

## **Small Group Materials (Genesis 11)**

**Pray for your time together in God's Word!**

**Read to the Group (Synopsis of Study):** In this study we'll be discussing the narrative of the Tower of Babel. We'll talk about the sin behind the people's choice to build the tower, the consequences of that sin, and how God has reunited believers again through His Holy Spirit.

**Ask the Group one of the following icebreakers:**

*Leader's Note: We included two because some groups respond differently to different questions. One is more personal, the other bigger picture. Choose the one that fits your group best:*

In your opinion, what are some of humanity's greatest achievements? (e.g. DNA mapping, moon landing, globally connected internet)

- Do you feel pride in any of these achievements? Why do you think that is?

*or*

What do you consider your biggest personal accomplishment?

- Why are you proud of that accomplishment?

**Read passage out loud as a group.** Option: Give group 3 minutes to look at the passage by themselves.

### **Genesis 11:1-9 (NIV)**

1 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. 2 As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

3 They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. 4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

5 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. 6 The LORD said, "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. 7 Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

8 So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. 9 That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

### **Discussion Questions**

*Leader's Note: Throughout the study consider the perspectives of different groups: people, God, and relationship to each other.*

**Ask the Group:** Why did the people want to build a tower?

*Possible Answers: To reach God, build up their fame and glory, avoid being scattered.*

**Ask the Group:** Why was God unhappy with the people after coming to see the tower?

*Possible Answers: Talk about the broad sins committed. The people were being proud and self-reliant.*

*Leader's Note: Use the questions below to focus your conversation and explore the dynamic between the people's behavior and their relationship with God.*

**Ask the Group:** How does the idea of building a tower to reach the heavens distort the relationship humanity has with God?

*Possible Answers: The people were trying to bring God down to the level of humanity. They built a tower to God as if He needed them to come to Him. God demonstrates the fallacy in this notion by coming down Himself to look at the Tower. Suggesting that God needed them to reach Him shows how anthropomorphizing God is a distortion of His true nature. This project went beyond idolatry; it degraded the nature of God by portraying Him as having needs.*

- **Ask the Group:** Have you ever tried to build a "tower" in your life?  
*Possible Answer: Any time we think of God as "genie" who will just answer our requests all the time, or when we think we can bargain with God, etc.*
- **Ask the Group:** How did your "tower" impact your relationship with God?

**Ask the Group:** In Genesis 2, God told Adam and Eve to, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." In what way were the people disobeying this command by building the tower (look at the end of verse 4)?

*Possible Answer: They were trying to prevent themselves from being scattered over the earth (i.e. refusing to fill it). Rather than concerning themselves with ruling over the earth they were trying to control God and bring themselves to His level.*

- **Ask the Group:** How does a tower reaching towards heaven fail to honor God's actual purpose for His command?  
*Possible Answer: We are called to subdue the earth under God's authority and for His glory. The people were only trying to build the tower to bring themselves glory.*

**Ask the Group:** Was it wrong for men to speak one language? What is the real problem created when humanity shares one language?

*Possible Answer: The evil does not lie in the fact that all men spoke one language. However, it allowed them to rely on themselves too much. They used something that can be good (community and communication), but instead made it sinful by glorifying themselves rather than God.*

**Ask the Group:** How do you think the people felt when they no longer understood each other?

*Possible Answer: Confused, frustrated, helpless, etc.*

**Ask the Group:** How did changing the peoples' languages affect their relationship with God?

*Possible Answer: They could no longer rely on their strength in numbers because they could not communicate. They realized that they were not as powerful as they thought they were and did not have as much control as they thought they did. They were forced to rely on God.*

- **Ask the Group:** Can you think of a time in your life when you felt "forced" to rely on God after realizing you could not do it by your own power?
- **Ask the Group:** What was your response?

**Read this to the group:** Commentators say that the word Babel in Samarian meant "gate of god." If this is true, the Babylonians likely considered themselves to be a focal point of the earth and saw the tower as man's great achievement. As language developed, the Hebrew meaning of Babel became meaningless gibberish. The tower of Babel was intended to be a monument of human achievement, and instead sits at the center from which human divisiveness radiated, and the cause of disastrous alienation from God.

*Possible Transition: Now let's look at a parallel passage from the New Testament, and see how God used language to help reunite humanity.*

**Read passage out loud as a group.** Option: Give group 3 minutes to look at the passage by themselves.

#### **Acts 2:1-12 (NIV)**

1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. 5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. 7 Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? 9 Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome 11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" 12 Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

**Ask the Group:** What parallels do you see between the passage from Genesis and this passage?

*Possible Answers: God uses language in both accounts to accomplish a greater goal. They are different because in Genesis God confuses the people with language, but in Acts He "undoes" the confusion created by multiple languages by allowing everyone to understand the Gospel.*

**Ask the Group:** For what reason does the Holy Spirit allow the Apostles to miraculously speak many different languages?

*Possible Answers: God wanted the Gospel to be communicated to everyone regardless of their language.*

*Only a few people knew the Good News and God wanted it to spread as quickly as possible.*

**Ask the Group:** In Genesis we see God divide men by their language; in Acts God uses language to unite the church. What do you think God's ultimate goal is in both of these passages?

*Possible Answers: God's ultimate goal is to bring glory to Himself. In each of these accounts He manipulates language to meet this goal. Even though He destroys communication in one account and effectuates it in another, in both He is redirecting people into relationship with Him.*

**Ask the Group:** One of the Holy Spirit's first acts after Christ's resurrection is to restore what God divided at Babel. How does the Holy Spirit change how we communicate with each other and with God?

*Possible Answers: Just like God used the Holy Spirit as an intermediary between the disciples and the people in Acts, the Holy Spirit is an intermediary between us and God. The Holy Spirit can also use people in our lives to communicate with us, for instance when a friend's words bring conviction, encouragement, or insight into our lives.*

**Ask the Group:** Humanity can now communicate with each other in ways like never before (e.g. technology, accessibility, etc). In what ways might we be able to use these modern tools for God's glory?

*Possible Answers: The Gospel is more accessible because of technology. The Bible can be more easily translated into other languages.*

**Ask the Group:** What is our community application of this passage?

*Leader's Note: You may choose to create your own application question as a group based on your discussion, or highlight a question from this study.*