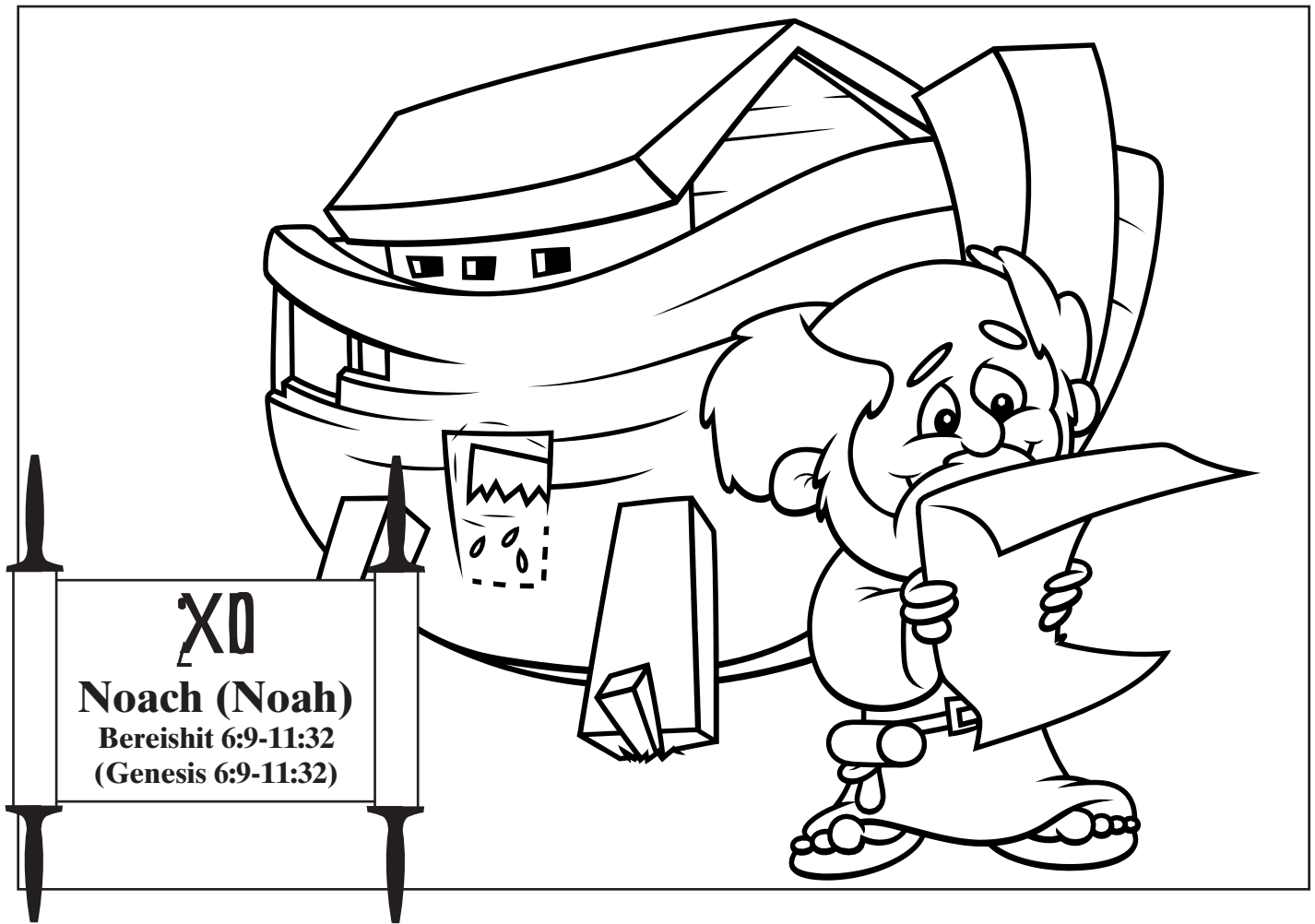


# — Parashat HaShavuah —



## Understanding the Parsha Genesis 11:1-9

**Objective**— Learn how to 1) interpret the main theme of a Parsha, 2) make thematic connections to that Parsha and 3) learn how to gain greater understanding of the Parsha under consideration through its thematic connections to other portions of Scripture.

### The Tower of Babel

Many Bible critics think the Scriptures are simply a hodge-podge of stories hooked together. But, this is not the truth. The Scriptures (and mainly the Torah) are very organized and structured. In fact, it's so well organized that once you understand how to uncover its organization principles you will definitely fall on your knees and give glory to Adonai, knowing that only our Elohim (God) could have developed such highly structured stories.

In Parashat Bereishit we saw that we must study to understand the **literary techniques** of the Torah if we want to really know what it is saying to us. Now, let's learn about a new literary unit called a **chiastic structure**. A chiastic structure is a thematic method of organizing the stories of the Torah. A chiastic structure is a pattern organized like this:

A story is divided into two halves.

The themes of the first half of the story are repeated in the second half of the story in reverse order. Both halves of the story point to the central axis, the most important part in the story.

This will be more easy for you to understand once we see a picture of the **chiastic structure** in Genesis 11:1-9.

**A. Read Genesis 11:1-9.** Let's begin by learning to write a **general outline** of the story in these verses. Write your outline below:

• Genesis 11:1 \_\_\_\_\_

Everyone understands the same language

• Genesis 11:2 \_\_\_\_\_

The people all moved to one place in the world

• Genesis 11:3-4b \_\_\_\_\_

They made a plan to build a city and tower

• Genesis 11:5-7 \_\_\_\_\_

Adonai's response toward the building of the city and tower

• Genesis 11:8 \_\_\_\_\_

The people are scattered throughout the earth

• Genesis 11:9 \_\_\_\_\_

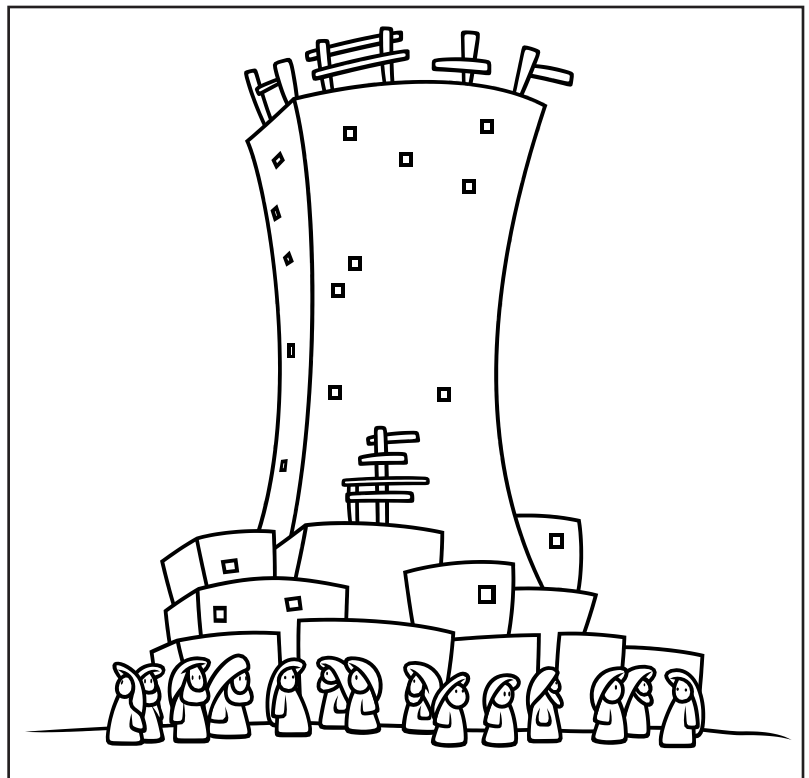
Everyone speaks a different language

Look carefully now at your outline, can you see any pattern as you think about your outline above?

Look at how the themes of the first 2 lines of your outline seem to repeat again in the last two lines of your outline but in reverse order!

Here's an example, the first line is about everyone speaking the same language (unity), and the last line describes the everyone speaking in different languages (confusion). Your outline has revealed to you that this passage is **chiastically related**.

Lets look again at this **chiastic structure** using a chart. Color the chart on the next page to match the correct themes. Color the central axis red.



- A) Genesis 11:1 – Everybody understood the same language Color Blue
- B) Genesis 11:2 – The people all moved to one place in the world Color Green
- C) Genesis 11:3 – They made a plan to build a city and tower Color Yellow
- D) Genesis 11:4a – Building of the city and a tower Color Orange
- E) Genesis 11:4b – The reason for building the city and tower (Color red)
- D1) Genesis 11:5-6 – The Holy One examines the City and Tower Color Orange
- C1) Genesis 11:7 – Adonai’s comes down to foil the plans of build a city and tower Color Yellow
- B1) Genesis 11:8 – The people are scattered throughout all over the world Color Green
- A1) Genesis 11:9 – Everyone speaks in different languages Color Blue

B. In order to see the **chiastic structure**, look at the colors of your chart and compare and contrast the two halves of the story.

1. How does A compare to A1? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
2. How does B compare to B1? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
3. How does C compare to C1? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
4. How does D compare to D1? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is the central axis? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

C. As you can see, the **chiastic structure** is a thematic piece of art (and your coloring makes that clear!). These structures literally appear everywhere in the Scriptures!

**II. Let’s see if we can find any other themes in these nine verses.**

**A. Do you see any key words that repeat themselves in this passage?**

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Genesis 11:2 vs 11:9. Both verses use the words, “whole earth”

Remember that this is important because many times you can find “**headers**” and “**footers**” that mark the beginning and ending of a literary unit.

In other words, in **thematic analysis**, you will learn to divide passages of Scripture into meaningful, **thematic units**. The Torah often repeats words and phrases at the beginning and ending of a literary 3

unit. For example,

Genesis 1:1 begins, “**In the *beginning* God created the heavens and the earth.**”

Genesis 2:1 states, “**Thus the heaven and the earth were *finished*, and all their array.**”

Can you see how we can know that Genesis 1:1 – 2:1 as a **literary unit**.

B. How is each element of the chiasmic structure thematically related to each other?

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The second half of the story is opposite of the first half of the story.

It is pretty clear that, there are many lessons worth learning in this story, and you may even know a few of them. You can analyze this story in many different ways. What is important is to be aware that there is **one central theme or message**. When you use the **chiasmic structure** to you will discover the central thematic issue. This story has two main points.

- It is a story about how mankind wants to make a name for themselves.
- It is a story about how mankind wants to remain located in one particular area.

C. Remember, in a **chiasmic structure**, the two halves of the story “**point**” to the **central axis**, which contains the **most important theme** of the passage. And that is what Adonai wants to teach you about.

