

09.07.06 Coromandel Baptist 10:00 a.m.

The Power Behind the Thrones

Bible Readings = Gen. 3:1-7, 22-24; Gen. 10:8-12; and Rev. 17:1-7, 15-18

Introduction:

- (1) Last week we focussed on two passages which are central to our understanding of the nations and their relationship to God and his to them: the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 and the account of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11.
- (2) We will touch on some of this material in different ways throughout the series, but what becomes immediately clear is that we cannot think of the nations as free standing entities.
- (3) Just as we cannot think of Man *qua* Man, we cannot think of the nations *qua* nations. They all exist in relationship to God and his purposes, and to the biblical revelation of the spiritual forces with whom they are in league.
- (4) At various points in the series we will need to comment on the nature and source of true power. All the nations are essentially power hungry, and are keen to take and exercise power over other nations, and (ultimately) over God!
- (5) Behind all of the visible and acknowledge power of the nations lies unacknowledged and invisible sources and means of power, and to this, at least in part, we turn this week.

Today, we will be considering the power behind the thrones, i.e. the fact that the nations are not independent entities in relation to God and his purposes, but are aligned with and driven by the power of the City, which in turn rides on the power of the Serpent.

1. The Knowledge of Good and Evil

(1) In order to open the theme up we need to take a step backwards, into the account of the fall in Genesis 3, from which the first of our Bible readings have been taken.

- At the heart of human sin is the desire for an independent knowledge of ‘good’ and ‘evil’.
- Moreover, this independent knowledge of good and evil was so that we might be ‘as God’ i.e. to enable us to live without reference to him, in a self-defining relationship with one another and the world.
 - The implication of the Serpent’s temptation was that God only placed a prohibition on the tree in order to protect his own superior status.

(2) In a very real sense, human sin is the insistence on our independence in the realm of making assessments and judgements.

- We judge what is good and evil, for ourselves, and react accordingly! If our ‘good’ runs headlong into another person’s ‘good’, we go to war!
 - In this way, our knowledge of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ is linked to us gaining and maintaining a name (as in Gen. 11:4). In doing so we say that we are acting with ‘wisdom’ (as the world understands it).
 - Though it does not come through in English, it is clear that the account of the Tower in Gen. 11 is in fact a description of folly/foolishness. There are repeated uses of and allusions to the Hebrew letters *nbl*, which means ‘fool’. The ‘wisdom’ of the world systems seeks to accomplish an

outcome for itself: wisdom is measured by successful outcomes, which are evaluated on our understanding of good and evil! In all departments (the nature of the outcome, the means of achieving it, the very venture itself) the Tower building is folly.

- The love of God completely circumvents the judgements we make about ourselves and one another, even about our enemies. He loves! The Son does not weigh up the 'good' or 'evil' of coming to the Cross. He just loves and comes to the Cross so that our sinful independence can be broken by his redeeming grace!

(3) The Tower is the attempt to construct for ourselves a 'good' outcome (i.e. security, name, no scattering: thus power, prestige, wealth etc.) and in so doing to avoid the good purposes of God for us.

- We have been structured for dependence on him, and such is the joy of life in the Spirit, but in our sin we do not want it, so see the necessity of dependence to be a demeaning and enslaving thing.

2. Nimrod: The Antitype of Christ in His Person and His Work

(1) When we come to Nimrod, whom we mentioned last week, we find a mighty man, representing the great kings of the earth. We note a few things about him:

- There is an emphasis on his might. See the repeated reference in Gen. 10:8-9 = mighty, mighty, mighty Nimrod!
 - The word for 'mighty one' is likewise intensified (*gibbor*, with reduplication) an intensive form of the more common word for strength or power (*gbr*), and indicates power that surpasses the ordinary (NIDOTTE, 1, 810). It is often found in military contexts. Ultimately, God himself is the great *gibbor* of his people (e.g. Jer. 32:18).
 - Some Old Testament commentators point out that the word 'mighty one' (*gibbor*) in this context carries the sense of violent, tyrannical power (Westermann, 516), especially when seen in combination with the meaning of his name...
- His name in Hebrew = 'rebellion' or 'let us rebel'. It could also be translated 'valiant', but he is certainly not 'valiant for truth'! The context and content of Gen. 10 and 11 indicates he is the leader of human rebellion against God.
- His leadership is with great strength and power, able to drive vast populations of men to do his will, and to use his political, physical, and mental prowess to establish a series of cities and thus an empire.
- We should not lose sight of the fact that this empire was formed against the Lord! His was a repetition of the actions of Cain, the first city builder of Gen. 4:17, who wanted to immortalise his name by calling the city after his son.
- He was a religious/spiritual leader as much as a military /political genius. 'The *beginning* of his kingdom was Babel' (Gen. 10:10) means that he was the prime mover behind the tower building of Gen. 11, and after the scattering that took place there, he established the other cities such as Nineveh.
- His desire in making a name etc. was parallel to that of the evil one himself in Is. 14:13-14 You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will

set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north, I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High

(2) In all this, he stands as sort of anti-type to Christ.

- Nimrod was a hunter (of men), whereas Christ is the Shepherd of the flock. The one seeks to gather them to consume them, the other seeks to gather them to bless them.
- He rules over the nations he enslaves with might and power, built on fear and false worship. The Lord Jesus rules over the nations by love, in the true worship of God the Father
- Nimrod establishes his whole kingdom on the basis of making a name. Jesus' kingdom is established on the fact that he seeks no name for himself, but only that he might proclaim the Father's name to his brothers.
- Nimrod builds his empire on the blood of men he enslaves. Jesus builds his on his own blood, given as he makes himself slave to all.
- Nimrod builds this Tower/City to glorify his name, the Lord builds his to glorify the name of the Father. Jesus is indeed the Lord's *gibbor*! However, also see its use in Is. 9:6! There will be a gathering of the nations Gen. 49:10 cf. Is. 11:10!
- The work of the one is from the Serpent, in empowered by the Flesh, the work of the other is from the Father, empowered by the Spirit.

(3) Simply put: the City of Man is entirely the opposite of the City of God in all aspects.

- But it is this, not because the intelligence of men is deficient or limited, but because of who it is who stands under the whole enterprise! The serpent produces children in his image!

3. The Power Behind the Thrones: And God's Verdict on Him!

(1) Without following the theme of the City through the Bible (which we will of necessity touch on as we go through the series) we need to turn to the Book of the Revelation.

- The nations are seen to be a restless sea (Rev. 17:1, 15; cf. Ps. 65:7; Is. 8:6-8; Jer. 51:42; etc.)
- The Dragon (i.e. the Serpent, the Devil who deceives the whole world...Rev. 12:8) calls a great beast to come out of the sea (of the nations) Rev. 13:1, who seeks the worship of the earth (13:8), and who gives rise to the false prophet (13:11ff).
- The Great City is shown to rule over the kings of the earth (Rev. 17:18 cf. 18:3) who has traded on human souls (Rev. 18:13), and who has provided wealth for the merchants etc. She is not *a* city, but *all* the cities *and the principle* of the city...even if not linked to a city!
- The Lord gives his enemies enough power to destroy themselves (Rev. 17:16f.)

(2) In other words, the nations themselves are enslaved to an entity: called the City/Babylon, who herself serves the Beast/Serpent and whose end is destruction. She has no mercy for her children (feeds on their souls) and the Lord has no mercy on her.

- Christ had to enter into the City...Jerusalem. Evil one came to him and for him. The ruler of the kings of the earth came to gain power of the King of Kings.
- Christ shows himself to be *the* mighty one, but through the humility of his self-giving grace! He defeats the serpent, and brings judgement on the City.