

Dan Phillips: Diversity in Herstory – Babel

Sermon presented at Seekers worship

06 August 2000

by Dan Phillips

Diversity in Herstory: Babel

There was a time when humans did not fight, when they had no wars. They were all united, and even God herself admitted that they could accomplish any goal they had. However, all was not as it should be.

After the Great Flood, as humanity again began to grow in number, God told them that it would be a good thing if they would spread throughout the entire earth. She knew that her human children needed to grow up as a people. In order to mature, they needed to explore the world, and find different solutions to the problems of living in different places. They needed to become more diverse.

However, there was a problem. The problem was that the valley the people were living in, the valley of Shinar, was a very good place to live. It had plenty of water, and allowed them to grow much food. It even had a particularly good kind of clay with which they could make bricks, so they could build any kind of building they wanted to build. Moreover, as their numbers grew, and as they began to invent more and more ways to do things, they had no reason to move on to other places. They became very comfortable where they were, and did not want to leave. As it is with us today, their comfort was more important to them than obeying God, or finding out new things, or changing.

God was patient with Her people, as She is today. She did not push them out of the valley of Shinar. She did not punish them for not obeying Her. She watched and waited to see what they would do. Eventually, the people at Shinar noticed that there was more to the universe than just this earth. So they proposed to build a building that would take them up to heaven, or to say it in our words, allow them to go into space. God, of course, took note of their purpose, and realized that She would now have to do something. She knew that as united as they were, they would inevitably accomplish this new goal.

God was not against the goal. She is well aware that Her children must leave the Earth someday. Moreover, She wants us to grow up and leave home, as does any good parent. However, She also knew that the people at Shinar needed some maturity before they left. Just as we don't allow our 10 year olds to leave home when they want, She knew that Her children needed some wisdom they did not have, and that they would need it even more when they met Her other children on other worlds.

The particular wisdom the Shinar people needed was how to deal with others. Not *others* as in other people who look, think, and act as we do; but *others* as in people who do not look like us, who do not act or worship like us, and who do not think as we do. The wisdom of embracing and sharing diversity was what the people at Shinar lacked, and desperately needed before they left the cradle that is Earth.

Knowing as She does that language drives so much of human culture, God decided to diversify their language. She made Swahili the language of some, Hebrew the language of others, and Chinese the language of still others. Where before they had one language with few words, She gave them many languages, with many words for the same things. She knew that this would force them to do one of two things: either give up their goal, which they could only accomplish while united, or learn (**quickly**) to deal with their differences.

Moreover, they could have done this. They could have done as we do today: trained translators, learned about other cultures, built international organizations, and kept working on their goal. However, they did not. They panicked in the face of change. They decided that each group should live apart from each other group. Now, just on the verge of what could have been a triumph, they abandoned their efforts to get into space, and scattered throughout the earth. Now they obeyed God's command. In this sense, they failed God's test, and disappointed her yet again.

What is worse, they misinterpreted what God had done. They thought that God was afraid of them getting up into her realm, and that She had punished them for what they tried to do. They saw all of the unity of purpose, and reliance on their own efforts as being wrong, and worthy of God's curse. That was how they interpreted diversity: as a curse, rather than a blessing. Rather than try to find a way to continue working together, they separated into many different lands. Since then humans have put a lot of effort into making everybody acts/worships/ talks/thinks the same way. We seem to believe this is what God wants from us.

Children often wonder why their parents make them do hard things: such as clean their rooms, or go to school, or learn to play a musical instrument, not realizing that the parent wants what is best for them. Like those children, they felt very much like God was beating them for some sin. However, it was not like that. God has never been afraid of people, or what they can do. In addition, She certainly approves of unity of purpose among her people. However, She knows that any mature approach to life, spirituality or even space travel must be based on the awareness that not everyone is exactly alike, and that all deserve equal consideration. Until we learn this, nothing will work right for us humans.

That is not to say that we are a lot better off today. As we again approach space travel, we are hardly united as a race.

We can also look back and see many examples of where we have destroyed others for being different from us. While some of us today are aware of the value of differences, and the infinite variety that may exist in God's universe, we still face a great deal of ignorance and hatred around this issue. Our hope and consolation must continue to be that, as at the Tower of Babel, God is still watching, and will give us what we need, even when we do not want it.