

# Explore: Scattered

September 25, 2015

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Oct. 11 focuses on Genesis 11:1-9.*

When I got off the airplane in Germany for the first time, I felt quite confident. Even though I was alone, I was certain those four years of high school German 20 years ago would be all I needed to follow directions, especially the simple traveling terms with which I was so familiar. Indeed, I had no trouble departing the plane, claiming my bag, getting on my first train, and even switching trains.

Each time the train stopped, I noticed the doors magically opened and people departed the train. After about three hours and more than 10 stops, I finally reached my destination, the town where I would spend the week preparing for future mission work. I also was meeting my host family and ministry counterparts for the first time. I was the only person left in train car, so I stood up and walked to the exit as the train came to a stop. I could see my new friends waiting in the distance, holding “Welcome to Germany” and “We Love Texas” signs.

I stood and waited and waited for the train doors to “magically” open as I had noticed earlier. And then it happened. The train started moving. I went into instant panic. I had no idea how to say, “Stop the train,” and I’ve since learned they would not have stopped it anyway. I finally found an employee and said repeatedly, “*Können sie mir helfen, bitte?*” which means, “Can you help me, please?” But, that was all I could say! The employee finally figured out what happened. Indeed, I had stood at the proper place to exit, but the door didn’t open for one simple reason. I couldn’t read the word on the “magic button” which said “*offnen*,” which simply means “open.” The button was even green.

## **Tower of Babel!**

Now, every time I'm in a foreign country, I wave my hand in the air and say, "Darn you tower of Babel." Language is a huge barrier. It can be so incredibly frustrating to not be able to communicate with someone of a different language. Millions of dollars are spent every year on trying to learn a language. But it is so hard. The tower of Babel story stands as a lasting reminder of man's depravity, an enduring symbol of man's prideful and sinful ways.

When God confused the language, he really confused the language. So much so that people, on their own accord, dispersed from Babel and became segregated by language. And we've been fighting language segregation ever since. It simply was too difficult to stay together.

## **No barriers to the gospel**

While differing languages may seem an insurmountable barrier to us, it absolutely is no barrier in God's kingdom. Millennia later, we read in the book of Acts that the God who is the author of language certainly is not bound by language.

Because of some ongoing mission work, I found myself with about two hours to spare in Amsterdam last year. Near a train station, I sat at a café and enjoyed some hot chocolate and a croissant. Amsterdam is a very international city. As I sat outside alone, more and more people started walking past. I realized something fascinating I never had experienced before. About every 15 seconds, the language I heard changed as people streamed past. From English to German to French to Mandarin to Turkish to Spanish, and on and on. In all, I counted what I believed to be 23 different languages in a two-hour span. It was fascinating.

I asked myself, "How would I share the gospel in this circumstance?" It would seem impossible, but the God of language also is the author of each

language. He gets the gospel to people of all nationalities and languages as he sees fit. I didn't preach to anyone that day. Maybe I should have tried. But I couldn't help but think of Acts 2, when God used men to speak gospel truth in multiple languages.

God still is using people to speak gospel truth to the masses. He still is using people to translate his Holy Word into languages of people who have never read it nor heard it. He still is screaming out with his creation, "There is a God who is worthy of worship and praise."

### **It's about pride**

The Bible is perfectly consistent in content. God hates pride, and pride led to the tower of Babel. Genesis 11:8 says, "So the Lord scattered them from there all over the earth, and they stopped building the city." Pride destroys. Pride brings out the worst in me. Pride brings out the worst in you. And when pride hits a relationship, or a group of people, it can cause irrevocable damage.

Think about the church splits you have heard about in your life. So often, pride causes these tragic situations. Pride often is not seen as the obvious factor, but it always seems to be lurking behind the scenes in church problems. Pastors who won't apologize. Deacons who aren't led by humility. Church members who want their way. Pride is a divisive cancer, and that exact cancer is what God addressed at the tower of Babel. God's natural consequence to pride is to "scatter people." Prideful behavior never glorifies God.

### **Application ideas for your Bible study group:**

1. A simple Internet search will yield hundreds of websites with the Bible in different languages. With one click of the button, you can play an excerpt from any Bible passage, in some different language, for your group. Give this a try in multiple languages. Ask: Has the Tower of Babel story limited

the spread of the gospel? Has it possibly advanced the message of the gospel?

2. There are missionaries whose sole purpose is to translate the Bible into languages that have no Bible in their native language. Lead your group to pray for these missionaries. Perhaps try to find such a missionary and pray for them specifically.

3. Ask: How has pride caused the “scattering of people” in your life? In churches you have attended? In your family?