



words about the dangers of materialism (cf. 1 Tim. 6:10). However, we must never twist Scripture or alter its clear teaching to support religious, philosophical, or political views no matter how strongly we may believe in them.

What is figurative about this statement?

There are certainly lessons to be learned from the biblical account—lessons about contentment, presumption, arrogance, and the consequences of confusion and trying to usurp divine authority. I actually appreciate some of Beck’s concluding

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BULLETIN OF  
THE OLSEN  
PARK CHURCH  
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# Faithful Sayings

December 12  
2010



## Services

Sunday: 9:30 AM  
10:20 AM  
6:00 PM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

## Elders:

Pat Ledbetter  
Jeff Nunn  
Kyle Pope

## Deacons:

Dean Bowers  
Eddie Cook  
Bill Davis  
Steve Dixon  
Pat Goguen  
Jack Langley  
Neil Ledbetter  
Brady McAlister  
Walker McAnear  
Lance Purcell  
Rusty Scott

## Evangelists:

Kyle Pope  
Jason Garcia

## Glen Beck and the Tower of Babel

By Kyle Pope

On November 16, 2010 political commentator Glen Beck did a show that featured an interview with the Jewish Rabbi Daniel Lapin, president of the American Alliance for Jews and Christians. The focus of the program addressed Beck and Lapin’s concerns that national debt, growing centralization of government, and rising unemployment are pushing our world further away from an emphasis on individual freedoms and toward greater dependence upon government as the solution to all problems. Both fear that one day this trend might even lead to a worldwide government. While I might share some of their concerns, their treatment of the biblical account of the Tower of Babel in defense of these fears, reflects such a loose handling of God’s word that it must be rejected.



The gist of their argument was that the entire account of the Tower of Babel must be understood politically and allegorically. Lapin claims that Nimrod (whom he assumes engineered the en-

deavor) was not a “mighty hunter” of animals, but “he hunted people to seduce them into becoming his subjects and to allow him to become their master.” These people, according to Lapin, constitute the “bricks” used to build (not a literal tower) but, he argues “a tower means reaching for the skies—appealing to everything that is great in human nature.” Lapin claims that the Hebrew word translated “mortar” is related to the word for “materialism” thus the real significance is that “you can unify people

through materialism.” Beck and Lapin, conclude that the story does not end with punishment but a “happy ending” in which God says, “I’m on the side of people. I’m not on the side of tyrannical government.” They see in the confusion of tongues an affirmation of the value of individualism as opposed to collective conformity under a centralized government.

While this is certainly a creative twist on the biblical account, it bears no resemblance to the account in Scripture. Let us note a few examples:

**“The whole earth had one language and one speech”** (Genesis 11:1). The biblical account begins with this fundamental declaration. A common language is what allowed these ancients to work together. Yet, even though Beck and Lapin rightly charge our generation with being “biblically illiterate,” on this central point both claim the ancients spoke “many different languages” until someone said “hey, how about we all speak one language.” That is not what the text says.

**“Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD”** (Genesis 10:9). In the account of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9 nothing is said about Nimrod. The possible connection is found in the fact that 10:10 says of him, “the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.” *Babel* was the name given to the site of the failed tower after the confusion of tongues (11:9), but it is not clear if Nimrod’s rule over Babel came before, during, or after the confusion of tongues. Even so, Beck and Lapin characterize Nimrod as the tyrannical mastermind behind this effort. That is not in the text.

**“They said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks’”**

(Genesis 11:3a). In the biblical text it is the people (not a tyrannical Nimrod) that makes this declaration. In fact, it is the people who aspire to build “a city and a tower whose top is in the heavens” (11:4). Nothing about this is characterized as metaphorical or figurative. Yet, as Beck and Lapin would have it, the bricks are the people themselves. This would force us to read the text, “the *bricks* said to one another, ‘come let us make *ourselves* into bricks.’” That is not what it says. This account says more about the dangers of unbridled aspirations of people in general than it does about the dangers of tyrannical centralized rule.

**“They had asphalt for mortar”** (Genesis 11:3b). The Hebrew text uses two words here which are closely related to one another—*chemar* “asphalt” and *chomer* “mortar.” Their root *chmr* can mean 1) *ferment, boil, foam*; 2) *heap up*; or 3) *to be red* (Harris, Archer, Waltke, 298-99). Both words, as used in 11:3 fall within the first conceptual group—to *boil, foam*. In this capacity *chemar* “asphalt” refers to pitch or bitumen. This is the same stuff, that was daubed on the ark of bulrushes in which Moses was placed when a baby (Exod. 2:3). *Chomer* “mortar” is a little broader, to include *clay* and the raw material used by a potter (Ringgren 3). In Job it is used of man’s makeup—“You have made me like clay (*chomer*)” (Job 10:9). In this sense it comes in modern Hebrew to refer to what is “material” (Ben-Yehuda 103),



but it never has this sense in Scripture. Even so, Beck and Lapin build their case on the assumption that the “mortar” described in the account refers to *materialism*. That is not what the text says. In fact, it is interesting to note that Dr. Solomon Schechter, the one time head of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, in his work *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* claims that “old Rabbinic literature is even devoid of the words *spiritual* and *material*” (144). Beck and Lapin seem to ignore the fact that the text defines the nature of the “mortar”—it was “asphalt.”

