

EXPOSITION OF GENESIS

Message #29

Genesis 11:1-9

From Moses statement in Genesis 10:25, we may conclude that God, during the days of Peleg, established an inheritance for each and every one of Noah's sons and their descendants. God set the locational boundaries for each family lineage to have. But as we come to this text, we see that the people did not want to obey God and move to the specific habitational places that God had appointed. Probably Nimrod convinced the people to build a city and some type of tower in a form of proud rebellion against God, so God pronounced a judgment on the world.

THE LORD WILL SOVEREIGNLY WORK OUT HIS PROGRAM AND WILL JUDGE ALL WHO ARE IN PROUD REBELLION AGAINST IT.

God had separated the nations to various geographical locations but instead of going to their proper appointed places, they initially decided to stay together. Had God allowed them to remain together, they would have deteriorated to a total level of wickedness, which would have ruined all the people. God confused their languages so they had to divide. This assured that people would go to their appointed place and it also assured that a line of people could be preserved as a special people for God, through whom He could produce His Son.

NARRATIVE OBSERVATION #1 - The unity of the people. 11:1

The Hebrew words “language” and “words” indicate that there was an incredible verbal unity that existed both in dialect and words - people spoke the same language which included the same words and accents of those words. The tragedy is that instead of using their speech to exalt and glorify God, they used it to elevate and glorify themselves.

NARRATIVE OBSERVATION #2 - The location of the people. 11:2

The text is very explicit as to where the Babel episode occurred, in the “land of Shinar”, which immediately tells us we are in Nimrod's domain (10:8-10). Shinar is the O.T. name for the plain that existed between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. In ancient times, this land was known as Babylonia. This area has critical prophetic implications because many Jews will come out of this area at the second coming of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 11:11). The modern day name for this area is Mesopotamia, which is bordered on the south by Kuwait, on the west by Iraq and on the east by Iran. When one considers present world focus, once again things are happening in the “land of Shinar.”

NARRATIVE OBSERVATION #3 - The accomplishment of the people. 11:3

These people were, as Dr. Ross said, an “ingenious lot.” The Hebrew word for “brick” indicates that these bricks were made from a white, chalky clay, which when burned had a white color to it. The word “tar” refers to an oil-like or pitch-like liquid that when hardened by the sun becomes very solid. The English name that we know this substance by is asphalt, which is known to have its deposits in the vicinity of Babylon and also near the Dead Sea (Gesenius, p. 289).

NARRATIVE OBSERVATION #4 - The rebellion of the people. 11:4

Fact #1 - They wanted to build a city and tower. 11:4a

The word “city” refers to a strong, fortified place and the term “tower” refers to a building that is known and seen for its height. It has been discovered in the Mesopotamian area that there were a number of ziggurats (lofty, pyramidal towers). Dr. S.L. Johnson writes: “The ziggurats were like a stepped pyramid, the edifice being about the height of a modern twenty eight story building. An altar was usually erected on the top layer, a kind of shrine, around which were written the signs of the zodiac. Thus, the tower was to be a religious building” (Lecture 21, p. 2).

Fact #2 - They wanted to reach the heavens. 11:4b

The people wanted this tower to make a statement that they could accomplish whatever they wanted, including make their own way to heaven.

Fact #3 - They wanted to build a name for themselves. 11:4c

Notice the motive - not to glorify God, but self.

Fact #4 - They wanted to stay together. 11:4d

This desire to stay together is a unified attempt to stand against the will of God, as Dr. Leupold said, “This world breathes defiance against God” (Vol. 1, p. 287).

NARRATIVE OBSERVATION #5 - The evaluation of the people. 11:5-6

If we keep in mind that the goal is to build a tower to the heavens and then read the opening of verse 5 “And the LORD **came down**. . .”, we see that this accomplishment of man was nothing more than, as Dr. Johnson said, an accomplishment of “dwarfs” (p. 4).

Just five generations before this, God had destroyed the entire world by flood because it reached a level of total rebellion against Him and it was heading in the same direction again. God has every right to do the same thing again, but in an amazing demonstration of Grace, He doesn't.

NARRATIVE OBSERVATION #6 - The judgment of God. 11:7-9

God's solution was to “confuse” their language (11:7). The word “confuse” means God mixed up their speech so they could not understand each other.

The ability to understand is a gracious gift from God and God can, at any moment, confuse a person so that he or she cannot understand wonderful things of God.