

GROWING IN THE GOSPEL

PENTECOST: REVERSING BABEL

The First Pentecost Brought People Together Thus Reversing
the Tower of Babel

Michael Harvey Koplitz

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Published by Michael H. Koplitz

ISBN-13: 978-1719397193

ISBN-10: 1719397198

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Introduction

At the Tower of Babel, the LORD separated the people of the world into seventy nations and confused them by introducing seventy different languages. This was done because of the wickedness of the people and their belief that if they built a tower which reached into Heaven that they could become god. The LORD had to demonstrate his sovereignty by destroying the tower and insuring that this sin would not happen again.

Jesus Christ was sent to unify people. A part of Jesus' mission was to bring people together into a new family of God. By bringing people together under the Holy Spirit they could worship God and always pay reverence. The first Pentecost was the historical event when God started the process of bringing the nations of the world together.

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The first Pentecost was the reversing of the Tower of Babel event.

The main differences between the Greek method and Hebraic method of teaching

Once you are aware of the two teaching styles, you will be able to determine if you are in a class or reading a book, whether the analysis and/or teaching method is either in a Greek or Hebraic method. In the Greek method it is automatically thought that the instructor is right because of advanced knowledge. In the college situation, it is because the professor has his/her Ph.D. in some area of study, so one assumes that he or she knows everything about the topic. For example, Rodney Dangerfield played the role of a middle-aged man going to college. His English midterm was to write about Kurt Vonnegut Jr. Since he didn't understand any of Vonnegut's books he hired Vonnegut himself to write the midterm. When it was returned to him, the English Professor told Dangerfield that whoever wrote

the paper knew nothing about Vonnegut. This is an example of the Greek method of teaching. Did the Ph.D. English professor think that she knew more about Vonnegut's writings than Vonnegut did? ¹

In the Greek teaching method, the professor or the instructor claims to be the authority. If you are attending a Bible study class and the class leader says, "I will teach you the only way to understand this biblical book," you may want to consider the implications. This method is common since most Seminaries and Bible colleges teach a Greek method of learning, which is the same method the church has been utilizing for centuries.

Hebraic teaching methods are different. The teacher wants the students to challenge what they hear. It is through questioning that a student can learn. In addition,

¹ *Back to School*. Performed by Rodney Dangerfield. Hollywood: CA: Paper Clip Productions, 1986. DVD.

the teacher wants his/her students to excel to a point where the student becomes the teacher.

It is said that if two rabbis come together to discuss a passage of Scripture, the result will be at least ten different opinions. All points of view are acceptable if the points can be supported by biblical evidence. It is permissible and encouraged for students to have multiple opinions. There is a depth to God's Word, and God wants us to find all His messages that are placed in the Scriptures.

Seeking out the meaning of the Scriptures beyond the literal meaning is essential to fully understanding God's Word.² The Greek method of learning the Scriptures has prevailed over the centuries. One problem is that only

² Davis, Anne Kimball. *The Synoptic Gospels*. MP3. Albuquerque: NM: BibleInteract, 2012.

the literal interpretation of Scripture was often viewed as valid, as prompted by Martin Luther's "sola literalis" meaning that only the literal interpretation of Scripture was valid. The Fundamentalist movements of today are generally based on the literal interpretation of the Scripture. Therefore, they do not believe that God placed any deeper, hidden, or secret meanings in the Word.

The students of the Scriptures who learn through Hebraic training and understanding have drawn a different conclusion. The Hebrew language itself leads to different possible interpretations because of the construction of the language. The Hebraic method of Bible study opens avenues of thought about God's revelations in the Scripture that may have never been considered. A question may be raised about the Scripture being studied for which there may not be an immediate answer. If so, it becomes the responsibility of the

learners to uncover the meaning. Also, remember that multiple opinions about the meaning of Scripture are also acceptable if they can be supported by Scripture.

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Methodology

The methodology employed is to use First Century Scripture study methods integrated with the customs and culture of Jesus's day to examine the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, thus gathering a deeper understanding by learning the Scriptures in the way the people of Jesus's day did.

The Process of Discovery

I have titled the methodology of analyzing a passage of Scripture in a Hebraic manner the "Process of Discovery." This methodology was developed by the author bringing together the various areas of linguistic and cultural understanding. There are several sections to the process and not all the sections apply to every passage of Scripture. The overall result of developing this

process is to give the reader a framework into the ideas being presented.

The “Process of Discovery” starts with a Scripture passage. If the passage is in a poetic form, it is identified. Possible poetic techniques include: parallelism, chiasmic structures, and repetition. Formatting the passage in its poetic form allows the reader to be able to visualize what the first century CE listener was hearing. The chiasms are labeled by their corresponding sections, for example: A, B, C, B', A'. Not all passages of the Scriptures have a poetic form.

The next step is to “question the narrative,” which is accomplished by assuming the reader knows nothing about the passage. Therefore, the questions go from the simple to the complex. The next task is to identify any linguistic patterns. Linguistic patterns include, but are not limited to: irony, simile, metaphor, symbolism,

idioms, hyperbole, figurative language, personification, and allegory.

Any translation inconsistencies discovered between the English NASB version and either the Hebrew or Greek versions are identified. There are times when a Hebrew or Greek word can be translated in more than one way. Inconsistencies also can be created by the translation committee, which may have decided to use traditional language instead of the actual translation. The decision of the translation committee can be generally found in the Preface or Introduction to the Bible. Perhaps some of the inconsistencies were intentionally added to convey some deeper meaning therefore, the inconsistencies need to be examined.

Echoes of the Hebrew Scriptures in the Christian Scripture are identified. This occurs when a passage from the Hebrew Scripture is used in the Christian Scripture

or when a command is directly discussed in the Christian Scriptures.³ In addition, echoes can be found when Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy) passages are used in other Hebrew Bible books. In addition to echoes, cross references are listed. A cross reference is a reference to another verse in the Scripture which can assist the reader to understand the verse that is being read.

The names of persons mentioned in the passage are listed. Many of the Hebrew names have meaning and may be associated with places or actions. Jewish parents used to name their children based on what they felt God had in store for their child. An example of this is Abraham whose original name was Abram and was changed to mean eternal father (in this case Abram's

³ Mitzvot are the 613 commandments found in the Torah that please God. There are positive and negative commandments. The list was first developed by Maimonides. The full list can be found at: <http://www.jewfaq.org/613.htm>.

name was changed by God to Abraham indicating a function he was to perform). When the Hebrew Bible gives names, many of the occurrences will indicate something special to the reader/listener. The same importance can hold true for the names of places. The time it takes to travel between places can supply insight to the event.

Key words are identified in a verse when they are important to an understanding of that passage. There are no rules for selecting the key words. Searching for other occurrences of the keywords in Scripture in a concordance is necessary to understand how the word was being used; this must be done in either Hebrew or Greek, not in English. A classic Hebraic approach is to find the usage of a word in the Scripture by finding other verses that contain the word. The usage of a word, in its original language, is discovered by searching the Scripture in the language of the word. The verses that

contain the word being researched are identified and a pattern for the usage of the word is discerned. Each verse is examined to see what the usage of the word is which, may reveal a pattern for the word's usage. For Hebrew words the first usage of the word in the Scripture, especially if used in the Torah, is important. For the Greek words the Christian Scriptures are used to determine the word usage in the Scripture. Sometimes finding the equivalent Greek word in the Septuagint then analyzing its usage in Hebrew can be very helpful.

The Rules of Hillel for Bible understanding can be used when applicable. Hillel was a Torah scholar who lived shortly before Jesus's day. Hillel developed several rules for Torah students to interpret the Scriptures which are referred to as halachic midrash. In several cases these rules are helpful in the analysis of the Scripture.

After the linguistic analysis is complete an examination of the cultural implications will be examined. The culture is important because it is not specifically referenced in the biblical narratives as indicated earlier.

From the linguistic analysis and the cultural understanding, it is possible to obtain a deeper meaning of the Scripture beyond the literal meaning of the plain text. That is what the listeners of Jesus's time were doing. They put the linguistics and the culture together without even having to contemplate it. They simply did it.

This will lead to a conclusion or a set of conclusions about what the passage is talking about. Most of the time the Hebraic analysis leads to the desire for a deeper analysis to fully understand what Jesus was talking about or what was happening to Him. Whatever the result, a

new deeper understanding of the Scripture will be obtained.

The components of the Process of Discovery are:

Linguistics Section

Linguistic Structure of the Scripture

Discussion

Questioning the Passage

Main/Center Point

Verse Comparison on citations or proof

text

Idioms

Metaphors

Symbols

Translation inconsistencies

Reversing the Tower of Babel

People's names

Name of places

Word Study

Scripture cross references

Echoes

Rules of Hillel

Culture Section

Discussion

Questioning the passage culturally

Culture and Linguistics Section

Discussion

Only the applicable sections are in this document.

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The Hebraic Analysis of Genesis 9:1-8

Language

New American Standard 1995	Hebrew	Targum
<p>¹ Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words.</p>	<p>וַיְהִי כָל־הָאָרֶץ</p>	<p>¹ And all the earth was of one language and one speech.</p>
<p>² It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.</p>	<p>שְׁפָה אֶחָת וּדְבָרִים אֶחָדִים:²</p>	<p>² And it was in their migrations at the beginning, that they found a plain in the land of Babel; and dwelt there.</p>
<p>³ They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn <i>them</i> thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and</p>	<p>וַיְהִי בְּנִסְעָם מִקֶּדֶם וַיִּמְצְאוּ בְּאֶרֶץ שִׁנְעָר וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם: ³ וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ הֵבָה לְבִנָּה וְנִשְׂרָפָה לְשִׂרְפָּה לָהֶם וְתָהִי הַלְבָּנָה לְאֲבֹן</p>	<p>³ And they said, a man to his companion, Come, let us cast bricks and bake them in the fire. And they had brick for stone,</p>

they used tar for mortar.

⁴ They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *will reach* into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

⁵ The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.

⁶ The LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And

וְהַחֲמֵר הָיָה לָהֶם
לְחֵמֶר:

⁴ וַיֹּאמְרוּ הִבָּה |
נִבְנֶה-לָּנוּ עֵיר
וּמִגְדָּל וְרֵאשׁוֹ
בְּשָׁמַיִם וְנַעֲשֶׂה-
לָּנוּ שֵׁם פֶּן-נִפְּוֶץ
עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-
הָאָרֶץ:

⁵ וַיֵּרַד יְהוָה
לִרְאֹת אֶת-הָעִיר
וְאֶת-הַמִּגְדָּל
אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ בְּנֵי
הָאָדָם:

⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה הֵן
עַם אֶחָד וּשְׂפָה
אֶחָת לְכָלֶם וְזֹה
הַחֲלָם לַעֲשׂוֹת
וְעַתָּה לֹא-יִבְצָר

and bitumen for mortar.

⁴ And they said, Come, let us build a city, and a tower, the bead of it coming to the pinnacle of the heavens. And we will make to us a name, lest we be dispersed upon the face of all the earth.

⁵ And the Lord was revealed to punish the work of the city and the tower which the sons of men had built..

⁶ And the Lord said, Behold, the people are one and the language one with all of them: and this is what they begin

<p>this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them.</p> <p>⁷ "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech."</p> <p>⁸ So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city.</p> <p>⁹ Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the</p>	<p>מֵהֶם כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת: ⁷ הֵבֵה נִרְדָּה וְנִבְלָה שֵׁם שְׁפָתָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ אִישׁ שְׁפֶת רֵעֵהוּ: ⁸ וַיִּפֶץ יְהוָה אֶתֶם מִשָּׁם עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ וַיַּחְדְּלוּ לְבַנֵּת הָעִיר: ⁹ עַל-כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ בְּבָל כִּי-שֵׁם בָּלַל יְהוָה שְׁפֶת כָּל-הָאָרֶץ וּמִשָּׁם הִפְיָצָם יְהוָה עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ: פ</p>	<p>to do. And now nothing will be restrained from them of what they imagine to do.</p> <p>⁷ Come, We will be manifest, and will confuse their language there, that a man shall not bear the language of his companion.</p> <p>⁸ And the Lord dispersed them from thence upon the face of all the earth, and they were restrained from building the city.</p> <p>⁹ Therefore the name of it is called Confusion, because the Lord there confused</p>
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language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.		the tongue of all the earth, and from thence the Lord dispersed them upon the face of all the earth.
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Process of Discovery

Linguistics Section

Linguistic Structure

A¹ Now the **whole earth used the same language** and the same words.

B² It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn *them* thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. ⁴ They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *will reach* into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise **we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.**"

C⁵ The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. ⁶ The LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. ⁷ "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their

language, so that they will not understand one another's speech."

B' ⁸ So the LORD scattered them abroad from **there over the face of the whole earth**; and they stopped building the city.

A' ⁹ Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused **the language of the whole earth**; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.

Discussion

This passage consists of one A-B-C-B'-A' chiasm. The center of the chiasm is the LORD's decision to confuse the people with multiple languages.

Questioning the Passage

(The questions and answers offered are for discussion purposes. You may have different questions and answers. Remember all questions are valid and all

answers must be defensible from Scripture. This applies to this section and to the Culture Section.)

1. Why is the term “the whole earth” used in verse one?

The distinction is made because the Torah wants all the peoples of the Earth to understand that we come from a common ancestor, Adam and Eve.

2. Where was the land on Shinar located? (v. 2)

The land of Shinar is the ancient name for Babylon. Today it is called Iraq.

3. Why were the bricks to be burnt? (v.3)

“Burnt” can be translated as “baked.” The bricks used in the building of the Tower had to be baked in an oven before they could be used. The bricks had to be especially strong to be able to build a tall tower. It also tells us that bricks were used instead of stone.

4. Why did the men assume that they would not be scattered across the Earth? (v. 4)

Midrash tells us that Nimrod was a power political figure and under his authority the seventy nations of the Earth lived and worked together. Nimrod wanted to build a Tower to reach God. Once that was accomplished he wanted to wage war against God. Perhaps a reason for this was that they did not like that God had control over him (Nimrod). They would have seen the Great Flood as a way for God to control them and Nimrod was not happy allowing God to be in control.

5. Why would the people think that their tower could reach heaven? (v. 4)

Ancient peoples believed that Heaven was just a couple of miles above the sky. The clouds were seen as creatures from Heaven and lived at the

edge of Heaven. Therefore, a tall tower could reach Heaven.

6. Why did the LORD believe that the tower the people built was sinful? (v. 5)

“It may be that the actual construction of the city and the tower were not sins, but that they would have led to sins that the Torah does not spell out.”⁴

7. Why was the Tower destroyed?

The sin of the people wanting to wage war against God and to try to destroy God was as great a sin than any sin before the Great Flood. Since the LORD promised Noah not to destroy the world with another flood, the LORD was forced to find

⁴ Scherman, Nosson. "Genesis 11." In *The Chumash: The Torah: Haftaros and Five Megillos with a Commentary Anthologized from the Rabbinic Writings*. Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 2002.

an alternate way of destroying the people's sin. The destruction of the Tower destroyed their sins of wanting to wage war against God.

8. Why did the LORD create the multitude of languages we have on Earth?

At the time of this event the LORD perhaps thought that if people could not communicate with each other that they would not be able to sin against the LORD. Unfortunately, when the seventy nations could not communicate, they turned to sinning against each other.

Main/Center Point

The LORD created all people from one couple, Adam and Eve. The creation of the seventy nations of the world was from the descendants of Noah. The creation of different languages was because the seventy nations worked together to sin against the

LORD. Instead of the people of the Earth working together to please the LORD, they worked together to sin against the LORD. The LORD must have thought that the seventy languages would eliminate sin.

Name of places

1. שִׁנְעָר *Shinar* **Meaning:** another name for Bab.

Scripture cross references

Verse 2 Dan 1:2

Verse 4 Deu 1:28; Deu 9:1; Psa 107:26; 2Sa 8:13;
Deu 4:27

Verse 7 Isa 33:19; Jer 5:15

Culture Section

Discussion

It was important for the LORD to remind us that we are descendants from a couple of humans. There are

three stories in Genesis that remind us of this. The first story is the Creation story. We are all descendants of Adam and Eve. Whether or family is in the line of Cain or Seth, we are cousins. All human life on the planet was destroyed by the Great Flood and the only people to survive was Noah, his wife and his three sons and their wives. Thus, we are reminded that we are descendants of Noah, which makes us descendants of Seth, then to Adam. The line of Cain was removed from history. The Tower of Babel is the third story. In this story, we learn that we are descended from one family line and the reason why we were separated into different areas of the world and have such diverse languages is because of sin.

As the human population grew it would have to move into new areas of the world. It is believed that the Tower was built in modern day Iraq. It is possible that civilization started in the Mesopotamian Valley and

spread as the shepherds needed to find land for their flocks and to find farm land to support the growing human population. When people separated from one another they would have started to incorporate new words and idioms into their language. Over the centuries, the language of one tribe would be different than another tribe.

The Tower of Babel is the biblical explanation of why there are so many different languages in the world. The seventy nations which came from Noah explains why there are so many nations on the Earth.

The Tower was built so high that the workers on the top of the tower had a hard time communicating with workers below them. They did not have a communications system beyond speech. The Tower was a place of confusion because of the communication problem. The people at the bottom of

the Tower would not know what was going on at the top of the Tower and the same can be said about the people at the top of the Tower not knowing what the people at the bottom of the Tower were doing.

The Tower could be a metaphor of how organizations, including the church, work today. The people at the top of the hierarchy of an organization rarely know what it is like at the bottom of the organization. When a person moves up in the hierarchy of an organization they become focused on their level and many become blind to the people below them and above them. Can the Bishop of an area know what is going on in the local churches? They are at the top of their "Tower" and they cannot hear the cries of the people at the bottom of the "Tower." The communications path from the bottom to the top and from the top to the bottom of the "Tower" is usually strained and not direct. Even in our current world with instant

communications the message from above or below can get distorted.

Questioning the passage

1. What does it mean to travel to or from the east?

In biblical days people used the word “east” to mean that they were going in the direction toward light, truth and good guidance. The word “west” was used to symbolize darkness, going astray, and moving away from the light. The phrase “they migrated from the east” means they strayed from the true path, this is from the ways of the LORD.⁵

2. Why is the word for God plural?

⁵ Errico, Rocco A., and George M. Lamsa. "Chapter 11." *Aramaic Light on Genesis: A Commentary Based on the Aramaic Language and Ancient Near Eastern Customs*. Smyrna, GA: Noohra Foundation, 2007. N. pag. Print.

Emperors, Kings and other authority figures always used the plural pronouns of respect, especially after deciding. The LORD is speaking about himself when He says, “let us go down.” The plural form of the language must be used. The people believed in one God, the LORD. Therefore, it is an error to think that the Hebrews believed in polytheism.⁶

⁶ IBID.

The Connection to Pentecost

What is the connection between the Tower of Babel and Pentecost? The story of the Tower tells us why the LORD created so many different languages on the Earth. It is believed that people spoke the Holy Language of God (Hebrew) before that event. They were able to get along because of their common language. Harmony seemed to exist. Midrash says that Noah and Shem were still alive to council the people as the population grew. But then they stepped toward sin. They built the Tower to reach God and to wage war against the LORD. The result was that God destroyed the Tower and gave them many different languages.

The differences in the languages of the Earth would keep people apart until the time of Jesus. When the power of the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples of

Jesus they were able to communicate in different languages. God made this happen to tell us that we are descended from the same parents, Adam and Eve, but most especially that we can be reunited under the messiahship of our Lord and Savior Jesus.

Jesus unites people together, He never divides. God's love given to us through Jesus is meant to unite us into one family under God. The Christian family is a family of every nation on Earth and needs to act in that way. Pentecost is supposed to bring us together, therefore, it is the reversing of what the LORD did at the Tower of Babel. The time of separation was over. Now the LORD expects us to live together in peace. Unfortunately, 2000 years later that peace and harmony has not come to the Earth.

Looking at the churches today we find that harmony does not exist among the denominations nor at the

local church level. How can we celebrate the Pentecost when we do not celebrate our diversity? People within a local church tend not to work together. Adjacently located churches in the same denomination do not work together. At the highest level the leadership of the differing Christian groups do not work together.

Unity is a message of the Pentecost. Perhaps the LORD thought that enough time had passed since the time He separated people and it was time for a new sense of humanity. The teachings of Jesus concentrate on togetherness. The offering of forgiveness for sin between humans and between humans and God should certainly bring unity. Unfortunately, that has not happened yet.

As early as 48 CE, 15 or so years after the first Pentecost, the people of the church were disagreeing with each other to the point that a split occurred. Peter

and his followers went one way while Paul and his followers went the opposite way. Jesus should have stopped this immediately. Why He did not is unknown to us? Perhaps He believed in humanity to make the correct choices. It is questionable whether humanity has made good choices. Our history is replete with bad decisions.

The LORD separated us at the Tower because of sin. God forgave us for our sins through the life of the Jesus our Messiah. If we follow the interpretations of the Torah that Jesus has placed before us, we would be able to live in perfect harmony one with another. God clearly wants us to live together in harmony. The Bible is clear about that point.

The Pentecost was the event to reverse the dispersion of people. Pentecost is the event that we celebrate each year that should deeply remind us about the need for

unity. We must learn to work together with our differences. Unity is a major theological theme of Christianity, certainly of the Pentecost.

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