

Book Review
The Urbanity of the Bible: Rediscovering the Urban Nature of the Bible
by Sean Benesh

Aura Soraya Angulo-Pichardo
ATS /NY City

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In the text *The Urbanity of the Bible: Rediscovering the Urban Nature of the Bible* by Sean Benesh the author tells the urban story and addresses the urban nature of the Bible. He

argues that the urbanization that is occurring throughout the world is in fact, part of the *missio dei*, the call that God has given to those that were created in his image. Benesh attempts to show that the *missio dei* can be found within the urban community.

Benesh's desire is to show that God has a heart and love for the urban community and its people; the city and all aspects of it. He sees the work of God alive and well in the cities and in the individuals that are attempting to make conditions in the cities better. His desire is for followers of Christ to go beyond the church walls and flow out into the streets of these cities. It is a call to action; a call to bring the people of God to the cities that, since Biblical times, was a place where Jesus walked and healed, taught and preached. A place that is the very heart of God.

In the text *The Urbanity of the Bible: Rediscovering the Urban Nature of the Bible*, the author poses several thought-provoking questions, "What if instead cities were all part of God's redemptive plan? How would we respond if we discovered that all along throughout history that the trajectory of the *Missio Dei* was and is urban, not rural"¹. In posing the question to the reader, the author brings to light the idea of approaching the reading of the Bible through an urban lens.

The author acknowledges that the city does in fact play a vital role in God's redemption plan. Although Benesh admits that there have been several instances in the bible where God has punished both people in the cities and destroyed the cities themselves does not necessarily mean that God does not have a love for the city. He views the punishment given by God to these people and cities that are living in sin as a way to bring them back to him and what his mission is for them in their lives. He notes that throughout the Bible, God uses Prophets to teach and warn the people of the punishment that can occur as a result of the ways that they were behaving/living which was contrary to what God wanted. In doing this, God was hoping that his

¹ Sean, Benesh. *The Urbanity of the Bible: Rediscovering the Urban Nature of the Bible*. Portland, Oregon: Urban Loft Publishers, 2015, 22 Kindle Edition.

people would turn from their self-destructing ways and find their way back to him. Hope to restore humanity and bring the world to what it once was.

Benesh identifies several key issues pertaining to cities; issues such as the economy, rapid growth of the cities with not enough resources or employment, and Industrialization. Although the author acknowledges that cities in North America (which were once viewed as dirty and infested), are growing and advancing in many different ways as more and more people continue to migrate to these cities. In the Majority World, the situation is very different. For example, when referring to the cities in Delhi, the author states, “Here we are confronted with stark contrasts between cities in the West versus those in the Majority World where urban poverty is most often seen and felt in more acute ways”². These issues are in need of being addressed and the Kingdom is being called to fix these problems.

The issue of poverty and the disparity between the rich and the poor is a significant problem that needs to be addressed. As more and more people migrated to these cities seeking employment, industrialization led to the need for more food and shelter. Industrialism created significant social and environmental problems in the cities. As Benesh states, “It was not only true for low-income workers but even the wealthy were affected by the problematic attributes of the industrial-era city”³. Despite the reality of this, Benesh sees this as an opportunity for hope; that part of God’s redemptive plan that will bear good fruit.

One of the arguments that the author mentions and also disagrees with deals with the idea that part of God’s redemptive plan, the *missio dei*, has to do with removing people from the cities and returning them to, essentially, a place much like Eden; the kind of place that God intended the world to be. Benesh disagrees with this argument and believes that the *missio dei* is rooted in

² Sean Benesh. *The Urbanity of the Bible: Rediscovering the Urban Nature of the Bible*, 49 Kindle Edition.

³ Sean Benesh, 21 Kindle Edition.

the city and despite the Fall of Man in Genesis 3, it had no effect at all on the urban direction of mankind.

Additionally, the author's argument regarding the urbanity of the Bible and the biblical evidence used to support his argument is convincing. Reading the Bible through the lens of the urban world and seeing the love that God has for the city from the very beginning allows the reader to connect with the Bible on a more personal level. His belief that “God is relational and made us relational, and thus we were created for community”⁴ is a key point in his argument. We were created and are meant to be communal. Living together in close proximity to each other and sharing our lives together is vital to a community.

Highlighting the urbanity of the Bible allows one to come to the realization that God’s love for the city was evident from the very beginning of time. In the same way that he loved the city, the expectation is that we are to do the same. In doing so, we are not going to reconcile ourselves to God but we are also building a relationship with each other as God originally intended.

Bibliography

Benesh, Sean. *The Urbanity of the Bible: Rediscovering the Urban Nature of the Bible*. Portland, Oregon: Urban Loft Publishers, 2015.

⁴ Ibid, 27 Kindle Edition.