

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS**  
**Commentary by Michael Sigler**  
**September 29, 2013**

**God Scatters the People**

Read Genesis 11:1-9

**Key verse: “Then the Lord dispersed them from there all over the earth, and they stopped building the city” (Genesis 11:8).**

In his book *A Free People’s Suicide*, Os Guinness shows how the idea of human freedom as “limitless potential apart from God” has been expressed by humanistic thinkers:

- Karl Marx: “Man is free only if he owes his existence to himself.”
- Friedrich Nietzsche: “If there were gods, who could bear not to be gods? Therefore there are no gods.”
- Herbert Spencer: “Progress is not an accident, but a necessity. Surely must evil and immorality disappear; surely must men become perfect.”
- Walt Whitman: “One’s-self I sing, a simple separate person.”
- John F. Kennedy: “Man can be as big as he wants. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings.”
- Ayn Rand: “Man’s destiny is to be a self-made soul.”
- E.O. Wilson: “Humanity will be positioned godlike to take control of its own ultimate fate.”

This spirit of limitless potential apart from God was the motivation behind the tower of Babel. “They said, ‘Come, let us build for ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky, and let us make a name for ourselves so that we won’t be dispersed over all the earth’” (Gen. 11:4).

“Us...ourselves...we...ourselves”—their plans were full of humanistic egotism, rebellion and pride. Their intentions were to push God out of their lives and take their destiny into their own hands. Because of their rebellious pride and the damaging effects their efforts would inevitably produce, God confused their language and scattered the people.

The spirit of Babel is, of course, still around. We all are susceptible to it. So, we might all do well to ask ourselves from time to time: “Am I building any Babel towers in my life?”

*(continued next page)*

Warren Bird tells the story of a conversation that took place during the construction of Emerson Hall at Harvard University. Harvard president Charles Eliot invited psychologist and philosopher William James to suggest a suitable inscription to go over the entrance to the soon-to-be-completed philosophy building.

In response, James sent Eliot a line from the Greek philosopher, Protagoras: “Man is the measure of all things.”

James never heard back from Eliot, so he was curious to see what inscription had been chosen. On the morning that the canvas covering the entrance to the new building was removed, the inscription was revealed for the first time. It read: “What is man that thou art mindful of him?”

Eliot had replaced James’ humanistic quote with words from the Psalmist: not “man is the measure of all things” but “what is man that thou art mindful of him?” “Between these two lines,” observed Warren Bird, “lies the great distance between the God-centered and the human-centered points of view.”

(Contact Michael at [msigler@fumcfwb.com](mailto:msigler@fumcfwb.com).)