



**The Living Truth Fellowship**  
MAGNIFYING JESUS CHRIST, THE LIVING TRUTH

## **The Tower of Babel and Pentecost**

### **A Tale of Two Cities**

The opening line of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," has captivated the imagination of millions of readers. It also offers a fitting analogy for showing the contrasting parallels between what happened at Babel in Genesis 6 and what happened on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. In the Tower of Babel, we see the worst of times, while in Pentecost we see the best of times. In the Tower of Babel, we see conflict, while in Pentecost we see resolution. It may well be said that the accounts of the Tower of Babel and Pentecost make perfect bookends in the epic tale of the entire Bible story. Between the two accounts, we see God slowly but surely working with people in order to bring unity and clarity instead of division and confusion.

Both accounts are composed of words, but not just any words. Psalms 12:6 tell us that each and every word God uses has been purified 7 times. He told us that so we would know that He had a reason for putting each word, each sentence, and each story where He put it and how it related to other stories. The order in which He puts things is a big part of how He wants us to understand His will. Seeing the parallels and the contrasts between different stories serves to highlight the brilliance of God's plan for His people. It is no accident that God tells us about the Tower of Babel in the beginning of the story and the day of Pentecost towards the end.

In the opening paragraph, we've already seen one parallel between the two stories. One, the Tower of Babel, introduces conflict. We see God's hope for all people living according to His will dashed to pieces. The people that came to the plain of Shinar had their own ideas of which god to follow. They rebelled against the one God who created the cosmos and defined how life should be. Instead, they were following in the footsteps of Adam and Eve who thought they could determine good and evil, of what led to a society as God intended and what led to a failed society. In the other story, the day of Pentecost, we see that conflict resolved. Instead of rebelling against God, the apostles obey God's command to tarry in Jerusalem until they should be endued with power from on high. They would once again be in God's perfect image, which was God's original desire from the day He created Adam and Eve and told them to cover the entire land with an offspring that would be perfect images of Himself.

In Genesis 11 we see the people going from a common language to many different languages. Whereas they began with the ability to understand each other, they ended up unable to



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communicate with each other. Tribalism entered the scene, bringing with it division, mistrust, jealousy, and ultimately war. In contrast to that, Acts 2 begins with many different languages and ends with everybody, regardless of their native tongue, understanding the Apostles as they spoke the wonderful works of God in languages which they themselves knew not. It is the spoken word alone that can make many people from all cultures and walks of life as one in Christ. Where man's wisdom led to division and confusion in Genesis, God's wisdom led to unity and clarity in the book of Acts.

In Genesis 11 the people got together in order to "make a name" for themselves. In the Ancient Near East, that meant ensuring a good legacy, that future generations would look back at their ancestors with admiration. The word "name" is the Hebrew word "shem" which Strong's Concordance defines as:

1. an appellation, as a mark or memorial of individuality.
2. (by implication) honor, authority, character.

Was it not enough honor, authority, and character that God gave Adam and Eve when He created them in His image and gave them dominion over all the land? Clearly, their ability to judge between good and evil had deteriorated to a most dismal degree! But on the day of Pentecost that changed as we learn of another name, a name that holds all the honor, authority, and character as God Himself; Jesus Christ. Peter told the people that it was his name that would bring remission of sins and the gift of holy spirit. It is a legacy that will remain ultra-bright for eternity. It will never diminish nor be forgotten. Now that is a legacy on steroids!

It is believed by most scholars that the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 was a ziggurat. The purpose of such a ziggurat was to provide a means for the gods to come down and be with the people. At the top of every ziggurat, the part that "reached into the heavens," was a small room where the god would come down from heaven and reside in the land. At least that was the hope of the people who built a ziggurat. Having a god dwelling within the city was essential for maintaining security from invading tribes, for ensuring a bountiful harvest, and for the health and prosperity of all the residents. Thus, in their minds at least, the importance of providing a place for the god to dwell was an absolute essential need. In contrast, on the day of Pentecost we see God Himself providing a place where He could dwell among the people. The sound that came from heaven, along with the tongues of fire that sat upon the apostles were sure signs that God and Christ Jesus, by way of the gift of holy spirit, took up residence in their hearts and minds. The essence of what happened on that day is God in Christ in you. The Tower of Babel now lays in ruin. In stark contrast, the gift of holy spirit is our assurance of an everlasting fellowship with God and with His son, Jesus Christ. The gift given at Pentecost will never decay or lay in ruin.



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I'd like to make one final comparison between Genesis 11 and the early chapters of Acts (although there are probably more). Both accounts describe a scattering of the people. But the difference between the two scatterings is astounding. An unfortunate byproduct of God scattering the builders of the Tower of Babel was that they took their dysfunctional ideas with them, whereas before they were scattered, the dysfunction was at least somewhat localized. But after they were scattered their dysfunctional ideas now covered a wider geographical area. Certainly not God's primary will, but apparently it was better than letting it remain concentrated and end up doing who knows how much harm to His ultimate goal of sending a Messiah to redeem all mankind. But one thing is certain; the result of the scattering that occurred in Acts chapter 8, which took place not many years after Pentecost, was in stark contrast to the earlier scattering. When the early Christians moved out into the land, they took with them the good news of Jesus Christ. Today, we see the result of that scattering. Today, there is hardly a person who has not heard the gospel. It has been made available for all to know about the peace, the protection, the love, the unity, the hope of resurrection, and much more. When the early Christians moved out into the land, all the places that were filled with darkness became flooded with the light of God's love and grace.

I believe 1 Corinthians 1:25 offers a fitting summary of the whole matter: "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men".

The wisdom of the "masterminds" behind the Tower of Babel led the people to complete failure, whereas God led His people to the greatest success ever told. Unlike the tragedy that carried through Dickens' entire story, God's story ends on a most positive note, showing Him as a master of turning man's ideas upside down, right side up, and inside out. The light of Pentecost has shined out of the darkness of Babel to give us the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

God bless you richly,

*Rich Robson*