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THE PRIDE AND THE FALL

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Last week, we had a lengthy sermon about ancient history as revealed in Genesis chapter 10. The two America-centered sermons before that were also very long, so I'll try to be brief today. *This sermon will self destruct in 23.25 minutes!*

Genesis 10 gives us the places the different family groups moved, but today's chapter gives us the reason for their movement. Let's consider Genesis 11:1-9 right now:

Genesis 11:1-9:

And the whole earth was of one language, and of 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.

And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.

And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.

And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

This is really fascinating. The Land of Shinar is in modern-day Iraq, an area called Mesopotamia ("Land Between the Rivers") by the Greeks. Even today, secular historians who do not believe the Bible refer to this area as "The Cradle of Civilization." This is where liberal theologians place the "mythological" Garden of Eden and the site of a local flood that is recorded as Noah's Flood in the Bible; but of course Noah's Flood was world wide and destroyed all pre-Flood civilization and the site of the original Garden.

Let's consider for a moment: if you were Noah, and you knew that the whole world would be destroyed, what things would you take with you into the ark along with the animals and the food? I suspect you'd take whatever technology you'd need to survive and prosper afterward. We know that, according to Genesis 4, mankind developed musical instruments and metallurgy. The Ark itself took a high level of technology to build. My suggestion today, though I obviously can't prove it, is that Noah and his family came off the Ark with a certain amount of know-how preserved from the ancient world.

One bit of evidence is this story right here in Genesis 11. Shortly after the Flood, the earliest generations formed a large city and began construction of a massive tower. You have in your hand a record of civil engineering and structural engineering right at the dawn of history. There's also a level of administration here. Think of the words "Go to, let us..." as a resolution. Today we would say, "Resolved, That we make brick." Of course I'm not suggesting that Parliamentary Procedure was in place! I'm just saying that there was a means of governance.

From this account, we see that they moved into a fertile region, and named the rivers that after rivers that had existed in the pre-Flood world. (They also named some of their children after pre-Flood locations, such as *Cush* and *Havilah*). With the food supply established, the body politic, whatever form it may have been, made a resolution: "*Go to, let us make brick and burn them thoroughly.*" The earliest culture had the rather impressive technology to make kiln-fired bricks. The words here have been completely validated by archeology: we do in fact find kiln-fired brick with tar for mortar in ancient Babylon, the "Cradle of Civilization."

We are not told how much time passed, but eventually the body politic made another resolution: "*Go to, let us build a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.*"

There is nothing wrong with making bricks and building a city, but these folks went beyond that into direct rebellion against God. God had told them to spread out, to replenish the earth; but they had other ideas! They sought to establish a religious, cultural and civil superpower that encompassed all humanity under one banner. This becomes clearer when we compare these verses to the story of Nimrod in chapter 10. It appears that Nimrod's idea was to set up a one-world government in rebellion against God. In fact, his very name means "Let us rebel"! These early Babylonians sought to control all humanity, all resources, all future "colonies." That is the thrust of Genesis 10 and 11.

This resolution reflects religious apostasy in that the tower would be for false worship; it reflects pride in that they wished to make a name for themselves rather than bow in obedience to God; and it reflects rebellion in that it proposes to thwart God's command to spread out over the earth.

If this situation had continued, all freedom would have been stifled under tyranny, and all attempts to follow the one true God would have been viewed as acts of sedition against the state and its religion. God has a funny way of accomplishing His plans, though. If He can't accomplish His plans *with* man's obedience, He will accomplish those plans *in spite of* man's disobedience. Which is better for us? Shall we be on God's side as He accomplishes His plans, or shall we be in opposition to Him as He accomplishes His plans?

Proverbs 16:18 is informative here:

Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.

The rest of this story shows God undoing the exact things man attempted to do. The phrase "The LORD came down" is an anthropomorphism. It's not that God wasn't there before or was unaware of their doings up to that point, but rather this shows God stepping into his legal role as Judge.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary has an excellent comment here:

What the people considered their greatest strength—unity—He swiftly destroyed by confusing their language (v. 7; cf. v. 9). What they considered their greatest fear—scattering (v. 4)—came naturally on them What they desired most—to make a name for themselves—ironically came to pass, for they became known as “Babel.”¹

Their pride and rebellion was their undoing. God accomplished His purpose in spite of their disobedience.

I want to spend a few minutes before we close sort of wrapping up this part of the historical record. From this point on, the Bible is largely silent for about 200 years until the call of Abraham. Much of the narrative from this point on deals narrowly with Abraham and his descendants; but what about the rest of the world?

Secular historians confirm, without being able to offer much explanation, that human civilization sprang up rapidly all around the world within a very short period of time with a high level of technology. One common feature of ancient civilizations are pyramid-like buildings, patterned after the manner of the Babylonian ziggurat form.

There is no evidence whatever of any technological breakthrough in the methods of quarrying or cutting stone which might account for the onset of pyramid building. All the tools and techniques used by the pyramid builders were in existence well before their time.²

The archaeological evidence suggested that rather than developing slowly and painfully, as is normal with human societies [*note the bias*], the civilization of Ancient Egypt, like that of the Olmecs, emerged all at once and fully formed. Indeed, the period of transition from primitive to advanced society appears to have been so short that it makes no kind of historical sense.

Technological skills that should have taken hundreds or even thousands of years to evolve were brought into use almost overnight—and with no apparent antecedents whatever.³

The Bible provides the most reasonable explanation for this and other features of early human history, such as the high level of artistry found in some cave paintings and in the astonishing fact that “stone-age” people created musical instruments. What happened was that as people were pushed farther from civilization, they lived very primitively for short periods of time in caves or other temporary dwellings until they were able to establish agriculture, find and work veins of metal, quarry stone, and establish permanent buildings and trades. I mean, think about it: if you had the skill to craft musical instruments and tools, would you live for generations in a cave somewhere? Of course not. The Bible’s view of history is thus much more sensible than assuming that humans lived primitively for hundreds or thousands of years.

The bottom line today, though, is that God is going to accomplish His purpose in history. Will you

1 John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 45.

2 Kurt Mendelssohn, “A Scientist Looks at the Pyramids,” *American Scientist*, March–April 1971, 210. Quoted in “The Mystery of Ancient Man” by Steve Cardno, *Creation* 20(2):10-14. Available at <http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v20/i2/ancient.asp>.

3 Graham Hancock, *Fingerprints of the Gods* (New York: Crown Trade Paperbacks, 1995), 135–136. Quoted in Cardno.

work with Him, or against Him as you build your own agenda, your own personal empire, your own great name? Pride goes before destruction, my friends, but the Bible also informs us that if we humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord, He will lift us up (James 4:10). Let's work *with* God in obedience and humility.