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Guided by His Word,
Serving in His Love

God's Answer to Babel

After the flood, God commanded Noah's descendants to fill the earth. One line of his descendants settled on the plain of Shinar. This group may have been the first people to develop the practice of baking bricks as an alternative to building with stone. In any event, they determined to use this more versatile technology to build a great tower, one that reached the heavens. They did this to make a name for themselves. The idea of this clan "making a name for themselves" probably carried with it the thought of amassing power and advantage over all other such clans. It was their intent to settle and to dominate. Their great tower and city would be a testament not just to their ingenuity with bricks, but to their raw might. There was no thought of the glory of God in any part of this grand scheme.

For a man, family, church or nation to pursue greatness for the mere sake of greatness is always a dangerous thing. In His mercy and wisdom, God did not allow this to happen. He divided these arrogant visionaries by confounding their language and further scattering them. The confusion of languages that occurred here is why the place became known as "*Babel*."

I attribute this to God's mercy as well as to His wisdom because, had God not provided them with the necessity to divide and scatter, they would ultimately have oppressed others on their way to eventually falling apart anyway. That much human ego cannot cooperate indefinitely. It may accomplish some great thing. In fact, God said of this people, "nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them" (Genesis 11:6). Still, eventually, all such imperial dreams run their course – Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, the Third Reich, *etc.* In His mercy, God prevented these men from oppressing others.

The notion of "reaching to the heavens," or breaking into the realm of God was, of course, absurd. When it did become time for man and heaven to meet, it had to be God that took that initiative. In Genesis 28, Jacob was on the run for his life from his older brother, Esau, because of his own chicanery. He had stolen from Esau the covenant blessing of his father, Isaac. God allowed this to transpire

because it was always His intent to produce His covenant nation through the younger brother, but Jacob did not understand all of this. He just knew that his powerful big brother was furious.

One night, Jacob had a dream. What is popularly called "Jacob's ladder" is represented by a Hebrew word that can also be rendered "staircase" or "tower with a staircase." This structure indeed spanned heaven and earth. In fact, Jacob saw angels ascending and descending on it. This bridge that spans heaven and earth was something only God could build, and "Jacob's ladder" is considered to be an Old Testament type of Jesus Himself.

God confounded the languages at Babel. This signaled the inevitability of division among fallen man, but a time would come for God to restore the potential for oneness to humanity. Jesus removed the penalty of our sin. After He was raised from the dead, He would send the Holy Spirit to begin restoring "oneness" to all believers. A most fascinating foreshadowing of this work occurred on the very day that the Holy Spirit arrived. Jews from all around the world were gathered in Jerusalem for the great feast of Pentecost. Peter, empowered by the Holy Spirit, addressed the crowd, and all who were gathered there heard the Gospel of Christ in his own native language.

If "Babel" is to be identified with that ancient moment in time when men attempted to exalt themselves to the place of God and show themselves to be powerful, then, God's answer to Babel must be to remind us all that all such enterprises are doomed ultimately to fail. God is the author of the salvation that brings man to God. God alone is mighty to create a truly united and great nation. In fact, He is the process of doing just that, which is why every Christian must embrace the pursuit of purity and unity with holy passion.



Karl's Korner