



God Judges the Nations at Babel

Genesis 11:1–9



LESSON GOAL

Students will understand why and how the Lord scattered the people at Babel.

BIBLE TRUTHS

- All men spoke a common language.
- God had commanded men to fill the earth.
- Men disobeyed and settled in the plain of Shinar.
- Men planned to show off their own greatness.
- God was concerned about man's growing sinfulness.
- God confused their language to limit their sin.

KEY VERSE

"So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city" (Genesis 11:8).

APPLICATION

- Turn from sin; God will judge it.
- Don't be proud like the people of Babel.
- Be humble, obey the Lord, and worship Him.

NEXT WEEK

God Makes a Promise to Abram
Read Genesis 11:27–12:9.

Symbol Key



Craft



Finger Play



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Center



Activity



Q & A



Age Group

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PREPARE WITH THE TRUTH

“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul... You shall teach them to your children” (Deuteronomy 11:18–19).

Please take time to prepare your mind and heart to accurately handle the truths of God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Read through the Bible background and study the truths contained in this lesson. Crucial background information is included here to aid you in understanding the Scripture.

Bible Background

Perhaps as many as a thousand years elapsed between the flood and Babel. You would think that mankind would not have forgotten the lesson of the flood. But while the flood destroyed sinful men, it did not destroy sinful nature. The account of the tower of Babel depicts a tragic rebellion against the authority and commands of a sovereign God.

According to Genesis 11:1, all men spoke one language and one dialect. This fact should not be surprising, since they all were descendants of the sons of Noah. It is possible that this one language was either Hebrew or an original Semitic language that Moses later translated into Hebrew for his readers.

Verse 2 indicates that after the flood, men traveled east, from the region of Ararat (Gen. 8:4) to the fertile crescent. These migrants found an open plain (the land of Shinar) in southern Mesopotamia and began to settle down. As the people gathered in this region, they agreed to stay and make a name for themselves.

The inhabitants of the land of Shinar feared that they would “be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11:4). Although after the flood, God had reiterated His command to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gen. 9:1), the people disobeyed it. To prevent being scattered, they decided to build a city and a tower for themselves. The tower would serve as a focal point of their political and religious life and would be a symbol of their unity and strength.

Verse 3 describes the techniques used in building the city and tower. These early builders used fire-hardened brick instead of stone, and tar or asphalt instead of mortar. The materials for the brick and the tar substance are very common in southern Mesopotamia.

Note: God reacted not against the building of the city, but against the people’s wicked motives for building it. These people blatantly rebelled against God’s command to inhabit the entire earth.

What does the phrase “whose top is in the heavens” mean? Scholars offer several interpretations. First, the builders were resisting God’s command to inhabit the whole earth, and so they possibly were attempting to protect themselves from another divine judgment like the flood. We know that the flood covered the highest mountains of the world. Perhaps men thought that if a structure higher than the mountains could be built they would be safe from whatever God might do. Second, the tower could have been designed to satisfy a supposed religious need of the people. They would build a tower unto heaven, a tower dedicated to heaven and its angelic hosts. This would lead to idolatry, and thus the people would be judged accordingly by God. Third, some scholars believe that this tower was a part of the city’s defensive system. Such fortifications were said to be built “up to heaven” (Deut. 1:28).

Additional Reference Materials

*Paradise to Prison:
Studies in Genesis* by
John J. Davis

*The MacArthur Study
Bible* by John MacArthur

Creation and Blessing by
Allen P. Ross

Verse 5 speaks of God, during this rebellion, coming “down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.” That God “came down to see” means that He was aware of what was going on and now was officially and judicially taking the situation under direct observation and consideration. The decision to construct a city and tower in order to keep unity no longer could be ignored.

God responded with divine judgment in verse 7. What man refused to do in voluntary obedience to God’s command, he was forced to do. God’s plan was to scatter the people, and He did. God went down to “confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” Once groups of people were isolated from one another by language, they naturally would scatter.

Note: The word “Babel” in verse 9 is connected with the Hebrew word *salal*, which means “to confuse.” Just how God miraculously confused the tongues is unknown; it was a miracle.

As the groups of people departed from Babel, the last memory of the place probably was of a loud “babble” of angry and incoherent noises pouring from the lips of those who had once been friends and fellow citizens. It is hard to imagine the surprised confusion that must have quickly spread through Babel. Presumably, members of each family group still could understand one another, but everyone else would seem to be talking nonsense. Some people may have thought others were mocking them. In the palace, mighty Nimrod, the leader of Babel (Gen. 10:8–10), would have found it impossible to get his servants to carry out his commands. Chaos eventually reigned in the city.

Is it wrong to desire to be unified? Unity of a race is ideal if there is no sin. But man is fallen and the human heart corrupt. A one-world government ultimately would result in a vast, unified anti-God religious philosophy.

One thing is clear from Genesis 11: God did not permit human rebellion to reach the level it had before the flood.

POINT TO THE TRUTH

*"Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth"
(Psalm 78:1).*

This section includes questions to review last week's lesson and ideas to prepare students for this week's lesson. Choose from the following ideas to point to the truths of this lesson.



Review Questions

Use these questions to review and reinforce key truths.

Which book of the Bible are we studying?

The book of Genesis.

What made God sad when he saw Adam and Eve's descendants?

All the people except Noah's family were selfish and were hurting one another.

What did God command Noah to build?

God told Noah to build a big ark in a very specific way.

Who obeyed God and got onto the ark?

Noah's family of eight people, two of every kind of unclean animal, and seven of every kind of clean animal and bird went onto the ark.

What happened during the flood?

It rained for 40 days and 40 nights, and water covered the mountains of the entire earth. Only the people and animals on the ark were safe, as God promised.

When Noah and his family got off the ark, what did Noah do?

Noah built an altar and burned an offering of thanks to God.

What was God's promise, and what did God put in the sky so that people could remember the promise?

God put a rainbow in the sky to remind people that He would never again send a flood to cover the entire earth.



Babylonian Bricks

Set up a table with Play-Doh and rulers. Instruct the students to make bricks from the Play-Doh. Tell them that today they will find out what happened to some builders who disobeyed the Lord's commands.



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Tall Tower

Place a large supply of blocks in the center of the room. Instruct the students to work together to build the tallest tower they can. Tell them that they will hear a story about some people who built a very tall tower.

Variation: Have the students build a city with blocks. Give them miniature people to put in their city. Tell them that in today's lesson they will learn about a city full of people who disobeyed God.



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Bilingual Surprise

Play a game that requires you to give verbal instructions (“Simon Says,” for example). In the middle of the game, begin speaking another language. Let the students feel the confusion. After a few minutes, sit down and talk about what happened and how confusing it was to not be able to understand the language.



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Spreading Out

Have the students hold hands and form a circle. Say, “Crowd together.” The students should go to the center of the circle and try to get as close to one another as they can without breaking hands. Say, “Spread out.” The students should break hands and spread throughout the room, putting as much space between one another as possible. If the students are sticking together, ask them to spread out. In the Bible lesson, Noah’s children and grandchildren did not want to obey God and spread out. They wanted to stay close together. They thought they could have a great and powerful city if they stayed together.



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Babbling Center

As students arrive to class, direct them to sit at a table with blocks on it. Have them listen to simple building directions recorded on a tape recorder. After a few simple instructions, the recording should begin to babble. Ask the students whether they were able to understand and follow the directions. Repeat the babbling and ask, “Did you understand?” Explain that today’s lesson is about some builders who had the same problem but for a different reason.



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Scattering Beans Center

Place a world map in the lid of a box. Give each student a sandwich bag containing 10 beans. Ask the students to take turns scattering the beans all over the map and count how many come to rest on land. The one with the most beans on land is the winner! Tell the students, “Something else is going to be scattered in our Bible lesson today. Listen to find out what it is.”

PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

“Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done” (Psalm 78:4).

This section includes the Bible lesson, lesson questions, and praise and worship ideas. Song suggestions are included to use during worship time. Use the lesson questions to check the students’ understanding. This section also includes various presentation ideas to use during the teaching time. Read the Bible passage several times before you read these pages. All teaching should be done directly from the Bible.

Bible Lesson

Reading of the Text

Read Genesis 11:1–9: Genesis 11:1, a common language among all men; Genesis 11:2, the journey and settlement of the men; Genesis 11:3–4, the plan of the men; Genesis 11:5–6, the Lord’s investigation and evaluation; Genesis 11:7–8, the Lord frustrates the men’s plan; Genesis 11:9, summary.

Have your mom and dad ever asked you to do something? Of course they have. Every day they ask you to do things. Hopefully, you obey. But have you ever said no to your mom or dad? We can say no with our words or with our actions. The same is true in today's Bible lesson.

After the flood, the animals spread out to find new homes. God had told Noah, "Spread out your children and grandchildren over the entire earth. Don't stay together in one place." God wanted people and animals to be everywhere on the earth, but some of Noah's grandchildren had a big "no" in their hearts. They didn't want to obey God. They said to one another, "Let's not spread out like God said. Let's stay together in Babel and build a big tower that will give us great power." They wanted to make themselves into a big city with a great name, without God.

The "no" in their hearts came from pride. Pride is when we think we are better than God. Do you think you are better and more powerful than God? That is just what we think when we say "no" to God.

In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan. He told them that they could be like God. Now, many years later, the people of Babel thought they could be like God. They did not spread out over all the world. They went to a place called Shinar to make a great city. They wanted to be famous.

They decided to build a great tower that reached up into heaven. They wanted everyone to think they were important. They wanted everyone to think they were special. What should they have done? They should have spread out. They should have wanted God to look great. They should have told everyone else how awesome God was. Their pride made them disobedient. They wanted their own way and not God's way.

God saw what the disobedient people were doing. God sees everything we do. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit talked to one another and said, "Noah's grandchildren are disobeying Us. They want to build a great city and make a great name for themselves without Us. If We let them, they will sin in bigger and bigger ways. Let's confuse their words so that they can't understand one another. Then they will spread out over the earth." God changed the words that came from the people's mouths so that when they talked to one another, they couldn't understand what the other person was saying. The words came out differently. People in one family couldn't talk with people in another family. The people were getting more and more frustrated trying to build the tower. They could not get their work done. Finally they gave up trying and moved their families away from Babel. The Lord spread them out over the whole earth, just like He had said. God always has the best plan. Now the name of the city is Babel.

Be careful to say "yes" to God. Don't be proud like the people at Babel. Ask God to help you obey Him by obeying your parents and teachers. Do things so that people think God is great, not so they think you are great.



Lesson Questions

Did God tell the people to spread out over the earth?

Yes.

Did the people obey?

No. Many of them settled in Shinar.

Why did they disobey?

They were proud. They said no in their hearts.

What did they do?

They built a tower to be famous and powerful.

What did the Lord do?
He confused their languages and scattered them over the earth.

What should they have done?
They should have been humble and obeyed.

Should you obey God?
Yes. You should be humble and obey.

Presentation Ideas



A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards

Use A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards to present the lesson.



Betty Lukens Flannelgraph

Use appropriate flannelgraph pieces as you teach the Bible lesson.



Language of Love

On a small piece of paper, write "I love you" in various languages, including English. This is for your own use. Use a puppet to say "I love you" in different languages. Ask the students, "What did I say?" After they guess, tell them what the puppet said and ask them to repeat the phrase that you just said. Explain that in today's lesson, they will learn how all the different languages were created.



Letter Mix-up

Start the lesson by holding up a magnetic board with alphabet magnets on it. Talk about the ABCs with the students. Start pulling the letters off one by one and dropping them into a bowl. When all the letters are in the bowl, mix them up with your hand to illustrate that the language was confused.

Praise and Worship

Great Is the Lord

I Love You, Lord

Lord, I Lift Your Name on High

Mighty Is Our God

O Worship the King

Oh, Be Careful

Seek Ye First

The Wise Man and the Foolish Man

Trust and Obey



Scattered

The people spoke one language, and they gathered in one place.
(Move hands in talking motion.)

They said, "Let's build a tower that will make our name look great."
(Place fists one on top of the other as though building.)

That's not what God had said to do; the people disobeyed.
(Shake head and wag finger back and forth.)

The Lord had said to spread abroad; instead, they chose to stay.
(Spread arms outward; then cross arms defiantly in front of chest.)

The people wouldn't listen; they were proud and ignored God.
(Point to ear; shake head.)

God made their language babble, and He scattered them abroad.
(Move hands in talking motion; spread arms outward.)

PRACTICE THE TRUTH

"That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments" (Psalm 78:7).

Choose ideas from this section to review and apply the truths of the Bible lesson.



All the Children of the World

Give each student a photocopy of the provided world map and a handful of miniature cutout people (you can also use stickers, happy faces, or other cutouts). Tell the students to color the water blue and the land green and then to glue the people all over the map. Remind them that God dispersed the people and confounded their language because they were disobedient to Him.



Letter Jumble

Have the students haphazardly glue uncooked alphabet pasta all over a piece of construction paper to illustrate the confused language. Older students could make up words. Print out or write Genesis 11:7 on the bottom of the page. Emphasize that it is difficult to understand other languages because of God's judgment on Babel.

Variation: Use alphabet stickers or large letters cut out from newspaper headlines instead of pasta.



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Paper-Tube Binoculars

Let the students decorate two paper tubes that you have stapled together. Punch two holes at one end of the paper tubes. Attach a piece of yarn to the holes so the "binoculars" can hang around the neck. Let the students look around with their binoculars. Talk about what you can see and how God can see everything at once. God doesn't need binoculars; He could see the people of Babel building the tower, disobeying Him, and thinking they were strong.



Pin a Person on the World

Tape a large world map to the wall. Let the students cut pictures of people from magazines. Let the students take turns being blindfolded, walking up to the map, and taping a person on the map. For younger students, don't use a blindfold. Simply let them tape the faces on the map. Talk about how the people at Babel were scattered so they would listen to God and obey Him rather than trying to do



mighty things in their own power.

Learning about Missionaries

Tape pictures of your church's missionaries onto a world map, marking the countries in which they serve. Display the map in the classroom. Explain to the class the different languages these missionaries must learn in order to speak the truth in those countries.



Coloring Sheets

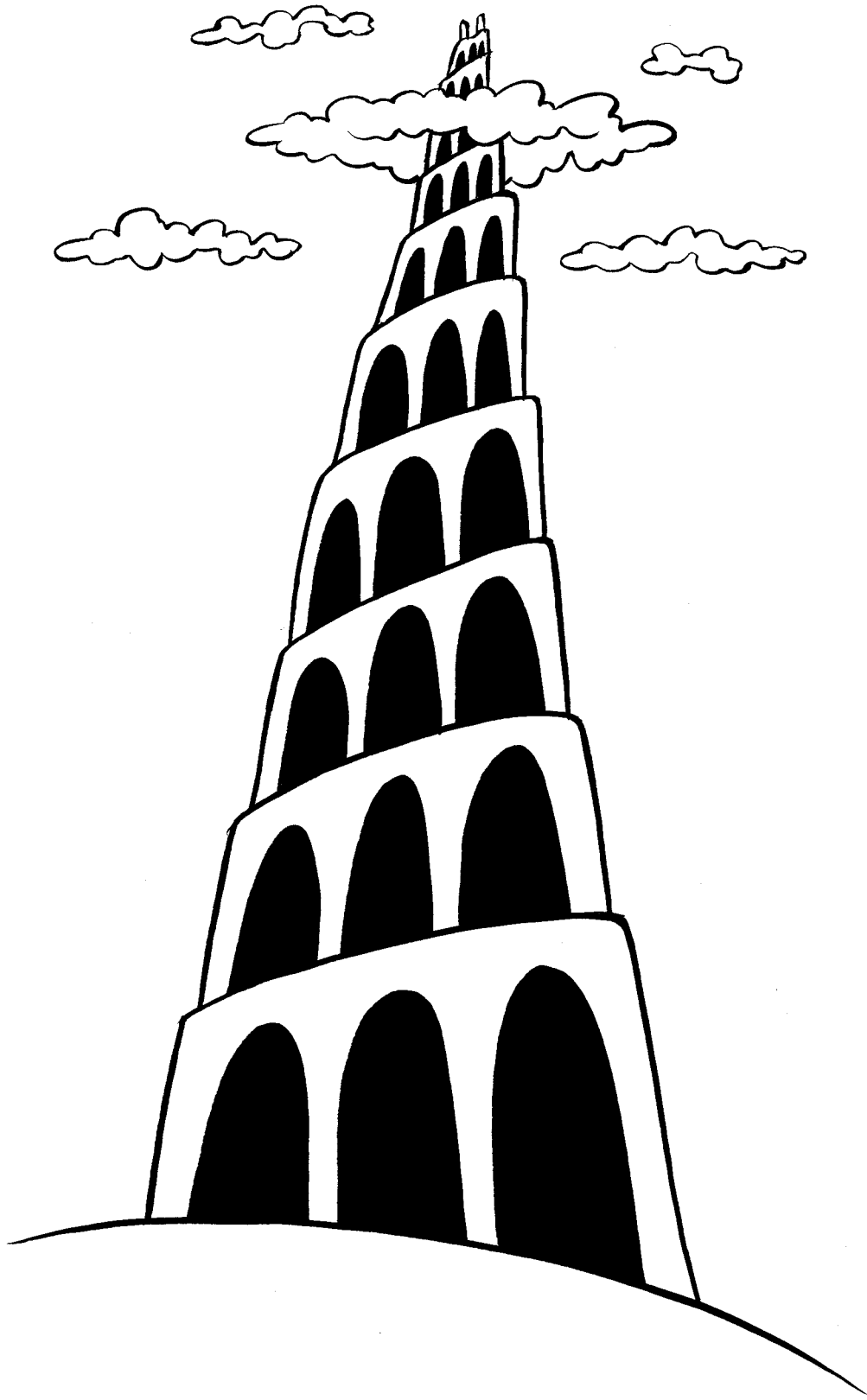
Give each student a copy of the coloring sheets at the back of this lesson. Students can color the pages in class or take them home to color.

MEMORY VERSE

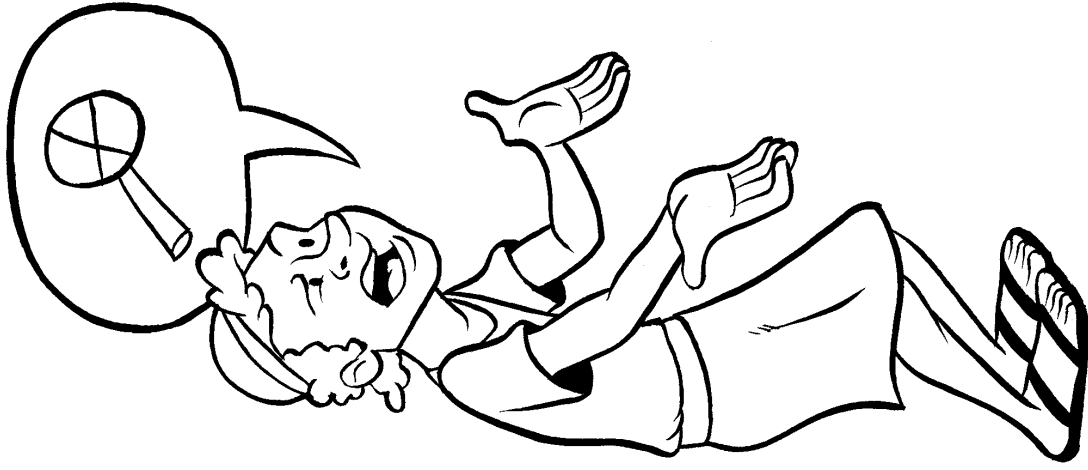
"So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth; and they ceased building the city" (Genesis 11:8).

World Map





The Tower of Babel



The Tower of Babel



God confused the language of the people of the earth (Gen. 11:7).



God scattered the people over the face of the entire earth (Gen. 11:8-9).

