

CGYG / LIFE Bible Study Series 2006-07: Genesis
Genesis 9:18-11:32 – The Pride of Man and the Glory of God

July 6, 2007

How fitting that the Lord should warn us against the sin of ‘pride’ at this time: the city has just ended ‘pride week’ – the time every year that homosexuals take advantage of, to openly flaunt their acts of depravity. They want to ‘make their mark’ so to speak, to declare their ‘freedom’ to resist the moral standard that God has set in place, both in His Word and in their very own hearts (Rom 2:15). As they went about their loud festivities this week, I wondered whether there was a similar atmosphere on that day in Genesis 11 when men gathered together to ‘make a name for themselves’. Thousands of years later, the heart of sinful man has not changed – man wants to define his own rules, make a name for himself, to live in any which way pleases him, and to remove God far from the equation. Yet to God, who reigns on high, it is all the same – man’s greatest endeavour to glorify himself is a pitiful effort and bears no lasting consequence before an infinite, almighty God, whose name will be the only one that prevails unto all of eternity.

Our culture prides in people who are ‘self-made’. The world is fascinated with people who have accomplished much on the material level, especially when they started with little. When was the last time you worked hard to achieve something? Perhaps it was to obtain a job, or a spot in a college program, or perhaps it was even church or ministry-related? What motivated you to want to achieve that particular thing, and what was the outcome?

Read Genesis 9:18-10:32

1. After the great peace covenant that God gives to Noah in the previous verses, here we now find Noah – a man who Scripture says ‘walked with God’ and was ‘a righteous man’ (6:9) – described as a naked drunkard lying in his tent. What does this tell us about Noah (Gen 8:21)? How should this serve as a warning to us claiming to be Christians even today (see 1 John 1:8-9)?

- ‘Every inclination of (man’s) heart is evil from childhood’ – all men are sinners
- People of faith can still fall into sin
- When a person accepts Christ as their Lord and Saviour, it marks the beginning of their sanctification journey. As Christians, we ought to strive for holiness, but when we fall we need to come before the Lord in repentance and seek His forgiveness (1 John 1)

2. What did Ham, Noah’s youngest son, do that was so detestable in his father’s sight (c.f. Exodus 20:12)? In contrast, what did Shem and Japheth do?

- Ham saw his father’s nakedness, and instead of acting to cover it up, went and told others about it
- Ex 20:12 → “Honor your father and mother...”
- Shem & Japheth showed honor and respect for Noah and covered him up, being careful not to see their father’s nakedness

3. What did Noah do as a result of Ham’s actions (v.24-26)? What do you think was the implication that Noah cursed Canaan, and not Ham directly? How would Noah’s curse eventually play out in the history of Israel (e.g. Lev 18:1-5, Josh 3:9-10)?

- V. 25 → Noah cursed Ham, or more accurately, cursed Ham’s son Canaan – not just the person, but the people that he represented
- Noah also placed God’s blessing on Shem, and that God would bring prosperity to Japheth
- Canaan, according to many parts of the Bible, were one of the greatest sources of temptation to the people of God, e.g. in their sexual perversions (Lev 18)

A note about Chapter 10: The history of people groups is complex, but at the very simplest level, Japheth, the oldest son, fathered what are now know as the Indo-European people. From Japheth came those who live in Europe and all the way across to India and even across Russia and across the Bering Sea and into North America and South America, the native peoples. And then Ham, we learn, fathered families in Africa and the Far East, the Asian world as well as some regions of the Middle East. And then that most well-known of the sons of Noah, Shem from whom came the Semitic people of the Mesopotamian valley, the Middle East as we know it, the Jewish people (through Isaac, God’s promised son for Abraham and Sarah) and the Arabic people (primarily through the illegitimate son that Abraham bore with Hagar – Ishmael; incidentally, Mohammed himself claimed to be a descendant of Ishmael).

Read Genesis 11:1-32

Babel, or Babylon as it came to be known, was the centre of the civilization of the ancient world. The mighty towers of the Babylonian ziggurats were widely known. From the perspectives of human achievement, Babylon was the summit. In King Nebuchadnezzar’s day (about 600 BC) it was the capital of a great world empire: it shattered Judah and carried the Jewish people captive (Daniel 1:1-2). Ancient Babylon’s ruins today lie about 50 miles south of modern-day Baghdad, Iraq.

4. What was it that the men decided to do at Babel (v.1-4)? What motivated their actions, and how were they planning to go about building this tower (compare this attitude with what Romans 1:32 tells us)? What did God do as a result of this, and what happened (v.5-9)? Why do you think God did this?
- The legacy of a man will be remembered if he fears the Lord...
 - Man's motivation was so that they could make a name for themselves and not be scattered over the face of the earth
 - Rom 1:32 → sin loves company... sinners not only know what they're doing is wrong, they approve of each other's sin
 - God 'came down' to see the city and tower, confused their language and scattered them all over the earth; the city was left unfinished
 - As judgment but also as an act of mercy – God could've allowed man to continue down the path of sin and build their 'tower' in vain
 - "Nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them..." – even sin! So this is also an act of mercy by God, to preserve them
5. Pride is perhaps the most hideous of sins because at its core, pride is man dethroning God from his heart, 'erasing God from the equation' and making himself his own king, lawmaker and object of worship. Pride was what motivated Adam & Eve to commit the first act of disobedience – they were tempted by the lie that they 'would be like God' (Gen 3:4). What do the following verses say about pride and what the Lord will do with the proud (Prov 16:18-19; 1 John 2:15-17; Isaiah 14:3-4,13-15; example of King Uzziah in 2 Chronicles 26)
- Prov 16:18-19 → Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall
 - 1 John 2:15-18 → "For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever..."
 - Isa 14:3,13-15 → Though the 'king of Babylon' (v.3) said in his heart, "I will ascend to heaven...", God brought him down to the grave, to the 'depths of the pit'
 - 2 Chronicles 26 → King Uzziah began faithful to the Lord (v.5) but later became proud because God had given him success (v.5b); it was the Lord who helped him against the Philistines and against the Arabs (v.7), and as a result of this his fame spread far (v.8) – in spite of this, Uzziah's pride led to his downfall and he became 'unfaithful to the Lord' (v.16)
 - God rebuked him via Azariah the priest and afflicted him with leprosy; he died alone (v.21)
6. Contrast what happened at the tower of Babel with just a few verses later, in Genesis 12:1-3. What does God say to Abram? Ultimately, whose prerogative is it to 'make a name' for someone? Whose name is God most concerned with lifting high and making known (e.g. Isaiah 63:7-14, Ezekiel 36:22-23, and in the work of salvation e.g. Rom 1:1-6)?
- Gen 12:2 → God promises to make Abram into a great nation and to make his name great; In contrast to those at Babel, who wanted to make a name for themselves, here God is the One who promises to make a name for Abram
 - Isaiah 63:7-14 → He chose and loved and delivered Israel "...to gain for yourself a glorious name" (v.14) and again "to gain for himself everlasting renown" (v.12)
 - Eze 36:22-23 → God said He would judge the pagan nations for scorning Israel (v.7), and would multiply their numbers (v.11), etc. not because Israel had been an obedient people (in fact, they had profaned God's name – v.22) but because God wanted to show the holiness of His great name (v.23)
 - Rom 1:1-6 → It is through Christ and for His name's sake (v.5) that we 'received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles...'
7. Read Psalm 112. What promises are given in this Psalm to those who fear the Lord (especially v.6, 9)? What contrast is given in verse 10 for those who are wicked and do not know the Lord?
- Psalm 112:6 → A righteous man will be remembered forever... i.e. he will have a lasting name!
 - Psalm 112:9 → '...his horn will be lifted high in honor'
 - Psalm 112:10 → '...the longings of the wicked will come to nothing' → basically futility in their efforts, which is what happened at Babel

From verses 10 onwards we see God working through the line of Shem to carry on the 'godly lineage' – one that would lead to the birth of Abraham (Abram), with whom God would make His covenant. We will learn and focus more on Abraham in later studies.

Taking every thought captive...

As Spurgeon said, "Many men and women have said of their works, "They will last forever;" but how disappointed they have been! In the age following the flood, they made the bricks and built the Tower of Babel, and they thought, "This will last forever." But God confused their language; they never finished it. By His sovereignty he scattered the men and women and left the tower as a monument to their folly... So it is with all the proudest works of man, whether they have been his temples or his kingdoms, he has written "everlasting" on them; but God has ordained their end, and they have passed away... in his pride, man calls his works eternal—God calls them transitory; man conceives that they are built of rock—God says, "They are built of sand, or worse than that—they are built of air." Man says he erects them for eternity—God blows on them for a second, and where are they? Like the fragments of a vision, they are passed and gone forever." Do we have this kind of attitude in our hearts? Let us not fall into the sin of pride as the men at Babel did, glorying in the works of their own hands and endeavoring to make a name for themselves. Rather, as the Apostle Paul reminded the Corinthian church, in everything we do, let us do for the name and the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). May we who boast, boast only in the Lord Jesus Christ, because He alone is our 'all in all' – our righteousness, holiness and redemption (1 Cor 1:30-31).