

Confusion and the Call of God

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Of all the dividing lines which have crossed this world's history, the flood is by far the most prominent. If we view things from an ordinary physical standpoint, it will be exceeded doubtless by the mighty purging effects of judgment to be yet executed at the appearing of Christ in glory to usher in the kingdom of God, and if we view things from the moral and spiritual rather than the physical standpoint, the flood becomes relatively unimportant and the Cross of Christ stands out as the great dividing line. Until the present moment, however, it is the only upheaval affecting at one and the same moment and equally all the human race, and it divided between "the world that then was" and "the heavens and the earth which are now" (2 Peter 3: 6, 7).

Morally, however, men were the same after it as before it. The spirit of Lamech, the ante-diluvian, was soon reproduced in Nimrod the postdiluvian, and Cain's city of Enoch was succeeded by Nimrod's city of Babel. A godly seed, too, was still preserved, and the faith of Enoch, who was translated, found its counterpart in the faith of Abraham, who became a man of heavenly hopes and consequently a stranger and a pilgrim in the earth.

From dates and details given in Genesis 10 and 11 it would appear that only about a century elapsed from the time of the deluge before the building of Babel's tower and the resultant scattering of mankind into nations occurred. The eight souls that had been saved through the waters had by this time become a considerable band, and the rebel and independent nature of mankind came again strikingly into evidence. Genesis 11: 1-9 supplies us with such knowledge as we have of this great event.

These early post-diluvians said, "Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (verse 4). In these few words not only their activities but their thoughts and motives are revealed to us.

In the first place then we gather that, as at the outset, so now *they distrusted the Word of God*. At the outset God announced His judgment which would follow upon disobedience. Eve falling under Satanic influence did not believe that God *would* judge as He had said. Now God had announced that come what may He would *not* judge the world again by a flood consequent upon an interruption of the order of nature which He had established (See Gen. 8: 21, 22), and men did not believe that he would not, and consequently proposed to build a tower whose top should reach unto heaven.

By this proposition they virtually said — "Supposing that once more God interferes with our doings, and sends a flood of water rolling over our plain in the land of Shinar, *let us take steps to circumvent His plans and frustrate His judgment.*" Unbelief thus was followed by rebellion against the anticipated judgment of God.

The tower, however, was not merely for such a contingency but was connected with their purpose to make themselves "a name," i.e., that their renown should be spread abroad in and dominate the earth. This brings us to the great feature which marked Babel at the outset, and which is stamped upon Babylon all through Scripture — *the glorification of man*. Clearly enough these early post-diluvians had no thought of God as the proper end and object of their existence, and hence they substituted themselves as such. It was "let us build US a tower," and "let us make US a name." Their course then is pretty plain. First unbelief, then rebellion against the feared judgment of God, followed by the setting up of themselves as the great centre-piece of the picture, so that everything on earth might contribute to

their pleasure and glory.

All this leads to a fourth thing. These early pioneers were no barbarians, as the perpetrators of the great "higher critical" hoax would have us believe, but men of intellect and astute vision. The ante-diluvian age had been one of fierce and murderous individualism; theirs should be one of highly organized centralisation. The cut-throat policy, when every man's hand was against his neighbour, must cease. It must be replaced by the policy of men amicably combining to assert themselves and cast off the fear of God. Moreover, how could they, as individuals, achieve the mighty works they proposed? Only by *combination, organization, and centralisation* could they hope to build their colossal and magnificent tower. It was a work, we may safely say, which no twentieth century contractor would dare to tender for. They truly did not carry their project far, but the pyramids of Egypt, which apparently date back to centuries not long after the flood remain to show us what gigantic works were accomplished. So the days after the deluge became days not of the great and imposing "I," but of the glorified and magnificent "US."

Thus men began once more to lift themselves up *in mind and achievement*, and consequently the great JEHOVAH "*came down.*" He saw their works and their projects. He recognized their unity expressed in the oneness of their language. He foresaw the possibilities and the ultimate results of this oneness, and from Him judgment proceeded — a judgment totally different from that which they had expected and were in process of arming themselves against. They were taken all unawares. By the simple act of confounding their language so that they did not understand one another's speech, their combination, organization, centralisation and their building enterprise instantly collapsed.

Their fear had been "lest we be scattered." One single act of Almighty power, and "from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth." The thing was so patent that men themselves named the spot Babel, which means "confusion."

It strikes us as not a little significant that those who have studied the subject (see, for instance, *Young's Analytical Concordance* under Babel; Babylon) give a second meaning to the name, viz., Bab-il meaning "gate of God." It looks as if there is here one of those plays upon words which are common in Scripture, and employed to fix the reader's attention. Men thought it was "Bab-il" but it turned out to be "Babel." They dreamed that they were going through the golden gate to deity, in some shape or form; it may have been in making themselves gods. In result, however, they had to painfully learn that their bricks and bitumen were but a slimy gate to folly and confusion.

The confusion so plainly manifested was an act of God in government. As, however, is the case with God's judgments, it was exactly suited to the offence. Their thoughts, their actions, their tower and city all were *confusion*, . . . though from the human standpoint all seemed to be symmetry and order. The fact is that nothing is order outside of God's order. There may be extra-ordinary organization, and men may act with the unanimity and precision of a well-disciplined army, but if all this order is not of God and beneath His control it is pure confusion. Babel was pure confusion, and consequently CONFUSION was written upon it large by God Himself, in so plain a fashion that *men* have called the place Babel from that day to this.

Today the world is more closely following out the ideas which prevailed in primitive Babel than at any other time in its history. Never was so much stress laid on organization and order, and in the irony of God's government never was confusion more plainly stamped upon the whole fabric of civilisation. To show the way in which the principles set forth in Babylon are coming to a head today would be instructive, but we must not be tempted to digress.

A couple of centuries or so rolled, during which men learnt to accommodate themselves to the

limitations imposed by diversity of speech and division into nations, whilst not abandoning the original principles of Babel, and then Abram was born of the stock of Shem, and Genesis 12 abruptly begins with the announcement, "Now the Lord had said unto Abram, get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee . . . so Abram departed." The world having been judged as confusion, here we have *the call of God*; an altogether new departure in God's ways. The two features that mark every call of God come plainly into view.

The call of God firstly means *separation*. Abram had to go "*out of . . . from . . . from . . .*" It entailed the snapping of links — links not only of a national sort but those social and even domestic in character. By this time the infection of idolatry had spread from Babel in many directions, and so we read, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood [i.e., the river Euphrates] in old time, even Terah the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: *and they served other gods*. And I took Abraham from the other side of the flood" (Joshua 24: 2, 3). Out of these idolatrous surroundings Abraham was called, and because of them the separation involved in the call was of a drastic and thorough nature. He who was eventually to be called "the friend of God" must not be left in any kind of friendship with the idolatrous world.

Just as the fact of Abraham's early surroundings being of an idolatrous nature is not mentioned in Genesis, so also no word is given to us there of the character in which God appeared to him when the call was given. We must go to the New Testament for this. Stephen commenced his final address with the statement, "*The God of glory* appeared unto our father Abraham." This great revelation was the starting point of his remarkable career.

Let us just visualise the situation. Abraham is dwelling in great Ur of the Chaldees. Archaeological discoveries make it plain that this was a splendid city of wealth and learning in those far-off days, a place where men were still making themselves "a name" and displaying their glory. In the midst of all this magnificence there appears before him the God of glory, i.e., God presented Himself to him characterized by the glory which is proper to Himself, clothed with that glory, if one may so speak.

How overwhelming must have been this revelation! What a revolution it must have wrought in Abraham's thoughts! How effectually it must have taken the glitter out of the glory of Ur! Here we have the secret of his remarkable life of pilgrimage and self-denial.

The separation of Abraham from his country, his kindred, and his father's house was not accomplished in a day. Years elapsed, and the final links were not broken until God further intervened and Terah his father died in Haran. Then Abraham stepped forth and turned his back upon the glories of the plains of Shinar for ever. He became the man of the tent and the altar. The tent proclaimed his dissociation from the mighty palaces as a pilgrim: the altar proclaimed his approach to and communion with God.

The call of God, then, not only meant *separation* but also *designation*. It meant that God called Abraham not only "*from*" but "*unto*." He was called "unto a land that I will show thee." To that land was he designated, and consequently that land is his. True, he never possessed it, not a square yard of it, save a few that he purchased with money as a burying-place for Sarah. Yet he will possess it *all*, taking it up in the coming age in the persons of his national seed, the elect Israel of God.

The land then was that to which Abraham was designated, and the knowledge of this was public property. But the God who appeared to him was more than the God of the land, or even than "the God of all the earth": He was the God of glory, and Hebrews 11 lets us into the knowledge of that which consequently Abraham had before the vision of his soul as a secret thing. "He looked for a city which

hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." He was amongst those who "declare plainly that they seek a country . . . they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city" (verses 10, 14, 16).

So after all Abraham had a city before him. Nimrod and his helpers started to build their city, the tower of which was intended to reach unto heaven — man ever attempts to work up to heaven and fails. Abraham had a heavenly city in view: God was its Builder and Maker not man, and consequently it has foundations which abide. The contrast was complete.

The object of the builders of Babel was to make themselves a name. To a certain extent they succeeded, for Nimrod "began to be a mighty one in the earth." The call of God carried Abraham into a path far removed from the prowess and renown of these famous men. He started on his pilgrimage, however, with the Divine promise, "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and *make thy name great*; and thou shalt be a blessing"; and God has been as good as His word. Even today, when faith is still at a discount, the name of Abraham is venerated not only by Christian but by Jew and Mohammedan also. That, however, is a small thing, but how great is the honour that God Himself should speak of him as "Abraham my friend" (Isa. 41: 8). Here is true greatness, greatness which abides whilst Nimrod's tower and city are but a mass of shapeless ruins upon the plains of Mesopotamia and his rebel name is well-nigh forgotten.

Abraham became "the father of all them that believe" (Rom. 4: 11) and hence, as the next verse says, we are to walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham." We, too, have received the call; for to those same Roman believers Paul wrote of his own apostleship as being "for obedience to the faith among all nations, for His name: among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1: 5, 6)

Our place then in the world is after the pattern of Abraham's. The heavenly hopes which were more or less secret in his day are clearly revealed to us and consequently the declared portion of our souls. The faith is preached amongst the nations, the effect of it where believed is to separate a people *from* the nations, but they are still for a time left *among* the nations, but responsible to walk among them as *the called of Jesus Christ*; for the way we know God is as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is even more wonderful and intimate than knowing Him as the God of glory.

Christian reader, what can the world offer us that is at all comparable with this?