

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF GENESIS

by

Charles H. MacIntosh

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

THIS is a chapter of very deep interest to the spiritual mind.

It records two great facts, namely, the building of Babel, and the call of Abraham; or, in other words, man's effort to provide for himself, and God's provision made known to faith; man's attempt to establish himself in the earth, and God's calling a man out of it, to find his portion and his home in heaven.

“And the whole earth was of one language and of one speech. And it came to pass as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there And they 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.”

The human heart ever seeks a name, a portion, and a centre in the earth. It knows nothing of aspirations after Heaven, Heaven's God, or Heaven's glory. Left to itself, it will ever find its objects in this lower world; it will ever **“build beneath the skies.”**

It needs God's call, God's revelation, and God's power, to lift the heart of man above this present world, for man is a groveling creature,- alienated from Heaven, and allied to earth. In the scene now before us, there is no acknowledgment of God, no looking up to, or waiting on, him; nor was it the thought of the human heart to set up a place; in which God might dwell,- to gather materials for the purpose of building a habitation for him,- alas! no; His name is never once mentioned.

To make a name for himself was man's object on the plain of Shinar; and such has been his object ever since. Whether we contemplate man on the plain of Shinar, or on the banks of the Tiber, we find him to be the same self-seeking, self-exalting, God-excluding creature, throughout. There is a melancholy consistency in all his purposes, his principles, and his ways; he ever seeks to shut out God and exalt himself.

Now, in what light soever we view this Babel confederacy, it is most instructive to see in it the early display of man's genius and energies, regardless of God. In looking down along the stream of human history, we may easily perceive a marked tendency to confederacy, or association. Man seeks, for the most part, to compass his great ends in this way.

Whether it be in the way of Philanthropy, Religion, or Politics, nothing can be done without an association of men regularly organized. It is well to see this principle, well to mark its incipient working,- to see the earliest model which the page of inspiration affords of a human association, is exhibited on the plain of Shinar, in its design, its object, its attempt, its overthrow.

If we look around us at the present moment we see the whole scene filled with associations.

To name them were useless, for they are as numerous as are the purposes of the human heart. But it is important to mark that the first of all these was the Shinar association, for the establishment of the human interests, and the exaltation of the human name,- objects which may well be set in competition with any that engage the attention of this enlightened and civilized age.

But, in the judgment of faith, there is one grand defect, namely, God is shut out; and to attempt to exalt man, without God, is to exalt him to a dizzy height only that he may be dashed down into hopeless confusion and irretrievable ruin.

The Christian should only know one association, and that is, the Church of the living God, incorporated by the Holy Ghost, who came down from Heaven as the witness of Christ's glorification, to baptize believers into one body, and constitute them God's dwelling-place. Babylon is the very opposite of this, in every particular; and she becomes at the close, as we know, "**the habitation of devils**" (See Revelation 18).

"And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not, understand one another's speech. So the Lord, scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth; and they left off to build the city."

Such was the end of man's first association. Thus it will be to the end.

"Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces . . . gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces" (Isaiah 8:9).

How different it is when God associates men!

In the second chapter of Acts, we see the blessed One coming down in infinite grace to meet man in the very circumstances in which his sin had set him. The Holy Ghost enabled the messengers of grace to deliver their message in the very tongue wherein each was born. Precious proof this, that God desired to reach man's heart with the sweet story of grace!

The law from the fiery mount was not thus promulgated.

When God was telling what man ought to be, he spoke in one tongue; but when he was telling what He himself was, He spoke in many.

Grace broke through the barrier which man's pride and folly had caused to be erected, in order that every man might hear and understand the glad tidings of salvation, "**the wonderful works of God.**" And to what end was this? Just to associate men on God's ground, round God's centre, and on God's principles.

- it was to give them, in reality, one language, one centre, one object, one hope, one life.
- it was to gather them in such a way as that they never should be scattered or confounded again;
- it was to give them a name and a place which should endure forever;
- it was to build for them a tower and a city which should not only have their top reaching to heaven, but their imperishable foundation laid in heaven, by the omnipotent hand of God himself.
- it was to gather them around the glorious person of a risen and highly exalted Christ, and unite them all in one grand design of magnifying and adoring him.

If my reader will turn to the seventh chapter of Revelation, he will find at the close thereof, "**All nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues,**" standing round the Lamb; and, with one voice, ascribing all praise to him.

Thus the three Scriptures may be read in most interesting and profitable connection.

In Genesis 11, God gives various tongues as an expression of his judgment; in Acts 2 he gives various tongues as an expression of grace; and in Revelation 7, we see all those tongues gathered round the Lamb, in glory.

How much better it is, therefore, to find our place in God's association than in man's!

- the former ends in glory, the latter in confusion;
- the former is carried forward by the energy of the Holy Ghost, the latter by the unhallowed energy of fallen man;
- the former has for its object the exaltation of Christ, the latter has for its object the exaltation of man, in some way or other.

Finally, I would say, that all who sincerely desire to know the true character, object, and issue of human associations, should read the opening verses of Genesis 11; and, on the other hand, all who desire to know the excellency, the beauty, the power, the enduring character of divine association, should look at that holy, living, heavenly corporation, which is called, in the New Testament, the Church of the living God, the body of Christ, the bride of the Lamb.

May the Lord enable us to look at and apprehend all these things, in the power of faith; for only in this way can they profit our souls.

Points of truth, however interesting; scriptural knowledge, however profound and extensive; Biblical criticism, however accurate and valuable may all leave the heart barren and the affections cold. We want to find Christ in the Word; and, having found him, to feed on him by faith. This would impart freshness, unction, power, vitality, energy and intensity, all of which we deeply stand in need of in this day of freezing formalism.

What is the value of a chilling orthodoxy without a living Christ, known in all his powerful, personal attractions?

No doubt, sound doctrine is immensely important. Every faithful servant of Christ will feel himself imperatively called upon to “**hold fast the form of sound words.**” But, after all, a living Christ is the very soul and life, the joints and marrow, the sinews and arteries, the essence and substance of sound doctrine.

May we, by the power of the Holy Ghost, see more beauty and preciousness in Christ, and thus be weaned from the spirit and principles of Babylon.

We shall, God willing, consider the remainder of Chapter 11 in the next section.

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