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THE 66-BOOK 8-WEEK GROUP BIBLE STUDY SERIES • BOOK 01 OF 66

בְּרֵאשִׁית

GENESIS

Bereshit — “In the Beginning” • An 8-Week Group Bible Study

By Greg and Kayla Gibson

WEEK 3 OF 8 • GENESIS 6:1-11:32 • GENERAL / MIXED GROUP
EDITION

De-Creation, Covenant & Babel

Scripture Scope: Genesis 6:1-11:32 (ESV) • Session Length: 75-90 Minutes

LEADER GUIDE EDITION

Complete Participant Text + Interleaved Pacing, Hebrew Word Studies, Facilitation
Probes & Pitfalls

Genesis — 8-Week Group Bible Study (Leader Guide Edition)

By Greg and Kayla Gibson • Week 2: De-Creation, Covenant & Babel (Genesis 6:1–11:32)

How to Use This Leader Guide Edition

This **Leader Guide Edition** is built on the same synchronized two-edition architecture you used in Weeks 1 and 2, so you never have to juggle two separate books while leading your small group or mini-church gathering:

1. **100% Word-for-Word Participant Text Included:** Every section (**3.1** through **3.6**), the Open-Bible Supplemental Notice, every Scripture reading prompt, every verbatim ESV anchor verse callout, all teaching prose, every table, and every numbered discussion question (**3.1 Q1** through **3.6 Q4**) appears here exactly as your group members see it in their *Participant Study Edition*.
2. **Interleaved [LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY] Blocks:** Immediately after each section you will find a leader block containing:
 - **Pacing & Time Targets** calibrated for an 85-minute core session (plus a 5-minute buffer).
 - **Hebrew Word Study & Research Quick-References** so you can unpack terms like *nacham*, *chen*, *tamim*, *chamas*, *tevah*, *kaphar*, *zakar*, *berit*, *qeshet*, *shem*, and *balal* in plain English without lecturing.
 - **Question-by-Question Facilitation Probes** that move the conversation past polite surface answers into honest reflection.
 - **Pitfalls to Steer Around**, including the sons of God and the Nephilim, the global-versus-regional flood debate, the claim that Genesis "copied" Gilgamesh, capital punishment and Genesis 9:6, and the modern cultural use of the rainbow.
 - **One Mandatory Pastoral Flag (Section 3.5):** the historical misuse of Noah's curse on Canaan (Genesis 9:20–27) to justify racial slavery. Please do not skip it.

WEEK 3 SESSION PACING AT A GLANCE (85-MINUTE CORE PLAN)

SECTION	FOCUS	TIME TARGET
Section 3.1	Opening: A World Gone Wrong — Gen 6:1–8, Open-Bible Notice, Toledot Map (3.1 Q1–Q3)	12 mins
Section 3.2	Grace in the Middle of Judgment — Gen 6:8–22 (3.2 Q1–Q3)	15 mins
Section 3.3	De-Creation and "God Remembered Noah" — Gen 7:1–8:19 (3.3 Q1–Q3)	15 mins
Section 3.4	Covenant, Bow, and the Image of God — Gen 8:20–9:17 (3.4 Q1–Q4)	15 mins
Section 3.5	A New Start, the Same Heart — Gen 9:18–29 (3.5 Q1–Q3)	13 mins
Section 3.6	Babel, the Nations, and a Name Given by Grace — Gen 10:1–11:32, Closing Prayer (3.6 Q1–Q4)	15 mins
Total	Full Week 3 Group Session	85–90 mins

A Word on Scope: Week 3 covers six chapters, the largest block in the entire study. You will not be able to read every verse aloud or answer every question. Choose the questions marked as your priorities ahead of time, read the focal passages aloud, and trust your group to read the rest at home.

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SECTION 3.1

Opening: A World Gone Wrong (Genesis 6:1–8)

Keep Your Bible Open (Supplemental Study Notice): This study guide is supplemental to Scripture—it is designed to serve the biblical text, never to replace it. Always go to the Bible directly first, and keep your own Bible open alongside you whenever you use this guide. Before reading the commentary in each section below, read the passage for yourself directly from your open ESV Bible, and keep it open throughout the session so the text always speaks first.

WEEK 3 AT A GLANCE

- **Scripture Scope:** Genesis 6:1–11:32
- **Focal Passages for Open-Bible Group Reading:** Genesis 6:1–22; Genesis 7:11–24; Genesis 8:1–22; Genesis 9:1–17; Genesis 11:1–9 (with Genesis 9:18–29 and 11:10–32 read in summary)
- **Literary & Toledot Anchor:** Finishes the bridge out of **Toledot 2** (Genesis 6:1–8), covers all of **Toledot 3** (the family history of Noah, Genesis 6:9), **Toledot 4** (the family history of Noah's sons, Genesis 10:1), and **Toledot**

5 (the family history of Shem, Genesis 11:10), and opens **Toledot 6** (the family history of Terah, Genesis 11:27).

- **Big Idea:** God's grace comes before, during, and after judgment. The Flood washes away a violent world but not the sin of the human heart, so God binds Himself by covenant to preserve the earth. And Babel presses the question of the week: whose name are we living for? Proud people try to make a name for themselves; God gives a name by grace.

WEEK 3 LEARNING OBJECTIVES (HEAD, HEART, HANDS)

- **Head (Understand the Text & Structure):** Trace how the Flood undoes and then remakes the creation of Genesis 1, how the covenant with Noah works (it covers all creation, it depends on God alone, and it is sealed with the sign of the bow), and how the Tower of Babel and the family line of Shem build a bridge to Abram in Genesis 12.
- **Heart (Feel the Weight and the Comfort):** Feel the weight of God's grief over sin (**6:6**) and the comfort of a God who "remembers" (**8:1**). Recognize in ourselves the same unchanged human heart that God diagnoses both before the Flood (**6:5**) and after it (**8:21**).
- **Hands (Live for His Name):** Identify one place where we are quietly "building a name" for ourselves, and choose one concrete way to honor the image of God in another person this week (**9:6**).

OPENING FRAME: FROM "WALKED WITH GOD" TO A WORLD FILLED WITH VIOLENCE

Last week we watched the story move east of Eden. Cain's anger turned into murder, Lamech turned murder into a boast, and yet a quiet line of hope ran through Seth, through Enoch who walked with God, and down to a baby named Noah, whose father hoped he would bring the family relief from the painful toil of a cursed ground (**Genesis 5:29**).

Genesis 6 opens with that hope under siege. Humanity is multiplying, but so is evil. Before we follow Noah into the ark, Genesis pauses to show us what the world looked like from heaven's point of view—and it is one of the most honest, sobering paragraphs in all of Scripture.

A ROAD MAP FOR WEEK 3: FOUR FAMILY HISTORIES (TOLEDOT) IN SIX CHAPTERS

As we saw in Weeks 1 and 2, Genesis is organized around ten headings built on the Hebrew word תולדות (**toledot**). Your ESV translates it "These are the generations of..." In plain English, it means "This is the family history of..." or "Here is what came from..." Each heading works like a chapter divider: it names a person and then tells the story of what came out of that person's life. Week 3 is the busiest week in Genesis for these headings:

TOLEDOT DIVISION	SCRIPTURE RANGE	HEADING (PLAIN ENGLISH)	WHAT THIS FAMILY HISTORY SHOWS
Bridge from Toledot 2	Genesis 6:1–8	(continues the family history of Adam begun in 5:1)	The sons of God and the daughters of man, the Nephilim, the 120 years, and God's verdict on human evil. It turns on one sentence: Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD (6:8).
Toledot 3	Genesis 6:9–9:29	"This is the family history of Noah" (6:9)	The ark, the Flood, God remembering Noah, the new start, the covenant and the bow, and Noah's sad failure in the vineyard. Ends with Noah's death (9:28–29).
Toledot 4	Genesis 10:1–11:9	"This is the family history of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth" (10:1)	The Table of Nations (chapter 10), then the Tower of Babel (11:1–9), which explains how those nations came to be scattered with many languages.
Toledot 5	Genesis 11:10–26	"This is the family history of Shem" (11:10)	Ten generations from Shem to Terah, narrowing the camera from all nations to one family.
Toledot 6 (opening)	Genesis 11:27–32 (continues to 25:11)	"This is the family history of Terah" (11:27)	Introduces Abram and Sarai, the move from Ur toward Canaan that stalls at Haran, and the painful note that Sarai could not have children (11:30). Sets the stage for Genesis 12.

GUIDED OPEN-BIBLE READING (GENESIS 6:1–8)

Invite **one group member** to read **Genesis 6:1–8** aloud directly from their open ESV Bible while everyone else follows along.

ESV Anchor Verses — Genesis 6:5–6

Genesis 6:5–6 (ESV): "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart."

TEACHING NARRATIVE: A STRANGE PARAGRAPH AND A GRIEVING GOD

1. The Sons of God, the Daughters of Man, and the Nephilim (Genesis 6:1–4): These four verses are among the most debated in Genesis. The "sons of God" (Hebrew *bene ha-elohim*) take wives from the "daughters of man," and the mysterious **Nephilim**—a word that may mean "fallen ones" or simply "giants" or "mighty warriors"—appear as famous men of old. Faithful Christians have read this in three main ways:

- **The Angelic View:** The "sons of God" are fallen spiritual beings, as the same phrase means in Job 1:6 and 38:7. Many early Jewish and early church writers held this view.
- **The Sethite View:** The "sons of God" are the godly line of Seth, who married into the ungodly line of Cain until faith collapsed. Augustine, Luther, and Calvin read it this way.
- **The Royal View:** The "sons of God" are ancient kings—rulers in the ancient Near East were often called sons of a god—who took any women they wanted, continuing Lamech's pattern of many wives and violence (4:19–24).

Good Christians disagree here, and that is fine. Every view agrees on the main point: whatever exactly happened, boundaries were being smashed and power was being abused. God responds by setting a limit of **120 years (6:3)**, which may describe a shorter human lifespan or a final grace period before judgment (compare 1 Peter 3:20, where Peter speaks of God's patience waiting in the days of Noah).

2. Heaven's Verdict (Genesis 6:5): Then the camera pulls back to God's point of view. Notice how total the language is: the wickedness was *great*, every intention was *only* evil, and it was *continually* so. This is not a description of a few bad people in an otherwise good world. Evil had moved from the outside of life to the inside—to the *intentions of the thoughts of the heart*. It had become normal.

3. A God Who Grieves (Genesis 6:6–7): Verse 6 is one of the most tender verses in the Old Testament. The ESV says "*the LORD regretted.*" The Hebrew verb is נָחַם (*nacham*), which can mean "to be sorry," "to grieve," or "to be moved to comfort." The next phrase, "*it grieved him to his heart,*" uses אִצָּב (*atsav*), from the same family of words as the "pain" of childbirth and the "painful toil" of work in Genesis 3:16–17. In other words, the pain that sin brought into human life is now felt in God's own heart.

Does that mean God made a mistake? No. Scripture is clear that God does not change His mind like a fickle human being (Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29). God's nature and plans do not change, but He is not a cold machine. He truly responds to human evil with real sorrow. And notice the wordplay: Noah's father hoped his son would bring *nacham*—"comfort" or "relief" (**5:29**). Before Noah can bring comfort, God feels *nacham*—grief. The God of the Bible is not distant from our brokenness. He grieves it.

OPENING CONNECTION QUESTIONS

3.1 Q1: Genesis 6:5 says "every intention" was "only evil continually." What does it look like when evil becomes normal in a culture, or in a person, without anyone noticing?

3.1 Q2: How does it change your picture of God to read that sin "grieved him to his heart"? Is that comforting, unsettling, or both?

3.1 Q3: Where do you see violence and corruption treated as ordinary today, and where might you be numb to it?

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 3.1 · PACING TARGET: 12 MINUTES

- **Pacing Breakdown:** 3 minutes for the Notice and the Week 2 recap, 4 minutes for the reading of 6:1–8 and a brief walk through the *toledot* chart, 5 minutes for discussion. With three questions, pick **3.1 Q1** or **3.1 Q2** as your priority and keep **3.1 Q3** in reserve.
- **Facilitation Tip (Make the Notice Physical):** Read the **Keep Your Bible Open (Supplemental Study Notice)** aloud and ask everyone to physically open their Bibles to Genesis 6 before you say anything else. Then use the *toledot* chart as the map for the whole evening: "Tonight we're walking through four family histories. Watch how the camera keeps narrowing from the whole world to one family."
- **Hebrew Quick-Reference (*nacham* and *atsav*):**

- **nacham** (נָחַם) — "to be sorry, to grieve, to be moved to comfort." Echoes the wordplay on Noah's name in 5:29 ("relief").
- **atsav** (אָצַב) — "to hurt, to grieve." Related to *itsavon*, the "pain" and "painful toil" of 3:16–17 and 5:29.
- **Plain-English summary for your group:** "The hurt sin caused us is a hurt God feels too."
- **Follow-Up Probes:**
 - "What makes God's grief different from human regret?" (Human regret often means "I wish I hadn't done that because I didn't know better." God's grief is the sorrow of a perfect Father watching His children destroy themselves.)
 - "Why do you think the text pairs God's grief with the same family of words as the 'pain' of Genesis 3:16–17?"
- **Research Pointer (The 120 Years):** Two readings are common: (1) a limit on human lifespan (lifespans do shrink sharply in Genesis 11), or (2) a 120-year grace period before the Flood. First Peter 3:20 supports the idea of God's patient waiting. Either reading fits the theme of grace before judgment.
- **Pitfall to Avoid (The Speculation Hour):** Genesis 6:1–4 can easily swallow your whole evening with talk of giants, angels, and ancient legends. Give the three views in under three minutes, affirm that faithful Christians disagree, and move to 6:5. Useful line: "Whichever view you hold, the point of the paragraph is the next verse."
- **Pitfall to Avoid (God Made a Mistake?):** If someone asks whether God regretted creating humans because He didn't see it coming, gently point to Numbers 23:19 and 1 Samuel 15:29. Scripture holds both truths together: God's purposes do not change, and God genuinely feels and responds. We don't have to resolve every mystery to receive the comfort that God is not indifferent to evil.

SECTION 3.2

Grace in the Middle of Judgment (Genesis 6:8–22)

GUIDED OPEN-BIBLE READING (GENESIS 6:8–22)

Invite **two group members** to read aloud directly from their open ESV Bibles:

- **Reader 1:** Genesis 6:8–13 (*Noah Finds Favor, Walks with God, and Hears God's Verdict on a Violent Earth*)
- **Reader 2:** Genesis 6:14–22 (*The Ark, the Pitch, the First Mention of Covenant, and Noah's Obedience*)

ESV Anchor Verses — Genesis 6:8–9

Genesis 6:8–9 (ESV): "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God."

TEACHING NARRATIVE: GRACE FIRST, THEN A LIFE THAT WALKS WITH GOD

1. "But Noah Found Favor" (Genesis 6:8): After the darkest verdict in Genesis so far, one small word changes everything: *But*. The Hebrew word for "favor" is נָחַ (chen), which also means "grace." This is the first time grace is named in the Bible. And here is a detail you can see even if you don't read Hebrew: Noah's name in Hebrew is נֹחַ (Noach), spelled with two letters, *nun* and *chet*. The word for grace, נָחַ (chen), uses the same two letters in reverse. Noah's very name is a mirror of grace.

Pay attention to the order of the verses. First Noah *found favor* (6:8). Only then are we told that Noah was *righteous* and *blameless* (6:9). Grace is not God's reward for Noah's goodness; Noah's goodness is the fruit of God's grace. That order is the order of the gospel.

2. "Blameless" and "Walked with God" (Genesis 6:9): Notice also that verse 9 opens a new family history (toledot): "This is the family history of Noah." The word "blameless" translates תָּמִים (*tamim*), meaning whole, complete, or having integrity. It is the same word used for a sacrificial animal "without blemish" and for what God later asks of Abram (Genesis 17:1). It does not mean sinless—we will watch Noah fail in Section 3.5. It means wholehearted. And the phrase "Noah walked with God" is the exact expression used for Enoch in Genesis 5:22–24. In a world where everyone else was walking away, Noah kept walking with God.

3. A World Filled with Violence (Genesis 6:11–13): God names the specific sin that brought the Flood. The earth was corrupt and filled with חָמָס (*chamas*)—"violence." *Chamas* is more than a bad temper. It is the abuse of power to harm other people: cruelty, injustice, and bloodshed. It is what Cain's murder and Lamech's vengeance (4:8, 23–24) grew into when it spread across a whole society. Notice the tragic irony in God's words: because humanity had *ruined* the earth, God would *ruin* it with them. The same Hebrew verb (*shachat*) is used both ways. Judgment, in other words, is God handing a self-destructing world over to the destruction it has chosen.

4. A Box Without a Rudder (Genesis 6:14–16): God tells Noah to build an ark. The Hebrew word תֵּבָה (*tevah*) is not the normal word for a ship. It means a "box" or a "chest," and it appears in only one other story in the Old Testament: the basket in which baby Moses was placed on the Nile (Exodus 2:3, 5). Both times, God preserves a chosen life from death-dealing waters inside a *tevah* sealed with pitch. Both vessels have no rudder and no sail. Survival depends entirely on God.

The ark was 300 cubits long, 50 wide, and 30 high—about 450 × 75 × 45 feet using an 18-inch cubit. That six-to-one ratio of length to width is remarkably stable, similar to modern cargo ships. By contrast, the hero of the Babylonian flood story builds a perfect cube, which would spin helplessly in the water.

5. "Cover It with a Covering" (Genesis 6:14): God tells Noah to cover the ark inside and out with pitch. In Hebrew, the sentence literally reads, "cover (כָּפַר, *kaphar*) it with a covering (כֹּפֶר, *kopher*)." This is the only place in the Old Testament where *kaphar* is used in its plain physical sense. Later, the same root becomes the key word for **atonement**—as in Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). We should be careful not to build a whole doctrine on one wordplay, but it is a beautiful picture worth noticing: the people inside are safe because a covering keeps the waters of judgment out.

6. The First "Covenant" and Noah's Obedience (Genesis 6:17–22): In verse 18, God says He will establish His בְּרִית (*berit*)—"covenant"—with Noah. This is the first time the word *covenant* appears in the Bible. A covenant is a binding, formal relationship in which someone makes solemn commitments, often sealed with a sign. Before a single drop of rain falls, God has already promised to keep Noah's family alive. And the chapter ends with a simple sentence: Noah did everything God commanded him (6:22). Hebrews 11:7 tells us that Noah acted by faith, warned about things not yet seen, and in reverent fear built an ark to save his household. Noah obeyed long before he could see why.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (GENESIS 6:8–22)

3.2 Q1: Grace is mentioned (6:8) before Noah's righteousness (6:9). Why does that order matter for how we understand our own standing with God?

3.2 Q2: Noah obeyed for years before a drop of rain fell (Hebrews 11:7). What is God asking you to obey right now that you can't yet see the reason for?

3.2 Q3: The ark had no rudder or sail. Where in your life are you trying to steer when God is asking you to trust?

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 3.2 · PACING TARGET: 15 MINUTES

- **Pacing Breakdown:** 6 minutes of teaching, 9 minutes of discussion. Prioritize **3.2 Q1** (the gospel order of grace and righteousness) and **3.2 Q3**; use **3.2 Q2** if your group is engaged and you have time.
- **Facilitation Tip (Draw the Letters):** If you have a whiteboard or a sheet of paper, write the two Hebrew letters of Noah's name (נח) and then the same letters reversed for grace (חן). This lands visually even for people who have never seen Hebrew. Then connect *tevah* to baby Moses as a "storytelling rhyme": God keeps rescuing His people through waters in a little box He alone can steer.
- **Hebrew Quick-Reference:**
 - **chen** (חן) — "favor, grace." First use in Scripture (**6:8**).
 - **tamim** (תָּמִים) — "blameless, whole, complete." Wholehearted integrity, not sinlessness.
 - **chamas** (חָמָס) — "violence," especially the abuse of power to harm others (see also Psalm 7:16; Habakkuk 1:2–3).
 - **tevah** (תֵּבָה) — "ark, box, chest." Used only for Noah's ark and Moses' basket. (The Ark of the Covenant uses a different word, *aron*.)
 - **kaphar / kopher** (כָּפַר / כִּפָּר) — "to cover / a covering, pitch." Same root later used for atonement.
 - **berit** (בְּרִית) — "covenant." First use in Scripture (**6:18**).
- **Follow-Up Probes:**
 - "What do you think 'walking with God' looked like for Noah when nobody around him was?"
 - "How does obeying before understanding actually feel in practice? Is it more like peace or more like pressure?"
 - For **3.2 Q1**: "If righteousness came first and grace second, how would that change the way you pray when you've failed?"
- **Pitfall to Avoid (Overstating the Atonement Link):** The *kaphar* connection to atonement is a real wordplay, and it is worth noticing, but the research flags it as a picture, not a proof. Avoid saying "the ark was a sacrifice" or "the pitch was atonement." Say instead, "Here is a picture we'll see filled out later in Scripture."
- **Pitfall to Avoid (Chamas and the News):** Some members may hear *chamas* and think of a modern political or militant group with a similar-sounding name. Simply note that this is the ordinary Hebrew word for violence, used throughout the Old Testament, and has no connection to any modern organization. Then move on.
- **Pitfall to Avoid (Turning Noah into a Superhero):** Keep the emphasis where the text puts it. Noah is not saved because he was the one good man on earth who earned it; he is a man who found grace and then walked in it.

SECTION 3.3

De-Creation and "God Remembered Noah" (Genesis 7:1–8:19)

GUIDED OPEN-BIBLE READING (GENESIS 7:11-24; 8:1-19)

Invite **two group members** to read aloud directly from their open ESV Bibles:

- **Reader 1:** Genesis 7:11–24 (*The Fountains Burst, the Windows Open, the LORD Shuts the Door, and the Waters Prevail*)
- **Reader 2:** Genesis 8:1–19 (*God Remembers, the Wind Blows, the Raven and the Dove, and the Command to Come Out*)

ESV Anchor Verses — Genesis 7:23; 8:1

Genesis 7:23 (ESV): "He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark."

Genesis 8:1 (ESV): "But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided."

TEACHING NARRATIVE: CREATION UNDONE, CREATION REMADE

1. The Flood as De-Creation (Genesis 7:11-24): In Genesis 1, God created a livable world by *separating* things: light from darkness, the waters above from the waters below, the seas from the dry land. In Genesis 7, those separations collapse. The fountains of the great deep burst open from below and the windows of the heavens open from above (**7:11**). The waters God once pushed back return. Genesis 6–9 is written to echo Genesis 1 so that we read the Flood as creation being undone—and then remade:

GENESIS 1 (CREATION)	GENESIS 6–9 (DE-CREATION & RE-CREATION)
God saw that what He made was good (1:4, 10, 31).	God saw that the earth was corrupt (6:12); the LORD saw the wickedness of man (6:5).
The waters above and below are separated (1:6–8).	The fountains of the deep burst and the windows of heaven open (7:11); the separation collapses.
Dry land appears (1:9–10).	Dry land is covered (7:19–20), then reappears (8:5, 13–14).
The Spirit (<i>ruach</i>) of God hovers over the waters (1:2).	God makes a wind (<i>ruach</i>) blow over the earth (8:1).
Birds, livestock, and creeping things are created by their kinds (1:20–25).	The same creatures are blotted out (7:21–23), then brought out by families (8:17–19).
God blesses humanity to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (1:28).	The blessing is repeated to Noah and his sons (9:1, 7).

Genesis 7:23 is meant to land with weight. The word "*blotted out*" appears twice. Judgment is real, and it is total. Only one sentence of hope remains at the end of the verse: *Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark.*

2. The Mirror Structure of the Flood Story: Genesis 6–9 is built as a giant literary mirror, which scholars call a *chiasm*. In plain English, the story climbs up step by step to a peak and then comes back down the same steps in reverse order, like a mountain path. Whatever sits at the very top of the mountain is the main point. Old Testament scholar Gordon Wenham mapped this pattern in detail. Even the numbers of days form a mirror:

GOING UP (THE WATERS RISE)		COMING DOWN (THE WATERS RECEDE)
7 days of waiting (7:4)		7 more days before the dove's last flight (8:12)
7 days until the flood (7:10)	CENTER:	7 days before the dove returns with an olive leaf (8:10)
40 days of rain (7:12, 17)	"But God remembered Noah..." (8:1)	40 days before the window opens (8:6)
150 days of the waters prevailing (7:24)		150 days until the waters abate (8:3)

The hinge of the whole story is not the destruction. It is God's faithful attention to the people He promised to keep.

3. What It Means When God "Remembers" (**Genesis 8:1):** The Hebrew verb is זָכַר (*zakar*), "to remember." When the Bible says God remembers, it never means He had forgotten. It means God *acts* on behalf of someone because of His commitment to them. Later in Genesis, God remembers Abraham and rescues Lot (**19:29**), and God remembers Rachel and opens her womb (**30:22**). In Exodus 2:24, God remembers His covenant and moves to rescue Israel from Egypt. When God remembers, things start to move.

And watch what moves first: God makes a *wind* blow over the earth. The Hebrew word is רוּחַ (*ruach*), the same word used for the Spirit of God hovering over the waters in Genesis 1:2. The first act of the new creation looks exactly like the first act of the original creation. God is starting again.

4. Waiting in the Ark (**Genesis 8:2–19):** Noah's family was inside the ark for over a year (compare **7:11** with **8:14**). Noah sends out a raven, then a dove three times, testing for dry land. The dove's return with a freshly plucked olive leaf (**8:11**) is a small, beautiful sign that life is coming back. Yet even when the ground looks dry, Noah does not leave until God tells him to (**8:15–16**). He came in at God's word, and he goes out at God's word.

5. Other Ancient Flood Stories—and a Very Different God: Flood stories appear across the ancient Near East. The three best known come from Mesopotamia: the **Sumerian Flood Story** (hero: Ziusudra), the **Atrahasis Epic** (hero: Atrahasis), and **Tablet XI of the Epic of Gilgamesh** (hero: Utnapishtim). They share real similarities with Genesis: a divine decision to send a flood, one man warned ahead of time, a large boat sealed with pitch, animals on board, a landing on a mountain, birds sent out to test for dry land, and a sacrifice afterward. But the differences are where the teaching power is:

MESOPOTAMIAN FLOOD STORIES	GENESIS 6–9
Many gods quarrel, deceive, and work against each other.	One sovereign God both judges and saves.
The flood is sent because humans are too noisy or too numerous.	The Flood is sent because of moral evil and <i>violence</i> (6:11, 13).
The gods panic at the flood they caused and cower like frightened dogs.	God is in complete control: He shuts the door (7:16) and remembers Noah (8:1).
The hero is spared by a god's secret favoritism or trickery.	Noah finds <i>grace</i> and walks with God (6:8–9).
The hungry gods swarm the sacrifice like flies because they need food.	God needs nothing; the sacrifice leads to a gracious promise (8:21–22).
The hero becomes immortal and is removed from humanity.	Noah stays mortal and dies (9:29); the hope is in God's covenant, not a hero becoming divine.

Similarities like these are not surprising. If a real catastrophe lay deep in humanity's memory, we would expect many cultures to tell versions of it. Genesis is not borrowing a myth; it is telling the true story about the true God in conversation with the stories its neighbors knew.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (GENESIS 7:1–8:19)

3.3 Q1: The hinge of the whole Flood story isn't the destruction; it's "But God remembered Noah." What would it look like for you to read your hardest season with that sentence at the center?

3.3 Q2: Noah waited in the ark for over a year. What do you think waiting did to (or for) his faith? What is waiting doing to yours?

3.3 Q3: Compared with the gods of the other ancient flood stories, what stands out about the God of Genesis? Which contrast matters most to you, and why?

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 3.3 · PACING TARGET: 15 MINUTES

- **Pacing Breakdown:** 7 minutes of teaching, 8 minutes of discussion. **3.3 Q1** is the heart of this section; give it the most time.
- **Facilitation Tip (Let the Silence Sit):** Ask one person to read Genesis 7:23 slowly. When they finish, let several seconds of silence pass before you say anything. The judgment is real, and the room should feel it. Then have a second voice read 8:1 as the turn: "But God remembered Noah." The contrast teaches itself.
- **Hebrew Quick-Reference:**
 - **zakar** (זָכַר) — "to remember," meaning God acts on His commitment (see **19:29; 30:22** ; Exodus 2:24).
 - **ruach** (רוּחַ) — "wind, breath, Spirit." Links **8:1** to **1:2** .

- **mabbul** (מַבּוּל) – "flood." A special word used almost only for Noah's Flood (also Psalm 29:10, where the LORD sits enthroned over the flood).
- **Research Pointer (The Mirror Structure):** Gordon Wenham's analysis (Word Biblical Commentary, *Genesis* 1–15, 1987; and "The Coherence of the Flood Narrative," *Vetus Testamentum* 28, 1978) is the most widely cited. The full outline runs: Noah and his sons (**6:10**) → violence and the decision to destroy (**6:11–13**) → instructions for the ark (**6:14–22**) → entering the ark (**7:1–10**) → the flood begins and the LORD shuts the door (**7:11–16**) → the waters prevail (**7:17–24**) → **God remembered Noah (8:1)** → the waters recede (**8:1–5**) → the raven and the dove (**8:6–12**) → leaving the ark (**8:13–19**) → sacrifice and promise (**8:20–22**) → covenant blessing (**9:1–7**) → covenant and Noah's sons (**9:8–19**).
- **Follow-Up Probes:**
 - "Why might the story be shaped so that God's faithfulness is literally at the center?"
 - For **3.3 Q2**: "Noah couldn't see out—the ark had one window (**8:6**). What helps you trust when you can't see what's happening outside?"
- **Pitfall to Avoid (Global vs. Regional Flood):** Christians who hold to the full truthfulness of Scripture disagree about the extent of the Flood. Some hold to a global flood; others hold to a regional flood that covered the whole world of humanity at that time. Both views take the text as real history and affirm its theological point. Name this in one sentence and keep the session on God's justice, grace, and covenant.
- **Pitfall to Avoid ("Genesis Copied Gilgamesh"):** If someone has heard that Genesis is just a borrowed Babylonian myth, don't turn it into a debate. Walk through the contrast table. Scholars such as Kenneth Kitchen, John Walton, and Tremper Longman note that shared memory or deliberate engagement explains the similarities, while the differences show a radically different God.
- **Pitfall to Avoid (Source-Splitting):** Someone may ask why 6:19 mentions two of every kind while 7:2 mentions seven pairs of clean animals. Some critical scholars use details like this to split the story into two original sources. The simpler explanation is that 7:2 adds detail: clean animals were needed for sacrifice (**8:20**). The mirror structure shows the story is one carefully unified narrative. Answer briefly only if asked.

SECTION 3.4

Covenant, Bow, and the Image of God (Genesis 8:20–9:17)

GUIDED OPEN-BIBLE READING (GENESIS 8:20–9:17)

Invite **two group members** to read aloud directly from their open ESV Bibles:

- **Reader 1:** Genesis 8:20–9:7 (*Noah's Altar, God's Promise in His Heart, and the Renewed Blessing*)
- **Reader 2:** Genesis 9:8–17 (*The Covenant with Every Living Creature and the Sign of the Bow*)

ESV Anchor Verses — Genesis 8:21–22; 9:6; 9:12–13; 9:15

Genesis 8:21–22 (ESV): "And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.'"

Genesis 9:6 (ESV): "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."

Genesis 9:12–13 (ESV): "And God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.'"

Genesis 9:15 (ESV): "I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh."

TEACHING NARRATIVE: THE SAME DIAGNOSIS, A DIFFERENT RESPONSE

1. An Altar, an Aroma, and a Surprising Promise (Genesis 8:20–22): The first thing Noah does on dry ground is build an altar and offer sacrifices. God receives the "*pleasing aroma*," and then something astonishing happens. Put Genesis 6:5 and 8:21 side by side. Before the Flood, God saw that every intention of the human heart was only evil continually. After the Flood, God says the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. *The diagnosis has not changed.* The waters washed away a violent generation, but they did not wash the sin out of the human heart.

Yet God's response *has* changed. In 6:5–7, the diagnosis led to judgment. In 8:21–22, the same diagnosis leads to a promise: never again will God strike down every living creature in this way, and the steady rhythm of seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will continue as long as the earth remains. God is not saying sin no longer matters. He is committing Himself to preserve the stage of history so that His rescue plan can unfold. Every sunrise and every harvest since is a quiet sign of that patience.

2. Noah as a "New Adam" (Genesis 9:1–5): God now speaks to Noah the way He spoke to Adam. The blessing to be fruitful and multiply is repeated (**9:1, 7**). Humanity's rule over the animals continues, but now the relationship is strained by fear (**9:2**). Animals are added to the human diet, but the blood—which represents life—must not be eaten (**9:3–4**). The pattern is clear: God is restarting the human story with Noah as a new head of the human family. But as we will see in Section 3.5, a new Adam with the same heart will need a better Adam still.

3. The Image of God and the Value of a Human Life (Genesis 9:5–6): Remember that the sin that brought the Flood was *violence*. So the first law God gives the new world directly addresses bloodshed. God says He will require a reckoning for every human life (**9:5**). Then comes one of the most important verses in Genesis: whoever sheds human blood will be held accountable by human justice, *for God made man in his own image*.

That last phrase is the foundation of the whole verse. Human life is not precious because of a person's usefulness, intelligence, nationality, or skin color. It is precious because every single person bears the image of God. The Fall marred that image, but it did not erase it (compare Genesis 5:1–3 from last week). Later, James 3:9 will point out how inconsistent it is to bless God and curse the people made in His likeness.

4. The Covenant That Depends on God Alone (Genesis 9:8–17): The word בְּרִית (*berit*)—"covenant"—appears **seven times** in these ten verses, and seven is the Bible's number of completeness. Two features make this

covenant stand out:

- **It is universal.** God makes it not only with Noah and his descendants, but with *every living creature* and with *the earth* itself (**9:10, 12-13, 15-17**).
- **It is unconditional.** God alone makes the commitments. Nothing is required of Noah for the covenant to stand. It does not depend on humanity behaving better—which, as 8:21 has already admitted, we will not.

5. The Bow in the Cloud (Genesis 9:13-16): The sign of the covenant is God's *bow* in the clouds. The Hebrew word קֶשֶׁת (*qeshet*) is the ordinary word for a warrior's bow, the kind used in battle and hunting (compare Genesis 27:3). Hebrew has no separate word for "rainbow." Many interpreters see a powerful image here: the divine Warrior has hung up His bow in the sky, pointed upward and away from the earth, as a sign of peace after judgment. We should hold that image with an open hand—it is widely held and likely, not certain—but it fits the scene beautifully.

Notice also *who* the sign is for. God says that when the bow appears, *He* will remember His covenant (**9:15-16**). The rainbow is first a reminder for God, and only then a reassurance to us. And here is that word *remember* (*zakar*) again—the same word at the center of the Flood story in 8:1. The God who remembered Noah binds Himself to keep remembering. Centuries later, the prophet Ezekiel describes the brightness around God's throne as looking like the bow in the cloud on a rainy day (Ezekiel 1:28), and John sees a rainbow encircling the throne of God (Revelation 4:3). The sign of mercy surrounds the very center of heaven.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (GENESIS 8:20-9:17)

3.4 Q1: God says the human heart is evil "from his youth" and then promises never again to destroy the earth. Why would that diagnosis lead to mercy instead of more judgment?

3.4 Q2: God's covenant with Noah required nothing from Noah. How do you relate to a promise you can't earn or lose?

3.4 Q3: Genesis 9:6 grounds the value of every person in the image of God. Whose image-bearing dignity is hardest for you to honor, and what would honoring it look like this week?

3.4 Q4: The rainbow is a reminder "for God" first. What does it do to your faith to know God binds Himself to remember?

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 3.4 • PACING TARGET: 15 MINUTES

- **Pacing Breakdown:** 6 minutes of teaching, 9 minutes of discussion. With four questions, choose two ahead of time. **3.4 Q1** and **3.4 Q3** usually produce the richest conversation; **3.4 Q4** makes a good one-sentence reflection if you are short on time.
- **Facilitation Tip (Draw the Bow):** Sketch a simple bow and arrow on the whiteboard, then flip it so it points upward. Ask the group: "What would it mean for a warrior to hang up his weapon facing away from you?" Let them make the connection before you explain it.

- **Hebrew Quick-Reference:**
 - **berit** (בְּרִית) — "covenant," seven times in **9:8–17**.
 - **qeshet** (קֶשֶׁת) — "bow," the ordinary word for a war bow. Some scholars, such as Meredith Kline, see the image of God hanging up His war bow. In the Babylonian creation story *Enuma Elish*, the god Marduk's bow is set in the sky after battle—so this kind of picture would have been familiar in the ancient Near Eastern world.
 - **zakar** (זָכַר) — "remember," returning in **9:15–16**.
- **Research Pointer (Establishing the Covenant):** Some theologians, such as William Dumbrell, argue that the verb used in 6:18 and 9:9 ("establish," *heqim*) suggests God is confirming a commitment already implied in creation; others see a brand-new covenant here. Either way, the covenant with Noah preserves the world as the stage for God's redemption. Isaiah 54:9–10 later uses God's oath in the days of Noah as the guarantee of His steadfast love and covenant of peace toward His people.
- **Follow-Up Probes:**
 - "How does the 'new Adam' pattern prepare us to look for a better Noah?"
 - For **3.4 Q2**: "Is it harder for you to trust a promise you can't earn or a promise you can't lose? Why?"
 - For **3.4 Q3**: "Think of the last time you were tempted to see someone as less than an image-bearer—in traffic, online, at work. What changes if 9:6 is true of them?"
- **Pitfall to Avoid (Capital Punishment Debate):** Genesis 9:6 is often cited in debates over the death penalty, and Romans 13:4 is often linked to it as a foundation for human government. Acknowledge that faithful Christians apply this verse differently today, and bring the focus back to the foundation of the verse: the image of God gives every human life its value.
- **Pitfall to Avoid (The Modern Rainbow):** Some group members may raise the modern cultural use of the rainbow as a symbol. Gently frame the biblical sign for what it is—God's covenant promise of mercy to every living creature—without turning the session into a debate. Useful line: "Before the rainbow meant anything else, it meant God hanging up His bow over a world that didn't deserve it."
- **Pitfall to Avoid (Meat and Blood):** If someone asks whether 9:4 means Christians shouldn't eat rare steak, note briefly that the command honors life as belonging to God, and that Acts 15 and the wider New Testament address how this applies to the church. Then return to the covenant.

SECTION 3.5

A New Start, the Same Heart (Genesis 9:18–29)

GUIDED OPEN-BIBLE READING (GENESIS 9:18–29)

Invite **one group member** to read **Genesis 9:18–29** aloud directly from their open ESV Bible. This short, uncomfortable scene has no anchor-verse callout this week; let the text speak for itself straight from your Bible.

TEACHING NARRATIVE: THE FLOOD COULD NOT WASH THE HEART

1. A Man of the Ground, a Vineyard, and a Fall (Genesis 9:18–21): The story that follows the rainbow is jarring. Noah, the man who found grace and walked with God, begins working the ground and plants a vineyard. The text describes him as a man of the *adamah*—the same Hebrew word for "ground" from which Adam was made (**2:7**). He drinks the wine, becomes drunk, and lies uncovered in his tent.

Genesis tells this story deliberately. Noah is being presented as a "new Adam," and the parallels with the first Adam are hard to miss:

THE FIRST ADAM (GENESIS 2–3)	NOAH, THE "NEW ADAM" (GENESIS 9)
Made from the ground (<i>adamah</i>) and placed in a garden to work it (2:7, 15).	A man of the ground (<i>adamah</i>) who plants a vineyard (9:20).
Eats the fruit of a forbidden tree (3:6).	Drinks the fruit of the vine to drunkenness (9:21).
Nakedness and shame are exposed (3:7).	Lies uncovered in his tent (9:21).
God covers the shame with garments of skins (3:21).	Two sons cover their father's shame with a garment (9:23).
A curse is spoken (3:14–17).	A curse is spoken over one line of descendants (9:25).

The lesson is sobering and freeing at the same time. The Flood washed away a violent generation, but it could not wash away the sin of the human heart. God Himself said so in 8:21. A fresh start, even one as dramatic as a new world, is not enough to make people new. If Noah needed grace after the Flood, so do we.

2. Ham's Sin and the Brothers' Covering (Genesis 9:22–23): Noah's son Ham sees his father's nakedness and goes out and tells his two brothers. Shem and Japheth respond very differently: they take a garment, lay it on their shoulders, walk in *backward*, and cover their father without looking. Interpreters have proposed different explanations of exactly what Ham did, but the simplest reading fits the details of the text: Ham dishonored his father. He looked on his father's shame and then spread it, treating it as something to gossip about rather than something to cover. His brothers chose to protect their father's dignity even in his failure.

3. Why Canaan? (Genesis 9:24–27): When Noah wakes, he speaks a curse—but not on Ham. He speaks it on Ham's son **Canaan**, saying Canaan will serve his brothers, and he blesses Shem and Japheth. Why Canaan? Two explanations work together. First, there is a mirror-image justice: Ham dishonored his father, and so Ham's son is named. Second, Noah's words are a *prophetic* statement looking ahead to Israel's later history. The first readers of Genesis were about to enter the land of Canaan, whose people had become known for the very kinds of sexual and moral corruption the Law warns against (Leviticus 18:3, 24–28).

It is essential to read this passage carefully. The curse is spoken on **Canaan alone**, not on Ham's other sons. It is Noah's prophetic word about a specific people in a specific land, not a permanent decree from God about any ethnicity or skin color. Only a few verses earlier, God declared that *every* human being bears His image (**9:6**). Nothing in this passage overturns that.

4. The End of Noah's Story (Genesis 9:28–29): The family history of Noah ends the same way the family histories in Genesis 5 did: Noah lived 950 years, and he died. Unlike the heroes of the Babylonian flood stories, Noah is never made immortal. The hope of the world does not rest on Noah. It rests on the God who made a covenant with Noah.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (GENESIS 9:18–29)

3.5 Q1: Even the man who "walked with God" fell soon after the rescue. Why do you think Genesis tells this story so honestly about its hero?

3.5 Q2: Ham exposed his father's shame; his brothers covered it. When someone close to you fails, which is your first instinct, and why?

3.5 Q3: Where have you assumed a "fresh start" (a move, a new job, a new year) would fix something only God's grace can change?

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 3.5 • PACING TARGET: 13 MINUTES

- **Pacing Breakdown:** 5 minutes of teaching (including the pastoral flag below), 8 minutes of discussion. Prioritize **3.5 Q2** and **3.5 Q3**.
- **Facilitation Tip (Keep the Tone Tender):** This scene is about family shame. Some members of your group may carry addiction in their own story or in their family's, or painful memories of a parent's failure. Read the passage plainly, avoid humor, and model the posture of Shem and Japheth in how you lead the conversation: honest about sin, protective of people.
- **Hebrew Quick-Reference:** *adamah* (אָדָמָה) — "ground, soil." Noah is literally a "man of the *adamah*" (**9:20**), echoing Adam's creation from the *adamah* (**2:7**).

⚠ **IMPORTANT PASTORAL & HISTORICAL FLAG — The Curse on Canaan (Genesis 9:20–27) and the Misuse of Scripture to Justify Racial Slavery (Address Directly and Briefly):**

In the 18th and 19th centuries, this passage—falsely labeled the "curse of Ham"—was horribly misused to justify the enslavement of Africans. Many enslaved people and their descendants heard this text preached against them. Name that history plainly and call it what it was: a twisting of Scripture. The text itself does not support it:

1. **The curse is spoken on Canaan, not on Ham** or on Ham's other sons (Cush, Egypt, and Put; **Genesis 10:6**).
2. **The Canaanites lived in the Levant** (the eastern Mediterranean coast, the land later given to Israel), not in sub-Saharan Africa.
3. **It is Noah's prophetic word, not a permanent decree of God** on any skin color or ethnicity. Genesis records Noah's words; it never says God endorsed them as a rule for all time.
4. **Every human being bears the image of God (Genesis 9:6)**, the very foundation God laid for human dignity just verses earlier, and every nation descends from the same family (**Acts 17:26**).

Suggested wording: "Before we move on, I want to name something. For a long time, this passage was used to defend slavery and racism. That was a terrible misuse of God's Word. The text doesn't say what those people claimed, and the God who just declared that every person bears His image doesn't either." Then move on. If someone in your group is personally affected by this history, follow up privately and with care.

- **Research Pointer (Views on Ham's Sin):** The most common and simplest reading is dishonor—looking on his father's shame and gossiping about it, which connects to the later command to honor father and mother. A second proposal reads a sexual act into the text, based on the idiom "uncover the nakedness" in Leviticus 18:7–8. The text says Ham *saw*, and the brothers' remedy is covering without looking, which supports the first view.
- **Follow-Up Probes:**
 - "What does covering another person's shame look like without enabling their sin?"

- For **3.5 Q1**: "What would we lose if the Bible only told us flattering stories about its heroes?"
- For **3.5 Q3**: "What is the difference between a fresh start and a new heart?"
- **Pitfall to Avoid (Speculative Readings)**: Do not linger on speculative sexual interpretations of Ham's sin; mention them only if asked, and keep it brief.
- **Pitfall to Avoid (Shaming Language About Alcohol)**: Avoid jokes or shaming comments about drinking. The point of the passage is not that Noah was uniquely weak, but that even the best of us carry a heart that needs grace.

SECTION 3.6

Babel, the Nations, and a Name Given by Grace (Genesis 10:1–11:32)

GUIDED OPEN-BIBLE READING (GENESIS 11:1–9 ; SKIM 10:1–32 AND 11:10–32)

Invite **two group members** to read aloud directly from their open ESV Bibles, and encourage everyone to skim the genealogies of Genesis 10 and 11:10–32 at home this week:

- **Reader 1**: Genesis 11:1–9 (*One Language, the City and the Tower, the LORD Comes Down, and the Scattering*)
- **Reader 2**: Genesis 11:27–32 (*The Family History of Terah, Abram and Sarai, and the Journey That Stops at Haran*)

ESV Anchor Verses — Genesis 11:4; 11:9

Genesis 11:4 (ESV): "Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.'"

Genesis 11:9 (ESV): "Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth."

TEACHING NARRATIVE: WHO GETS TO MAKE A NAME?

1. The Table of Nations (Genesis 10): Genesis 10 opens a new family history: "This is the family history of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth" (**10:1**). What follows is often called the **Table of Nations**. It traces peoples descended from Japheth (generally to the north and west), from Ham (generally to the south and southwest, including Egypt, Cush, Canaan, and the Mesopotamian cities of a man named Nimrod), and from Shem (including Eber, the ancestor of the "Hebrews"). In the Hebrew text, the names add up to **seventy**, a number that becomes a symbol in Scripture for "all the nations" (compare Deuteronomy 32:8). Two names deserve a quick look:

- **Nimrod (10:8–12)** is a mighty hunter and the founder of a kingdom that includes **Babel**. He represents early empire-building and links the genealogy to the Tower story that follows.
- **Peleg (10:25)**, whose name means "division," is born in the days when the earth was divided—likely a hint pointing ahead to Babel.

Before God ever chooses Israel, Genesis shows that He cares about *every* nation. The spread of peoples and languages is part of the blessing to fill the earth (**9:1**).

2. Why Chapter 10 Comes Before Chapter 11: Readers often notice that Genesis 10 already describes nations spread out by their languages, but Genesis 11 begins with the whole earth speaking one language. Genesis is

not confused. Chapter 10 shows the *result*—a world full of nations—and 11:1–9 then steps back to tell the *cause*.

3. A Tower to the Sky (Genesis 11:1–4): People settle in the land of **Shinar**, which is southern Mesopotamia. They make bricks and use bitumen (tar) for mortar—an accurate detail, since Mesopotamia had little building stone. Their tower was very likely a **ziggurat**, a stepped temple-tower of mud brick. Mesopotamians believed these towers were stairways connecting heaven and earth, where a god could come down to the temple at the top. Babylon's great ziggurat was called *Etemenanki*, "House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth."

Listen to their two motives in 11:4. They want to *make a name for themselves*, and they want to avoid being *dispersed over the face of the whole earth*. The first is pride. The second is resistance to God's command to fill the earth. They want security and significance on their own terms.

4. God Comes Down (Genesis 11:5–9): Then comes one of the great moments of holy humor in the Bible. The builders aimed for a tower with its top in the heavens, but the LORD has to *come down* to see it (**11:5**). Their skyscraper is so small, from heaven's point of view, that God must stoop to look at it.

The builders said, "Come, let us make bricks" and "Come, let us build." Now God answers with His own "Come, let us"—*let us go down and confuse their language* (**11:7**). In Hebrew the sounds mirror each other (*nilbenah*, "let us make bricks," and *navlah*, "let us confuse"). The Hebrew verb בָּלַל (**balal**) means "to mix up" or "confuse." Babylon's own name, *Bab-ili*, meant "gate of god" in the Akkadian language. Genesis renames it with a pun: not "Gate of God," but **Babel**—"Mixed-Up" (**11:9**). Across the rest of Scripture, Babylon becomes a symbol of proud human power set against God (Isaiah 13–14; Daniel 4:30; Revelation 17–18).

5. The Thread of the "Name" (Shem): The Hebrew word שֵׁם (**shem**) means "name," "reputation," or "renown." Watch it run through this whole week like a red thread:

REFERENCE	THE "NAME" THREAD
Genesis 6:4	The Nephilim are famous men of old—literally "men of the <i>name</i> ."
Genesis 11:4	The builders of Babel: <i>let us make a name for ourselves</i> .
Genesis 11:10	The chosen family line is the line of Shem —whose name literally means "Name."
Genesis 12:2	God promises Abram that He will make Abram's name great.

The question underneath Week 3 is simple: *Who gets to make a name?* A self-made name ends in confusion and scattering. A God-given name is a gift of grace.

6. From Shem to Terah—and a Barren Woman (Genesis 11:10–32): The next family history, "This is the family history of Shem" (**11:10**), narrows the camera from all the nations to one family line. Like Genesis 5, it runs ten generations—but this time without the refrain "and he died," and with lifespans shrinking sharply (Shem lives 600 years; Terah 205). Then a final family history opens: "This is the family history of Terah" (**11:27**). Terah's family lives in **Ur of the Chaldeans**, a great Mesopotamian city devoted to the moon god, and Joshua 24:2 tells us they served other gods. They set out for Canaan but stop at **Haran**, another center of moon-god worship.

And then Genesis gives us one quiet, heartbreaking detail: Sarai, Abram's wife, was unable to have children (**11:30**). The entire future of God's promise of a "seed" (Genesis 3:15) now rests on a couple who cannot produce one. Genesis ends its first great section exactly where human ability runs out—which is exactly where God loves to begin.

CANONICAL HORIZON: FROM BABEL TO PENTECOST TO EVERY NATION

Week 3's story stretches across the whole Bible and comes to rest in Jesus Christ:

- **The Days of Noah** (**Matthew 24:37–39**; **Luke 17:26–27**): Jesus says His return will be like the days of Noah, when people went on with ordinary life, unaware until the Flood came. The warning is not that eating and marrying are wrong, but that people ignored God's warning.
- **Rescued Through Water** (**1 Peter 3:18–22**; **Hebrews 11:7**): Peter says Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God. He points to the eight people brought safely through water in Noah's day and says baptism corresponds to this—not as washing dirt off the body, but as an appeal to God for a clean conscience through the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is the true ark: those who are *in Him* are carried safely through judgment.
- **The Better Covenant** (**Isaiah 54:9–10**): God compares His unbreakable love for His people to His oath in the days of Noah. The covenant with Noah becomes the guarantee of a greater covenant of peace.
- **Pentecost: Babel Reversed** (**Acts 2:1–11**): At Babel, people climbed up to make a name for themselves, and one language became many. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes *down*, and people from every nation under heaven hear the mighty works of God in their own languages. God does not erase languages and cultures—He speaks through them, and He lifts up the name of Jesus rather than any human name (**Acts 2:21**).
- **Every Nation, Tribe, People, and Language** (**Revelation 7:9**; **4:3**): The scattered nations of Genesis 10–11 are finally gathered as a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, worshiping before the throne of the Lamb—a throne encircled by a rainbow.

GENESIS 6–11	FULFILLED IN CHRIST & THE NEW CREATION
Eight people saved through the waters of judgment in the ark (Genesis 7:23).	Believers are saved through Christ, the true ark, pictured in baptism (1 Peter 3:18–22).
God's bow hung in the cloud as a sign of mercy (Genesis 9:13).	A rainbow encircles the throne of God (Revelation 4:3).
Humanity says, "Let us make a name for ourselves" (Genesis 11:4).	God gives the name that is above every name to Jesus, and all who call on it are saved (Philippians 2:9 ; Acts 2:21).
One language confused, the nations scattered (Genesis 11:9).	Many languages hear one gospel at Pentecost (Acts 2:6–11).
Seventy nations spread across the earth (Genesis 10).	A multitude from every nation gathered in worship (Revelation 7:9).

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (**GENESIS 10:1–11:32**)

3.6 Q1: The builders wanted a name and wanted to avoid being scattered. What are the "towers" people build today to feel secure or significant? What's yours?

3.6 Q2: Genesis ends this week with a barren woman (11:30), right before God's great promise. Why might God so often start His work where human ability ends?

3.6 Q3: At Pentecost, God didn't erase languages; He spoke through them. What does that say about how God values culture and ethnic diversity in His church?

3.6 Q4 (Closing): Whose name are you living for this week, and what's one concrete way to live for His?

MY ONE CONCRETE STEP FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

Write down one "tower" you will stop building for your own name this week, and one person whose image-bearing dignity you will intentionally honor (Genesis 9:6):

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CLOSING PRAYER

- Father, thank You that Your grace came before Your judgment, carried Noah's family through the waters, and still holds back the floods today. Thank You that You grieve over sin and that You remember the people You have promised to keep.
- Lord Jesus, You are our true ark and the better Noah. You went under the waters of judgment so that we could be carried safely through. Teach us to stop building towers for our own names and to rest in the name You give us by grace.
- Holy Spirit, as You came down at Pentecost and spoke the gospel in every language, make our group a place where every image-bearer is honored and where Your name, not ours, is made great this week. In Jesus' name, Amen.

LOOKING AHEAD TO WEEK 4

Next week in **Week 4 (Genesis 12 –)**, we begin the second great section of Genesis: the story of Abram and Sarai. Before our next gathering, read **Genesis 12** in your open ESV Bible, and watch how God answers Babel's "let us make a name for ourselves" by calling one family out of Ur and Haran and promising to make *their* name great—so that through them all the families of the earth will be blessed.

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 3.6 • PACING TARGET: 15 MINUTES

- **Pacing Breakdown:** 6 minutes of teaching (including the Canonical Horizon), 7 minutes of discussion, 2 minutes for the closing step and prayer. Prioritize **3.6 Q1** and **3.6 Q4**; use **3.6 Q2** or **3.6 Q3** depending on your group.
- **Facilitation Tip (End on the Cliffhanger):** Close the teaching by reading the note about Sarai being unable to have children (**11:30**) and pausing. Then say: "That's where Genesis leaves us until next week. Everything God has promised now depends on a couple who can't have a child." It is the perfect setup for Genesis 12.
- **Hebrew Quick-Reference:**
 - **shem** (שֵׁם) — "name, reputation, renown." The thread of the week (**6:4; 11:4, 10; 12:2**).

- **balal** (בָּלַל) — "to mix, mingle, confuse." Also used for mixing flour with oil (Leviticus 2:4–5). The ESV footnote on 11:9 notes that Babel sounds like the Hebrew for "confused."
- **Bab-ili** (Akkadian) — "gate of god," Babylon's own proud name.
- **Research Pointer (Ur and Haran):** Most scholars identify Ur with the large Sumerian city in southern Iraq excavated by Leonard Woolley in the 1920s and 1930s; some propose a northern Ur nearer Haran. "Chaldeans" is a later name, likely used so later readers would recognize the place. Both Ur and Haran were centers of moon-god worship, so Abram's call is a call out of idolatry by grace alone (Joshua 24:2).
- **Research Pointer (Jacob's Ladder):** If your group enjoys connections, point ahead to Genesis 28:12. Babel is humanity's stairway trying to reach heaven; at Bethel, God sets up the stairway and comes down to meet Jacob. Grace always comes down.
- **Research Pointer (Pentecost Vocabulary):** The Greek translation of the Old Testament uses the verb *syncheō* ("confuse") in Genesis 11:7, 9, and Luke uses a form of the same verb in Acts 2:6 for the crowd's bewilderment—a deliberate echo.
- **Follow-Up Probes:**
 - "How does Babel's 'let us make a name' set up God's 'make your name great' in Genesis 12:2?"
 - For **3.6 Q1**: "Name a tower that looks respectable—a career, a reputation, a family image, a ministry. How do you know when it's become a Babel?"
 - For **3.6 Q3**: "What would our church look like if it reflected Revelation 7:9 a little more this year?"
- **Pitfall to Avoid (The Genealogy Lecture):** Don't let the Table of Nations become a geography or genealogy class. Pick two names (Nimrod and Peleg) and move on.
- **Pitfall to Avoid (Chapter Order):** Expect someone to ask why chapter 10 describes many languages before chapter 11 explains them. Kenneth Mathews, Gordon Wenham, and Victor Hamilton all read chapter 10 as the summary and 11:1–9 as the flashback that explains it.
- **Pitfall to Avoid ("God Hates Cities, Technology, or Diversity"):** Babel is not a warning against cities, building projects, or cultural diversity. The problem is pride and refusal to fill the earth as God commanded (**9:1**). Diversity is God's gift; Pentecost proves He delights to speak through it.
- **Pitfall to Avoid (1 Peter 3:19–20, "Spirits in Prison"):** If someone asks about Christ proclaiming to the spirits in prison, acknowledge that this is one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament. Main evangelical views: (1) Christ, through Noah's preaching, spoke to people of Noah's day who are now imprisoned (Augustine; Wayne Grudem); (2) the risen Christ proclaimed His victory to fallen spiritual beings, often connected to Genesis 6:1–4 (Thomas Schreiner; Karen Jobes); (3) Christ preached to the dead between His death and resurrection (less common among evangelicals). Then steer back to Peter's clear point: salvation through the resurrection of Jesus.
- **Closing the Session Well:** Give the group sixty silent seconds to write their **One Concrete Step**. Then pray the printed Closing Prayer together, or invite two or three volunteers to pray specifically for one another's "towers."
- **Leader Prep Note for Week 4:** Remind group members to bring their open ESV Bibles next week having read **Genesis 12**, watching for the five-fold repetition of blessing in God's call to Abram.