

***International Bible Lesson Commentary***  
***Genesis 11:1-9***

***International Bible Lessons***  
**Sunday, September 29, 2013**  
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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, September 29, 2013**, is from **Genesis 11:1-9**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* (formerly, *Bible Lesson Forum*) below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further** discuss the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the *International Bible Lesson Commentary* website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught and in *The Oklahoman* newspaper.

***International Bible Lesson Commentary***

**Genesis 11:1-9**

**(Genesis 11:1) Now the whole earth had one language and the same words.**

God had said to Noah, “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” and “abound on the earth and multiply in it” (Genesis 9:1, 7). As they multiplied, they all

spoke the same language and had the same words for what they named and for how they expressed actions and thoughts. When the people on earth had only one language, they could easily cooperate and make plans for good or for evil.

**(Genesis 11:2) And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.**

As they multiplied, they migrated and stayed together as one large group that looked for larger areas of land in which to live, raise crops, and enlarge their herds. Their area to the east may have been totally abandoned, or their area simply enlarged as they moved west. The Bible does not tell us everything that we might like to know. However, we know they all spoke one language, so business and sharing thoughts would have been easy. The land of Shinar is probably Babylonia, probably an area near or within modern Iran and Iraq.

**(Genesis 11:3) And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar.**

Perhaps they had built with bricks where they had come from in the east, or perhaps they had only used stone for building where they came from; we do not know, but it appears that building with brick and

mortar was a new invention for them. In Shinar, they chose to make bricks for building. Bitumen (perhaps tar) is a product of petroleum, which they used to hold the bricks together as they built. Petroleum is still produced and shipped from this area. By this time, their technology had developed so construction did not need to be by either natural or cut stones. People could now make their own building materials from sand to make bricks, and tar to construct homes, walls for a city, or towers.

**(Genesis 11:4) Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.”**

The descendants of Noah disobeyed God, “who had told them to fill the whole earth,” when they began building their tower (see Genesis 9:1, 7). They wanted to build their tower specifically to avoid obeying God, to avoid being “scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” Instead of consulting God in how best to use their technology as they obeyed Him, they chose to use their technology and building skills to make a name for themselves instead of to honor God. The tower could easily become an object of worship or an object built to display the arrogance of humankind.

**(Genesis 11:5) The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built.**

The Bible shows that people can do many great and marvelous things because God created humankind in His image. Still, people are so small in comparison to the great Creator of all that God comes down from His place on high. God saw from on high what they were doing, so God “came down” to their level. God “came down” to become involved in what they were doing. God “comes down” whenever He works in human history. Jesus “came down” to earth in human flesh to accomplish the will of God. “Mortals,” people with a limited lifespan, built the city and the tower without consulting the Immortal God, Who will never die.

**(Genesis 11:6) And the LORD said, “Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.**

As we look back in time for the past 5000 years or so, nothing humankind does or invents should surprise us, for God made humankind in His image and God said, “nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.” Some will use new technology for evil and some will use new technology for good. Having one language can make the development of technology easier and faster for good or for evil. God

wanted to “slow down” people’s ability to do and invent new ways of doing evil. Confusing people’s language would accomplish this purpose. The great flood had not changed the moral nature of humankind. That would not happen until after Jesus Christ came into the world.

**(Genesis 11:7) Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.”**

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit chose to confuse human language or create different languages to interfere with people’s ability to cooperate in doing evil. If they could not understand each other, they would develop different cultures using the words that were common in their different language groups. Only after the coming of Jesus the Messiah could God change the moral and spiritual nature of people through filling them with the indwelling Holy Spirit, Who helped different language groups understand the gospel on the Day of Pentecost.

**(Genesis 11:8) So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.**

The Lord scattered the people abroad because the people disobeyed God and refused to scatter themselves abroad as God had commanded (so they could fill the whole earth). They not only refused to

obey, but they invented some ways (building a high tower in a city) to try to assure themselves that they could disobey God and stay together. The Bible shows that no one can disobey God indefinitely without suffering the consequences, either by natural causes, or from the enforcement of the laws of human government, or from God intervening to stop rebellion and enforce His laws as a part of His government.

**(Genesis 11:9) Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.**

God could have used a variety of means to discipline humankind for their rebellion, but God chose to use the best and least severe and painful discipline that would also achieve His purpose that people “fill the earth.” God’s way did not imply or indicate that creativity and the development of technology by human beings was wrong. His discipline indicated that the development and use of technology contrary to the loving purposes, laws, and will of God was wrong. The place was called Babel from which we get the name Babylon and Babylonia. Sometimes people will say, “Quit babbling,” quit talking nonsense. The English word “babbling” comes from the word “Babel.”

## **Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. What are some of the benefits when everyone speaks the same language in a group or nation?
2. What had God wanted the people to do that they refused to do when they built their city?
3. What did they do that indicated their cultural development? Was their cultural development wrong?
4. What did the people say that indicates they were no longer a God-centered people?
5. What did God say that revealed something about the way God made people?

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