

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ; when we have done what we can for others and for You, give us the courage to leave things in Your hands. Grant us the peace and confidence that can come only from You, and help us accept Your gracious and ultimate authority over everything we do. May we live to show others that our faith means that we really do trust You, each moment of the day. Thank You, Lord Jesus, AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Nuclear power

Pray for politicians who have the responsibility of deciding how nuclear power should be used in their countries, and how much electricity is required. Pray for godly wisdom.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for Israel and the consequences of its election results*
- *Give thanks for the joy of worship and the love of God*
- *Pray for Australia and the terrible loss of life there in fires*

Meditation

What is the truth behind Your love, O Lord?
A love which made the world and chose a people,
Led a broken nation through the desert,
Spoke through the lives of people good and great,
And wept and bled when all seemed lost because of sin;
Then triumphed in a plan of unsurpassed beauty,
Sending Jesus to our world to save the lost,
Your Son, who took the world's rejection on the Cross,
That good might conquer death and show itself the victor:
A love that rose from death in triumph, showing all the world
That its best and only hope is in its Saviour!
It is a love that only finds a home in you and me,
Because our past and present make us ever lost
Unless we place our future's hope in Him
Who longs, in love, to be at home in us.

Bible Study - Genesis 11:1-9

¹ Now there was one language with the same words in the whole earth. ² As people migrated eastwards, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ They said to each other, 'Come, let us make bricks, and bake them thoroughly.' For stone they used brick, and for mortar they used bitumen. ⁴ Then they said, 'Come, let us build a city for ourselves, and a tower reaching into the heavens; and let us make a name for ourselves, otherwise we shall be scattered over all the earth.'

⁵ The LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the people had built.

⁶ And the LORD said, 'Look, as one people with one language, they have begun to do this; so nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let

us go down there and confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another.’⁸ So the LORD spread them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.⁹ This is why it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world; and from there the LORD spread them over all the earth.

Review

The ‘Tower of Babel’ is a famous Old Testament story. It describes the inept attempts of early people to build a city and high tower big enough to make contact with the heavens and, as far as they could, reach ‘the gods’! The story seems simple. Of course, God did not want humanity scaling the divide between earth and heaven, as if to bridge the gap by their own efforts. Sin had affected all creation due to the Fall (Gen 3), and could not be the basis for spiritual aspiration, so God frustrated these efforts. He confused the people’s language (11:7) so that they could not communicate properly, and they abandoned their project, scurrying away to find security in their own tribal groupings where they could understand each other.

Normally, the only time this scripture is used, is as background to the great New Testament day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Pentecost is a great day in the Christian year, and it is celebrated rather like the birthday of the Church. At the coming of the Holy Spirit, God overcame the curse of ‘Babel’ in power, and the gap between heaven and earth was bridged by the gift of the Holy Spirit, given exclusively by Christ because of His death and resurrection. The gift of tongues given specifically as a sign of that truth, enabling the Gospel to be heard throughout the world (Acts 2). All this is very important, but the Tower of Babel has much more to teach us than all this would imply, and we should be careful to study its place in the Old Testament as well as the New.

A number of other important themes account for the story in scripture, and they all comment on the relationship between God, humanity and creation after the Fall and the Flood. Amongst these are the nature of the separation between God and humanity, the pitfalls of common human endeavour across cultural boundaries, and the tendency of people to gather in ‘cliques’, rather than explore the prospects of collaboration. It can be fruitful to examine these themes alongside real history and the story of God’s people over the centuries. However, the incident at Babel provides a fascinating comment on human achievement. It is a reminder to us that despite the enormous enterprise and development of humanity over thousands of years, this has done virtually nothing to enable people to access their creator, or to overcome the moral problems of the world in general. Sin is still a powerful destroyer of human achievement, and as these are all the more remarkable now, so is the capacity of sin to use what has been created for evil.

In addition, a careful look at verses 3 to 5 will show that the attempt to build a city and a tower were examples of human efforts to construct their own surroundings, instead of being content with what God had made. Secondly, the technology of bitumen and bricks was thought at the time to be virtually permanent, but as we now know, this proved to be limited. This is a reminder to us that even today we can be deluded about the longevity and sustainability of our efforts, even in science, engineering and technology. Thirdly, the people in this story thought their efforts would place them on a par with the gods, and they failed; as do all those who like to think they have such power and authority.

We should notice that God when dismantled efforts on the Tower of Babel in the second half of the story, He did not act with spite. He had not commanded people to gather together and focus on themselves and their achievements; he had commanded them to spread over the whole earth (1:28, 8:17, 9:1 etc), to work with the created world and master it (1:28). The message is that God is not against people achieving great things, but He will

act against those who think they can replace Him as God. Some of the biggest problems in the world happen not because of technology and human achievement, but because some people still think that like gods, they can control both the technology and other people, to their own benefit. Consequently, God is still in the business of confusing their language!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What kinds of human endeavour today remind you of this story about the city and tower of Babel?
2. In what ways does the message of Pentecost help us with overcoming confusion within the world and within the church?
3. Why is it important to God that humanity is spread over all the earth?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The message from the study today makes us consider whether we understand two things, firstly the true nature of unity and diversity within the world, and secondly, the power of the Gospel to bring things together and overcome confusion. Most churches, for example, have a problem with communication, and most churches today tend to want to ‘do their own thing’. However, why do we have a problem with communication if we proclaim a Gospel which is supposed to overcome this? And why do we struggle to find churches that are truly interested in playing an active part in the wider Church of God to which we belong? The answer is sin, and it must be dealt with, but it does need to be recognised for what it is.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Consider what can be done today to give moral direction to science technology and engineering, and perhaps building and other forms of human endeavour. Is regulation the only way to ensure that what is created by people is worthy and not potentially dangerous for society?*
- *Pray for any individuals you know who are involved in scientific and technological endeavours to ‘go further’ and pursue the boundaries of human knowledge and experience. Pray that they will be led by a good moral compass, and that Christ will touch their lives.*

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, guide my lips to praise You in all I do and say. May my speech reflect what is good, may my actions display care, and may my thoughts be focused on the Good News of the Kingdom. Help me, therefore, to know Your presence, and practice it; in Your name Lord Jesus: AMEN.