

March 5, 2021

## God and Man

***"Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth"...Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."*** Genesis 9:1-11:9

As we continue in our efforts to better understand both our God and ourselves we come to the story of the tower at Babel in Genesis, chapter 11. There are a number of enlightening indications in this account that can, I think, teach us a lot about both.

After the flood we are told that God blessed Noah and his sons and commanded them to ***"...increase in number and fill the earth..."*** It was God's intent that Noah and his sons would repopulate the world and not stay together in one place.

But, as is often the case, mankind had a 'better' idea. The descendents of Noah and his sons decided to build a great city and a great tower so that they would not be scattered across the earth. They chose, in their misguided wisdom to go against God's direct and specific command and to do what they wanted to do.

As is too often the case, mankind chooses to ignore the direct and specific command of God and to choose to follow his own wisdom. In the account in Genesis 11 God confuses the language of the people so that they will naturally separate and disperse.

I think we can understand from this account that there are times when God will force us to obey his commands by created a situation where nothing else is possible. The point of this story in Genesis 11 is, I believe, an example of exactly that. Since the people would not ***"...fill the earth..."*** God created a situation where they really had no other alternative.

There is another interesting indication about man's nature from this story that is, I think, often overlooked. Chapter 11 begins, ***"Now the whole world had one language and a common speech..."*** and a bit later in the chapter God observes, ***"If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them."***

While it might be possible to interpret this aspect of the account to mean that God doesn't want us to work together so closely, I have come to believe that there is a much more positive meaning here. The descendents of Noah were able to do great things because they spoke the same language. Their common language created the capacity for them to work well together and they literally could have accomplished anything.

God did not, I think, confuse their languages because working together was a bad thing, but instead he did so because they chose to use this capacity to intentionally ignore his direct and specific command to spread out over the whole earth.

In a world as divided as ours I often wonder what we would be able to do if we could find a common language and a common purpose and learn somehow to work together. As humans we have the capacity to do great things when we work together and sadly we have the capacity to do great evil as well. In reality, we do not often choose to work together and possibly that is because our confused languages make that so difficult.

It is still possible, I believe, for us to work together, but we must learn the most basic lesson of effective communication to do so. What is that most basic lesson? James would teach us, ***"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."*** (James 1:19)

Because our languages have been confused, we must learn to listen and listening demands selflessness. That might well be why we find it so difficult. When we choose to selflessly listen we can build real solutions to our common problems. But, when we selfishly demand our own way and let anger rule us we accomplish nothing.

Since the days of Babel mankind has been trying to rediscover a common language that would make so many things possible. Perhaps selflessness is the beginning of that conversation.

