

#140 “What Was So Bad About the Tower of Babel?”

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Genesis 11:1-9 is the account of the Tower of Babel. Now we should note before we read this passage that Babel was and is a literal location on the earth near the Euphrates River in the Middle East. It could also be translated Babylon, as in the case of the Babylonian empire which encompassed the region many years later or as in Babylon as symbolized by the evil world empires and forces that have pervaded the earth throughout history and will certainly be in play in the last days (Revelation 14:8,17:5,18:2). This is important because the sins of the people of Babel of old will be repeated throughout history until the very end. We must look at what the people of ancient times did wrong so that we don't repeat the sins in our time.

Verses 1-3 says, "Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.' And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar." At first read, it wouldn't appear that these people did anything wrong up to this point. They journeyed together to the plain in Shinar and decided to settle there. They formed a city such that a vibrant and thriving economy could develop. Yet in doing so, they had directly violated what God had commanded to Noah and his sons just two chapters earlier in Genesis 9:1. God said, "And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.'" So if the entirety of mankind which had populated the earth since the flood decided to settle in one place, they would fail to obey God's command to fill the earth. They might increase the earth's population which God wanted to see happen, but they did not fill the earth. So the first sin of Babel was to directly disobey the command of God and to do things their own way. That sounds very familiar to the acts of unredeemed man throughout history and to the antichrist yet to come.

Verse 4 says, "They said, 'Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.'" Here we see some really interesting facts. The people of Babel build the tower knowing that unless they do so, they will be scattered throughout the earth. So their decision to stay in one place was in direct defiance to God's command which they seemed to be fully aware of. This decision reeked of great pride and arrogance toward God. The people of Babel didn't care about honoring God's name, but they wanted to make a name for themselves. This is a form of humanism, the exaltation, glorification, and worship of man. They were trying to show God just how strong and self-sufficient they were. They despised Him, rejected Him, and even believed that they didn't need Him. Worse yet, they believed that they could thwart His plans. It is the epitome of humanistic arrogance when man believes that he is more powerful than God. Just by building a tower, they apparently thought that they could enter heaven and have power just like God. By their own works, they would build and climb until they were just like God. That is the sin from the beginning when the serpent told Eve that she would be just like God if she would eat the fruit (Genesis 3:5). It is the

ultimate form of pride that man would like to be God or to see God in his natural self. This pride is man's perpetual undoing in this life and in this world (Romans 3:23, Isaiah 53:6). Man's only hope is to turn to the gracious salvation of our Lord which is offered to those who repent of this nonsense and submit to the true God through Jesus Christ.

Verses 5-9 give the response of the Lord Who will not be mocked (Galatians 6:7). It says, "The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. The LORD said, 'Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech.' So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth." Notice that even though man thought he was ascending his way toward heaven, it was God Who still had to "go down" to them to observe their feeble attempts at taking His place and subverting His will. God saw that the people could keep on indulging their sin to no end and had no incentive or reason to repent and stop. The fullness of the extent and degree of their pride and sin was limitless. In that respect, nothing would be impossible for them. So God knew that He needed to intervene such that His will would be accomplished and man would be humbled. By confusing the languages, it was impossible for the economy to continue to thrive because communication was impossible. The only hope people had to even talk to each other, let alone live and work effectively together, was to seek out others who spoke a similar language or to try to start learning another language. Either way, the result was confusion (hence the name Babel, meaning confusion) and a major disruption to man's own agenda. God's agenda won out because He confused the languages, forcing people to separate and fill the earth.

God's legacy here as it is throughout history is order and truth, while man's is chaos, disorder, confusion, and destruction. Man cannot reach God of his own accord because man by nature is desperately wicked and deceived (Jeremiah 17:9), thinking he is or can become God. Until man submits to God and honors Him as God (Romans 1:21), he will be deceived and destined for eternity without God, which, ironically, is in and of itself a forced recognition of the way things were all along, an eternal picture that man is not God but rather separated from Him.