

# The Navel Of The Earth

Long Beach Alliance Church • Happy Mother's Day • May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2006 • Pastor Chris Lankford

**THEY SAID, "COME, LET US BUILD FOR OURSELVES A CITY, AND A TOWER WHOSE TOP WILL REACH INTO HEAVEN, AND LET US MAKE FOR OURSELVES A NAME, OTHERWISE WE WILL BE SCATTERED ABROAD OVER THE FACE OF THE WHOLE EARTH."**

**THE LORD CAME DOWN TO SEE THE CITY AND THE TOWER WHICH THE SONS OF MEN HAD BUILT.**

**~GENESIS 11:4-5 (NASB)**

## **1) Is It Lots Of Languages, Or Only One?**

- A) Genesis 10 is the genealogical list which follows the 'Flood Account' (Noah & The Ark - Genesis 6-9). Genesis 10 is broken into three sections, according to the sons of Noah (Genesis 10:1; Japheth - 10:2; Ham - 10:6; and Shem - 10:21).
  
- B) Genesis 10 is a "horizontal" genealogy reporting the descendents of the three sons of Noah. However, the focus is on the eldest son (Shem). The line of Shem drops off with Joktan (10:25-29), but is picked up again in Genesis 11:18 with Joktan's brother Peleg, who would become the 'father' of Terah, the father of Abram (11:26-31).
  
- C) The "focal emphasis" of Genesis 10 is to describe a "Table of Nations" where the peoples of the earth are organized by "their families, according to their languages, by their lands, by their nations" (10:5, 20, 31-32).
  
- D) The text begs the question, "How did this happen?" The answer is provided in a "deliberate dischronologization" (a flash-back) to how the world ended up separated and speaking different languages (Genesis 11, The Tower of Babel account).

## 2) Unified Language, Unified Hearts

- A) After the flood, the whole earth spoke the same language (Genesis 11:1) and journeyed to "the East\*," where they began to build with brick and tar (1:2-3).
  
- B) The goal of the building project was directly in opposition to God's plans (cf. Genesis 9:7). With the expressed purpose of preserving both their name and their unity (11:4), an enormous tower† is begun to "reach into heaven."
  
- C) The irony of Genesis 11:5 is thick. The builders intention was to build a tower which will reach into the heavenly realm. But the tower is so small that God must "come down" to see what mankind has built.
  
- D) What God finds is not (notably) a city or tower (neither are mentioned as being of issue), but rather a people who have joined together in an arrogant opposition of God. This is the crux of God's issue with mankind, their delusional self-sufficiency from the false religion of freedom and corporate security.
  
- E) God states that this first great building project must be stopped, or mankind will once again pursue a route of ignoring God. Mankind will be in the same unfortunate position they were before Noah, attempting to throw off God and rule their own universe.

## 3) The Scattering Judgement Of God's Blessing

- A) God scatters humanity (note, "in the days of" Peleg, cf. Genesis 10:25, 11:18ff.) by "mixing up" their languages (11:7-8). Today, as then, "Babylonians" everywhere must abandon self-erected ziggurat's of God-absent living and chasing after "a name" for themselves and find identity and purpose in Jesus Christ (John 1:12).

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\* The mention in Genesis 11:2 of the journey to "the East" indicates the potential for trouble. In Genesis "east" or "from the east" sometimes (but not always) suggests movement away from God. When Adam & Eve were banished from the garden, the cherubim angel guarded the entry at the "east of the garden of Eden" (3:24). Cain was sent to Nod, "east of Eden" (4:16). Shem's descendents occupy the "hill country to the east" (10:30). Babel is to the "east" (11:2). Genesis 16:12 gives a clear allusion that "to the east" is a negative term, meaning "outside of the family." (Collected from various sources, esp. *Genesis*, by Kent Hughes, page 170).

† The reference is certainly to a ziggurat. The lofty, massive, solid brick, multistaged temple tower (see example picture on the front of the worship guide) that was the outstanding feature of most Mesopotamian cities and dominated their landscapes. The name is derived from a verb meaning "to build high." The function of the ziggurat was to symbolize a mountain. The sacred mountain played an important role in most religions. Rooted in the earth, with its head lost in the clouds, it was taken as the meeting place between heaven and earth and, as such, the natural arena of divine activity. On the heights of grand ziggurats, gods were imagined to have their abodes. The sacred mountain was observed as the center of the universe, the "navel of the earth." Many ziggurat names reveal the mountain motif... The ziggurat of Nippur was called "The House of the Mountain." At Larsa, "The House of the Link between Heaven and Earth." The most famous ziggurat of all, the one at Babylon (the focus of the present narrative) was known as "The House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth." It was perceived that this man-made mountain would be the physical location by which man and god might enter into direct contact with one another. (*Genesis*, by Nahum Sarna, page 82).