

Justice – Genesis 11:1-9

Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. ² And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. ³ Then they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and bake *them* thoroughly.” They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. ⁴ And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *is* in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”

⁵ But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. ⁶ And the LORD said, “Indeed the people *are* one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. ⁷ Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” ⁸ So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. ⁹ Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

Open: What is it like to be in a conversation with someone who doesn’t speak the same language as you do?

→What words in the passage need to be explained for you?

1. What was the world like at this time in terms of culture (v 1)?
2. From v 3-4, what were the people’s motivations for building this city and tower?
3. What do you think God means when he says in v 6, “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”?
4. How is God’s response an act of mercy to the people (v 7-9)?

Apply

- By definition, God is just. How does this passage reflect God’s justice?
- How is God’s justice different from your ideas of justice?

How does it happen that, on the one hand, we all share not just a sense that there is such a thing as justice, but a passion for it, a deep longing that things should be put to rights, a sense of out-of-jointness that goes on nagging and gnawing and sometimes screaming at us—and yet, on the other hand, after millennia of human struggle and searching and love and longing and hatred and hope and fussing and philosophizing, we still can’t seem to get much closer to it than people did in the most ancient societies we can discover?

N. T. Wright