



# The Tower of Babel

Genesis 11:1–9

Let us build us a city and a tower.

# Genesis 11

(Most info gathered from *SDA BC*)

- One language and one speech — Literally one lip and one kind of words
- As they journeyed — has the basic meaning up pulling up tent pegs as nomads would do.
- From — *miqqedem* — translated “eastward” in ch. 2:8 and “east” in ch. 13:11. To reach Shinar from the mountains of Ararat, the direction of travel would be southeasterly, and not going from the east in a westerly direction.
- Go to — come, come now

- Shinar — In antiquity the southern Mesopotamian lowland, often called “Shinar” in the Bible was a well-watered, fertile region. The oldest known civilization, the Sumerians, thrived here.
- Brick — The plain of Babylonia lacked stone of any kind but had an ample supply of clay. Lower Mesopotamia has always been a land of brick buildings, in contrast to Assyria, where stone is plentiful.
- Burn them thoroughly — Most bricks, in ancient as in modern times, were sun dried, but bricks for public buildings were baked in the fire to make them more durable.

- Slime — The Hebrew word here translated “slime” means, more accurately, asphalt or bitumen. Mesopotamia abounds in oil and related products, and asphalt wells existed in the vicinity of Babylon as well as in other parts of the country. Having discovered the durable quality of asphalt, early Babylonian builders used it extensively in the erection of buildings. Asphalt binds the bricks together so well that it is difficult to save any of them when a building is demolished. In fact, it is almost impossible to detach bricks from ancient ruins in whose construction asphalt was used.

- Tower — This would give inhabitants of the city the feeling of security. It would protect them against attack, and enable them, they believed, to escape another flood, which God had promised should never be. The Flood had covered the highest mountains of the antediluvian world, but had not reached “unto heaven.” If, therefore, a structure higher than the mountains could be erected, men reasoned, they would be safe whatever God might do. Archeological excavations reveal that the earliest inhabitants of Lower Mesopotamia erected many towerlike temples dedicated to the worship of various idol deities.

- Name —reputation.
- Nimrod —Genesis 10:8–10 —a mighty hunter before —against —the LORD. The expression *mighty* denotes a person renowned for bold and daring deeds. It may also include the connotation of “tyrant.”
- Nimrod is the beginning of imperialism. Under him society passed from the patriarchal form to the monarchical. He is the first man mentioned in the Bible as the head of a kingdom, and his first kingdom was Babylon. Centralization was begun.
- It was given the name *Bab-ilu*, “the gate of god.” The founding of the city started the creation of the world. Sargon, an early Semitic king of Mesopotamia, took soil from Babylon for the founding of another city modeled after it. Even in the later period of Assyrian supremacy Babylon became the center of Mesopotamian culture. Its greatest fame and glory was in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, who made of it the world’s first metropolis.
- Shinar was in Babylonia.

- But as Noah's descendants increased in numbers, apostasy manifested itself. Those who desired to cast off the restraint of God's law decided to separate from the worshipers of Jehovah. They determined to keep their community united in one body and to **found a monarchy** which should eventually embrace the whole earth. In the plain of Shinar they resolved to build a city, and in it a tower that should be the wonder of the world. This tower was to be so high that no flood could rise to the top, so massive that nothing could sweep it away. Thus they hoped to secure their own safety and make themselves independent of God. (*8T* 213.2)

- This confederacy was born of rebellion against God. The dwellers on the plain of Shinar established their kingdom for self-exaltation, not for the glory of God. Had they succeeded, a mighty power would have borne sway, banishing righteousness and inaugurating a new religion. The world would have been demoralized. Erroneous theories would have diverted minds from allegiance to the divine statutes, and the law of Jehovah would have been ignored and forgotten. But God never leaves the world without witnesses for Him. (*8T 213.3*)



- At this time there were men who humbled themselves before God and cried unto Him. “O God,” they pleaded, “interpose between Thy cause, and the plans and methods of men.” “And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.” Genesis 11:5. (*8T* 213.3)
- Those that feared the Lord cried unto Him to interpose. (*PP* 123.2)
- *It is* time for *thee*, Lord, to work: *For* they have made void thy law. (Psalm 119:126)

- Confound — God did not wish again to destroy man. Wickedness had not as yet reached the limits to which it had gone before the Flood, and God determined to check it before it should again reach that point. By confusing their language and thus forcing them to separate, God designed to forestall future united action. Each of the groups might yet pursue an evil course, but the division of society into many groups would prevent concerted opposition to God.


Some of the descendants of Noah soon began to apostatize. . . . Some **disbelieved** in the existence of God, and in their own minds accounted for the flood from **natural causes**. Others **believed** that God existed and that he destroyed the antediluvian race by a flood, and their feelings, like Cain, rose in rebellion against God, because he destroyed the people from the earth and cursed the earth the third time by a flood. (*ISP 91.1*)

- 1. Those that apostasized either did not believe God existed and accounted for the flood by natural means,
- 2. or believed God existed but rebelled against him for destroying the people of the earth and for cursing the earth a third time by a flood.

Those who were enemies of God felt daily reproved by the righteous conversation and godly lives of those who loved, obeyed, and exalted God. The unbelieving consulted among themselves, and **agreed to separate** from the faithful, whose righteous lives were a continual restraint upon their wicked course. They journeyed a distance from them, and selected a large plain wherein to dwell. **They built them a city**, and then conceived the idea of building a **large tower** to reach unto the clouds that they might dwell together in the city and tower and be no more scattered. They reasoned that they would secure themselves in case of another flood,

- 1. Some did not believe God existed and accounted for the flood by natural means.
- 2. Others believed God existed but rebelled against him for destroying the people of the earth and for cursing the earth a third time by a flood.
- 3. These people separated from those who loved, obeyed, and exalted God.
- 4. They settled in a plain of Shinar and built a city first, then started a tower.

for they would build their tower to a much greater height than the waters prevailed in the time of the flood, and all the world would **honor** them, and they would be as **gods**, and **rule** over the people. This tower was calculated to exalt its builders, and was designed to turn the attention of others who should live upon the earth from God to join with them in their idolatry.

A scenic landscape photograph of a lake with snow-capped mountains in the background under a cloudy sky. The mountains are rugged and have patches of snow on their peaks and slopes. The sky is blue with scattered white and grey clouds. The water in the foreground is calm and reflects the sky and mountains. The overall mood is serene and majestic.

Genesis 7:20 – Fifteen cubits upward did the  
waters prevail; and the mountains were covered.  
About 26 feet



Before the work of building was accomplished, people dwelt in the tower. Rooms were splendidly furnished, decorated and devoted to their idols. Those who did not believe in God, imagined if their tower could reach unto the clouds, they would be able to discover **reasons** for the flood.

*(ISP 91.2)*

- 1. Some did not believe God existed and accounted for the flood by natural means.
- 2. Others believed God existed but rebelled against him for destroying the people of the earth and for cursing the earth a third time by a flood.
- 3. These people separated from those who loved, obeyed, and exalted God.
- 4. They settled in a plain of Shinar and built a city first, then started to build a tower.
- 5. They desired honor, to be as gods, and to rule over the people.

- 1. Some did not believe God existed and accounted for the flood by natural means.
- 2. Others believed God existed but rebelled against him for destroying the people of the earth and for cursing the earth a third time by a flood.
- 3. These people separated from those who loved, obeyed, and exalted God.
- 4. They settled in a plain of Shinar and built a city first, then started a tower.
- 5. They desired honor, to be as gods, and to rule over the people.
- 6. They also were intellectually curious and wanted to discover the reasons for the flood.

They exalted themselves against God. But he would not permit them to complete their work. They had built their tower to a lofty height, when the Lord sent two angels to confound them in their work. Men had been appointed for the purpose of receiving word from the workmen at the top of the tower, calling for material for their work, which the first would communicate to the second, and he to the third, until the word reached those upon the ground. As the word was passing from one to another in its descent, the angels confounded their language, and when the word reached the workmen upon the ground, material was called for which had not been required.

And after the laborious process of getting the material to the workmen at the top of the tower, it was not that which they wished for. Disappointed and enraged, they reproached those whom they supposed were at fault. After this, there was no harmony in their work. Angry with one another, and unable to account for the misunderstanding, and strange words among them, they left the work and separated from each other, and scattered abroad in the earth. Up to this time, men had spoken but one language. Lightning from heaven, as a token of God's wrath, broke off the top of their tower, casting it to the ground. Thus God would show to rebellious man that he is supreme. (*ISP 92.1*)

- *v9. Babel.* The Hebrew linked the name of the city, Babel, with the Hebrew verb *balal*, “to confuse.” Ancient Babylonian texts interpret *Bab–ilu* or *Bab–ilanu* as meaning “port of god” or “gateway of the gods.” It is, however, possible that this meaning was secondary and that the name was originally from the Babylonian verb *babalu*, meaning “to scatter,” or “to disappear.”

- The passion of Mesopotamian peoples for building lofty towers did not cease with the first unsuccessful attempt to erect one that would “reach unto heaven.” Throughout antiquity they continued building temple towers, or ziggurats. Several such ruins are still standing. The best preserved one is at Ur, Abraham’s early home. The exact location of the original tower is unknown.