

Come, let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for ourselves; else we shall be scattered all over the world. --- Gen. 11:4

According to the straightforward sense of the text, what was the sin of the generation of the Dispersion? If it was the *tower with its top in the sky*, we read elsewhere about *cities with walls sky-high* (Deut. 1:28). Rather, it is that the Holy One commanded them to *be fertile and increase and fill the earth* (Gen. 1:28), but they chose instead to settle in a single place so as not to *be scattered all over the world*. That is precisely why He decreed that they be scattered. --- Rashbam

This is a direct challenge to God, who had told the family of Noah: *Abound in the earth and increase on it.*” (Gen. 9:7) Thus, the plot to build this tower should be seen as a way of defying God’s plan. --- Prof. Nahum Sarna, JPS commentary, p. 83.

To make a name for ourselves: A reputation for power, so that we can rule everyone else. *Else we shall be scattered:* By defeat in war, if we do not manage to build a city and a tower. --- Chizkuni, Rabbi Hezekiah b. Manoah (France, mid. 13th c.)

All of humanity could certainly not live in one city. Rather, these people believed that all other cities would be established near theirs and of only secondary importance. From the tower, they would be able to see over them all, and prevent them from considering themselves independent. --- **Netziv** (Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Berlin, 19th c.)

The generation of the Flood is like the generation of the Tower. The former’s approach to life is to indulge the self; “Either me or you.” The latter seem to do better in dealing with each other, but their motto is “Me and not You”; they cannot accept God’s authority. What neither generation can encompass is a world with God at its center... --- Avivah Zornberg, Genesis: The Beginning of Desire, p. 55

The Holy One knew they had to be scattered. For every location on earth has some particular deficit that can cause harm: earthquakes, hail, and the like. If they remained in one place, they might all be killed in some natural way, but if they were scattered throughout the earth there would always be others to perpetuate the

species. --- Gersonides (Levi ben Gershom, 13th c. Provence)

The generation of the tower still meant to serve and respect God. Their sin was in wanting to isolate God's name to the heavens; they wanted a clear separation of earthly and heavenly authority. The earth would thus be under human sovereignty only. --- Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz, Shnei Luchot Ha-brit, 16th c.

The Lord came down to look at the city and tower that man (“b’nei ha-adam”) had built... --- Gen. 11:5

Did God actually need to “go down” and see? Is not all open and revealed to Him? Rather, it is to teach us not to judge a case or to speak of what we have not personally seen. --- Midrash Tanchuma 18

Judges should not convict a defendant until they see and understand the evidence. --
- Rashi

Hillel taught: Do not judge your fellow man until you stand in his situation. ---
Pirkei Avot 2:5

The last clause of the verse is superfluous; who else besides man could have built them? Rather, the phrase, **b’nei ha-adam**, literally meaning “the sons of Adam”, alludes to the ingratitude of Adam. Just as he blamed his sin on the wife who was a gift of God, so these people rebel against the One who provided them life and rescued their ancestors from the flood. --- Rashi

The text speaks in human terms here; obviously God could look and investigate perfectly well from where He was. --- Yosef Bekhor Shor, 12th c., northern France

The Lord came down to look (as with Sodom and Gomorrah) only at a stage before things have gotten so bad that punishment is required. --- Sforno, 15th-16th c. Italy

And the Lord said: If, as one people with one language for all, this is how they have begun to act, then nothing that they may propose to do will be out of their

reach. --- Gen. 11:6

What was so bad about having a common language? Isn't this something for which people should strive? Before the tower was built, everything was peaceful. Afterwards--speaking the same language--they argued over who would do which chore, who would get the credit for what part of the work; they became preoccupied with their individual stature, and stopped thinking of the community.
--- Abarbanel

Speaking only one language would not be a problem! But "one language" alludes to the deeper goal of the builders: one religion, one way. It was because God saw that they were suppressing differences in thought and action that He decided to stop them. If they were all working under a unified direction, nothing would prevent them from completing whatever they intended to do, all people acting upon their united decision, and not one of them would turn aside to know God or to understand that He was the Creator of all. --- Sforzo, 15th-16th c. Italy

This should be a great incentive for us to take this drive and utilize it in a positive fashion, for any quality used for good is more powerful than if it is used for evil. Who could imagine what we could do in God's service if we could indeed serve Him with "one language," with one mind and heart? --- **Chofetz Chayim** (Rabbi Yisrael HaKohen, 19th-20th c.)