

# THE COST OF PRIDE



*Genesis 11:1-9*

THE TOWER OF BABEL



Special Music: Tower of Babel

Don Francisco

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QunHSM4Zm8>

## Genesis 11:1-9

- 1 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech.
- 2 As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.
- 3 They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar.
- 4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."
- 5 But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building.
- 6 The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.

**7 Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”**

**8 So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.**

**9 That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.**

## **A MATTER OF PRIDE**

The bump in the road jostled the car, and Marilee was pulled from her slumber in the passenger seat. She moaned and then sat up, “What in the world, Andy? You need to be more careful. Are you getting tired? You want me to drive for a while?”

“No, Marilee. I don’t want you to drive. I’m fine. Can’t you see I’m fine? It was just a bump in the road. Nothing to worry about.”

“Are we getting close to Parable?” Marilee asked sleepily.

“I’m pretty sure we’re close. I followed the map. There was a confusing turn about an hour back, but I’m sure I took the right cutoff from the freeway. We should be there soon.”

“Just how pretty sure are you, Andy? How can you read the map in the dark anyway?”

“I know what I am doing, Marilee. Why don’t you just go back to sleep? I will wake you when we get there.”

Marilee glanced at the clock on the dash. “My word, Andy! It’s two o’clock in the morning. How long have I been asleep? We should have been there hours ago! Where are we?”

“Well, I’m pretty sure we are close to Parable. We have to be. I know what I’m doing. Now be quiet and go back to sleep!”

Marilee shook her head to help wake up and then took a sip of the cold, stale coffee they had picked up at the last gas station. No, wait, they couldn't have driven for this long without getting gas again. "Did you stop somewhere for gas, Andy?"

"Well, yeah. I had to. You were asleep and I let you sleep. I stopped in San Angelo just long enough to fill up,"

Marilee closed her eyes and thought about that. When she realized what he had said, she spoke up in a tense voice, "San Angelo? San Angelo is on the other side of Parable. You missed an exit, didn't you?"

Andy hem-hawed around and then gruffly replied, "Well, yeah. But it could have happened to anyone. If you had been awake you might have been able to help me see it."

"Now hold on, Andy. You don't let me navigate. You won't even let me hold the map. Like always, you insisted you knew exactly what you were doing. You can't blame me for this." Marilee pouted and paused for a minute. After she had thought about it, she said, "You don't know where we are, do you, Andy? Do you even know what road we're on?"

"Of course I do. It's Highway 483... no, I mean County Road 278... I'll let you know when I see the next sign, okay?" Andy said in frustration.

"Did you even call Katie and tell her where we are and that we are running late? I'm sure she is worried." Marilee paused again. "Oh right, you don't know

where we are, and you didn't want to tell our daughter that we are lost. Do you even know in what direction we're going?"

"Well, the moon's on our right so we must be going East."

"Andy, pull over."

"What? No... we're almost there."

"Andy, you need to pull over."

"Why should I do that? We'll be there in a few minutes."

Marilee frowned and held her breath. "Andy, when you stopped, did you even think to ask for directions?"

Andy appeared flabbergasted. "Why would I do that? I know where I'm going. I'm not lost. I looked at the map. We're good. Just be patient."

Marilee gave a deep sigh. "Andy, I want to drive for a while. And if you don't mind, I think I'll turn on the GPS."

"Now why would you want to do that? You know I don't trust those things! We could wind up anywhere! No, just settle back and we will be there soon."

Up ahead, Marilee spotted a sign that read, "Bent Tree Motel – Vacancy."

"Andy, I want you to pull into that motel. Let's get a room and start fresh in the morning."

"But Marilee! We are almost there. I can feel it!"

**“Andy, I do not want to spend the night in the car. Pull into that motel. We’re spending the night here. I’m tired and I don’t want to argue about this.”**

**Andy knew he wasn’t going to win this one, so he pulled into the drive by the lobby entrance. They went inside and a nice young man named Tim met them at the desk. Andy spoke first and said, “We would like a room for the night, please. Your sign says you have a vacancy.”**

**“Sure thing, Mr...”**

**“Donaldson,” said Andy**

**“Would that be Andy and Marilee Donaldson? Is Katie Callaway your daughter?”**

**“How did you...,?” Andy stammered.**

**“Katie called earlier, Mr. and Mrs. Donaldson. She reserved you a room and said that you would probably be coming in very late... and from the wrong direction.”**

**“She said what?” Andy exclaimed.**

**“It’s really not a problem,” Tim said. “Your room is ready. It’s right around the corner. Here are your keys. Do you need help with your luggage?”**

**“But our daughter lives in Parable!” said Andy.**

**“Exactly, sir. Which is where you happen to be,” Tim said as he came out from behind the corner to help them with their bags.**

**“Such a nice young man,” Marilee said, not holding back her laughter.**

**Andy’s face was red with embarrassment. Once again, he had been caught letting his pride get the best of him. It’s a good thing that Marilee still found it amusing after all their years together.**

I recently saw a video that astounded me. The video was on the Ghost Cities in China. These cities started being built in the 1990s and continued well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Both the government and investors of the time were looking at a growing financial market in China and felt a need to build cities that would be inhabited by millions of people as the economy boomed. Unfortunately, the Asian financial crisis in the early 2000s caused severe economic hardships, and many of the buildings were never finished. Today, the majority of these cities remain uninhabited. There are skyscrapers, apartment complexes, gorgeous homes, recreational facilities, parks, statues, working street lights, and stop lights. One of these cities is a replication of Paris, including the Eiffel Tower and the Arche de Triomphe. Another is a replica of London complete with cobblestone streets. These cities that were built to handle millions of people and businesses have less than 1000 residents each. If you Google “China’s Ghost Cities” you can learn more about them. It is almost worth a visit to China just to see these Ghost Cities. They are amazingly spooky when you look at them.

These cities currently serve no practical purpose, but thousands of acres of farmland were destroyed to build them. The cities could handle the entire homeless population of China and still have plenty of room for more people. They were a vision that far exceeded the need. Living in these cities is far beyond the income of the millions of Chinese meant to inhabit them. And yet, investors continue to hold onto their property in hopes that one day they can glean a little profit or at least break even.



The story of The Tower of Babel is the first campfire tale to occur after the great flood. Genesis 10 is the genealogy of Noah's sons which directly leads into the story of the Tower in Genesis 11. The story is very short and leaves a great deal to interpretation. It is a tale told to explain why different peoples on earth speak different languages. It is also worth noting that the Hebrew for Babel is the same as for Babylon. There are a great number of differing opinions of whether this is a coincidence or a puzzle piece in history. I am not a historian and would hesitate to speculate on the facts surrounding this city. The Tower is never called The Tower of Babel in the Bible. The city is referred to as Babel and the Tower is simply referred to as The Tower.

But the inhabitants of the city wanted to leave their mark on the world by building this city and this tower, monuments to their engineering and artistic skills. They even started construction with hand-made bricks rather than the rocks normally used during this period. They used tar for mortar.

Probably the most often asked question about The Tower of Babel is not about the creation of diverse languages, but about how tall it was. No one knows how tall the tower was or even how tall it was supposed to be. But there have been a number of different arguments that propose the height to be anywhere from three stories (which would have been a marvel for the time), up to a mile high. The suggested height is really a matter of perspective. There's a song in the Musical "Oklahoma" called "Kansas City" with the lyric:

**"Everything's up to date in Kanas City.**

**They've gone about as far as they can go.**

**They've gone and built a skyscraper that's seven stories tall.**

**About as tall as a building ought to grow."**

**Perspective. It's all about perspective.**

**In the long run, does it really matter how tall it was? After all, it was never finished. The point of the story is not how tall it was, but the attitude of the people believing that nothing was impossible for them. They took God out of the equation by seeking to build this city and towering structure as a tribute to their own magnificence.**

**4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."**

**They were building a tower that said, "Hey, look at us! See how wonderful we are. We know that when you see this tower you will want to be a part of us. Because we are so magnificent, you will obviously want to settle among us." And all the time they were thinking, "If people appreciate how wonderful it is to be amongst our greatness, they won't go other places and challenge us in the future. It's a win-win for everyone."**

**Isn't it amazing how many people believe that the world would be so much better off if all the people would just do things their way? That the world is in such chaos because we don't all submit to their opinions and ideas? "Come on**

**everyone. Join me and I promise you that everyone will have a chicken in the pot, a car in the garage, a beautiful place to live, a good job that you enjoy, lots of money in the bank, and few burdens to hinder you. All you have to do is submit to the way I tell you to do things.”**

**There's a Calvin and Hobbes cartoon by Paul L Wilson that I love. In it, Calvin is talking with Hobbes and says, "I'm at peace with the world. I'm completely serene. I've discovered my purpose in life. I know why I was put here and why everything exists. Yes, I am here so everybody can do what I want. Once everyone accepts it, they'll be serene, too."**

**That sense of hubris abides in all of us to some extent. It becomes an issue in many marriages. A woman may ask her spouse to fold the clothes, and he, with great intent to please her, folds the clothes. And the wife demeans the husband by telling him that he did it all wrong and proceeds to show him how she wants it done, never accepting the fact that there may actually be another way to fold clothes. A man may ask his wife if she would mind taking out the trash because he is running late for work. When he gets home and sees that the trash isn't where he expects it to be, he derides her for not knowing better. How often do we get upset with children when we ask them to do something and they do what they think we are asking, only to be talked down to because they didn't do it the way we expected them to, nor did we instruct them properly to begin with? We truly believe that we have all the answers. Especially to things that we do all the time, forgetting that there was a point in our past where we had to learn and adapt. Somehow, we think everyone should want to please us through some kind**

of osmosis, that they should be able to read our minds. After all, shouldn't it be obvious the way things ought to be done? You know, OUR WAY.

God looks at the attempt to build the tower in Babel and says, "This can't happen. They're getting too big for their britches. Their heads have grown too large for their bodies. So, I will throw a monkey wrench into their plans to bring them down a notch."

**7 Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."**

**8 So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.**

So, the very thing that the builders of the great city were trying to avoid, the scattering of the population, was the very thing that happened. Which is what God intended all along.

I want to point out that this story of the Tower of Babel is a Campfire Tale, a story told around the campfires of early Nomadic people to explain events that they didn't understand. They had to wonder why people they encountered spoke different languages. Jesus uses the same storytelling tradition with his parables. Whether the story is fact or fiction, doesn't really matter. It is what we take away from the story that matters. It is about what the story teaches us. When we hear the story, does it make us think, possibly questioning our culture and belief system? Such a statement does not mean the story isn't true. It simply means

that God presents us with a way to challenge ourselves when it comes to our own hubris.

When we examine the story, the focus is not on how different languages came into being. No, the focus is on how we choose to lift ourselves by taking our Creator out of our human experience. When we believe that we no longer need God, that the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ doesn't matter, because our opinions are based in the reality of a world subject to our own perceptions. Such an opinion does not negate the existence of God or his love for his children. It simply means that we have lost our perspective and limited our understanding of God to our own preconceptions. God does not stop being God simply because we don't believe in him. God is not dependent on our belief in him. It is only when we get rid of our pride and step into his mercy and grace that we can begin to see God for who he is, not limited by our own vision and experience.

Peter tells us in his second letter:

**The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**

I find those words truly astonishing. How gently and patiently God deals with us in our stiff-necked obstinance and pride. How merciful for God to forgive our sins by allowing his son to die on that cross at Calvary. Nothing that we could ever do would make us deserving of such grace. It is the reason so many non-

Christian have difficulty embracing a relationship with Christ. To do so means that we all have to come humbly to the cross, admitting our sins and our faults. So many people are unable to lay their pride aside and humble themselves at the grace of Jesus Christ. Dying to self is hard. For us to teach that we can have a fruitful relationship with our Lord and keep our pride is contrary to everything that Jesus taught.

This week, I want us all to take time to examine our pride and our hubris, remembering that such an attitude is unjustified in our relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul tells us in his letter to the church at Galatia, **“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”** Are those words written on our hearts and minds? They should be. They are words that are basic to our salvation and service.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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