

# Climbing the Tower of Babel

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple Internet sources)

Introduction: Genesis 11:1-9

A. The account of the building of the tower of Babel is brief but it is important.

1. This story has been repeated millions of times on many occasions in hundreds of nations throughout the course of history.
2. We need this lesson today - Ecc. 1:9
3. Just as the people involved in building Babel's tower, 21st century man has problems with exaltation of human wisdom, power, & achievement

B. The account of the colossus on the Shinar Plain:

1. The people were united by a single purpose facilitated by a common language; they wanted to build a great tower at Babel in Shinar to:
  - a. Make a name for themselves,
  - b. To avoid dispersion throughout the world.
2. God intervened because both purposes were contrary to His will
  - a. Gen. 1:28, 8:17
  - b. He ended the project and dispersed the people by taking away what empowered them to undertake the task: He took away their common language.

C. Background information: What happened on the Plain of Shinar (Sumer)?

1. Gen. 10:5 follows the genealogies of Noah and tells of the distributions of land and dispersion of the peoples under various rulers and great families after the flood ended and humans began again to proliferate on the earth. It seems to imply that the dispersion occurred before the incident at the Tower of Babel. It is simply a reference to the future of the descendants of Noah. The balance of the chapter continues in the same manner.
2. Gen. 10:8-10 states that Babel formed part of Nimrod's kingdom. The Bible does not specifically mention that Nimrod ordered the building of the tower, but other sources associate its construction with Nimrod.
3. Genesis 11:1-9 reveals an expanded account of 10:5 by giving the reason for the dispersion. Otherwise, one would wonder what brought about the dispersion and language changes. But God does not reveal it to satisfy curiosity; there is a profound moral lesson in this account.
4. The Hebrew version of the name Babel, is from the verb balal, which means to confuse or confound in Hebrew. The Hebrew noun form babal means confusion.
5. The Book of Jubilees contains one of the most detailed accounts found anywhere of the Tower. It must be understood that this is speculative and suspect. "And they began to build, and in the fourth week they made brick with fire, and the bricks served them for stone, and the clay with which they cemented them together was asphalt which comes out of the sea, and out of the fountains of water in the land of Shinar. And they built it: forty and three years were they building it; its breadth was 203 bricks, and the height was the third of one; its height amounted to 5433 cubits and 2 palms (8150 feet; over 1.5 miles), and the extent of one wall was thirteen stades (7800

feet; just under 1.5 miles) (600 feet per stade), and of the other was thirty stades (18,000 feet; 3.4 miles)." (Jubilees 10:20-21, Charles' 1913 translation) Consider the design and materials, it could only have been built to a height of 1.3 miles before the bricks at the bottom were crushed.

6. Lest anyone think it just a Bible story and take it lightly, there are 16 other places around the world that have a Tower of Babel account in their myths. They appear to hark back to a time when they knew humankind had a common language - a protolingua.

7. Sumerian myth of the Tower of Babel, called Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta, where Enmerkar of Uruk is building a massive ziggurat in Eridu and demands a tribute of precious materials from Aratta for its construction, at one point reciting an incantation imploring the god Enki to disrupt the linguistic unity of the inhabited regions; Lozi, Ashanti, Kongo, Tanzania, Karbi Kuki people of Assam, Karen people of Myanmar, the Admiralty Islands, the Tharu of Nepal and northern India; the Greek myth that Hermes confused the languages, causing Zeus to give his throne to Phoroneus, the Wasania of Kenya, the Kacha Naga people of Assam, the inhabitants of Encounter Bay in Australia, the Maidu of California, the Tlingit of Alaska, and the K'iche' Maya of Central America

8. The account in Genesis makes no mention of any destruction of the tower. The people whose languages are confounded simply stop building their city, and are scattered from there over the face of the Earth. Erosion over time would account for some of its disappearance; the constant reuse of building materials, especially fired bricks which were an expensive commodity in those days, accounts for the rest. (Wikipedia, et al)

9. The location of the Tower of Babel is completely unknown.

## I. HOW THIS STORY IS REPEATED FREQUENTLY

A. By humankind's complete selfish-orientation

1. 11:4 - "Let **us** build ourselves a city and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let **us** make a name for **ourselves**, lest **we** be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."
2. From the beginning, people have wanted more glory for themselves
  - a. Gen. 3:5-6 - Self is at the heart of sin.
  - b. Among the greatest vulnerabilities of the righteous are selfish ambitions and self-righteousness.
3. Examples
  - a. Naaman - 2Kings 5:11
  - b. Saul of Tarsus - Acts 26:9-11
  - c. Devout Jews - Rom. 10:1-3
4. The same condition of self-orientation prevails today.
  - a. Instead of humbly yielding to the Great I AM, they themselves become the great I (we know how that turned out for Sauron)
  - b. Luke 12:18-19 - "So he said, '**I** will do this: **I** will pull down **my** barns and build greater, and there **I** will store all **my** crops and

my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.”

5. Last Spring when Buddy Payne made the mildly amusing, but quite unfortunate comment that it looks like the Blakes and Berdines run this church, I wanted to crawl under the seat. While it was offered in innocence, it must never reflect reality. This is not the church of Berdine or the church of Blake. It is the Lord's church; let no man push himself, his name, or his family before the Lord Jesus Christ and His children in this place.

B. This attitude differs from that of Christ

1. Matt. 11:29, 20:28; John 13:12-17; Phil. 2:5-8

2. When people are determined to do things their own way regardless of what God has said, they are building towers of Babel that bring division and ultimately personal apostasy.

3. Promoting my will over that of God's is tantamount to reaching up to heaven to wrest away His authority

4. Even if we succeed, what we build will always fall short of what God has done and will continue to do - Isa. 55:8-9

5. How tragic it is for one to dismiss God's way in favor of his own!

a. John 14:6; Luke 6:46

## **II. THE RESULTS OF TOWER BUILDING TODAY**

A. While the plan seemed good to the builders of the tower of Babel, it:

1. Was foolish from heaven's point of view - 1Cor. 1:20

2. Resulted in confusion, chaos, and destruction of one of the earliest empires of the Patriarchal Age

3. Few men learned the lessons God was trying to teach them. Of the twelve great houses that left the Plain of Shinar, only one remained believers and followers of God, the house of Eber

B. We must remember that we will always be dependent on God for all things

1. Prov. 14:12, 20:24; Jer. 10:23; Psalm 32:8, 17:5, 119:116