

“Let Us Make a Name for Ourselves” (Genesis 11.1-9)

two structural outlines of the story in Gen 11:1-9

as chiasm

- A: v. 1: *Introduction: the whole earth had one language*
 B: [scene 1: travels of humanity:] v. 2: there
 C: [vv. 3-4: scene 2: human building plan] v. 3a: each other
 D: v. 3b: come let us make bricks
 E: v. 4a: let us build for ourselves
 F: v. 4b: a city and a tower
 G: [v. 5: scene 3: divine inspection visit]
 v. 5a: the LORD came down
 F1: v. 5b: the city and the tower
 E1: v. 5c: which mortals had built
 D1: v. 6-7a [v. 6-7: scene 4: divine plans to stop the building]:
 come let us ...confuse
 C1: v. 7b: each other's language
 B1: [scene 5: humanity scattered] v. 8: from there
 A1: *conclusion: v. 9: the language of the whole earth*

As parallel panels

A: v. 1: one language and one kind of speech	v. 6: one people, one language
B: v. 2: there	v. 7: there
C: v. 3: each other	v. 7, each other
D: v. 4: build a city	v. 8: building a city
E: v. 4: name	v. 9: its name
F: v. 4: lest we are scattered over the face of the earth	vv. 8-9: LORD scattered them over the face of the earth

Use of key words and wordplay (building a story brick by brick!)

“Language,” *safah*: vv. 1, 6, 7 (twice) and 9 (only 22:17, 41:3, 17 elsewhere in Genesis)

“there”/“name,” *sham/shem*: v. 2, 4, 7, 8, 9 (also, v. 10, 11, the name “Shem”)

“come,” *havah*: v. 3, 4, 7

“build,” *bnh*, v. 4, 5, 8 (see also 4:17, Cain’s building of a city; 10:11, Nimrod’s building project in the land of Shinar)

“scatter,” *pvts*, v. 4, 8, 9 (only 10:18 previously and 49:7 after in Genesis)

“face of the earth,” *peni kal-ha’arets*: v. 4, 8, 9

(the beginning and ending consonants of the phrase match those of *pvts*, “scatter,” above)

“Babel”/“confused,” *babel, balal*: v. 7, 9 (*babel* probably from Akkadian, “gate of the gods”)

also, much soundplay in repeated use of the three Hebrew consonants, B, L, N in close proximity, e.g.,

v. 3: “let us brick bricks”: *nilbenah levenim*; “they had brick for stone and bitumen for mortar”:
hallvenah le’aven vehachemar hayah lahem lachomer

v. 4: “let us build ourselves”: *nivneh-llanu*

v. 5: “which mortals had built”: *banu beni ha’adam* (“big boys build big buildings”)