

## The Origin of Despotism

By: Keith Keyser

The international scene is littered with conflicts, stemming from the desires of competing power blocs who struggle for hegemony on the world stage. Great despots like Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Attila the Hun, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Adolf Hitler - to name a few - have all shared a desire to obtain power and enjoy the conquest of large swathes of territory. The Lord Jesus noted this propensity of the Gentiles for power mongering, telling His disciples that the Kingdom of God operates on entirely different principles (Mat. 20:25-26.) Man's struggle for tyrannical power goes back to ancient times. God commissioned Adam and his descendants to have dominion over the earth. Nevertheless, since the Fall the God-given impulse to rule over the planet has been corrupted by sin. Man now wants to oppress his fellow man. By investigating the ancient records of the birth of empires, one may glean instruction for both the current and future situation.

Genesis 10:8-11 introduces us to the first emperor, a fearsome ruler ominously named Nimrod ("Rebellion/Valiant" *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Lexicon*.) His chief credential as a leader was his martial skill, described as "a valiant warrior" and "a mighty hunter before the Lord" (v.8, NET.) The margin of *The New English Translation* notes that the phrase "before the Lord" can be used "...as a means of expressing the superlative degree." In other words, it is a Semitic way of saying that he was the greatest hunter – one who had no equal in combat. Interestingly, words from the same Hebrew root are used in the Old Testament to describe hunting for men (e.g. Jer. 16:16.) Nimrod was indeed a hunter, but his quarry was not deer or lions – it was his fellow man!

Through his military prowess Nimrod assembled a kingdom that was the cradle of the greatest civilizations of the Near East, including Akkad, Assyria, and Babylonia (vs. 10-12.) Genesis 11 gives the account of his followers' vain attempt to establish a power that could rival Heaven itself. Rather than subdue the earth for God's glory, they wanted to unite in a project that would demonstrate their numerical strength and leave behind a monument to their architectural genius and engineering skill. What is more, this grandiose public works project would keep them from being scattered over the earth (v. 4.) By working together they would become a cohesive unit that would collectively exercise power. Furthermore, they would construct an immense edifice to their own glory: "a tower whose top may reach unto heaven" (v. 4.) It was a statement of human strength and wisdom independent of their Maker, flaunted in the face of the God of the Heavens.

With man arrogantly taunting the Almighty with this expression of defiance, it is ironic that God had to stoop to see their puny tower: "And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower..." (v. 5.) It looked big from the human perspective, but from God's viewpoint it was miniscule. Likewise, contemporary man makes great plans and undertakes ambitious projects, but it is all of no account in the sight of the Most High God. His sovereignty is absolute and therefore is not threatened by the machinations of

proud men. He quickly brought the matter to an end by confounding their language into many diverse tongues.

In spite of God's greatness and man's comparative frailty, human beings continually overestimate their own importance. The modern onset of a formal philosophy called "Humanism" is merely a restatement of the ancient lie in the garden, "You will be like God" (Gen. 3:5, ESV.) Man always sees himself as the center of the universe. If he thinks of God at all, he exiles the Almighty to the marginal role of being a sort of celestial Santa Claus – someone to call upon when he wants something or is in some kind of trouble. The Lord is certainly not viewed by man as someone who commands human reverence and accountability.

Like the ancient builders of Babel, contemporary humans want to make a name for themselves. Thus, their scientific advances and artistic achievements are adduced as proof of their intelligence – not as evidence of the brilliance of the Creator of the human mind. This preoccupation with man as the measure of all things will ultimately culminate in the deification of humankind in the person of the Man of Sin (2 Thes. 2:3-12.) The Lord Jesus referred to this when He said: "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?" (John 5:43-44.) In man's search for a lasting name, humans will only find eternal shame and infamy by following the Son of Perdition. He will hold sway over a mighty confederacy of nations, but it will lead the world to the final judgment.

How much better to emulate Abraham's obedience to the Lord, and letting Him make a name for you (Gen. 12:2.) While the architects and luminaries of Babel are entirely anonymous today, Abraham's name is still world famous and will continue to be so for all eternity. Greatness is found in humbly submitting to God, rather than in exalting oneself. In Christ, man will indeed be glorified (Rom. 8:28-30.) 1 Peter 5:6 exhorts believers to "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." James 4:10 similarly adds: "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up." The Christian should also keep in mind the promise to the overcomer in Rev. 2:17: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone *a new name written*, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it" (Italics mine.) The names that man seeks are temporary; the name that God gives is eternal. Human pride must be abased; Deity must be exalted! God will elevate man to a high position, but never at the expense of Divine glory.