

Here is a Devar Torah from 10th grader, Isaac First, a SA 2018 graduate

At the end of Parshat Noach, the Torah talks about the Tower of Babel, a large tower partially built by the people of the earth before God caused them to be unable to communicate and complete the tower. After Noach's family survived the flood and the population grew, the people eventually settle in a valley. They are described as being united with "*d'varim achadim*", "few words", or one idea. Rashi explains based on the Midrash that their idea was that it was unfair that God was the only one in charge of the spiritual forces, they would build the tower to Shama'im (heavens) and take control from God. This Midrash states in a simple way what must have been a very complex idea. I'd liked to focus on just one small area.

Rashi notices that the Torah refers to the builders of the tower in an odd way, "*B'nei Adam*" which literally means "sons of man".

"עָרָד ה' לְרֹאֵת אֶת־הָעִיר וְאֶת־הַמִּגְדָּل אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ בָנֵי אָדָם:"
"God went down to see the city and their tower built by B'NEI ADAM".

Rashi wonders,

"אֵלֶא בָנֵי מַי? שְׁמָא בָנֵי חַמּוֹרִים וְגַמְלִים?"
Who else's sons could they have been? The sons of donkeys and camels?

Rashi answers,

"אֵלֶא בָנֵי אָדָם הָרָאשׁוֹן שְׁכִפֵּר אֶת הַטּוֹבָה וְאָמַרְתָּ אֶשְׁתָּחַת עַמְּדִי, אֲפִלּוּ כִּפְרוּ בַטּוֹבָה לְמַרוֹד בַּמִּי
שְׁהַשְׁפִיעַם טּוֹבָה וּמְלַטָּם מִן הַמְּבוֹל"

"But this is referring to the sons of the first man, Adam, who was ungrateful and said: 'The woman that You gave to be with me gave me the fruit of the tree that I ate.' These people too were ungrateful to the One who bestowed them with good and allowed them to escape the flood."

The Torah is saying that the builders of the Tower were ungrateful for God's material blessings and for saving them from the flood the same way that Adam was ungrateful to God by blaming Him for his following Eve's advice and eating from the Tree of Knowledge. He ignored the fact that God created Eve as a companion for him and to help him. This mistake is common in the modern world, and results from what is called "a sense of entitlement". People feel like they are owed the best in life and therefore don't have to show gratitude for whatever others do for them. It is painful to see people do this, especially for the people who receive no thanks or gratitude for what they do for others. When gratitude is expressed it creates warm feelings and bonds between people and a sense of joy for the one who receives the good.

I understand why God felt it necessary to prevent the formation of a society built on such an immoral foundation. I also appreciate how beneficial it is to encourage ourselves and others to feel and express gratitude. It would certainly build a more joyful and peaceful society.