GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

This examination shall assess the candidate's ability to interpret an assigned passage of Scripture by demonstrating attention to the original language of the text, an understanding of the text's historical context, and an ability to relate the text effectively to the contemporary life of the church in the world.

The candidate shall have access to Hebrew and Greek texts, translations, commentaries, and other exegetical tools. Using these, he or she shall provide a faithful interpretation of the passage, show how he or she arrived at this interpretation, and suggest how this passage might be used in the contemporary life of the church. (This description approved by 2008 General Assembly.)

1. **TECHNOLOGY.** Computers must be used to write this examination. Double-space your answers to Sections I and II; use a 12-point font throughout. **Section III may be single-spaced.** When finished, staple the printed copy to the inside of the exam folder. Handwritten examinations will not be evaluated.

2. **IDENTIFICATION NUMBER.** Include your identification number (not your name) at the top of each page of the exam.

3. **FORM.** Examinations that cannot be understood because of poor grammar or syntax will be returned unevaluated.

4. **HONESTY.** You must do your own work, without giving or receiving aid from anyone after the passages are announced. The exam will not be proctored.

ASSIGNMENT OF PASSAGE

Choose from selected passages:

Genesis 11:1–9    OR     1 Timothy 5:17–22

Your examination is due to your proctor at 9:00 AM, FEBRUARY 2, 2012. The time of submission will be strictly observed.

SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS

1. Clearly identify each section of the exam. Within Section I label your answers "First Required Response," etc., and indicate "A" or "B" where appropriate. Identify the parts of Section II by number.

2. In formulating your answers, remember that your readers will be looking for an ability to work with the passage in its original language and to communicate the findings of biblical scholarship to those who have not had the opportunity of formal training in the field.

3. You must provide original answers to the exam questions. When using written material from other sources, you must identify the author, title, and page number. You must also identify electronic sources, either software or on-line. You may use parenthetical citations within the text of your answers, endnotes, or footnotes.

4. Include a bibliography of consulted works.
Specific Instructions continued:

5. Readers will be looking for logical organization and consistency within the examination. They will evaluate the exam as a unit and not in parts.

6. In order to maintain your anonymity and to ensure the integrity of the ordination exam process, an examination that contains any of the following will be returned unevaluated:
   - your name
   - the educational institution or congregation where you study or worship
   - the names of professors with whom you have studied, except in citations of their published works in references or your bibliography
   - mention of your having taken the exam previously.

REQUIRED PARTS OF A SATISFACTORY EXAMINATION

The following sections are required parts of a satisfactory examination. If any of these sections is incomplete the entire examination will be evaluated as unsatisfactory. The specified ministry contexts for each passage and specific questions in each of the categories of Section I will be provided when the passages are announced.

Section I: Language, Historical Situation, Scriptural and Theological Context
After studying the passage, answer the questions in the following subject areas:

1. *Language of the Text:* word meanings, grammar, literary and other features with respect to both its original language and its translation into the language of the modern community
2. *Historical Situation:* the influence of the historical and cultural context in which the engagement between God and God’s people has come
3. *Scriptural and Theological Context:* the passage’s relation to the broad teaching of Scripture and theological tradition of the church

A total of four (4) responses will be required in Section I of the examination, and there will be a 600-word limit per response. You will be required to respond to three specified questions and will be permitted to select between an option of either A or B in the other response. To assist the readers of your examination, clearly label this portion as Section I and identify each response by required response number and letter (as necessary).

Section II: Presenting a Faithful Interpretation

1. *Focus Statement:* Write a focus statement based on your broad study of the passage (not just material presented in Section I) that articulates a central theme of your faithful interpretation of the passage. Limit your statement to 50 words.

2. *Supporting the Interpretation:* Write an essay presenting your faithful interpretation of the passage consistent with the central theme in the focus statement. Support your interpretation by a careful and critical analysis of the text. You may draw on any material in areas of the required responses in Section I and other exegetical methods and evidence relevant to the interpretation. Limit your essay to 1,200 words.

Identify the parts of Section II by number.

Section III: Application
Present a sermon outline or lesson plan (as required by the specified ministry context) based on your faithful interpretation of the passage and consistent with your focus statement. Limit your sermon outline or lesson plan to 2 pages.
GENESIS 11:1–9

Ministry Context:
You are the pastor of an urban church with a diverse congregation. With the approach of Pentecost, Year C, you want to explore the way in which the Pentecost story in Acts 2 seems to reverse the story told in Genesis 11:1–9. Realizing that you do not have the time in a Pentecost sermon to do justice to the Old Testament reading, you propose a weekly Bible study of Genesis chapters 1–11 and plan for the lesson on Genesis 11:1–9 to come in the week preceding Pentecost. This ministry context should inform your responses throughout the examination. In the final section of this examination, you will present your lesson plan for this Bible study.

Section I: Language, Historical Situation, Scriptural and Theological Context
After studying Genesis 11:1–9, answer the questions in the following required areas of response. To assist the readers of your examination, clearly label this portion as Section I and identify each response by number and letter as necessary. Limit your answer to each question to 600 words.

1. Language of the Text

First Required Response
Theodore Hiebert has suggested this translation of God’s speech in verse 6:

There is now one people and they all have one language. This is what they have begun to do and now all that they plan to do will be possible for them. (Journal of Biblical Literature, 126, no. 1, 2007, p. 45)

Compare Hiebert’s translation with the New American Bible and the Tanakh translations.

If now, while they are one people, all speaking the same language, they have started to do this, nothing will later stop them from doing whatever they presume to do. (New American Bible)

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. (Tanakh)

Which translation, one of these three or your own translation, do you think is most faithful to the original Hebrew? Justify your choice by discussing the grammar and syntax of the verse.

2. Historical Situation

Second Required Response

Abraham begins ancestral hist.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis are often referred to as “Primeval History.” Briefly describe at least three characteristics of this primeval history. How do these characteristics inform your interpretation of Genesis 11:1–9?

Various sources - J, E, D, P + extra-penal

Describes a beginning - new things came to be the way they are - v. 9 etiological

World/humanity in general

Little geographical/historical definition

* Not necessary historical - Bible not a history text - last crit. - but this often short - doesn’t have
3. **Scriptural and Theological Context**

**Third Required Response**

**Fourth Required Response — CHOOSE ONE: A or B**

A. In Genesis 1:28 God commands humankind to “fill the earth” (*New Revised Standard Version*). How does this command inform your understanding of God’s statement in Genesis 11:8–9?

OR

B. There are genealogies in Genesis 10 and 11 preceding and following Genesis 11:1–9. What is the function of Genesis 11:1–9 in the context of Genesis 10 and 11? How does its placement within the genealogies affect the understanding of Genesis 11:1–9?

**Section II: Presenting a Faithful Interpretation**

1. **Focus Statement:** Write a focus statement based on your broad study of the passage (not just material presented in Section I) that articulates a central theme of your faithful interpretation of the passage. *Limit your statement to 50 words.*

2. **Supporting the Interpretation:** Write an essay presenting your faithful interpretation of the passage consistent with the central theme in the focus statement. Support your interpretation by a careful and critical analysis of the text. You may draw on any material in areas of the required responses in Section I and other exegetical methods and evidence relevant to the interpretation. *Limit your essay to 1,200 words.*

Identify the parts of Section II by number.

**Section III: Application**

Present a lesson plan (as required by the specified ministry context) based on your faithful interpretation of the passage and consistent with your focus statement. *Limit your lesson plan to 2 pages.*

**Bibliography**
1 Timothy 5:17–22

Ministry Context:
As pastor of a church, you have been asked by the session to help plan a retreat for elders and deacons on the topic of church leadership. The session would like to know what biblical teachings there are on church leadership, especially after some elders and deacons noted that Presbyterian churches have elders but no priests or bishops, as some other churches have. Others have asked what leadership roles are actually “biblical” and what we know about church leaders in the Bible. In response you prepare a lesson plan on 1 Timothy 5:17–22. This ministry context should inform your responses throughout the examination. In the final section of this examination, you will present your lesson plan for this Bible study.

Section I: Language, Historical Situation, Scriptural and Theological Context
After studying 1 Timothy 5:17–22, answer the questions in the following required areas of response. To assist the readers of your examination, clearly label this portion as Section I and identify each response by number and letter as necessary. Limit your answer to each question to 600 words.

1. Language of the Text

First Required Response
In preparing for the retreat, you come across the following translations of 1 Timothy 5:17a:

Let the priests that rule well be esteemed worthy of double honour .... *(Douay-Rheims Bible)*

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor .... *(New Revised Standard Version)*

Elders who provide effective leadership must be counted worthy of double honor .... *(New English Translation)*

Discuss at least two translation possibilities for πρεσβύτερος in the wider Pauline corpus. Include in your discussion how πρεσβύτερος is related to ἐπίσκοπος (e.g., Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5–7) and how πρεσβύτερος could be translated in 1 Timothy 5:1. How would you translate πρεσβύτερος in the context of 1 Timothy 5:17–22, and why?
2. Historical Situation

Second Required Response — CHOOSE ONE: A or B

A. How would the word πρεσβύτεροι have been understood in the Greco-Roman context of the passage? How would the instructions concerning them have been understood in that context? How does this historical context affect your interpretation of 1 Timothy 5:17–22? Given this historical context, discuss ways this passage might guide the church today.

OR

B. Discuss what 1 Timothy reveals about the Christian community assumed by the text. How do your findings affect your understanding of what is said about the πρεσβύτεροι in 1 Timothy 5:17–22 (e.g., what is expected of them, how they have been behaving, how they should be viewed or treated)?

3. Scriptural and Theological Context

Third Required Response
Identify the sources of the quotations used in verse 18. Discuss the canonical issues related to the quotations used in 1 Timothy 5:17–22. Include in the discussion the canonical or theological significance of understanding both 18a and 18b as “scripture.”

Fourth Required Response
Identify and discuss the instructions in 1 Timothy 5:19–22 with regard to the πρεσβύτεροι. What theological issues are involved in verses 19–22? How are these instructions regarding the πρεσβύτεροι relevant for other church members, i.e., those who are not πρεσβύτεροι? How do instructions given elsewhere in 1 Timothy shed light on your interpretation of 5:19–22?

Section II: Presenting a Faithful Interpretation
1. Focus Statement: Write a focus statement based on your broad study of the passage (not just material presented in Section I) that articulates a central theme of your faithful interpretation of the passage. Limit your statement to 50 words.

2. Supporting the Interpretation: Write an essay presenting your faithful interpretation of the passage consistent with the central theme in the focus statement. Support your interpretation by a careful and critical analysis of the text. You may draw on any material in areas of the required responses in Section I and other exegetical methods and evidence relevant to the interpretation. Limit your essay to 1,200 words.

Identify the parts of Section II by number.

Section III: Application
Present a lesson plan (as required by the specified ministry context) based on your faithful interpretation of the passage and consistent with your focus statement. Limit your lesson plan to 2 pages.
January 2012

Book:  Genesis

CANDIDATE'S ID# 845055

READER'S EVALUATION SHEET IN OPEN BOOK BIBLE EXEGESIS

I. EVALUATION OF THIS EXAMINATION. The examination consists of three sections, designed to be completed over five days. All three sections must be answered. Section I has four required responses, one of which will instruct the candidate to choose between an option “A” or “B.” A single evaluation of either “Satisfactory” (S) or “Unsatisfactory” (U) must be given on the examination as a whole. If any required response is omitted from a section, then the examination must receive an overall evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.”

Each examination will be evaluated independently by two readers. If both overall evaluations are “S,” the conveners will record a final evaluation of “Satisfactory.” If both readers evaluate the exam overall as “U,” the exam receives a final evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.” If the two readers disagree in their overall evaluations, the exam will be given to a third reader. The conveners will record the final evaluation based on the two concurring overall evaluations.

II. THIS EVALUATION SHEET GOES TO THE CANDIDATE. Each reader's comments should represent his or her considered appraisal of the paper. These comments are read by the candidate and the candidate's Committee on Preparation for Ministry.

OVERALL EVALUATION

S

Paul Casner
Reader's Name (print)

Note: Comments include a message for committee on preparation for ministry.

Section I: Language, Historical Situation, Scriptural and Theological Context [600 words/response]

1. Language of the Text
First Required Response

The paper offers a clear statement of which translation is preferred. There is a tendency to assert rather than offer genuine dialogue on the basis of scholarly reasoning, especially in the discussion of “hen.” The writing often is awkward and cumbersome to read.

2. Historical Situation
Second Required Response

There is a tendency in this response to assert rather than offer substantive scholarly argument. The paper would be greatly strengthened if it discussed in more detail how its understanding of primeval history informs its interpretation of 11:1-9.

3. Scriptural and Theological Context
Third Required Response

The paper addresses possible relations between Genesis 11 and Acts 2, but it sometimes imposes ideas upon the text (e.g., the reference to original sin) rather than utilizing scholarly and contextual resources to let the creative interpretative possibilities of the text emerge.
Fourth Required Response

The argument of this response needs to be refined and sharpened. The basic point the paper makes is that the people in 11:1-9 did not desire to "fill the earth" as commanded in 1:28. This point is treated adequately, but needs to be developed in greater detail.

Section II: Presenting a Faithful Interpretation

1. Focus Statement [50 words]

The paper offers a clear and concise statement of its thesis. It would be strengthened by reference to supportive scholarly material beyond what has been previously utilized.

2. Supporting the Interpretation [1200 words]

A lot of information, some of it beyond what is given in the previous responses, is offered here. The addition of the Koehler and Baumgartner lexicon is noteworthy. But information is presented in a rambling manner that doesn't come to a clear conclusion. How does this new information bring us to the point of the essay? For example, the paper could offer more development on how the connotation of "babal" (vs. 9) is "not positive," yet the diversity of 11:8-9 "is a gift." This is an important theological move. What is the critical connection here? The paper would be greatly strengthened with more concise, focused, writing and a clear conclusion.

Section III: Application [2 pages]

The two stated objectives should be shortened and combined into one. The outline attempts to take a pastoral tone, beginning with prayer. The outline does an adequate job of surveying Genesis 1-11. Its suggestion of utilizing the genealogical roots of participants, and the migrations of their ancestors, is creative and potentially effective. Yet far too much is attempted here generally. The outline needs to be cut so that it addresses two or at most three concrete ways to relate the themes of the biblical text to the situation of the congregation. Further, the attempt to address this concrete situation must be more intentional.

Summary Statement (why exam is satisfactory or unsatisfactory)

The paper is adequate, but has a lot of weaknesses. It would be a more substantial paper if it included explicit statements concerning the connections between scholarly discussion and interpretative options in the text. There is too much assertion rather than substantive argument. The writing is often wordy and rambling. A more mature paper would exhibit concise, clear, argumentation utilizing scholarly resources in a balanced manner, concluding with application of key biblical themes to concrete congregational needs.

Comments to the CPM
January 2012
Book: Genesis
CANDIDATE'S ID# 845055

READER'S EVALUATION SHEET IN OPEN BOOK BIBLE EXEGESIS

I. EVALUATION OF THIS EXAMINATION. The examination consists of three sections, designed to be completed over five days. All three sections must be answered. Section I has four required responses, one of which will instruct the candidate to choose between an option “A” or “B.” A single evaluation of either “Satisfactory” (S) or “Unsatisfactory” (U) must be given on the examination as a whole. If any required response is omitted from a section, then the examination must receive an overall evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.”

Each examination will be evaluated independently by two readers. If both overall evaluations are “S,” the conveners will record a final evaluation of “Satisfactory.” If both readers evaluate the exam overall as “U,” the exam receives a final evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.” If the two readers disagree in their overall evaluations, the exam will be given to a third reader. The conveners will record the final evaluation based on the two concurring overall evaluations.

II. THIS EVALUATION SHEET GOES TO THE CANDIDATE. Each reader’s comments should represent his or her considered appraisal of the paper. These comments are read by the candidate and the candidate’s Committee on Preparation for Ministry.

OVERALL EVALUATION

Garrett Andrew
Reader’s Name (print)

Reader’s Signature

Note: Comments include a message for committee on preparation for ministry.

Section I: Language, Historical Situation, Scriptural and Theological Context [600 words/response]

1. Language of the Text
First Required Response

This is an adequate response that demonstrates excellent understanding of Hebrew. It would have been strengthened had it commented on the NAB translation as well.

2. Historical Situation
Second Required Response

This is a solid response that would have been enhanced by citations. It demonstrates great knowledge of the Primeval History and the Babel narrative as a part of that history.

3. Scriptural and Theological Context
Third Required Response

Another good response that is clear and concise! The paper adequately addresses each part of the question and the comparison is excellent.
Fourth Required Response

This was an excellent discussion, that was careful not to make any rash conclusions while allowing the whole of the Primeval narrative to exist as one argument. A great use of Hebrew, and a very clear writing style make this response nearly perfect!

Section II: Presenting a Faithful Interpretation

1. Focus Statement [50 words]

A clear and concise focus statement.

2. Supporting the Interpretation [1200 words]

First off the quality of scholarship in this essay is incredible! The variety of exegetical tools that were used, and the skill with which they were handled led to a remarkably satisfying conclusion that both totally supported the focus statement and lifted up the concerns of a diverse church. This work is fantastic!

Section III: Application [2 pages]

This is a solid lesson plan that does a good job focusing on the particularities of the congregation. The choice to leave any mention of Pentecost till Sunday is interesting and ultimately satisfying in that the plan anticipates leaving the congregation with a cliff hanger. Good job!

Summary Statement (why exam is satisfactory or unsatisfactory)

This is a nearly perfect exam, that reached its peak of magnificence in an excellent essay on the faithful interpretation. There is much more to say about the qualities of this exam but it is enough to know that it should inspire confidence and joy!

Comments to the CPM
SECTION I – First Required Response

Theodore Hiebert’s rendition of Genesis 11:1-9 certainly gives food for thought. However, we must be careful that our thoughts are first and foremost directed by a faithful translation of the Hebrew text. In this case, I do not find Hiebert’s overall translation for verse 6 to be accurate enough to be the basis for which he makes various arguments in his article. Rather, I prefer the Tanakh translation. The first part of Hiebert’s translation is okay: “There is now one people and they all have one language.” However, Hiebert has apparently chosen to ignore the particle ְָּא in his translation. Although this is certainly a small detail, it should be noted that there are two main functions for this word. The first is as a demonstrative adverb or interjection, which we would typically translate “Look!” or “Behold!,” the second is as a hypothetical particle, thus beginning a conditional clause.¹ Either could be used here.

Interestingly, all the verbs in Genesis 11:1-9 are in the Qal stem, with the exception of four. Two of these are in verse six, and the first is בַּלָּא. This is a Hiphil infinitive contract, with a 3rd person masculine plural sufformative, and the definite article at the beginning. Coming from the root בַּל, this verb in the Hiphil is “begin.” Paired with the form of עָֽשְׂרָן immediately following it, the sense is that “this <the tower> is the beginning of what they <the sons of men, v. 5> will do.”

The second non-Qal stem verb in this passage comes from the verb עָֽשְׂרָן and is in the Niphal form, meaning “to be withheld” or “to be inaccessible/impossible.” This verb is attached to the negative particle נַּוּ and is later followed by בֶּל, or “all.” Given the presence of the negative particle נַּוְּל, בֶּל should be translated as “nothing” to coincide. After putting all this

together, we arrive at the translation, “and now, there will not be withheld from them nothing that they propose to do.” In other words, nothing that they propose to do will be withheld. The *Tanakh* renders it, “nothing that they may propose to do will be out of their reach.” This translation still honors the essence of the verb with its negative particle.

This translation is centered in the verb *and* the particles, instead of relying solely on the particles to give an accurate rendering of the text. The problem with Hiebert’s translation is that it is centered on the particle קְלָל, making it the hinge upon which the sentence functions. If we put the translation of קְלָל (“all”) as the priority and want it to have it make sense with the rest of the sentence, then there is little choice than to give something similar to Hiebert’s rendering.

What Hiebert neglects, however, is primarily the negative particle קְלָל, which is meant to be used emphatically in many more instances than קְלָל.

The meaning, too, is affected. Is it the same to say that “all they plan to do will be possible” versus “nothing they plan to do will be out of their reach?” I would propose that these are two different ideas. Although they have grammatically similar nuances, they do not necessarily lead to the same outcome. And this works for Hiebert, because it supports his argument. However, as I mentioned at the beginning, we must first begin with a faithful translation of the text in order to do good exegesis. Beginning with our own preferences and theology leads to eisegesis, in which we begin with our own pre-conceived notions and look to craft the text to our own liking. I believe this is what Hiebert’s translation represents.
SECTION I – Second Required Response

Scholars disagree as to the exact passages that are part of primeval history in the Bible, but Genesis 1-11 is generally considered to be included. One characteristic of primeval history is that it cannot be pinned down to a specific author. Such is the case with Genesis 1-11. The Documentary Hypothesis, which proposes four sources, is generally accepted to help guide our thinking regarding authorship. These include the Yahwist (J), Elohist (E), Deuteronomist (D), and the Priestly (P) sources. These sources were written independently of each other, and were later compiled by a Redactor (R) into the final form which we now have. The current passage, Genesis 11:1-9, is attributed to the Yahwist; this source concerns epic history and myths of long ago. Its language is trademarked by its assignment of Yahweh as the name for God in Hebrew.

A second characteristic of primeval history is that it describes a beginning which explains how things came to be the way they are. This beginning often includes mention of ancestors and concentrates on genealogical descent. It sets moral code and can attempt to explain moral responsibilities. Often, in Biblical literature, we find in these stories accounts of human sin and God’s grace. This is all certainly true of Genesis 1-11. Of course, we have the explanation of beginnings in the creation story, but the Tower of Babel has its own beginning – the point at which different languages and cultures came into the world.

Another characteristic of primeval history is that it talks about the big picture of the world and humanity in general. Often it omits details which we would very much like to know. For this reason, it is often said that primeval history includes myths. By popular definition, we often think of a myth as being something that is not true. Sometimes the word is paired with words such as “legend” or “folktale,” and is assumed to be something that has been made up for the purpose of telling bedtime stories to children. However, a myth is simply a sacred story that
has been endorsed through generations and is accredited for giving an account of something from the past. In the case of the Babel passage, if we consider that the Yahwist is thought to have been writing either in the 10th or the 6th century BCE, and we still have access to the story today, then by definition we can count it as a myth.

Finally, primeval history often discloses little geographical and historical definition. We find this to be true as we dig into researching Genesis 11:1-9. For example, scholars have proposed that the Tower of Babel is actually a ziggurat (a pyramid-like tower built to look like steps, so that each ascending layer is smaller than the one below it), but this is disputed. There is not agreement on whether Babel can be conclusively linked with Babylon, and even though we can pinpoint Shinar, we do not know much about it using modern scientific methods.

When thinking about primeval history, however, one must keep in mind that historical criticism can only get one so far. It is limited in the tools it provides, and if we base our knowledge solely on it, we will fall short in our overall understanding of any given subject. We know from historical records and archaeology that the Bible is not a history book. It contains inaccuracies and biases. However, we must remember that something does not necessarily have to be historically accurate in order for it to be true. Such is the case with Genesis 11:1-9. The story of the Tower of Babel might raise more questions than it answers, but it does give us a window into God’s nature and character. In this respect, the passage is invaluable to us.
SECTION I – Third Required Response

Acts 2:1-21 is often said to be a reversal of the Tower of Babel. Indeed, upon first reading, one immediately notices some parallels. Acts talks about the people all being together in one place (v. 1), and, apparently, in one house (v. 2). In Genesis 11:1-9 we see that the people had come from the east and settled in Shinar, and thus were also gathered in one place. In both passages, God’s intervention is sudden and comes from heaven. In Acts, this is through a seemingly mystical tongue of fire that comes and rests on each of them, so that each person begins to speak in other languages. The result of God’s intervention in Genesis is very different, though, because it leads to the confusion of languages. This is interesting, because we see that God’s intervention has opposite effects. In Genesis, as in Acts, various languages are present. However, in Acts, we learn that the people present were all Galileans (v. 7) and they could all understand each other (v. 8). This remarkable event is attributed to the people being filled with the Holy Spirit.

In contrasting the two passages, Catherine and Justo Gonzalez make some good observations: at Babel, humans try to reach God; at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes to those gathered. At Babel, we see a prideful attitude in the people; at Pentecost, we find renewal for the people. It is noteworthy that in Acts, God is the one who acts first, whereas in Genesis, it is the people who act first.

The quotation from Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:17-21 is a description of the last days, and the inclusion of this passage here suggests that something similar to this alleged “reversal” of the Babel incident will be a sign of the last days, when all who call on the Lord will be saved. This gives a message of great hope to the Babel account. Commentators are quick to note that, in all

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the stories of the primeval history as told in Genesis 1-11, the Tower of Babel is the one story that leaves the reader hanging with an awful sense of abandonment. There is no sense of God's grace, abiding love, or everlasting presence with the people as there are in the other stories. Rather, the passage ends with God scattering the people and confusing their language. In all the other stories of chapters 1-11, God always responds to the sin problem with grace. Granted, there is debate as to whether or not the events of Babel are a result of sin, but we can assume as much due to the presence of original sin through the fall of Adam and Eve. However, when we reach Acts 2, we suddenly understand that this passage is the fulfillment of Genesis 11, and it also describes what the ultimate fulfillment will look like in days to come. Acts 2 is not a reversal of Babel; rather, it is its completion. Our expectation of hope, which is missing in Genesis, is fulfilled when we reach Acts.

We learn that, even if we do not like the way the story ends in the Tower of Babel, we need to keep going forward and trust that God is a God of surprises. God will take care of that which is left undone, and oftentimes will do it in ways that are beyond anything we could ever imagine. What is left undone should be put in God's hands, because God is the one who has the power and creativity to mold the situation into something that will bring God glory. There is always hope – if we are willing to wait for its fulfillment.
SECTION I – Fourth Required Response – A

In his essay entitled “The Tower of Babel and the Origin of the World’s Cultures,”3 Theodore Hiebert proposes that the Tower of Babel narrative is not about pride and punishment, as the majority of commentators has suggested, but rather is about the origins of different cultures and languages. The purpose of the current discussion is not to prove Hiebert right or wrong, but rather to focus on one part of his argument – that God commanded humankind to “fill the earth” in Genesis 1:28 and the Tower of Babel thus contributes to the fulfillment of this command.

Hiebert’s reasoning is not new. In fact, it is commonly used by modern Jewish commentators even today.4 It is refreshing to see something other than the common idea of sin and punishment proposed for the Tower of Babel. And it is certainly true that, by giving a people who previously had one single language many languages, and by dispersing them throughout the whole earth, the earlier mandate to fill the whole earth would be fulfilled.

It is important to note that, in Genesis 11:2, the people are gathered in Shinar, and in v. 4 it is their desire not to be scattered abroad. This desire, whether or not it was born out of direct sinful disobedience, goes directly against God’s command to the people in Genesis 1:28. When God gives a command, the expectation is that God’s people will obey. God gives commands because God wants God’s will to be carried out in all circumstances, and because God wants the best for God’s people.

The Hebrew in Genesis 1:28 is revealing. The people are actually instructed to do three things: be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. The phrase is שָׁבָעְתָּם וַתֹּֽלֶךְוֹן אֶת הָאָרֶץ. One

4 See, for example, Nahum M. Sarna, Genesis, vol. 1 of The JPS Torah Commentary, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 8-12.
of the first things that we notice is that the first three words rhyme. This phrase is meant to be taken as a whole. All three commands are to be fulfilled. When we compare it, then, with Genesis 11:8-9, we see that the people had apparently had no problem with two of the commands. They had multiplied and they were (perhaps in their own minds, at least) being fruitful, but they were not filling the earth. In fact, they were doing the exact opposite. They were doing all they could to enclose themselves so they would not have to do so. By building a city and a tower, they would not have to worry about that third, pesky command God had given the people at creation.

God's actions, therefore, are certainly not surprising: God confuses the people's language and scatters them (NRSV). Certainly, other translations of these words (in Hebrew, הָרַעְשָׂנָה and הַרְשׁוֹעִים, respectively) are possible, but the point is that God interrupts the peoples' plans and takes control. God thwarts the plans of the people so that, not only were they not able to be in the same place (they had to desert their building project), but they were scattered all over the earth.

There is an obvious word play in Hebrew in this passage, between the word הָרַעְשָׂנָה (“confuse”) and the name given to that place, הֲבָרָבָא. It is interesting that this name, Babel, is similar to the English word “babble.” Remembering that God commanded humankind to fill the earth, we see that any attempt to go against this—intentional or not—is simply babble. It is futile. We can discuss and plan all we want, but if we are not in accordance with God's desires for us, our efforts are in vain.
SECTION II – 1.

Genesis 11:1-9 is a representation of different languages and cultures coming to exist in the world as a result of human pride. In this story, God takes a less-than-ideal situation and uses it to bless the people by creating more diversity, from which God’s people can learn.

SECTION II – 2.

The story of the Tower of Babel, as told in Genesis 11:1-9, is a story of diversity. We see in this passage an explanation for why there exist different cultures and languages in the world today. Verse nine stands alone, saying, “Therefore it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth” (NRSV). This verse is what we would call an etiology – it is something that explains why things are the way they are as we know them, i.e. why different languages exist. Otherwise, the form of the passage is symmetrical, with the peoples’ actions being described in verses 1-4 and God’s actions described in 5-8. The phrase “Come, let us...” is used three times, twice by the people and once by God. This is used to instigate action on the part of those who are speaking, thus moving the storyline along.

If one uses the scientific method, one will find many gaps in our knowledge of the historical site of Babel. Some believe that the Tower of Babel is actually a Mesopotamian ziggurat called Entemenanki, which was the great ziggurat temple of Babylon.\(^5\) Others, however, believe that the value of Genesis 11 is purely theological. This passage is normally attributed to the Yahwist, and comes at the end of what most scholars classify “primeval history.” This can be defined as “speculative, often mythological history between the creation of the world up to the

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point when one's historical memory begins.⁶ Our current passage comes between two
genealogical lists. The last great story we have before these genealogies is the flood narrative,
which at the end recalls creation in chapter nine, just before God makes the covenant with Noah,
and also specifically recalls God's mandate to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth, (9:1, 7).
Prior to the Noah narrative, there are yet more genealogical lists, which also recall creation
(5:1-2). Prior to these are the stories of Cain and Abel and, finally, creation. Therefore, we see
that creation is recalled over and over again throughout chapters 1-11. With God's command in
1:28 to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth, chapter 11 ends up being the final fulfillment of
that, even though that was not what the people wanted.

The traditional understanding of this passage has been that the people began building the
city and the tower out of their own pride (and therefore sin), due to the reference to making a
name for themselves (v. 4) instead of letting God make a name for them.⁷ It describes an instance
of God's people attempting to go against their God-given limits.⁸ The tower was to have its top
in the heavens (v. 4). Commentators debate as to whether this literally meant that the people
wanted to build a tower to reach heaven, or if it was simply meant to be a very tall tower. Either
way, the text itself does not mention anything about the people wanting to use the tower to reach
God, as some scholars suggest. The purpose for building the tower was so that the people would
not be scattered throughout the whole earth. Obviously, the tower did not actually reach heaven,
because God had to come down (v. 5) to see the peoples' handiwork. God's comment in v. 6
("Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of

⁷ Westermann, for example, points out that, elsewhere in Scripture, it is God who "makes a name for himself by his
saving acts on behalf of Israel...Name can only be understood as fame; a name that draws attention and recognition."
Claus Westermann, Genesis 1-11: A Commentary, translated by John J. Scullion, (Minneapolis: Augsburg
Publishing House, 1984), 548.
⁸ Ibid., 554-555.
what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them." NRSV) has traditionally been interpreted in a negative light, giving the impression that God felt threatened by the peoples’ actions. As a result, then, God makes it so the people are not able to understand each other, thus halting the building of the tower. Not only this, but God scatters them (v. 8) across the earth. So, that which the people were trying to avoid in the beginning was exactly the consequence they ended up receiving.

There are a couple words in this passage which are important to understand by studying them in-depth. The first of these words, מַהֲרִים, is found in verse four. We find that this word can have a range of meanings. It is traditionally translated “tower” in the current passage, but also can function as “watchtower” or a tower along an exterior wall of a city, as would have been common in Biblical times. The text explicitly says that the area of Shinar is located on a plain, which would have made it vulnerable to attack. Therefore, we can see that one of the motives for building a city with a tower could have been for protection. The people were depending on themselves and their own manpower and engineering skills for protection instead of on God.

The second word to highlight is מַעֲטִים, which here is found in the Qal stem in verses seven and nine. This word can have a range of meaning: to mingle, mix, confuse, or confound. It is related to such languages as Syriac and Ethiopic, where its only meaning is “to mix,” but is also related to the Arabic word whose connotation is “to drive away, disperse, be separated.” The history of the word and its linguistic comparison to other languages show that it is not a very

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positive word. And, in fact, it is important because it represents a major turning point in the narrative. Whereas we began the passage with the people speaking the same language, after this word we clearly see that they spoke different languages. It is the effect of יְבִיבָה which truly changes the course of the story. יְבִיבָה is the word which, in effect, gives us diversity.

I previously mentioned that the word יְבִיבָה is not positive. However, by that I do not mean to say that diversity is not a positive outcome. In fact, diversity is a gift. God often uses less-than ideal situations to bring about good things. We see God act in this way over and over again throughout Scripture, and in our own lives as well. We choose to act a certain way and God gives us consequences for our actions, but in the end God does what is good for us. The beautiful thing about diversity is that it offers opportunities for us to learn from each other.

The similarity of the Hebrew words לא (“there,” used five times) and נמה (“name,” used twice) is striking. The people were given a name at Babel. As much as they did not want it, it was given. They were scattered, and in the process they received their identity. In diversity, we receive our identity and we learn more about God’s character and who God has called us to be. The church given in the ministry context is a diverse, urban church. It might include people from different races, genders, sexual orientations, cultures, and classes. One commentator says there is a parallel between Babel and how today’s typical church relates to the world. “In the interests of unity and preserving its own future, the members often stay close to home and don’t risk venturing forth.”

We are called to go forth, to scatter, and to be intentionally diverse. A diverse church is the ideal toward which we should work, for it just might give us a glimpse of what heaven will be like.

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SECTION III
Objectives:  
1. Participants will recognize that diversity is a gift from God, and that we can learn from each other when we are in a diverse context.
2. Participants will learn that one of the keys to studying Genesis 11:1-9 is its emphasis on diversity.

I. Opening Prayer
II. Introduction
   a. Genealogical history of participants – Where are your roots?
   b. Name the number of states in which you have lived.
   c. What are some causes of migration?
   d. How does migration cause diversity?
   e. What are some things that make our congregation diverse?

III. Biblical Diversity – A review of previous weeks’ studies
   a. Diversity in Genesis 1-2 (Creation)
      i. Diversity within the creation – plants, animals, humans
      ii. Diversity within humanity – men and women
      iii. Diversity within God’s goodness
          1. Creation was good
          2. One thing was not good: that man should be alone
      iv. God commands humanity to multiply, fill the earth, and be fruitful (1:28)
   b. The Fall of Humanity – Genesis 3-4
      i. Ends with a note of hope despite bad situations (both the fall and Cain & Abel)
   c. Noah and the Ark – Genesis 5-9
      i. Recalling of creation (ch. 5, 9)
         1. Reminder to multiply, fill the earth, and be fruitful (9:1, 7)
      ii. Diversity within the Ark – Noah, 3 sons, their wives, & 2 of each animal
      iii. Genealogical lists throughout these chapters
      iv. Noahic covenant
      v. Ends with a note of hope
   d. “Fill the earth” becomes a reality by diversity – Genesis 10-11
      i. Gen. 10 is one account of how, genealogically, the earth is filled.
      ii. Another account is found in our lesson for today, the Tower of Babel.

IV. The Tower of Babel – Genesis 11:1-9
   a. The last story in the primeval history (review characteristics)
   b. Today’s focus will be on what we can learn about God and about ourselves from this story, but we will also talk about some historical aspects.
   c. Genesis 11:1-4
      i. Who is acting in these verses? (The people)
      ii. The passage begins with monotony – literally “one language, few words”
      iii. v. 2 – a plain would have been vulnerable to attack from outsiders. So, the tower referenced in our passage is thought by some to be for security. Notice the people were migrating.
      iv. v. 4 – The people try to make a name for themselves. In other passages, we find that God is the one who makes a name for Godself by performing saving acts on behalf of Israel. (Is. 63:12; Jer. 32:20; Neh. 9:10).
1. (v. 4) What are some ways we try to make a name for ourselves?
2. Do you think this is a sign of pride and/or sin?
3. What are some of the towers you can name? (Eiffel, Leaning Tower of Pisa, etc.)
   a. Do you know what the tallest tower in the world is currently? (Tokyo Sky Tree – Japan – show picture)
4. In antiquity there was another type of tower called a ziggurat. (Explain and show picture)
5. The peoples’ desire is to not be scattered – they wanted to stay in the same place. Remember Genesis 1:28 (read). Was this God’s desire for them?
6. What are some ways that we, as a church or in our daily lives, strive to maintain the monotony and stay within our comfort zone?

d. Genesis 11:5-8
   i. Who is acting in these verses? (God)
   ii. v. 6 – What are the implications of what God says?
   iii. v. 7-8 – What consequences does God choose to put on the people?
      1. Confuse their language
      2. Scatter them over all the earth
      3. How does this fulfill Genesis 1:28?
   iv. We usually think of “consequences” as being negative, and one might think such a thing when reading this passage.

e. Genesis 11:9
   i. This verse is what Biblical scholars call an etiology, which is something that explains why things are the way they are. In this case, it is a verse that communicates that this passage tells about why we have different languages and cultures today.
   ii. This passage shows a less-than-ideal situation, but we gain diversity from it – diversity of languages and cultures. This is very, very good.
   iii. Can you think of other times, either in Scripture or in your own life, that God has brought something good out of a seemingly bad situation?
   iv. The passage itself, though, does not end on a note of hope as we have seen the other studies from stories in the primeval history do.
   v. As God’s diverse creation, we will not always get what we want. We are called to follow God, and sometimes that entails giving up or postponing our own desires.

V. Application
   a. What are some of the different resources our church has because of our diversity?
   b. In what ways does our church’s diversity interact with our urban context?
   c. How could our diversity help us better serve those in our community?
   d. This Sunday is Pentecost. Who can tell me what Pentecost is and why we celebrate it in the life of the church?
   e. I encourage you to come to worship on Sunday to see how the story of The Tower of Babel is completed. There is, indeed, a note of hope, but we do not find it until we reach the New Testament.

VI. Closing Prayer