

The Babbling Builders

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Among those who believe there really was a Tower of Babel, there's a big argument about how tall it might have been. Some historians say that the "reaching to heaven" description is common when describing temple towers and tells us nothing about its actual height.

Many historians agree that such a tower built by King Nebuchadnezzar — a Babylonian king from a much later time — had 8 levels and was over 300 feet tall. And some modern scientists believe that, if it were built with tapered walls more like a pyramid, the Tower could have been built several miles high!

In any case, the original story is recorded in Genesis 11:1-9.

After Noah's Ark came to rest on the peaks of Ararat,
high above the fertile plains of Shinar
between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers,
survivors of the Great Flood made their way down
to start rebuilding the world they once knew.

With each generation their numbers grew
from eight to a hundred, to a thousand, to ten thousand...
and with each generation their lifespans shrank
from hundreds of years to a handful of decades.

Fearing their mortality, they looked to make a mark—
something that would last beyond their dwindling years,
something that would keep them all together—
and they settled on building a tower
that would reach to heaven.

Nobody knows what "the Tower" was meant to be.

Was it meant to be a skyscraper looming over Shinar,
a beacon visible for miles around
like an ancient Statue of Liberty?
"Here be civilization! Don't fear the wilderness!
Come, bring your tired, your hungry, your lost;
Come and find safety among our numbers!"

Or was it meant to beget a new religion—
a stargazing tower, the home of the dark arts
that would one day come to dominate Shinar?
“Maybe God will forsake us, try to destroy us again,
but what we have built will stand against even Him!
Come and join our eternal city!”

In the end it didn't matter what they intended;
what mattered was that their intentions troubled God.
The Holy Trinity watched for a while—
watched His wayward creatures form and bake bricks,
watched them sweat under the hot tropic sun
as they planned their tower
and organized their labor force
and gathered more materials
and dug their foundation
and began their glorious would-be monument...
all without any thought of Him.
And He said to Himself, “If I let them do this,
they will build their whole world without Me
and there will be no limit
to the evil they will be capable of doing.”

So God Himself took action that day.
Did they notice His presence
as He visited their construction site?
Were they aware as He personally inspected
the foundation laid by their hands?
Did they recognize His hand
in the stunning effects that resulted from His visit?

Or were they simply overwhelmed with confusion
as the excited sharing of ideas between co-conspirators
gave way to the fearful gibberish of newfound strangers?

In the end their tower was never finished
and their grand plan for world unification vanished—
much like the tribes of like-speaking outcasts
who wandered away to start their own civilizations.

After all, it's dangerous to live
among those who are different from you, isn't it?

The tower became known as Babel because
that's where God confused their languages
and turned their grand plans into so much senseless noise.
They didn't try to understand God's plan
so He rendered their own plans unintelligible.

Nevertheless a great city called Babylon
grew up around the remnants of the tower,
a city built by some of those too stubborn to give up
their dream of a world without God's interference.

By the time of Jesus, that once-great city of Babylon
was little more than a settlement for refugees...
and to many modern people
the Tower of Babel itself is little more than a myth.

*But even in our time we tend to avoid people who babble.
There's a lesson there somewhere, I think.*