

# A PEOPLE SCATTERED

**+** **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Rebellion against God and His ways is in the heart of all people; however, God's grace is greater than all our sin.

**+** **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

Genesis 10:1–11:9; Isaiah 65:1-7

**+** **SETTING:**

The pristine setting of Eden's garden is already a distant memory by the time we arrive in Genesis 10–11. The first act of human rebellion in Genesis 3 paved the way for countless more, and not even a worldwide flood could scrub the wickedness from our hearts. In Genesis 10–11, as Noah's offspring multiply on the face of the earth, they too turned away from worshiping and obeying God. Seeking to ascend to God, humanity repeats the folly of their first parents and rebels against God—a case study for the doctrine of sin as rebellion.

# DAY 1

## READ:

Isaiah 65

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 65:1-2

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The real attitude of sin in the heart towards God is that of being without God; it is pride, the worship of myself, that is the great atheistic fact in human life."<sup>1</sup>

—Oswald Chambers (1874-1917)

Isaiah 65:2 records God's charge that Israel had been a rebellious people who had chosen to walk a bad path. Though Isaiah was written long after Genesis 3, the echoes of Adam and Eve's choice to go their own way reverberate throughout God's accusation against His people in Isaiah. If we are honest, we'll admit the echo doesn't stop in Isaiah. It resonates within our own hearts and experience.

The thing is we know that rebellion against God's ways is foolish. We have watched human rebellion play out since the garden of Eden. As Adam and Eve were evicted from the presence of God in paradise, we see the folly of their fatal choices. As Genesis goes on, so does this foolish inclination toward rebellion. Cain rejected God's counsel and killed Abel, a crime against God and humanity for which he was cursed to the end of his days. Generations later, all the people on the earth chose to think and do whatever wickedness they could come up with, resulting in God's judgment of the flood. And in Isaiah 65, we watch with horror as the people chosen by God to bear His name refused to call out to Him who was ready to be merciful in the midst of their despair.

If we were to think about our own lives, we could provide ample personal accounts about the foolishness of rebelling against God's ways. So why do we, like dogs returning to our own vomit (Prov. 26:11), choose to persist in making our own way instead of following God's way?

Prayerfully ask the Lord to help you (1) pause when you encounter temptations to do things your way, (2) consider that rebellion is always foolish, and (3) choose to live God's way through the strength provided by the Spirit. May our lives give glory to the God who has saved us from the folly of our own rebellion.

**In what ways do you feel you are most inclined to go your own way rather than follow God's way?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

Genesis 10:32–11:4

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 10:32–11:4

## NOTES



### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #38: SIN AS REBELLION

Because the Bible portrays people as responsible beings, called to respond in faith and obedience to God's revelation, the Bible often portrays sin in terms of defiance and rebellion toward God the King. Isaiah 1:2 is one of many passages that describes sin in terms of rebellion against God: "I have raised children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against Me." Seen in this light, sin is personal and willful disobedience, the raising of a clenched fist toward the One who made us.

The story of the Tower of Babylon, or Babel, is a relatively familiar and short account. It begins in Genesis 11:1 and is concluded only nine verses later. If we are not careful, the familiarity and brevity of this story can obscure the gravity of its message. And if we miss the weight of the story, we are likely to repeat the people's missteps.

Nestled in the middle of the admittedly silly human plans to build a tower whose top would reach heaven, the people of Babylon revealed their prideful motivations (Gen. 11:4). The rationale for their proposal displayed at least three attempts at rebellion.

- First, the people intended to build and settle in this great city so as to avoid the divine command to fill the earth.
- Second, the people were seeking to reach the heavens by their own ability and skill.
- Third, and perhaps the most insidious, they wanted to make a name for themselves.

Do you hear in this plan the whispers of a fresh articulation of the serpent's temptation in Genesis 3? The serpent got Eve to consider that God might be holding out on her. The fruit, so she believed, promised a way to make herself like God. So too, the people of Babylon took the bait of believing that their tower project might have made them something more substantial than what they already were.

**Where do you find yourself tempted to make a name for yourself by impressing others? What can you do today to pursue God's kingdom and to point others to Jesus?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

Genesis 11:1-9

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 11:3-9

NOTES

In the last hundred years, the amount of technology produced by humanity has grown exponentially. We build sturdier buildings to live in. We make more efficient vehicles to help transport us and to deliver the products we consume. We have developed electronic technologies that open lines of communication with others that allow us to overcome time, language, and space barriers. We have improved our medical technology so as to alleviate the symptoms and spread of many of the health problems we face in our world.

Most of this technology has been developed in an effort to make money, to increase personal security, to proliferate convenience, and to stave off the debilitation that comes from sickness. Much of this is the good work of people who are researching, developing, and stewarding God's world. Technology is not itself bad. However, technology and our ability to produce it can distract us from our ultimate dependence upon God.

Just like the people of Babylon determined that their own skill and ability as builders might provide them access to the heavens, we run the same risk of thinking we can protect and promote ourselves. Take inventory of your own heart and consider where you are tempted to trust in human technology, efforts, and understanding more than in God's providential care.

While the Lord often uses human agents and products to administer His kindness and protection, we must remember Jesus' encouragement to the crowds who were prone to store up riches and be anxious about their circumstances: God provides for the birds and He adorns the grass with flowers; have faith that He will take care of you in even greater ways (Matt. 6:26,30).

**How does Scripture help us to benefit from certain technologies while also being aware of their drawbacks or the ways they could lead us into temptation?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

Acts 2

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 2:1-12

## NOTES

In Genesis 11, we see in the Tower of Babylon a display of human pride and self-glory. We also see the response of God to punish and judge the people of Babylon by multiplying and confusing their language, dispersing them across the face of the earth. However, despite the diversity of languages being rooted in God's judgment in the plain of Shinar, we see in the New Testament that God acted to reverse the curse of Babel. In fact, He did more than reverse the curse.

In Acts 2, when the Spirit is poured out at Pentecost on the early believers, the very languages of the nations that gave evidence of divine punishment in Genesis 11 become vehicles of gospel communication. Acts 2:5 records that on the day of Pentecost, there were people gathered in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven. The miracle of this story is that all of these people with different histories and backstories heard the apostles' gospel message in their own languages.

The details here are important. Rather than being made to understand Peter's language—a mere reversal of Babel's curse—these representatives of the nations received the message in their own languages. Not only did this communicate the fact that the message was for them, but it encouraged them to proclaim it among the peoples to whom they would return. They had received the message of the gospel in the very tongues that gave evidence of God's judgment against human pride. Yet God in His providence has now turned these languages into vehicles profitable for His purposes of making Himself and His salvation known.

Have you ever stopped to think about how unlikely it is that you have a Bible written in your language? It is not only a great privilege to have access to the words of God in our own tongues, it is also a great responsibility.

**How can you find ways to proclaim God's goodness to those around you today?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

Revelation 7

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Revelation 7:9-10

NOTES

At the beginning of this week, we contemplated the sinful rebellion that began at Babylon and that resulted in the confusion of human languages. Yesterday, however, we recognized that our great redeeming God demonstrated His curse-reversing power by allowing the languages of the world to become vehicles for gospel proclamation beginning at Pentecost in Acts 2. Today, then, it is good to consider the end to which history is headed and how eternity will prove God's redeeming work complete—even including the redemption of languages.

Though human rebellion is everywhere shown to be total and pervasive, God's mercy and grace endure and overcome so as to prove God faithful to His original purposes. God will dwell with His people who delight in offering Him obedient worship. We see this manifested in John's vision recorded in Revelation 7:9-10, where people of every nation, tribe, people, and language surround God's throne and shout that salvation belongs to God and to the Lamb—Jesus Christ.

God's salvation is so comprehensive that He is willing to receive praise through the languages that formerly evidenced His just judgment against human pride. Take a moment to give Him praise today and realize that the language you are using to worship Him proves His willingness and ability to redeem, restore, and re-purpose all things for His glory!

As we anticipate participating in this great multi-ethnic, diverse worship extravaganza glimpsed and recorded by John, we also should soberly consider our present situation. In the future envisioned in Revelation 7:9, we see evidence that one day there will be people praising God in their own respective languages who even today lack access to the Scriptures in those very languages.

**How can you be involved in supporting missionary efforts and Bible-translation projects that will be used of God to make Revelation 7:9-10 a reality?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Just as when holy men live together, it is a great grace and blessing; so, likewise, that congregation is the worst kind when sinners dwell together. The more sinners there are at one time, the worse they are. Indeed, when the tower was being built up against God, those who were building it were disbanded for their own welfare. The conspiracy was evil. The dispersion was of true benefit even to those who were dispersed."<sup>2</sup>

-Jerome (d. 420)

### POINT 1: Rebellious hearts seek to violate God's commands (Gen. 10:32–11:2).

**?** Why might a common language contribute to multiplying expressions of human sinfulness after the Fall?

We've seen sin portrayed as transgression, but sin goes much \_\_\_\_\_ than an act. Sinful actions are an \_\_\_\_\_ of our rebellious hearts, which show disdain and \_\_\_\_\_ for God and His commands. We reject what God wants and \_\_\_\_\_ for what we want.

**?** What are some implications of sin being a heart issue and not just a hands issue?

### POINT 2: Rebellious hearts seek to rob God's glory (Gen. 11:3-9).

Our rebellious hearts turn us away from God and exclusively to ourselves. We become \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, seeking to claim for ourselves what belongs only to God alone. Furthermore, we seek to \_\_\_\_\_ ourselves by our own standards rather than our Creator's.

**?** What are some ways we might "make a name for ourselves" in rebellion against God?

God, who is holy and just, will not long endure the sinful rebellion of His image-bearers. From His throne on high in heaven, the Lord \_\_\_\_\_ rebellion, which is both a \_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_ that sin would not have its full effect upon humanity.

### POINT 3: Rebellious hearts seek to live other than God's way (Isa. 65:1-2).

#### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #38: SIN AS REBELLION

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Because the Bible portrays people as responsible beings, called to respond in \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to God's revelation, the Bible often portrays sin in terms of defiance and rebellion toward God the King. Isaiah 1:2 is one of many passages that describes sin in terms of rebellion against God: "I have raised children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against Me." Seen in this light, sin is personal and \_\_\_\_\_ disobedience, the raising of a clenched fist toward the One who made us.



**How can we turn from the path of rebellion and instead walk the road that leads to life?**

#### MY RESPONSE

Because in Christ our rebellious hearts have been replaced with hearts of love for God, we obey our calling with joy as we scatter throughout the nations, desiring to make God's glory known to all.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways we see self-worship on display in our culture and even in our own lives?
- **HEART:** How can we ensure we are seeking God's kingdom instead of building our own name?
- **HANDS:** How can you support missionaries and Bible translators who are taking the Word of God to the nations? More locally, how will you share the gospel with those around you who speak your language?

#### VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Now, therefore, pray we heartily to God that this evil time may be made short, for the sake of the chosen men, as he hath promised in his Holy Gospel, and that the large and broad way that leadeth to perdition may be stopped, and that the straight and narrow way which leadeth to bliss may be made open by the Holy Scriptures, that we may know what is the will of God, to serve him with truth and holiness, in the dread of God, that we may find by him a way of bliss everlasting."<sup>3</sup>

-John Wycliffe (d. 1384)