



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

The unity of the human race was lost.

WE GATHER

✝ Lord, help us to live as one world family.

What are some of the causes of divisions in our world today? How can the world be more united?

WE BELIEVE

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 the separation among different groups of people. It 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. They feared being exposed to all sorts of dangers and weakening their ability to defend themselves. 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. On the top of the highest platform stood a temple. Long staircases led up to the various platforms and to the temple. 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 fact we think that this story might be about actual ancient people who built the great ziggurat.

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 understand one another. They could not work together. To explain what happened the biblical writer used a Hebrew word that means *babble*. All people could do was babble helplessly at one another. The biblical writer was suggesting that the unity of the human race had been lost.



🌍 What do you think this expression means: “They don't speak the same language.”

Misunderstandings Begin Sometimes the only reason people disagree is because they do not understand one another. This misunderstanding can lead to suspicion, mistrust, and even open hostility. According to the biblical writer, 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 had developed different ways of living and communicating. Throughout history it has been necessary to respect these differences and to appreciate the dignity that all people possess.

WE RESPOND

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

Each person in the class is to participate in the talk show. Work together to decide who will be the moderator, interviewer, panelists, audience, and reporter.