

Bi121 Old Testament

Lesson Bi121-6 Babel (Genesis 9, 11)

In this lesson you will learn how life on earth began again for God's children after the Flood. God had made a covenant—a binding agreement—with Noah, his family, and all the creatures of the earth. But even though they had this wonderful promise from God, as time passed people sinned again. They tried to live without God and disregarded His plan for their lives.

After the Flood God said to Noah, “As a sign of my blessing you will be fruitful and repopulate the whole earth. From now on, animals will fear you, yet you are still responsible for them. You may now eat animals as well as plants. Everything that moves and all green plants will be food for you. But you are not to kill people, because they are made in the image of God. You are to have many children and once again fill the earth with people.”

God added, “Do not eat meat that still has the life in it, that is, the blood. I will hold responsible every person and every animal that violates this agreement. If you shed the blood of another person and they die, other people will shed your blood and you will die. The reason for this is that every human is made in the image and likeness of God.”

God also said to Noah and his family, “I hereby establish my covenant with you. Look into the clouds and see my rainbow. This is the sign of the covenant between me and all living creatures of every kind on the earth. Let it remind you of My mercy and faithfulness to My Word. When you and I see it, we will both remember this promise and the conditions I have set. A flood will never again destroy all life on the earth. This agreement is an everlasting promise, a covenant for all generations to come” (Gen 9:1-17). After the Flood Noah lived 350 more years—950 in all—and then he died.

As time passed the number of people grew great again. The children and grandchildren of Shem, Ham, and Japheth began to spread out across the land. They still all spoke the same language. Those people who settled in the region of Babylonia thought that their power would be greater if they stayed together. So they did not go throughout the world like God had said. They built a city and began to construct a tower of mud brick and tar that went high into the sky—high enough so everyone could see it. In their pride they wanted to make a name for themselves and avoid being scattered over the face of the earth. During that time towers of this type—reaching to the heavens—were actually shrines for the worship of false gods. Because of their arrogance and self-centeredness, these people wanted to be famous and to dominate God's creation. Their efforts were man-centered, not God-centered.

So God looked at the tower and at their rebellious hearts and said, “People are disobeying my commands again. If they stay together and continue to rebel by building their own kingdom instead of the kingdom of God, then nothing will be impossible for them. Therefore, let us go down and make them speak different languages” (Gen 11:7).

Suddenly the people began speaking many different languages! They ran back and forth confused because they couldn't understand one another anymore. "What is happening?" one man called out. But those around him had no idea what he was saying. Slowly, one by one, people began to find others that spoke as they did. But they were no longer one great unified people. Instead they were now many small groups of people speaking many different languages. Frustrated and fearing those who did not speak as they did, the small groups departed from each other. And so God scatters them from there to all parts of the earth. The unfinished tower becomes known as the tower of confusion, or the Tower of Babel.

About that time the great-great-grandson of Shem was born. His name was Peleg, meaning 'division,' because at the time of his birth, the earth was divided into different languages. People turned from God to idolatry, sorcery, and wickedness. The apostle Paul describes their condition in the first part of his letter to the Romans. "Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal being and birds and animals and reptiles (Rom 1:21-23). God allowed sin to continue until He chose one of Peleg's descendants, Abraham, to bring mankind back to himself. Abraham was known as the Friend of God.

This story is important because it teaches that God still holds people accountable for the way they live, because He has given them the requirements for living on this earth. If we fail to obey Him, we will also experience judgment for sin.

The main truth these events show us is that God has given people free will, in other words, the power of choice. Some choose to serve God and desire to please Him, while others choose to continue to rebel by challenging God's authority and leaving Him out of their lives. Those who choose God's way will know His presence. Those who choose to go their own way will receive God's judgment.

To review the lesson, answer these questions.

1. What did God say about sending another flood?
 - a. [Pause for 6 seconds.] If you said, "God promised that He would never again destroy all the earth with a flood," you are correct.
2. What is the sign in the sky of God's promise to His people?
 - a. [Pause for 6 seconds.] If you said, "the rainbow," you are correct.
3. What did God do in response to the rebellion and pride of the people building the tower?
 - a. [Pause for 6 seconds.] If you said, "He confused their language and scattered the people to different places," you are correct.

Your assignment for this lesson is to listen to the story at least three times. As you hear the story each time, imagine how it happened; see the events in your mind. Then tell the story in your own words as you remember it. Then listen to the story again and retell it until you feel sure you are repeating the circumstances and actions correctly. You should spend at least 45 minutes in learning the story. You may need to have someone check that you are telling the story correctly.

Find someone who has never heard the story of the Tower of Babel. Tell them the story and ask, "Is it still true that when people turn away from God, they will experience judgment?" After listening to their opinion, tell them that Jesus is the only one who can turn away the judgment of God. This punishment may not be seen in one's lifetime, but will happen in the next life if sin is not confessed now. Only Jesus' death and the covering of His blood make it possible to escape God's judgment of our sin. Pray for the person to come to Jesus if they do not know Him.