

The Tower of Babel



SABBATH—APRIL 23

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 9:18–27; Genesis 10; Genesis 11:1–4; Genesis 11:5–7; Psalm 139:7–12; Genesis 9:1.

MEMORY VERSE: “So the name of the city was Babel, because there the Lord mixed up the language of the whole earth. The Lord sent the people everywhere over the whole earth” (Genesis 11:9, NLV).



Men go against the plan of God. Men stay in one place and build the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9).

AFTER THE FLOOD, the Bible talks about the three sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham is the father of Canaan (Genesis 10:6; read also Genesis 9:18). Canaan also is the name of the Promised Land (Genesis 12:5). Later, God promises the land of Canaan to Abraham and blesses him. God will bless everyone on earth because of Abraham (Genesis 12:3).

God also wants to bless humans after the Flood. He commands them to fill the earth with their families. But men go against the plan of God. Men stay in one place and build the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9). God judges humans for not obeying His command. God causes the men at Babel to become confused. The men no longer understand each other. They stop building and move away to different places. So, the people finally do what God wanted them to do right after the Flood when He said, “ ‘Have many children. Fill the earth with your people’ ” (Genesis 9:1, ERV). Yes, we often fail to follow God, just as Ham and the builders of Babel failed. But the sin of Ham (Genesis 9:21, 22) and the story about the Tower of Babel show us an important Bible truth: God can turn our mistakes into blessings.

NOAH CURSES THE SON OF HAM (Genesis 9:18–27)

Read the story about Noah and Ham in Genesis 9:18–27. What is the message of this story?

The story about Noah and Ham is the same in many ways as the story about Adam and the forbidden fruit. Both stories talk about (1) bad fruit, (2) wearing no clothes, (3) being covered, (4) a curse, and (5) a blessing.

God never wanted men to drink the juice of spoiled fruit. When Noah drank the wine, he got drunk. Then he lost self-control and took off his clothes. Then Ham “saw” his father. Ham sees something he should not see. So, Ham is the same as Eve, who “saw” the forbidden tree (Genesis 3:6). This connection between Ham and Eve shows us that Ham did not just see something by chance. Ham told his brothers about seeing his father wearing no clothes. But Ham did not try to help his father. Ham left Noah the way he was. But Shem and Japheth cover their father right away.

Our parents show us our past. Because they come before us, they show us who we are and where we come from. When we fail to honor our parents, we will have problems in the future (Exodus 20:12; compare with Ephesians 6:2). Ham did not respect or honor his father. So, God puts a curse on Canaan, the son of Ham. This curse will change the life of Ham in the future and the life of his son Canaan.

We must not use this story to say that we should hate anyone who comes from the family line of Ham. The curse is put only on the son of Ham. This curse shows us that the future children of Canaan will be guilty of the same crimes and sins that Ham did (Genesis 19:5–7, 31–35).

The curse on Canaan includes a blessing for Shem. What is this blessing? The name of Canaan gives us a big hint. In the Hebrew language, the name “Canaan” means “to bring something under control.” This name shows us that the family line of Shem will win the Promised Land from the children of Canaan. That win will make it possible for the people of God to prepare the way for the Savior to come to this earth. The Savior will cause the children of Japheth to “live in the tents of Shem” (Genesis 9:27, NLV). This verse is a special message about the future. It shows us that God will offer His saving mercy to everyone on earth (Daniel 9:27; Isaiah 66:18–20; Romans 11:25). So, we see that in the end the curse on Ham becomes a blessing for all people on the earth.



Our parents show us our past. Because they come before us, they show us who we are and where we come from.

FAMILY HISTORY (Genesis 10)

There are two men named Lamech in the Bible. The first Lamech is from Cain's family line. The second Lamech was the father of Noah (Genesis 5:25–31). Adam died when Lamech was 56 years old. For sure, Lamech told stories about Adam to Noah. No doubt Noah told these stories about Adam to his own family members before and after the Flood.

Read Genesis 10. Why does the Bible give us this family history in Genesis 10? (Read also Luke 3:23–38 for the answer.)

Genesis 10 is a list of family history. This list helps us understand three things: (1) The list helps us understand that the people in the Bible are real. (2) The list shows us the connection between the past and the things that happen later on. (3) The list helps us see the danger of sin. We see the awful things that happen to children because of their parents' sin.

Genesis 10 shows us the 70 family groups that come from Shem, Ham, and Japheth. This number is an important number in the Bible. Later, 70 family members from the family of Jacob will live in Egypt (Genesis 46:27). 70 leaders of Israel go up the mountain with Moses in the desert (Exodus 24:9). The 70 family groups in Genesis 10 and the 70 leaders in the desert show us the plan of God for Israel. God wanted His people to share Bible truth with people everywhere on the earth. In the New Testament, we read about how Jesus sends 70 of His followers to countries around Israel to share with them the Good News (Luke 10:1).

Genesis 10 helps us see the connection between Adam and the first fathers of the people of Israel. All these men are real people. The first fathers were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These men talked with older family members who were witnesses of the things that happened in the past.

Read the family history in Matthew 1:1–17. What do these verses teach us about the people in this list? How do we know that they were real people? How is that important for our faith?



Lamech told stories about Adam to Noah.

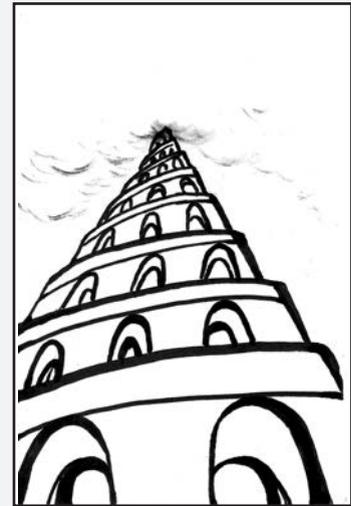
ONE LANGUAGE (Genesis 11:1–4)

Read the story in Genesis 11:1–4. Why do the people in this story want to stay together in one place?

The words “the whole earth” (Genesis 11:1, NLV) show us only a small number of people. These were the people living on the earth after the Flood. All these people come together because they want to build a tower to reach to the sky (Genesis 11:4). Do you see how the people try to do what God did when He made the earth? In Genesis 11:3, 4, we read that “they [the people] said.” These words help us remember that “God said” in Genesis 1:6, 9, 14, and so on. In Genesis 11:3, NLV, the people also say another thing the same as God: “let us make” (compare these verses with Genesis 1:26). So, we see that the people really want to remove God and His government. We see their evil plan when the people say: “ ‘Let us make a name for ourselves’ ” (Genesis 11:4, NLV). This verse shows us that the people wanted to become famous and be remembered forever. But God is the only One who can “make for Himself a name that lasts [continues] forever” (Isaiah 63:12, NLV).

So, the builders want to replace God. (We know that this idea came from Satan. Read Isaiah 14:14.) For sure, the builders think about the Flood when they make their plan to build the tower. The men build the tower high, so that they will not be destroyed by another Flood. The builders do not trust the promise of God never to destroy the earth by a flood again. In the records of Babylon, we read about the Flood and the city of Babel (Babylon). The spirit of the kingdom of Babylon is the same spirit that is in the builders of the Tower of Babel. Both the kingdom and the builders want to reach heaven and replace God.

The story about the Tower of Babel is important in Daniel, too. In Daniel 1:2, NLV, we read about the land of Shinar. King Nebuchadnezzar brings to Shinar the riches from the temple in Jerusalem. Shinar makes us think about the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:2). Later, Nebuchadnezzar builds a big gold statue. No doubt, the king builds the statue in the same place where the Tower of Babel stood. Nebuchadnezzar shows the same spirit as the builders at Babel. God shows Daniel that in the end times, humans again will come together against God (Daniel 2:43; Daniel 11:43–45; compare with Revelation 16:14–16). But the people will fail in their plan, just as the people failed at Babel.



The men build the tower high, so that they will not be destroyed by another Flood.

“LET US GO DOWN” (Genesis 11:5–7)

Read about God and the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:5–7 and Psalm 139:7–12. Why does God come down to the earth in this story? What happens at Babel that causes God to make this trip from heaven?

The builders of Babel try to go up. But as high as they go, God is higher. So, God must come down to them. This idea shows us that God is all-powerful and above all humans. That is why Jesus must come down to us to save us. For sure, there was no other way for us to be saved.

“Then the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the sons of men had built” (Genesis 11:5, NLV). Does God really need to come down to earth to find out what happens? Of course not! God knows everything (Psalm 139:7–12; compare with Psalm 2:4). But God comes down anyway. Why? Because God wants to show humans that He cares about them and pays attention to the things they do.

Read Luke 1:26–33. What do these verses teach us about God and His coming down to us?



God chooses to mix up their language. Then they no longer can understand each other.

When Jesus came down to live with us, He showed us His mercy and loving-favor. Our good behavior does not bring us to God or save us. The only thing that will save us is God, coming down to us in mercy. We see this idea in the story about the Tower of Babel in Genesis. Twice, Genesis says that God goes down. So, we see that God cares very much about what is happening at the Tower of Babel.

The Lord wants to stop the plan of the people at Babel to join together. This plan is evil because the people are sinners. As sinners, their agreement can only lead to more pain and evil. So, God chooses to change their language and separate people into many small groups. Then they no longer can understand each other. So, they stop building Babel and move away.

“God causes the plan of the builders of Babel to fail. Then the builders feel ashamed. They built the Tower to show off. Their hearts were filled with pride. But now the tower shows that the builders were very foolish. Today, men are doing the same thing that the builders of Babel did. Men today depend on self. They reject the law of God. Satan did the same thing in heaven. This same spirit also filled Cain and all his future children.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 123, adapted.

THE PEOPLE ARE SCATTERED (Genesis 11:8, 9)

In Genesis 11:8, 9 and Genesis 9:1, we read about what happens to the people after the Tower of Babel. “The LORD scattered them over the whole earth” (Genesis 11:9, NlrV). How does this plan from God show us His saving mercy?

After the Flood, God has a plan for humans. He wants them to “have many children. Fill the earth with your people” (Genesis 9:1, ERV; compare with Genesis 1:28). But the builders go against God’s plan. The builders want to stick together as one people group. One reason they want to build the city of Babel is so that they “won’t be scattered over the whole earth” (Genesis 11:4, NlrV). The people refuse to move elsewhere. They feel they will be stronger together.

Sad to say, the people wanted to use their strength for evil and not for good. They say, “Let us make a name [become famous] for ourselves” (Genesis 11:4, NLV). This plan shows us the pride in their hearts.

So, God judges the builders. “The Lord sent the people everywhere over the whole earth” (Genesis 11:9, NLV). The people never wanted to be separated. Now the thing that they fear most happens.

The name “Babel” shows us an important Bible truth. Babel means “door to God.” There is an interesting connection between the word “Babel” and the Hebrew verb “**balal**.” “**Balal**” means “confuse” (Genesis 11:9, ERV) or “mix up” (Genesis 11:9, NlrV). The people become confused because they try to go to the “door to God.” But the people do not want to go there to worship God. The people want to remove God. They think they can become their own gods.

“The men of Babel wanted to start a government that was separate from God. Some of the builders respected the Lord. But these men were tricked by the plans of the evil builders. God cared about these tricked men. So, because He loved them, God delayed His punishment. God gave the people time to show what was really in their hearts. The sons of God tried to convince the evil builders to change their plans. But in the end, the people joined together in agreement against God. What if God did not stop them? Then the people will cause much evil on the earth. The people wished to turn against God and worship self. They wanted to start a kingdom that completely replaced God.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 123, adapted.



After the Flood, God has a plan for humans. He wants them to “have many children” (Genesis 9:1, ERV).

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Tower of Babel,” pages 117–124, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“The men decide to build a city. They also want to build a tower that is very high. . . . The builders make these plans to keep the people from scattering over the earth in small communities. God commands the men to move to different places on the earth. God also tells them to fill the earth with their children and to take control of the land. But the builders at Babel want to keep their community together in one area. They also want to start a kingdom that will fill the whole earth. Their city will be the capital of this worldwide kingdom. Then everyone on earth will give them glory and worship them because of their beautiful building. The wonderful tower touches the highest part of the skies. The builders want this tower to show everyone on the earth that the builders are very powerful and wise. Their future children will see the tower and always remember them. Then the builders will be famous forever.

“The people who live on the plain of Shinar do not believe the promise of God. They do not trust Him when He says that He will never destroy the earth again with a Flood. Many of the people do not believe in God at all. These people say that forces in nature caused the Flood. Other people believe that God destroyed the old earth with a Flood. But these people are the same as Cain. They turn against God in their hearts. So, they decide to build the tower. One reason they want to build the tower is to stay safe from another Flood. They want to build the tower higher than the Flood waters reached on the earth. The builders think if they make the tower that high, then they will be safe from all danger in the future. They also want to go up high in the clouds to figure out the cause for the Flood. The whole plan shows that the people want to replace God. The builders also want to turn the hearts of their future children away from God forever and cause them to worship false gods.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 118, 119, adapted.



“The people who live on the plain of Shinar do not believe the promise of God.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What happens when people try to replace God and His government? What trouble comes from this plan? What does history show us?
- ② How can we, as a church, avoid building our own “Tower of Babel”?