The Curse of Babel Reversed!

1. Acts 2 –Too many of us come to this text to prove something rather than to learn something. Let us seek to be learners. The awesomeness of Acts chapter 2 is it is the invasion of earth by the Holy Spirit. If Jesus’s appearance was D-Day, Pentecost was the arrival of the rest of the army behind the spearhead.
   a. Not only is Pentecost a miraculous event, it is the beginning, the birth of the church. It is also the reversal of a historical day on which humanity was cursed with mixed languages. Let’s go back in time to the book of Genesis, to the post flood time when man tried to build a tower to the skies.

2. Zephaniah 3:9 provides the link between Babel and Pentecost. “"For then I will give to the peoples purified lips, That all of them may call on the name of the LORD, To serve Him shoulder to shoulder.”
   a. Remember that Jesus said, (Mt 12:34) “For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.”
   b. The lips speak of what is in the heart.
   c. Purified lips or speech as some translations give it, is the result of a heart that has been washed clean. This passage speaks of the day when ALL may call upon the Lord and serve Him shoulder to shoulder. It is speaking of an era when men would unite in speech once again and serve God together. The Gentiles were considered “unclean” and unable to call upon the Lord with clean lips. Not a unified language so much but with the reversal1 in the company of the redeemed, of Babel’s putative curse, which some think caused ethno-linguistic distinctions.
   d. When the Spirit comes, all understand each other, not because one language is restored or a new all-encompassing meta-language is designed, but because each hears his or her own language spoken.

3. Babel takes place some time after the flood. God commands Noah and his descendents in Gen. 9:1 to scatter and fill the earth. “And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.”
   i. Genesis 11:1-9 1 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. 2 As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. 3 They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. 4 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." 5 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. 6 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. 7 Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." 8 So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. 9 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.
   b. Many secular critics consider this a “myth” to explain” the existence of multiple languages.
      i. What is fascinating, is that this event is described in dozens of different people groups across the world, from India, to even the Americas, to African clans and Asian peoples, with only minor modifications. It is more than an explanation, it is the SOURCE

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1.“In the Old Testament Yahweh promises that when He fulfils the process of salvation (which He began in Abram), He will reverse the curse of Babel” (Bax 1983, 124).

The logic is simple and compelling. The sin of Babel was hubris. The curse of Babel is linguistic division. Christ came to destroy sin and reverse the curse of God. He sent the Spirit to effect that destruction in one body in which there is no more Jew or Greek ethnic distinction as well as slave or free social-class distinction, and male and female gender distinction. All are one in Christ (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11).
historical event that culminated in the division of humanity into different language groups. Linguists have found that all languages have a similar link as well, in other words, the languages all had a common point that then divided. Language didn’t develop in a dozen different places…it started with one language and then divided…and the place was Babel, which means “to confuse.”

c. Babel describes the attitude of mankind as he began to unite to build a tower “to reach into the heavens.” The city and tower of Babel is an act of arrogance against God.
   i. They had been commanded to spread into the earth, but in Genesis they were gathered in one place, attempting to use their unity to do something mighty and amazing.
      1. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus said the tower of Babel still stood in his day and he had seen it.
      2. The Land of Shinar is considered the Tigris and Euphrates valley, the “fertile crescent” that was the cradle of early civilization.
   ii. 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.
   iii. Many historical commentators describe this as an attempt to “reach God”, to “bring God down to earth” or to “be Gods.” This is at the root of mankind’s rebellion against God…to reach God through our own efforts (ie. Works).
      1. In fact, most of the religions of the world, with the exception of biblical Christianity, seek to reach God through formulas, efforts and works.
         a. The Buddhist believes he will arrive at enlightenment if he will but purify his own thoughts.
         b. The Muslim believe that if they try to kill an infidel and die in the process, they will get to heaven.
         c. The Hindu believe in hundreds of gods that rule every part of their lives. They appease their gods with offerings of food.
         d. On and on, each religion has a formula to get to God. But Christianity is God coming down to man.
   iv. Hubris: Pride: “that we may make a name for ourselves” (be famous, well known, remembered). This is the root of sin…ME, ME, ME. My interests, my future, my needs.
   v. See in the next verse, what God does? .’ 5 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building
      1. God Himself goes down and visits the construction site, the tower and the city. Their efforts did get God’s attention, but not as they anticipated. They were seeking to rise up to God, and God came down.
      2. I saw a sign this week at a local Baptist church that embarrassed me. It said, “Don’t make me come down there…God.’
      3. What do we believe about God? Thank God He came down in the person of Jesus, not to judge mankind but to redeem mankind! He will return one day, and we should be extending His mercy to people in that light, not cursing men with threats of “better clean up your act or else.”
         a. How many of you had cleaned up your act before you trusted Jesus? None of you! You come to Jesus as you are and he changes your heart! He gives you a brand new life! He forgives you of your sin!
   i.
   4. . 6 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. 7 Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” 8 So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city
      a. Next, “nothing will be impossible for them” if they are united. Man is disunited due to languages, and eventually scatters over the entire earth.
b. Just as at Eden, barring the way to the Tree Of Life after man had sinned was a mercy, so also this forced separation of men from Babel was more God's mercy than just His judgment. God, in dividing man both linguistically and geographically, put a check on the power of his fallen nature.

c. Now, as mankind grows in his unified language of computer code and science, we see an arrogance of man again...believing he is god. Nothing seems impossible for humanity...dna engineering, space travel, peering into the universe, believing man can control his climate and the weather.

5. "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs--we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?". (ACTS 2:1-12 niv)

6. Pentecost vs. Babel:
   a. At Babel God drove people apart to thwart evil, at Pentecost he brought people together to inaugurate righteousness.
      i. The tower and its city was a symbol of our rebellion against God. Pentecost united people who were seeking God, and the Holy Spirit actually came to live in them.
      ii. “The God up there” became “The God in me.”
         1. God came down at Babel but not to redeem but to separate. In Jesus, mankind is redeemed and Pentecost brings God inside of believers.
         2. The message of people of Babel was: “We are gods!” The message of the people of Pentecost was: “We are God’s.”
      3. 
   b. The people at the tower of Babel wanted to “make a name for themselves.” The people at Pentecost wanted to glorify the name of God.
      1. After the tower of Babel people could no longer work together to create a kingdom for themselves. At Pentecost people began to work together to establish God’s kingdom on earth. Language is used to promote a human agenda:
      2. "Let's make a name for ourselves..." [Genesis 11:4] 3. Language is used as a "sign" to announce the mighty works of God.
   c. Babel Results in disunity [Genesis 11:8] Pentecost Results in unity
      4. By one miracle of tongues men were dispersed and gradually fell from true religion. By another, national barriers were broken down--that all men might be brought back to the family of God.
   d. Babel was the imposition of human will; Pentecost was the acceptance of God’s divine will.
   e. Babel was bad news; Pentecost was good news.
      1. After Babel the people spread out over the earth in mutual hostility and alienation. It was every person for themselves. After Pentecost God’s people spread through the inhabited world to serve God and to live in love and fellowship.
   f. Pentecost is Babel reversed and undone.
      1. Babel was God’s judgment on the people who tried to unite against Him.
2. Pentecost was God’s blessing in bringing people together people from every race, nation and language to live as one under God.

3. Pentecost is God ending the chaos and confusion of Babel.

b. What Pentecost is saying is that God is not far away. We do not have to build a tower to get to him. The Bible says, “The righteousness that is by faith says: ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?” (that is, to bring Christ down) or “Who will descend into the deep?” ‘(that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,’ that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:6-9).

i. Will you be saved today? Jesus has come to you, will you receive Him and his forgiveness that comes thorough faith in what He did on the cross on your behalf?

c. 1. Confusion of tongues [Genesis 11:9] 1. Reversal of Babel: tongues are understood [Acts 2: 5-10] as Peter, for example, spoke everyone from all the different language groups gathered there would hear Peter speaking in their own language. The miracle of Pentecost was a miracle of mutual understanding, a restoration of that precious gift that humanity lost at Babel. God used speech to divide at Babel, but ‘various tongues’ united at Pentecost.

d. 2. God scattered the people in judgment to the four corners of the earth [Genesis 11:8]. 2. People will scatter to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to bring into the Covenant the harvest of souls from every corner of the earth [Acts 1:8]

7. One of the most dramatic examples of God getting inside a man is the life of William J. Murray. Murray is the son of Madalyn Murray O’Hair, the famous atheist who was responsible for the Supreme Court ruling which removed prayer and Bible reading from public schools in the United States. He tells in his book, My Life Without God, about living in a home where there was constant rage and violence. His mother could not keep a job because of her frequent angry outbursts. She never married either man who fathered her children, and lived with her parents and brother in a small row house in Baltimore. Murray’s grandmother read Tarot cards, his grandfather was engaged in illegal activities, and his uncle kept stacks of pornography in his room. William Murray was told by his famous mother that since there was no God, nothing was really right or wrong. She taught him that the most important things in life were food, drink and sex, and he took her advice and fully indulged himself. But in 1980 he sought help for his drinking problem through a Twelve Step program. It was his first encounter with anyone who talked about a loving God. Yet this loving God had no name. He read a novel that told the story of Luke in the New Testament. It talked about Luke’s relationship with God and finding God’s love. There began to be a stirring and yearning in his heart for that kind of experience, but he had no idea how to come into contact with this God. Then one evening, on January 25, 1980, as he was sleeping in his apartment in San Francisco, he says that the Holy Spirit came upon him and told him to seek the truth in the Bible. That was the one place he had never looked before, for that was the very book his mother had removed from our nation’s schools by her lawsuit in 1963. Murray states that the true reason for his mother filing the suit was her deep personal hatred for followers of Christianity. He told how his mother’s zeal against Christianity was so great that it had “taken over her life and rendered her incapable of seeing other people (himself included) as anything but either enemies or people who agreed with her every ideal.” But Murray committed his life to Christ and has never looked back. O’Hair called her son a traitor and cut off all communication with him. Murray experienced the love of God he was longing for and now goes all over the world telling his story. He is the chairman of the Religious Freedom Coalition in Washington, D.C. Pentecost reversed the Babel in his life.

8. God’s command is the same today: Go and make disciples, scatter, go into the world, be fruitful and multiply, make disciples of all nations (people’s groups, ethnos,). Will you obey?