

Group Study Outline

LAUNCH QUESTION

Why can't people get along better? ...

What theories do our friends have to explain why our world is divided?

READ Genesis 11:1-9

Compare verses 1-2 with verses 8-9.

In what ways are the people of the world different by the end of the story?

What are all the things wrong in verses 3-4?

What things lie behind the things they want to do? what motivates them?

In what ways are their attitudes here similar to ones people have today?

In verses 5-6 how does God diagnose the problem(s)?

Surely it would be a good thing if we could now do anything?

Think of some ways today in which unified action like this is bad.

What is God's punishment (in verse 7)?

What is his punishment aiming to do?

What is the link between speaking different languages and the dispersal (8-9)?

Why do we find it so hard to understand each other?

(cf Launching Question) Why can't people get along better?

Why is the United Nations never going to succeed (in its charter to 'practice tolerance ... and live together in peace with one another')?

READ Acts 2:1-11

(cf the box of background on p3 of these notes)

How is this story in Acts 2 similar to the story about Babel?

How is it like the antidote to Babel?

What is the antidote to Babel?

Why does God give these disciples this extraordinary gift of 'other tongues'?

What does this teach us about ...

- what a divided world needs?
- what Christians should be doing (when faced with divisions in our world)?
- why worldwide mission is not a minority interest for just some Christians?

Why are we holding *A Passion for Life*?!

What possible attitudes to *A Passion for Life* are disobedient?!

PRAY (lots!)

Genesis 11:1-9



Genesis 1-12 at a glance

God is the creator of everything and the giver of every blessing. He created humanity as an image of Himself to rule the world under Him. Life with God in a perfect world forever was the wonderful intention of God.

However, humanity rebelled against God. Satan tempted Adam and Eve to cross the one boundary God had set up, to take God's place in deciding for themselves what was right and wrong. As soon as they sinned, they realised they were naked and exposed before God, so they hid.

God responded to their sin as He said He would, by bringing curse and death into the world as punishment. The relationships between men and women, as well as between humanity and creation would be strained. The serpent too was cursed, in particular with a promise (3:15) that one of Eve's offspring would be hurt by Satan, but in the process stamp on his head. Humans were banished from the presence of God.

The story then follows humanity outside the garden, waiting for this offspring to come. We have many disappointments as the promised son fails to materialize. But God continues to bless and to keep His promises.

As humanity spreads out, so their sin increases and God decides to judge the world with a flood. But He graciously saves one small family to begin again.

Humanity would spread out once again and sin yet again, causing God to scatter people and confuse their language – a terrible judgment but nothing like as severe as the flood, which He'd promised not to use again.

The descendants of Adam continue until Abram is born. God makes it very clear that Abraham's family is *the* family to watch, and His promises get even more specific about many people (not just one), living back in God's place and experiencing His blessing as before.

Throughout the story we see that Jesus is that promised offspring and all these stories find their ultimate fulfillment in Him and His finished work.

Theme Sentence for Genesis 11:1-9

Mankind repeats the sin of the garden in defying God's rule and God's word ... and God repeats his punishment of 'scattering'.

Application

- God punishes human rebellion (and the multiplicity of languages is evidence)
- there will never be Utopia this side of the grave
- **MAIN POINT:** God's purpose is to bring this world back together in Jesus
- taking the gospel into all the world is not optional

[NS]

People plot to defy God's purpose (11:1-4)

The context is the family trees of the three sons of Noah in ch 10. These 70-ish people (ie a 'complete' number, sufficient for the world) are already divided with separate languages (10:5, 20, 31). Ch 11 tells us how that happened.

- 2 they move Eastward, an ominous direction (cf 3:24; 4:16; 13:11-13).
- 3 they make bricks (in preference to the God-provided building material of 'stone'): is this a celebration man's creativity, or man terribly imagining that he knows better than God?
- 4 describes the **two** ways in which they defy God:

build a city	don't want to spread	defy God's word	love of security	security not here ... but there
build a tower	do want to make a name	defy God's rule	love of human praise	praise not for us ... but for him

they defy God's word

God had told them to spread through the earth (9:1, 7). But they disobey him and prefer the security of being safe within city walls. The truth is that God will provide a city for us, but it will come down to us (Rev 21:2). So the model for the believer is Abraham who looked 'forward to that city without foundations, a better country, a heavenly one' (Heb 11:8-16).

they defy God's rule

God is the one who gives Adam his name ... and Adam gives names to the animals and to his wife. Naming is to do with rule. That is why it can only be God who makes a name for himself (Isa 63:12, 14; Jer 32:20; Neh 9:10). And his promise to Abram is that he will make his name great (12:2). No wonder we are to pray: 'hallowed be your name'.

The turning point in the story: the Lord came down to see (11:5)

Just as 8:1 is the turning point in the story of Noah, so here the turning point is God's action. He cannot even see this tower that supposedly has its top in the heavens; he must go down to see something so puny! 'He who sits in the heavens laughs' (Psalm 2:4) as people plot together like this. For heaven is his throne ... not ours (Isa 66:1), and the inhabitants of the earth are like grasshoppers (Isa 40:22)!

It is ominous when God goes down to see (cf Gen 18:21): a prelude to judgement.

God's purpose will always continue (11:6-9)

- 6 A city and a tower today ... just think what tomorrow could bring. God foresees the might of the mob: those who say 'united we stand, divided we fall' are a potentially dangerous force. And in his kindness, God decided to hinder their ability to work together like this.
- 7 'Let us mix up ...' (in 3) is mirrored by God saying 'Let us mix up ...' (lit) here. 6,809 languages. God's punishment for human rebellion is the confusion and frustration represented by the 6,809 languages of today's world.
- 8-9 The people wanted a name (in 4) and so the Lord gives them one: 'babble'. They didn't want to be dispersed, but that is exactly what God gives them. The whole story is constructed to give the reason for the name (9) ... and for the worldwide dispersal of ch 10.

What is this purpose of God that will always continue?

God intends that mankind will 'be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it' (1:28; 9:1, 7). As a result of this story, that spread and filling does indeed happen (as ch 10 demonstrates). God's word and rule are supreme.

God's purpose is unity ... but it is to be achieved in the way that he intends. He has revealed in Ephesians 1:10 that the unity he intends is 'in Christ'. So ...

- Zephaniah 3:9 envisages an end to the confused languages of Babel, and it is to do with the time when God brings judgement and salvation to the world.
- Jesus' ministry involves 'gathering into one the children of God who are scattered abroad' (John 11:50-52). And that gathering happens in his death: 'when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself' (Jn 12:32-33).
- Jesus sends his disciples to 'all nations' to make disciples (Matt 28:16-20).
- Jesus sends his Spirit to equip his church with the languages (Acts 2:8) and dialects/regional accents (2:11) for 'every nation under heaven' (2:5). As they proclaim 'in our own tongues the mighty works of God', through that proclamation of Jesus, God is undoing his judgement at Babel.
- So, in the church, and 'through the cross', God is bringing together peoples who were 'separated ... strangers ... far off'. He has broken down 'the dividing wall of hostility' through Jesus (Eph 2:11-22).
- And so, eternally, around the throne of God and of the Lamb there is a gathering of the cleansed, who are from 'every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages'. And all those are united not in 'making a name for ourselves' but in praising the name of their Saviour (Rev 7:9-17).