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GENESIS 11:1-9

THE GREAT CONFUSION

THIS WEEK'S **focus**

Have you ever heard someone speak and then thought, “I have no idea what this person is talking about”? (Sometimes older adults might say this about the way you and your friends talk to one another!) The truth is that even when two people speak the same language, it can be hard to understand one another all the time. So imagine a big group of people who are all speaking the same language and working together on a group project—only for everyone to suddenly begin to speak different languages! The group project would become impossible, right? Today we’ll look at a group project—a tall, magnificent tower—that was motivated by sin and disobedience. Since the end goal was evil, God scrambled the speech of the people working on the tower. It reminds us once again that God limits sin’s power so that His will prevails.



CENTRAL **truth**

God limits sin’s power so that His will prevails.



EXPLORE

scripture

GENESIS 11:1-9

GENESIS 11:1-4

1 The whole earth had the same language and vocabulary. 2 As people migrated from the east, they found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3 They said to each other, “Come, let’s make oven-fired bricks.” (They used brick for stone and asphalt for

mortar.) 4 And they said, “Come, let’s build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky. Let’s make a name for ourselves; otherwise, we will be scattered throughout the earth.”

GENESIS 11:5-7

5 Then the LORD came down to look over the city and the tower that the humans were building. 6 The LORD said, “If they have begun to do this as one people all having the same language, then nothing

they plan to do will be impossible for them. 7 Come, let’s go down there and confuse their language so that they will not understand one another’s speech.”

GENESIS 11:8-9

8 So from there the LORD scattered them throughout the earth, and they stopped building the city. 9 Therefore it is called Babylon, for there the LORD confused the

language of the whole earth, and from there the LORD scattered them throughout the earth.

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GENESIS 11:1-9
CONVERSATION

questions

▶ READ GENESIS 11:1-4.

.01 Re-read God's command in Genesis 9:1. How was humanity disobeying that command?

.02 Based on what Noah and his family had endured, why might the idea of a tower be appealing to people?

.03 Does it surprise you to see people so quickly disobeying and doubting God? Why or why not?

¹ Holman Bible Publishers, *Christian Standard Bible* (Ultrathin Reference edition), "Introduction: How the Names of God are Translated" (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), x.

² Nico Daams, "Translating YHWH," *Journal of Translation* 1, no. 1 (2005), 48, <https://doi.org/10.54395/jot-mm6yt>.

³ Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, s.v. "Yahweh," accessed June 22, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Yahweh>.

Q GIVE AN ANSWER

Why was it such a big deal that the people wanted to make a name for themselves (see v. 4)? Remember that anytime you see the word LORD in capital letters, the Hebrew word being translated isn't just "God"—it's God's divine name.¹ Sometimes we also translate it as Yahweh or Jehovah, and it's crafted from the Hebrew phrase, "I Am."² God has lots of titles, but this is the personal name He used to refer to Himself (see Ex. 3:13-14). It tells us about His character as holy, faithful, compassionate, and just (see Ex. 34:6-7). Jews throughout history have considered God's personal name to be so sacred that they have often refused to speak it aloud.³ When we exalt God's name, we are praising who He is! When we exalt our own names, we are saying, "Who I am matters more than who God is." It might not seem like a big deal that these people wanted to promote their own name, but it was an act of treason against God.

▶ **READ GENESIS 11:5-7.**

.04 Whose name were the people looking to exalt and honor? Who should they have been exalting and honoring?

.05 How does sin make it dangerous for people to unite together to accomplish something big?

▶ **READ GENESIS 11:8-9.**

.06 Describe sin in your own words. Where have we seen God limit sin's power so far in Genesis?

.07 How did God limit the power of sin in today's passage?

.08 How did God's actions in verse 9 get humanity back on track to follow His commands?



HISTORY

Sometimes the narratives we read in Genesis can feel less like factual narratives and more like tall tales designed to teach us a lesson. But you might be surprised by some of the ways that even secular resources offer support for the Bible's words. Many of those who have read the ancient Greek historian Herodotus believe he references this same tower! According to Herodotus, the tower of Babel, or the tower of Babylon (both names refer to the same place), was an actual tower. He considered it a wonder of the world, the way we might talk about the Great Wall of China or the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt.⁴

⁴ Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, s.v. "Discover the monumental Tower of Babel in the ancient city of Babylon," accessed May 26, 2023, educational video, 2:06, <https://www.britannica.com/video/180010/Overview-Tower-of-Babel>.

09

GENESIS 11:1-9

NOW

what?



CENTRAL truth

God limits sin's power so that His will prevails.

.09 How can we respond when we are tempted to “build” something ourselves instead of relying on God?

.10 What does it mean to “make a name for yourself”? How might we make a name for God instead?

.11 How can we celebrate the diversity of languages and cultures that God created?

.12 What are some other ways God limits the power of sin in the world?

DAILY devotions

MEMORIZE PSALM 138:2b

7 ARROWS FOR BIBLE READING



What does this passage say?



What does this passage tell us about God?



What did this passage mean to its original audience?



How does this passage change the way I relate to people?



What does this passage tell us about humans?



How does this passage prompt me to pray?



What does this passage demand of me?

day 1

GENESIS 10:1-13

DWELL

Noah had three sons, and Genesis 10 gives us evidence that they obeyed God's command in Genesis 9:1 to "be fruitful and multiply." That means they had families! However, our study of the tower of Babylon taught us that they weren't faithful to do the other part of the command: "fill the earth." Instead, they stayed put, and God had to intervene to ensure that they spread throughout the world.



Does God view partial obedience as true obedience? Why or why not?



Why do you think humans are prone to partial obedience?

MEMORIZE

Using colored pencils or pens, creatively write out Psalm 138:2b on a piece of paper. Then, "take a picture" of it with your mind and try to say the verse to yourself a few times without looking.

PRAY

Ask God to help you obey all the way. Ask Him to help you believe His promises more deeply so that obeying Him is a joy and not a bore!

day 2

GENESIS 10:14-32

DWELL

It can be hard to pay attention to passages that contain long lists of unfamiliar names. But consider how incredible it is that the Bible names people from so long ago and how it reminds us that God is all-knowing! He knows the name, thoughts, and personality of every person—because He made every person. We may get dizzy reading so many names, but God knows every name—including yours.

↔ How does God's ability to know all these names impact how you value others?

← What do you think it meant to the original hearers, who'd been enslaved in Egypt, to know more about where they came from?

MEMORIZE

Write out Psalm 138:2b on a piece of paper or note card, and place it next to your bed. Make it a goal to say it five times before you go to bed and five times when you wake up.

PRAY

Praise God for knowing your name and everything about you! Ask Him to help you know Him more through His Word.

day 3

GENESIS 11:1-9

DWELL

The tower-builders were trying to exalt—that is, lift up—their own names, instead of exalting God's name (see Ps. 138:2b, this week's memory verse). They wanted to be seen as awesome—more awesome than God. They were disobeying His command to fill the earth and doubting His promise that He would never destroy it again by flood. Disobedience to God's commands and disbelieving God's words—well, that's sinful stuff. And sin is always dangerous. In mercy, God limited their sin.

↻ Why was this tower a bad idea?

← Have you ever caught yourself “building a tower” to exalt your own name? What was the result?

MEMORIZE

Invent motions that match the words to Psalm 138:2b, and practice them while saying the words out loud a few times. It probably feels a little weird, but when something is weird, it helps us remember!

PRAY

Ask God to teach you to discern the difference between wanting to lift up your own name and wanting to lift up His.

day 4

GENESIS 11:10-25

DWELL

Genesis 10 gave us some insight into the families that stemmed from Noah's three sons, but Genesis 11 zeros in on one particular son: Shem. There are another batch of unfamiliar names—but keep an eye out for a name you may have heard of. This particular family is important because it points to that long-awaited Rescuer. From Shem would come Abram (Abraham), and from this family would eventually come Jesus. (See Luke 3 for more on this lineage.)

↑ Why do you think God had Moses include all of these names in the text?

← How are you encouraged to know that this family points to Jesus?

MEMORIZE

Write down the first letter of each word of Psalm 138:2b on a note card. At least five times today, see if you can say the verse just by looking at the letters.

PRAY

Praise God for always having a plan, for always keeping His promises, and for sending Jesus, the ultimate plan and promise.

day 5

GENESIS 11:26-32

DWELL

Finally, after all these unfamiliar names, we are able to zoom in on the man Abram (later Abraham) on whom nearly a third of Genesis focuses.¹ Right away, we learn that Abram's wife had been unable to have children. But it was no coincidence that "Abram" means "father." This name may have been painful for a man who didn't have any children—but it was also a perfect opportunity for God to move.

↻ What other details does this piece of text reveal about Abram and his family?

↻ How does God's far-reaching plan motivate you to continue to pray to Him and ask Him for what you need?

MEMORIZE

Tell a friend or family member that your memory verse this week is Psalm 138:2:b, and explain what it means. Then, invite that person to randomly quiz you at some point today to see if you can remember the verse.

PRAY

Ask God to increase your faith in His ability to fulfill His promises and do the impossible.

⁵ David Guzik, Enduring Word Commentary, s.v. "Genesis 11 - Mankind After the Flood; The Tower of Babel," accessed May 26, 2023, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/genesis-11/>.