

The Tower of Babel

When Noah and his family left the Ark, God instructed them to *"be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth"* (Genesis 9:1). Unfortunately, soon they gathered at Babel, and under the leadership of rebellious Nimrod they built a tower *"lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth"* (Genesis 11:4). The tower became an astrological worship center to exalt the creation rather than the Creator. The people who settled in the area of Babel included some Shemites and Japhethites, but the vast majority of the people in Babel were the descendants of Ham, led by the Hamite named Nimrod.

God wanted them to disperse throughout the earth. He separated their languages into many, for as long as they all spoke the same language no endeavor was beyond their reach (Genesis 11:6). Genesis 10 has come to be known as **The Table of Nations**, for it documents 70 people who migrated from Noah's ark to fill the earth, prodded on by their lack of ability to communicate with one another. In our studies we are tracing major locations and people groups from Shem, Ham and Japheth, although some names have been obscured or lost in time.

When the family of Ham scattered from the Tower of Babel, the Hamites – great explorers and technological geniuses – traversed the globe and settled further and further away. The language groups of the Hamites are difficult to trace, and even vary within single tribes (Ill. The Yaps of the Pacific Islands). The Hamites carried with them special skills in mining, metallurgy, music, agriculture, and animal husbandry. Some of the Hamites quickly rose to prominence over the rest, while others lived in far and remote outposts. Each group carried with it memories of their common history—Creation, Fall and Flood, and Babel—which eventually deteriorated into vague legends. *They also carried Nimrod's great error of astrology and the misuse of the signs of the Zodiac and worship of the stars, explaining why nearly all cultures have essentially the same baseless system.*

With the one language, all genetic traits were originally shared among humankind, but once the break-up occurred, ethnic traits began to be expressed, quickly leading to differing cultures. The Ice Age was occurring during the centuries following Babel, resulting in harsh climates in Europe, a well-watered Egypt, and a lower sea-level allowing global migration across land bridges such as between Siberia and Alaska.

The Evidences of Babel from Around the World

It was during the days of Peleg that the family groups left the plain of Shinar and traveled to different parts of the world, taking with them their own language that other families couldn't understand. Not long after this, Babylon (2234 B.C.), Egypt (2188 B.C.), and Greece (2089 B.C.) began. Civilizations that were closer to Babel (e.g., those in the Middle East) were established prior to civilizations farther from Babel (e.g., those in Australia or the Americas).

The Tower of Babel has traditionally been depicted as a type of ziggurat, although the Bible doesn't give specific dimensions. The Hebrew word for tower used in Genesis 11, referring to the Tower of Babel, is *migdal*: a tower; by analogy, a rostrum; figuratively, a (pyramidal) bed of flowers.

Interestingly, this word means tower but figuratively reflects a flowerbed that yields a pyramidal shape. This gives a little support to the idea that the Tower of Babel may have been pyramidal or ziggurat shaped.

In what is now Iraq, Robert Koldewey excavated a structure some think to be the foundation of the original Tower of Babel. It underlays a later ziggurat that was thought to be built by Hammurabi in the 19th century B.C.

When the Hamites were scattered from the Tower of Babel in the time of Peleg, they likely took this building concept with them to places all over the world. It makes sense that many of the families that were scattered from Babel took varying ideas of the tower to their new lands and began building projects of their own.

Ziggurats, pyramids, mounds, and the like have been found in many parts of the world—from Mesopotamia to Egypt to South America. The ancient Chinese built pyramids and the Mississippian culture built mounds. Pyramids are classed slightly differently from ziggurats, as are mounds, but the similarities are striking.

Why did the people at Shinar build a tower? Some suspect that they were afraid of another flood, similar to the one that Noah and his sons had informed them about. However, Dr. John Gill casts doubt on this idea.

The Bible records that the people said among themselves:

“Come, 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” (Genesis 11:4).

It seems that the tower was to be a special place to keep people together, rather than filling the earth as God had commanded them to (Genesis 9:1). It is possible that the tower was built under the guise that it was a place for sacrifice unto God. This would have prevented people from going too far since they would have to come back to offer sacrifices at Babel.

A recurring theme in Scripture is that people seek to do things they think will honor God but end up disobeying God. One example is when Saul offered a sacrifice when he wasn't supposed to (1 Samuel 13:8–13). It is better to obey than sacrifice. In fact, many ziggurats and pyramids around the world were used for sacrifice or other sacred religious events, such as burying people (e.g., pharaohs of Egypt). Perhaps the concept of sacred sacrifice and religious festivities with ziggurats was a carryover from Babel.

Regardless, ziggurats and pyramids all over the world are an excellent confirmation of the original recorded in God's Word—the Tower of Babel.