

# There Is Still Hope

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**Genesis 11:1-9** Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake *them* thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. <sup>4</sup> And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *is* in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." <sup>5</sup> But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. <sup>6</sup> And the LORD said, "Indeed the people *are* one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. <sup>7</sup> "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." <sup>8</sup> So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. <sup>9</sup> Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

The account of the building of the tower of Babel takes place about 100 years after the flood. Both Noah and Shem were still living. In fact, Noah was still alive when Abraham was called by God at the age of 75, and Shem lived long enough that he could have seen Isaac and Jacob.

One might wonder what they were doing during the events of our text this morning. My guess is that they were sitting on a porch, drinking fig juice, and muttering "לאן העולם מתקדם" lan ha'olam mitkadam. Which means, "what is the world coming to?"

They certainly would have had good reason to ask that question. Only 100 years after God's wrath was poured out on the world to remove the wickedness of men, people were again spitting in the face of God, determined to continue in their wickedness.

We can certainly relate. Less than 100 years from the time of the wickedness and suffering of WW2 and once again people have forgotten God. Evil grows and prospers. The world at large turns it back on God and even basic common-sense morality. We also might truly wonder what the world is coming to.

The account that is before us this morning is not one of despair, but one that offers hope in just such circumstances. We have hope.

Hope because we see God's patience and mercy.  
Hope because God does bring an end to Man's wickedness.  
Hope in the cross of Christ.

There is still hope in Christ.

## Hope in God's Patience

God allows a great amount of evil. At the end of the flood God said, "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed;" Genesis 9:6. This wasn't just an institution of capital punishment, it was also God's declaration that man would have to learn how to govern himself. From now on it was not God who would shed man's blood, but men would have to make sure the wicked were punished. God stepped back from the role of enforcer on this earth. He keeps for himself the right to judge all people at the end of time, but while we live on this earth it is the role of government to punish the evil.

Why God did this we are told in Peter.

**2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**

**Rom 9:22 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,**

**Eze 18:23 "Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" says the Lord GOD, "and not that he should turn from his ways and live?"**

He allows wickedness and evil, and does not punish those who do such, because he desires to give **everyone**, even the most wicked, the opportunity and chance to repent.

Thus, when we see the world "going to hell in a handbag," as the expression goes, we see the grace of God. When we see evil and wickedness prospering, we can bemoan the downward trend of the world, but we can also recognize the grace of our God and his patience. We can come to church and give thanks for his mercy that he has not utterly destroyed us as a nation and as a people, even though we surely deserve it.

Our hope has never been in man's choices or abilities. Our hope is always found in God's patience and mercy.

## Hope in God's action

In the account of Babel we see God finally act. The Old Testament term for this is visitation. God has visited his people. This phrase indicates that God has stopped sitting around in the background and has touched the world with his power. He has done something to bring about his plans. The New Testament equivalent is "the son of man is coming. " As Jesus says to the leaders of the Jews, "**You will see the son of man coming in a cloud with power**" and Revelation describes Jesus as "**the one who is and was and is coming.**"

Such phrases of course do not mean that God is literally sitting around doing nothing. Jesus tells us in John:

**John 5:17 "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."**

These phrases speak from a human viewpoint. Although God is always at work, we do not see him at work most of the time. At his own time God touches the world with his power and we see him coming into the world to visit his people. He acts in a visible way.

These phrases are evident in our text. God came down to the people of Shinar, which would later be named Babylon. He visited them, and he touched the world with his power.

In this act we find great comfort and hope for our own time. We see the world rotting around us, just as Shem and Noah would have watched the world descending into evil around. We see God doing nothing as it looks to us just as God seemed to do nothing for about 100 years from the time of the flood until the incident at Babel. Yet God does act, in his time and place, as he did at Babel. Thus, we too can be confident that wickedness will not continue forever. God will act in his own way and at his own time.

As the poet has said:

"God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform;"

From [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God\\_Moves\\_in\\_a\\_Mysterious\\_Way](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_Moves_in_a_Mysterious_Way)

Our hope is found not in hoping that man will turn it around, our hope is found in knowing that God will act at the right time. Although for a while he seems to be doing nothing, yet at the right time he will "visit" his people.

## Hope in God's plan

Why now? Why does God act now at this point?

The sin of the people at Shinar is clearly indicated by scripture. Their sin was not that they sought technology. Their sin was this, "that they sought to make a name for themselves." Not only did they desire to make a name for themselves greater than the name of God, but they specifically planned to go against God's will. God said that they were to spread out throughout all the earth, but these people declare we will do this so that we do not have to do what God said. We will do this so that we will not be scattered.

**Genesis 11:6 6 And the LORD said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.**

## **They have decided to do this**

The verb here means that they have set themselves on this course. Despite what God told them, they will not be moved from their goal. The problem with Babel isn't that technology is bad, but what they choose to do with that technology.

It is one thing when sin against God's word without realizing what we are doing. We do that daily. We do it sometimes because we forget to stop and think. Sometimes we do not realize what we are doing. This is why we daily pray for forgiveness "even for those sins we do not know that we have done." It is quite another thing when know full well what God has said, and we harden our hearts against his word and do what we want anyway.

When we act like that, we join the ranks of people like King Saul and the Pharaoh during the time of the exodus. We put ourselves in grave danger. The Bible warns that if we harden our hearts against God's word, God will sometimes remove his word from us. We will no longer even have the choice to repent. This he did both with Pharaoh and with King Saul.

In this utterance however we find the real reason why God acted. They "set themselves against God and against his anointed." They set themselves against God's plan of salvation. Although God is patient and merciful, this is the one thing that he will not allow. He will not allow his plan of salvation to be destroyed. The division of languages is God's mercy at work. He acts to bring about his plan of salvation.

In the same way the New Testament assure us that Jesus reigns and rules over all the earth for the good of his church. He will come with power when his plan of salvation is threatened. In Revelation we see the woman and her child, which is a picture of Christ's church, constantly being threatened. Although they are threatened and suffer, they are persevered and saved by God from destruction.

God in his patience allows great evil to prevail on the earth but he always acts if his plan of salvation is threatened. He would not allow that which threatened the formation of the nation of Israel. He would not allow that which threatened the coming of the Christ. Now he will not allow that which would stop the preaching of the Gospel.

In the same way and for the same reason we see God acting at the time of Pentecost which we celebrate today. He divided the languages and created the nations at the time of Babel. He did this for the sake of creating the nation of Israel and through them bringing the Savior. Now at Pentecost he removes that language barrier so that the message of Christ, the preaching of the Gospel might be proclaimed.

Yes, the world is going to "hell in a handbasket." Yes, evil things and people grow, and yes it seems as though God is sitting in the background doing nothing. But the Gospel is preached, and God is at work through the preaching of that Gospel.

This is what Jesus himself proclaimed in Matthew 24, after describing all the evil and terrible things that would happen in the world, he says:

**Matthew 24:14 this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations,**

As we sit on our rocking chairs and complain about what is "wrong with this generation," we nevertheless take hope in these things. God's patience is his mercy. God will act in his own time and in his own way, and the Gospel is being preached. Our hope is in the Lord who made the heavens and the earth.