

Let's for a moment retrace our steps and see where we have come from in this series. As we seek to understand from Gen 1-12 our relationship with God.

We began by looking at Gen 1&2 and saw that we humans were created by God as the pinnacle of his creation. We were created in his image and likeness, which Henri Blocher in his book 'In the Beginning' put like this, "God created man as a sort of earthly son who represents him and responds to him."

We were made to relate to God and represent him here on earth as we rule under him over creation.

However we saw that humans rejected God's rule over their lives and as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve, the relationship with God was broken and the result was death. From then on as we saw with Cain and Abel every person was born in sin and lives in sin and the relationship with God continues to be broken. Such was the sin of humanity that God, as we saw last week, decided to remove humanity from the face of the earth sparing only Noah, his wife, his sons and their wives. After the flood God made a covenant with Noah but still humanity remained sinful.

What we see today is further evidence of the sin of humanity and as a result further punishment from God as God reminds humanity that he is God. However, so as not to end today on a negative we will also lift the curtain into next week and beyond to see what God does to restore the relationship with us humans.

What we see today from these verses is how God as Sovereign defeats the plans of humanity which exclude him and which do not fit into his will and purpose.

### **1. The arrogance of humanity v1-4**

What we see at the start of Chap 11 is humanity as one group with a common language. Wouldn't that be great! You'd be able to wander anywhere in Europe and not only be able to pay for a beer as they have the same currency but be able to order it as well as they'd speak the same language! They are a nomadic group perhaps as a result of the punishment on Cain where Gen 4:12 he was destined to be a "restless wanderer". They came to Shinar, the area of Mesopotamia we know as Babylon. Arriving here they decided "let us make bricks" and then v4 "let us build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches the heavens." The latter may be the idea of we can get to God. However, the emphasis cannot and should not be missed, let us make, let us build, and for ourselves. The picture is clear these humans were talking to each other but not to God. They made their plans according to their own wishes and for their own purposes. Those purposes are spelt out for us in v4, "so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth." They were looking for status and security.

**a. let us make a name for ourselves.** The tower was meant to stand as a sign of the status and power of humanity – see and be amazed. Note that there was no room here for God. What comes to mind is the old adage, ‘He was a self made man who worshipped his creator’. These people certainly were not the last people who tried to make their mark by building a tower. Up and down this country are lots of such towers and buildings that go by the name of follies!

Here we see the arrogance of human beings thinking we can write ourselves into history by dint of our achievements. Well these people are remembered in history but only because of the folly of their thinking. It is God who has given us status as we saw from Gen 1:26 that we are made in his image and likeness. It is God who calls us sons and daughters and we find our identity and our status in him.

**b. let us not be scattered.** God had said to Noah and his sons, “fill the earth” (Gen 9:1) but here are humans saying just the opposite let’s not spread out over the earth let’s stay in one place together. It was a disobedient action as they sought to find security together.

I wonder how you view your status? What is your title and how many letters do you have after your name? I was watching a Foyle’s War the other evening and Foyle was in the office of an academic when one of the academic’s colleagues came in. When Foyle referred to the academic as Doctor she corrected him saying “Professor”. He then asked is she was a professor to which she replied “no Doctor” and finally as he left she asked his name he said “Foyle that’s Mr Foyle”. Often we can look to our title such as Rev, or Very Rev or Rt Rev or Vulnerable or Rural dream to give us status but what higher status can we have than that which God gives to us, “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are.” (1 John 3:1). This is our status. What matters is not how people around see us, how highly or otherwise they might regard us. Nor does it matter how history views us, whether what we do warrants a paragraph, a line, a word or just a comma on the page of the history of the world. What matters is how God views us.

Then where you look for your security? We have bolts and locks, and stocks and shares and life insurance and home insurance and so many things to keep us secure don’t we and while none of these are wrong ultimately they mean our focus is in the wrong place. These things and what the people in Gen 11 were doing was trying to find security through their own human actions. They were, in disobedience, seeking a city for security next week we will get on to Abraham of whom it is said, “By faith Abraham...was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God.” (Heb 11:8-10) Faithful obedience which finds its security in God.

Here is human arrogance seeking status and security with no reference to God at all. So let’s see how God viewed this sin of humanity.

## **2. The divine perspective v5**

“But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the children of man were building”.

I think the sentence is laden with sarcasm as we see God firstly mimic the words of the humans, “let us” and secondly as he has to leave heaven to be able to see what they have done!

Here is this magnificent edifice, which to God is so miniscule that he has to come down to see it.

People speak of the great wall of China being visible from space and the magnificence of the Pyramids but what God is saying that the greatest achievements of humanity are minor in his sight. More than that God use of the term “children of man” or children of Adam here links their sin back to Adam and we see that Adam’s offspring are still getting it wrong. Let’s build a tower to heaven and we can be like God.

What we see here is what Tim Hedgecock reminded us last week that God sees. He is aware of what we humans are doing. God sees what we do and more he sees the thinking behind what we do.

Jesus speaking to the Pharisees in Luke 16:15 said, “you are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight.”

The Pharisees did get all the praise from humans but God knew their hearts and the sin and pride there. God sees and God knows is what this passage shows us.

## **3. God’s judgement v6-9**

Having seen what humanity was doing God acts to judge and to punish. However his action is not just reactive but also proactive.

I have never played Chess. It takes too much brain power and the ability to think several moves ahead so that you are not just reacting to the move your opponent has played but thinking ahead to the best moves you can make to win the game.

Here we read that God saw what was going on with the building of this city and tower but he doesn’t just see the action of humanity he looked further ahead as we see in v6, “if as one people speaking the same language then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.” This is God the Father speaking about his errant children saying if this is the start then where will it end? God was looking ahead and saw that humanity being together and speaking one common language was not going to be good. It was not going to lead to them obeying and exalting God – just the opposite! As such then he was left with no option but to punish them. As Dima mentioned a couple of weeks ago many of us have seen how when a football player has just chopped down an opponent, the referee looks at him with slight exasperation as he shows him the red card as if saying look you stupid man you have left me no option here. God in effect says the same. This course of action can only lead to worse rebellion against God and so he is left with no option but to do, what it says in v7, “Come let us go

down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” In one sense while it is an act of punishment it can also be seen as an act of mercy in that God was seeking to prevent the situation getting worse. When our children were younger to stop them bickering and fighting we would separate them and send them to their bedrooms to prevent the situation from escalating. It also then gave them a unifying factor of the common enemy of the parents! I learned later they used to use a remote control car to send each other messages!

So God confused their languages and brought about the creation of different tribes and languages as v8 he scattered the people all over the earth, preventing the building of the city. In the Bible scattering is always a sign of God’s punishment and that is what it was here, though again it achieved what God had purposed and expressed in 9:1 for humanity to fill the earth.

However we should not miss nor underestimate what was going on here. Humans were seeking to work out their plans without reference to God. Plans focused upon their own desires and for selfish reasons. God knew what was going on and he thwarted those plans and punished humanity.

Now we have to be careful as we apply this to ourselves. Some things remain the same post Jesus but others are different. God is still sovereign and he still knows not just what we do but what is in our hearts and minds. He still looks for us to live in holiness seeking his will and purposes. However, he will not immediately punish us if our plans, thinking and action are selfish and disobedient. He allows us time to repent.

So, if, in your humanness, you have made your plans for this year, for your life, for your career for your future or whatever, plans which have not included God and which are simply made out of your own thinking and with the focus on yourself, then let me ask you to stop and think again. Let me ask you to come in humility before God who rules over the nations and bow in submission to him, seek his forgiveness and ask him what he would have you do with this year, your life, your career, your future.

I am not saying that plans made without God cannot work and people cannot flourish, they do. In 1961, without I am sure any reference to God, the Berlin wall was put up. It was indeed a successful plan and divided not just a city but a continent for nearly 40 years. Until in November 1989 when it was ripped down. What I am saying is that ultimately these plans will founder upon the will and purpose of God. Ultimately they will be seen as vain. As the Psalmist reminds us “Unless the Lord builds the house its builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city the watchmen stand guard in vain.” (Psalm 127:1)

Psalm 37 gives us the opposite perspective, “Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust him and he will do this.” (Psalm 37:4-5)

#### **4. God’s purpose and plan**

All this is a bit negative though, as I suggested, what we can see is God working out his plan even in the face of human sin. God called them to fill the earth and he was making that happen. But three things to note as we close:

**a. we see human pride laid low.** The account reminds us of the folly of our human pride and arrogance of our 'I'll do it my way' society. It reminds us who is God and it is not us. It is the fool who says there is no God and it is folly to act as if there is no God.

**b. God is sovereign and has authority over the nations.** It is God who dispersed them to fill the earth. However, they remained his people and he still holds authority over them. The authority and power of Jesus is shown because he lays claim on every language group and every people as we see when he spoke to his disciples at his ascension saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:18-19a).

**c. The Bible shows us a reversal of this punishment.** God scattered people separating them by different languages. As we next week look over the page at Gen 12 we will see the promise of God to Abraham that from him will come one nation, the drawing together of people, God's blessing. Then in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost we see that "each one heard them (the Apostles) speaking in his own language". The gospel was spoken in every language. Then in Rev 7:9 we see the vision of heaven where, "a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne and in front of the lamb." The curse of scattering reversed as all people's come together in one place. More than that "And they cried out in a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the lamb" (Rev 7:10). A multitude of people in one place, with one voice and one song presumably in one language, the language of heaven, God's punishment and curse reversed.