteous judgment while preserving mercy
3. human pride and autonomy opposing divine sovereignty
4. cultural development as both blessing and potential idolatry
5. God's sovereign plan advancing despite human rebellion.

These narratives provide the necessary context for understanding God's calling of Abraham and the covenant promises through which all nations will be blessed.

Historical Context

The primeval history (Genesis 1-11) parallels ancient Near Eastern traditions including Sumerian King Lists (pre-flood longevity), Akkadian flood traditions (Atrahasis, Gilgamesh), and Mesopotamian city foundation myths. However, Genesis demythologizes these traditions, presenting monotheistic history rather than polytheistic mythology. The genealogies connecting Adam to Noah to Abraham provide historical framework absent in pagan myths.

Archaeological evidence confirms ancient urbanization (chapter 4's cities), agricultural development, metallurgy, and musical instruments emerging in Mesopotamia's early history. The Babel account reflects Mesopotamian ziggurat construction (stepped pyramid temples), particularly in Babylon. Linguistic diversity requiring explanation was obvious to ancient peoples, making the Babel narrative culturally relevant.

For Israel in covenant with Yahweh, these chapters explained their relationship to surrounding nations. All peoples descended from Noah, but Israel descended from Shem through Abraham—chosen for blessing all nations. The flood demonstrated God's justice and mercy: judging wickedness while preserving the righteous. This pattern would recur throughout Israel's history, assuring them that God's covenant faithfulness endures despite judgment on the wicked.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does this verse contribute to the biblical doctrine of creation, fall, or redemption?
2. How can we apply the principles from this passage to contemporary challenges in family, work, or church?
3. How does understanding Christ as the ultimate fulfillment illuminate this passage's meaning?

Interlinear Text

וְרֹאשׁ	וּ	וּמִגְדָּל	וְ	וְרֹאשׁ	וּ	וּמִגְדָּל	וְ
And	they	said	Go	to	let	us	build
H559			H3051		H1129		H0
						us	a city
						H5892	and a tower
						H4026	whose top
						H7218	
בָּשָׂם	וְ	לְ	כִּי	שָׁם	וְ	פָּנִים	
may	reach	unto	heaven	and	let	us	make
H8064			H6213		H0	H8034	H6435
כָּל	פָּנִים	לְ	כָּל	פָּנִים	לְ	כָּל	כָּל
lest	we	be	scattered	abroad	upon	the	face
H6327			H5921		H6440	H3605	H776
כָּל	כָּל	כָּל	כָּל	כָּל	כָּל	כָּל	כָּל
of	the	whole	earth	of	the	whole	earth

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 1:28 (Parallel theme): Whither shall we go up? our brethren have discouraged our heart, saying, The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there.

John 5:44 (Parallel theme): How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?

Luke 1:51 (Parallel theme): He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

Deuteronomy 9:1 (Parallel theme): Hear, O Israel: Thou art to pass over Jordan this day, to go in to possess nations greater and mightier than thyself, cities great and fenced up to heaven,

Proverbs 10:7 (Parallel theme): The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot.

Daniel 4:30 (Parallel theme): The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?

Daniel 4:11 (Parallel theme): The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth:

2 Samuel 8:13 (Parallel theme): And David gat him a name when he returned from smiting of the Syrians in the valley of salt, being eighteen thousand men.

Genesis 6:4 (Parallel theme): There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.

Psalms 92:9 (Parallel theme): For, lo, thine enemies, O LORD, for, lo, thine enemies shall perish; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered.