

Who gets the glory: America or God?

Commentary by Greg Baker

Rome has the Coliseum, Egypt the pyramids, and Greece the Parthenon. These were the symbols of great empires that were each the center of the world in their time. These empires dictated human culture. Their ruins remain today, reminders that something great and powerful once stood there. They are symbols of massive power, wealth, and glory. They are also a shadow of what once was, a constant reminder that even the most powerful nation can fall, as every empire has.

Throughout the Holy Scriptures, we interact with these empires, and God constantly reminds us that empires come and go, but He remains forever. Living in modern America we must remember the fate of all great empires – and that salvation, power, and glory do not belong to any nation, but solely to God, Yahweh, the Creator of the heavens and earth.

Before becoming “born again,” I always looked at Genesis as a book with simple stories to answer the world’s complicated questions. The Tower of Babel was one of those stories, just a way to simply explain the world’s diversity. Today, when I look at this story, I see it as history that has repeated itself over and over again. People are always looking for ways to massively centralize power to one place. The Bible records many principalities, places of centralized power, and the first one it records is Babel. Babel was the people’s attempt to consolidate power – one language, one currency, one identity, in one place.

God looked down on this principality and deemed it not to be good. He knew and still knows that we as people cannot handle such power. It corrupts us and leads us to commit some of the

greatest sins of history. It leads us away from the Lord, and brings us to worship of ourselves. We forget God and believe instead that salvation, glory, and power can be found in our plans. God, being gracious, merciful, and wanting all people to come to a knowledge of Him, cannot let this principality stand. So He did the most merciful and loving thing that He could do: He destroyed Babel.

After the destruction of Babel came a massive decentralization of power. The people learned that they were not indestructible and began to spread to the ends of the earth. New languages, tribes, and nations were born. Yet people had not learned the lesson. After the dust settled from Babel, people again attempted to create a central power. Nations began to merge. The number of languages began to decrease, and new principalities were born. In the Scriptures we learn of powerful cities like Sodom and Gomorrah, cities of power that became corrupt, small principalities that God was forced to destroy, because they shepherded people away from God. By the end of Genesis the massive principality that controlled the culture of the world was Egypt.

Egypt grew to be the central economy of the world. It was well-known throughout the world, and its culture extended well beyond its borders. Like all empires though, Egypt fell. Egypt was followed by Babylon, Persia and then Greece, each growing stronger than the previous before its demise. Greece fell to one of the most powerful principalities the world has ever seen, Rome.

Under Caesar Augustus, Rome accomplished what Babel sought. Augustus ordered that there would be one language, one currency, and one identity throughout the empire because he knew that for Rome to succeed, all those they conquered needed to conform to Rome's identity. From Judea to Spain people would use the same currency and speak the same language. To this end, Augustus awarded Roman citizenship to people well outside the Italian peninsula. He ordered the building of

Roman baths throughout the empire and expanded the network of roads that led to Rome. The Roman identity extended not only throughout the empire, but throughout the world. This massive culture created a climate for Rome to rule as the primary principality for centuries.

However, not even Rome could stand, and it too fell. When principalities of this massive size fall it creates great instability. Just like when Babel fell, people began to scatter throughout the world. Hundreds of new tribes, nations, languages, currencies, and cultures replaced the once massive principality. All that remained were ruins.

Rome is evidence that it is only by the Lord that nations rise and fall, and for the sake of His people God will not share His salvation, glory, and power with anyone or any nation.

In the Book of Daniel, we see this lesson taught to King Nebuchadnezzar. God sent Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar to address his pride and arrogance over his kingdom. The exchange begins with Daniel recognizing the power Babylon had acquired. Babylon had become a massive nation that the world not only looked to, but had also become dependent on. Then Daniel warned Nebuchadnezzar that God was going to turn him into a tree stump. Why a tree stump? Because when you see a tree stump it is evidence that something once powerful and magnificent has now been cut off. God did this to show the world that salvation, glory and power belong to Him. "This is so the living will know that the Most High is ruler over the kingdom of men" Daniel 4:17.

Nebuchadnezzar would later repent and be restored, but his heir did not learn from this lesson and would repeat the same mistakes. The night God sent Daniel to warn the king, the massive empire of Babylon fell. The massive kingdom was gone overnight. Babylon today is nothing more than a tree stump: a reminder of what once was.

America is the principality of today. After the fall of Rome, people did exactly what they did after the fall of Babel: scatter, rebuild, and then begin to centralize power. Small kingdoms became empires, and by the end of World War 2, America came out on top. World currency is exchanged off of the dollar, billions of people are learning English, and the American culture has become the dominant culture of the world, as people wear American clothes, shop at American stores, eat at American restaurants, watch American movies, and listen to American music. Most of the world can identify the president of the United States. Like Rome, America's influence has expanded well beyond its borders.

Christians in America today must learn from men like Daniel, Joseph, Moses, Nehemiah, Peter, and Paul, who did miraculous things in the shadows of massive empires. Daniel thrived because he refused to eat from the king's table and he refused to drink the king's wine (Daniel 1). Moses thrived because he considered suffering for the Messiah to be of greater wealth than all the treasures of Egypt (Hebrews 11). Paul survived because he never took his eyes off of the prize. He endured the hardships. He did the work of an evangelist. He fulfilled his ministry (2 Timothy 4).

Like the principalities of the past, America is after our hearts. She wants us to find salvation, glory, and power in her. She wants us to eat her food, drink her wine, worship her gods. The American culture is calling us to find life in the earthly things it has to offer: nice homes, promotions, competitions, fame. It can be easy to try to find hope, safety, and glory in a massive economy, powerful military, and sheer patriotism.

We must learn from Daniel, that it is OK to love the land God has chosen us to live in, and it is right for us to desire its best, but we must never eat from the king's table and drink his wine. We must never bow to the gods of the land. Our hope, our salvation, and our glory are found in God alone, through

Jesus Christ our Lord. We must never forget that the things in America are temporary and cannot give us real life. We must remember that this nation will fall in the same way all other principalities have. Someday it will be nothing more than a tree stump.

This is not to discourage us, but to sober us. God has chosen us to live in this place at this time. We were chosen to be born in one of the most powerful nations of all time. We have an incredible opportunity to be a light, like the many servants of the Lord before us. God has truly surrounded us by a great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12). Desire what is best for America. Love its people. But live as Paul commanded Timothy to live in Rome: "For the time will come when they will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear something new. They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths. But as for you, be serious about everything, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" 2 Timothy 4:3-5.

The time has come. Many believe that we can follow God and live the American dream at the same time. But let it not be so with us. Shine. Shine as a bright light in the culture. Suffer for the sake of the Gospel in a land that does not believe it needs salvation. Be sober. Learn contentment in the land of consumerism and shine for others to see, no matter where you are. At work, show you are working for the Lord and for the good of the company, not the promotion and the pay raise. Be thankful and content in all circumstances. Say no to endless entertainment that is rotting the culture's brain. Say no to the culture of addiction. Deprive yourself of wants, and fulfill your ministry. If we do this we will be a light and will be able to say one day, "God, I fought the good fight. I kept the faith, and I finished the race. I did not eat the king's meal and I did not drink his wine!" Now I await my crown of righteousness, which will not only be rewarded to me,

but also to all who long for His appearing.

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