



Tower of Babel, by Pieter the Elder Brueghel (1515–1569)

The unity of the human race was lost.

We now come to the very last event that the Book of Genesis records for the period called prehistory. In Genesis 11:1–9 we read the story of the tower of Babel. This story symbolizes humanity’s loss of unity and the development of different languages.

We read that at first “the whole world spoke the same language, using the same words” (Genesis 11:1). This symbolizes that all human

beings were related. Because they were able to communicate, they could truly act as God’s stewards of the earth. Part of God’s plan for completing the work of creation involved humanity’s spread across the face of the earth. However, human beings feared this. So they decided to resist God’s plan: They would all settle in one place and build a great tower to live in.

The tower that they tried to build looked very much like an ancient structure called a *ziggurat*. A ziggurat is made of a series of smaller and smaller brick platforms, one on top of the other. The biblical writer called the city and the tower that the humans built *Babel*, the Hebrew name for Babylon. Babylon was an ancient city with the most famous ziggurat of all.


In the story the tower was a symbol of human resistance to God’s will. The people who were building it did not trust God. They preferred to do things their way.

God saw what human beings were doing and decided to stop them. He did this by confusing their language. As a result, humans could not work together. All the people could do was babble helplessly at one another. The unity of the human race had been lost.

People often disagree because they do not understand one another. This misunderstanding can lead to suspicion, mistrust, and even open hostility. This


began to happen to the human race after Babel. Humanity began to lose its unity and break up into rival groups.

As the story closes, the process of populating the earth continued as God had planned. Now, however, humans spoke many different languages and developed different ways of living and communicating. Today it is still necessary to respect these differences and to appreciate the dignity that all people possess.

 What do you think this expression means: “They don’t speak the same language”?



WE RESPOND

 As a class produce a talk show. The topic of today’s talk show is: Do the divisions symbolized by the story of the tower of Babel still affect our lives today? Why or why not?