

One Nation United Against God: When Unity Leads to Rebellion

Genesis 11:1–9 | Bridge Fellowship Church Season 2: *Divided Hearts, Faithful God*

It was 2002.

A young pastor — sharp, gifted, theologically serious — planted a church in St. Louis, Missouri with almost nothing. Just a vision. A handful of people. And what felt like a clear call from God.

The church grew. Fast. Within a few years, The Journey Church was one of the most talked-about church plants in America. Books got written. Conference invitations came. His name started appearing on lists. And from the outside, everything looked exactly like it was supposed to look — a man surrendered to God, building something for the kingdom, doing it the right way.

But here's what nobody could see from the outside: something was shifting. Quietly. Slowly. Not a scandal. Not a sudden moral failure. Just a drift — the kind that doesn't announce itself. The kind that happens in the space between who you started out being and who you're becoming. The kind that looks like success on the outside while something is rotting on the inside.

In 2016 — fourteen years after he planted that church — everything came to a head.

What happened to Darrin Patrick didn't start in 2016. It started the moment he stopped asking whose glory he was building for.

And that is the question Genesis 11 refuses to let us avoid.

Because nobody wakes up and says: *"Today I'm going to rebel against God."* Nobody plants a church, starts a ministry, writes a check, or joins a movement thinking: *"This is Babel."* It never starts that way. It starts with opportunity. It starts with unity. It starts with ambition that feels righteous. It starts with people who look around at what they have — their resources, their ingenuity, their community — and say: *"Come. Let us build."*

That's exactly where Genesis 11 begins. One language. One people. One valley. And a building project that looked like progress — but God called it rebellion.

1. Babel Corrupts Our Picture of God

Genesis 11:1–4

On the surface, it looks like they're doing a good thing. Unity. One language. Common speech. The people migrate to a common place and settle. But when you read it carefully — when you think about what the text is actually saying — you start to realize something else is going on here. They're moving away. Not just geographically. Spiritually.

Remember who these people are: descendants of Ham, Shem, and Japheth — the nations God commanded to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. They find fertile land, resources, and space to build. But here is the problem. Opportunity without obedience is always a precursor to sin.

From verses 3 and 4, the narrative unfolds in three movements.

They innovate. They don't have access to stone, so they use oven-fired bricks — baked in kilns to harden them — and asphalt for mortar, the same bituminous material used to make the ark watertight. They are solving problems. Using human ingenuity. Nothing wrong with that in itself. But watch what they do with it.

They self-direct. Notice the repetition: *Let us. Ourselves. Ourselves.* This is humanity setting the agenda, defining the mission, calling the shots.

They build a ziggurat. A ziggurat is a step-pyramid common throughout the ancient Near East — unlike Egyptian pyramids with chambers inside, ziggurats were solid structures with brick on the outside and rubble filling the middle. They served one purpose: a stairway between heaven and earth. At the top sat a shrine. Inside that shrine: a bed, a table, food stocked on the table — so the deity could refresh himself as he descended from heaven to be worshiped in the temple below.

The ziggurat represented a system of belief in which god has needs. As people meet the gods' needs, god rewards the people with blessing. Transactional religion. Manipulation dressed up as devotion.

Bible scholar Kenneth Matthews puts it plainly: the irony is almost palpable. They think they are building to the heavens with brick and tar — the equivalent of cardboard and duct tape in architectural terms.

And here is their stated motivation: *"Let us make a name for ourselves — otherwise we will be scattered."*

Scattering was God's explicit command. In Genesis 9, God told Noah and his sons twice: *"Be fruitful. Multiply. Fill the earth."* Not stay together. Not consolidate in one place. Fill the earth. God said scatter. They said stay. God said fill the earth. They said build a monument. God said trust Me. They said we'll take care of ourselves.

Before going any further, it's essential to understand what this text is really about. This is not a story about architecture. It's a story about idolatry disguised as worship. It's about humanity attempting to remake God in their own image — to reshape Him according to their needs, to conscript Him into serving their agenda.

Here is the Babel Problem in one sentence: **They corrupted their picture of God, resulting in a god they expected to come down and be worshiped by having his needs met.**

They didn't reject God. They redesigned Him.

They built a system where humans provide what God needs, and God rewards what humans provide. Religion becomes transaction instead of transformation. Instead of God transforming you into His image, they flipped the script and made God serve them.

And here is what should concern every one of us: the Babel impulse didn't die at Babel. It's alive today — alive in our doctrine, alive in our expectations, alive in the way we pray, the way we give, and the way we define what it means to follow Jesus.

2. We All Want to Build Babel

Genesis 11:4

Verse 4 gives us the anatomy of the Babel impulse — three universal temptations embedded in one verse.

"Let us build ourselves" — self-centered religion. *"Make a name for ourselves"* — self-glory disguised as worship. *"Otherwise we will be scattered"* — fear-driven control of outcomes.

Every false gospel. Every corrupt doctrine. Every Babel tower echoes these three things. From them, four primary towers get built in every generation.

The Wealth Tower — Prosperity Gospel

Plant a seed — your money. Expect a harvest — God's money multiplied back to you. Sow into this ministry. God will bless you in return.

Same ziggurat theology. The ziggurat had a table stocked with food for the deity. The prosperity preacher has a ministry account waiting for your seed-faith offering. Both say the same thing: meet god's need, earn god's blessing.

Oral Roberts popularized this in the 1950s. By the 1980s, televangelists were preaching it as formula. In 2015, Creflo Dollar asked his congregation to help him purchase a \$65 million Gulfstream jet, arguing he needed it to spread the gospel. That's Babel. Different bricks. Same tower.

When your prayers about finances sound more like a talk with a financial adviser than submission to God, you're not at His throne. You're at Babel.

The Comfort Tower — Therapeutic Deism

This is the god of the self-help sermon. The divine life coach. The cosmic therapist who exists to validate feelings and affirm the journey. Church becomes a weekly pep talk. Repentance gets replaced with positive thinking. Holiness gets replaced with self-care.

Sociologists have a name for this: Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. It is the dominant folk religion of American Christianity — and it is Babel theology.

Therapeutic Christianity is like going to the gym only for the smoothie bar. You show up, consume what makes you feel good, and leave without ever doing the hard work that actually transforms you. You've been to the building — but you haven't experienced the purpose of the building.

Consider which passages you skip when you read your Bible. The ones about suffering? Persecution? Taking up your cross? Dying to self? If you've curated a version of Christianity that never makes you uncomfortable, you're not following Jesus. You're building Babel.

The Power Tower — Nationalist Christianity

This is the tower wrapped in a flag. The gospel fused with political power. Scripture quoted as campaign slogans. At Babel, they said: *"Come, let us build ourselves a city"* — exclusive unity, one language, one people, one agenda. And they expected God to bless it because they built it.

Nationalist Christianity does the exact same thing: *"God, we've built this nation for You. Now bless it. Protect it. Ensure our victory."*

The January 6 Capitol riot placed crosses and Christian flags alongside Confederate flags and conspiracy banners. That wasn't fringe Christianity. That was Babel with a flag on top.

Here is a direct question worth sitting with: If God called you to leave America permanently to serve Him in another country, would you go? Or have you built a tower you can't leave?

The Tribal Tower — Ethnic and Racial Unity

This is the Babel move of using shared ethnic identity as the foundation — with Jesus as the decoration. When it takes hold, Christ becomes a tribal mascot instead of universal Lord. A pastor's word gets elevated to equal or above Scripture. Loyalty to ethnic identity and charismatic leadership trumps submission to Biblical truth.

In the early 2000s, Bishop Eddie Long of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta had over 25,000 members — one of the largest Black churches in America. He preached prosperity gospel. He promoted himself as a "spiritual father" whose word was law. When multiple young men accused him of sexual coercion in 2010 and 2011, many congregants defended him — not based on biblical truth or evidence, but on tribal loyalty. *"Our pastor wouldn't do that. They're attacking a strong Black man."* The case settled out of court. Long's authority came not from Scripture but from his ability to articulate the Black experience and cultural pride. That's Babel — one people all having the same language, unified around tribal identity rather than Christ.

This needs to be said plainly. In Black culture there is a habit of worshiping the pastor — treating him and his family like royalty, giving preferential treatment in every area. It is a pattern that needs to be named and broken. No pastor is special in the sense of being above accountability to God's Word. The lead pastor is not the same as — or greater than — God's Word. He is the least of these, trying to serve God by serving His people regardless of race, gender, creed, or country of origin.

All four towers echo Genesis 11:4:

Prosperity Gospel: "Let us give — make our name great through wealth — otherwise we'll be financially scattered." *Therapeutic Deism:* "Let us construct emotional safety — make our feelings validated — otherwise we'll be emotionally scattered." *Nationalist Christianity:* "Let us build the Christian nation — make our nation great — otherwise we'll be politically scattered." *Tribal Christianity:* "Let us stay with our people — make our ethnic identity central — otherwise we'll be culturally scattered."

Same structure. Same impulse. Different vocabulary. God exists to serve us. That is the Babel move, every time.

3. Building Babel Is Dangerous and Comes with Consequences

Genesis 11:5–9

The narrative shifts. After humanity's grandiose plans, the text zooms out to God's perspective.

"The Lord came down."

This is divine irony at its finest. They built a tower to reach the sky — but God had to come down to see it. Their tower, meant to pierce the heavens, was so insignificant from God's vantage point that He had to descend just to inspect it. They thought they were building greatness. God had to squint to find it.

But here is the irony they didn't expect. They *wanted* God to come down. That was the whole point of the ziggurat — a stairway for the deity to descend and receive worship. And He did come down. Just not the way they expected. Instead of bringing blessing, He came to judge.

That is the danger of building Babel: you might get God's attention. Just not the kind you wanted.

"Nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them."

Pause. Is that a compliment? Is God impressed? No. It is a warning. Unified rebellion has unlimited potential — not for good, but for evil. This language echoes Genesis 6, where every inclination of man was evil all the time, until the whole world was corrupted. God is saying: if they stay unified in rebellion, there is no limit to the damage they'll do to themselves, to each other, and to the created order.

Some may wonder: why would a loving God judge people just for building a city? Here's what that question misses — **God's judgment was an act of mercy.**

Every totalitarian regime in history — Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, Maoist China, Khmer Rouge Cambodia — required three things: linguistic or cultural unity, centralized power, and ideological conformity. When you have all three, there is no limit to the evil that can be organized. God scattered humanity to protect them from themselves. He didn't dismantle Babel because He was threatened. He dismantled Babel because He was merciful.

He confuses their language. Without shared language, collaboration is impossible. They can't finish what they can't communicate. They can't stay together if they can't understand each other. So they scatter — and the building project stops. Not because they chose to stop. Because they couldn't continue.

Notice what God targets: their unity. Language was the tool of their rebellion. God removes the tool. The very thing that enabled their rebellion becomes the instrument of their judgment.

Here is what Genesis 11 is teaching: you can build Babel and think you're building the kingdom. You can have unity and still be in rebellion. You can have impressive religion and still experience God's judgment. You can have a megachurch and be building Babel. You can have financial success and be building Babel. You can have emotional peace and be building Babel. You can have political power and be building Babel. You can have cultural pride and be building Babel.

The question is not how successful is your tower. The question is whose glory it is being built for.

Because here is what is sobering: you can stand before God one day with a résumé full of religious activity and hear Him say, *"I never asked you to build that."*

4. Babel Is a Subtle Seducer That Must Be Guarded Against

Genesis 11:5–9 & 12:1–3

Babel doesn't announce itself. It starts small — a prayer that sounds like a negotiation, a fear that drives religious activity. Before long, there's a tower under construction that gets called ministry.

So how does one guard against it? Three guards — each with a corresponding move.

Guard 1: Check Whose Name Is on the Building Permit

v. 4

Babel said: *"Make a name for ourselves."*

The diagnostic question is this: Is this for God's glory or mine? Because if recognition is required to keep going — if applause is what sustains motivation — if credit is what produces fulfillment — then the building is not for God. It is Babel.

The move: Repent. Name the false theology. Confess the manipulation. Admit out loud: *"I've been building for my glory, not God's."* It means releasing what has been invested — time, money, reputation, identity. But you cannot receive what God is offering while your hands are full of bricks.

Guard 2: Check Whose Terms You're Following

v. 5

Babel expected God to come down on their terms. They built the stairway, set the table, prepared the shrine — and expected God to show up and cooperate. Perform on command.

The difference between faith and manipulation is this: faith says, *"God, I trust You even if You say no."* Manipulation says, *"God, I've done my part — now You do Yours."* One is surrender. The other is Babel.

The move: Submit. Stop clinging to the tower. Stop clinging to the rubble. Sometimes God scatters in order to save — and the wisest response is to stop fighting the scattering.

Guard 3: Check What You Fear

v. 4

Babel feared being scattered. They wanted control. Security. Predictability. So they built a tower to prevent the outcome they feared.

The diagnostic question is: *What am I afraid of that is driving my religious activity?*

Because here is what happens: the thing you are most afraid of becomes the god you serve. Afraid of poverty? The Wealth Tower goes up. Afraid of discomfort? The Comfort Tower. Afraid of losing power? The Power Tower. Afraid of losing identity? The Tribal Tower. Fear-driven religion is still Babel — even when Scripture is being quoted in the building process.

The move: Surrender. Surrender to God's agenda, not your own. Receive Him as He reveals Himself — not as you prefer Him. Trade transaction for transformation. Trade manipulation for submission. Trade the tower for the cross.

Conclusion: The Man Who Let God Scatter Him

Darrin Patrick's story doesn't end in 2016.

His own elders removed him from the church he planted. Not his enemies — his elders. The people closest to him. The people who loved him most looked him in the eye and said: the tower has to come down.

The charge wasn't a single catastrophic moral failure. It was a pattern. Pride accumulating quietly. Unapproachability. A ministry that had slowly become more about the name on the building than the God of the building.

And here is what made Darrin's story different from most: he didn't fight it. He didn't spin it. He didn't find another pulpit to rebuild what he lost. He let God scatter him. He submitted to restoration. Sat under accountability. Stopped clinging to what he had built.

Somewhere in that season — stripped of the platform, the influence, the name — he said something that deserves to be heard slowly:

"God had to take away the ministry I loved to show me I loved the ministry more than I loved Him."

That is a man who found his Babel. Named it. And surrendered it.

Darrin Patrick died unexpectedly in 2020. The last chapter of his life wasn't the tower. It was the rebuilding.

Genesis 11 leaves every reader somewhere on that same spectrum. Some have felt God put His finger on something specific while reading this. Some know exactly what the tower is — they've known for a while. They just haven't named it out loud yet. Others aren't sure, but something in this text won't let go — and that unsettled feeling is not anxiety. That is the Spirit.

Three questions to sit with this week:

1. **What am I building — and whose name is on it?**
2. **What am I afraid of losing — and is that fear driving my faith?**
3. **Am I receiving God as He reveals Himself — or as I've redesigned Him to be?**

Those three questions are a compass.

Because the opposite of Babel isn't trying harder. The opposite of Babel isn't a better version of the same project. The opposite of Babel is surrender. And surrender doesn't start with a program, a checklist, or resolve. It starts with honesty.

Be honest with God. Name the tower. Release the bricks. Trust the God who came down on His own terms — not to reward what was built, but to build in you what you never could.

*This message is part of Season 2 of the Genesis Series: **Divided Hearts, Faithful God** — a verse-by-verse journey through the book of Genesis at Bridge Fellowship Church in Southeast Raleigh, NC.*

Watch the full sermon at bridgefellowshipchurch.com or on our YouTube channel.

© Bridge Fellowship Church | 3060 Hammond Business Place, Suite 121, Raleigh, NC 27603 | 919-679-1222