

Pentecost, an undoing of Babel

Genesis 11: 1 – 9

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”

But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. The Lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”

So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel —because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

Acts 2: 1 – 12

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

1) Babel was the work of man, not of God

- Come let us make bricks and bake them
- Let us build a city with a tower that reaches the heavens.
- The work of man is humanistic and centred on man and not on God.
- The philosophy of “you can do anything you put your mind to” is not a new philosophy. We see it here at the building of Babel.
 - We hear it so often these days
 - It isn’t a false statement. Even God agreed that it was true: nothing they do will be impossible for them.
 - We can see this in the world today. Many very successful people are self-centred, worldly, ungodly.
- Worldly success doesn’t mean favour in God’s sight, and lack of worldly success doesn’t mean a lack of favour with God.
 - Let’s not apply worldly standards of success and favour to people.
 - Look at people through God’s eyes, his word, to make righteous judgments on others and ourselves.
- Babel was a worldly success, but was abhorrent to God.
- Be careful, just because something is a success doesn’t mean that God is pleased with it.
- Worldly success wants to make a name for itself, leaving God out of the picture, which is detestable to God.

2) Pentecost was the work of God, not of man

- On the day of Pentecost the disciples were all together in one place, just as Jesus had told them to be.
 - An act of obedience to Jesus.
- They were then filled with the Holy Spirit, also as Jesus had promised. This in itself was of God and not of man.
- They spoke in tongues, as the Spirit enabled them
 - It wasn't a work of man, but something of God's doing. They weren't able to speak in languages that were understood by people from many countries, unless it was of God's doing.
- They were declaring the glory of God, not focusing on themselves.
- Godly success always brings glory to God. It is always concerned about upholding and honouring the name of God, whereas worldly success wants to make a name for itself.
- Godly success will be a failure if God isn't in it. It's completely dependent on God.

3) Judgment and blessing

- At Babel God confused their language and scattered them turning their worldly success into failure.
- At Pentecost God enabled them to speak in languages allowing people from different nations to hear the Gospel in their own language, bringing nations together in Christ.

What works are we doing in this world? Are they self-centred or God centred?

Is their purpose to make a name for yourself or to uphold the name of Jesus?

Do they bring confusion and division, or clarity in God's purposes and unity in truth?