

Self-Government

Happy Sabbath to everyone.

I was going over a document earlier this week in which I listed ideas that I had jotted down for future studies, and I found one that caught my eye. It was a single line, basically stating that “the Tower of Babel = self government.” It seemed like a good, and relevant, issue for us to discuss, and so I would like to give a short study about what that statement means to me.

First, let us read the scripture that discusses this Tower, which has been used as a spiritually significant symbol all through the Bible, even until the very last book.

“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 Yahweh came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And Yahweh 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 Yahweh 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 Yahweh did there confound the language of all the earth; and from thence did Yahweh scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.” (Gen 11:1-9)

Their goals in building that tower, as stated in the record here, were threefold. First, they wished to “reach unto Heaven.” Second, they wished to “make us a name,” or establish themselves under a self-imposed identity. Third, directly connected to the second one, they wished to obtain unity that would prevent them from being scattered over the earth, which was the very thing that Yahweh had commanded men to do, saying, to Noah and his descendants after the recent flood, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.” (Gen 9:1)

Now, what is wrong with those three things? If you look at them from just a face-value perspective, those three goals sound quite similar, actually, to OUR mission in this generation. We teach, according to the principles of the Three Angels' Message, the concepts of Victory, Purity, and Unity.

Those who desired to construct the Tower of Babel wished to have victory over this earth, by ascending to Heaven. They wished to have an identity of their own, which established them as separate from others on the earth, a kind of uniqueness distinguished from the world. And, by desiring to avoid being scattered, they wished also to have a kind of unity that has an appearance similar to the Christian unity of the Spirit.

So where is the difference, spiritually speaking? What is it that makes those goals subject to the censure and judgment of Yah, while ours is praiseworthy and inspired by the divine nature?

The common thread of the three goals that underpinned the citizens of Babylon was a desire for self-government. This is something different from “independence,” which nations need in order to function properly, and “freedom,” which individuals need to function properly.

“Independence” is just that: a lack of dependence upon another. Babylon was not, at that time, being threatened or oppressed by any other nation. It had no need to fear being controlled by another human power. It did not need to defend its freedom from any earthly authority. It did fear something, however, and that was Yah Himself.

Consider the first stated purpose of the Tower. It was to reach Heaven. As we read of the flood, which was then a relatively recent event: “And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills that were under the whole heaven were covered. Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered.” (Gen 7:19, 20)

It has ever been the goal of fallen creatures, whether angels or unregenerate men, to obtain the benefit of holy things without the character of holiness.

The men of Babel wished to be safe from God’s judgment, but they did not wish to accomplish this by pursuing righteousness, by being undeserving of His wrath. Instead, they considered that if they could rise above the mountains of earth, they could overcome the waters that drowned everything that was “under the whole heaven.”

Thus, the “victory” that they sought was not the victory of overcoming the world and being in harmony with Yah’s Spirit. Instead, it was a victory over His power, to escape the reach of His punishment. Of course, these men understood neither the physics of this world, nor the true power of the Almighty. The tower could never have reached the true Heaven; but as foolish as this plan appears to us now, the men of this modern age take much the same steps to escape our Father’s judgment. Secularism, Atheism, Evolutionism, Paganism, Spiritualism... these are just towers, designed to escape the fear of Yahweh. In hindsight, from the perspective of eternity, these will seem no more intelligent than trying to build a tower tall enough to reach Heaven.

Now, consider the second stated purpose of the Tower. It was to make a “name” for themselves. We know what the Bible has to say about names. Names are a sign of individual character. The Father has a name, which He has given to us as “Yahweh.” The Son has a name, which He has given to us as “Yahshua.” The Bride of Christ has a name, given under Their authority, which in this generation is “Creation Seventh Day Adventist.” As with all divine names, this perfectly represents our nature. We are to be a “standing rebuke” to those who would disbelieve our Father’s creative power, His authority in establishing commandments for us to obey, and His promise to return in judgment to receive His people unto Himself.

Yahweh had desired to give a “name” to the people that descended from Noah. They were to form communities, and raise children in the religion of the Most High, until the earth was filled with faithful men and women that would one day see the plan of redemption fulfilled among them.

We do not know just how the world would be now, if mankind – united in a common language – had used their common tongue to praise the Lord, rather than to rebel against Him. We do not know what names our Father would have given us, or how many more souls (though assuredly, countless more) would have

been saved if the languages had not been necessarily divided that day. But because of mankind's desire to make a name for himself, we see the evil results thousands of years later. Every sin – every individual act of transgression – costs humanity so much.

As it is written, “O Yahweh, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” (Jer 10:23)

Men are not given the authority to direct their own steps. They are to be governed by the principles of Christ, and not by “self.” Self-governance, in regard to spiritual matters, does not lead to true freedom. True freedom consists of the ability to act according to one's conscience, to walk according to the steps that Yahweh has given him. Indeed, if all knew Yah, and believed that His wisdom was perfect, they could never intelligently choose to work contrary to His will. It is only because human beings are not free, because they are kept in ignorance of our Father's nature, because they are slaves to sin, that they wish to make names for themselves, rather than receiving their identity from Him.

Even to this day, much of the conflict manifests itself this way. One group of people, faithful and earnest, accept Yahweh's name for them. They receive it as a blessing, and hold to it as a sign that they have entered into a covenant with Him, willingly receiving His authority over them. The other group, self-willed, seeking self-government in spiritual things, Babylonian in nature, are driven to offense over this faith, and Satan leads them (for one reason or another) to attack them, and to try to drive them from their straight and narrow course. As it is written, nothing is new under the sun.

We may consider the third stated purpose for the construction of the Tower of Babel. It was to avoid being scattered over the earth. It was to have “unity,” which to all outward appearance is what we as Christians seek. But this unity of Babylon was based on a tower, a monument to human authority, human ability, human wisdom. It was based on a rejection of God's authority and power, much as the Churches of today “unify” in an ecumenical sense, over doctrines that are not of God. The three most common doctrines of Christendom today have nothing to do with the religion of the Bible: Sunday-sacredness, Trinitarianism, and Salvation-in-sin. You would hardly find a Church calling itself “Christian” that does not subscribe to these three doctrines, although the mainstream SDA Church (and a few others) avoids the first, and – while not identifying itself as “Christian” *per se* – the Jehovah's Witness organization (and a few others) avoids the second.

The ecumenical movement, with its non- or inter-denominational fellowships, is very much the modern incarnation of this third Babylonian principle. Victory over God's law is the first. Worshipping human authority over God's (commonly manifesting in choosing one's own “name”) is the second, and unity without true, Christian fellowship in the Spirit is the third.

Fellowship without the discipline of true, Christian conduct is without everlasting value. Christ instructs us to “take up our cross,” and walk. The life of the true believer is joyful and peaceful – it is the embodiment of Sabbath rest. Nevertheless, there is a solemnity that attends it, for we know we stand in the time of judgment, and have no time for foolishness of the flesh or spirit. This common journey, this common process of sanctification, is one of the aspects of the faith that binds us together as one... but it is unknown in spiritual Babylon.

As I have said, the unconverted seek the benefits of holy things without the character of holiness. This shows itself in a number of ways: order without discipline, authority without responsibility, salvation without true victory. These things are the very heart of what took place at Babylon, and why Yahweh intervened to break things apart. It is a lesson to us, even in this generation.

We cannot have order without heavenly discipline. Governments that become secular inevitably fall into transgression and ruin. As it applies to us, we cannot control our words, actions, or habits, without the abiding Spirit of Christ within us. It is impossible to follow conscience, to have (as I identified it earlier) true freedom, if we do not possess the Holy Spirit. If we seek to govern ourselves, to direct our own paths, we will make flawed decisions, and we will fall into great error. But Yah, in His mercy, has given us His Word, His Spirit, and His People, each representing an aspect of the completeness of His perfect wisdom. We learn, in the school of sanctification, how to hear His wisdom in these things, and thus remain on the path He has marked out for us.

We cannot have authority without responsibility. One of the tenets of Protestantism is that the civil magistrates cannot prevent an individual from freely practicing his chosen form of worship – except where such forms might restrict the freedom of others. Another is that the Church itself does not have arbitrary authority over individual conscience. It is not that the Church has no authority, just as it is not that the civil magistrates have no authority, but that this authority is subject to the responsibility we bear toward the Most High. When a civil government acts in cooperation with God’s law, then there is peace. When a Church exercises its authority according to Biblical principles, then its members become Christ-like, corrected from errors, and guided toward all truth.

We cannot have salvation without victory over sin. This is the great truth of the Gospel, that Christ has saved His people from, rather than in, their sins. Our righteousness is not by works, or by word, but by faith. Because we believe that we are Christ’s, He has made us His, and He and His Father have come into us, to abide therein. Because the “seed” of Yahweh abides in us, as John wrote, we “cannot sin.” We do not choose sin, because we have become “partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” (2Pet 1:4)

And so, this is a simple message. The deceptions of the enemy are crafty, and Satan can make his servants appear as angels of light – seeking similar goals as those of the saints. He may argue in favor of victory, of purity, of unity. But if we have discernment, and spiritual eyesight, we can distinguish between the principles of holiness, and the counterfeit principles of Babel. Babylon may dress itself up in modern clothing, in modern churches and independent ministries, but can the leopard change his spots? (Jer 13:23) If Babylon were to act contrary to its own principles, it would no longer be “Babylon.” Because we are Christ’s we can see it when it appears, and avoid it.

Because we are Christ’s, we can see when this tendency appears as a temptation in our own lives, to have our own way, to speak our own words, when conscience, principle, the Word, and the wisdom of the Body, show us what the righteous course would be. But we learn from the example of the Tower of Babel, knowing that self-government in spiritual things leads to ruin, and we let Yahweh bring us into unity with His Son and His people. We let Yahweh tell us who we are in Christ, giving us a “name,” identifying us both as a Church and as a child of His Kingdom. We let Yahweh give us His victory, that victory demonstrated by His Son in human flesh, so that we may have the testimony of that Son, that “the prince of this world cometh,” tempting us with the goals of Babylon, but he “hath nothing in me.” (John

14:30) “And He that sent me is with me; the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please Him.” (John 8:29)

It is written, in the very next verse, John 8:30, that “As He spake these words, many believed on Him.” Let us therefore adopt “these words,” so that we may see, even in this dark generation, similar results.

Are there any questions or comments on tonight’s study?