LESSON 7

God judges the nations at Babel

GENESIS 11:1–9

CENTRAL TRUTH

God defeats the proud.

KEY VERSE

"So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city" **(Gen 11:8).**

Supporting Truths

1. God punishes sin.
2. God is opposed to the proud.
3. Pride is boasting in man instead of in God.
4. Pride is transgression—crossing God's boundaries.
5. God is sovereign.

Objectives

1. Describe how God overturned the people's work.
2. Identify God's punishment of the proud people.
3. Explain what it means that they wanted to make a name for themselves.
4. Explain how the people tried to gain access to heaven on their own terms.
5. Match up the peoples efforts to God's responses to show how God was in control.

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

God judges the nations at Babel • Genesis 11:1–9

Lesson Summary

After the flood, the people were supposed to worship God and fill the earth. But at Babel, the people disobeyed God's command to spread through all the earth, failed to worship God, and sought to honor themselves instead of God. But God defeated all their plans by confusing their language and forcing them to scatter.

Spotlight on the Gospel

The people at Babel chose to put their own glory on display instead of God's. In response to their sin, God scattered the people by confusing their languages. However, one day people from every language will be united in praising God because God's plan is to save people from every language through faith in His son, Jesus Christ.

LAST WEEK

God preserves Noah
Genesis 8:1–9:17

THIS WEEK

God judges the nations at Babel
Genesis 11:1–9

NEXT WEEK

God makes a promise to Abram
Genesis 11:27–12:9

FALL | PROMISE

Lesson Commentary

God defeats the proud.

After the flood, God commanded Noah and his sons to fill the earth (Gen 9:1), and Noah showed the way mankind should respond to God—with worship (8:20). Unfortunately, after several generations had gone by (Gen 10), mankind violated both of these principles. In the story of the tower of Babel, the people tried to resist God's command to fill the whole earth, and they tried to exalt themselves rather than God. But the people failed because God is ***sovereign***, or in control of everything, everywhere, all the time. This story is about God undoing man's sinful plans so that He can accomplish His own plan.

The people had a sinful plan (11:1–4)

The people gathered together in Shinar, in southern Mesopotamia (11:2). To keep from being scattered, they decided to build a city (11:4). They used resources common to the area: fire-hardened bricks joined together with tar (11:3).

Genesis 11:4 explains their ***rebellion***, which was their intentional resistance against God. First, they decided to build a city with a tower reaching into heaven. This tower was not an attempt to literally build up to heaven; rather, it was likely a ziggurat.

THINK ABOUT IT
Pride is making much of man and little of God.

Ziggurats were massive structures shaped like a pyramid with a flat top. They were built by the Sumerians, Babylonians, Elamites, Akkadians, and Assyrians. Ziggurats had shrines on top for pagan worship, representing the link between gods and men, between heaven and earth. Men were attempting to worship false gods in a way of their own choosing, rather than worshiping the true God through obedience. God alone dwells in heaven, so by building a tower to connect to the heavenly world on their own, the people were trying to reach heaven by themselves without God's help.

Second, they sinned by being ***proud*** or thinking they were more important than they were, even more important than God. They honored themselves instead of God by wanting to make a name for themselves (11:4). This sets up the story of God calling Abram, when God said that He would make Abram's name great (12:2). When humans worship God and not themselves, God makes their name great; in fact, God allows them to be called by the greatest name: His own (Jer 15:16). The name of God, received through faithful obedience, is far greater than any human name puffed up by pride.

Third, they decided to stay together in one place in direct opposition to God's command (Gen 11:4). Again, this was ***sin***, or disobeying God in thought, word, or action. It was disobedience to God's command to not spread out through the whole earth (9:1). For these three reasons they deserved to be punished: (1) they crossed their God-given boundaries (Prov 29:6), (2) they boasted in themselves instead of in God (Jer 9:23–24), and (3) they disobeyed God's command (Deut 8:20).

God defeated the people's sinful plan (11:5–9)

The Hebrew words chosen throughout Gen 11:1–9 express strong irony. In fact, it is almost like a comedy to see mankind at their strongest fail so miserably against a God who easily defeats all their efforts. The words and ideas of Gen 11:5–9 match up with those in Gen 11:1–4, showing how at each step of the way God ruined their plan (see table).

But first, God came down to see what was happening (11:5). Of course God knew what was going on, but the language here pictures God having to stoop down even to see the tower that the people thought was so impressive. In God's eyes, it was puny. God saw their abuse of the common language and their united commitment to rebel, so He began to undo their evil plans (11:6).

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

God judges the nations at Babel • Genesis 11:1–9

Just as the people said, "Come, let us make bricks" (11:3), so now God responded, "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language" (11:7). The people made bricks to construct a city, but God confused their language and sent everyone out. Similarly, Genesis 11:3 begins, "They said to one another." Genesis 11:7 undoes their efforts at communication, using the same phrase for "one another" when it says "that they may not understand one another's speech." They tried to communicate a sinful plan with one another, but God made communication impossible.

Again, Genesis 11:2 describes how they settled "there" in the land of Shinar, but Genesis 11:8 reverses this process as God scattered them from "there." They tried to come together; God drove them apart. Yet again, Genesis 11:1 describes how "the whole earth" spoke one language, but Genesis 11:9 describes how God intervened to confuse the language of "all the earth". God took away the gift of one language they had tried to use against Him.

Before God Punished	After God Punished
(11:1) "the whole earth" used the same language	(11:9) God confused the language of "the whole earth"
(11:2) the people settled "there"	(11:8) God scattered the people from "there"
(11:3) the people spoke to "one another"	(11:7) God made it impossible to understand "one another"
(11:3) people said "Come, let us make bricks"	(11:7) God said "Come let Us...confuse their language"

So when the people tried to make a name for themselves, they did get a name. But it was not a name of honor. Forever they would be remembered by the name "Babel", which means "confusion". They were famous, not for their greatness, but for God's punishment of their failed attempt to reach heaven by their own effort. God had turned all their rebellious efforts upside down.

Sinful man is powerless before God. The story of Babel is a reminder of God's judgment of sin in the days of Noah. God destroyed the world with a flood because of human sin. In the story of Babel, God prevented human sin from attaining that kind of level again. Even the combined efforts of sinful man are nothing compared to God. Genesis 11 is a picture of the greatness of God and the weakness of man. God defeats every effort of those who are His enemies.

THINK ABOUT IT
Man's greatest achievements, viewed from the heights of heaven, are seen for what they really are—nothing.

This is critical to understand for all those who oppose God. God punished the people at Babel by confusing their language and causing them to separate from one another and gather where their own language was spoken. James, the half brother of Jesus, records God's evaluation of the proud: He is opposed to them (Jas 4:6). Those who think they are more important than they really are, or think they are more important than God have become God's enemy. Because of their pride they are separated from God and His grace.

However, in the same verse, James also records God's kindness towards the humble: They receive God's grace. Those who recognize their own weakness and sin and call out to God for help receive His grace. They are raised up to the heights of heaven by God's strength and God's work—the forgiveness of sins through Jesus' death on the cross. One day people from every language will be united in one place praising God. This is because God's plan is to save people from every language by His grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Lesson Outline

God defeats the proud.

AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE

1. **The people sinned by disobeying God's command to fill the earth (11:1–4).**
2. **God scattered the sinful people by confusing their language (11:5–9).**

AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE

1. **The people had a sinful plan (11:1–4).**
   - They had one language and lived in one place (11:1–2).
   - They planned to build a city and a tower to reach into heaven (11: 3–4).
   - They wanted to make their own name great (11: 4).
   - They did not want to be scattered (11: 4).
2. **God defeated the people's sinful plan (11:5–9).**
   - God came down to see their city and tower (11: 5).
   - God chose to confuse their language (11: 6–7).
   - God scattered them, and the building stopped (11: 8).
   - The name Babel became a reminder of God confusing human pride (11: 9).

Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.

Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

1. **Did God tell the people to spread out over the earth?**
   Yes.
2. **Did the people obey?**
   No. Many of them settled in Shinar.
3. **What did they do?**
   They built a tower to be famous and powerful.
4. **What did the Lord do?**
   He confused their languages and scattered them over the earth.

Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

1. **Do you remember what God told Noah in Genesis 9:1?**
   God told him to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth."
2. **Were the men who settled in the plain of Shinar obeying God?**
   No. God told man through Noah to fill all the earth.
3. **What did the men say that they wanted to do?**
   They wanted to build a city for themselves and make their name great.
4. **What did the people mean when they said, "Let us make for ourselves a name" (Gen 11:4)?**
   The people wanted to show how great they were. They were proud and sinful.
5. **What did the Lord think of what the people were doing?**
   He did not like that the people were being disobedient to His commands.
6. **What did the Lord decide to do?**
   God caused the people to speak many different languages.
7. **What happened after God confused their language?**
   The people were scattered because it was impossible to understand their neighbors. God made them stop building the city.
8. **Where were the people scattered?**
   The people were scattered over the face of the whole earth.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5

INTRODUCE

TALL TOWER
Place blocks in the center of the room. Instruct the children 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 children build a city with blocks.

SPREADING OUT
Have the children hold hands and form a circle. Say, "Crowd together." The children 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 children should break hands and spread throughout the room, putting as much space between one another as possible. 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.

ILLUSTRATE

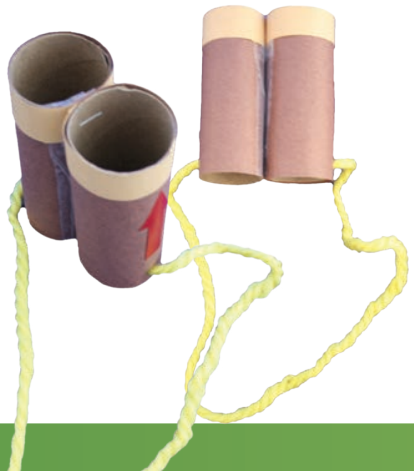
LETTER MIX-UP
Start the lesson by holding up a magnetic board with alphabet magnets on it. Talk about the ABCs with the children. Start pulling the letters off one by one and dropping them into a bowl. When all the letters are in the bowl, mix them up with your hand to illustrate that the language was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

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 children, "What did I say?" After they guess, tell them what the puppet said and ask them to repeat the phrase that you just said.

APPLY

PAPER-TUBE BINOCULARS
Materials: Paper tubes, hole punch, yarn.

Directions: Let the children 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 children 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.



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

God judges the nations at Babel • Genesis 11:1–9

AGES 6–8

INTRODUCE

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 children 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.

PIN A PERSON ON THE WORLD
Tape a large world map to the wall. Let the children cut pictures of people from magazines. Let the children take turns being blindfolded, walking up to the map, and taping a person on the map. For younger children, 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.

ILLUSTRATE

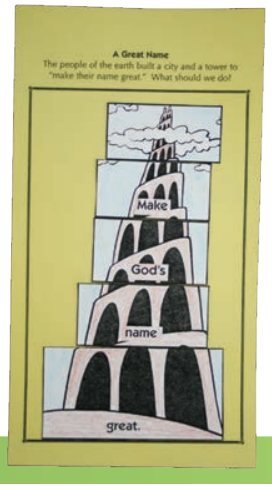
I CAN SEE YOU
Bring in a pair of binoculars. Describe how they work. Talk about how God can see everything at once. He doesn't need binoculars. God saw the people of Babel building the tower, disobeying Him, and thinking they were strong.

ROLL CALL
Tell children to stand when you call their names. After you call all their names and the children are standing, tell them to sit back down when they hear their name again. This time, call out their names (first and last) in pig latin. Some children will recognize their names right away. Repeat the names of children who remain standing until they finally recognize them. Is pig latin really another language? Wouldn't it be great if it were this easy to understand another language? How would you feel if everyone around you spoke a different language and you were not being understood or understanding others?

APPLY

A GREAT NAME
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1.
Materials: Craft page, glue, scissors.

Directions: The people of the earth built a city and a tower to make a name for themselves. Have children cut out the pieces of the tower. Have them "build" the tower and glue it in place to find out whose name we *should* make great.



A Great Name
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1

AGES 9–11

INTRODUCE

GREETINGS

Before class, make a chart of greetings in various languages. As the children settle down for the Bible lesson, greet them in another language. Show them the chart and practice the greetings together. Tell them that in today's lesson they will hear where and why God created different languages.

TOWER OF BABEL SLIDE SHOW

Make a slide-show presentation of various ziggurats. There are a number of Internet sites that have pictures you can download. (Note: You may have to get permission to use the pictures.) We are not sure that the tower of Babel was a ziggurat, but it is possible, since ziggurats were common before the time of Abraham.

ILLUSTRATE

LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD

Bring in recordings of different languages. As the children whether they can guess what language the people are speaking and what is being said. Ask the children what languages they've heard others speak (or can speak themselves). Use the globe to point out different countries and tell children which language is spoken there. Tell the children that there was a time when everyone in the world spoke one language but that today there are thousands of languages spoken around the world.

TRIP AROUND THE WORLD

Ask the children where they would go if they could travel anywhere in the world. Allow a few children to give answers. Point out that many children will likely have different answers. Explain that after the flood all the people chose to live in the same place in disobedience to God's command to fill the earth. Tell the children that this disobedience was motivated by a prideful desire to display the power of man.

APPLY

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.