



6

Confusion: Dispersion at Babel

Key Themes

- God judges sin.
- God is omniscient.

Key Passages

- Genesis 10:8–12, 10:25, 11:1–9

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify the sin that caused God to judge mankind by changing the people's language.
- Explain how the confusion of languages scattered people over the whole world.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, "Were the pyramids in Egypt built before the Tower of Babel?"



Studying God's Word

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After the Flood, God commanded the people to spread across the globe, but they refused and assembled together in Shinar. There they sought to build a city and a tower to make a name for themselves. God judged their sin by confusing their languages, causing them to scatter.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.



Activity 1: Babel Around the World

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Show images of ziggurats and read Babel legends from around the world.

- Print one Ziggurat Images sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM.
- Print one Babel Legends from Around the World sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM.



Activity 2: John 3:16 in Various Languages

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Students will look for similarities in the various languages.

- Print one Verse in Various Languages worksheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

To prepare for this lesson, read Genesis 9:1, 9:7, 11:1–9; Acts 17:26–27.

After the Flood was over, Noah and his family—eight people in all—left the Ark. All the tribes and nations on the earth today have come from these eight people. God gave Noah and his family very specific instructions in Genesis 9:1: “So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.’” God repeated this same command again in Genesis 9:7: “As for you, be fruitful and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth and multiply in it.” Noah had been commissioned by God to repopulate the earth. Noah and his family obeyed this command; however, the descendants of Noah disobeyed.

While Noah’s descendants were dispersing to fill the earth, the people, possibly under the powerful Nimrod (Genesis 10:9–10), stopped at the plain of Shinar to live (Genesis 11:2). There they began to build a city (Genesis 11:4). These people were openly rebellious and disobedient to God. First, they disobeyed God’s specific instructions to disperse across the earth (Genesis 9:1, 9:7). Second, they were prideful in their disobedience by coveting a name for themselves (Genesis 11:4). They were anxious to build a monument to themselves whose top is in the heavens, looking to gain fame in the land among the people while disobeying the holy God.

This prideful attitude of blatant disobedience angered the Lord—as does all disobedience to Him. He came down to them and confused their language so they would not understand one another’s speech (Genesis 11:7). Thus, these wicked people were scattered across the land, there was no longer a common language, and the building of the Tower of Babel

ceased (Genesis 11:8–9). God’s purpose to fill the earth was accomplished.

APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Christians are often faced with questions concerning how the world’s history fits in with the biblical timeline. An example of this relates to the Tower of Babel. The secular world is continually making archaeological finds that supposedly pre-date the Flood. Be on the lookout for this. It is contradictory to what we know God’s Word tells us.

For example, secular historians date the first civilizations around 8000–10000 BC, with Egyptian civilizations beginning at 3200 BC (along with the Babel-like pyramids). This information is not accurate according to God’s Word. The worldwide Flood that destroyed everything on the earth began in 2348 BC, so none of these civilizations could have existed before then. It was only after the dispersion at Babel that these early civilizations started, as family groups began to spread around the world.

Some skeptics will also try to discount the account of the Tower of Babel by refusing to believe that the ancient people were skilled enough to accomplish such a task. According to God’s Word, however, the people of antiquity were very intelligent. Genesis gives us insight into these people and what they were capable of. For instance, they were building cities (Genesis 4:17), they were raising and caring for livestock (Genesis 4:20), they made and played musical instruments (Genesis 4:21), and they were metalworkers in bronze and iron (Genesis 4:22). They were certainly talented enough (and sinful enough) to build this tower as a tribute to themselves and their own accomplishments—ignoring their Creator God and His instructions.

Be aware that information like the above is just what children, parents, teachers, and all of us see and hear from the world—and it contradicts the Bible. It confuses and denies the infallibility of God’s Word. We must continue to rely on the biblical worldview we know to be true.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

We see from the Genesis account that the people disobeyed God and built a tower and a city to make a name for themselves (Genesis 11:4). God confused the language, and the people dispersed throughout the earth (Genesis 11:8). This occurred a little more than 100 years after the Flood subsided in the year 2349 BC. Our understanding of history continues to confirm the biblical account of the Tower of Babel.

It is generally agreed that the Tower of Babel was a ziggurat temple-tower. This conclusion is based not on having discovered the Tower of Babel—which has not been found—but on discoveries of very similar “ziggurat” structures in other areas of the Middle East and beyond. The Egyptian pyramids in particular and, much later, the great Mayan temples of Central America are examples of this structure being spread around the globe from Babel.

Historically, we know that these ancient ziggurats were built to offer homage to the false gods of the people who built them. These structures are part of the idolatrous worship of these various people groups. We can connect this to our understanding that the building of the Tower of Babel was dishonoring of the one true God who spared Noah and his family and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Genesis 9:1).

Again, looking biblically at this entire account, we see that the dates given for these archaeological finds are inaccurate. We know, according to Scripture, that the Flood was about 4,300 years ago—and everything on the face of the earth was destroyed. Consequently, all evidences of civilization that we find have to be dated later than the Flood.

As the people dispersed from the plain of Shinar, they recalled their attempt to build the Tower of Babel and make a name for themselves. Thus, because men are wicked and, when left to their own devices will always turn from God, they once again began to build their cities and temples throughout the earth—the ziggurats that we find today.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Lord, I know that through one man, Adam, all men sin. And I know that my sin demands punishment because you are holy and just. Thank you, dear Lord, for your longsuffering and mercy, and thank you for providing the ultimate cure for sin—the death of your Son Jesus on the Cross. How amazed I am at your grace, that through faith you have revealed the truth of the gospel to me. And I beg you, Lord, to have mercy on the students in my class who don’t know you. Help them to acknowledge their sinfulness and need for the Savior. Help me to be a clear and encouraging witness to each one.

► **Pace your lesson!** You can use the provided clocks to indicate the time each section should be completed to keep the lesson on schedule. While teaching, you can compare your anticipated times with the actual time and shorten or drop sections as necessary.



Review

Last week we wrapped up our study of the Flood by discussing how the earth was reshaped by this global event. The floodwaters that came from the fountains of the great deep and the windows of heaven ripped up the rocks and soil that covered the earth.

- ? What happened to all of the rocks and dirt that were ripped up by the Flood? *They were deposited in the layers of sediment that we see around the world today.*
- ? What evidence is there that God's purpose in destroying all of the land-dwelling animals from the earth was accomplished with the Flood? *The dead organisms that we find in these rock layers confirm what the Bible teaches. Billions of dead things are buried in rock layers laid down by water all over the earth.*

Refer to the Seven C's Timeline to remind the students of the scope of the events being discussed.

As we think back over the ideas we have studied in this curriculum, we have covered three of the Seven C's of History, and we are about to talk about the fourth.

Let's take a minute to review them. The first was Creation, six normal-length days about 6,000 years ago, followed shortly after that by the Corruption that entered with the first sin. Sixteen hundred years later, the Catastrophe of the Flood was sent as a judgment for man's wickedness.

For the next two lessons, we will be discussing the events surrounding the scattering of the people from the Tower of Babel—the Confusion of the languages.



➤ Write on the board, "Were the pyramids in Egypt built before the Tower of Babel?"

➤ Have the students bookmark Genesis 9:1 and Genesis 11:1 in their Bibles.



Studying God's Word

READ THE WORD

The account of the events surrounding the Tower of Babel is presented in Genesis 10 and 11. Chronologically, the description of the genealogies in chapter 10 comes after the dispersion of the people from Shinar. Reading from verse 10:32 to 11:1, some have wondered if this is a mistake or contradiction in the text. There is no contradiction; rather, chapter 11 presents background information about how the spreading of chapter 10 came about. It also gives some extra information about the ages of the individuals mentioned.

In all, Noah had 16 grandsons. It is their families that are described in chapters 10 and 11, and we will look at how they spread across the earth, settling in new areas. *The 16 grandsons are included in the text at the bottom left of the Seven C's Timeline with additional information about each.*

Let's read Genesis 11:1–9 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Genesis 11:1–9

EXAMINE THE WORD

In this passage we have the description of what is often called the Tower of Babel. Let's examine the text carefully to make sure we don't bring any misconceptions in our understanding into the account.

Observe the Text

Refer to the Bible Study poster to remind your students how to dig deeper into God's Word by asking the right questions.

- ? **What type of literature is this passage?** *Historical narrative.*
- ? **How many languages were spoken on the earth at this point?** *One.*
- ? **Where had the people come from?** *The east.*
- ? **Where did the people settle?** *A plain in the land of Shinar.*
- ? **What did they plan to build?** *A city and a tower.*
- ? **How is the tower described?** *A tall structure with its top in the heavens.*
- ? **What construction material were they using?** *Baked bricks with asphalt for mortar.*
- ? **What was the purpose of building the city and tower?** *To make a name for themselves and not be scattered over the earth.*
- ? **In Genesis 9:1, God commanded Noah's descendents to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." Did they obey God's command?** *No, they stayed together, rather than filling the earth.*
- ? **What did God find when He "came down"?** *The people had one language and were so unified that they could accomplish anything together.*
- ? **What was God's response to the building of the city and tower?** *He confused their language.*
- ? **What was the result of the languages being confused?** *The people scattered over the earth.*
- ? **How does this relate to Genesis 9:1?** *God had commanded Noah's descendents to fill the earth. They had refused. God confused their languages in order to accomplish His will.*
- ? **Why is that place now called Babel?** *Because the Lord confused the languages there.*
- ? **What does the passage tell us about God?** *He sees what is happening on the earth and has the power to change the language of its inhabitants. God's will is always accomplished.*

Discover the Truth

Now that we have asked questions about the text, let's talk about the main idea and gather some more information with some cross-referencing.

? The people seemed to be avoiding spreading across the earth. Why would this be a concern for them in light of Genesis 9:1 and 7? *God had commanded the people to multiply and fill the earth. Read Genesis 9:1 and 7 as a cross reference that explains their attitude.*

? Based on the information given in the text, what was the root cause of the sin of the people at Shinar? *Their pride caused them to desire a name for themselves more than honoring God.*

? Did they complete the city and tower? *Based on the statements in verses 5 and 8, it seems that the construction had begun and was interrupted.*

? Most agree that the land of Shinar is the plain between the Tigris and Euphrates in modern-day Iraq. (In Hebrew, the word likely means “two rivers.”) If that is true, then according to the information in Genesis 11:2, where did the Ark land? *If the people came from the east, then the Ark likely landed somewhere to the east, possibly in the mountains of Iran. Remember that the Ark rested in the “mountains of Ararat,” so no one knows the exact location.*

Genesis 10:8–12

? Genesis 10:8–12 gives us more information about what happened at Babel. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

? What do we learn from this passage? *Nimrod seems to be the leader of the people at Babel.*

There is no date given in the text, but there is information in the text that can help us arrive at an approximate date for the events we have been discussing. We know that Arphaxad, one of Shem’s sons, was born two years after the Flood. We also know the ages of the next generations that led up to Shem’s great great grandson Peleg. Peleg was born 101 years after the Flood (2247 BC) and lived for 239 years (Genesis 11:18–19).

Genesis 10:25

? What does Genesis 10:25 tell us about Peleg? *It tells us that in his lifetime the earth was divided.*

Peleg would have lived at the same time as Nimrod and most believe that the division referred to is the division of the languages at Babel. (However, there are some who suggest it refers to the splitting of the continents, but this seems unlikely in light of the major disruption this would have caused on the earth.) If this is the case, then the events of Babel would have occurred within 100–200 years after the Flood. One historian, Bishop Ussher, places the date at 2242 BC when Peleg would have been 5. (Peleg's name may have been prophetic of the division that was to come.)

As an interesting side note, we find the root of two words we use frequently in the names of two individuals in this lineage. Our word *Semite/Semitic* comes from *Shem*, and the word *Hebrew* is believed to come from Peleg's father, *Eber*.

God confused the languages of the people and scattered them over the face of the earth. **How did the confusion lead to the scattering?** *The best explanation seems to be that the confusion led to the inability of the different groups to communicate. As a result they continued migrating from Shinar to other parts of the earth, as they were supposed to do in the first place. This will be examined more closely in the next lesson.*

If the people were scattered across the earth, that means that they would have taken their cultural influences—the things they knew and ways of doing things—with them as they scattered. We will talk more next week about what that dispersion looked like and examine the details from chapter 10.

We are going to take a look at some of the evidences that confirm this biblical understanding of history.





Babel Around the World

MATERIALS

- Ziggurat Images sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM

INSTRUCTIONS

? If people had been living together as one culture with one language and then were scattered across the globe, what do you think the first government structures, religious ideas, and buildings they establish might look like? *We would expect them to look much like the culture they came from.*

This first image is an artist's representation of what the Tower of Babel may have looked like. *Show the first image of the Tower of Babel.* We are not certain where the tower was located, but there are a few candidates in modern Iraq. What seems to be clear is that the tower was this stepped structure. This is agreed upon by biblical and secular scholars alike, though the secular historians tend to assign unbiblical dates.

These people were openly rebelling against God, and we know from other cultures that these step pyramids and ziggurats were often used as temples for human sacrifice and the worship system commonly called the Babel mystery religions. It is likely that these religious practices were founded in Shinar and that the tower was part of this new religion.

The rest of these images show step pyramids and ziggurats from various places around the globe. *Show the images of the various pyramid structures that are found around the globe from the Resource DVD-ROM.* As these people scattered, they built structures that were similar to the building project that was frustrated by God. Throughout history, these structures have been used for religious practices—just like when the people were trying to replace God at Babel. The human sacrifice and other wicked practices used to honor the many false gods can only be attributed to demonic worship that arose at Babel.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

If we understand that the people of Shinar were the first civilization after the Flood, then we can fix a date for the beginning of other civilizations. If the date of about 100 years after the Flood is accurate for the division at Babel, then the earliest date for the first civilizations that arose after the dispersion would have been about 2100 BC.

- ? Secular historians have suggested that the pyramids in Egypt were constructed beginning about 2600 BC, and that the oldest pyramid structures, in Caral, Peru, were built around 3000 BC. And these structures supposedly came from these cultures long after they were founded. **What is the problem with such claims?** *If the dates fall earlier than 2349 BC, these structures would have been destroyed during the Flood. Even if the dates are close to the date of Babel, the civilizations did not take long ages to form before they built these structures.*

- ? **What is a biblical explanation for the occurrence of all of these pyramid structures all over the earth?** *The result of the confusion of the languages was the scattering of the people across the earth. As they went, they would have carried part of the information from the building of the tower and the other cultural practices with them.*

- ? **If this is the case, what “memory” should we expect to find in cultures all over the world? (Think back to what we learned about the “memory” of the Flood in various cultures.)** *We would expect to see legends of the entire population having one language and being scattered. There would be themes of the true account present in these distorted legends.*

It should be no surprise to know that these legends do exist, just like we saw with Flood legends. Here are a few samples. *Read the various legends from the Babel Legends from Around the World sheet. These are a sampling of how the truths of Scripture have been distorted over time, but they point to the historical truth of the scriptural account.*



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

Today we have received an introduction to the fourth of the Seven C's of History—the Confusion of the languages at Babel. We have seen that mankind continued to rebel against God's commands even after the judgment of the Flood.

The people sought to make a name for themselves and stay together rather than spread out as God had commanded them to do. Under the leadership of Nimrod, the people were united not only by their language,

but also in their purpose to defy God. This was a clearly sinful response and God judged the people for that sin.

As the people spread across the globe, they carried the story with them as well as the culture and architecture that they had used in Shinar. Common themes are seen in the early cultures around the world and the common memory of the Flood and the universal language bear testimony to the Bible's account of the origin of the nations.

We will continue uncovering how this event shaped history next week when we look back to chapter 10 and the origin of the various nations and people groups.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

Now let's consider how we might apply some of these truths to our lives.

- ? We looked at evidence such as the legends of a common language and the ziggurat structures found around the globe, which seems to confirm the Genesis account of the people spreading across the globe. Why do many people, even those claiming to be Christians, reject this as an actual account of the origin of the various people groups around the world?

Many simply reject the Bible's history and others try to allegorize the accounts and say they simply teach us a moral lesson. When we reject the authority of Scripture, we will have to explain the origins of the people groups based on some other authority. For most people, that has come from evolutionary explanations of man's origin.

- ? Were God's plans for the people to multiply and fill the earth thwarted by the disobedience of the people? *No, His plans were initially disobeyed, but man cannot thwart God's plans. God's command was ultimately followed, just not willingly.*

- ? What attributes of God does this judgment of the people by confusing their languages demonstrate? *God's justice and omnipotence are demonstrated. He is just for judging the people for their sin, and His absolute power is demonstrated in the reprogramming of each person's brain to speak and understand a new language.*

- ? The people who were gathering together in Shinar were only removed from the judgment of the Flood by a few generations. The details would have been directly available to them through Noah's testimony. (Noah was still alive during the events at Babel.) Does it surprise you that this rebellion happened so quickly? *Explain. If we think of the condition of the heart of mankind, this shouldn't be much of a surprise. Looking forward to the grumbings of the Israelites in the desert, we see that this is the case throughout history.*

- ? Knowing that this is the tendency of mankind, how do we conduct our lives so that we don't fall into this pattern? *It is a matter of daily, and even moment-by-moment, recognition of our sinfulness and the need we have for a Savior. We should focus on the grace of God in our lives that was made possible only by the sacrifice of Christ.*

JUST OMNIPOTENT

(Refer to Attributes poster)

? We see in Genesis 8:21 that God knew man’s heart would continue to be evil from his youth (“although the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth”), yet He simply confused their language rather than wiping them out again. How is this a picture of God’s continuing grace to mankind today, including you? *All have sinned and deserve God’s wrath, but He has been gracious to every person in Christ. Recognizing that we as individuals deserve judgment and yet have received forgiveness in Christ is an essential part of understanding who God is and what He has done for us. We are no different than the people at Shinar—we are proud and rebellious apart from the grace of God changing our hearts. Keeping our focus on what Christ has done for us provides us with a motivation to lovingly serve Him and keep His commands.*



John 3:16 in Various Languages

MATERIALS

- Verse in Various Languages worksheet for each student

INSTRUCTIONS

This sheet shows John 3:16 written in several different languages. Can anyone find similar words in any of the different translations? *Students may notice words like mundo, monde, and mundum (all meaning world); Gott and Gud (meaning God); or eterna, éternelle, and aeternam (meaning eternal or everlasting).*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Since all modern languages are descended from the original language groups God created at Babel, it makes sense that many words in different languages would be similar. Similar words in related languages are evidence that confirms the account of Babel in the Bible.



MEMORY VERSE

Acts 17:26–27 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Praise God for His mercy and grace shown toward us each day.
- Pray that each person in the class would grow in his knowledge of God.
- Ask for the ability to take these truths to heart and put them into practice each day.

