

Tower of Babel

According to Genesis 11, all humans spoke the same language immediately following the flood of Noah. Those that migrated to the west and settled in the land of Shinar decided to build a city, and a great tower out of baked bricks to make a name for themselves. Since there is no evidence of buildings from antediluvial civilizations, we can probably conclude the Tower of Babel was the first major monument that had ever been built.

The story of the Tower of Babel is important to creation science because it provides a key piece of information that helps explain why humans exist as multiple distinct races today. The Bible explains that God intentionally scattered mankind to retard their technological advancement by confusing their speech. The origin of the various root languages is presumably linked to this event. God apparently created several unique languages to scatter humans throughout the world. This action effectively speciated humans into several groups allowing physical differences to develop. All humans can trace their ancestry back to Noah and his family only 4500 years ago, and then even further back to Adam and Eve. We are all close relatives, and the differences that distinguish us should be considered superficial at best.

Genesis 11 - *The Tower of Babel*

Philology

First, language studies have led many scholars to the conclusion that the varied human tongues ultimately can be traced to a common source. Max F. Muller (1823-1900) was one of the world's foremost comparative philologists, i.e., one who studies ancient languages and observes their similarities and differences. He taught at Oxford University. In his book, *Science of Language*, he wrote: "*We have examined all possible forms which language can assume, and we now ask, can we reconcile with these three distinct forms, the radical, the terminational, the inflectional, the admission of one common origin of human speech? I answer decidedly, Yes*" (Muller 46-47).

Sanskrit was the ancient and classical language of India. Sir William Jones (1746-1794), was an accomplished scholar in this language, and in 1786 he wrote:

"The Sanskrit language, whatever may be its antiquity, is of

wonderful structure; more perfect than Greek, more copious than Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either; yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and the forms of grammar, than could have been produced by accident; so strong that no philologist could examine all three without believing them to have sprung from some common source which no longer exists “(10).

Jones also suggested that Gothic, Celtic, and Persian belonged to the same linguistic family, now known as Endo-European.

In his respected two-volume work on Genesis, Dutch scholar G. Ch. Aalders has this comment:

A famous Assyriologist made the amazing discovery that there is a clear relationship between the languages of some of the native people in Central and South America and some of the Islands, on the one hand, and the ancient Sumerian [the oldest known language] and Egyptian languages, on the other. This scholar, who formerly had considered the account in Genesis 11:1-9 to be no more than a myth, came to the conclusion that the biblical narrative is more credible than had been supposed (1981, 254).

Dr. Harold Stigers has an interesting summary of this matter:

Though there are countless languages and dialects [approximately three thousand currently known], yet ultimate derivation from a parent language is revealed through the continuing studies being made across the boundaries of the major language families. Common features of syntax and vocabulary, which are similar enough, yet different enough not to be labeled borrowings, indicate that one must posit a common ancestor (1976, 130).

Interestingly, secular journalists recently discussed the work of certain linguistic scientists who, using computers to compare languages, are speculating that there may indeed be a mother tongue, which they are calling “proto-World.” One writer went so far as to say: “*Maybe the Bible is right, and there really was a Tower of Babel. Or at least, maybe there really was once a single human language, before we were all cursed with a confusion of tongues*” (Dyer 1990).

History

There are historical evidences that lend support to the Genesis record regarding the origin of languages. There are several ancient traditions concerning this incident.

Abydenus (a Greek historian of the mid-fourth century B.C.), as quoted by

Eusebius, spoke of a great tower at Babylon which was destroyed. The record notes: “[U]ntil this time all men had used the same speech, but now there was sent upon them a confusion of many and divers tongues” (quoted in Rawlinson 1873, 28).

In a grossly garbled account, but one which obviously has roots in some ancient event, Plato in one of his works, tells of a golden age when men spoke the same language, but an act of the gods caused them to be confounded in their speech (see M’Clintock and Strong 1968, 590).

Josephus, the Jewish historian, quoting from an ancient source, records these words:

When all men were of one language, some of them built a tower, as if they would thereby ascend up to heaven, but the gods sent storms of wind and overthrew the tower, and gave every one his peculiar language; and for this reason it was that the city was called Babylon (Antiquities of the Jews, 1.4.3).

Aside from such references, the details of Genesis 11 are strikingly precise from a historical perspective. Consider the following:

- (1) The identification of Babylon with Shinar was apparently known in the earliest of times (cf. Genesis 10:10; Daniel 1:2).
- (2) The allusion to a “tower” in Babylon is certainly consistent with the fact that such towers, called ziggurats, were common in that ancient locale. These towers consisted of several platforms, constructed one on top of the other, progressively smaller in size till a pinnacle was reached which accommodated a small temple dedicated to some particular deity.
- (3) The reference to “brick” and “bitumen” (“slime” KJV) has a genuine touch of authenticity. The region of Babylon did not contain the common building stone that was characteristic of Palestine. Some of the fired bricks from that area were usable for centuries. There is no reason whatsoever, aside from anti-religious bigotry, to question the historicity of the Genesis account of the Tower of Babel.

Donald J. Wiseman, professor of Assyriology at the University of London, has confidently stated that the record in Genesis 11 “bears all the marks of a reliable historical account” (1980, 157). Even a liberal writer concedes that “the background that is here sketched proves to be authentic beyond all expectations” (Speiser 1964, 75).

Archaeology

The precise site of the ancient tower of Babel is a matter of uncertainty, for there are possibilities among the remnants of several ruins in the region. Many

writers, following Jewish and Arab traditions, locate the tower ruins at Borsippa (the “Tongue Tower”), about eleven miles southwest of the northern portion of Babylon (formerly a suburb of the city). Others identify the site with Etemen-an-ki (“the temple of the foundation of heaven and earth”), which is located in the southern sector of the city near the right bank of the Euphrates river. One or the other of these ruins may represent the archaeological “descendant” of the original tower of Babel.

In his book, *Chaldean Account of Genesis* (1880), George Smith of the British Museum—the scholar who translated the Babylonian flood account—published a fragment which is certainly reminiscent of the Mosaic record. The inscription tells of an ancient ziggurat. “*The building of this temple offended the gods. In a night they threw down what had been built. They scattered them abroad, and made strange their speech. The progress they impeded*” (1880, 29).