



This Sunday we were in the account of Noah's sons (10v1-11v9), which consists of a table (10v1-32) and a tower (11v1-9) which record two different perspectives on the one event of God's post-Flood people spreading and filling the earth.

### 1 – Humans spread through God's grace (10v1-32)

Just as God has commanded in 9v1, we see that God's new people grew, spread out and filled the earth. In this loose genealogy we are told of the individuals, tribes and nations that descended from Noah's sons, and of their lands, languages and jobs. We finish with a map of the known world in Israel's time, with 70 nations (the biblical number for completeness) filling it. Though there are warning signs of what is to come (as we hear of the Egyptians, Babylon, Nineveh, the Canaanites), this seems by and large to be a good story of God, through his common and ordinary grace, growing and spreading a new descendants-of-Noah people.

### 2 – Humans scattered because of their sin (11v1-9)

Though we are given few details, this episode probably occurred near the beginning of the spread of chapter 10. In their fear, insecurity and pride in their social unity and technological accomplishment, the people decide to build a city with a heaven-reaching skyscraper, that they might make a name for themselves and avoid being scattered (v4). In his mercy, God limits their ambition by confusing what had enabled them to engage in this project – their shared language – and then punishes them by scattering them across the earth (v6-9), just as they had feared, and he had promised and commanded.

We're left with a question: was God's people spreading across the earth a good thing – the result of God's kindness as his people obeyed him – or was it a bad thing – a judgment against their sin? And how are we to view the diversity, difference and division in the world today? Is it a sign of God's grace or of his judgment?

We considered that Genesis 10-11's first Israelite readers would probably have felt:

- **reassured:** God keeps his promises! He grew many world-filling nations out of Noah and his sons, just as he had said he would. Their weak nation sat right in the centre of this world map, perfectly positioned to bring God's blessing to the nations around them. God does not allow powerful enemies who defy him (eg. Egypt, Canaan, Babylon) to succeed.
- **warned:** Those who settled at Shinar were not yet enemy nations, Israel were not exempt from God's indictment in 8v21, and fear and pride are not far off, unfamiliar sins. Israel, too, were prone to fear and pride, and ultimately were scattered because they failed to be a witness among the nations. Wonderfully, Jesus was the perfect Israel. He died that people of every nation, tribe and language might come to God. In Pentecost and through his church has begun to reverse Babel. He has promised that we will all unite around his throne to forever make his name great.

Here are a few questions you might want to use with your group...

1. How do we see both our world and the church struggle to know what to do with diversity, difference and division?
2. Why do we need chapter 10 to make sense of 11v1-9? What light does it shed? And why is it worth reading passages like chapter 10, and not just skipping over them to find the next narrative?
3. How would this passage have been both reassuring and a warning to its first Israelite readers? How is both reassuring to and a warning for us?
4. How do Jesus and the gospel provide an answer to the hard things we read in these chapters? What is the gospel solution to the problems we see here and face today?
5. What difference might all this make to our Monday morning lives? How might it encourage us, convince us of Christ's love and greatness, and lead us to love him and others better?