

The Lord Confused the Language

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain what the Word of God teaches about the spread of the nations from the family of Noah. In this topic, we will see that the people began to rebel against God again as they decided to build a tower so they would not be scattered abroad.

God had destroyed the earth with a flood because of the fact that the hearts of the people were evil continually. When Noah and his family came off the ark, God said, in Genesis 9:1, “...Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.” Within a short time, we see that the people chose to rebel against filling the earth. Genesis 11:1-4 says, “Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks and bake *them* thoroughly.’ They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. 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.” Here, we see that the people rebelled because they did not want to be scattered so they could fill the earth.

As the number of people began to increase after the flood, we see that they all had the same language and speech. The word translated “language” is most often translated “lip” and speaks of speaking with the lip. In a few places, it is translated by words that speak of the shore of a river or sea. However, in several places, it is used to speak of the fact that people are speaking a language or speech with their lips. In these verses, it is translated “language” three times and its second use, in verse seven, is translated “speech”. It is also translated by “language” in Isaiah 19:18, where we read, “In that day five cities in the land of Egypt will speak the language of Canaan and swear by the LORD of hosts; one will be called the City of Destruction.” This meant that everyone could understand each other.

We see that the people traveled as a group until they found a fairly level area in Shinar (later called Babylon). The two names of Babylon and Shinar are used together in Daniel 1:1-2, where we read, “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.” As a result, these names both refer to the same area. The people settled down in that area and remained there. We see, in Genesis 10:9-10, that Nimrod became the king of this kingdom. Those verses say, “He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; therefore it is said, ‘Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord.’ And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.” Here, we see that he formed a kingdom with these four cities that were all located in the area of Babylon.

The leaders of these cities began to talk together about building a new city with a tower that would reach into the heavens. Together, they discussed making bricks and baking them thoroughly. Then, they said that they had asphalt for mortar to hold the bricks together. The word translated

“asphalt” is tar and was later common in the tar pits around the Dead Sea. Genesis 14:10 says, “Now the Valley of Siddim *was full of* asphalt pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled; *some* fell there, and the remainder fled to the mountains.” As the king and the leaders talked together, we see they decided to build a city with a very high tower in it. Their purpose for this new city with its high tower was to make a name for themselves. Here, we see that they were controlled by their own pride. Their pride was what caused them to rebel against the command of God.

God had said to multiply and fill the earth. In their pride, these leaders wanted to build this city and tower so they would not be scattered abroad on the face of the earth. It was this very attitude of pride that caused Satan to originally rebel against God. We see the five “I wills” of Satan (Lucifer) in Isaiah 14:13-14, where we read, “For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’” Here, we see that Nimrod and the other leaders of these cities had a similar attitude. They wanted to make a name for themselves instead of scattering and filling the earth. They even had unity in their rebellion because they had one language, one purpose, and a will to work together to accomplish that purpose.

However, Genesis 11:5-7 says, “But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, ‘Indeed the people *are* one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.’” God knew the pride in the hearts of Nimrod and the other leaders. God also knew the destructive potential that this pride would cause because they had one purpose and language and had a will to work together. God knew this combination of things meant that anything they agreed to do could be accomplished. The word translated “will be withheld” means to *fence, fortify or restrain*. In Deuteronomy 9:1, we read, “‘Hear, O Israel: You *are* to cross over the Jordan today, and go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourself, cities great and fortified up to heaven.’” Here, the word is translated “fortified up”, which normally meant that they could not be defeated.

God saw this rebellion and knew it had to be stopped. We see that the whole Trinity acted in unity to end this rebellion (“let US go down and confuse their language”). The word translated “confound” means to *mix, mingle, confuse or confound*. It is used in most passages to speak of so completely mixing oil with flour that there is oil in every single part of the flour. Leviticus 7:12 uses the word twice when it says, “‘If he offers it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer, with the sacrifice of thanksgiving, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, unleavened wafers anointed with oil, or cakes of blended flour mixed with oil.’” Here, we see that God said they would so mix their language that the different families would not be able to understand one another’s speech.

At the same time, God made a statement about the results of having a unified purpose, language, and a will to work together to accomplish that purpose. God said that with this combination, “nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.” These people were in rebellion against God. He knew that if this rebellion was allowed to continue, the situation would soon be like it was before the flood. That situation is described in Genesis 6:5, where we read, “Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts

of his heart *was* only evil continually.” God made it clear that men will become more and more evil when they are unified around a common evil purpose. That was the very reason why God had earlier found it necessary to destroy the earth with a flood.

This time, God chose to deal with that rebellion in a different way. God confused the speech so each extended family or clan had a different language when they spoke. This meant that the people were no longer able to understand one another. We see the results of this lack of understanding in Genesis 11:8-9. Those verses say, “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.” In these verses, we see that once the people could no longer communicate with one another, they then began to scatter out over the whole earth.

We see that the name of Babel was given to describe what had happened to this city. The word translated “Babel” means *to confuse or confusion*. Babylon is the Greek spelling of the name, which is spelled Babel in Hebrew. In Genesis 10:10 and 11:9, the name is used to refer to this city which they started to build. In the other two hundred and fifty-seven uses, after the Tower of Babel, this word is always translated Babylon and refers either to the city or to the nation of Babylon. We also see that this confusion of the language affected the entire earth, just as the earlier flood had affected the entire earth. We might say that what God did in one day had a longer and greater impact on the people of the earth than the flood, even though it took Noah one hundred years to build the ark.

This confusion of the language of the earth continues to have an impact throughout the world. God gave a tiny reversal of this confusion of the language on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:6 says, “And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language.” Here, we see that God chose to reverse the effects of the confusion of language in Genesis for a short time, on the day of Pentecost, as a sign to the Jews. The confusion of language was only on earth, because in heaven, all are able to understand one another. This is illustrated in Revelation 7:9-10, where we read, “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn that the confusion of language will end when we get to heaven. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things.