

confusion

module

6

Consider

The Story so Far...

It all began when the eternal, personal God made everything there is as a perfect paradise. God intentionally made us as personal beings in his image and loves us passionately. But Adam rebelled against God, paradise was lost and evil became a horrific reality.

Continuing the Story...

The evil that began in the Garden of Eden intensifies and accelerates on a downward spiral, until the world rejects God completely. Babel is the place where new languages, cultures, nations and religions began, and it sets the scene for the many religions of the modern world.

Day One: The Axle's Broken...

Some songs are just silly. Here's an old one. Each crazy verse is meant to be sung louder, and faster, than the one before:

*You can't play with my little red wagon
The axle's broken and the wheels are saggin'
Second verse, same as the first
A little bit louder and a little bit worse
You can't play with my little red wagon
The axle's broken and the wheels are saggin' ...
Tenth verse, same as the first...*

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The Genesis story runs a bit like that. From chapter 3 to chapter 11, as one story is piled on top of another, each one becomes a little bit worse. Not good reading... but important reading.

'First verse': Adam and Eve disobey God and bring sin into the world.

'Second verse' (a little bit louder... a little bit worse): the first family on earth is shattered by jealousy, anger, hatred and murder.

'Third verse' (even louder and worse): Lamech's blood-curdling song (Genesis 4:23–24) shows that while society is advancing technologically (Genesis 4:19–22), it's falling apart spiritually and socially! Lamech swears to kill an innocent boy for accidentally wounding him... and he threatens to pay back anyone who crosses him 77 times.

'Fourth verse' (much louder and much worse): society is overflowing with violence and unprecedented evil. So God sends the flood (Genesis 6:5, 11–17).

'Fifth verse' (worse still): after the flood, God told Noah to go and "fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1). But, when the people arrived at Shinar, they refused to budge and decided to make gods of their own (Genesis 11:4). The wheels had well and truly fallen off.

Explore the Bible

Read Genesis 4:8, 23–24; 6:5–7; 9:1; 11:4.

What do these verses tell you about the human race?

Day Two: God of Nations?

National anthems are interesting things. In Britain they sing, “God save the Queen”. In Canada, “God keep our land glorious and free.” In Botswana, “Blessed be this noble land, gift to us from God’s strong hand.” In Fiji and New Zealand they sing to the “God of nations”. But is he?

There was a time when there were no nations (before Babel) – just one large mass of humanity. Rejecting God’s instruction to spread out across the earth (Genesis 9:1, 7), the human race decided to stay put. So, they built a city and a tower designed to frustrate God’s will. They would stay together, living in one place, having one government, easily managing one economy and maintaining one religion. Smart idea – right? No political divisions, no ethnic distinctions, no economic difficulties, no religious differences and no conflicts! What could be wrong with that?

Well, in a perfect world with perfect people, there would be nothing wrong with that. But the world is not a perfect place. Ever since Adam sinned, it’s been a very broken place, with very broken people. And, when broken, sinful people take total control of the world, things go horribly wrong.

So God caused the human family to scatter and separate into distinct people groups... groups that would develop different languages, values, cultures and ways of thinking. And, as people settled and claimed their respective land areas, each group became a distinct nation.

But God remained God... *the same God*... and still *the only God*. Yet, as Creator, he retained ownership of the whole planet (Psalm 24:1).

Explore the Bible

Read Acts 17:24–29.

Does the God of nations want to be found by every person?

Day Three: Some Words about Words...

In her book *The First Word*,¹⁰ Christine Kenneally reminds us that words are strange things. She's right!

They're little more than bursts of air. They come out of our mouths as a series of puffs and then disappear into thin air. We can't see them or touch them. But it's impossible to imagine life without them. No friendly chats. No songs. No poems. No explanations. No advice. No warnings. No invitations. We live and breathe words... that's part of being human. And words are such powerful things. The smallest words can hurt or they can heal. Words can make people love us more but one careless word can make them love us less.

It's hard to imagine something more important than language. But where did it all start? The Bible begins with God, Adam and Eve talking together. Community is about culture and the core of culture is common language. And that's the way the human family hung together – they had a common language.

But when the human family refused to follow God's instruction to "fill the earth", God intervened and brought confusion into their language. Whenever someone tried to communicate with their neighbour, it created great confusion. People misunderstood each other... so much and so often... that they ended up in continual conflict. Confusion turned to chaos and chaos turned to conflict! There was no option. They would have to separate from each other and live apart in peace.

Isn't it interesting? The human family could resist God's will (to spread out and fill the earth) but they couldn't resist his purpose (God made them spread out). Perhaps that's the way it always is.

Explore the Bible

Read Genesis 11:1–7.

How did different languages come about?

¹⁰ Christine Kenneally, *The First Word: The Search for the Origins of Language* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2007).

Day Four: Different Races?

Remember the Beatles? Their hit song *Eleanor Rigby* had this line: “All the *lonely* people, where do they all come from?” Good question. And what about all the *different* people? Where do they all come from? Asians, Latins, Eskimoes, Caucasians, Arabs, Polynesians – how did it all happen?

We frequently talk about different ‘races’. But the Bible actually talks about only one race... the human race (Acts 17:26). Sure, there are different ‘people groups’ – but, there is only one race. Despite the so-called ‘racial’ differences, we can fall in love, intermarry and create bicultural families. Why? Because we all belong to the one big human family.

But how did these differences come about? Imagine humanity all together – one very big gene pool! As the human race split up, the gene pool reduced for each group. It’s a bit like dealing a deck of cards. Each hand has a completely different mix. And when humanity split up, each group ended up with a slightly different genetic mix. And hey presto – ethnicity begins – all the physical characteristics that make our world such a diverse and interesting place! And different climates and other local factors all made impacts as well.

But these ethnic differences are really quite minor – compared to the unity of the human race. Basically, we’re one people. And that’s why racism is so wrong! Every person is ‘sacred’ simply because they’re human! The image of God is embedded in our humanity – not in our ethnicity! It’s a serious mistake for us to maximise the differences within the human race. There is, after all, only one world, one human family – and one God.

Explore the Bible

Read Genesis 11:8–9 and Acts 17:26.

How could understanding that we are one human family help overcome racism?

Day Five: Different Religions?

Babel is a very significant story in one more way. It's the place of some fairly big beginnings. It's where languages began, nations began, ethnic people groups began and it's where different religions began.

Up until the time of Babel, the biblical picture seems fairly simple. There was one world, one human family, one language – and one God. The God who made the world, ruled the world. Sure, people increasingly 'thumbed their noses' at him, but he was still mankind's only supreme being. It really was a case of one world, one people and one God... until Babel.

When the human family stood against God and built a tower reaching to the heavens, they were actually taking authority into their own hands. It was their way of saying God would no longer have authority over them. They would raise themselves to the heavens, be their own authority and set their own rules.

Then, when at Babel, the human race separated off into their various people groups, each of these began to create their own religions. It's interesting that they didn't declare themselves atheists. Maybe that's because they knew that, at the core of each of their beings, they were incurably religious. It certainly seems that way.

Explore the Bible

Read Romans 1:20–23, 25.

With what did the people in these verses replace God?

Explore

Discussion starter

Q – What excites you the most about different cultures?

Q – What were some of the highlights from the readings?

Reading

Read Genesis 11:1–9.

Volunteers may like to read out loud a part or all of this story.

Q – What do you think it would be like to have all people united, in one world, under one God?

Q – What do you think is the most significant thing about this story?

View

Video episode 6 – confusion

Five things that God wants us to know about Babel:

1. At Babel humanity God’s purpose.
 2. At Babel God confused the of humanity.
 3. After Babel different languages led to different
 4. After Babel different locations caused different
and different
 5. After Babel different cultures caused different
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Discuss

Questions I have

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see www.longstoryshort.co/confusion

