

HUMANITY REBELS

CORE PASSAGE: GENESIS 11:1-9

CONTEXT

After living in the ark for just over a year, Noah and his family stepped out on dry ground. Then God made a covenant with Noah that He would never again flood the whole earth to destroy sin. Like He had commanded Adam, God commanded Noah and his sons to fill the earth by spreading out and multiplying. Creation had a fresh start. One would think obedience and a desire to walk with God would be foremost on the minds of every human being after the flood, but sin still corrupted the hearts and minds of each new generation. And once again, God would not tolerate their rebellion.

KEY CONCEPT

Humanity rebels against God's commands and needs to be restrained.

As you examine Genesis 11:1-9:

- Reflect on our attempts to bring God to our level or to worship Him on our terms.
- Identify ways God still restrains sin today.



TIMELINE

God Judges Sinful Humanity with the Flood (Genesis 5–8)

SESSION STUDY: God Scatters Prideful Humanity at the Tower of Babylon
(Genesis 10–11)

God Makes a Covenant with Noah; Commands Him to Fill the Earth
(Genesis 9)

God Calls and Makes a Covenant with Abraham to Bless the World (Genesis 12–17)

Daily Readings

☐ **Day 1:** Genesis 10:1-20

☐ **Day 2:** Genesis 10:21-32

☐ **Day 3:** Genesis 11:1-4

☐ **Day 4:** Genesis 11:5-9

☐ **Day 5:** Genesis 11:10-26

☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 96



Scan this QR code to access
this session's Scripture passages.

SIN CAUSES US TO REBEL AGAINST GOD'S COMMANDS (GENESIS 11:1-4).

Circle the words that emphasize oneness and unity.
How many times did the people emphasize their unity?

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.”

After the flood, God commanded Noah’s sons to spread out over the earth and multiply (Gen. 9:7). Genesis 10 describes how the sons of Shem, Ham, and Japheth branched out, their descendants being the forefathers of the nations. But just as Genesis 2 gives a focused view of Genesis 1:26-31, Genesis 11 rewinds and focuses on how Noah’s descendants rebelled against God’s call to spread out, instead settling in a valley to make a city that would be called Babylon and to make a name for themselves.

Some commentators believe that the architect of Babylon was Ham’s grandson Nimrod (10:8-12), whose name means “rebel.” He represented the rebellious nature of the people to resist what God had commanded. Perhaps the people feared that spreading out would make them vulnerable or cause them to lose their sense of unity. Instead of trusting God’s provision and protection, they believed they knew better than God. They were content to stay where they were comfortable, and they set out to make a monument to their greatness.

LEADER NOTE: Located in Mesopotamia—modern-day Iraq, Kuwait, and western Iran—the valley of Shinar would be a place that God’s people revisited again and again. God would call Abram to leave the land of Shinar to go to a land God would give him and his descendants. The people of Judah would spend seventy years in exile there. Throughout Scripture, Babylon became evocative of the human pride and godlessness that attracts the judgment of God. When the Lord returns at the end of the age, all of heaven will rejoice when rebellious Babylon and her children are finally destroyed (see Rev. 18).

Why do you think it is so easy to disobey God?

Key Concept: Humanity rebels against God's commands and needs to be restrained.



Notes

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

x

x

"Any religion that makes salvation dependent upon something man does, rather than what Christ has done, is the religion of Babylon."¹

—Don Fortner (1950–2020)

The people wanted to make a name for themselves; they wanted fame and glory. In today's age of online influencers and Hollywood celebrities, the desire to be famous and known for our accomplishments is something we can fully understand. The problem, however, arises when we remember that we are made for God's glory (Isa. 43:7), and He does not share His glory (48:11). Since the name *Babel* originally meant "gate of God," some scholars believe Nimrod and his contemporaries were trying to build the means to approach God or meet Him on equal footing. Like Cain, Nimrod may have believed he found a way to worship God on his own terms, but that's not the way true worship works. True worship stems from obedience, truth, humility, and love for God (Matt. 22:37; John 4:22-24; Rom. 12:1-2).

What are some ways we try to come to God on our own terms?

Notes



SCAN ME

Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to see the chiasmus structure of Genesis 11:1-9 and its significance.

THE LORD RESTRAINS SIN AND ACCOMPLISHES HIS WILL (GENESIS 11:5-9).

Underline words that are repeated in the text.

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.” **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.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

GOD: God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving, and all-wise. God is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is fatherly in His attitude toward all men.

The people constructed a tower that would reach to heaven, where God was. Despite their solidarity, Moses juxtaposed the arrogance of the builders with the magnificence of God. The Lord knows all things, yet here it is said that He “came down”—using human terminology, we can imagine God stooping down to view the city and tower the people were building (Ps. 113:6). Though the people deluded themselves, believing they could somehow exist on the same level as God, Moses exposed their absurdity. No one is greater than God, who is sovereign over all His creation, nor can anyone match His glory.

God was not threatened by the people’s rebellion. Instead, the Lord’s chief concern was that without anything to restrain humanity’s depravity, no kind of evil would be outside the realm of possibility. In their rebellion, they “would build up a delusion of self-sufficiency through their false religion, corporate security, and political uniformity. . . . And in their delusion they would never turn to God.”² Just as God drove Adam and Eve away from the tree of life so they would not live in perpetual sin without the hope of redemption, God confused the people’s language and forced them to scatter. What was a punishment was also God’s restraint of sin.

How does God restrain sin today?

Notes

LEADER NOTE: Some scholars believe that God made genetic differences in human beings after the tower of Babylon that led to different skin tones and characteristics, but the Bible is clear that all people are part of one race from one common ancestor (Gen. 1:27; 3:20; Acts 17:26). Therefore, racism has no place within Christianity because we know that God has created all of humanity in His image, and Christ died to offer forgiveness to whoever trusts in Him (John 3:16; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28).

The people could no longer understand one another and had to migrate and live with people who spoke as they did. The tower representing their ingenuity remained unfinished, a testament to their foolishness (Gen. 11:8-9; Luke 14:29-30). The scattering was also a tangible symbol of God's greater design. God's idea of "oneness" does not mean one skin color, language, geographical region, or political ideology. The unity found in God's kingdom is that of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation together redeemed by Christ's blood (Rev. 5:9-10).

LEADER NOTE: In an effort to share the gospel with all people in all places, missionaries have set about the arduous task of translating the Bible into as many languages as possible. The Summer Institute of Linguistics, now known as SIL International, has cataloged as many as 6,909 distinct languages in 2009, and as of 2009, the Bible has been translated into 2,508 of them.³ Even with technology and the ever-expanding discovery of new languages, the task set before us by Jesus to take the gospel to the ends of the earth is far from finished!

How can we be a group that refuses to "settle" and instead "scatters" and "goes" in obedience to the Great Commission?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

As a consequence of the rebellion at the tower of Babylon, God confused the language of humanity to scatter the peoples over the face of the earth, but through the gospel of Jesus Christ, God saves people from every tribe, tongue, and nation to make one people united in Christ forever.

ARRIVAL

ASK: As your group arrives, ask: When have you had to move to a new house or change jobs, and what motives were involved in that?

CONTEXT

SAY: After Noah and his family left the ark, God commanded them to spread out and fill the earth, just as God had originally commanded Adam in the garden of Eden. Then the Lord made a covenant with them never to flood the entire earth again in judgment. This was signified by the beauty of the rainbow. The flood may have given humanity and the world a fresh start, but it had not erased the sin nature in people, nor had it eliminated death as sin's consequence, as exemplified in Noah's subsequent death (see 9:29).

TRANSITION: Today, we will explore more of the rebellious streak that exists in humankind. We will also discuss the ways God restrains sin in His great mercy.

RECAP

ASK: What questions arose for you as you read Genesis 11:1-9 and prepared for today's Bible study?

SAY: As we continue through the book of Genesis, we continue to witness the effects of the fall on humanity. Each generation after Adam and Eve continued to sin—even the descendants of those who survived the flood. Yet despite our rebellion, God intervened in a way that would not only carry out His desired plan but would also keep sin from corrupting the world unchecked.

TRANSITION: Let's look at the Scriptures to chart out the people's actions and their motives in building the tower of Babylon, also known as the tower of Babel.



Listen to session-by-session training every week on

Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify

ministrygrid.com/gospelproject • gospelproject.com/leader-training.

Key Concept: Humanity rebels against God's commands and needs to be restrained.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

CHART: Guide your group to look at page 56 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a table with the column headings "ACTIONS" and "MOTIVES," and rows labeled "HUMANITY" and "GOD." Draw this chart on a board so you can record your group's thoughts as they work through the text.

Actions and Motives	
Read Genesis 11:1-9 and write down the various actions of the people seen in this passage and those of God as well. Then write down the corresponding motives.	
ACTIONS	MOTIVES
HUMANITY	
GOD	

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 11:1-4.

IDENTIFY: Call for the group to identify the actions of the people in the text and the motivations behind those actions, making sure to use Scripture references to support their ideas. Write down their answers and the references in the appropriate boxes.

READ: Invite a second volunteer to read Genesis 11:5-9.

ANALYZE: Instruct the group to call out the Lord's actions and motivations in this passage, making sure to base their responses in Scripture. Write down their answers and Scripture references in the appropriate boxes.

DISCUSS: As necessary, help the group wrestle with the Lord's motives. Be sure to ground the discussion of God's motivations with His attributes displayed in Scripture: Since God is all-knowing, why did He come down to see the tower (v. 5)? If God is transcendent and all-powerful, what did He mean when He said, "Nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them" (v. 6)?

TRANSITION: Briefly summarize the group's conclusions regarding humanity's motivations to sin and God's motivations in response.

DEBRIEF

What insights about humanity or God did you glean from this activity?

What are some of your motives in the various spiritual acts that you do, and what are some ways to keep our motives in check?

SUMMARIZE

Invite a volunteer to read the key concept. Encourage your group to share how today's group experience helped them understand our propensity to sin and our need for God's restraining power in our lives.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Guide your group to look at the Head, Heart, Hands section in their PSG (p. 57). Invite volunteers to share their responses to the questions as you help explain the various routes of application. If pressed for time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week's study.



HEAD: One of the chief attributes of God is His wisdom. A. W. Tozer wrote, "Wisdom, among other things, is the ability to devise perfect ends and to achieve those ends by the most perfect means. . . . All God's acts are done in perfect wisdom, first for His own glory, and then for the highest good of the greatest number for the longest time."⁴ In His perfect wisdom, seeing the end from the beginning, God chose not to wipe out the rebellious Babelites but instead confused their language and sent them out to fill the earth as He had intended from the beginning.

Why do you think God allowed the people to begin a tower they would not finish before scattering them as He had commanded?



HEART: The book of Genesis begins a grand narrative of fall and redemption, corruption and restoration. Just as we will one day be restored to paradise with God (Rev. 21:3), the saved remnant of humanity will one day worship God with tongues from every language on the face of the earth (7:9-10) and the glory of the nations will rightly be lavished upon the one true God (15:4; 21:26). While we wait for that day, the church must make every effort to reflect love and compassion for all people, even those who are different from us.

How does the church reflect true unity with diverse groups of people throughout the world?



HANDS: To reach the nations with the gospel, churches have had to sponsor or send out missionaries. With technology and global travel, often the nations are right around the corner, down the street, or a drive away. Unfortunately, the multiculturalism of society sometimes renders us timid about speaking the gospel with our neighbors for fear of being labeled bigoted or xenophobic. But instead of worrying about human perception, remember the importance of our calling. As the apostle Paul stated, “How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher?” (Rom. 10:14).

How can you help someone who may not look, think, or speak like you to understand the good news of Jesus Christ this week?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- Reflect on any areas in your life in which success or notoriety cause you to seek your own glory instead of God's. Consider ways you can redirect the praise you receive from others to God.
- Share with a friend the beauty of God's design for diversity and how the church is unified through faith in Jesus Christ.
- Write down Psalm 96:1-3 and memorize it this week. Ask a friend in your group to check in during the week and ask you to recite it. Let these verses guide you to seek opportunities to declare God's glory among the nations.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray with your group through Psalm 96:1-3 as you close.

References

1. Donald S. Fortner, *Discovering Christ in Genesis* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2002), 136.
2. R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 173.
3. Stephen R. Anderson, “How many languages are there in the world?” *Linguistic Society of America* (Washington, DC), accessed January 25, 2024, <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/how-many-languages-are-there-world>.
4. A. W. Tozer and Ron Eggert, *The Tozer Topical Reader*, vol. 1 (Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread, 1998), 241–42.