

Synopsis for others

Genesis 3:1-9

“Making a name for themselves” V1-4

Gathered in Shinar

Using available materials

Turning from God and making a name for themselves

Relying on their own skills and abilities

“God’s Judgement” v5-9

Their sin – God’s judgement

Confusing their languages

Only God is a strong tower (Prov 18:10)

“God’s Love”

God’s intent to prevent people from greater sin

God’s love for all he created

God’s call to repentance.

Salvation through Jesus

For Home Group Studies

This passage can be quite hard to get to grips with until we dig a bit deeper into what God is doing here and the message that it gives to us. Like the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden, the exile of Cain for murder and the flood, the key is sin and judgement. Sin always has a consequence. The consequence of the people’s desire in Shinar, is judgement from God.

God’s words prior to the flood are mind focusing (or should be) for us all, because it is the story of humanity down the ages, to think we can carry on without God.

(Gen 6:5) The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.

With no antidote to this, the world would be a very sad and broken place, and as we know if we look around the world it is still pretty broken in many ways. Hopefully this account and looking at it will give us all some encouragements to change where we need to and to keep on where we are doing well with God.

What do we know about the situation?

The previous chapter has a genealogy of the people of the time who spread out over the whole world (Gen 10:32). They had spread to a place called Shinar, now Southern Iraq, around where Babylon was later built.

Question: How might making a high tower lead to making a name for themselves (v4)?

We may think that using something like tar or asphalt as some translations of the bible refer to it, as not good for building. However, there is archaeological evidence that the people in that region did just that and built quite large structures using it. Stone was not as easy to come by there, so the people in our account, used what they had and learned to bake clay in brick, which we know is good for building.

So, relying on their own skills (technology) and their ability to cooperate through a shared language, the people start to build a city with a great tower. One that reaches to the heavens.

Note there is no mention of trying to reach out to God here. The key is in v4 ...

To make a name for ourselves, otherwise we will be scattered.

To see what was going on, God went down to look and as result of what he saw, God acts. The common thing in this is their ability to understand each other and God’s concern is that with this and their relying upon their abilities, they will sin even more.

Question: Can you think of other times in scripture when God visited people?

Gen 12:7-8; Gen 17:1-27; Exo 19 (Moses mount Sinai); Jesus.

The big issue in our narrative is that of sin. The people appear to have developed both pride and arrogance that leads them away from God, it is this that God noticed in their desire to build and make a name for themselves. After all who needs God when they think they can do it for themselves?

God's judgement was to mix up their languages and so end their cooperation with each other.

Question: Can you think of reasons why having one language could be an advantage or why confusing languages would disperse them?

A little aside ... ignore if you want ☺

You may have heard of the US army group called the "Code talkers". A group of Navajo native Americans, used in the Pacific in WWII to confuse Japanese military code breakers as they used their tribal languages to communicate to send secret messages.

You might like to share experiences of being in other countries and not understanding the language.

Some Reflection: You might like to spend a few moments in quiet reflection and ask yourselves "Are there parts of my life that I leave God out of". If there are give them back to him.

Back to the question of sin, the passage points to a basic human problem, our ability to sideline God as we chose for ourselves how we will live and what will guide us or direct us.

Sin of any form will sour our relationship with God and turn us away from him, if it is not dealt with. God's judgement on the people of Shinar comes from his deep love for his people, his creation and his desire that they do not supplant him with their own desires and creations.

We catch some more of this in the prophets, as we see the sadness in God's heart for how his people have turned away to self-serving, hedonistic behaviour.

Jer 5:21 Hear this, you foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear:

We can find a number of places in scripture where God confronts the peoples' sinful behaviour. Jeremiai has one such in Ch 5

Read Jeremiah 5:21-31

Question: Can you see a connection with the attempt to build the tower in our story? What are the connections?

Question: In what ways does our nation /culture set God aside in an attempt to make a name for itself?

In a very familiar passage, we are told:

(Rom 3:21) But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

(Rom 3:22) This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,

(Rom 3:23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

(Rom 3:24) and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

God's heart is to turn people from the consequences of doing their own thing and setting him aside. Why? Because He loves us beyond anything thing we can imagine. As I read this account of the tower I can see God directing people from a sinful path.

Our story is near the beginning of the journey that the Bible takes us on and together with earlier chapters of Genesis tells us of the way in which rebellion against God plays such a part in our nature. It also tells us of God's continued desire for relationship with us and for us to find our best in him, through acknowledging our sin and accepting his forgiveness.

This is now possible through Jesus and as we read in Acts, Peter tells us ...

(Act 2:38) Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

For all of us who know Jesus, it is an ongoing need since we still get things wrong.

If you have time ... or skip to the last reflection

If you heard the sermon, you may recall that God said in Zep 3:9

Zep 3:9 "For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, That they all may call on the name of the LORD, To serve Him with one accord.

At Pentecost we know that all of the people heard the disciples speaking in their own languages, a partial at least reversal of the confusion resulting from the tower of Babel.

God's reversal of Babel may well be in his giving us scripture. Not turning all of our languages to one, but giving us a common text to understand how to relate with God and to live our lives in the way he knows is best for us. While it has to be translated for each tongue, it is the word of God for all.

Question: What do we think?

Some Reflection: Consider how this passage can help us handle the continual pressures of life, work, family, culture day by day.

Spend a little time in prayer.