

*First Things – Genesis*

**Genesis 10:8-11**

**“Hero or Villain?”**

1. **THE THINGS SOCIETY WOULD COMMEND ABOUT NIMROD**
  - A. He was a powerful man
  - B. He was a prestigious man
2. **THE THINGS SCRIPTURE WOULD CONDEMN ABOUT NIMROD**
  - A. His sinful attitude
  - B. His selfish ambition
3. **THE THINGS SALVATION WOULD CORRECT ABOUT NIMROD**
  - A. He would be living in a kingdom instead of ruling one
  - B. He would be looking for a city instead of building one

1. Though my mother frowned upon it, when I was younger my brothers and I used to love to watch professional wrestling.
2. *Now* I know that the only professional thing about that kind of wrestling is the acting, but as a kid I believed it was real and I watched every pile driver, figure four, and turn buckle leap with amazement and wonder.
3. In those days, wrestling was easy to follow because there were the good guys and the bad guys.
4. For instance, it was clear to any viewer that my favorite tag-team, “The Rock N Roll Express”, were good guys. Their arch enemies, “The Midnight Express”, were obviously bad guys.
5. Dusty Rhodes was a good guy. Rick Flair was a bad guy (even though you still rooted for him). The lines were clearly drawn, and the rivalries were obvious.
6. Somewhere, however, things changed in the world of wrestling, and eventually you couldn’t tell who was good and who was bad.
7. Everybody seemed to be bad to some degree, even the guys that used to be good. It was a confusing time for fans of “squared circle”.
8. In Genesis chapter 10, in the midst of a long list of the descendents of Noah’s sons, among Ham’s family line, we meet a figure named Nimrod.
9. Though there is not a lot of information given about him, there is enough to make him an interesting figure in an otherwise mundane chapter.
10. When you look at Nimrod, and what the Bible says about him, it is hard to tell what kind of man he actually was. Was he a hero or a villain, a good guy or a bad one?

11. I want us to consider this man, Nimrod, and I want to point out to you three things about him and his life that I think will help us to make an assessment about the kind of man he really was. Notice with me first of all:

### **I. THE THINGS SOCIETY WOULD COMMEND ABOUT NIMROD**

1. Look back at our text, and read again the record given to us of this man, Nimrod. Verse 8 tells us, "*And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth.*"

2. Verse 9 adds that, "*He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD.*" Verse 10 tells of the beginning and expansion of Nimrod's kingdom on the earth.

3. Based on the fact that little else is said about all the other men listed in this chapter, it appears that Nimrod was "a man among men" in his day and a towering figure in the world at that time.

4. In that society, Nimrod was probably somewhat of hero, admired and envied by those around him.

5. In fact, I would venture to say that much of the same things they envied and commended about Nimrod in that society are basically the same things people admire and respect in this society.

6. Think about this with me. A man like Nimrod would be commended by society because:

#### **A. He was a powerful man**

1. Three times in two verses the word "mighty" is used in connection with Nimrod. In the Bible, the word is used to describe a champion, and means "manly, strong, and vigorous."

2. Nimrod's power, however, was not just in his personal strength. His power was seen in what he achieved.

3. Nimrod rose as a mighty man in that day to become the first king on the earth. He built cities and ruled over other men.

4. Nimrod was apparently a powerful man, both physically and figuratively. He was a conqueror; what we might call a titan, a baron, or a mogul.

5. In 2009, *Forbes* Magazine published its first-ever list of the world's most powerful people. Atop the list was President Obama, and it included people from all walks of life; everyone from the Pope to the CEO of Wal-Mart.
6. The article begins with a quote from the historic French ruler, Napoleon Bonaparte. He said, "I love power. But it is as an artist that I love it. I love it as a musician loves his violin..."<sup>1</sup>
7. Napoleon is not the only man who has loved power. There are many men who value power as much as wealth, and they hold on to it with the same tenacity.
8. And while people often criticize those who are in power, it is usually because they wish they were in their place.
9. Our world, even if only secretly, admires and commends people who are powerful.
10. Nimrod was the kind of man society would commend and praise, because he was a powerful man. I think he would be admired and revered also because:

#### **B. He was a prestigious man**

1. Look again at verse 9. It says of Nimrod, "*He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD.*"
2. Apparently, Nimrod was such a mighty hunter, such a powerful figure, that his name became a sort of nick-name for others who were like him.
3. Whenever someone was strong and mighty, they would say of him, "He is another Nimrod." In other words, Nimrod was famous and prestigious in his day.
4. Though things may have been much different in the time of Nimrod, we today can certainly understand how people can be impressed by fame.
5. Our culture is addicted to celebrity, and filled with people who will do absolute anything for a little publicity and the possibility of being famous.
6. We live in the world of people like Paris Hilton, who are famous simply for being famous.
7. Every move of the so-called "stars" is photographed, documented, and sold for the consumption of a nation full of people who wished everybody knew who *they* were.

8. The story is told of how Ronald Reagan was flipping through the 1991 edition of the publication, *Who's Who*. The former president was a bit surprised to find that only ten lines were used to tell about his life.

9. He was even more surprised when he looked down and found that the entry for Nancy Reagan was twenty-eight lines.

10. Our world admires the people who make it on the list of who's who, and a famous man like Nimrod would be commended for things like his power and prestige.

11. Nevertheless, before we make a judgment about the kind of man Nimrod was, we need to consider not only *the things society would commend about Nimrod*, but we need think also about:

## **II. THE THINGS SCRIPTURE WOULD CONDEMN ABOUT NIMROD**

1. As we try to understand what kind of man this interesting figure was in Genesis 10, I am mindful of what the Lord told the Prophet Samuel when he was looking for a king to rule over Israel.

2. The Lord told the prophet in I Samuel 16:7, "*Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.*"

3. As we come to measure the man called Nimrod, we need to be mindful that the God of heaven is not impressed by the things this world admires.

4. A man's power and fame mean little to the God whose power and glory outshine the sun. He measures men by a different standard than the society around them.

5. With that in mind, while Nimrod is not specifically condemned in this passage, there are some things about his life that God speaks out against in other parts of His Word.

6. Though our world would probably see Nimrod as a celebrity, God saw him as He does all men, a sinner who had fallen short of what he should be.

7. What is it about Nimrod that Scripture would condemn? Well, first of all, the Word of God condemns:

### **A. His sinful attitude**

1. One of things we learn as we read through the Bible is that in it, names are very important. Names carry meaning and are often descriptive of the person to whom they are given.

2. Nimrod's name is very interesting. It means, "Let us rebel!" As is often the case in the Bible, Nimrod's name indicates something about his life.
3. Though a descendent of Ham and Canaan, Nimrod rebelled against the curse that His ancestor Noah had placed upon his family.
4. Nimrod rebelled against both the world in which He lived, and apparently the God who controlled it.
5. Notice the phrase in verse 9 that says, "*He was a mighty hunter **before the LORD...***" The idea of the word "before" is "in the face of", and can be translated as "against".
6. The sense is that Nimrod grew in might and did what he did in the face of the Lord, as an act of rebellion against Him.
7. Though they do not carry the authority of the Bible, some of the ancient Jewish commentaries on this passage refer to Nimrod as a hunter, not so much of animals, but of the souls men.
8. One such document, called the Jerusalem Targum, quotes Nimrod as saying to the men of his day, "Depart from the judgment of the Lord, and adhere to the judgment of Nimrod!"<sup>ii</sup>
9. Whether that is true or not, we *do* know that the kingdom Nimrod started, called Babylon, is emblematic throughout the Bible, even into the end-times prophecies, as a rebellious, evil empire.
10. Nimrod may have been renowned among his peers, but he was a rebel to the Lord, and the Scripture condemns all rebellion against God.
11. I Samuel 15:23 says, "*For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry...*"
12. The Bible would condemn the sinful attitude of Nimrod. I would add further, it would no doubt also condemn:

### **B. His selfish ambition**

1. Look now at verse 10. It says, "*And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.*"
2. Nimrod built a pretty impressive little domain, including the city of Babel, which appears as the world's leading city in the very next chapter.

3. However, having built all this, it doesn't appear that Nimrod was satisfied and content. Verse 11 indicates that he extended his kingdom and rule into what would become Assyria, and there he built Ninevah, and other great cities.
4. There is little question as to what was going on in Nimrod's heart as he spread his power further and further out into the world.
5. With the heart of a rebel, Nimrod was ambitious to build up his own name and his own kingdom for his own glory.
6. While a sanctified ambition that desires to glorify the Lord and to do things for His honor is something to be commended, selfish ambition is never pleasing to the Lord.
7. In Mark 10, just after James and John ambitiously requested to be seated on the right and left hand of the Lord in His kingdom, Jesus said to his disciples, beginning in verse 42:  
  
*"Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all."* (Mark 10:42-44)
8. While selfish ambition may fuel the work of many men in our world, in the Kingdom of Christ, it is condemned, and it is counter to what our Lord expects of us as His people.
9. You see; Nimrod, though powerful and prestigious in his society, is the kind of man the Scriptures condemn.
10. There is one more truth I want us to consider about this man, Nimrod. Think with me not only about *the things society would commend about Nimrod*, and *the things Scripture would condemn about Nimrod*, but think also lastly about:

### **III. THE THINGS SALVATION WOULD CORRECT ABOUT NIMROD**

1. Lest we be too hard on this man, Nimrod, I want to point out that Nimrod is many ways just a caricature, an illustration of what is true of every single one of us.
2. That's right; there is some Nimrod in all of us. We too are rebels at heart. We too are hungry for power and control, and are given to selfish ambitions.
3. The close of Romans chapter one gives a pretty grim description of mankind, saying among other things that we are, "...filled with all unrighteousness, fornication,

*wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness...haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents..."* (Romans 1:29-30)

4. The assessment of man there ends finally with the statement, "*Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.*" (Romans 1:32)

5. The truth is; there wasn't anything wrong with Nimrod that is not on some level wrong with us as well.

6. With that being said, the only hope for a man like Nimrod and people like us is for the grace of God to transform our hearts, and save us from our sins.

7. In Jesus Christ we have hope that though we are sinners and rebels against God, we can become saints and children of God.

8. Knowing what we know about the work of salvation, and what Jesus does for those who come to Him by faith, consider what would be different about Nimrod, had He entered into the grace of God in Christ.

9. Paul tells us that when a man comes to Christ, He is a new creature. How would that affect Nimrod? Well, for one thing, we know that:

**A. He would be living in a kingdom instead of ruling one**

1. Again, Genesis 10:10 describes the beginning of Nimrod's kingdom as the city of Babel. Nimrod expanded his kingdom and his rule into other areas as well.

2. Were Nimrod to meet Jesus Christ, and come to faith in Him, Nimrod's kingdom would be surrendered and swallowed up by the Kingdom of Christ.

3. In I Timothy 6:15, Paul says that Jesus Christ is, "*...the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords...*"

4. As the only Potentate, and the King of kings, Jesus will not settle for a mutual rule, a shared sovereignty, or a co-reign in anyone's life.

5. When a man is truly saved, whether he fully realizes it or not, he gives over the kingdom of His life to the Lord Jesus.

6. Vance Havner rightly said, "Jesus Christ demands more complete allegiance than any dictator who ever lived. The difference is, He has a right to it."<sup>iii</sup>

7. When a rebels like Nimrod and you and I meet King Jesus, we must wave the white flag of surrender, step down from our throne, and bow before the scepter of the Lion of Judah and the Lamb who has overcome.

8. Were Nimrod saved, he would be living in a kingdom instead of ruling one. I think it is safe to say also that, were he saved:

**B. He would be looking for a city instead of building one**

1. If I am reading the text correctly, there are at least eight cities that are listed as part of Nimrod's kingdom.

2. After moving into Asshur, or what is Assyria, Nimrod built Ninevah, which we know was a large and great city in history.

3. Nimrod spent much of his life building cities, much like the descendents of Cain had prior to the flood.

4. In contrast to Nimrod, just two chapters over in Genesis 12, we are introduced to Abram, soon to be Abraham. He was the man who was called by the grace of God out of the sin and idolatry of the world in which Nimrod lived.

5. In Hebrews 11:9-10, it says something interesting about Abraham. It says, "*By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*"

6. Based on that, I think we can safely say that had Nimrod met the God of Abraham, and experienced His saving grace, he would have left behind all his city building and would have spent the rest of his days looking for the city God built.

7. Likewise, when rebels like us meet the Lord Jesus, all of sudden the little homes and habitats we build down here aren't as important as they used to be.

8. Our hearts aren't ever satisfied with the temporary dwellings of this passing world. No, we've heard Jesus say that He's gone to prepare a place for us.

9. Therefore, no place down here seems to hold our heart like that city where a home has been built just for us.

*I've got a mansion just over the hilltop,  
In that bright land where we'll never grow old,  
And some day yonder, we will never more wander,  
But walk on streets that are purest gold*

1. Genesis chapter 10 is certainly not the most exciting chapter in the Bible. Very often these genealogical chapters are overlooked.
2. In the middle of this one, however, we find a man who displays some of the characteristics that our world praises, even though he also represents what is wrong with all men. He is a hero and a villain.
3. Nimrod reminds us of what we are apart from the grace of God. We are rebels, and we are sinners whose deeds in this world condemn us in the world to come.
4. Thankfully, the God against whom we have rebelled loves us anyway, and has provided through the death of His Son on the cross a way in which rebels can be redeemed.
5. Because of that, we should bow our knees in submission to the King of kings, and crown Him the Hero of all those who *used* to be villains.

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<sup>i</sup> Noer, Michael, and Perloth, Nicole, “The World’s Most Powerful People”, 11/11/09, *Forbes.com*, accessed 2/24/11, <http://www.forbes.com/2009/11/09/world-most-powerful-leadership-power-09-intro.html>

<sup>ii</sup> Quoted by Morris, Henry, *The Genesis Record*, (Creation-Life Publishers, San Diego, CA, 1976), p. 252

<sup>iii</sup> Hester, Dennis J., *The Vance Havner Quote Book*, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1986), p. 136