

Nimrod; A Mighty Hunter

'This is the history of the descendants of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and the sons born to them after the flood ... The sons of Ham were Cush, Egypt, Put and Canaan. Cush became the father of Nimrod. He was the first to be a mighty king on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord." The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad and Calneh in the land of Shinar (in Mesopotamia – modern-day Iraq). Out of the land of Shinar, Nimrod went forth into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rebooth-Ir, Calah and Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah. Together, these (towns, villages) made the great city (of Nineveh)' (Genesis 10:1, 6 to 12).

'They (the Jews) shall rule the land of Assyria (Syria and Iran) with the sword and the land of Nimrod (Iraq) within her gates. Thus shall the Messiah deliver us from the Assyrians when he comes into our land (Israel) and when he treads on our borders' (Micah 5:6). This verse from Micah will be fulfilled when Jesus returns. That is when Israel will include all of the following land. 'On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham saying: "To your descendants I have given this land; from the river of Egypt (the Nile) to the great river Euphrates (in Iraq)"' (Genesis 15:18). When Jesus returns to Jerusalem, Israel will become a huge country.

There are a lot of negative things written about Nimrod by Christian writers, but there is no scriptural evidence to support their claims. The scriptures do not state anywhere that Nimrod was wicked or that he did evil in the sight of God or that he enticed others to be wicked. When someone was wicked, the scriptures state they were wicked. When they enticed others to do wickedly, we are told about it. For example; 'The Lord saw the wickedness of man ... and saw that his thoughts were continually evil' (Genesis 6:5). 'Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord and dealt wickedly above all' (1 Kings 16:25). 'Ahab the son of Omri, did evil in the sight of the Lord' (1 Kings 16:30). 'Manasseh did wickedly above all and made Judah to sin' (2 Kings 21:11). 'After this Jehoshaphat king of Judah and Ahaziah king of Israel did very wickedly' (2 Chronicles 20:35). 'Libnah ... led Judah astray' (2 Chronicles 21:11).

No such statement was ever written about Nimrod. What the scriptures do say, is that Nimrod was a hunter and was the son of Cush, grandson of Ham and great-grandson of Noah, who was a very righteous man. Nimrod was born about 2,000 years after creation and approximately 500 years after Noah's flood. Nimrod was the very first great king on the earth. He was a mighty hunter 'before the Lord' and what hunters do, is provide food. He became the king of Babel and other places, then he moved to Assyria to build Nineveh and the surrounding towns. The phrase 'before the Lord' means he was aware of the presence of the Lord; he hunted in the presence of God. When we serve God, whatever we do, we do all things before the Lord (Colossians 3:23).

If we study the scriptures carefully, the people who came 'before the Lord' were righteous people. 'Three times in the year shall all your men appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel' (Exodus 34:23). Hannah poured out her heart and soul before the Lord (1 Samuel 1:15). King David sat before the Lord (2 Samuel 7:18). All nations will worship before the Lord and glorify His name (Psalm 86:9). The two holy witnesses stand before the Lord (Revelation 11:4). Zachariah and Elizabeth were righteous before the Lord, walking blamelessly in all the commandments (Luke 1:6). 'That He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of the Lord Jesus' (1 Thessalonians 3:13). All of these people who came 'before the Lord' were God-fearing. Rebellious or wicked people cannot come 'before the Lord' because the Lord is far from the wicked and only hears the prayers of the righteous (Proverbs 15:29). The fact that Nimrod hunted before the Lord, strongly infers that he knew the Lord, and we know that God would not have accepted his work if he had been wicked. Notice that the Lord did not accept Cain's work; 'But for Cain and his offering the Lord had no respect' (Genesis 4:5), and the scriptures tell us Cain was wicked (1 John 3:12).

The scriptures do not say Nimrod was wicked or evil. We also need to notice; the Lord never said Nimrod was righteous either. The Bible tells us: 'Cush became the father of Nimrod. He was the first to be a mighty king on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord"' (Genesis 10:8 & 9). If we study what the scriptures say in Hebrew, many people will be surprised. We need to remember that in Hebrew, the nuances of English grammar and punctuation do not appear. This is word for word what the Hebrew Scriptures say about Nimrod written in Hebrew; "Cush he generated Nimrud ... He started to become of masterful in the earth. He became masterful hunter to faces of YHVH ... on so he is being said as Nimrud masterful

hunter to faces of YHVH.” That verse is very surprising. Nimrod was closer than just being before the Lord, he was literally face to face with God. To be face to face with someone means to be close enough to be within visual range. Could a wicked man be face to face with God?

The Hebrew word for face in these references is the plural word ‘phnim’, so Nimrod was in the ‘phnim’ of the Lord; literally face to face. To be that close is more than the Lord merely looking on and approving or disapproving of the person’s actions. The relationship between the Lord and Nimrod appears to have been a very close one at some point in Nimrod’s life. It is possible for Nimrod to have once been a righteous man face to face with God, then perhaps he later became the unscrupulous man he has been portrayed as being in the legends. We will never know for sure but there is a verse that infers Nimrod did in fact begin with the blessing of the Lord. In English the verse reads: ‘Cush was the father of Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth’ (1 Chronicles 1:10). In Hebrew this verse says: ‘Cush he generates Nimrud. Nimrud he started to become of masterful man on earth’. So Nimrod started to become a mighty man, then something went wrong. The name ‘Nimrod’ or in Hebrew ‘Nimrud’ means ‘Upstart’ – someone who is arrogant. Solomon was a man who started off being face to face with the Lord and the scriptures tell us he turned away from God, disobeyed the Lord’s commands and became evil. Perhaps Nimrod’s life took the same wrong turn.

Nimrod may have been arrogant, but the scriptures do not say Nimrod was involved in the building of the tower in Shinar, later called Babel, or that he began the Babylonian religious cult. These accusations have been levelled at him but the Bible does not say any of those things. Nimrod was the king of Babel and surrounding cities in the Land of Shinar but had already moved to Assyria and began building Nineveh before the Tower of Babel was started (Genesis 10:10 to 12). There was no particular leader at the time of the building of the tower. The scriptures make it clear that the tower was a joint effort – not ordered by any one person or king. Nimrod’s name was not mentioned in regard to its construction (Genesis 11:2 to 9); however, Nimrod was fully involved in the construction of Nineveh as the Bible states. If Nimrod was the king of Babel at the time of the construction of the Tower of Babel, the Bible would have stated that, but by the time of the building of the tower, Nimrod had already moved on.

The scriptures are our guide and all scriptures are inspired by God Himself (2 Timothy 3:16). If Nimrod had been as evil as people say he was, and if he had behaved wickedly, or enticed millions of people to do wickedly, the Lord would have said so, as He has in other scriptures within the Bible about other people. Nimrod may or may not have become the wicked man he is portrayed as, but to accuse Nimrod of wickedness for no other reason than because ‘tradition’ and myths or legends says he was wicked, is wrong. The Bible says: ‘Do not listen to myths or legends’ (1 Timothy 1:4). What the Lord did tell us is that Nimrod was the first great or mighty king or ruler on earth, who also happened to be a hunter in the face of the Lord. Christian and secular writers are too quick to criticise Bible characters without searching the truth from, and cross-referencing the scriptures. They say things like ‘we suggest’ or ‘we believe’ or ‘we cannot take the Bible literally’ and other comments like that. Almost everything written about Nimrod is speculation and we cannot rely on old traditions or legends. We need to rely solely on the absolute truth of the Word of God. The only truth we have regarding Nimrod is written in the Bible, and the Bible does not indicate that he was wicked; not in his early life anyway.

Nimrod was a significant Bible character. He was the first ‘masterful’ king on earth; or in other words, a great leader. He was a masterful hunter; he mastered the art of hunting, and that would have been to provide food for the people. The Bible does not mention any other person who hunted in the presence of the Lord. As leader, Nimrod would have hunted down and killed the wild animals that could have harmed his people. Ancient kings did not sit in fancy palaces and give orders, they went out and protected their people, provided for them and fought wars for them. Nimrod was also a great Town Planner. He had several cities built including the great city of Nineveh, so here we have a great leader who fed and protected his people, and provided them with housing, education and a society in which to live. It is possible that the way Nimrod went about achieving his goals was questionable.

The city of Nineveh became only one of a very few Gentile cities that were visited by the Lord as recorded in the scriptures. The people of Nineveh must have known a degree of righteousness at some point in the city’s history, because at the spoken Word of the Lord, the whole city repented and turned back to God. ‘The Lord said to Jonah, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach out to it the message that I tell you.”’

So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the Word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city of three days' journey. Jonah entered into the city a day's journey, and he cried; "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown!"

So the people of Nineveh believed God and proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest of them to the least of them. The news came to the king of Nineveh and he arose from his throne and removed his royal robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. He made proclamation published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: "Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock taste anything; let them not feed nor drink water but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth and let them cry mightily to God. Yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows, God may turn and relent and turn away from His fierce anger so that we might not perish."

God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented of the disaster that He said He would do to them and He did not do it' (Jonah 3:2 to 10).

It is clear that the people, including the king of Nineveh knew about the Lord, they believed in Him, they knew enough to obey His Word, repent, fast, humble themselves and be saved. That is more than many people in this modern world take notice of. We see in the Bible that it was Nimrod who originally built Nineveh. Sadly, Nineveh did not remain repentant. It was eventually laid waste and became desolate (Nahum 3:7; Zephaniah 2:13), but the people of Jonah's generation who lived in Nineveh will be eternally blessed. Jesus said, "The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, Someone greater than Jonah is here!" (Matthew 12:41; Luke 11:32).

We will never know for sure if Nimrod started out well then turned away from the Lord and become the terrible person he is portrayed as being. The ancient peoples did not value life as we do today. Their actions were warlike and hideously cruel, but because they were not famous like Nimrod was, their actions have mostly gone unrecorded in history. Other kings of that time in history did the most terrible things and the wicked actions of at least four of them have been attributed to Nimrod, even though the Bible tells us he was not in that area at the time. Then, just to make the legends fit Nimrod, he has been given at least four other names, yet scripturally, he was only ever known as Nimrud. Some of the wicked deeds attributed to him happened long before he was born (i.e. before the flood – 500 years before he was born) and long after he would have died (i.e. after the Exodus). It is quite possible for Nimrod to have been a man influenced by that barbaric time in history and was no worse than other unnamed kings who were alive then. We only need to read in the Bible about Samson and what was done to him to see how barbaric the ancient pagan kings were (Judges 13:24 to Judges 16:30). Nimrod would have battled viciously with other kings, violently fought for land, fought ferociously over his people and been influenced by the idolatry that was commonplace in that generation, but because his name is written in the Bible, he is being continuously vilified. We do not really know what Nimrod did or did not do, because we were not there! We need to keep an open mind about Nimrod because the Bible does not say he was wicked or righteous – just that he once lived. We do not know if the Lord approved or disapproved of Nimrod because the Lord chose to keep silent on the matter. If we put aside all the myths written about Nimrod, scripturally, what do we have left? A powerful, brave man who led his people, fed, protected and built cities for them, all under the watchful eyes of the Lord.

Amen and God bless you.

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