

Reformation Fellowship Notes • April 26, 2020

Teacher: David Crabtree

Handout #2

Daniel Introduction, Part 2

I. Introduction

A. We will be looking at the story of the tower of Babel.

1. Second week of introductory material

B. Question from last week:

Could you describe in more detail the events in Judah in 605 BC. You mentioned Babylonians coming to Jerusalem and collecting tribute – “some temple vessels and maybe 1000 young men.” Later you mentioned the destruction of the temple. When we hear of the Babylonian captivity it was surely more than these young men.

Was the temple destroyed as part of the “collecting tribute,” or did the Babylonians return later for more destruction and take more people?

C. My response

1. Daniel was taken in the first deportation to Babylon (605 BC).
 - a) This is not specifically talked about in the Bible.
 - (1) It is deduced from clues in various places, and the information at the beginning of Daniel.
 - (2) It is also consistent with extra biblical information.
2. Jehoiakim rebelled against Babylon. and Babylon returned and besieged Jerusalem (597 BC).
 - a) More tribute and exiles were taken to Babylon.
3. Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon. and the Babylonians came again (587 BC).
 - a) The Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and tore down the temple.
 - b) They took wealth and exiles.
4. There may have been yet another deportation (582 BC).

II. The relevance of the story of Babel to Daniel

A. I am going to look at the story of the tower of Babel.

1. Essential background for understanding Daniel

B. Daniel 1:2 refers to Babylon using the unusual word “Shinar.”

1. Rarely used in OT (8 times)

2. The word was never used by Babylonians to refer to their land.

3. The word was only used by surrounding countries to refer to the lower end of the Mesopotamian plain.
- C. Why would Daniel use this word where Babylon is the clear referent?
1. Why not use the word Babylon?
 - a) It was purposely chosen to bring to mind the story of the tower of Babel.
- D. Shinar is always used with respect to something negative.
1. Various contexts
 - a) Beginning of Nimrod's kingdom (Gen. 10:10)
 - b) One of four kings that raided Abraham was from Shinar (Gen. 14:1, 9).
 - c) The sin of Achan included taking a mantle from Shinar (Joshua 7:21).
 - d) Isaiah predicts God will gather his people from various places including Shinar (Isaiah 11:11).
 - e) Zechariah says a temple will be built for "Wickedness" in Shinar (Zech. 5:11).
 2. Most importantly, it is used to describe the place where the story of the tower of Babel took place in Genesis (Gen. 11:2).
 3. In Hebrew, Babel and Babylon are the same word.
- E. So the word "Shinar" is intended to point us back to Genesis 11.
- F. So before we start into Daniel, we will review the story of the tower of Babel.

III. Introduction to Genesis 11

- A. In Genesis, Babel is the last story in the first section that deals with the nature of fallen man.
1. The first 11 chapters are dominated by the wickedness of all mankind.
 - a) It culminates with the story of the flood.
 2. This story comes right after the story of the flood.
 - a) At the end of the story of the flood, Ham dishonors his father.

IV. Genesis 11:1-2

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

- A. "The whole world"
1. There was linguistic and probably cultural homogeneity in the world.
 - a) The conditions for unity
 2. They moved to Shinar
 - a) Apparently, the people were nomadic or semi-nomadic,
 - b) They made their way from Ararat to Mesopotamia.
 - (1) A fertile plain

- (2) They wanted to settle in this location.
- c) It is not clear who “they” refers to.
 - (1) Apparently, they were descendants of Ham (Genesis 10:9-11).
 - (a) “Shinar” is associated with Nimrod (10:9-11), and Nimrod is associated with Ham.
 - (b) Assyria was also related to this people group.
 - (c) This was the most rebellious branch of Noah’s family.

V. Some comments on our extra biblical knowledge of this development

- A. Mesopotamia is known as the “cradle of civilization.”
 - 1. Before the agrarian revolution, people were hunters and gatherers.
 - a) Nomadic or semi nomadic
 - 2. Agrarian revolution was a long process.
 - a) People developed the art of agriculture.
 - 3. Agriculture first developed most quickly and fully in Mesopotamia.
 - a) Started on hillsides northeast of Mesopotamia
 - b) Moved to the valley
 - (1) But agriculture needed irrigation.
 - (2) Irrigation requires social organization.
 - (3) But intensive agriculture requires a settled population.
 - (4) Intensive agriculture encourages settlement.
 - (5) This makes possible the accumulation of surplus food and wealth.
 - (6) This creates the need for cities—to defend their wealth.
 - (7) Voila! Civilization
 - (a) Civilization is a city-based culture.
- B. In general terms, the extra-biblical information is consistent with the biblical story.

VI. Genesis 11:3-4

They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”

- A. Highly cooperative undertaking
 - 1. Urging one another to work for the common good
 - 2. Urging one another to put their hearts into it, to not cut corners
 - 3. It is not immediately clear what they are building.
- B. Using technological breakthrough
 - 1. Problem—how to create building materials where there were none
 - a) The Mesopotamian plain lacked building materials.
 - (1) No forests, no stone

2. They innovated a solution.
 - a) Baked bricks
 - (1) In a place where there was no stone, but there was clay.
 - b) Held together by tar
 - (1) In a place where there was an abundance of tar
 - c) They created a stone-like material from nearly nothing.
 - (1) An almost “God-like” achievement
- C. A huge communal project
1. Build a city
 - a) This is the key part of the project.
 - (1) “City” is used three times.
 - b) City as a defensive structure
 - (1) Needed to protect their wealth
 2. Build a tower
 - a) With top in the heavens
 - (1) Hints at an aspiration to divinity
 - (2) Hubris; Godlikeness

Generally, the Bible regarded tall towers as symbols of human arrogance, as for example, in Isaiah 2:12-15, 30:25 and Ezekiel 26:4,9. (Sarna, p. 83)

3. Make a name for ourselves
 - a) Become famous, immortal

“Name” here probably connotes “monument,” as in Isaiah 56:5. This meaning developed from the fact that the names of most of the important kings of Mesopotamia were associated with great building projects designed to assure the monarch’s eternal fame. The royal name and titles were inscribed on bricks and cylinder seals that were deposited in the foundations of the ziggurats. Thus, a temple inscription of Gudea of Lagash records that, “on account of the great name that he made for himself, he was received among the gods into their assembly.” Nebuchadnezzar, who restored the ziggurat at Babylon, records in a commemorative inscription: “The fortifications of Esagila and Babylon I strengthened, and made an everlasting name for my reign.” (Sarna, p. 83)

4. Lest we be scattered
 - a) Main goal
 - b) They want to stay together to be able to keep one another safe.
 - (1) To preserve the prosperous way of life they have created

However, in the present context, the stated purpose of the builders, “that we be not scattered all over the world,” constitutes a direct challenge to the intent of God as expressed in the blessing to postdiluvial humanity: “Fill the earth.” Man did not perceive this to be a blessing and so devised means to thwart its fulfillment. (Sarna, p.83)

VII. Genesis 11:5-7

But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

- A. People had begun building this project.
 - 1. God came down to see the tower.
 - 2. It did not actually reach into the heavens.
 - 3. Sons of man—this is the work of mere mortals.
- B. Since they share a common language and culture, they are able to work together on this.
 - 1. If they can do this, they will be able to do anything.
 - 2. They will be able to carry out all their hubristic projects.
- C. So God was determined to frustrate these efforts.
 - 1. "Let us then"—this is what the people had said in verse 4.
 - 2. He decided to confuse their communication.
 - a) The word for "brick" is the mirror image of "to confuse."

It can hardly be coincidental that *navlah*, a unique form of the Hebrew stem b-l-l, "to confuse," is a disarrangement of *levenah*, "brick," the order of the first three consonants being reversed. The device underlines the teaching that a human enterprise that runs counter to the will of God is inherently perverse and doomed to self-defeat. (Sarna, p. 84)

- 3. This will make unified efforts more difficult.

VIII. Genesis 11:8-9

So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

- A. By confusing their language, God caused them to fail in *all* their goals.
 - 1. God scattered them.
 - 2. They stopped building the city (and tower).
 - 3. They became infamous.

Here is the climax of the account, a parody on the pride of Babylon. In the Babylonian literature the name *bab-ili* meant "the gate of God," but in Hebrew it sounds like the word for "confusion,"

and so retained that connotation. The name “Babel” (בָּבֶל, *bavel*) and the verb translated “confused” (בָּלַל, *balal*) form a paronomasia (sound play). (NET translation notes).

- B. A union of people who are each seeking their own personal security and prosperity is inherently chaotic.
 - 1. Chaos held together with bailing wire
 - 2. The chaos will always break out eventually.
 - 3. God’s punishment is just unleashing the natural outcome of the city.
 - a) Self-destruction

IX. Conclusion

- A. The first 11 chapters of Genesis are a picture of the sinfulness of man.
 - 1. It shows the development of sin and God’s reaction to it.
 - a) In chapter 3, sin seems trivial and harmless.
 - (1) But subsequent chapters show that it is far from harmless.
 - (a) Cain murders Abel
 - 2. God punished people for their sin on several occasions.
 - a) Most significantly the flood
 - 3. But this did not stop sin.
 - a) Right after the flood, Ham greatly disrespected his father.
 - (1) Ham’s descendants appear to have been especially rebellious.
 - 4. After the flood, people were told to “be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth” (9:1).
 - a) Descendants of Ham went to Mesopotamia.
 - b) They wanted to settle; they didn’t want to be scattered.
 - c) They built Babel.
 - (1) This is the first time we see a group of sinners living out their rebellion in concert with one another.
 - (2) They discovered that community could attain Godlikeness.
 - (a) Outlandish hubris
 - 5. God would not allow this illusion to stand (not yet).
 - a) He unsettled them and sent them on their way.
 - b) He did so by creating cultural and linguistic differences.
 - (1) This smashed the illusion of a community of egoists
 - B. Abraham is the counterpoint to this.
 - 1. God takes a man out of the most civilized area of the world at that time.
 - a) Ur of the Chaldeans (Babel, Babylon)
 - (1) This term is anachronistic.
 - (a) Chaldeans came along after Moses.
 - (i) Dominant group in Babylon during the Neo-Babylonian Empire
 - (b) This must have been a late edit.

- (c) It draws attention to the fact that Ur was in the land of Babylon.
- b) Took him from all security

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. (Genesis 12:1)

- 2. He becomes a nomad without a homeland.
- 3. But God blesses him.

X. What became of Babel (Babylon) after the tower?

- A. This became the location where the first civilization developed (Sumerian).
 - 1. It lasted a very long time (over 1,000 years).
- B. Old Babylon (1830-1530 BC)
 - 1. Hammurabi (1792-1750 BC)
- C. Kassites (1530-1356 BC)
- D. Assyrians (1356-612 BC)
- E. Neo-Babylon (612-539 B)

XI. Significance of this story to Daniel

- A. Clues about the fate of empire were embedded in the very beginning of history.
 - 1. God has created the history of mankind with great coherence.
 - a) This coherence is discernable.
 - b) The early history of man tells us much about how the story will unfold

*I make known the end from the beginning,
from ancient times, what is still to come. (Isaiah 46:10)*

- c) The story of Babel allows us to get an early glimpse of Empire.
- B. Empire and Babel are the same kind of project.
 - 1. The first ten chapters of Genesis are charting out a picture of sinful man.
 - a) Starting with the eating of the fruit in the Garden of Eden
 - b) This evolves into the drive for "city."
 - 2. Empire is just a continuation of this attempt to knit people from diverse cultures together to accomplish a common purpose.
 - a) That common purpose is to take care of ourselves (security).
 - (1) I call this drive for one's own personal security the "spirit of Empire."
 - 3. In Daniel, we see the "spirit of Empire" embodied in Empire,
 - a) But the "spirit of Empire" first shows up in Genesis 3,
 - (1) We think: Who is best at looking out for me?

- (a) I know that I care about my best interests, but I can't be sure that God really cares about my best interests.
 - (b) I must at least retain the final veto power.
 - (2) We think: Shouldn't we look out for our own well-being?
 - (a) Shouldn't we buy insurance?
 - (3) Common sense and the realities of life tell us that we should look out for ourselves.
 - (a) The question we must ask ourselves (expressed in two ways):
 - (i) Would I disobey God for the sake of (what I believe to be) my security (well-being)?
 - (ii) Do I value my security (well-being) too much?
 - 4. The sweep of history is the tapestry of billions of people over centuries trying to take care of themselves.
 - a) This has been driven mainly by the spirit of Empire.
 - (1) This has fueled the wars and inhumane behavior that we have seen.
 - b) There is a natural progression built into the spirit of Empire.
 - (1) Security—> comfort—> prosperity
 - (a) Needs always expand.
 - (i) Mere survival grows to comfort, which grows to the desire for abundance.
 - (b) Rome defended its way into a world empire.
- C. Over the course of history, God has allowed that human drive to play itself out.
- 1. God kept that in check for centuries.
 - a) God's patience
 - (1) He gives men time to repent.
 - 2. The drive for empire will be allowed to reach full potential.
 - a) So all can see how futile and horrible this is.
 - b) We see the spirit of Empire writ large.
 - (1) It ceases to be cute, innocuous.
 - (2) We see it in all of its ugliness.
 - 3. Empire will ultimately be completely destroyed.
 - a) At the end of time, God will destroy it.
- D. Empire will be replaced by a kingdom.
- 1. It will have a fundamental and unshakeable unity.
 - a) Centered around a deep-felt gratitude toward God
 - b) Total obedience to God
 - 2. It will be made up of people from every language and culture.
 - 3. There will be eternal security for everyone.
- E. In the meantime, we are called to come out of Babylon.
- 1. Like Abraham

2. I think Daniel is at least a partial answer to that question.
- F. Daniel will present the nature of Empire and how God’s people ought to relate to it.
1. We will start looking at that next week.

Appendix—Deportations

Jeremiah 52:28 says there were three deportations. It dates each deportation according to the year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign. Nebuchadnezzar became king in 605 BC. Jeremiah does not mention any deportation in 605 BC. However, based on the information in Daniel, we know there must have been some young men (at least 4) taken in 605 BC. There were probably many more than that. But for some reason Jeremiah does not include this event (605 BC) as one of the “deportations.” Most modern history books written by conservative scholars list three deportations: 605 BC, 597 BC, and 582 BC. Most acknowledge that other captives were probably taken on other occasions. Some list as many as 7 deportations.

The question of how many people were deported elicits a wide variety of guesses. Jeremiah lists how many were deported in the deportations he talks about. Here are the numbers he gives:

Seventh year	597 BC	3,023
Eighteenth year	586 BC	832
Twenty-third year	582 BC	745

But it is hard to know what these numbers mean. In II Kings 24:14, we read that in 597 BC the number of captives was 10,000. (In II Kings 24:16 it talks about 9,000 captives. It is unclear whether these were part of the 10,000 or whether these are in addition to the 10,000). It has been suggested that the number in Jeremiah is the number of men only, and the number in II Kings is the number of total people (including women and children).

We know from Ezra 1:64 that more than 50,000 people were in the first wave of returnees. And we know that there were several waves of returnees. These waves of returnees occurred about 70 years after they were deported.

Given these data points, those who have suggested that the total number of deportees was in the ballpark of 30,000-50,000 seem reasonable.