



Two Plans, Two Results

Topic

God's sovereignty

Theme

God is sovereign over rebellious humanity.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will evaluate his life in light of God's sovereignty, making sure he is not trying to live according to his own plan.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 6
- Building blocks or Legos
- Permanent markers

Scripture Focus

Genesis 10:1–11:30

Summary

Genesis 10 gives the table of nations and provides clues as to where the nations settled. Genesis 11 gives the account of the tower of Babel. God demonstrated His sovereignty in thwarting the plans of those rebelling against His command to fill the earth. God's sovereignty is then seen in the record of the line of Shem, the line through which the Savior would eventually be born.

Outline

I. Formation of the Nations (10)

- A. Descendants of Japheth (10:1–5)
- B. Descendants of Ham (10:6–20)
- C. Descendants of Shem (10:21–32)

II. Spreading of the Nations (11:1–9)

- A. The people's pride (11:1–4)
- B. God's judgment (11:5–9)

III. Continuation of the Line of Shem (11:10–30)

Memory Verse

*"I know that thou canst do every thing,
and that no thought can be withholden from thee"
(Job 42:2).*

GETTING STARTED

Look at My Tower!

Give the learners access to building blocks or Legos. Organize them in groups based on how many building blocks or Legos you have. Give the learners four minutes to build a tower as tall as they can. Time them and call stop when the time is up. Survey the towers and comment on them.

ASK: What do you think of your tower?

ASK: Whose do you think is the best? (Most learners will think their own tower is the best.)

ASK: What would your towers look like if we put them next to the Great Pyramid in Egypt? *They would look pathetic! Hardly noticeable.*

Sometimes children build things they think are gigantic. But size is always relative. In our continuing account of Genesis, we encounter some tower builders who thought their tower was pretty special until God came along and put it in the proper perspective. God showed that He is sovereign over rebellious humanity. That is still true today. We should take comfort in that truth.

Unfinished Projects

Have learners use handheld devices to search the web for information on the following unfinished buildings. Give them four minutes to work. Have them report why the building was never finished. See the answers in the parentheses below.

- Woodchester Mansion (*owner's perfectionism made it too expensive to finish*)
- Cincinnati Subway (*Great Depression hit*)
- Deutsches Stadion (*Germans lost World War II*)
- Marble Hill Nuclear Power Plant (*company ran out of money*)
- Sagrada Família (*large and intricate; funding depends on tourists*)

ASK: What do all these projects have in common? *Someone made plans to build them. The projects were started. There was an anticipated completion date.*

ASK: What unfinished projects do you have around your house?

The Bible account for today includes an ambitious building project that was eventually abandoned. The unfinished project is a testimony to God's sovereignty.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. Formation of the Nations (10)

The genealogy in Genesis 10 might seem unimportant to the casual reader. But

the information in it helps us understand the major people groups that formed after the Flood. In fact, some of the names listed in the table of nations can be traced to people groups at the time of Israel's occupation of the Promised Land and even today. Though all these groups came from one man, Noah, some of them became bitter enemies of Israel.

ASK: How might the table of nations relate to God's sovereignty? (Q3) *The table of nations is a report on how God directed the nations in their settlement after the Flood.*

A. Descendants of Japheth (10:2–5)

Japheth had seven sons and seven grandsons. They settled mainly in the North in modern Turkey, as well as west and south of the Caspian Sea.

Madai, a son of Japheth, is the one from whom the Medes descended (10:2). They settled in what we now call Persia. The Greeks are descendants of the sons of Javan. *Hellenists*, a term to describe Greeks, is probably from the name Elishah, one of Javan's sons (10:4).

Historically, the descendants of Japheth did not cross paths with the nation of Israel. But they are mentioned in prophecy (Ezek. 27; 37–39).

B. Descendants of Ham (10:6–20)

Ham had four sons. Cush, the oldest, had descendants who settled in southern Arabia (10:6). The Queen of Sheba, who visited King Solomon, was a descendant of Cush (1 Kings 10:1–13).

Nimrod was a son of Cush (Gen. 10:8). The table of nations breaks at the listing of Nimrod to give a fuller description of what he was like and what he did. He is described as both *a mighty one in the earth and a mighty hunter* (10:8, 9). These titles suggest that Nimrod was both a skilled hunter and an influential leader. He gathered people to follow him and built major cities (Nineveh and Babel) that became the hubs for the superpowers that would one day take Israel and Judah into captivity (Assyria and Babylon). Nimrod's name probably means *Let us rebel!* Some speculate that his name is a reflection of Cush's attitude toward the curse God put on the family of his father, Ham (9:25–27). Perhaps Cush even trained his son to lead a rebellion against God to try to thwart God's curse on his descendants. It is plausible that Nimrod was the leader of the worldwide rebellion at the tower of Babel described in Genesis 11.

ASK: Describe the level of arrogance it takes to think one can thwart God's plans. (Q4)

Mizraim, the second oldest son of Ham, and his descendants settled in northeastern Africa in what became known as Egypt (10:6). The Philistines are descendants from Mizraim's son Casluhim (10:14). Canaan, another son of Mizraim, settled for the most part in the land God would later promise to Israel (10:15–19).

READ: Genesis 9:26. **ASK:** What did God say the descendants of Canaan would do for the descendants of Shem, specifically the Israelites? (Q5) *They would serve them.*

ASK: What role did God play in the Canaanites' decision to settle in what would become the Promised Land? (Q6) *God sovereignly directed the descendants of Canaan to settle in the Promised Land. The Canaanites believed they were making their own decision when they settled there. They did not know that centuries later their descendants would be invaded by descendants of Shem.*

The descendants of Ham ended up powerful but evil people. We could conclude that it would have been best if Ham had never boarded the ark with his father Noah. Think of all the trouble that Israel would have been spared by not having the Egyptians, Philistines, Canaanites, and the Babylonians in existence!

READ: Joshua 23:11–13. **ASK:** Why did God allow the descendants of Ham to become both so powerful and so evil? (Q7) *So He could show His own power by defeating them and so He could sovereignly use them to chasten Israel when they disobeyed.*

Israel's enemies always served a purpose in God's plan. They thought they were acting independently to oppose God's people. But God was the One working behind the scenes. He in essence set the table for Israel's history by sending the nations to strategic locations where they would multiply and be ready to be used in His dealings with Israel.

God is still working in the affairs of the nations of the world. The books of Daniel and Revelation talk about nations that will be located exactly where God wants them for His yet-future dealings with Israel during the Tribulation.

C. Descendants of Shem (10:21–32)

Five sons of Shem are listed in the table of nations. Notably, Asshur (10:22) and his descendants settled in Assyria. They apparently lived in the cities founded by Nimrod, the grandson of Ham.

Peleg, a great, great grandson of Shem, is the other notable descendant of Shem. His name means *division*. The note that appears along with his listing says that *in his days was the earth divided* (10:25). This is probably a reference to what happened at the tower of Babel. If so, it provides the connection between Genesis 10 and 11. The account of the tower of Babel, then, tells us how all the nations of Genesis 10 became scattered.

II. Spreading of the Nations (11:1–9)

A. The people's pride (11:1–4)

The account of the tower of Babel begins with the fact that the whole world had one language (11:1).

ASK: What would have been some advantages of having one language? (Q8) *A leader like Nimrod could control people much more easily. Ideas and propaganda could be spread swiftly. Joint projects and goals could be completed effectively and efficiently. Worship of deity could be uniform. There would be few cultural barriers to overcome.*

The universal language at the time of Babel was doing what we would expect it to do. It was bringing the people groups together for common goals. However, those goals were not godly. Even the fact that the people were *together* was a problem because it violated God's directive to fill the earth (9:1).

The people of the earth journeyed to Shinar and settled there (11:2). Shinar is where Nimrod built part of his kingdom (10:10). As already mentioned, he is probably the leader in this rebellion against God, though his name is not mentioned in the immediate context.

Beginning in verse 1 there is a chiastic structure that goes through verse 9 and is worth noting. Chiastic structure is a literary device to emphasize contrast. In the case of Genesis 11, the contrast is between the people of Babel and God. This structure emphasizes that everything the people determined to do (11:3, 4) was prevented by God (11:6–9). The account turns on verse 5 when God comes down to see what the people have been up to.

RESOURCE: Display resource 6 to show the chiastic literary device. Use the resource as you teach through the passage.

Like the pre-Flood generation, the descendants of Noah saw no reason to honor God. Instead of honoring Him, they honored themselves. They wanted to make a name for themselves (11:3, 4). They reasoned that by constructing a metropolis and a skyscraper, they could glory in their achievements.

READ: Genesis 11:3, 4. **ASK:** What parallels do you see between the attitude that motivated the building of the city and the tower of Babel and the attitudes that prevail in society today? (Q9) *Both sets of attitudes are humanistic, centrally focused on man. In both there is a denial of the true God and a belief that one has the right to dictate his own life and determine what is right and wrong.*

The tower builders directly rebelled against God's desires. They even said that they wanted to stay together lest they be *scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth* (11:4). So they were driven by their own ambitions and their desire to thumb their noses at God's commands. Apparently they believed they would be successful and that God would be exposed as weak and unauthoritative.

Given the purposeful rebellion against God, the tower of Babel must have been a religious temple with a platform at the top from which the builders could worship the stars instead of the true God. Ancient ziggurats found around the globe were probably modeled after the tower of Babel. In fact, most pagan religions have their roots in the religion of Babylon. The deities of pagan Roman, Greek, and Egyptian religions have been traced back to Babylon's original array of gods.

The heavens were important to the people of Babel (11:4). Their tower connected them with the stars and provided a high place to worship their gods. The signs of the zodiac may have originated with the pagan religion of Babel. In later history, the zodiac became a common theme in paganism all over the globe. It still is.

The ambition of the tower builders to make a name for themselves was evident in their religion. They wanted the power to create their own gods. They did not want to be answerable to their Creator.



The builders at Babel baked their bricks in order to make them strong enough to build a high tower. Sun-dried bricks would not have stood up under the pressures created by the height of the tower.

READ: Romans 1:18–20. ASK: What message do the stars communicate?

(Q10) *They reveal God's eternal power and divine nature.*

READ: Psalm 19:1–4. ASK: How effectively do the heavens communicate God's glory to humanity? (Q11) *The heavens are so filled with wonder and amazement that no one could possibly miss the message of God's glory in the heavens.*

No one could be excused from not knowing God, because God reveals Himself in His creation. David even said that there is no *language* in which creation's voice is not heard (Ps. 19:3). So those at Babel could read the message of God's glory in the heavens no matter what language they spoke. But instead of seeking to know the Creator, they suppressed what they knew of Him and worshiped the creation (Rom. 1:18, 23).

B. God's judgment (11:5–9)

The builders of Babel went blithely on their way as though God were too distant, too disinterested, or too deficient in power to intervene. But God *came down* to look at the tower (11:5). The irony is obvious: people elevated themselves, shooting their tower of rebellion into the sky, but the tower was so low that God had to come down to see it.

We don't know how tall the tower of Babel was. The modern Burj Dubai building stands an astounding 2,717 feet tall. It is located in the city state of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates on the Persian Gulf. No doubt the tower of Babel did not reach that height. But even Burj Dubai's height is relatively small in comparison to God's creation. The building is dwarfed by Mount Everest (29,029 feet) and countless other mountains. But the earth itself is dwarfed by the sun, which is dwarfed by the size of the Milky Way Galaxy. Yet even the Milky Way Galaxy is small in comparison to the universe, visible as a mere dot or even not at all from across the universe. In other words, the tower of Babel was microscopic and inconsequential in size in the scope of the entire universe.

ASK: To what might you compare the tower of Babel to demonstrate its smallness? The tower of Babel was to God as what is to you? (Q12)

No wonder God had to come *down* to see the tower and the metropolis built by the residents of Babel. He was not impressed with the man-made structure in the midst of His awesome, unfathomable creation. The tower was a mere pimple on the earth.

Obviously it was not the size of the tower and metropolis that drew God into the scene; it was the people's wickedness and pride that captured God's attention. He knew that the tower and metropolis were just the beginning of the people's rebellion against Him. The building of the tower and the ongoing building of the city would make them more deeply entrenched in their rebellion and more brazen in how they displayed it. God saw the world headed for the same evil seen in the pre-Flood world if He did not do something to break up their unity (11:6).

The focus of God's judgment was the common language the people shared.

God later showed Abram the stars and connected them to His omnipotence and omnipresence (Gen. 15:5).

If you used the tower-building activity in the opening, use the learners' towers to point out how ridiculous the tower of Babel must have appeared to God.

Like the tower of Babel, the Burj Dubai has a religious connection. There is a mosque on the 158th floor of the building, the highest place of worship in the world at the time of its building.

READ: Genesis 11:6. **ASK:** What are some severer judgments God could have justly brought on the people? (Q13) *God would have been just in destroying the rebellious through any means but a flood.*

How foolish the inhabitants of Babel were. They thought themselves invincible and unstoppable. They believed they had foiled God by completing their tower. Yet God had not been foiled at all. He still had His infinite power to use in His judgment of the people. God showed restraint and mercy. He didn't strike down even one person. Instead, He judged them all in a way that was pain free (11:7).

God said, *let us go down* (11:7). The first person plural pronoun points out the different persons in the Trinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit agreed together that something had to be done. They confused the people's language so the people would not be able to understand each other's speech.

ASK: What problems arise when people don't speak the same language? (Q14) *The leaders lose their authority. The hierarchy breaks down. Communication of ideas becomes impossible. Unity gives way to division.*

Imagine a leader like Nimrod trying to keep his city together when most of the citizens no longer understood him. He would have sounded odd and maybe even ridiculous to them.

ASK: What is your reaction when you hear someone talking in a language you have never heard before? (Q15)

ASK: How much of a connection do you think you could have with the person? (Q16)

The confused languages destroyed the *people* structure, not the tower. The tower stood for who knows how many more years. But the unity that built it never recovered. So the people stopped building the city; and at the Lord's prompting, they scattered abroad over the face of the earth (11:8).

The building site was called *Babel*, a word with two meanings. The Hebrew word means confusion. To the people the word meant *the gate of God*. The people saw their city and tower as a gateway to God, but God said that it was the place of confusion.

ASK: What did God show the people about their ability to define and control Him? (Q17) *He showed that they are powerless before Him even when they are unified around a common rebellion.*

The judgment at Babel is often seen as not as important as the judgment at the Flood. But mankind's sin was just as serious. God had to intervene to address mankind's pride and to thwart their plans for an even more entrenched rebellion against Him.

III. Continuation of the Line of Shem (11:10–30)

In Genesis 11:10–30 the writer, Moses, revisited the line of Shem, the line God had chosen as the one through which the Redeemer would eventually come (3:15). Most of the line is a repetition of the list in 10:21–30. However, the chapter 11 genealogy lists only firstborns and goes to ten generations instead of just five. Hence the names Terah and Abram are included. As becomes apparent with chapter 12, Abram is the man God called to follow Him. God made a covenant with Abram, thus beginning the history of God's people.

ASK: What point do you think God was making by re-emphasizing the line of Shem immediately after the account of Babel? (Q18) *God is sovereign over rebellious humanity. He can stop their plans. But God's plan for a Seed to crush Satan's head continued on without interruption.*

READ: Genesis 11:30. **ASK:** What piece of information makes it seem as if God's plan was derailed? (Q19) *Sarai's barrenness.*

God sets up some tense years for Abram because of Sarai's barrenness. But God proved to be sovereign and faithful—lessons that Abram learned as he walked with God and waited on Him.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Whose Plan?

ASK: What will characterize the life of someone who lives as if he is in control of his life? (Q20) *He will be selfish with his time and money; he will despair when life doesn't go his way; he will be controlling and demanding of others; he will be impatient.*

ASK: What will characterize the life of someone who recognizes God's control of his life? (Q21) *He will have a well-developed prayer life; he will be humble and service-oriented; he will seek to know and do God's will through His Word.*

ASK: Whose plan are you following, your own or God's? What evidence from your life supports your answer? (Q22)

Challenge your learners to use the demise of the tower of Babel as a reminder of their need to respond to God with humility and submissiveness. Have the learners take a block from the Getting Started activity and use a permanent marker to write a short statement on the block to remind them of God's sovereignty over humanity. They can keep the block in a place that will remind them of this lesson.

Praise God's Sovereignty

The line of Shem eventually led to Christ, Who then died in our place on the

Responding to God & His Plan	8.
1. Understand and enjoy God's revelation of Himself through creation.	9.
2. Recognize Christ as the only solution to sin.	10.
3. Take sin seriously and share God's grace.	11.
4. Submit to God's sovereign plan for your life.	12.
5.	13.
6.	
7.	

Genesis
GOD'S PLAN BEGINS

cross so that we might be saved from our sins. Christ also makes it possible for us to walk with God as we ought. We should praise God for His sovereignty over thousands of years to bring about salvation that we now can enjoy. (Q23)

Summary and Memory Verse

RESOURCE: Display resource 1. Add a summary statement for lesson 4 or use the following: Submit to God's sovereign plan for your life.

Encourage learners to memorize Job 42:2. Give them an opportunity to say the verse in class next week.