

Sin City: The Babel Rebellion

Text: Gen. 11:1-9

Introduction:

1. We come now to another pivotal event in Biblical history with the dispersion at Babel and the origin of the world's diverse languages.
2. Babel would go on to become known as Babylon. The Babylonian empire would become a tool of chastisement in the hands of God against His chosen people with the Babylonian captivity.
3. Babylon would go on to represent not just a geographical location and an empire in Scripture but a system opposed to God and His truth. In fact, Babel was the first real attempt recorded in Scripture to set up a one world government in opposition to God's authority.
4. We will consider the text under three headings.

I. THE CREATOR OF BABEL (GEN. 10:8-11)

Nimrod, a son of Cush who was a son of Ham, founded the kingdom of Babel. He would go down in both biblical and secular history as a man renowned for his wickedness and defiance of the One True God. Let's briefly study the profile the Scriptures give us of this man:

A. The Parent of Nimrod (Vs. 8a)

1. Nimrod was a son of Cush. Sadly, it appears Cush followed in his father Ham's rebellious ways as the name he chose for this son (Nimrod) means "let us revolt/rebel". Remember, in the ancient world, the meaning of a name was usually of primary importance when selecting a name for a child. In our culture today we tend to pick a name based on whether we like the sound of it or whether it has a special connection to a beloved relative, friend or person we esteem but often the meaning of the name is barely considered. Understanding the definition of Nimrod's name is key to understanding the statements that follow concerning his character.
2. Sometimes the rebellious ideals of the parent are carried out more fully in the offspring. What a strange and sorry vision for your child! What a sad reflection of Cush's state as a father.
3. What is your priority and vision for your children's future? Is it a godly one?

B. The Prominence of Nimrod (Vs. 8b-9a)

1. His Rise to Notoriety (Vs. 8b)
 - a. "mighty one" = powerful; by implication warrior, tyrant (Strong's Concordance). The word "refers to a champion, somebody who is superior in strength and courage." (Wiersbe) The word 'mighty' is used in the Old Testament to describe both godly and ungodly people. The context determines the way it is being used. The same word is used to describe the "mighty men" before the flood who were very wicked (Gen. 6:4). The word is also used to describe David's "mighty men" (1 Chro. 11:11) who were good men.

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- b. In this context it is clear that Nimrod was mighty in an evil sense. He was mighty to do evil and to lead others into revolt against God. This statement is repeated in 1 Chronicles 1:10 “And Cush begat Nimrod: **he began to be mighty upon the earth.**”
2. His Reason for Notoriety (Vs. 9a)
 - a. “a mighty hunter” = he gained fame and notoriety through his exploits as a hunter. Given the description of his character in the previous verse it seems highly likely that he was more than just a hunter of animals which in itself is not evil. He “began to be a mighty one in the earth” (Vs. 8b). He became a powerful warrior-style leader in the ancient world and his image and prowess was bolstered by his hunting skills. He was also a hunter and oppressor of men, seeking to establish his own political and religious system in opposition to Almighty God.
 - b. “before the LORD” = this phrase can also have a good or bad connotation depending on the context. An example of a good sense is where Abraham stood “before the LORD” (Gen. 18:22). In this context, it is being used in the same way as it is used in Genesis 13:13 “But the men of Sodom *were* wicked and sinners **before the LORD** exceedingly.” The Hebrew word is ‘lipnei’ which means “in the face of”. Nimrod’s rebellion had not gone unnoticed by Almighty God. He was sinning in the sight/presence of God. Leupold writes, “in this context it means that Nimrod’s rebellious ways did not elude the watchful eye of Him, who in mercy regards the welfare of men, Yahweh, but the fact was openly before Him, even if He did not at once proceed to take vengeance upon the despot.”

C. The Parable about Nimrod (Vs. 9b)

1. “wherefore it is said” = Nimrod’s fame at that time was so widespread that a common saying was coined – “Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD”.
2. Nimrod’s fame as one who was mighty in his rebellion against the God of heaven was well established in the post flood world. His fame was for all the wrong reasons! Sadly, this is the reality in a wicked world. Wicked men who do great exploits for the cause of evil are idolized whereas those who are godly are lightly esteemed.

D. The Pioneering of Nimrod (Vs. 10-11)

1. Nimrod founded the kingdom of Babel. Again, this highlights that he was not just a hunter, he was also a builder of cities and an organizer of men. Nimrod established a network of four cities – Babel, Erech, Accad and Calneh in the land of Shinar with Babel functioning as a capital city.
2. Nimrod also instrumental in establishing the kingdom of Assyria as Asshur went out from Nimrod’s kingdom and built Nineveh which would become the capital of the Assyrian Empire.
3. To summarize Nimrod in three words; he was a hunter, builder and dictator.

II. THE CONSTRUCTION OF BABEL (GEN. 11:1-4)

Babel was all about rebellion against God's rulership and authority. There was:

A. A Rebel Ruler – Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-10).

1. It is important that as we read the account of the tower of Babel, we remember that Nimrod was the architect of it – “the beginning of **his kingdom** was Babel” (Gen. 10:10).
2. The city of Babel (to be later known as Babylon) was the crowning act of Nimrod's rebellion against God. The fact that God intervened in such a dramatic and definite way is clear evidence that God was displeased with what was going on at Babel. His desire was to setup a city and a system that would operate under his rule, independent from and in opposition to the authority of Almighty God.

B. A Rebel Region – Shinar (Vs. 1-2)

1. The location of the region – “the land of Shinar”.
 - a. The location is described as “east’ of Ararat. This is an accurate description as Babel is southeast of Ararat. The “land of Shinar” was the fertile Mesopotamian plain.
 - b. The location is in the region now controlled by modern Iraq between the two great river systems of the Tigris and Euphrates (refer maps).
2. The lushness of the region.
 - a. This area has been called “the Fertile Crescent”. Water usually plays a key role in the prosperity of a region. At this time in history the land of Shinar was a fertile and lush area.
 - b. While prosperity is not sinful in and of itself, it tends towards creating an environment conducive to rebellion against God's authority. Prosperity without submission to God's authority leads to anarchy and debauchery.
 - c. For Nimrod and his followers, material prosperity was more important to them than the commission God gave to fill the earth (Gen. 9:1). Materialism is one of greatest dangers to God's people in prosperous countries. If it comes down to a hard choice, it is much better to be like the Church at Smyrna which was poor materially and rich spiritually than Laodicea which was rich materially and poor spiritually (Compare Rev. 2:9-11 & 3:14-22).
 - d. Illustration: The prosperity of Sodom was linked to its indulgence in perversion. Ezekiel 16:49 “Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister **Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness** was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.”

C. A Rebel Regime – City (Vs. 3-4a)

1. The Unity of the Regime (Vs. 3a; 4a)
 - a. They were all of “one language and of one speech”. This was a major factor in their unity and is why God intervened to create other languages later in the account.
 - b. They were unified in their purpose - “they said one to another”. They held a council together and agreed on a course of action.

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There was also a spirit of enthusiasm as indicated by the phrase “go to” which is repeated twice. It’s meaning would be similar to our expression “come on, let’s go and do this!”

- c. This reminds us that not all forms of unity are of God. Unity that is based on submission to God’s truth and authority is the **right** kind of unity. Unity based on rebellion against God and His Word is the **wrong** kind of unity!
 - d. Note: Human government, while instituted by God (Gen. 9), was never intended of God to operate without reference to His supreme authority.
2. The Industry of the Regime (Vs. 3)
- a. Moses goes to some length to explain the brick making industry that was developed in Babel. Henry Morris explains, “The Babylonian construction was stronger than other common methods of construction in antiquity so the writer calls special attention to it. Furnace-treated bricks were used instead of stone, and bitumen instead of mortar. This “slime” was probably tarry material from the abundant asphalt pits in the Tigris-Euphrates valley. Archaeology has revealed that this type of kiln-fired brick and asphalt construction was common in ancient Babylon.”
 - b. Evidently Nimrod saw the opportunity “for the establishment of a strongly centralized society which, with controls over resources and occupations, would soon be able to produce a self-sufficient civilization capable of similarly controlling the entire world...A self-sufficient society, integrated under a powerful and brilliant leader, would be a society no longer dependant on God. And this was Nimrod’s aim.” (Morris)
 - c. Note: Industrial innovation is not evil in itself if it is used for a good purpose. In this case it was being misused for evil purposes. Mankind was using his inventive skills to rebel against God rather than using those skills within the sphere of submission to God’s will.
3. The City of the Regime (Vs. 4a)
- a. Having established the brick making industry, they then determine to construct the city of Babel. This would be a well-planned and constructed urban centre.
 - b. In Nimrod’s kingdom we see the first real attempt to achieve a one world government with centralized power in one city headed up by one man.
 - c. Babel came to symbolize not just a city but a system of pagan worship opposed to God. This is why Babylon is called “the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth” in Revelation 17:5. It is a type of the future one world kingdom of the Antichrist (See Revelation 17-18) which like Babel, is comprised of both a false system of worship and a political system.

D. A Rebel Religion – Tower (Vs. 4b)

The tower is emphasized in the account and brings us to the heart of the rebellion.

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1. Paganism – “a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven”.
 - a. This tower “would dominate the city, both architecturally and culturally. It would serve as the focal point of the political and religious life of the population and would be a symbol of their unity and strength.” (Morris) The tower was the centrepiece and shrine of the rebellion.
 - b. The tower was most likely a Ziggurat which was common in the Babylonian area. Sarfati explains, “The tower itself was likely a ziggurat, a massive step pyramid built from bricks, and part of a temple complex. One famous surviving ziggurat was long known in antiquity as the “Tongue Tower” in the Sumerian city Uruk, southwest of Babylon on the east bank of the Euphrates. The ruins of this tower are still about 50m taller than the mass of ruins.” Wiersbe adds, “A ziggurat was like a pyramid except that the successive levels were recessed so that you could walk to the top on “steps”. At the top was a special shrine dedicated to a god or goddess.”
 - c. The statement that the tower was to “reach unto heaven” tends to indicate that some sort of pagan worship of the heavens was intended. The ancient historian Herodotus claimed that there were religious shrines on top of ziggurats.
 - d. The Babylonian religious system served as the source of all the world’s non-Christian religions. Rev. 17:5 – Babylon is called “the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth”. Morris notes, “There is abundant evidence that all forms of paganism have come originally from the ancient Babylonian religion. The essential identity of the various gods and goddesses of Rome, Greece, India, Egypt, and other nations with the original pantheon of the Babylonians is well established. Nimrod himself was apparently later deified as the chief god (“Merodach,” or “Marduk) of Babylon.”
 - e. Note: What a picture the tower presents of manmade, works religion. It wouldn’t matter how high they made the tower; they would never reach heaven and eternal life that way. God’s way was not for you to try and build your way up to heaven but for God’s Son to come down to rescue you!
2. Pride – “let us make us a name”. Pride was the driving motivation behind the Babel endeavor. Their goal was their own glory rather than God’s.
3. Perversity – “lest we be scattered abroad”.
 - a. This brings us to a specific point of their disobedience. God had commissioned Noah and his descendants to “replenish” (fill) the earth (Gen. 9:1). Of necessity this would involve a spreading out of the nations across the globe to fulfill this commission. Nimrod and his followers were attempting to do the opposite. Instead of spreading out across the earth, they were working towards centralized power in one main location. “This was a collective act of defiance against God’s clear and repeated commands to fill the earth.” (Sarfati)

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- b. While the tower of Babel is long gone, the Babel spirit of rebellious disobedience to God's authority has not! We find the Nimrod spirit in:
 - i. The wicked world in which we live. Our own country of Australia is at war with Almighty God in many areas.
 - ii. The home with children who rebel against the authority of their parents or where parents are in hostile opposition to God's ordained will for the home.
 - iii. The church with Nimrod members and attendees who come along and hear God's Word but have little to no attention of obeying what they hear. Or worse still, are in open rebellion about certain parts of the whole council of God.

III. THE CONFUSION OF BABEL (GEN. 11:5-9)

These verses describe the dramatic intervention of God into the situation.

A. The Divine Determination (Vs. 5-7)

- 1. The Omniscience behind the Determination (Vs. 5-6)
 - a. God's view of the tower of their hands (Vs. 5).
 - i. The statement that God came down to see the tower is not a suggestion that God did not know what was happening. God is Omnipresent and Omniscient so He had perfect knowledge of what was happening. The expression is an anthropomorphism, a figure of speech ascribing human actions to a non-human.
 - ii. Leupold explains it as, "a vivid way of stating that God interposed. Where He had till now, as so often in the affairs of the children of men, simply allowed things to take their course, now He manifestly intervenes and takes the situation in hand. His judicial control and regulation is His coming down."
 - iii. The lesson is that man's sinful actions do not escape the all-seeing eye of God. Sin does not go unnoticed by God.
 - b. God's view of the tendency of their hearts.
 - i. God's knowledge of the tendency of man's wicked heart is revealed. God knew that if they got away with their wicked imaginations in this area, it would serve as an incentive to go on and pursue darker and even more depraved imaginations. It is a sobering reminder that mankind's depravity knows no limits apart from the restraining hand of God. Achieving an evil objective spurs the sinner on to take his evil the next rung down the ladder of depravity.
 - ii. Often God allows mankind to pursue his own course (free will), leaving him to answer for his actions at the future judgment. However, human history is punctuated by supernatural interventions at key times in history and the tower of Babel is one such incident. This verse reminds us that while God allows mankind the exercise of his freewill, He is not a neutral bystander when it comes to

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his progress into evil. God can and does intervene in human affairs when mankind goes too far. Romans 1 reminds us of this principle where God gives men up and gives them over when they cross a Divine boundary.

2. The Objective of the Determination (Vs. 7)
 - a. “go to” = God uses the same words that had been used by the rebels in verse 4 & 5 in a sense to mock their foolish plans. This was heaven’s response to earth’s revolt. Wicked men had held their counsels and determined their course of action but now the Godhead (“let us”) holds counsel. We are reminded that “*There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless **the counsel of the LORD**, that shall stand.*” (Prov. 19:21) “Babel’s conceited ‘Let’s go up!’ was answered by heaven’s calm “Let’s go down!” (Wiersbe)
 - b. Read Psalm 2 – “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh...”
 - c. “confound their language” = the word ‘confound’ means “to mix”. God would introduce other languages that would force the population of that time to fulfill his mandate to spread out over the earth.

B. The Divine Division (Vs. 8-9)

1. The Lord scattered them (Vs. 8a).
2. The Lord stopped them (Vs. 8b). Their purpose to establish the city and tower was thwarted.
3. The city was called Babel meaning ‘confusion’. Instead of making a name for themselves, they ended up with the humiliating name ‘Babel’. Rather than Babel becoming a monument to man’s wisdom and ability, it would become a memorial in Biblical history to the power of God to put down man’s evil plans.
4. Babel is also a reminder that when mankind leaves God out of the picture, chaos and confusion is the result.

Conclusion:

1. How is your submission to God’s authority at this point in your Christian life?
2. Are you trying to construct your own religious tower to get to heaven? It will fail! Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven (John 14:6).