

THE



“The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2)

March 2021

No. 423

BELLY GODS AND TOWERS OF BABEL

Although the general world continues to stray further from God, worship and conflict still continue, albeit redirected. Throughout history, whether Israelites, Egyptians, Philistines, Persians, Greeks, Romans, etc., people have found something to worship and something to fight. Many ancient nations chose to worship something(s) of their own creation, something(s) with extremely mortal characteristics (Rom. 1:21-23). For example, we don't have to delve very deeply in classical Greek mythology to see “gods” with very human faults, lusts, and the ability to be fooled - not very almighty or all knowing. Similarly, history is filled with conflict and disagreement. In

THE HARVESTER

141 County Road 474

Woodland, AL 36280

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



ancient times, enmity was often as simple as your neighboring nation because the two were competing for limited resources. However, we also see in times of great prosperity when it seems you've run out of the obvious conflicts, you start having to make them up yourself. In many of the books of the prophets, before their respective captivities, both the northern kingdom of Israel and southern kingdom of Judah strayed from God in times that aligned with economic prosperity. We see what they worshipped became idols, riches, and themselves, and their conflicts became each other. In this country we've seen decades of great rising economic prosperity that extends to the world economy. Wars and conflicts are certainly still across the world, but it seems we've begun to make up enemies of ourselves. In other words, we're so blessed that we have started to make up problems. It should be simple: what we worship is God, and our enemy is sin - that which displeases God. However, for many what is being worshipped is one of two things, neither of which please God: 1) Our own desires and/or 2) a popular idea or movement that we will refer to as "the collective" in this article. Similarly, people choose their enemy as anything that comes between them and serving those two things. This is not the first or only time this has been evident. In fact, fairly early on we see this in the Bible.

Before the great flood, humankind clearly deviated from worshipping God. Instead, their god was their own pleasure in Genesis 6:

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them... The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and,

behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. (Gen. 6:5-13)

The Hebrew word for “violence” here is also translated as unjust, wrong, and unrighteous. In any case, it’s clear that people were living for themselves and doing what they wanted without thought for what God wanted. As Paul might say, their god is their belly (Php. 3:19). Fast forward a bit, and we see history repeating itself in Sodom (Gen. 13:13). Not even ten righteous people can be found in the city. That is, almost everyone had chosen to worship their own desires, doing what they wanted to do, when they wanted to do it, how they wanted to do it, and to come between them and their desires made you their enemy. Exactly this happens when the two angels come to bring Lot out of Sodom in Genesis 19:

But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter: And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them. And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof. And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door. (Gen. 19:4-9)

You can argue that being surrounded by such a society living after its desires has taken an effect on Lot, with evil communi-

cation corrupting good manners (1 Cor. 15:33) when Lot offers up his daughters to the horde only looking to serve their individual lusts. As much as a high tide raises all boats, a low tide will begin to ground all boats. Just from these two early examples, it's evident that God does not value us worshipping ourselves and living only to further our pleasure. You'll find that many tell us we need a "higher purpose," but that higher purpose is not to further our pleasure. To do so is to live a vicious cycle where nothing is ever enough and you'll be chasing a "high" you can never catch. So, what if our "higher purpose" is on the other end of the spectrum and is serving the collective instead?

From the same source as our examples of worshipping our individual desires, we find an instance of worship of a collective. In Genesis 11 is the story of the construction of the tower of Babel:

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 one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. 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.
(Gen. 11:1-4)

There is nothing wrong with the construction of a town or building, but there are a few warning signs here. First, in verse 4 "may reach" are words added by translators and not found in the original Hebrew (as the KJV notes with italicized

THE HARVESTER is a monthly publication intended to encourage all men everywhere to become laborers into God's harvest (Luke 10:2). This paper is mailed free of charge to anyone who wishes to receive it. Please submit name, address, address changes and all correspondence to:

The Harvester

141 County Road 474 * Woodland, AL 36280

Phone: (256) 449-9221* Email: theharvesteronline@gmail.com

Web Page: www.churches-of-christ.org

words), so it's very likely that the goal of the tower was not to physically reach into the firmament of Heaven - which is not accessible in a physical plane, anyway - but rather the goal was a "top unto heaven" which may indicate an idolatrous tower to worship celestial bodies, such as the moon. In fact, many groups eventually forming around this area in later history, such as the Assyrians and Babylonians, would come to be associated with idols who were deemed gods of the moon and sun. God's reaction to this large scale activity in Babel follows in verse 5:

And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. 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. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth. (Gen. 11:5-9)

For many of us, we grew up picturing this tall tower and the fact the people were able to communicate so well as a challenge to God. However, this is incorrect, because there is no challenge to God. Do we think these people could erect a tower so tall, climb to the top and shake a weapon posing a real threat to God, the almighty creator of all who very recently just wiped the earth with a flood? The tower and efficient communication was no threat to God. The problem we see in the construction of this tower at Babel is a singular mindset that began to supersede the purpose God set forth for them. After the flood, God had told Noah and his family to "*Be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth*" (Gen. 9:1), and here are the descendants through Nimrod settling down in one spot with one

collective mindset to build a memorial to themselves, and quite possibly idolatry.

Delving deeper, what is wrong with this singular mindset the people at Babel seemed to have? There's nothing wrong with shared goals and values. However, taken to its extreme, this mindset can begin to be worshipped and in direct opposition to the first problem can lead to the devaluation of individuals. It's hard to imagine this is a common problem, but it's around us and has been for some time. Consider many of the great marvels of construction; many lives were lost in their creation. From pyramids, great walls, bridges, and railroads across the world, you'll find that in many instances little regard was given to human life. The workers, in many cases enslaved, may have died of injury or exhaustion and were quickly tossed aside or even buried within the construction itself. The cost of some people here and there were considered less than the greatness at which was being achieved. At this point, the building, the project, or whatever it may be comes to be the worshipped. Around us today, it may not be bridges or railroads, but we certainly see movements become deities.

We've recently gone through another election cycle in this country. Fewer direct their worship and value towards God, but we see it directed towards political movements, ideologies, or what many may consider altruistic intentions. Although there's nothing inherently wrong with supporting a movement or policy (as long as it does not oppose God's Word), I fear policy has become a religion itself. People worship the policies, government, its officials, its candidates, and its critics more than God, it seems. Here we see a tower of Babel. People are searching for a "higher power" and instead of God, they're placing it in these towers and rationalizing actions as necessary to further the agenda of this movement. In doing so, we now use these towers as justification for making enemies of each other because we disagree. Judging by how God dispersed the people of Babel, God does not value serving these collective mindsets.

So here are two extremes that God does not favor: 1) serving one's self above all other considerations; and 2) serving some collective movement with no regard for humankind above all else. In either case, we would be making an idol; it's either our own bellies or a tower. So what does God find value in for us? Return to the stories of Noah and Lot. When the surrounding people made gods of their bellies to the point of impending destruction from God, God offered hope not just to Noah and Lot, but to their families as we see back in Genesis 6:17-18 and 19:15, respectively:

And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die. But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee. (Gen. 6:17-18)

And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. (Gen. 19:15)

God values not just our righteousness, but on those we can influence to meet His purpose (Gen. 9:1). Within a family we find a balance between two extremes of serving our belly and building a tower: We serve God above all else, we care for others, and we pass this and His Word onto those whom we can influence. A sad realization of recent generations is the family unit has weakened. Both in physical proximity and values, families are nowhere as cohesive as they once were. That said, we're not to make even our closest relatives or friends our "higher power" either (Mat. 10:37-38). The point is that as God provided Noah and his family a passage through the flood and Lot and his family a passage out of Sodom, God too has made a passage from the eternal death which sin brings. This rescue comes for His family, defined by Jesus in Matthew 12:50: "*For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.*"

People leave families and can be welcomed back if they

choose, but the choice is theirs (i.e., the Prodigal Son). To be truly members of this family, we can neither value our own desires or some grand movement. One last time looking back to Lot, his wife did exactly this. She was part of his family who had been given safe passage out of the destruction, but she looked back. Why? Perhaps it was curiosity. What was there to miss? We don't know, but she clearly valued something about Sodom. It was likely she valued her desires or the towers which were soon to fall, neither of which God valued as much as the family he was delivering from there.

BEN

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. What did Naboth refuse to sell?
2. "Hope deferred" maketh what sick?
3. Which king had a feast using the gold and silver vessels taken from the temple in Jerusalem?
4. While John was baptizing, what did he call the Pharisees and Sadducees?
5. Which group of people stood and watched Jesus as he ascended into heaven?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH. . .

And remember last month's questions?

1. According to the law, why could the Israelites not eat blood?
GOD SAID, "THE BLOOD IS THE LIFE." (Deu. 12:23)
2. How many times did Samson lie about his source of strength to Delilah? THREE (Jdg. 16:15)
3. What did Abigail prevent David from doing to Nabal?
KILLING HIM (1 Sam. 25:34-35)
4. When Jesus died, for how long was there darkness over the land? THREE HOURS (Luke 23:44)
5. Which woman, who was "full of good works and almsdeeds", was raised from the dead by Peter at Joppa?
TABITHA (DORCAS) (Acts 9:40)