

**02.07.06 Coromandel Baptist 10:00 a.m.**

***The Nations and Their God***

Bible Readings = Genesis 10:32-11:9; 12:1-3 and Gal. 3:6-9

**Introduction:**

- (1) This week's message introduces a new theme which will occupy us for the next part of the year. We will be talking about God and the nations, their relationship to him, his to them, and this all to the plan and purpose that God has for his creation.
- (2) The concept of a nation which we will have in our minds throughout is not primarily a nation-state, but a people group.
- (3) That there are different people groups within even relatively confined geographical areas is beyond doubt, and as we look at the history of the nations in the Bible, we see universal similarities, despite the undoubted cultural differences.
- (4) Are these nations simply random in their actions and purposes, or can we understand them (and ourselves) from within the full framework of the Bible?
- (5) Especially through the news media we are brought face to face with the turmoil of the nations every day. In terms of the broad sweep of history, it would be possible to argue that the last 100 years has seen more anger, warfare, rage and hostility among the nations than ever before.

***Despite the rebellion of the nations against their Creator, we aim to see that creation is not in vain, and that the rage of the nations is subdued by grace so that creation can be brought to its full pitch.***

**1. The 'Table of Nations'**

(1) Our Old Testament Bible reading took in the closing verse of Genesis 10. This verse rounds off what many Old Testament commentators call the Table of Nations. This designation is gained from the repeated theme seen in Gen. 10:5, 20, and 32. We note a few points of interest:

- There are 70 names in the list: it stands for totality and completion.
- The descendants of Noah are listed in reverse order: from the youngest (Japheth) to the oldest (Shem). Moreover, Shem's list is divided: see Gen. 10:21 cf. 11:10. We will come back to this shortly.
- The description of the nations is written from the stand point of someone in Jerusalem/Israel. The furthest nations (e.g. 10:5 cf. the way in which the 'coastlands' is used in Is. 24:15; 40:15; 41:5; 42:10; 49:1; 59:18; 60:9; Jer. 2:10; 25:22; etc.) to the immediate nations and great powers surrounding them (10:7ff.) to the very land of the Canaanites (10:15).
- Two special sections stand out: the section devoted to Nimrod (a great empire builder, see Gen. 10:8ff.); and the Canaanite section (10:15ff.). Special attention is given to these because it with these groups of nations that Israel had most to do (often, negatively!)
- Shem's divided list acts as a sharp way of focussing the material. From Shem comes Abraham in (see Gen. 11:10 cf. 27), i.e. the list identifies Israel both in terms of its *common* heritage with the other nations of the earth, and its *unique* heritage in being the heirs of the covenant promises to Abraham.

- Gen. 10:5, 20, 32 compared with Gen. 11:1 indicates that the Table of Nations describes the situation after the events of Genesis 11.

## 2. The Tower of Genesis 11

(1) With all this background in mind, we turn to the events of the tower building in Genesis 11.

- We note firstly the connection between this event and the actions of Nimrod. See ‘Shinar’ and ‘Babel’ compared to Gen. 10:10. Shinar = lower regions of Tigris-Euphrates = Sumer. (Cities there include Ur, from which Abraham came; Eidu, Uruk, Nippur).

(2) The tower was almost certainly an ancient ziggurat: stepped mountain.

- These were a ‘gate for the gods’, to attract them, and cause them to dwell in the (lower) temple, and thus have fellowship and grant power to the people. See also the extract notes below.
  - The presence of the god with his people gave power to defeat the enemies (cf. Assyria’s approach in Is. 36:18). This tower was designed to tap into spiritual power to gain earthly power. Idolatry is the exchange of true worship for a lie, but doing so with the intention of having some other source of spiritual life and power than God. The tower was a deliberate attempt to enlist spiritual forces in alliance with human pride *against* the Lord. This was not constructed for Yahweh!
  - Indeed, it was constructed against him...as the building materials indicate. As they used tar for mortar they were making the tower flood proof.
- The tower is also linked with the building of the city. Cain the first city builder (Gen. 4:17), and now there is a new Cain on the earth (Nimrod) building cities again. He was a ‘hunter’ i.e. of men for his kingdoms. Both tower and city building were so that they could make themselves a *name* i.e. reputation, identity, destiny, future.
  - There is a continual movement East...from Eden (Gen. 3:24, to 4:16, to 11:2). The attempt to build a tower and city and empire is the attempt to avoid the scattering.
  - See also Gen. 11:4, which makes it plain that the building of the tower/city/name is so that they might not be scattered abroad.
  - Was the idea of being scattered a judgement or a blessing? The answer is ‘Yes’! See Gen. 1:28, cf. Acts 17:25f. The creational mandate would have meant pursuing the settlement of the earth in dependence on God. The tower/city/name building was to avoid both the dependence involved in the creational mandate and the negative effects on their own plans and schemes that the scattering would have produced.

All of God’s commands are for our blessing.

(3) The tower and the city were related to making a ‘name’ for themselves.

- The name “Shem” means ‘name’! I.e. in Shem’s line Israel was to see where their name came from (cf. Gen. 12:2)
- We see the great Seed of Abraham, who has no concern for his own name, but only that men and women might come to know the Name of his Father. For this

reason, God highly exalted him, and gave him a name, higher than all the other names of the earth! (Phil. 2)

### 3. God's Response to the Nations: Abraham

(1) God's response to the continual rebellion of humanity is stunning: Abraham, and a covenant to bless the nations! (Gen. 12:1 ff.)

- The seed, through whom this blessing would come, would bear the rebellion of the nations in his own body, and subdue them by grace!

*Extracts for information:*

A. 'Ziggurats were structures designed to provide stairways from the heavens (the gate of the gods) to earth so that the gods could come down into their temple and into the town to bring blessing. The ziggurats were constructed of a sun dried brick frame, filled with dirt and rubble and finished off with a shell of kiln-baked brick. There were no rooms, chambers or passageways of any sort inside. The structure itself was simply made to hold up the stairway.' *IVP Bible Background Commentary* p. 42.

B. ...the names used for ziggurats are indicative of at least one aspect, if not the most basic aspect, of their meaning. The names show a striking resemblance to the Gen 11:4 characterization as "a tower whose top may reach unto heaven, and let us make us a name ... "M. Beek has collected a number of ziggurat characterizations from Sumerian sources.<sup>24</sup> At Nippur, Larsa and Sippar the people spoke of the tower as "the house of the link between heaven and earth." The ziggurat at Babylon was called "the house of the foundations of heaven and earth." Another text from Nippur speaks of the tower there as "the great mountain of Enlil, whose peak reaches the sky, whose foundations are laid in the resplendent depths." The tower at Borsip-pa near Babylon was called "the house of the seven ladders of heaven and earth." The Sumerian word *enki* itself is actually a compound meaning "heaven-earth." The Sumerians believed that in early times heaven and earth were one and then subsequently separated. The separation is very important in the myths.<sup>25</sup> It appears, therefore, that the *raison d'être* for Sumerian temple-towers was the reunion of heaven and earth.

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<sup>24</sup> 24. M. Beek, *Atlas*, p. 151.

<sup>25</sup> 25. S. M. Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology* (New York: Harper, 1961) 43 ff.