

28 May 2017: The Power to understand (Genesis 11:1-9, Acts 2: 1-8, 41)

Long ago when the world was newly created, everything was perfect. Then sin entered the world. Adam and Eve had to leave the beautiful garden where God had put them but even that didn't stop wickedness. It grew and grew until eventually God used the flood to wipe out the evil. Only 8 people survived: Noah and his 3 sons and their wives. They were the only ones who had realised that God's commands were to be taken seriously.

It would be nice to be able to say that they and their children and their grandchildren lived happily and good ever after. But they didn't. They settled on a big plain somewhere in present-day Iraq. There they worked out how to fire bricks and, using this skill, they set out to build an enormous city and a very high tower. Proud of all they had taught themselves, they planned that a skyscraper tower that would reach right up to heaven. They thought they were so clever that they were like God and they wanted to be able to meet with him and organise things with him! They even called their town 'Babel' which, in the Hebrew language of the Old Testament, meant 'the gateway to god'

While they were aiming to climb up to God, the Bible tells us that "God came down to see what they were doing". We know that God knew everything, but this is just a neat way of telling us that they didn't need to climb up to God. God was all around and was concerned about them. All they had to do was speak to him!

God knew that they were actually not interested in him. He knew that they were acting in pride, and didn't really want to meet him. They were just doing their own thing! So he decided to stop this wickedness there and then. To do this, he allowed their languages to become confused or muddled. We don't know if it happened suddenly or gradually – but it happened. The people realised that they couldn't understand each other any longer and, because they didn't understand each other, they couldn't work together on their big project. In fact, gradually, each language group moved away, just as God had intended them to after the flood.

It is interesting that there is another Hebrew word which sounds very like the word 'Babel'. That is the word for 'confusion'. And this gives us our English word "Babble" to go on and on talking without making a great deal of sense or without people being able to understand you! If someone babbles, you will be confused!

Fast forward thousands of years later to Jerusalem where the disciples were waiting to hear how Jesus was going to direct them to achieve the PURPOSE /task that he had given them.

It was the Feast of Pentecost – exactly 50 days after Passover. Just as over Passover time, Jerusalem was full of people from all parts of the world where different languages were spoken.

At Pentecost God's people celebrated the fact that every year God gave them harvests and provided food for them. They remembered that God had made them his people and rejoiced that he cared for them. They knew that they did not always live according to God's laws and so part of their celebration involved asking for forgiveness for their sins.

The disciples and the other folk with them were spending their days prayin. They wanted to hear how Jesus wanted them to go ahead. Suddenly there was a roaring sound, "like the rush of a violent wind" filling the whole place. This was followed by something very strange. Tongue-shaped flames

spread through the room and a tongue of fire rested on every head. And, as this happened, their tongues were loosened so they were no longer controlling them. There was a babble of sound!

Soon a crowd began to gather in amazement at the noise, Some people thought these babblers were drunk, but then they realised that each member of the crowd could hear their own home language.

This was the opposite of Babel. There the many tongues brought confusion. Here they brought understanding. For, as they listened, the people heard that Jesus of Nazareth had conquered death. They were told that he was the Messiah, God's promised one, who had come to rescue people.

The people were horrified that they had hounded Jesus to death. They had probably just offered sacrifices asking God to forgive them. Now they saw that their sin was much bigger than they had realised! "What must we do?" they cried out. "Repent" said Peter. "Admit you were wrong; admit that you realise now that he *is* the Chosen One. Change your attitude to Jesus and accept that He alone is Lord.

And three thousand of them did! They asked God to forgive them; they asked God to be with them and they formed the first church family.

Their different languages, backgrounds and customs were no longer to divide or confuse them. The disciples on that special day of Pentecost were given the POWER to bridge these gaps. They were given the power to share the good news of the love of Christ.

From that day on, God has given his people in his church the power to talk about him – no matter what the consequences. God had sent the Holy Spirit to undo Babel!

Puzzle

God is three people in one.

The disciples knew about God from the Bible stories of the Old Testament. They knew Jesus as they had met him. Now they discovered the Holy Spirit.

What two signs showed that the Spirit had arrived?