

Humankind: Dispersed and Different – How did this happen?

Genesis 11:1-9

Beginning this weekend in New Zealand we have the FIFA Under 20 World Football Cup games getting underway where teams from 24 different nations and match officials and fans from many other nations too will be gathering to compete and watch the most played sport throughout the world. Soccer is popular not because everyone who plays speaks the same language but because there is a team in just about every nation in the world. Where ever there is a flat piece of ground and a ball, and sometimes where there isn't like in Thailand where one of the best national clubs originates from a floating village with its pitch located on the equivalent of a barge. Soccer is a sport that does not seem to favour one people group over another. It is able to be played equally well by most ethnicities and serves to bring different peoples together. And we will have many visitors from these different nations representing many different ethnicities and people groups visiting our country over the next three weeks.

But then when you live in Auckland you don't have to attend one of these football matches in order to easily meet people from of another ethnicity or from a different nation. Living in Cooladerry Place where the church manse was built, when we moved in two and a half years ago we were the first Kiwi Pakeha Christian family and there was only one other single occupied dwelling at that stage. Since then we have had Maori, Indian, Chinese, Pakistani and some other cultures that I'm not sure where they originate from bringing to our street a number of different languages, types of dress, cooking smells of diverse foods, which I must say is very nice, and of course there are the various religions including the one's I know about so far are Sikh, Bahai, Hindu, Taoism, Islam and of course Good old kiwi atheism or no-religion. One small street in South Auckland that is so diverse with a number of people groups with their own language, culture, and of course, religion.

And I am left wondering just how did this happen when you consider in the beginning God made man in His own image, Adam and Eve, how did we end up dispersing all the way around the world becoming vastly different recognisable people groups and cultures as the FIFA World Cup and Cooladerry Place in South Auckland represent?

To find the answer we return to Genesis and our reading from this morning. Pre Babel the world had just one people, the human race, with one language under one God. Adam and Eve, made in the image of God, were banished from the garden of Eden because of their sinful disobedience and pride, and then sent forth to multiply and disperse around the earth according to God's command (Gen 1:26,28;) to subdue, rule and manage it as good stewards of creation. This command was reissued to Noah and his family after they disembarked from the ark after the flood (Gen 9:1-2). The flood came about because of the first couple's sin and the evil that took root in their children. Cain killed his brother Abel. Evil only seemed to increase as the population of the world increased until sinful evil living became the norm (Gen 6:5-12) for everyone alive it would seem except Noah and his family whom God rescued from His judgment on the human race by having him build an Ark to be able to redeem Noah's family and the animals as well. But would Noah's family and their descendants comply and accept God's will and purpose to spread throughout the earth to rule subdue and manage it for Him? The answer to which we find in Genesis 11 is a definite NO!

The human race in rebellious defiance of God having retained that sinful seed of pride that had been born in Satan and resulted in him being cast out of heaven, spawned in Adam and Eve that had them banished from the garden of Eden, now permanently settled in the heart of mankind which has chosen not to separate and disperse out over the earth but instead to stop and build a single city. Within that city as a testament to their rebellious and egotistical pride they decided to build a temple-tower, what is known today as a ziggurat so that they might make a name for themselves. They developed a new method of building due to a lack stone in Mesopotamia using bricks made from mud and tar for mortar to make for themselves this tower to serve as a staircase from earth to heaven, a man made link between heaven and earth. Mankind at Babel was united in its determination not only to stop, rather than spread out over the earth, but in their desire to actually replace God. So, at Babel we have the rebellious human race united in their godless effort by way of a mega enterprise to make a name for themselves by dominating God's creation with a humanly conceived, planned and built

structure to put themselves in the place of God, the one LORD whom they were to worship.

God's Response (Gen 11:5-9): When the LORD came down and saw what this one united people with the same language had done both in the worldly realm in their proud attempt to take their destiny into their own hands through such a planned self-centred effort and spiritually because what they desired to create was in actual fact a godless human kingdom replacing God and excluding his kingdom. The LORD knew that there now would be no limit to what a united humanity could achieve and do. So the LORD came down and confused their language so that everyone would no longer be able to understand one another. Hence the confusion and without a common language, immediately their united joint effort became impossible for them to achieve. Which is why this city was called Babel, that is Babylon (v.9). The word means "gateway to a god". Now the word for confused in Hebrew 'balal' sounds just like "Babel" and is where we get the English word babble from. And more importantly it explains just how the LORD got the human race to obey the command to spread out over the earth after the flood. Humankind had attempted to go against God's will but we learn here that they could not subvert or change God's plan and purpose for their role in subduing the earth no matter how hard they tried.

Now the human race had all the reason it needed to separate into their new language groups and spread out across the world because they could no longer understand one another and therefore jointly work together in a unified way. This is the point in human history where things change markedly beginning with a number of parent language groups that were to further diversify along with ethnic features, cultural practices and cuisine which included the development of new religions in what were newly forming nations made up of these people groups.

So, in the world today we have more than 6000 languages being spoken which linguists can group and trace back to what they believe to be around 10-20 original languages, the parent language source that gave birth to a particular family of languages such as the Indo-European that English belongs to along with its next most similar language German.

And we have learnt this morning that according to the Bible those 10-20 source languages originated at Babel having been created by God. That is how we got different languages but how did the diverse ethnic groups come into being?

Pre Babel when the human race all lived worked and played together as a part of the same very large gene pool. As couples multiplied and grew the numbers of this one population human genes were evenly spread and well mixed so that all people would have been similar in their human characteristics including skin colour which I am guessing was a shade of brown. When God created mankind, Adam and Eve, God made them with what we call melanin which is a dark brown pigment found in our human skin. Depending on how much melanin a person has will determine which shade of brown you are. Having a small amount means that you will be light brown, even white. A large amount of melanin will result in you having a dark brown or black skin colour. So when the language groups dispersed around the earth the gene pool in each group was greatly reduced with less of a mix so some groups ended up with overall higher or lower averages of melanin in their genes so that some ended up dark brown, some almost white and nearly every shade in between. The interesting thing to note is that in the world today the average shade of a person's skin colour is thought to be mid brown. The reduced gene pool created this and other physically diverse features that are representative of the many different ethnicities today.

Then there was the cultural diversity that developed after Babel as these groups spread and further divided themselves into different clans and families each it would seem developing their own changing cultural values and beliefs over time that were passed down from one generation to the next. Each culture is human made. God didn't create culture. Humans thought up their own belief systems, philosophies, sports, cuisine, dress, hunting, farming, fishing and construction techniques. Along with such cultural diversity there were created and developed a great multitude of new gods, idols and various alternative religions that each people group began to worship in as a part of their culture.

After leaving Babel almost every people group and the nations that they founded rejected the Lord God, Yahweh Elohim as the one and only true and self-existent, eternal Creator God who made everything and is to be worshipped, obeyed the only One in whom humankind should put their trust. This is why Babylon, where the tower of Babel was built is perhaps referred to in the Book of Revelation (17:5) as "BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. Babylon was founded in opposition to God and God's will and was the place where false religion began. Up until this time there is no record in the Bible of idolatry and false religion, sin and evil yes but there's no mention of idols or other religions and gods being worshipped.

The apostle Paul outlines what happened from Babel and the effect that it had on the dispersing people groups as they developed their own cultures and created their own gods and religions in Roman 1:18-25. Moving from a time when all humanity knew the one true God but then deliberately turned from God, exchanging the truth for a lie, so that they might foolishly think and believe that they could feel better about living their life of wickedness and sin apart from God even though the creation that they now worship testifies openly and clearly every day to God's eternal power and divine nature. In our pluralistic multicultural age of political correctness and many different religions this truth is not well received or tolerated by atheists and adherents of other religions, spiritualities and humanist philosophies- the truth that humanity has walked away from in order to cease worshipping the one true God. The God whom the Bible says created all the nations (Acts 17:26-27), that they should inhabit the whole earth; marking out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands with the purpose of having all the peoples of the nations desiring to seek him and reach out to him and find him, no matter what the culture, nationality or ethnicity. Whether they believe it or not because God created the nations, God is their ruler whether they know it or not and can intervene in the affairs of any nation at any time, in any way and for any reason. Because no matter who you are, what you believe, what your culture, where ever you are from, God is not far from you and desires that you would seek him, reach out and find him, even today. So I leave you this morning with this

Challenge: Knowing the truth will you now receive it and confidently be ready to share it with any seeker, no matter what nation, culture, people group or religion they come from, who God brings into your life to do so?