

Facts & Fancy About the Bible - 7

In his writings, Voltaire published *On the Interpretation of the Old Testament*, and declared why he did not accept it as the word of God. He cites Genesis 11:1, when “the whole earth had one language and one speech...they said to one another...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. But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower”

The author, called by some “a prince of irony”, speaks of those who inhabited Greece long before the Jewish books had been translated into their language. These people believed that in days of yore the great Zeus and all the other gods came down from the upper regions to visit the earth.

And so it must be concluded that the tower of Babel is no more extraordinary than this example of pagan mythology! - “We cannot deny one fact without denying all the others.” He continues his attack by noting that “St. Jerome, in his commentary on Isaiah, says that this tower was already four thousand paces high when God came down to stop the progress of the work.”

He does a little math and concludes that the tower of Babel was twenty times as high as the Pyramids of Egypt, which are only about five hundred feet. The unfortunate part of this is that he is mixing the Scripture report with Jerome’s outlandish number of steps and his own 5½ times size of normal stairway steps - all in an attempt to make the Scriptures appear ridiculous.

But then he proceeds to place himself outside the category of those who lived in better-informed times - “It is no less a pity that there remains not on the earth among the profane authors one vestige of the famous tower of Babel.”

“The enterprise was undertaken in the time of a patriarch named Peleg, who counted the good man Noah for his fifth ancestor. It will be seen that architecture, and all the arts which accompany it, had made great [in his style, this means far more than believable] progress in five generations.”

In reply to the second claim, we note that in 1722 Voltaire was 28 years old, 400 years before that was 1322, little more than a century before that power came from three main sources: humans, draft animals, and water (and the windmill had lately been added). But coal mining was just getting under way in his lifetime. In the 15th century, the development of the blast furnace made possible the manufacture of iron cannon. Also in that period was the invention of the mechanical clock and by 1763 John Harrison produced his No. 4 chronometer.

In the 15th-century was the invention of printing with movable metal type. The early steam engine had been produced in England during his lifetime. There is little need to get into details of developments in the next 400 years in which the Industrial Revolution occurred, followed by the space age and nuclear technology. Voltaire’s difficulty with the 400 post-flood years gave far too little credit to the state of technical knowledge in those times.

But as to his first assertion that “there remains not on the earth among the profane authors one vestige of the famous tower of Babel,” we now know that at the sites of many ancient cities in Mesopotamia stand the remains of multi-storied towers. In the Babylonian clay tablet writings they are shown to be religious structures. On top of these staged towers there was usually a shrine. Possibly these towers were replicas of the original tower of Babel.