Just a Thought

After the Tower

“Let us make a name for ourselves.”
—Genesis 11:4

Most of us remember the Tower of Babel.

The people gathered on the plain of Shinar. They built a city and began a tower. They sought a name for themselves and intended to remain together. God confused their language and scattered them across the earth.

That is usually where we leave the story.

We follow the people who went away and give little thought to the place they left behind.

But the scattering was not the end of Babylon’s story.

Babel and Babylon are the same name in Hebrew. The different forms in our English Bibles can obscure a connection that runs through Scripture. The place associated with the unfinished tower belongs to the story of the city that would later become the seat of a mighty empire.

Genesis does not identify who remained there or describe how the area was subsequently populated. It tells us that the building stopped and the people were scattered. Yet when Babylon appears again in the biblical account, we should recognize the name.

We have been here before.

On the plain of Shinar, men sought greatness apart from submission to God. Centuries later, Babylon displayed that ambition through armies, wealth, palaces, and royal power. It conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, and carried God’s people into captivity.

The tower had ceased to occupy the story. The rebellion had not.

Babylon’s long prominence might have suggested that human power could establish something permanent. Generations came and went. Kings ruled. Commerce flourished. To those living beneath its authority, the empire must have seemed far more substantial than a warning about an ancient tower.

Yet its greatness could not preserve it from God’s judgment.

And Scripture’s use of its name did not end with the fall of the historical empire.

When we reach Revelation, Babylon stands before us as the great image of human civilization organized in opposition to God. Kings share in her pleasures. Merchants grow wealthy through her abundance. Her promises attract the nations, while her hands bear the blood of God’s people.

What began on the plain of Shinar has become a picture of the world’s rebellion in its accumulated splendor.

Then heaven announces:

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!”
—Revelation 18:2

The name that has followed us through Scripture finally stands beneath a sentence it cannot escape.

That is why Babel deserves more than a passing thought about the origin of different languages. Its story directs our attention to a persistent human confidence: that we can establish our security, determine our future, and secure our greatness independently of God.

We still live among those promises.

We work, raise families, build, buy, and make plans. These ordinary activities do not require us to share Babylon’s allegiance. But we must consider where we place our confidence and whose glory we seek.

The believer’s hope rests in Christ. His kingdom will outlast every power that appears permanent today.

At Babel, God stopped the building. In Revelation, Babylon’s judgment is complete. Across that long account, human ambition never escapes divine authority.

When we read about the scattered people, then, let us look back for a moment at the place they left.

Babylon’s story was far from finished.

But God already held its ending.

And as we consider our own place in that story, one question remains:

Where have we placed our hope—in the greatness of Babylon, or in the kingdom that cannot be shaken?

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