

## Prayers

### To God

*If you feel near to God, then praise Him for this great and wondrous privilege. If you feel far from Him, ask Him to show Himself to you again, and carry you where you need to go. If you are uncertain because it is not that clear, sit in silence for a moment and listen. Remember, God will often speak to you perhaps through your conscience, perhaps in a picture or vision, or perhaps in the obvious things all around you.*

### For myself

*Confess to the Lord all those problems that clutter up your day. Pray for guidance.*

### For others

Weekly theme: your local neighbourhood

**Thank You, Lord Jesus, for the people you have placed me with in this world. Thank you especially for those who live near me, of whatever greed or ethnic background. Give me a heart to love them all as You, Lord Jesus, would have loved them. Then, when Your Holy Spirit so makes the opportunity, give me the courage to speak to them about You, so they might gain a glimpse of the One God, and find Him in You, Lord Jesus; AMEN**

## Meditation

Where is the heart of faith today?  
The will to live according to the Gospel,  
To pay the price of standing tall with 'Christ'  
And scorn the world's rejection with no fear?

Where is the stomach to do what's right,  
The guts to grasp the truth, and never let it go?  
To know the price Christ paid for resurrection  
Was the loss of all, and gain of everything

Where is the wit, the mind and intellect  
To search through faith and never hesitate  
Because the facts are not convenient;  
But hold the Gospel close above the crowd?

Now, Christ will come, and when He comes,  
What we have done with what we have, He'll know.  
Our hearts and minds and feelings, He'll know all  
But will He find within it all a faith that yields to Him?

## Bible Passage

### Genesis 11:1-9

<sup>1</sup> Now there was one language with the same words in the whole earth. <sup>2</sup> As people migrated eastwards, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there, <sup>3</sup> and 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.'*

<sup>5</sup> Then the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the people had built, <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Come, let us go down there and confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another.'***

<sup>8</sup> So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. <sup>9</sup> This is why it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world; and from there the LORD scattered 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 in the form of a high tower, sufficiently high for human inhabitants to make contact with the heavens and, if at all possible, reach 'the gods'! The story seems simple enough. God, of course, does not want humanity scaling the divide between earth and heaven, and bridging the gap between heaven and earth by their own efforts. Sin has affected all creation because of the Fall (Gen 3), and there can be no route to God through human spiritual aspiration, so God frustrates these efforts (11:6f.). The means He uses to halt the work is fascinating and provides us now with endless opportunities for debate; God confuses the people's language (11:7) so they cannot not communicate properly and they abandoned their ungodly project. There is no clear statement of what God does to language, but we assume that He breaks down language so that people can understand each other only in their 'tribal groups', now scattered across the world.

In general, the only time this scripture is used within the calendar of the Church is as background to the great New Testament day of Pentecost (Acts 2). This is a great day in the Christian year, and many celebrate it as the birthday of the Church. At the coming of the Holy Spirit, God overcomes the curse of 'Babel' with great power; the gap between heaven and earth is bridged by the Holy Spirit, who is 'poured out' on God's

people with the evidence of this being 'speaking in tongues' (Acts 2:4f.). On this occasion, this gift has the special characteristic of enabling people throughout the world to both hear and understand the message of the Gospel (Acts 2:5-11), and in this sense, reverses the effects of Babel. All this is highly significant, but the Tower of Babel has much more to teach us than this. Without undermining the powerful connection with Acts, this passage has much more to teach us and we will find this by studying its place in the Old Testament as well as the New.

This great story illustrates a number of essential features of Scriptural teaching. It comments on the relationship between God and humanity after firstly the Fall and secondly the Flood. There is a fundamental divide now between God and His creation and there are many pitfalls ahead as people of different cultures and language seek Him out. Remember, all this comes before God has chosen a people through Abraham, and so, anything we say about this passage will be applicable, as Scriptures says, to 'Jew and gentile' alike. It is a reflection on all of humanity, especially the part that language plays in sustaining the separateness of cultures within which the diversity of humanity is preserved.

One interesting way of looking at this passage is to look at what it says about human achievement. To begin with, we should reflect on the fact that despite the enormous enterprise and development of humanity over thousands of years, humanity has not developed spiritually, at least, very much. People still try to reach out to God as if they can try to get at Him by their own efforts. Even Christians become caught up in this primitive belief! In addition, despite being able to build skyscrapers and enormous world-scarring projects, sin is still a powerful destroyer of human achievement. Great projects of our day may have done something for the human ego but have done nothing to promote harmony between nations or to gain access to the true and living God. God has successfully scattered people around the world, and despite much migration, the world is no more peace a place in which to live than it has been for many years.

A careful look at verses 3 to 5 will show something interesting. The attempt to build a city and a tower are examples of human efforts to construct their own surroundings, instead of being content with what God had provided for them. Secondly, the technology of building using bitumen and bricks was thought at the time to be virtually permanent, but as we now know, this has proved to be not true. The remains of these buildings can be seen in some parts of the Middle East, but towers built in other parts of the world using different technologies have proved more enduring. 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.

We should notice that when God dismantled the efforts on the Tower of Babel in the second half of the story, He did act firmly, but not with spite. Ultimately, the command to spread throughout the world was one that pushes forward the boundaries of the great commission given to all humanity to 'multiply' (1:27, 8:17), 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 through their own efforts. 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. God is still in the business of confusing their language!

## **Discipleship**

### ***Application***

#### ***The confusions of Babel today!***

It remains true, however, that confusions of language remain a limiting factor on all human achievement. Linguists affirm that all language is flawed and that even though we each like to think that what we say is perfectly clear, in reality it is not. People hear things said and read things written in ways that are sometimes wildly different from the intentions of the speaker or author. That is the confusion of Babel!

For example, the progress of science has often been limited by barriers of language which have sometimes prevented good communications between scientists and engineers, and there is hardly any activity of human endeavour in which 'communication' is not a problem. That is the confusion of Babel!

The different voices of the world's religions mostly speak of doing good, yet what is meant by 'good', and the reasons and motivations given, are all radically and irreconcilably different. Also, each believes in a multiplicity of physical or spiritual entities which might be called 'God', but what they all mean by this is barely recognisable, one from the other. That is the confusion of Babel!

### ***The message of Pentecost***

The message of Pentecost is that only the Gospel of Jesus Christ overcomes the 'Babel' we find in the world. In addition, the Gospel is not a religious system of one culture or another, it is the truth about God, for all cultures and environments, and for all times. The Gospel can also enable human endeavour to be fruitful under the will and direction of the Creator, even technological endeavour. The Gospel has been shown to be comprehensible in all languages and cultures over thousands of years, bursting through in new parts of the world even as it becomes tragically compromised by sin in another. This can be seen today as churches in non-Western countries are growing while those in developed countries are often dwindling.

All of this helps our understanding of the world as it is, not just as it was. This passage is highly descriptive of what we know even today, although it was written down thousands of years ago, and this is because it is the comprehensible Word of God, not Babel.

### ***Ideas for what to do***

- *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.*

### ***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?*

## **Final Prayer**

You are holy, Lord God Almighty. You are precious, Lord Jesus Christ. You are all powerful, Holy Spirit of God. You are everything we can imagine. All praise be to You; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN