

Behold, The People Are One

Genesis 11:1-9 (KJV)

1 And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. **2** 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. **3** 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. **4** 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. **5** And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. **6** 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. **7** Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. **8** So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. **9** 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 story is familiar to many of you. It is a story we tell children in Sunday school because it is easy to understand. (It also helps that it is not filled with death and gore.) This story, like many in Genesis, is a story of creation. While the book of Genesis starts with the creation of the world, this story deals with the creation of language. Language is very important to the Jewish audience. Specifically, Hebrew is very important.

The first 5 books of the Bible (Pentateuch or Torah) are written in Hebrew. God spoke to Moses in Hebrew. God wrote the 10 commandments in Hebrew.

To the Jewish mind, Hebrew is the language of God; God speaks to His people in Hebrew. The problem is that there are other languages in the world. You can go many places and meet people who don't speak Hebrew. So, if God created the universe and God speaks Hebrew, then why are there other languages at all? This story answers that question for us. The book of Genesis is the story of Beginnings. In it God tells us where things came from. Where did the stars come from? Where did the water come from? Why is there a moon? Why are there multiple languages in the world? The story of each is presented to us in Genesis.

The difference in this story and the others is that God tells us why in this one. In most of the stories in Genesis, God never tells us why he created most things.

Genesis 1:3 (KJV) And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

Why do we need light at all? Why didn't God simply allow us to stumble around in the dark?

Genesis 1:9 (KJV) And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.

Why does dry land need to be separated from water? Why didn't God just make us like fish? These and many more questions are never answered in the Biblical text. God simply does what he wants and the story moves on.

The Why of Languages

But in this story, we do get a "why." This story tells us why God did what he did.

Genesis 11:3 (KJV) 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.

The people had mud. Mud is made up of fine minerals mixed with water. Mud is easy to manipulate. It can be molded into something as needed. But what do you do once you get the clay molded into the shape that you need? You need to get it to stay in that shape. You need it to harden. You can allow the clay to dry out in the sun, but that makes for a weak product. You need to add fire. The fire makes the clay hard and able to carry the weight of the building.

God made stone. Stone represents God in many parts of the Bible. Jewish altars had to be made of stone that had not been altered by humans; they had to be raw stone. In this story, the people aren't using God's building material; they are using bricks. They aren't using stone; they took mud, fashioned it into the shape they needed, and then fired it. They had brick for stone: a substitute rock; an imitation for what God created.

When God takes the material in clay and works with it, you get Adam. God takes the dust of the earth and forms it into the form of a human being. God breathes into that image of clay (adamah) and it becomes a human being (Adam.)

Genesis 11:4 (KJV) 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.

The people were one. The people cooperated with each other; they planned to build a tower. They executed the plan to build the tower. People (the creation of God) used their one language (the language of God) to make a substitute for the rock that God created (bricks) in order to bring fame upon themselves (not God.)

Genesis 11:7 (KJV) Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

So, God confounded their language. The people were one and because they were one, they could do anything. The problem was that they were doing the wrong thing. They were using their talents for the wrong thing. They were using their talents to make a cheap substitute for what God created in order to bring fame upon themselves rather than glorifying God. They were making bricks, a substitute for the rock that God made, to build a tower that would make them famous, rather than a means of glorifying God.

Root of Immorality

The Devil is not one to reject a good idea when he sees one. He saw the effect that it had on the people of Babel when God confounded their languages. When the people stopped talking to each other, they lost their vision. When the people were one, God himself said, "...nothing will be restrained from them." When the Devil sees that the church is acting as one, he says the same thing. Just like Genesis 11, the Devil's first job when he sees that the people is one is to cause confusion.

A few years ago, there was a church in another city that was growing greatly. They were growing in size and influence in the local community. The people were acting as one for a while.

Then the Devil decided to confound them. This church started to have people get together into groups of two to pray as teams. The problem is that the teams were made of up men and women, not married to each other, behind closed doors, laying hands on each other to pray.

What did they expect would happen?

Within a few months this church was rife with immorality. Many of the people in the church had their lives and marriages ruined. The church closed its doors. A few of the people who managed to avoid the scandal stayed in church and started going to a Pentecostal church down the road.

The problem is that the Pentecostal church thought that just because they taught Jesus Name baptism, that made them immune to the effects of the Devil. It turned out that the people who came over from that other church simply brought the infection with them. Now the Devil had to be sneakier; the immorality was never as blatant as it had been before, but it was there. It just went underground. Like the roots of a tree, they immorality worked its way through the church, finding weak spots along the way, until it eventually made a crack large enough to break the church apart. The Pastor of that church was one of the strongest preachers I have ever seen and well respected by his peers. Today he is no longer in the Pentecostal movement because the spirit of immorality eventually found a root in his heart.

Root of Confounding

The Devil is looking for any church where the people are one. When the people act as one, nothing can stop them.

Deuteronomy 6:4 (KJV) Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord:

God is One, and when the people act as one, they become more like God. When they act as one with God, then they are truly unstoppable. That is why the Devil will do whatever he can to confound our language; to confound our ability to work together towards a single goal.

The Devil will come into the church, sit behind you in your pew, and whisper into your ear.

“No one here cares about you”

“You are never going to be used in this church”

“Your son’s never going to be healed. Why do you waste time praying for him?”

Lies!

I know what the Devil says to you, because he has said it to me. It is a little hard for the Devil to tell me that I won’t be used when I am standing in the pulpit, but I guarantee that he has tried. He has tried to make me jealous of the leadership of this church. He has tried to make me discontented. He has taken me on flights of paranoia and suspicion that I am ashamed to admit now. He has spoken the words to my wife as she sits in her seat. If he has done it to us, I know he has done it to you.

I won’t ask for a show of hands, but I am confident that the Devil is in this room right now speaking to some of you; it is how he works. He speaks to us and sows seeds of discontent, hoping that they will take root.

I tell you this so that you can recognize the voice of the Devil when he speaks. In my yard, there are weeds that pop up. I must show my son which plants are good and which ones are weeds. Then I show him how to take the weed killer and spray it on the weeds. The next week we must go out again and spray. If we didn’t know what is a weed, or if we don’t know to spray, then the weeds will eventually choke out the plants we want. By recognizing which are the weeds and which are the flowers, we can stay vigilant.

Reunited

Even though it was the Lord who caused the confusion in Genesis 11, it is not how he intends us to remain today. The people of Babel were looking to use a poor substitute for the things of God in order to bring fame upon themselves. If we want to be united with Him, the Lord has given us the means to be as one with each other.

Genesis 11:3 (KJV) 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.

Brick is made of clay. Like the people of Babel, the Lord starts with a vessel of clay. Instead of bricks, however, the Lord starts with people.

Acts 2:1 (KJV) And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

Next the people of Babel took fire:

Genesis 11:3 (KJV) 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.

The clay needs to be prepared by fire. To make a tower, you need to take the clay bricks and put them into the fire. The fire makes them hard. The fire makes sure that they can handle the stress. The fire makes sure that the brick doesn't get soft and melt the first time it rains. Without the fire, the clay can't be used for anything stressful. After the fire, the clay becomes ceramic.

Acts 2:3 (KJV) And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

The tongues of fire (Holy Ghost) made the vessels of clay (people) ready to be used by God. The fire of the Holy Ghost makes us strong. It ensures that we won't melt at the first sign of trouble. It ensures that we are fit together in order to build a strong tower unto the Lord, not to ourselves.

Genesis 11:7 (KJV) Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

In Genesis 11, the Lord created multiple languages to drive the people apart because their goals were not his goals.

Acts 2:6 (KJV) Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

But in Acts 2, the Lord created multiple languages to bring them together. Jesus united mankind towards a common goal. The confounding of languages that took place in Genesis 11 could finally be undone. In Genesis 11, they were confounded because they could not understand each other's speech, but in Acts 2 they were confounded because they could.

In Genesis 11:6, the Lord says, "...nothing will be restrained from them..." because they are united in a common language and a common purpose. In Acts 2, Jesus restores that mission to the church. If we are united in purpose, then there is nothing we cannot do. But we must be vigilant to fight off the lies of the Devil that will attempt to break the unity. If you hear the Devil speaking to you and trying to undermine your faith in God or in the person in the pew next to you, throw him out. Recognize that the Devil is trying to undermine your walk with God and undermine the strength of this church.

For the people of Babel, it was, "nothing will be restrained from them." If we remain vigilant, then "nothing will be restrained from us."

Empowered

In the beginning of this message, I made a claim that Hebrew was the language of God. To the modern Jew, that is still true. But how will you witness to those around you in your work and school? How will you speak to someone without a degree in Judaic Studies? How will you speak to someone without a knowledge of the Greek roots? Consider this:

Isaiah 28:11 (KJV) For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.

To a Pentecostal, we understand the phrase "stammering lips and another tongue" to mean the tongues that come with the infilling of the Holy Ghost; the initial sign that always accompanies true infilling.

I do not wish to take away or undermine that interpretation for us, but I do want to point out that to a Jewish listener, someone who speaks Hebrew, this scripture means something slightly different. To the Jewish listener the phrase, “stammer lips and another tongue,” means, “in a language that is not Hebrew.” So, to a Hebrew scholar, this scripture says:

“You are going to learn about God from someone who doesn’t even speak Hebrew.”

My advice to you is when you witness to someone, don’t worry about the words you will say. Teach Jesus.

“But I have studied Hebrew since I was a child. You don’t understand the subtleties of the language.”

“True, but Isaiah 28:11 said that someone who doesn’t even speak Hebrew is going to be the one to teach you about God.”

“I have a PhD in Divinity. I wrote the definitive thesis on the morphological differences between first and second Isaiah.”

“Yeah, Jesus loves you.”

“I touched the first edition of the Guttenberg Bible.”

“I have been touched by the Holy Ghost.”

Conclusion

In Genesis 11, the Lord spoke to the people in Hebrew before he had to confound their language. While that caused them to scatter from that task, it also caused His word to become hidden from mankind for a while. Since the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, the Word of the Lord is available to everyone through you by the power of the Holy Ghost. Don’t worry about the languages that you know or don’t know. Know Him. Talk about your personal experience. Preach Jesus. Allow the Holy Ghost to give you the words just as it gave the words to the 120 then. The days of Babel are over; Behold, the People are One.