

Facts & Fancy About the Bible - 9

Very much as the Genesis flood was memorialized in the myth of ancient civilizations, the same occurred in another devastating event of human history. The Tower of Babel and confusion of languages is also remembered in myths found in various parts of the world.

As we noted in the case of the Genesis flood, the same is true of the Tower of Babel - "History can be made into myth and myth can become more mythical, but myth does not become more simple, believable, and historical." Clearly, it is logical to conclude that the historical event of the Tower of Babel as documented in the simpler Genesis account was made into myth.

Voltaire, not quite finished with this subject, adds - "I do not know why it is said in Genesis, that Babel signifies confusion, for, as I have already observed, (the Hebrew) ba answers to father in the eastern languages, and bel signifies God. Babel means the city of God, the holy city. But it is incontestable (ironically speaking) that Babel means confusion..."

Modern science, particularly archaeology, shows that it was actually Voltaire who was confused. The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology reports, "It is now known that the name (Babel) was a Semitic pronunciation of the Proto-Euphratean or Hurrian Pabil/Papal. The commonly-accepted "gate of god" interpretation of the Sumerians and Akkadians is thus incorrect...The name (Babel) is a play upon the Hebrew balal ("to confuse", "to mix") as the place where the tongues of mankind were confused."

Voltaire takes one final potshot at the Tower of Babel - "People have wished to know how the children of Noah, after having divided among themselves the islands of the nations and established themselves in various lands, with each one his particular language, families, and people, should all find themselves in the plain of Shinar, to build there a tower..."

He continues, "The Book of Genesis speaks of the states which the sons of Noah founded. It has related how the people of Europe, Africa, and Asia, all came to Shinar speaking one language only, and purposing the same thing." In this way he disparages the Genesis story of the confusion of tongues.

The author has misread the Genesis account, not deducing that the Tower incident is an explanation of the conditions under which "the coastland peoples of the Gentiles were separated into their lands, everyone according to his own language, according to their families, into their nations" - Genesis 10:5.

Concerning the origin of language, philologist Otto Jespersen of the University of Copenhagen is quoted in *Archaeology and Bible History*, Free/Vos - "Some scholars (among them quite recently W. Schmidt) see the insufficiency of the usual theories, and giving up all attempts at explaining it in a natural way fall back on the religious belief that the first language was directly given to the first men by God through a miracle."

Max Mueller, a comparative philologist, (quoted in the same book) declared concerning the common origin of speech, "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." Quite naturally, most agnostic or atheist philologists will disagree and favour a theory of languages which is different from what is presented as fact in the book of Genesis.