

Bible Studies for Life Series for January 28: Faith can conquer chaos

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Faith can conquer chaos

- Genesis 11:1-9; Proverbs 28:2-5; 29:2-4

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A glance at the nightly news or a brief reading of the morning newspaper may prompt the thinking, caring person to ask, "Is there really any hope for society?"

This week's lesson completes the unit titled "Creation Faith: Living by God's Design," and places the emphasis on the relationship between God and society. As Christians, we should be vitally interested in how God seeks to relate to society and how society responds to God's initiatives. Moreover, as Christians we should supplement the question "What hope is there for society?" with the further question "What hope do we offer society?"



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Genesis 11 provides one of the great transitions in the biblical narrative. To this point, the Bible story has focused on all of creation as seen through the eyes of key individuals. Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and his sons have been the focal characters placed against the backdrop the whole of creation.

In chapter 10, the so-called Table of Nations gives an account of the descendants of Noah's sons and offers an explanation for the differences among people and the populating of the entire earth (v. 32).

In chapter 12, the narrative begins to focus on one single man, Abram, and the story of his family. The story moves from a focus on all the people of the earth in chapter 10, to a focus on one man and his faithful response to God in chapter 12.

Between the Table of Nations and the call of Abram, the focal passage for today's lesson tells the familiar story of the tower of Babel. Clearly, one of the main functions fulfilled by this story is a biblical explanation for the origin of different languages. However, the more important message seems to relate to the hubris and folly of humanity that sees itself as independent from God.

The facts of the story are well known. The story begins with the assertion that all people "had one language and a common speech (11:1). As people migrated east they settled on a "plain in Shinar," learned to bake bricks and use mortar to build a city and a tower (vv. 3-4). Located within the

Fertile Crescent near the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, we know this plain of Shinar as Babylonia.

The building of a city and tower in and of itself does not seem to be the main cause of God's judgment. Rather, the motivation of these people to "make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth" (v. 4) prompts God to observe and to act. It is hard to imagine that God finds the advancement of civilization troubling or that the cooperation between people goes against God's interests; however, the motivation for this "civilized cooperation" is the elevation of human interests at the expense of God's desires.

God's undoing of this human enterprise involves the confusion of language and the scattering of people over the face the earth (vv. 6-9).

It is easy to imagine the cacophony of voices trying to communicate with each other as the human plans for glory and greatness fall to pieces. The Bible identifies the site of this undoing of language as Babel, which some commentators suggests sounds like the Hebrew word for "confused." The attempt of humanity to control its environment and its destiny apart from God's direction and guidance results in confusion and chaos. This principle is no less true today.

The cacophony of voices we hear in the world today about almost every issue imaginable comes primarily because of the inability of humans to consistently and correctly seek and discern God's will for all of creation. Like-thinking, well-meaning people still have difficulty communicating with one another about all sorts of issues because there is no consensus about what God desires in every situation. To say nothing of the discord between people who do not believe in God or who worship other gods. Is this God's intention? Is there any hope for society? The Christian response should be a resounding "Yes!"

Hope for society comes, as it does in the biblical story, when individuals and groups seek God's will and act upon it. The biblical story does not end in the confusion and chaos of Babel but continues in a far away land, because Abram chose to exercise faith in what God had planned for him and his family.

The biblical story comes to its apex at the cross and empty tomb, because Jesus chose to exercise that same kind of faith in God's plan to offer the hope of salvation to all humanity. The biblical story continues at Pentecost, because the church in the power of the Holy Spirit undid the confusion and chaos of Babel and offered a message of hope to all people everywhere, and "each one heard them speaking in his own language" (Acts 2:6).

It is easy to point out the towers of confusion and chaos that the secular world attempts to build. Society puts its confidence in political power, economic might and educational superiority. All of these "mighty towers" are demonstrably fleeting. Governments rise and fall, economies fail and rebound, knowledge changes and grows.

Perhaps the greater challenge comes when we seek to find those towers of confusion and chaos that exist in the church. Do we build our own towers of Babel when we attempt to rely on our own abilities rather than on God? Do we attempt to "make a name for ourselves" when we become overly competitive about what our church is doing versus what some other church is doing? Most importantly, when we become overly concerned with making a name for ourselves, do stop offering hope to the world around us?

Discussion questions

- What evidence can you cite of society's need for a message of hope?
- How does God offer hope to society? What role does the church play in

offering hope to society?

- How do we avoid building towers of confusion and chaos inside the church?

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