

Lesson 7 – 14 March 2010

The Rebellion at Babel

Lesson Scope: [Genesis Chapter 9:18 to Chapter 11:26](#)

Lesson Focus

The lesson scope spans the four hundred years from the departure from the ark to the time of Abraham. While violence prevailed before the Flood, an ambitious spirit of vainglory, accompanied by mutual cooperation, characterized this early post-Flood era.

In this setting arose Nimrod, Noah's great-grandson (Noah-Ham-Cush-Nimrod). He was a ruler, hunter, and builder. In extra-Biblical history, many legendary elements have been attributed to him, making him appear almost godlike in his achievements. We do know that he was a man of earthly ambitions. He is linked to the building of Babel (Genesis 10: 10), both the city and the tower. He could also be regarded as the world's first king or dictator. The confusion curbed man's rebellion but did not eliminate it entirely. The spirit of Nimrod, with his worldly ambitions and the vain aspirations of the tower-builders at Babel, has been often repeated and has become a major component of world history. Man's fallen nature continues to express itself in various God-defying efforts to the present day. Fallen man defies God and seeks to be "mighty . . . in the earth. - His ungodly desires produce the social, political, and religious rebellions that characterizes the story of mankind from Genesis to Revelation.

As we study this lesson we must endeavour to grasp the truth that when we set ourselves against God, even in small ways, we begin a course away from God. We must be convinced that God knows what is best for us. In His wisdom He has given us the Scriptures to help us to understand ourselves and to find the place He wants us to fill. He desires that men would learn to do His will. He honors those who truly seek Him.

Let us also consider how rebellion can emerge in the social, political, and religious spheres of human life and that defiance of God's laws and of God-ordained authority is ultimately rebellion against God

Lesson Aim: To portray the spirit of defiance against God.

Theme Verse: [Revelation 18:5](#).

“For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.”

Lesson Text.

The People

[Genesis 9:18-19](#)

And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth: and Ham is the father of Canaan. ¹⁹These *are* the three sons of Noah: and of them was the whole earth overspread.

[Genesis 10:6-12](#)

And the sons of Ham; Cush, and Mizraim, and Phut, and Canaan. ⁷And the sons of Cush; Seba, and Havilah, and Sabtah, and Raamah, and Sabtechah: and the sons of Raamah; Sheba, and Dedan. ⁸And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. ⁹He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD. ¹⁰And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. ¹¹Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah, ¹²And Resen between Nineveh and Calah: the same *is* a great city.

The Plan

[Genesis 11:1-4](#)

And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. ²And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. ³And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. ⁴And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top *may reach* unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

The Punishment

[Genesis 11:5-9](#)

And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. ⁶And the LORD said, Behold, the people *is* one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. ⁷Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. ⁸So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the

face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. ⁹Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

Questions for Study

The People

1. What does the statement "a mighty hunter before the Lord." (Gen.10:9) tell us about Nimrod?
2. What are some current expressions of earthly ambition?
3. How can we avoid the snare of self-exaltation?

The Plan

4. Why did the people decide to build the tower of Babel?
5. In what ways might we seek recognition today?

The Punishment

6. What was the potential of this unified effort to build a tower?
7. How was the confounding of their language a fitting punishment?
8. In what ways might we become guilty of uniting in a wrong cause?

Analyzing the Passage

The portrayal of Nimrod as "a mighty hunter before the LORD" (Gen.10:9) highlights his work as a strong man distinguished shed for his successful control over beasts and men. As a destroyer of life, his role stands in contrast to the work of a shepherd who guards and sustains the lives of his sheep.

Nimrod's lack of concern for the well-being of others is mirrored in the prophetic message (Revelation 18:13) where "the souls of men" is listed among the merchandise of Babylon.

The religious system that had its origin in the ancient city of Babylon seeks to satisfy the desires of men to live in luxury, to gather wealth, and to enjoy sensual pleasure. The pursuits of those who follow this course center on self-indulgence and self-exaltation. This system is designed to make man feel self-sufficient, sensing no need of God.

The land of Shinar (Gen.10: 10) was a level plain between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the southern part of present-day Iraq. Here the people gathered to build a city and a tower.

"Let us make us a name" (Gen.11:4) indicates a desire for glory that be-

longs alone to God. "Lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Gen.11:4) shows their belief in group security and the power of united effort. God confounded their language, separating the people into families speaking different languages and thus scattered them abroad upon the face of all the earth (Gen.11:9). Babel means "confusion." When we expend the effort needed to learn another language we are dealing, with the effects of God's hand upon our ancestors at Babel.

Principles and Applications

The People

1. The gift of life demands loyalty and submission to the Giver of life (Gen.9:18-19). Noah and his family owed God honor as the (giver and the preserver of their lives. We who have also received the gift of life and who daily experience the sustaining power of God are likewise indebted to Him. Submission to God's will should be our ready response.

2. Men of earthly ambition chart a course away from God (Gen.10:8). Nimrod, like many mighty men since his time, used his might for earthly pursuits. He sought a position above his fellow men. But God sets men in places of authority as it pleases Him. He does not intend that a man should set himself up to rule over others. Thus Nimrod's actions were an affront to God. All who follow that course are outside the will of God,

3. Self-exaltation is a mark of defiance against God (Gen.10: 9). Nimrod expanded his kingdom for his own benefit. He did not seek to honor God. By contrast, Jesus humbled Himself. He was our perfect example of humanity Therefore God highly exalted Him.

The path to true greatness passes through the valley of humility. Pride in the carnal human heart seeks honor for self. God hates pride because it is man's way of seeking glory that belongs alone to Him.

The Plan

4. The spirit of defiance thrives on mass support and oneness in communication (Gen.11:1). At Babel the people united for a wrong cause. They recognized the power of unified effort and knew that with the involvement of many people they could accomplish a greater work than any one of them could do alone. In history we note many instances where a strong leader rallied the masses in support of a common goal.

The unity of language at Pentecost (Acts 2) displays God's desire for the church. What happened at Babel is the devil's counterfeit for the oneness

that can be found only in being one with God.

5. Desiring a name for oneself is an evidence of defiance (Gen.11:4). Pride and the desire for honor and recognition are so native to man. When men develop an inflated, deluded view of self, they push God out of their lives and become a god to themselves. We must daily crucify self and the ever-present tendency to view ourselves as important, accomplished, or exceptionally talented.

The Punishment

6. God is fully aware of and able to confound the devices of rebellious humanity (Gen.11:5-8). God knew what was developing at Babel and moved promptly to halt its progression. He knew that, if allowed to go unchecked, man would eventually destroy himself. Today, God still has ways of suppressing the devices of evil men.

7. God will deal with defiance (Gen.11:7-9). God caused the building at Babel to stop. Such will be the case with all forms of defiance against God. In the final Judgment, all who have exalted themselves against God will be brought low. All rebellion will be abolished, and God will rule alone.

Important Teachings

1. The gift of life demands loyalty and submission to the Giver of life (Gen.9:18-19).
2. Men of earthly ambition chart a course away from God (Gen.10:8).
3. Self-exaltation is a mark of defiance against God (Gen.10:9).
4. The spirit of defiance thrives on mass support and oneness in communication (Gen.11:1).
5. Desiring a name for oneself is an evidence of defiance (Gen.11:4).
6. God is fully aware of and able to confound the devices of rebellious humanity (Gen.11:5-8).
7. God will deal with defiance (Gen.11:7-9).
8. The desire to rule over men often results in defiance against God (Gen.10:9-12).

Answers to Questions

1. What does the statement "a mighty hunter before the LORD" (Gen.10:9) tell us about Nimrod?

The Bible shows us that Nimrod was intent on getting and acquiring for himself. His hunting suggests a disregard for life and for the welfare of

others. He sought control over men and beasts. Unlike a shepherd who guards and nourishes the sheep under his care, Nimrod was a destroyer of life.

2. What are some current expressions of earthly ambition?

Men today live as if their achievements in this life are of sole importance. Through their inventions and technological advancements, they seek to solve all their problems by material and earthly means.

We may forget that the acquiring of wealth is not our purpose in this world. Sensual pleasure is not our goal, nor should we love to have the preeminence among our brethren.

3. How can we avoid the snare of self-exaltation?

We should not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think (Romans 12:3). We should labor in the Lord's work without seeking recognition or honor. We must not desire to be seen of men or to have the praise of men. "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (James 4:10).

4. Why did the people decide to build the tower of Babel?

The plan to build the tower was intended to accomplish two objectives. First, it was intended to unite the people in a common cause to prevent them from being scattered abroad in the earth. Second, the tower was to be an achievement that would bring fame and recognition to the builders.

5. In, what ways might we seek recognition today?

The spirit of competition and rivalry can become evident among us. We may feel envious at the success of our brethren and try to surpass them in a bid for attention and recognition. The work of the church should not become a talent show where we rate and compare each other on the basis of how well each can do a particular job. We should have mutual appreciation for each one's contribution and desire only that God would receive all the honor and glory.

6. What was the potential of this unified effort to build a tower?

God said that nothing would be restrained from them that they had imagined to do (Gen.11:6). In His mercy God kept them from achieving their goals and thus glorying in the works of their own hands.

7. How was the confounding of their language a fitting punishment?

It showed God's mercy in giving them a lesser punishment than their self-exaltation and rebellion deserved. It accomplished God's purposes in hav-

ing them scattered abroad over all the earth. It also shows how God will bring to nothing the efforts of those who do not seek His wisdom and counsel.

8. In what ways might we become guilty of uniting in a wrong cause?

We might join in a spirit of defiance against God-ordained authority. We might allow ourselves to become class conscious and mingle with those who esteem themselves above others in various ways.

Summarizing the Lesson

Pride of will and lust of station,
Lord, I would from all be free,
And the only honor seeking,
Lord, to be of use to Thee.
—Frederick Woodrow,

Let us exalt the Name of our great God and seek to be faithful servants in His eternal kingdom, which will stand long after the cities and the towers built by men have crumbled Into dust.

Research Guide

In *Doctrines of the Bible*, read the chapter titled "Humility." The teaching here embodies the counterpart of pride and self-exaltation