



"Affliction comes to the believer not to make him sad, but sober;
not to make him sorry, but wise."

—Henry Ward Beecher

29-Feb-08

Babel: Confusing Wisdom and Rebellion

After the waters of the Flood receded, and Noah's sons began having children of their own, mankind began rebuilding and re-establishing itself on the planet. Although [God](#) had promised never again to destroy [the world](#) with a flood, after a few generations the people—not knowing God and thus not trusting Him—were still inclined to look to their own resources for protection and stability. Many gathered around strong men like Nimrod (meaning "rebellion" or "let us revolt"), hoping that having the right leadership—the leadership that *they* deemed was right—would shield them from further woe.

The people of one of Nimrod's cities, Babel, began a project conceived out of a desire to preserve themselves rather than to glorify the Divine: "And they said, 'Come, let us build *ourselves* a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for *ourselves*, lest *we* be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth'" ([Genesis 11:4](#); emphasis ours).

With the Flood undoubtedly still on their minds, their first consideration was not their standing before God. Instead, they wanted to create a monument to stand the test of time—something that would help them to endure as a people

and bestow a noteworthy reputation upon them. Their natural—carnal—inclination was to try to defend against an act of God rather than to make [peace](#) with Him.

In their hostility, it probably did not occur to them to come into alignment and favor with the One who has the power to scatter. Instead, they made contingency plans. Rather than being chastened by the Flood and turning to God, mankind became *suspicious* of Him—He was not behaving as they thought He should!—and sought to develop a structure to keep the consequences of [sin](#) (like scattering) at bay.

Nimrod was the grandson of Ham, yet only three generations after God's destruction of all but eight human beings, God was not part of humanity's calculations. Did the people really believe that *God* had sent the Flood? Or did they conclude that it was just a natural catastrophe—out of God's control, and thus one that *they* needed to guard against in the future? Though the stories of the Flood undoubtedly played into their thinking, the Bible gives no indication that they received any positive instruction from them. Neither God nor His governance of earth was in their thoughts ([Psalm 10:4](#)).

Strong's Concordance shows that *name* in [Genesis 11:4](#) means "an appellation, as a mark or memorial of individuality; by implication honor, authority, character." It contains the idea of a "definite and conspicuous position." Rather than submitting to God—and thus honoring and glorifying Him—they sought to elevate themselves. They were sure that *they* could find a way to advance beyond God-ordained consequences. The ironic outcome is that the identical consequence of sin they were trying so hard to avoid was what God ordained should befall them:

So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. ([Genesis 11:8-9](#))

[Moses](#) wrote this poignant chapter long ago, but we can see the same patterns wherever human nature is allowed to lead. When God broke up the Worldwide Church of God—a spiritual catastrophe we could compare to the

Flood—many of the same things happened. Some people began looking inward for stability, vowing never to follow another man, even though God has always worked through flawed human servants. A significant number of people gathered around ministers that they perceived to be spiritually strong, hoping that the right human leadership would keep them safe. Others sought to create—or be a part of—a legacy resembling church life before the calamity. Many sought safety in a structure of checks and balances designed to keep any one man from abusing—or effectively using—the authority that God ordains and controls (see [Proverbs 19:21; 21:1](#)).

Yet, how many really believed that God caused the scattering? Was it just a natural occurrence that was out of His control, but one that *we* needed to protect ourselves against in the future? Consciously or not, how many of us became suspicious of God for not governing as we thought He should have?

At the Tower of Babel, the peoples' greatest fear came to pass because they left God out of their thoughts. However, it did not have to be that way. It would not have been difficult to inquire about moral and spiritual conditions before the Flood to ascertain why God acted as He did. It does not take much to understand sin and its consequences. Even a child can accept chastening and seek peace with his father so that he is spared further punishment.

So it is with us. We have been scattered by God—chastened because of sin just like the people of Babel and just like the children of Israel—yet for many, this seems to fall outside of what God is allowed to do. For the people of Babel and the children of Israel, idolatry in some form led them away from God. If they only had wholeheartedly sought God, peace could have been made between Him and them. Instead, they trusted in structures—the Tower of Babel and the Temple in Jerusalem ([Jeremiah 7:1-15](#)). In both cases, what they trusted in was destroyed, either by neglect or violence.

The structure was not the problem, for God Himself commissioned the building of the Temple, and after it was destroyed, He commanded that it be rebuilt. The problem was that the structure occupied more of their minds than God did. The same decision is before us: to trust in a structure for safety or to seek the sovereign God of heaven and earth.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[What's So Bad About Babylon? \(1997\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Considering the Tower of Babel and the Babylonian system, mankind must stop trusting in its towers—anything that we place our trust in apart from Almighty God (wealth, status, achievement, military prowess, scientific inventiveness, etc.), giving us an arrogant, self-centered sense of security and well-being. Babylon constitutes the fountainhead of instruction that, like strong drink, impairs the ability to function properly while creating the illusion of doing better. A mere increase of knowledge (without the accompanying revelation of God) is useless, leading nowhere in terms of solving mankind's real problems. The fruits of Babylon have created a spiritual, social, and ecological crisis which threatens all life. God forces us to make a choice in favor of life and permanence, rejecting the way of death and impermanence.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Sovereignty of God: Part Four](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

God not only rules in heaven, but He is also sovereign on earth! He is not an absentee landlord, but One who is actively involved in administering His creation.

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