

## Babylon the Great - comments

(From D)

Hi Dave

I was going through the study prep for this week (1/27/20) which includes the account of the Tower of Babel and that's the focus of the Treasures section of the meeting. I was thinking how the society's statements (sometimes) say that this was the beginning of false religion. They pretty much say that in this week's material but they do give a bit more of an explanation. They also bring in other resources, namely, Josephus who, I think, is pretty trustworthy. He tends to look at things from a historical perspective and provides information that isn't necessarily referred to in the Bible itself. Plus he was a Jew and well-acquainted with the Hebrew scriptures so I think his input is worthy of respect.

Anyway, what I'm referring to is in the study prep on p. 9, it-1 239. They say the towers found in the ruins of Babylon "would seem to confirm the essentially religious nature of the original tower..." Then they say "The decisive action taken by Jehovah God to overthrow the temple construction **clearly condemns** it as of a false religious origin." Here they start off with a vague statement about what seems to be and then immediately jump to "clearly condemns", which is a lot more definite.

Then on p. 10, it-2 202 paragraph 2, they seem to back off by saying *"Instead of spreading out and 'filling the earth', they determined to centralize human society..."* OK, that sounds right. Then they say "Evidently this was also to become a religious center, with a religious tower. Gen. 11:2-4" OK, I read Gen. 11:2-4 and I don't see anywhere that it indicates anything to do with religion. Yes, it was defiance and disobedience to Jehovah's command to populate the earth, but is that religion? And yes, they were wanting to make a celebrated name for themselves, but is that religion? I just don't agree with that second sentence, particularly the use of the word *"evidently"*. How is it evident, other than that they say it is?

I suppose there is some support for the statements at the top of p. 11, it-2, 472, where it talks about how now that they were separated by communication barriers, they did indeed scatter and over time developed their own culture, customs and religion. Alienated from God, they contrived many idols of their mythical deities. I suppose if you look at it from that perspective, you could say that the building of the tower was the start of false religion but you really have to go into some explanation to make that leap, in my opinion. Also, It's not an automatic conclusion that just because those men went at that time to that place with Nimrod and said they were going to build a tower and it didn't happen that they then started their own religion. Who's to say that once they saw what Jehovah had done, they didn't decide it was better to repent and return to Jehovah?

p. 12, it-2 503 is where the information from Josephus comes in. That's a long quote so I'm not going to type it all out here but it really doesn't say anything about the building of the tower being a religious activity or the beginning of any religion, false or otherwise. It just says Nimrod was an egomaniac who

wanted the people to be dependent on him and the people willingly submitted to it because they felt like subjection to God was slavery. Is this the beginning of false religion? Is it a religion if you are more or less worshiping another person instead of worshiping God? I don't know that I would classify that as a false religion.

I don't have a particular conclusion here except to say that they present "evidence" in a very confusing way, in my opinion, because they seem to say one thing and then another and they put two statements together to make the conclusion that they want to make and cite a scripture that doesn't apply. There seems to be a lot of that going around lately.

(D)

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(From Me)

Hi D

(quotes from D are in blue)

"they start off with a vague statement about what seems to be and then immediately jump to "clearly condemns" which is a lot more definite"

Yes they do. :^)

[ it-1 p. 29] "The ziggurat towers uncovered not only in the ruins of ancient Babylon but elsewhere in Mesopotamia would seem to confirm the essentially religious nature of the original tower, whatever its form or style."

The word "*the*" in front of "*ruins*" makes you think there was but one ancient city, but that is not so:

- 1) There is the original ancient Babel, who's builders knew exactly who the one and only true God was, and therefore did not believe in false gods or have any false religion,
- 2) and then there is ancient Babylon that was inhabited for well over two thousand years after the original people were dispersed and were long dead. These latter people were mostly pagans who did not know Jehovah, and had false gods. (Isa 21:9; 1Pe 5:13) Of course they built towers and temples to their false gods. That's what pagans do.

It would be like if you went into an old empty house and found a Watchtower laying on an end table. Would you think that everyone who had ever lived in that house was a Jehovah's Witness? No. Just perhaps the last residents. So finding a pagan tower in the ruins of an old city does not mean that everyone who had ever lived in that city prior to pagan towers and temples being built were also pagans.

"I suppose if you look at it from that perspective, you could say that the building of the tower was the start of false religion but you really have to go into some explanation to make that leap, in my opinion"

Well lets' examine what those original occupants of Babel believed:

They believed that Jehovah was God. - True, not false.

They believed that Jehovah God flooded the earth. - True, not false.

They believed that He had the power to flood the earth again. - True, not false. (He could have if He wanted to, but He promised not to.)

Their beliefs aligned with the facts and were not a false religious belief. So the tower had nothing to do with false religious beliefs. Quite the contrary.

And they wanted to make a name for themselves. (Ge 11:4) What does it mean to make a name for yourself? It means to make a reputation among others about you, to become famous (or infamous). So they wanted everyone else on earth to know what they were doing. That confirms that there were many other people on earth at the time and that they were just a small group who were doing this. It also explains why they wanted to build the city "*for ourselves*": in order to create a reputation for themselves and be famous for acting in opposition to Jehovah. (Ge 10:9)

Perhaps Noah's son Japheth and his sons were already living among the islands (Ge 10:5), and his other son Shem and his sons were already living in the mountains (Ge 10:30), while Babel and the tower were being built. And it was among these, and the others living elsewhere, that the builders of Babel wanted to make their name known.

The region that they came from (Asia Minor - modern day Turkey) as they traveled "*eastward*" (Ge 11:2) was where Noah's grandsons (Go'mer, Ma'gog, Tu'bal, and Me'shech), the same ones spoken of in Ezekiel 38:2-6, took up residence after the flood and became four large nations west of Mt Ararat where the ark came to rest. So the builders of Babel and its tower came from a populated area.

Note: "Eastward" includes traveling southeast. So their following the Euphrates River valley from its origin in Turkey would be traveling "*eastward*." (location of Babel 32°32'15"N 44°25'32"E)

When the different languages were created all of the descendants of Noah (not just those in Babel) had their language confused and were "*spread abroad in the earth*." (Ge 10:5, 20, 31, 32) And as all mankind were further spread out, and as the succeeding generations forgot the true God, they invented false gods for themselves.

**[it-2 472]** "Separated now by communication barriers, each linguistic group developed its own culture, art, customs, traits, and religion—each its own ways of doing things. (Le 18:3) Alienated from God, the various peoples contrived many idols of their mythical deities."

That statement confirms that they did not have false religion until after they were scattered, and then only after some time elapsed.

Which means they did not have false religion while they were building the tower.

Which means the tower was not "*false religious in nature*", even though pagan towers and temples were built there 1,500 or more years later. (Isa 21:9)

Who's to say that once they saw what Jehovah had done, they didn't decide it was better to repent and return to Jehovah?

I never thought of that. The Bible does not say that any of the eight that were on the ark were among those building the city or its tower, so it is unlikely that any of the builders had firsthand experience with God. But once they experienced firsthand Jehovah's powers in action by having their language changed, some may have been jolted back into reality and repented. The Bible does not say either way but it is a nice thought, and logical too. :^)

God could have wiped them out in a different way (other than a flood), but instead He showed mercy by just scattering them. He probably extended that mercy by not breaking up immediate families with the language change. No doubt husbands and wives and parents and children were graciously given the same language. At least some of them probably acknowledged that mercy from Jehovah, and perhaps it touched their hearts.

"He threatened to have his revenge on God if He wished to inundate the earth again; "

Even Josephus acknowledged that Nimrod, their earthly leader, knew who the one and only true God was, eliminating the possibility of false religion.

I don't have a particular conclusion here except to say that they present "evidence" in a very confusing way, in my opinion, because they seem to say one thing and then another and they put two statements together to make the conclusion that they want to make and cite a scripture that doesn't apply. There seems to be a lot of that going around lately.

I agree.

It's a good thing we "*make sure.*" (Php 1:10; 1Th 5:21)

:^)

Dave

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(From D)

We are very much in agreement about this whole subject. And you brought up a few things I hadn't noticed or thought of, such as the use of the article "the" when referring to the ruins of ancient Babylon as if there was only one site of ruins and that represents everything. My brain hadn't formulated the breakdown into 2 Babylons, namely, the original builder's site and then the city/nation of Babylon that came into existence 1500 years later, but that's what I was thinking of when I said over time they developed their own customs and beliefs, including religious beliefs. The building of the original tower was not rooted in false religion or even the beginning of false religion. I liked how you went through all the things they believed were true--such as them knowing that Jehovah was the one true God--and that their purpose in building the tower had nothing to do with worshiping another god so it was not "essentially religious in nature".

That thought about how some of the people might have decided, after seeing Jehovah's display of disapproval of the tower building, that they would rather continue their worship of Jehovah than to make a celebrated name for themselves, had come to me when I was just reading over the account itself. But I hadn't thought about the fact that they might have seen the mercy Jehovah showed by allowing them to remain with their own language group and not separating families if they spoke different languages.

I did come across something yesterday when I was doing the regular Bible reading for the week. In Chapter 10, in verses 5, 20 and 31, there is a phrase used after saying "*these are the sons of ...*" where it lists the descendants of Japheth, Ham and Seth. The phrase is "*according to their languages.*" That was confusing to me because Chapter 11 starts off by saying that the earth was of one language and one set of words, so how could there have been other "tongues" prior to this? The only thing I can think of is that Chapters 10 and 11 are not necessarily in chronological order. Chapter 10 is listing lines of descent from Noah's 3 sons and Chapter 11 is describing this event that occurred on the plains of Shinar. In looking at the NLT, it starts off Chapter 11 with the words "At one time all the people of the world spoke the same language..." I think that perspective is supported by v. 25 of Chapter 10 which says Peleg's name means division because it was during his lifetime that the people of the world were divided into different language groups (that's the wording in the NLT). So it seems logical that Chapter 11 is then going back in time to describe the event that led to the confusion of the languages.

Your view that families would be kept together in terms of the same language being spoken within family groups is also supported by that wording. Each of Noah's 3 sons had their own families, language, land and nation, according to Chapter 10.

(D)

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(From me)

Regarding what you said about languages being referred to before Jehovah confused them by creating all of the languages. Genesis was written by Moses long after that event. So from his perspective it was all "back in time".

He was writing it for his readers who identified those groups he was writing about by their families and languages. So he wasn't trying to say that they had separate languages at the beginning. But he, as you said, was referring "back in time" to when they had one language.

In the NWT chapter 11 verse 1 begins with the word "*Now*". That tells us Moses is beginning a new account at a different point in time, which could be before or after the time of what he had previously been writing about. As the word "now" indicates. Moses uses it many times in his writings.

Moses is basically saying: 'Now this next account begins back when all the earth...'.

Note: When Moses wanted to start a new topic and timeline for a particular family's genealogy, he used the words: "This is the history of..."

Moses often restarted a new account by backing up in time. (See Ge 2:4; 5:1)

:^)

Dave

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