

NIMROD --- WHOSE SUCCESS WENT TO HIS HEAD AND DESTROYED HIS SOUL
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And Gush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD (Gen. 10:8-9).

The name Nimrod comes from maradh which means to rebel. and this might suggest it was acquired when the man rebelled against society and God. Unless Gush, his parent. were a prophet, that unpleasant name would not have been given to a baby. There was no way parents could foretell the future. It was impossible to predict the type of man their child would become. Sometime during his adult career. Nimrod became a rebellious, arrogant. dominating dictator who criticized Jehovah. His original name was abandoned, and what he became overshadowed what he had been.

It has been estimated that more than one hundred years had elapsed since the flood when Noah and his three sons commenced the task of replenishing the earth. However, since people lived to be very old in that era, that period would represent only a short time in history. To recall what had happened a century earlier would be the equivalent of a modern man remembering what happened when he was a teenager. That may explain the rebellious attitude of Nimrod who founded the first dynasty.

When Noah left the ark, he and his family entered an empty world to make a new beginning. The Bible says that Noah begat Ham; Ham begat Gush; Gush begat Nimrod. Therefore. Nimrod was a great-grandson of Noah (see Gen. 10:6-8). It is probable that in that age of longevity, young Nimrod could have listened to his ancestor who built the ark. Already the inhabitants of earth were increasing at an enormous rate. Each man desired to build his own city, and the population, as commanded by God, began to move further and further away from the ark's final resting place. Eventually Nimrod was born, and it is interesting that within the scope of a few sentences, the ancient writer emphasized that Nimrod was a mighty hunter. Animals had also increased and some of them had become a menace. Apparently no other man gained fame through his exploits. It is possible that Nimrod protected and fed his neighbors and thus attracted attention. His dominance over animals eventually extended to men, who became the army that established the first dynasty. The Bible says: "And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel [Babylon]. and Erech, and Accad. and Calneh. in the land of Shinar" (Gen. 10:10). Nimrod was the first man of renown to emerge after the flood, but he detested God. The Septuagint version of the Scriptures says: "Nimrod was a mighty hunter against the Lord." and this appears to be the key that unlocks the mystery of his life. Matthew Henry. the noted commentator, said:

That which is observable and improvable in these verses is the account here given of Nimrod. v. 8-10. He is here represented as a great man in his day: he was resolved to tower above his neighbors. The same spirit that actuated the giants before the flood, now revived in him. There are some in whom ambition and affectation of dominion seem to be bred in the bone. Nothing on this side of hell will humble and break the proud spirits of some men.

Nimrod was a great hunter: with this he began. and for this became famous to a proverb. Some think he did good with his hunting; he served his country by ridding it of the

NIMROD --- WHOSE SUCCESS WENT TO HIS HEAD AND DESTROYED HIS SOUL wild beasts which infested it. Others think that under pretense of hunting he gathered men under his command, in pursuit of another game he had to play. which was to make himself master of the country. Great conquerors are but great hunters. Alexander and Caesar would not make such a figure in Scripture history as they do in common history. Nimrod was a mighty hunter against the Lord, as translated in the LXX; that is, he set up idolatry. That he might set up a new government, he set up a new religion. Babel was the mother of harlots. He carried on his oppression and violence in defiance of God himself.'

Perhaps the oldest and most reliable explanation of Nimrod's power was given by Flavius Josephus, the famous Jewish historian. Concerning the present subject he wrote:

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Now it was Nimrod who excited them to such an affront and contempt of God. He was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah--a bold man, and of great strength of hand. He persuaded them not to ascribe it to God, as if it were through his means they were happy, but to believe that it was their own courage which procured that happiness. He also gradually changed the government into tyranny--seeing no other way of turning men from the fear of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence upon his power. He also said he would be revenged on God if he should have a mind to drown the world again: for that he would build a tower too high for the waters to reach, and that he would avenge himself on God for destroying their forefathers!

Now the multitudes were very ready to follow' the determination of Nimrod, and to esteem it a piece of cowardice to submit to God: and they built a tower, neither sparing any pains, nor being in any degree negligent about the work: and, by reason of the multitude of hands employed. it grew very high sooner than anyone could expect: but the thickness of it was so great, and it was so strongly built, that thereby its great height seemed, upon the view, to be less than it really was. It was built of burnt brick, cemented together with mortar made of bitumen, that it might not be liable to admit water. When God saw that they acted so madly, he did not resolve to destroy them utterly, since they were not grown wiser by the destruction of the former sinners; but he caused a tumult among them, by producing in them divers languages, and causing that, through the multitude of those languages, they should not be able to understand one another. The place wherein they built the tower is now called Babylon; because of the confusion of that language which they readily understood before: for the Hebrews mean by the word Babel, confusion.²

Nimrod was a rebel determined to oppose the Almighty. The Lord commanded Noah to replenish the earth to allow his descendants to colonize the world. The arrogant hunter was unwilling to obey. and prior to the erection of his tower said: "Lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Gen. 11:4). Nimrod was a mighty hunter, a forceful leader, and a great builder. The reasons for erecting the tower might have been various. The city would offer a place of refuge, although it would have been unlikely that any man would challenge the existing leadership. The tower could have served as a lookout from which the surrounding country could be surveyed. As the ancient commentator suggested. it was meant to be so tall that if God ever decided to drown the world again. the waters would

NIMROD --- WHOSE SUCCESS WENT TO HIS HEAD AND DESTROYED HIS SOUL never submerge the structure. It has been suggested that since Nimrod was anti-God, he might have thought it possible to erect a tower sufficiently high to reach God's country. and thus make possible a direct attack on the armies of heaven. The idea might have been stupid, but since Lucifer also tried to dethrone Jehovah. it would be easy to believe that Nimrod, like the giants before the flood, had permitted Satan to control his life. This strange event became obnoxious to the Lord, who destroyed the project. The incident bequeathed to posterity truths that should never be forgotten.

The Guilty Conqueror... Constantly Criticizing

As in retrospect the life of Nimrod is reviewed, certain facts stand forth in bold relief. Since he was aware of the experiences of Noah, his decision to remain in one locality was an indication he had no respect for the commandments of Jehovah, His plan to build a city led to disaster. Whatever his personal desire might have been, he was declaring war against God. That, to say the least, was extremely unwise. Any person who acted in this manner was committing suicide. Evidently he believed he could defy the Lord. Many years later Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, was equally foolish and was driven into the fields to eat grass as oxen (see Dan. 4:33). Unfortunately. when success goes to a man's head, he begins to think he can do anything. Perhaps Jesus had this fact in mind when He warned of the possibility of gaining the world at the expense of one's soul (see Mark 8:36).

The Great Calamity... Continuing Childless

When God confused the language of the people and instituted conditions that ruined their building project. Nimrod probably became incensed, but his immediate reactions were never revealed. The building of the tower ceased, and confusion

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paralyzed communications. During my work in Australia I stayed in the home of Walter Beasley. who at that time was intimately connected with archaeological activities in the Middle East. He described the clay tablets upon which was a sketch of a fish and three lines. He said this indicated an ancient customer's desire to buy three fish, but the buyer could not explain to the vendor what was desired. In a moment of time. God had disrupted all commercial activity, and the people had been confronted by circumstances beyond their control. What this meant to Nimrod is hard to imagine.

Every man desires to become a parent so that his children can continue using the family name. That the Bible writers valued genealogies endorses this fact. Men feared being impotent. All the details about Nimrod are surrounded by lists of men who begat children. Yet apparently Nimrod had no family. First Chronicles 1:10 states that "Cush begat Nimrod: He began to be mighty upon the earth." He began to be a mighty man! Does that suggest he never completed his task? He and his tower perished and disappeared from history. He had no heir. This unpleasant detail endorses the words of the psalmist. who wrote: "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo. he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found" (Ps. 37:35-36). Men who leave God out of their lives have very little left.

A Glorious Contrast... Christianity Confirmed

Describing the tragedy of Babel, Moses wrote: "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

NIMROD --- WHOSE SUCCESS WENT TO HIS HEAD AND DESTROYED HIS SOUL nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do" (Gen. 11:5-6). Many years later. Luke, who was a Christian physician, described another event. "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4).

At Babel, sinners were trying to reach up to heaven: at Pentecost, God was reaching down to earth. In the former, God terminated the greatest building project ever planned. In the latter, the Holy Spirit descended to begin another building project—the church. This would not only reach to heaven but outward to embrace the world. Paul wrote: "[We] are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone: in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:20-21). At the tower of Babel God confused the language to prevent listeners from understanding what was being said. At Pentecost He gave other tongues so that people would understand the word of God and thereafter repeat it around the world. After the tragedy of Babel people probably thought their world had ended. After Pentecost the citizens of Ephesus said: "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also" (Acts 17:6). The men and women who survived the destruction of the tower of Babel went out to live and die; the men and women who followed Pentecost knew they would live eternally.

Poor Nimrod! He believed he could cope with every emergency of life, but he made a great mistake and died a lonely man. He lived for self and lived in vain. Only foolish people emulate the example of the ancient rebel.

1. The Bethany Parallel Commentary on the Old Testament (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1985). 38.
2. The Complete Works of Josephus. trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1981), 30.

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