

Genesis. :- The Tower of Babel – Genesis chapter 11, verses 1 – 9

The word Babel is usually mispronounced! It should really be Bab-el. The word sounds like “balal” the Hebrew word for “confuse”. The ending “El” being the Hebrew word for God.. Surprisingly most dictionaries do not make the link between the word “babble” and the story from Genesis 11. As we read the story we need to remember that Paul, in his preaching and teaching recognised that the human race was a unity. *“and he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and boundaries of their habitation”*. (Acts 17, verse 26).

The Greek word for overweening pride is “*Hubris*”. It is defined as excessive pride or arrogance, but in the context of Greek history, it is pride that is in defiance of nature or the gods. Ancient Greek literature puts a strong emphasis on teaching about the dangers of hubris, and that when one presumes to be able to outsmart nature or the gods, it leads to disaster. In the story of the Tower of Babel we have a Biblical account of human hubris.

Genesis 11, verses 1 – 2:- After the Flood the descendants of Noah naturally had one language. The migrating nomads moved along the hill country from Ararat and onto the plain of Mesopotamia. There the fertile land would support a higher density of population and permanent settlements developed.

Verses 3 – 4:- Burnt brick is far more durable than dried mud brick (adobe). The building of a city and a tower was seen as an exercise in civic unity! The desire to have the biggest and best is part of fallen humanity’s make-up. The Guinness Book of Records still lists the world’s tallest buildings. (The present record holder is the Burj Khalifa in Dubai at 829.8-metres - 2,722 ft.) This joint endeavour would give them a place of vantage by which they could establish their importance in the eyes of men and even in the sight of God! They were determined to show their dominance and took pride in their achievements. They denied their reliance on God and set out to prove their self-sufficiency. Their tower would be a monument to their energy, daring, genius and resources.

The Tower was most likely in the shape of a ziggurat . It had a roughly square platform base with sides that recede inward as the structure rises, and a flat top presumed to have supported some form of a shrine. Sun-baked bricks form the core of a ziggurat, with fire-baked bricks forming the outer faces. Unlike the Egyptian pyramids, a ziggurat was a solid structure with no internal chambers.

Verses 5 – 6:- The greatest achievements of mankind are as nothing in the sight of the Lord God. Here in verse 5 we read that the Lord had to come down to see the city and tower. They were so small in his sight that he had to descend to see it! This cultural development was only the beginning of what united mankind could do. Read Psalm 53.

Verses 7 – 9:- In all international discussions the lack of a common language is the greatest barrier to agreement. Without an understanding of the culture and background in which the language has developed a simple translation is often totally inadequate to give a full understanding. The disruption caused by the judgement of the Lord God on the people as they developed their city and tower led to an abrupt halt in their building programme. They were scattered abroad *“from there over all the face of the earth . . .”* They were no longer of one heart and mind and unable to work with one another. Each local family group or tribe would break away and “do its own thing”!

The importance of Pentecost:- Read Acts chapter 2, verses 1 – 12. Here we have an account of the miraculous reversal of the curse of Babel. The Good News of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ as proclaimed by Peter and the other disciples was heard and understood by the multitude of foreign visitors to Jerusalem. More than this, the great celebration of worship in heaven includes those *“from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb . . .”* - Revelation chapter 7, verses 9 - 10. One of the many blessings of the New Creation in Christ - 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verses 16 – 21, is our Oneness in Christ Jesus, - Galatians chapter 3, verses 25 - 28. Christian worship today can catch something of this heavenly glory when we are of one heart and mind.

For prayer:- For Alex as he develops his ministry here in Chudleigh. Especially for his car journey each day.
For our witness to the love of Christ as individuals and as a group.
For the ministry to the housebound, elderly and frail.
For the witness to family and friends.
For the leadership in church and country.