



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

FEBRUARY 09 2019

reaching toward
heaven

Scripture Story: Genesis 11:1-9.

Commentary: *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 10.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Few stories in the Bible capture the imagination as does the Tower of Babel narrative. It arrests our attention for several reasons. The sheer audacity that a group of people would set upon building a structure that would literally reach into the heavens is not spectacular. What is audacious is the reason for their project.

The Babel builders decided to pursue their project in clear violation of God’s pronouncements. God had promised that He would never destroy the world by flood again, but they chose to erect an insurance policy in case He later changed His mind. They also built the tower to circumvent God’s second command to disperse throughout the world.

The signature lesson we can take away from the Babel episode is one of obedience to God. When God tells us to do something, no matter how much it goes against our own way, we are to obey. This lesson explores the concept of obedience to God and seeks to get students to consider tearing down any Babels that they have erected in their own lives. As you teach, be on the lookout for other themes in this story, such as the power of unity.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Learn about the importance of God’s commands to His people. (*Know*)
- Understand that obedience to God’s directives is the only route to peace of mind in the Christian life. (*Feel*)

- Be given an opportunity to prioritize God’s voice and His commands in their lives. (*Respond*)

III. EXPLORE

- Peer pressure
- Obedience
- Ambition
- Humility

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the *What Do You Think?* section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Who doesn’t admire the obedience a dog shows to its master? Archibald Rutledge, first poet laureate of South Carolina, wrote that one day he met a man whose dog had just been killed in a forest fire. Heartbroken, the man explained to Rutledge how it had happened.

Because he worked outdoors, he often took his dog with him. That morning, he left the animal in a clearing and gave him a command to stay and watch his lunch bucket while he went into the forest. His faithful friend understood, for that’s exactly what he did.

Then a fire started in the woods, and soon the

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blaze spread to the spot where the dog had been left. But he didn't move. He stayed right where he was, in perfect obedience to his master's word. With tearful eyes, the dog's owner said, "I always had to be careful what I told him to do, because I knew he would do it."

Ask your students the following: How do you think God wants us to obey Him? Have the students explain their responses.*

*Taken from *Our Daily Bread*.

II. TEACHING THE LESSON

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

The Babel builders were an ambitious lot. They dreamed of the greatness that their famous tower would bring them. They were also selfish. They wanted to be delivered from the destruction of a second flood, but the rest of the world was not their concern.

There was also an inordinate amount of peer pressure intoxicating everyone. From the outside looking in, it would appear that there were no dissenters among the group, but this is not so. Ellen White lets us know that even among this disobedient people there were faithful followers of God who refused to go along with the plan. This may have been one reason that God simply confounded the language of the builders to stop the project.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

- Who are the main actors in this story?
- What is the setting of this biblical narrative?
- What does this story say about crowds and "group think"?
- What parts of the story are key to understanding it? (*Underline* them.)
- What aspects of the story are new to you? (Place an *arrow* beside them.)
- What emotions, actions, and adjectives enrich this story? (Draw a *rectangle* around them.)
- What are two main lessons that you got from the reading of this story?
- What words or phrases most capture the various emotions of this story? (*Circle* them.)
- Is there another biblical narrative that demonstrates the level of arrogance displayed by the Babel builders?

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share in your own words.

The building of the Tower of Babel in clear contravention of God's commands happened several hundred years after the Flood. Other notable facts:

1. The Tower of Babel story seems to have taken place in Babylon, a city in what was then

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson. Invite students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Key Text**

Invite the students to share the Key Text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Flashlight**

Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book Patriarchs and Prophets. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**

Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that spoke most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.

Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.



Tips for Top-notch Teaching

Kinesthetic Learners

In every class there are students who require more stimulation than others. These students are doodling while others are listening. They are moving, talking, etc., when you no doubt want their undivided attention. To hold the attention of this group, you'll need to include at least one activity that stimulates these bodily-kinesthetic learners.

In this lesson, you may want to collect a group of newspapers and magazines. Distribute them to the class. Then ask class members to find objects that display people's pride and arrogance (i.e., cars, homes, beautiful friends or partners, money, etc.). These modern-day items are not unlike the tower erected by the inhabitants of Babel, which was an object of their pride and arrogance.

When they find such objects, have them tear or cut the objects out and assemble them in one pile. Have each class member share one or two objects from their pile and how people use that object as a source of pride.

RABBI 101

Mesopotamia, and what is today Iraq. The ancient peoples of this region were known to build massive structures and tall temple platforms called ziggurats. It appears that building and construction was simply in their blood.

2. It is estimated today that there are 4,000 to 5,000 different languages in the world. In Genesis 11:1 the Bible notes: "The whole world had one language and a common speech" (NIV). Many biblical scholars believe that our current plethora of languages is a result of God confounding the language of the builders at Babel. Of course, many others believe that this explanation is too simplistic.
3. In the statement below, Ellen G. White sheds light on why these builders assembled in the plain of Shinar:

"For a time the descendants of Noah continued to dwell among the mountains where the ark had rested. As their numbers increased, apostasy soon led to division. Those who desired to forget their Creator and to cast off

the restraint of His law felt a constant annoyance from the teaching and example of their God-fearing associates, and after a time they decided to separate from the worshipers of God. Accordingly they journeyed to the plain of Shinar, on the banks of the river Euphrates. They were attracted by the beauty of the situation and the fertility of the soil, and upon this plain they determined to make their home" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 118).

4. Many Bible readers lament the seeming lack of grace in Old Testament narratives. In the Tower of Babel story we see a God who gives a command that is disobeyed. In fact, the folks disobeying God build a huge tower openly flouting His words. Yet God does not destroy them, though He had every right to. God simply confounds their language, thereby stopping the building process. Then He disperses them throughout the world to repopulate and replenish it. What does this tell us about God's grace?

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Ask each student to say a silent personal prayer to God by finishing the following statement: "Dear God, I need Your power to help me overcome _____." Ask the students to continue to talk to God about the challenge with which they may be struggling.

Close with a prayer thanking God for answering each student's prayer.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

If the Babel builders hadn't been interrupted, they would have built a tower unlike anything the world had ever seen. However, God knew that their tower was meant to replace Him as the source of their safety and protection.

Not only that, the descendants of Canaan wanted greatness that belonged only to God. We can rest assured that when self-importance is cherished above a clear directive from God, God will intervene to make His will known.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 10. A special adaptation of *Patriarchs and Prophets* has been created by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.



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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Genesis 11:1-9.

Commentary: *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 10.

reaching toward heaven



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flashlight

“There were some among them, however, who feared the Lord, but who had been deceived by the pretensions of the ungodly and drawn into their schemes. For the sake of these faithful ones the Lord delayed His judgments and gave the people time to reveal their true character” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 123).

keytext

“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.’”

(Genesis 11:4, NIV)

what do you think?

Do you ever try to be God? Complete the following statement with one or more statements from the list below: I play God when I . . .

- a. tell on a friend who does something wrong.
- b. skip time alone with God.
- c. make important decisions after talking with friends.
- d. ask God to guide my future.
- e. eat healthful foods.
- f. don't listen to my parents.
- g. do my homework.

did you know?

The people of Babel didn't just come up with the idea to build a tower on their own. No, they had an instigator. His name was Nimrod, ruler of the nation, and a man whom the Bible refers to as a "mighty hunter" (Genesis 10:8-10, NIV). The great historian Josephus wrote: "Now it was Nimrod who excited them to such an affront and contempt of God."

there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. 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."

(Genesis 11:1-9, NIV)

INTO THE STORY

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

"They said to each other, 'Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly.' They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. 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.'

"But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. 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. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.'

"So the Lord scattered them from



OUT OF THE STORY

Who are the main actors in this story?

What parts of the story are key to understanding it? (*Underline* them.)

What aspects of the story are new to you? (Place an *arrow* beside them.)

What emotions, actions, or adjectives enrich this story? (Draw a *rectangle* around them.)

The builders of Babel had harnessed two of the greatest powers known to humans: effective communication and unity. Can you give any modern-day examples of groups that communicate effectively and are unified in doing something wrong?

To whom or what was the tower a monument? What types of monuments to themselves might people produce or create today?

How do we know the difference between using the gifts God gives us as monuments to ourselves or as monuments to God? (See 1 Cor. 13:1-7)

What are two main lessons that you got from reading this story?

punch lines

“Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain” (**Psalm 127:1, NIV**).

“Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him” (**Psalm 34:8, NIV**).

“Blessed are those who listen to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway” (**Proverbs 8:34, NIV**).

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (**Colossians 3:1, NIV**).

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (**2 Timothy 2:15, NIV**).

“Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like” (**James 1:23, 24, NIV**).

“If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them” (**James 4:17, NIV**).

further insight

“When Christ took human nature upon Him, He bound humanity to Himself by a tie of love that can never be broken by any power save the choice of man himself.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 73.

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Sabbath

Read Isaiah 14:12-15.

The *What Do You Think?* section of this week's lesson challenged you to identify times in your life when you may play God by the choices you make. In what way were the builders of the Tower of Babel playing God? Explain.

They were not the first beings to try to play God. From today's reading identify three actions and behaviors exhibited by Satan in his effort to kill God and take His throne. (Hint: Notice the number of I's in Satan's statements.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Sunday

Read Psalm 127:1.

Read the *Into the Story* passage for this week. Toward the end of the passage God is seen taking a very central role in the project undertaken by the builders. What was it that caught God's attention? Was God worried that the Babel builders were going to succeed in their act of defiance? What specifically moved Him to confuse their ability to communicate?

Monday

Read Genesis 11:4.

Read the *Key Text* for this week's lesson again. Do you notice anything peculiar about how the people arrived at the idea to build a great city with a megatower? Whom did they confer with about their plans? Do you ever launch out to do something "great" and forget to ask for God's input?

The Bible says that they wanted to build a great city and erect a huge tower "so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4, NIV). Great plans made without God are great plans doomed to failure.

List two goals you hope to achieve in the future. Pause now and ask God to tell you if these are the right goals for you to pursue. Trust God to answer your request. Watch for His responses each day. Through His Word, other Christians, and circumstances.

1. _____
2. _____

Tuesday

Read Matthew 27:11-23.

In the *Flashlight* section Ellen White is quoted from the book *Patriarchs and Prophets* in which she states that there were faithful believers among the rebellious and disobedient people who were building the tower. Some who assembled to erect the tower were sincerely mistaken in what they were doing.

In today's reading, who was being swept away in a tide of wrongdoing? What does Jesus' mock trial tell you about the dangers of following the crowd?

If you could witness to a friend who is about to join a gang or follow the wrong crowd, what would you say to them?

Wednesday

Read the scriptures in the *Punch Lines* section. Psalm 34:8, NIV encourages us to "taste and see that the Lord is good." How can you "taste" God? Why does the psalmist David ask us to taste God first before seeing how good He is? Don't you like to see your food first before tasting it? If someone asks you to close your eyes before they feed you a piece of some food, they are asking you to trust them. To experience God we must trust Him and exercise faith in Him.

Several texts in the *Punch Lines* section deal with obedience to God's Word. Choose one of these scriptures that specifically captured your attention. Explain what this scripture means to you.

Thursday

Read James 4:17.

After reading about the Tower of Babel, list two ways in which the same attitude is seen in society today. For instance, people who store up huge amounts of money for themselves while other people who are in need perish.

1. _____
2. _____

Now list two ways that you can care for those in need in your community, church, or school.

1. _____
2. _____

Do one act of caring for someone today. Say a prayer for that person.

Friday

Read Colossians 3:1.

By right, God could have destroyed the builders of Babel for disobeying His direct command to scatter throughout the earth and populate it. Instead, God simply confused their language and scattered them Himself, thereby allowing them another chance to obey Him.

When was the last time that God gave you a second chance? Was it a test for which you failed to study? Did you somehow escape punishment for something wrong you did or something right you failed to do? Why not thank God right now for His grace toward you?

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this week's reading*

Patriarchs and Prophets (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 10.

**Beginning of the End* is a special adaptation of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rB09s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.