

The Tower of Babel

GENESIS 10:1–12:3

1. Genesis 10 provides us with a “table of nations”—an overview of the descendants of Noah’s three sons. This includes where they lived and the nations that descended from each of them. Skim the chapter noting the repeated word or idea found in Genesis 10:5, 18, and 32.

A key word in chapter 10 is “spread” or “dispersed.”

2. Genesis 11:1–9 unity of language of the whole human race follows from the unity of its descent from one human pair but as the origin of the formation of the races of my kind are beyond the limits of our human logic.

3. To understand the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, we have to remember the instruction God gave to Noah and his sons in Genesis 9:1: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” What do you think this meant, and why do you think this instruction was given by God?

Noah and his descendants were supposed to have children and they were supposed to spread out all over the earth. God wants to establish his kingdom in every corner of the earth, and he wanted Noah and his descendants to spread out over the earth to rule over it as ambassadors of his kingdom.

4. Read Genesis 11:1–2. Immediately we see the problem in relation to God’s clear instruction. What is it?

They are supposed to spread out over the whole earth but instead they have found a place to settle as one group of people and they no longer intend to “fill the earth.”

5. Repeatedly in verses 3–4 the people say “Come, let us . . . ,” inviting all the people of Babel to work together on a great project. What do you think is the problem with their plans? Note your answers in the chart below.

The People's Plan	The Problem
"Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." (Gen. 11:3)	<i>They are using their God-given ingenuity to make something in defiance of God rather than stewarding their intelligence and creativity in obedience to God.</i>
"Come, let us build ourselves a city." (Gen. 11:4)	<i>This city was a way of providing their security instead of trusting God. A great city would be impressive, impenetrable, and independent from God.</i>
"Come, let us build ourselves . . . a tower with its top in the heavens." (Gen. 11:4)	<i>A tower that reached into heaven was a way of attempting to compete with God rather than submit to God. It was a way to make themselves like God.</i>
"Come . . . let us make a name for ourselves." (Gen. 11:4)	<i>Though they were made to bring glory to God, they want glory for themselves. And rather than trust God to make a name for them, they are going to take it into their own hands to establish their own reputation.</i>
". . . lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." (Gen. 11:4)	<i>God told them to fill the earth and they are determined not to obey.</i>

6. According to Genesis 11:6, why did God frustrate the people's attempt to accomplish this great feat?

God created humans with tremendous intelligence, creativity, and desire for greatness. With such great gifts from God and with unity and communication, they present a great danger to themselves of misusing those gifts to build a life apart from God.

7. How was God's action of dispersing people all over the face of the earth and giving them many different languages both a judgment and a preservation?

It was a judgment for their defiant rebellion in seeking to build a life insulated from God and as a rival to God. It was a protection for them from creating a society that was organized without reference to God, and built on their own power structures in the place of God, alienated from the presence of God. This would be doomed to destruction.

8. Read Genesis 12:1–3. How do these three verse offer tremendous hope in light of the grim situation of humanity in Genesis 10–11?

Here is blessing promised by God and not a curse. It is another new beginning. God promises to provide Abraham with what the people of Babel sought to obtain without God—to be a great nation, have a great name. There is hope for God’s world because of God’s promise to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham. This blessing will come primarily through Abraham’s most significant descendant, the promised offspring, Jesus Christ.

9. Using the chart below, compare Genesis 11:1–9 with Acts 2:1–11, looking for contrasts between what happened in Babel and what happened at Pentecost.

Babel	Pentecost
The people used their own initiative to gather together to make plans apart from God, in defiance of God.	<i>The disciples gathered together to pray and wait for God to take the initiative to give them the power they needed to accomplish the commission Jesus had given them.</i>
Human beings sought to climb their way up to God.	<i>God came down in the person of the Holy Spirit.</i>
Communication was restricted, as people could no longer understand	<i>Communication was expanded so that people could understand the</i>

each other to plot rebellion.	<i>gospel and respond to the gospel in faith and repentance.</i>
God came to judge and disperse the people into many nations.	<i>God came to bless and disperse a new tribe, the church, to take the gospel of the kingdom to many nations.</i>

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God intervened so that people with one language and culture were no longer able to understand each other.	<i>God intervened so that people of different ethnic backgrounds were able to understand each other.</i>
People sought to make a name for themselves through their own achievement.	<i>People sought to glorify God's name as they talked about his mighty works.</i>
The rebelling Babel resulted in the disintegration of the human family into different races and nationalities.	<i>Pentecost resulted in establishing the church made up of people from all races and nationalities.</i>
From Babel the people were dispersed over the face of all the earth.	<i>From Jerusalem, new believers from every nation under heaven returned to their homes to spread the gospel of Christ.</i>

10. Throughout the Old Testament we find many characters who foreshadow the person and work of Christ. But interestingly we also find characters who foreshadow

the person and work of the Antichrist. While we don't find a character in the story of the tower of Babel who clearly foreshadows Christ, we do find one who foreshadowed the Antichrist, a descendant of Ham named Nimrod (not exactly on the current top-ten list of baby names).

11. Satan is an imitator, parodying and counterfeiting the ways and things of God. But the climax of Satan's imitation will be when he also becomes incarnate as Christ was God incarnate. God's purposes for this earth were realized in "the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5), and Satan's plan will also be realized in a man, "the son of destruction" (2 Thess. 2:3), the Antichrist, who will, for a time, reign over the earth (Rev. 13:2-3). To explore how Nimrod foreshadows the Antichrist, look up the verses about the Antichrist, noting the similarities you find to Nimrod.

Nimrod	Antichrist
The name Nimrod means "the rebel." (Gen. 10:8)	2 Thess. 2:8 <i>Antichrist is "the lawless one."</i>
"He was a mighty hunter before the Lord." (Gen. 10:9)	Dan. 11:36-37 <i>Antichrist will exalt himself above every God.</i>

The word <i>mighty</i> is used four times to describe Nimrod. (Gen. 10:8, 9; 1 Chron. 1:10)	2 Thess. 2:9 <i>Antichrist comes "with all power."</i>
Nimrod was a king. (Gen. 10:10)	Dan. 11:36 <i>Antichrist is called "king."</i>
Nimrod's headquarters were in Babylon. (Gen. 10:10; 11:1-9)	Isa. 14:4 <i>Antichrist is called "the king of Babylon."</i>

Nimrod's driving ambition was to make a name for himself. (Gen. 10:9)	2 Thess. 2:4 <i>Antichrist proclaims himself to be God.</i>
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Discussion Guide

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Getting the Discussion Going

1. As you read the story of the tower of Babel this week, could you almost picture in your mind a movie version of this scene? Try to if you can. What are the people like? How is this group project progressing? What is God's tone of voice? What are the scenes like as families are split and dispersed and people can no longer understand each other?

Getting to the Heart of It

2. What are your thoughts about this picture of people sticking together to build a city in defiance of God and building a tower to get to God on their own terms? What is this about?

3. Looking back at the work you did in the Personal Bible Study, what was especially interesting or challenging to you?

4. There is some humor in this story (whether or not we recognize it) in the way God responded to the tower-building project. There is also judgment and mercy. How do you see humor as well as judgment and mercy here?

Humor: God belittles their plans by "coming down" to see their tower.

Judgment: They will be dispersed and speak different languages.

Mercy: They will be dispersed and speak different languages—which will keep them from pursuing independence from God.

5. Some people have said that the story of the tower of Babel is in the Bible as an explanation of why there are different people groups and languages in the world. Do you think that is why Moses told this story? If not, why do you think Moses included this part of primeval history for his original readers, the children of Israel who were preparing to enter the Promised Land?

We see in it the genealogy of Jesus, a clear picture of God's judgment of sin, the roots of the city that will become Israel's ongoing enemy, and a stark contrast to the way Abraham puts his faith in God to make a name and a nation.

6. There's nothing inherently wrong in our desires for security and significance, is there? The question is where we will look to have those needs met. How do you think we can distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate ways of having those needs met?

This is a "how do you think" question, so there is not a particular answer here, but keep in mind the purpose for which we were created: "to enjoy God and glorify him forever."

Getting Personal

7. The big question of this week was, "How will you meet your needs for security and significance?" As you look back over your life so far, do you see evidence of trying to secure your own future or make a name for yourself? Would you be willing to share that with the group?

Getting How It Fits into the Big Picture

8. Throughout this study, we're trying to grasp how some of these familiar stories fit into the bigger story of God's plan for redemption. What part does Genesis 10–11 play in understanding God's story of salvation through the Promised One?

We feel the ongoing wait for the Promised One, see the genealogy of Jesus, and gain further insight into the sinfulness of humanity that must be cleansed and

redeemed. We also are introduced to a spectacular sin through which God will bring glory to himself, when he is one day praised by people of every tongue and tribe and nation.