FIGURE G11-1. *The Hanging Gardens of Babylon (Tower of Babel in the Distance),* 1959-1962
Mario Larrinaga, 1895-1972

Mario Larrinaga was born in Los Flores, Mexico in 1895 and moved to the United States at the age of ten. He became "one of Hollywood's most successful scenic artists and art director at three of the major movie studios: Universal, RKO and Warner Brothers … He created the original set designs and backgrounds for dozens of Hollywood films including such classics as *King Kong* in 1933 and *Citizen Kane* in 1941. He also gained recognition in New York as an illustrator for *The Saturday Evening Post, Vanity Fair,* and *Harper's Bazaar* magazines."[1] He said: "God has given me a talent which has made it possible for me to enjoy a wonderful life, to provide for my family and to live among the beauties of my adopted country."[2]

"The Seven Wonders as listed by the classical Greek authors, revived during the Renaissance, retain their fascination. [The original of this] painting was one of a series done by Larrinaga for Lowell Thomas' documentary Cinerama film *Seven Wonders of the World* in 1956."[3] The version of the painting shown here was commissioned later by a Detroit industrialist.[4]

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1   Mario Larrinaga.
2   Biography for Mario Larrinaga.
3   I. L. Finkel *et al., Babylon,* p. 104.
4   For the fascinating story of the commissioning, loss, and recovery of this painting, see D. Lademann, Seven Wonders.

GENESIS 11
The Tower of Babel

Overview

THE stories of Adam and Eve, Enoch, and Noah amply demonstrate Ronald Hendel's thesis that the first chapters of Genesis are "characterized by a series of … transgressions of boundaries" that had been set up to separate mankind from the dwelling place of Divinity.[1] Therefore it should be no surprise that the "same stress on a borderline between the divine and human spheres is found in … [the] passage on the Tower of Babel, [which] presents 'the tower whose top assaults the sky—a perfect and natural metaphor for the human assault on the divinely ordained cosmos.'"[2] The tale is a clear demonstration of "human hubris and its consequences … The diversity of languages and nations become limiting conditions of human existence. As a story about language and power, it employs language artfully to express and undermine the human pretensions to power."[3]

In addition to its universal lesson for humanity, the story of Babel/Babylon also specifically "serves to mock the pretensions of the contemporary imperial power of Mesopotamia."[4] As Everett Fox explains:[5]

> "Shinar" refers to Mesopotamia, and the "tower," undoubtedly, to the ubiquitous *ziqqurratu* (now unearthed by archeologists) which served as man-made sacred mountains (i.e., temples). By portraying an unfinished tower, by dispersing the builders, and by in essence making fun of the mighty name of Babylon, the text functions effectively to repudiate the culture from which the people of Israel sprang (Abram's "Ur" of 11:28 was probably the great Mesopotamian metropolis).

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1   R. S. Hendel, Demigods, p. 23. See *Endnote G11-1,* p. 434. Of course, within these chapters God is also portrayed as having sought to *erase* the divine-human boundary for a righteous few, drawing them into His very presence. The prime examples of this motif are, of course, Enoch and Noah, of whom it was explicitly said that they "walked with God" (Moses 6:39, 7:69, 8:27). See INTRODUCTION, p. 4.
2   T. N. D. Mettinger, *Eden*, p. 127. See *Endnote G11-2,* p. 434.
3   Ronald Hendel in H. W. Attridge *et al., HarperCollins Study Bible*, p. 19 n. 11:1-9.
4   *Ibid*.
5   E. Fox, *Books of Moses*, p. 46.

Figure g11-2. *The Tower of Babel*, **Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria, 1563**
Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1526/1530–1569

"Bruegel's depiction of the architecture of the tower, with its numerous arches and other examples of Roman engineering, is deliberately reminiscent of the Roman Colosseum, which Christians of the time saw as both a symbol of hubris and persecution. Bruegel had visited Rome in 1552-1553 … The parallel of Rome and Babylon had a particular significance for Bruegel's contemporaries: Rome was the Eternal City, intended by the Caesars to last for ever, and its decay and ruin were taken to symbolize the vanity and transience of earthly efforts. The Tower was also symbolic of the turmoil between the Catholic church (which at the time did services only in Latin) and the polyglot Lutheran Protestant religion of the Netherlands."[1] Edward Snow describes the painting as a work of contradiction:[2]

> The painting by Bruegel … goes out of its way to excavate the iconic façade of a familiar image (and the received idea it represents) to reveal layer upon layer of contradiction within it. Even the immediate physical presence of the structure it depicts confronts us with conflicting perceptions. It appears obvious that the tower is being constructed on flat terrain from materials that have to be imported from somewhere outside the geography of the painting. In this respect its impact is that of a dominant, centralizing presence, an imposition of irreversible centripetal forces (growing ever denser as its concentric circles recede toward their core) on a placidly disseminated human landscape. Yet at the same time the conspicuous rock formations on the tower's surface seem to insist that it is being carved out of a mountain that already exists on the site, and that may even be a source where stone for the tower is being quarried. In this respect it takes on the look of an exfoliating presence, an opening in nature where transformative energies (catalyzed by human industry) are erupting .…
>
> One thing that makes the Tower … so ungainly looking and unlikely to succeed … is the way it leans to the left as it rises: the perpendiculars of its successive levels have been constructed with respect to the slanting spiral ramp instead of the ground upon which it is being erected[3] .…
>
> At the lower left Bruegel has depicted a visit to the construction site by Nimrod, 'author' of the project … He embodies the sovereign will and intention behind the project … Yet Bruegel portrays him derisively: stupidly vain and surrounded by sycophants, he is a temporary nuisance to whom the workers must pay homage until he passes and they can return to their tasks. (The four men lifting the marble slab haven't even waited for the rest of the retinue to go by.) .…
>
> [T]he way Bruegel has grafted an ancient Babylonian architecture onto these Roman forms and situated the composite on the contemporary Flemish landscape multiplies [the] ambiguities. Are we given a realistic portrayal of the original Tower of Babel (with its 'fall' yet to come) or a figurative depiction of its modern reconstruction (with its fall already behind)?"

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1   The Tower (Bruegel).
2   E. Snow, Language of Contradiction, pp. 41, 47-48, 46, 43-44.
3   "The workers in the painting have built the arches perpendicular to the slanted ground, thereby making them unstable and a few arches can already be seen crumbling. The foundation and bottom layers of the tower had not been completed before the higher layers were constructed" (The Tower (Bruegel)).

While the account of Babel is valuable in its own right, we should not forget its important role as the final flourish in a prologue to the rest of Genesis and, indeed, to the primary history of the Old Testament. After the destruction of Babel, "God will abandon efforts to educate all of humankind all at once; instead, He will choose to advance His plan for human beings by working first with only one nation. After Babel, the Bible will turn directly to its main subject, the formation of the nation of Israel."[6] However, in God's turning of attention to Israel the other nations will not be abandoned. Through Abraham, Israel will be commissioned to be the instrument through which God will bless all the nations of the earth.[7] Working toward ultimate fulfillment of a glorious vision that dwarfs the self-serving pretensions of Babel, God will continue to carry out His objective to make of the whole earth "a temple-city filled with people who have a holy or priestly status."[8]

Apart from his translations of the Book of Mormon and the Bible, we have only one substantive mention by Joseph Smith of the story of Babel. This is given in a retrospective third-party journal entry that will be discussed in more detail in a later section.[9] The story was mentioned two other times in passing in documents attributed to Joseph Smith; however, the original versions of these texts were written by others.[10] The relatively few Church leaders who have discussed the story at any length since that time have simply interpreted the incident at face value, drawing on the Book of Mormon account of the Jaredites for additional clarification and support.

The book of Ether relates that the brother of Jared pleaded with the Lord that he would not confound the language spoken by his family and friends.[11] Later, when the Lord commanded the brother of Jared to record his sacred experiences upon "the mount Shelem,"[12] he was told that "the language which ye shall write I have confounded."[13] As a consequence, his words "cannot be read"[14] without the use of "two stones"[15] that were specially prepared as translation aids.[16] That the language of the Jaredite group was apparently confounded for anyone but themselves has led some to teach that they originally spoke the "Adamic language."[17] However, in light of scriptural and scientific problems with this view, the alternative interpretations have been offered by LDS authors such as Hugh W. Nibley and Brant Gardner.[18] These and related views will be explored in greater detail in a later section of this chapter overview.

Before exploring the biblical account in detail, it will be helpful to outline certain details of the Mesopotamian context of the story.[19]

GENESIS 11

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6   L. R. Kass, *Wisdom*, p. 217.
7   See Genesis 22:18. See also overview Genesis 10, p. 352.
8   T. D. Alexander, *From Eden*, p. 30. See *Endnote G11-3,* p. 434.
9   See E. England, Laub, p. 175.
10   See *Endnote G11-4,* p. 434.
11   Ether 1:34-37.
12   Ether 3:1.
13   Ether 3:24.
14   Ether 3:22.
15   Ether 3:23, 28.
16   Ether 3:24.
17   See *Endnote G11-5,* p. 434. See also commentary Moses 6:46-c, p. 73; Moses 6:57-b, p. 78; overview Genesis 11, p. 398. Wisely, the *Joseph Smith Papers* editors avoid mentioning the idea of an Adamic language and instead refer merely to the Jaredites keeping "their original language" (J. Smith, Jr. *et al.*, *Documents, July 1831-January 1833*, p. 214).
18   See overview Genesis 11, p. 398; gleanings Genesis 11, Assumptions About the Jaredite Language, p. 428.
19   For a brief survey of worldwide parallels to the Tower story, see C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, pp. 537-539.

Mesopotamian Background

Although some have proposed alternate locations for the story of Babel,[20] most scholars have focused their attention on the city of Babylon, the namesake of the biblical Babel. D. J. Wiseman recounts what is known about the early history of Babylon:[21]

> The origin of Babylon is obscure, but according to the Babylonian Chronicle and omens relating back to Sargon of Agade (ca. 2350 BCE)[22] that king claims to have removed rubble or dust from a clay pit at Babylon and heaped it up near, or in front of, Agade naming it Babylon.[23] Such a gesture is elsewhere attested as marking the conquest of an existing city rather than, as is usually interpreted, denoting the establishment of a new one. Since Sargon by this claims to have set up "the likeness of Babylon" (*gaba.ri bābili*) the name, and thus the reality, was held to have been in use earlier.[24] His action was considered evil, possibly as defiling a sacred site, and for it his dynasty was thought to have been brought to an end. The reference there to the source of building materials, as in Gilgamesh's Uruk, may further indicate that the original city was both extensive and a religious center.
>
> Though Babylon seems to have had only a limited role under a local governor in the Ur III period (21st to 20th century BCE), it flourished as the capital of a powerful Amorite clan among whom Hammurabi had an international reputation. This dominant position, despite a raid by the Hittites (ca. 1595 BCE) and destruction by Sennacherib in 689 BCE, was never lost. All who controlled it accorded it respect as the ancient foundation — "the eternal city" (*āl šubat dārâti*) — what had early become the traditional capital.

Enuma Elish, or the *Creation Epic*,[25] gives the following account of the building of Babylon's temple tower (a ziggurat or ziqqurat) and its enclosing temple complex (named "Esagil" or "Esagila") as a tribute to the god Marduk. Answering the grateful group who he had freed from their enemies, Marduk is made to say:[26]

> "Then make Babylon the task that you requested,
> Let its brickwork be formed, build high the shrine."
> The Anunna-gods[27] set to with hoes,
> One (full) year they made its bricks.
> When the second year came,
> They raised the head of Esagila[28]
> They built the upper ziggurat of Apsu,[29]
> For Anu-Enlil-Ea[30] they founded his … and dwelling.
> He took his seat in sublimity before them,
> Its pinnacles were facing toward the base of Esharra.[31]
> After they had done the work of Esagila,
> All the Anunna-gods devised their own shrines.

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20   See *Endnote G11-6,* p. 434.

21   D. J. Wiseman, *Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon: The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy 1983*, pp. 43-44.

22   For more on Sargon, see the caption of figure G10-8, p. 346.

23   For a map of Mesopotamia showing the location of Babylon, see figure G10-9, p. 347.

24   See *Endnote G11-7,* p. 435.

25   See *Endnote G11-8,* p. 435.

26   B. R. Foster, *Before*, 6:57-68, p. 471.

27   The "Anunna" are lesser gods. Though it is unlikely that Genesis 11 draws directly on *Enuma Elish*, the account seems to be informed by some knowledge of Babylonian tradition. Perhaps there is irony expressed in that the Bible's temple city is built by ordinary people rather than by the gods (see A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 48. Cf. N. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 83).

28   *Ibid.*, p. 471 n. 1: "Word play on the [Sumerian] name of Marduk's temple ('House whose Head Is High')."

29   *Ibid.*, p. 471 n. 2: "Esagila is therefore a counterpart or replica of the abode of Ea (Apsu) and the abode of Enlil (Esharra) … [By] 'upper ziggurat' [is meant] the one visible to humanity in Babylon."

30   *Ibid.*, p. 471 n. 3: "The three divine names together may here be taken as a syncretism for Marduk."

31   *Ibid.*, p. 471 n. 4: "The significance of this line is obscure; variant: 'He was looking at.'"

Figure g11-3. *Model of the Marduk Temple Tower at Babylon*
Vorderasiatisches Museum, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany, 1999

"The ziggurat (Akkadian *ziqqurratu*, 'temple tower,' from *zaqāru*, 'build high') is a tower of block-shaped stages, each smaller than the one below, used as the base for a temple. Although no remains of the uppermost part of a ziggurat are extant, it is definite from descriptions that this upper part existed. The term 'ziggurat' is sometimes also used loosely in modern scholarly terminology for the architectural construction of a 'temple on terraces.'

Apart from their stepped terraces, the characteristic feature of a ziggurat is its access via a freestanding flight of steps in the middle of one side, with two further flights of steps beside it on the same side, all meeting in a small platform at the height of the first terrace. Further ascent is by staircases invisible from outside the ziggurat.

Very probably, this fixed architectural form can be traced back to Ur-Nammu, the founder of the Second Dynasty of Ur (2112-2095 bce), who redesigned the central sanctuaries of most of the cities of his empire in this manner. The form remained in principle unaltered for a millennium and a half, only its dimensions increased enormously: in comparison to the 65 x 43 m. base of the Ur-Nammu ziggurat in Ur, the ziggurat of Nebuchadnezzar (604-562 bce) in Babylon was built on a square with a side of 91.5 m. While the Ur-Nammu ziggurat of Ur had two steps and its total height, up to the floor of the temple, is estimated at 16.5 m, the Babylon ziggurat had six steps, and the floor of the temple was, according to Anu-Bēlšunu's detailed description (written 229 bce), presumably at 93.5 m."[1]

1   H. J. Nissen, Ziggurat.

The ziggurat of Esagil is associated with the name E-temen-anki, the "House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth." Though the name E-temen-anki is known only from first millennium mentions of later ziggurats presumably built on the same spot, Andrew George takes the reference in *Enuma Elish* as evidence for "the long-held theory that [the original ziggurat] existed already in the second millennium bce. There is no reason to doubt that this ziggurat, described as *ziqqurrat apsî elīte* 'the upper ziggurat of the *Apsû*,' was É-temen-anki."[32]

Walton gives the following description of what we know about the structure and function of ziggurats:[33]

1. Though they may resemble pyramids in appearance, they are nothing like them in function. Ziggurats have no "inside." The structure was framed in mudbrick, and then the core was packed with fill dirt. The façade was then completed with kiln-fired brick.

32   A. George, Tower of Babel. For a brief history of the modern discovery of the ruined temple complex and ziggurat of Babylon, see A. George, Truth.
33   J. H. Walton, Genesis, pp. 61-63.

2. Ziggurats were dedicated to particular deities. Any given deity could have several ziggurats dedicated to him or her in different cities. Furthermore, a given city could have several ziggurats, though the main one was associated with the patron deity of the city.

3. Archaeologists have discovered nearly thirty ziggurats in the general region, and texts mention several others. The main architectural feature is the stairway or ramp that leads to the top. There was a small room at the top where a bed was made and a table set for the deity. Ziggurats ranged in size from sixty feet per side to almost two hundred feet per side.

Most important is the function of the ziggurat. The ziggurat did not play a role in any of the rituals known to us from Mesopotamia. If known literature were our only guide, we would conclude that common people did not use the ziggurat for anything.[34] It was sacred space and was strictly off-limits to profane use. Though the structure at the top was designed to accommodate the god, it was not a temple where people would go to worship. In fact, the ziggurat was typically accompanied by an adjoining temple near its base, where the worship did take place.

The best indication of the function of the ziggurats comes from the names that are given to them. For instance, the name of the ziggurat at Babylon, E-temen-anki, means "temple of the foundation of heaven and earth." One at Larsa means "temple that links heaven and earth." Most significant is the name of the ziggurat at Sippar, "temple of the stairway to pure heaven." The word translated "stairway" in this last example is used in the mythology as the means by which the messenger of the gods moved between heaven, earth, and the netherworld. As a result of these data, we can conclude that the ziggurat was a structure built to support the stairway. This stairway was a visual representation of that which was believed to be used by the gods to travel from one realm to another. It was solely for the convenience of the gods and was maintained in order to provide the deity with amenities and to make possible his descent into his temple.

At the top of the ziggurat was the gate of the gods, the entrance into their heavenly abode. At the bottom was the temple, where hopefully the god would descend to receive the gifts and worship of his people …

In summary, the project the Bible describes is a temple complex featuring a ziggurat, which was designed to make it convenient for the god to come down to his temple, receive worship, and bless his people. The key … is to realize that the tower was not built so that people could ascend to heaven, but so that deity could descend to earth.

Records are scarce for the earliest ziggurats, but inscriptions describing later reconstructions, such as the rebuilding of temple complexes at Babylon (E-temen-anki) and Borsippa (Eur-me-imin-anki) by Nebuchadnezzar II (ca. 604-562 BCE), are revealing.[35] For example, the inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II on the so-called "Tower of Babel" stele describing the rebuilding of the temple of Marduk at Babylon attests the use of "bitumen and baked brick throughout" the structures[36] as described in the biblical account.[37]

More intriguingly, we read an elaborate description of how workers were gathered from throughout the empire to execute the project, recalling the biblical imagery of "confounded" (Hebrew *bālal* = to mix or mingle) languages and peoples:[38]

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34   On the use of the structure by priests, see, e.g., S. Bourke, *Middle East*, pp. 96-97.

35   Although in this overview we are not arguing for a specific timeframe for any historical events associated with the story of the Tower of Babel, we are currently persuaded that the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II is too late for such an occurrence. It is always possible, however, that a redaction describing an earlier event may anachronistically include details from a later time. In his essay on chronology in the book of Ether (B. A. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:146-154), Brant Gardner surveys arguments for the dating of the Jaredite migration that range from around 3000 BCE (John Sorenson) to around 1100 BCE (Gardner's own conclusion).

36   A. George, Stele of Nebuchadnezzar II, p. 160.

37   Genesis 11:3.

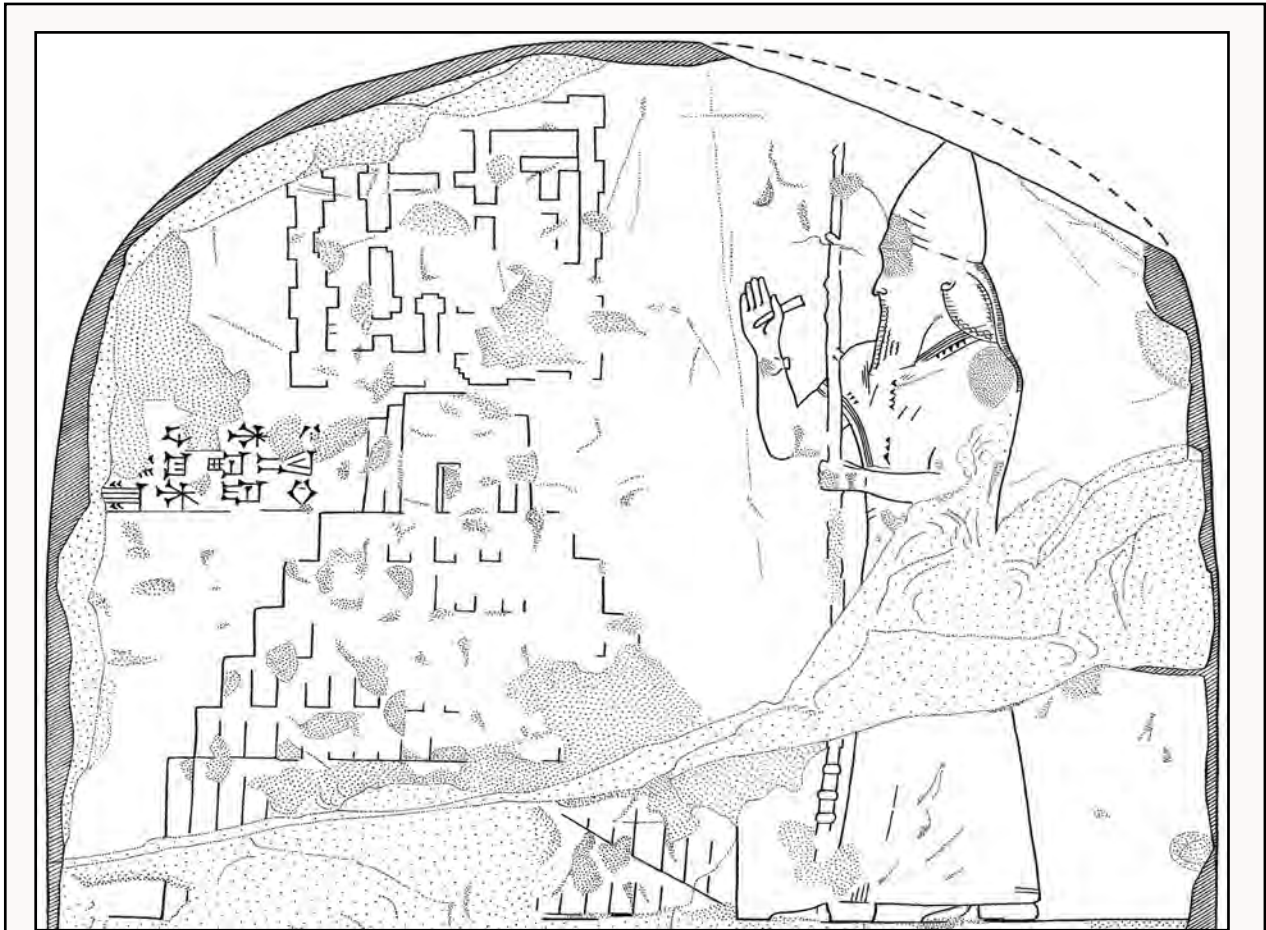38   A. George, Stele of Nebuchadnezzar II, p. 160. On the idea that such mixing of peoples was being condemned

FIGURE G11-4. *Nebuchadnezzar II before É-temen-anki,* **Ziggurat of Babylon, "Tower of Babel" Stele (detail), ca. 604-562 BCE**

The oldest representation of the ziggurat of Babylon is on the so-called "Tower of Babel" stele in the Shøyen Collection:[1]

The figure depicted on the right side of the relief is a bearded male dressed in a long robe and shod in sandals. The fine details of his beard, hair, and robe have largely disappeared but enough traces remain to give an impression of delicate rendering of very elaborate decoration. His right wrist is embellished with a bracelet or bangle. He wears the late form of the Babylonian royal crown, conical with a long tassel hanging from the back, and holds in his left hand a long staff that matches him in height. In his right hand he holds a curved conical object directed at his face .... As the bearer of ... three regalia — crown, staff, and curved object—the standing figure depicted on the present monument is unquestionably also a king. Given the certain attribution of the stele's inscription to Nebuchadnezzar II, there can be no doubt that he is none other than this great Babylonian monarch (reigned 604–562 BCE) ....

The stepped tower depicted on the left side of the relief, opposite Nebuchadnezzar, is accompanied by the following epigraph: "E-temen-anki, the ziggurat of Babylon" ... Its early history is unrecorded but more is known of the tower in the first millennium. It was destroyed by Sennacherib of Assyria when he laid Babylon waste in 689 BCE, and partially rebuilt by Sennacherib's successors, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. The project was restarted by Nabopolassar after Babylon won its independence from Assyria, and completed by his son, Nebuchadnezzar II, in about 590 BCE. Archaeological evidence reveals that the building was damaged beyond repair in the Persian period. It was leveled in the late fourth century BCE by Alexander of Macedon [i.e., Alexander the Great] and his successors in preparation for a rebuilding that was never started.[2]

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1   A. George, Stele of Nebuchadnezzar II, pp. 154-155.
2   The destruction of the E-temen-anki is echoed in late Israelite documents (J. C. VanderKam, *Book of Jubilees (2001)*, 10:26, p. 63; F. Josephus, *Antiquities* 1:4:3, p. 30; J. J. Collins, Sibylline Oracles, 3:101-103, p. 364; H. E Gaylord, Jr., 3 Baruch 3:8, p. 665).

In order to complete E-temen-anki and Eur-me-imin-anki to the top … I mobilized [all] countries everywhere, [each and] every ruler [who] had been raised to prominence over all the people of the world [as one] loved by Marduk, from the upper sea [to the] lower [sea,] the [distant nations, the teeming people of] the world, kings of remote mountains and far-flung islands in the midst of the] upper and lower [seas,] whose lead-ropes [my] lord Marduk placed in [my] hand so [that they should] draw [his] chariot …

Figure g11-5. *Building the Tower of Babel,* ca. 1896-1902
J. James Tissot, 1836-1902

An inscription from Borsippa tells us that the ziggurat had been left unfinished and that, prior to the reconstruction by Nebuchadnezzar II, it had fallen into ruins — a reminder of the uncompleted structures of the biblical Babel:[39]

> I built É-temen-anki, the ziggurat of Babylon (and) brought it to completion, and raised high its top with pure tiles (glazed with) lapis lazuli. At that time E-ur-(me)-imin-anki, the ziqqurrat of Borsippa, which a former king had built and raised by a height of forty-two cubits *but had not finished (to) the top, had long since become derelict and its water drains were in disorder. Rains and downpours had eroded its brickwork. The baked brick of its mantle had come loose and the brickwork of its sanctum had turned into a heap of ruins.*[40] My great lord Marduk stirred my heart to rebuild it.

Richard Hess[41] comments on an interesting parallel in the Mesopotamian *Gilgamesh Epic* on the matter of "making a name":

> In the story itself Gilgamesh seeks to make a name by finding immortality, which he fails to do. In the prologue and epilogue to the story,[42] Machinist[43] observes that his "name" is made through the city wall, which the reader is invited to admire (though this itself may point to the foundation text that is normally placed underneath the wall of a new structure). Both immortality and the construction of a large structure suggest parallels with the Tower of Babel.
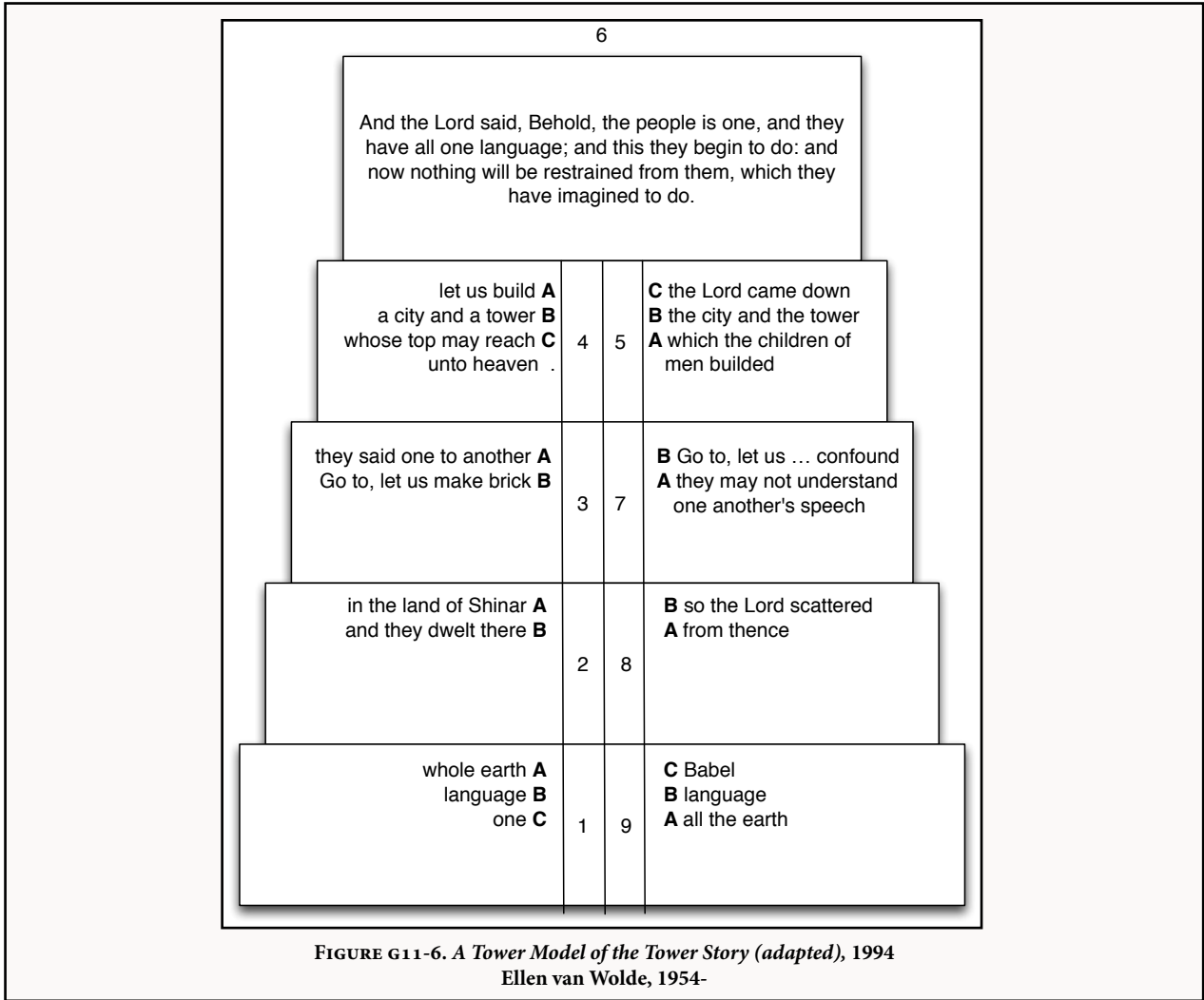
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39   A. George, Stele of Nebuchadnezzar II, p. 169, emphasis added.
40   See *Endnote G11-9,* p. 435.
41   R. S. Hess, *Israelite Religions*, p. 178 n. 24.
42   A. George, *Gilgamesh,* 1:18-21, p. 2, 11:323-326, p. 99.
43   Cf. L. R. Kass, *Wisdom*, p. 228.

FIGURE G11-6. *A Tower Model of the Tower Story (adapted),* **1994**
Ellen van Wolde, 1954-

A Tower Model of the Tower Story

In the nine verses that make up the account of the Tower of Babel, we have "a short but brilliant example of Hebrew story telling."[44] To begin with, we marvel with Fokkelman[45] at how little room the narrator had to do his job, yet he managed to keep "within the square meter. He who has something to say and must, speaking in terms of sound and time, do so in 121 words or two minutes, or, in terms of writing and space, within half a page of thirteen lines, is forced to confine himself." Yet within this highly constrained setting, the author has created a literary masterpiece. Ingenious word and sound parallels between verses, "ironic linkages between sections and ideas,"[46] and a beautiful economy of style are readily apparent to readers of Hebrew. In its original tongue "the prose turns language itself into a game of mirrors."[47] Addressing the meaning of this densely packed scripture gem, Everett Fox writes of how its general message of measure-for-measure allotment of divine action in direct response to human hubris "is transmitted by means of form":[48]

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44   G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 234.
45   Cited in E. van Wolde, *Words*, p. 84.
46   E. Fox, *Books of Moses*, p. 46.
47   R. Alter, *Five Books*, p. 59.
48   E. Fox, *Books of Moses*, p. 46.

The divine "Come-now!" of v. 7 clearly stands as an answer to humankind's identical cry in vv. 3 and 4. In addition humans, who congregated in order to establish a "name" and to avoid being "scattered over the face of all the earth" (v. 4), are contravened by the action of God, resulting in the ironic name "Babble" and a subsequent "scattering" of humanity (v. 9). The text is thus another brilliant example of biblical justice, a statement about a worldview in which the laws of justice and morality are as neatly balanced as we like to think the laws of nature are.

Many scholars have noted the obvious chiastic features of the story.[49] For example, Ellen van Wolde explains her tower model of the Tower story that visually demonstrates how city of Babel is incrementally built up by men and taken down by God:[50]

> The tower shows on the one hand how verses 1 and 9, 2 and 8, 3 and 7, and 4 and 5 are parallel to one another, and on the other hand clearly shows the ascending line in vv. 1-4 and the descending line in vv. 5, 7-9. Together these two lines represent the Tower of the story. The opposition between the human actions vertically upward and the actions of Yahweh vertically downward becomes abundantly clear in this way. The diagram shows also that the central verse is not v. 5 (a verse which contributes little in terms of content to the story), but v. 6, since the latter detracts from the vertical movements and presents Yahweh's implicit reaction at the moment the humans are at the top. Since v. 5 is a proleptic forerunner of the events of vv. 7ff., this verse assumes a place in the spatial order between vv. 7 and 9 (i.e., on the descending line). This tower model shows also how the parallel verses are also structured chiastically in relation to one another. [In other words, the parallel wording in each verse is laid out in reverse order from its counterpart verse (A, B, C vs. C, B, A).]

"Let Us Make Us a Name"

Although Jewish sources such as the book of *Jubilees* are clear in their condemnation of the wickedness of the generation of the Tower,[51] modern commentators disagree as to how the project of the Babel builders itself went wrong — or even whether it went wrong at all.[52] As Kass observes:[53]

> On first encountering the story, prior to careful reflection, any reader who is not already committed to defending everything God does is likely to find the tale troubling. For the building of the city and tower appears at first glance to be an innocent project, even a worthy one. It expresses powerful human impulses, to establish security, permanence, independence, even self-sufficiency. And it is accomplished entirely by rational and peaceful means: forethought and planning, arts that transform the given world, and cooperative social arrangements made possible by common speech and uniform thoughts. Babel, the universal city, is the fulfillment of a recurrent human dream, a dream of humankind united, living together in peace and freedom, no longer at the mercy of an inhospitable or hostile nature …

> The city is a mixture of pride and fear.[54] Its origins, quite likely, are in fear. The immediately postdiluvian population has better reason than most to know and fear nature's wildness and inhospitality and to shrink from standing unarmed and dispersed before the powers that be. Having (at best) hearsay knowledge of God's promise to Noah (no more floods, no total destruction), these men are inclined rather to trust to self-help for protection against the state of nature and the wide open spaces. They find strength in numbers and unification, and in their ability cooperatively to craft a home in the midst of an indifferent — not to say hostile — world.

49   See, e.g., G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, pp. 235-236.

50   E. van Wolde, *Words*, p. 89. See Figure g11-6, p. 387. Cf. Proverbs 11:11: "A city is built up (literally raised up) by the blessing of the upright/but it is torn down by the speech of the wicked" (translation in P. M. Sherman, *Babel's Tower*, p. 76).

51   See *Endnote G11-10*, p. 435.

52   For an overview of arguments relating to this issue, see P. M. Sherman, *Babel's Tower*, pp. 29-34, 52-55.

53   L. R. Kass, *Wisdom*, pp. 219, 230-231, 234.

54   See P. M. Sherman, *Babel's Tower*, pp. 67-69 for a discussion of the generally negative association attached to the city in the Hebrew Bible.

Figures g11-7, 8, 9. *The Ideal Palace of the Postman Cheval (Le Palais Idéal du Facteur Cheval),* **Hautrives, France, 1879-1912**
Ferdinand Cheval, 1836-1924

Ferdinand Cheval was a postman who lived in Hauterives, France. "Cheval began the building in April 1879. He claimed that he had tripped on a stone and was inspired by its shape. He returned to the same spot the next day and started collecting stones. For the next thirty-three years, Cheval picked up stones during his daily mail round and carried them home to build the Palais Idéal … He often worked at night, by the light of an oil lamp."[1] Wrote Cheval: "There was no notion of time anymore when the mail delivery was completed. I could have devoted my free time to hunting, fishing, billiards, or cards — there were plenty of pastimes possible. But I preferred above all the achievement of my Dream. It cost me 4,000 bags of lime and cement and my Monument represents 1,000 cubic meters of stonework — that is to say, 6,000 francs. But because of this, people tell me that my name will go down in history — that's quite flattering!"[2]

The inscription at top left reads: "Work of one lone man." Similar inscriptions, along with extracts from poetry and literature, surround the palace: "1879-1912: 10,000 days, 93,000 hours, 33 years of trials—may those more stubborn than me get to work," "This marvel of which the author is proud will be unique in the universe," "Work is my only glory; honor my only happiness," "In creating this rock, I wanted to prove what will power could do," "All that you see here is the work of a rustic." Through his work on the palace, Cheval made himself a name. By the end of his life, it had been visited by thousands of people, including art-world luminaries like André Breton and Pablo Picasso. After Cheval's death, a government report declared: "the whole monument is absolutely hideous. It is a pathetic pack of insanities muddled in a boor's brain." However in 1969, the French Ministry of Culture declared the palace a cultural landmark. In 1986, Cheval's image was put on a French postage stamp. The bust of Cheval at top right was commissioned by the people of his town for the fiftieth anniversary of his death. It stands outside the post office — which now, ironically, has been shuttered.

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1   Ferdinand Cheval.
2   J-P. Jouve *et al.*, *Le Palais Idéal*, p. 293.

But what began in fear grew in pride. Human imagination and especially human craft are its nourishment. Whereas animals pursue their aims thoughtlessly using their own inborn powers, human beings take pride in exercising those powers that come to them as a result of their own devisings. Working from the ground up, men make bricks from the dust of the earth by the transforming power of fire. Lowly materials in hand, their ambition soars as they conceive next to build a city and a tower, with its top in heaven. The city and tower express the human conquest of necessity, human self-sufficiency, and independence. Above all, the sky-scraping tower — whatever its explicit purpose — stands proudly as a monumental achievement of proud builders, to serve their everlasting glory. The anticipatory vaunt of the builders — "Let us make us a name" — shows the towering pride, though the fear of dispersion ("lest we be scattered abroad") has not been altogether extinguished.

What is this wish "to *make us a name*"? The verb "to make," *'asah*, has previously been used only by God, either to announce His own makings or to command Noah's building of the Ark, or, once, by the narrator to report God's making of coats of skins. The word "name," hitherto used in relation to particular names, acquires here a new sense for the first time in Genesis. Adam had named the animals, named himself and the woman as woman and man (*'ishah* and *'ish*), and later renamed the woman Eve, honoring her powers as the mother of all life. People give and receive names that are significant (Noah, for example, the first person born after the death of Adam, gets a name meaning both "comfort" and "lament"). Fame and renown are sought, and some men even boast of their deeds (for example, Lamech, who is the poet of his own heroism). But the aspiration to *make* a name goes beyond the desires to give oneself a name or to *gain* a name — that is, beyond the longings for fame and glory earned by great success.

To *make* a name for oneself is, most radically, to "make that which requires a name." To make a new name for oneself is to remake the meaning of one's life so that it deserves a new name. To change the meaning of human being is to remake the content and character of human life. The city, fully understood, achieves precisely that. Though technology, through division of labor, through new modes of interdependence and rule, and through laws, customs, and mores, the city radically transforms its inhabitants. At once makers and made, the founders of Babel aspire to nothing less than self-re-creation — through the arts and crafts, customs and mores of their city. The mental construction of a second world through language and the practical reconstruction of the first world through technology together accomplish man's reconstruction of his own being. The children of man (*'adam*) remake themselves and, thus, their name, in every respect taking the place of God ....

In their act of total self-creation, there could be no separate and independent (non-man-made) standard to guide the self-making or by means of which to judge it good. The men, unlike God in His creation, will be unable to see [whether] all that they had done is good. (Indeed, in the story, the Babel builders do not even pause, as God had done, to evaluate their handiwork.) They could, of course, see if the building as built conformed to their own linguistic blueprint, but they could not judge its goodness in any other sense.

In the end, "God will make a name for the one whom *He* chooses, and," writes Richard Hess, "that choice is found in the line of Shem, whose name in Hebrew is the word for 'name.'"[55]

Naming in a Temple Context

Because the Babel story is set in the explicit context of the construction of a temple city, we should not neglect the possibility that the desire of the builders to make a name for themselves has its roots in temple ritual. The importance of naming as it relates to Mesopotamian rites of investiture and Israelite temple ritual is well known:[56]

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55   R. S. Hess, *Israelite Religions*, pp. 177-178, emphasis added.
56   J. M. Bradshaw e*t al.*, Investiture Panel, pp. 11, 21-22.

Figure g11-10. *Manti Utah Temple*
Val W. Brinkerhoff, 1953-

Doris R. Dant describes Minerva Teichert's mural of the Tower of Babel on the east wall of the Manti Utah Temple as follows:[1]

> Teichert's narrative begins in the East, the post-Deluge birthplace of the civilizations of the world. On the east wall (appropriately) of the world room is depicted the Tower of Babel under construction in the Plain of Shinar … [The architecture of the ziggurat] harmonized with the observatory theme she chose for representing the learning — astronomy and mathematics in particular — that came out of the East. According to Teichert, this knowledge is also represented by the lever employed by a laborer on the mural's left, the compass in the architect's hand, the square held by a supervisor, and the wheeled carts. These are tools for a massive, concentrated effort — "almost the birth of cooperation" — made possible by the desire of unifying the dominant people … Teichert also portrays the harsh realities of slavery and the builders' lack of faith in God's promises. The ominous cloud hovering over the misbegotten enterprise may denote God's displeasure, which resulted in the dispersal of the people when their language was confounded. This dispersion is hinted at by the varied garb and headgear of the workers.

Frequently mentioned in ancient Jewish and Christian literature is a prophecy of Adam that the world would be destroyed once by water and once by fire.[2] Some accounts tell of a record (i.e., Adam's prophecy, astronomical information, or music) that was inscribed either on two pillars or else on tablets. To assure the survival of the record, the two pillars were made of different materials, one of which would be preserved in case of flood and the other of which would be impervious to fire. In some cases, the themes of the pillars or stelae and the Flood are connected to the construction of the Tower of Babel. In any case, Kass infers:[3]

> The context of the Flood suggests a connection with safety: the Tower is an artificial high ground providing refuge against future floods and a watchtower for the plain; it is even imaginable that it might be intended as a pillar to hold up heaven, lest it crack open another time[4] … The towers would, almost certainly, have been the favored sites for astronomical observation. In Babylonia, astronomical observation was not undertaken for the restful and disinterested contemplation celebrated by the Greek philosophers, but for an apprehensive yet patient scrutiny and measurement of the motions of the heavenly bodies, in the service of calculation, prediction, and control — and not the least regarding the coming of rain. The Babylonian priests ruled the city on the basis of their knowledge — and divination — regarding heaven. The "House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth" thus sought to link the city with the cosmos, and to bring the city in line with the heavenly powers that be, or — perhaps conversely — to bring the powers that be into line with the goals of the city.

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1   D. R. Dant, Minerva Teichert's Manti Temple Murals, pp. 17-18. For black and white photographs of the mural, see plates 1a, b, p. 33.
2   For more details on this topic, see J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, p. 492 endnote 6-4, p. 492.
3   L. R. Kass, *Wisdom*, pp. 229-230.
4   See J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, pp. 655, 699-700.

FIGURE G11-11. *The Fountain of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux,* near the former Clairvaux Abbey in Ville-sous-la-Ferté, France

Bernard of Clairvaux is best known to Latter-day Saints as the presumed author of the original Latin version of the hymn "Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee."[1] "On 25 June 1115, the abbot Bernard and his followers arrived from the abbey of Citeaux … to establish the first monastery (of which nothing now remains) in the narrowest part of the valley. According to ancient texts, the place name at that time was 'Val d'Absynthe,' but soon afterwards it changed to 'Clairvaux.' These names are allegorical, if not symbolic."[2] Legend has it that Bernard founded his original monastery at the exact spot of this fountain:[3]

> The Cistercian [monastery] ideal was to practice the rule of Saint Benedict in simplicity, poverty, and charity … By the time of Bernard's death, the Cistercians had spread throughout Europe, with 352 abbeys, 169 of them affiliated to Clairvaux .…

> On 10 February 1792, having become the property of the nation [as the result of the French Revolution], the abbey was sold for 337,550 pounds to Pierre Cauzon, an architect … who set up a paper mill and a glassworks within its walls … The industrial episode at least saved Clairvaux from total destruction .…

> Clairvaux's huge, under-used buildings could not but attract the attention of Napoleon's minister of the interior, who was expected to organize a national network of prisons … [T]hirteen prisons were created under Napoleon, including nine in former monastic buildings. But in fact … the prisons became, for all practical purposes, private factories whose owners were given the use of the prisoners' labor power in turn for taking care of their basic needs … As France's largest prison in the 19th century, Clairvaux dramatically illustrated the excesses of an unnatural situation in which the state's dereliction of duty, along with the parallel power of industrial liberalism, turned the prison into a machine for exploitation and destruction … The abbey church, having survived the upheavals of the Revolution relatively undamaged, was almost completely demolished in 1812 thanks to the inordinate zeal of an iconoclastic manager who was having trouble in paying the last of the bills for building work carried out on the new prison .… [The prison's famous "chicken coops," prisoner sleeping quarters that have been compared to livestock cages,] were still in use up to 1970 .…

> In 1971, the Ministry of Justice's prison service was moved to modern buildings with individual cells, common quarters and workshops, situated inside the walls of Grand Clairvaux, but not incorporating any of the historic buildings other than the 18th-century small cloister.

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1   *Hymns (1985),* Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee, #141. The first line of the Latin verse is "Iesu, dulcis memoria." In different manuscript forms, it ranges from forty-two to fifty-three stanzas.
2   G. Vilain *et al., Clairvaux Abbey,* p. 1.
3   *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 28, 29, 30, 31-32, 33, 34, 42.

Although we know few direct details of the Old Babylonian investiture ritual performed at Mari, it is certain that the fourth[57] of the eleven days of the later Babylonian New Year *akītu* festival always included a rehearsal of the creation epic, *Enuma Elish* ("When on high … "),[58] a story whose theological roots reach back long before the painting of the Investiture Panel and whose principal motifs were carried forward in later texts throughout the Levant.[59] In its broad outlines, this ritual text is an account of how Marduk achieved preeminence among the gods of the heavenly council through his victorious battles against the goddess Ti'amat and her allies and of the subsequent creation of the earth and of humankind as a prelude to the building of Marduk's temple in Babylon. The epic ends with the conferral upon Marduk of fifty sacred titles, including the higher god Ea's own name, accompanied with the declaration, "He is indeed even as I"[60] ….

In Babylonia, as in Jerusalem, "different temple gates had names indicating the blessing received when entering: 'the gate of grace,' 'the gate of salvation,' 'the gate of life' and so on,"[61] as well as signifying "the fitness, through due preparation, which entrants should have in order to pass through [each of] the gates."[62] In Jerusalem, the final "gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter,"[63] very likely referred to "the innermost temple gate"[64] where those seeking the face of the God of Jacob[65] would find the fulfillment of their temple pilgrimage …

We know nothing directly about the possibility or function of gatekeepers in Old Babylonian rites of investiture. However, it should be remembered that *Enuma Elish* both "begins and ends with concepts of naming" and that, in this context, "the name, properly understood [by the informed], discloses the significance of the created thing."[66] If it is reasonable to suppose that the function of sacred names in initiation ritual elsewhere in the ancient Near East might be extended by analogy to Old Babylonian investiture liturgy, we might see in the account of the fifty names given to Marduk at the end of *Enuma Elish* a description of his procession through the ritual complex in which he took upon himself the personal attributes represented by those names one by one.[67]

A Nephite incident that associates a (very different kind of) tower with the giving of a name is found in the Book of Mormon story of King Benjamin's speech. In reference to Benjamin's declaration that he "will give this people a name,"[68] Brant Gardner[69] notes that this "new naming is clearly tied to religious principles … In that culture, reality was defined through religion, and the validation of a political reality was the leader's persuasive claim or demonstration of Yahweh's sanction." Catherine Thomas goes further in her interpretation, explaining:[70]

Perhaps this was the first time among all the people brought out from the land of Jerusalem that a king and priest — in the tradition of Adam, Enoch, and Melchizedek — had succeeded in bringing his people to this point of transformation: he had caused them as a community actually to receive the name of Christ.

57 J. A. Black, *New Year*, p. 43.
58 S. Dalley, *Epic*.
59 K. L. Sparks, *Ancient Texts*, p. 167.
60 E. A. Speiser, *Creation Epic*, 72 (7:140). See *Endnote G11-11,* p. 436.
61 S. Mowinckel, *Psalms*, 1:181 n. 191.
62 J. H. Eaton, *Psalms Commentary*, Psalm 118:19-22, p. 405. See also Psalm 24:3-4.
63 Psalm 118:20.
64 S. Mowinckel, *Psalms*, 1:180.
65 Cf. Psalm 24:6.
66 B. R. Foster, *Before*, p. 437.
67 See *Endnote G11-12,* p. 436.
68 Mosiah 1:11.
69 B. A. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:108. See also *ibid.*, 3:183-188.
70 M. C. Thomas, *Benjamin*, pp. 290-292.

But what does it mean to receive the name of Christ? We remember that when we take the sacrament, we signify not that we have fully taken the name, but that we are willing to take the name.[71] Elder Dallin Oaks emphasized the word "willingness," pointing to a future consummation ….[72] In connection with being born again, Benjamin's people may have received something of a temple endowment.

Thomas likewise saw "something of a temple endowment" in the experience of the brother of Jared to whom the Lord showed Himself at the "cloud-veil."[73] But first, like Moses,[74] he was required to reject the counterfeit priesthood of the Babylonians and undergo testing.

Donaldson, Rogers, and Seely read the significance of the Tower of Babel in a similar way:[75]

First, the impetus in building this temple was to make themselves a name. In other words, … they [wanted to] build a temple to receive the name of God without making eternal covenants.[76] Second, they wanted to build this tower-temple so they would not be "scattered."[77] Latter-day revelation ties the temple's sealing power to preventing the earth from being wasted at the second coming.[78] One meaning of the word "wasted" in Joseph Smith's day was "destroyed by scattering."[79] … [The Babylonians] were building their own temple, their gate to heaven, without divine approval or priesthood keys ….

The narrative begun by Genesis ends in 2 Kings 25, in which the children of Israel found themselves — because they broke the covenant — back in Babylon where the story began. Their breaking of the covenant resulted in their exile from Jerusalem (Zion) to Babylon … In the latter days, the Lord once again has called us out of the world: we have been instructed to "go … out from Babylon"[80] to build Zion.

The city of Enoch had been translated[81] before the Flood. However, after the Flood Melchizedek led a righteous community who "sought for the city of Enoch" and "obtained heaven."[82] This scripture brings to mind the only remark of any length that has been attributed to the Prophet Joseph Smith on the subject of the Tower of Babel:[83]

Now in the days of Noah there was a man [with] the name of Nimrod … After the Flood, God commanded the people to spread over the earth, but they would not, and stayed and stayed upon the high land for fear of another deluge. But Nimrod rose up and said he could withstand God. He said, "Come, let us build a tower here that the water can rise. And I will go up and fight

71   See Moroni 4:3; D&C 20:77. Compare Mosiah 5:5.
72   D. H. Oaks, Taking Upon Us, p. 81.
73   M. C. Thomas, Brother of Jared, p. 389.
74   See J. M. Bradshaw, *Moses Temple Themes,* The Vision of Moses as a Heavenly Ascent (with D. J. Larsen), pp. 23-50. See also J. M. Bradshaw, *Gods Image 1,* pp. 32-81, 694-696.
75   L. Donaldson *et al.,* Building, pp. 60-61.
76   John S. Thompson sees the confounded language of Babel as pertaining to corrupted temple ordinances: "the language of this false temple was confounded by God and stands in contrast to the preserved language of … true priesthood and temple worship" (J. S. Thompson, Context, pp. 160-161).
77   Genesis 11:4.
78   See D&C 2:3.
79   N. Webster, *Dictionary*, s. v. "waste," v. t.: "2. To cause to be lost; to destroy by scattering or by injury."
80   D&C 133:5. Babylon is also used elsewhere in the Doctrine and Covenants as a symbol of wickedness, the antithesis to Zion (D&C 1:16; 35:11; 64:24; 86:3; 133:7, 14). For an overview of Babylon in the Old Testament, see P. M. Sherman, *Babel's Tower,* pp. 78-83.
81   See Genesis 5:23–24; Moses 7:21–23.
82   JST Genesis 14:33–34. Cf. Moses 7:27: "many … were caught up by the powers of heaven into Zion."
83   E. England, Laub, p. 175, retrospectively reporting a sermon that Laub dated to 13 April 1843, spelling, grammar, and punctuation modernized. The only other account of a speech by Joseph Smith on that day is "entirely different in subject matter than the one reported by Laub" (E. England, Laub, p. 173 n. 24).

FIGURE G11-12. *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*
Chapter House, Salisbury Cathedral, England
19th-century restoration of a 13th-century original

The Akkadian word *bāb-ili* means "gate of the god."[1] In practical terms, this means that "the Babylonian Tower was intended to pave a way for divine entrance into the city."[2] Nicolas Wyatt[3] sees a likeness to the "ladder"[4] (i.e., stairway, ramp) of Jacob's dream:

> The dream looks suspiciously like a description of a Babylonian ziggurat, in all probability the temple tower in Babylon. This had an external, monumental stairway leading to the top story, which represented heaven, the dwelling-place of the gods.

Jacob will later claim a name with similar meaning to the Akkadian "gate of the god" for the place of his vision: "gate of heaven."[5] Michael Fishbane notes:[6]

> As if to counterpoint the hubris of the tower building on the plain of Shinar,[7] the image of a staged temple-tower, whose "head" also "reaches to heaven," emerges out of Jacob's dream-work and humbles him.[8] He does not seek to achieve a name at the nameless place to which he has come on his flight to Aram, but is rather overawed by the divine presence there and extols His name: "Surely Yahweh is in this place," explains Jacob, "and I did not know it."[9] Nor does God collude with the pantheon in this text; but rather stands majestically above the divine beings whose "going up and coming down" the tower stairway provides the symbolic link between earth and heaven, and dramatizes the spiritual ascension inherent in the dream vision.[10] From atop this tower stairway promise and hope — not doom and dispersal — now unfold.[11] So as to commemorate and concretize this moment, Jacob, upon awakening, externalizes his dream imagery and erects a pillar whose "head" he anoints with oil: For indeed this place was for him a sacred center, a "cosmic mountain" linking heaven and earth.[12] It was, as he says, a *Beth-el*, a "house of God" and a "gateway to heaven."[13] And should he return from his journey in safety, Jacob also vows to recommemorate this pillar and transform it into a "House of Elohim."[14]

Later Jacob "wrestled (or embraced, as this may also be understood)" an angel who, after a series of questions and answers in a place that Jacob named *Peniel* (Hebrew "face of God"), gave him a new name.[15]

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1   In this case, the god is Marduk.
2   L. R. Kass, *Wisdom*, p. 229. According to the Chinese Shujing, the motivation for the damage to the pillar at the time of the Flood was to "break the communication between earth and heaven so that there was no descending or ascending" (J. S. Major, *Heaven*, p. 26. See also K-c Chang, Eve, pp. 70-71; J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, ENDNOTE E-207, p. 755).
3   N. Wyatt, *Myths of Power*, p. 74. A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 54 notes that unlike the Tower story, it is God that takes the initiative in the story of Jacob (cf. P. M. Sherman, *Babel's Tower*, pp. 57-58).
4   Genesis 28:12.
5   Genesis 28:17.
6   M. Fishbane, *Biblical Text*, p. 113.
7   Genesis 11:1-9.
8   Genesis 28:12.
9   Genesis 28:16.
10   See J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, figure 5-13, p. 351.
11   Genesis 28:13-15.
12   Genesis 28:18.
13   Genesis 28:17.
14   Genesis 28:20-22.
15   See B. H. Porter *et al.*, Names, pp. 506-507.

this God." This is the account Josephus tells us.[84] But God confounded their language and they were obliged to scatter abroad over the land .…

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84   See F. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1:4:3, p. 30. Note that the Prophet is not claiming that he has received specific revelation regarding the story of Nimrod, but is only summarizing details that are found in the account of Josephus. In 1835, Oliver Cowdery also quoted from Josephus' account (O. Cowdery, Mummies).

Now I will tell the designs of building the tower of Babel. It was designed to go to the city of Enoch, for the veil was not yet so thick that it hid it from their sight. So they concluded to go to the city of Enoch, for God gave him place above this impure Earth, for he could breathe a pure air. And he and his city were taken, for God provided a better place for him — for they were pure in heart. For it is the pure in heart that causes Zion to be. And the time will come again to meet, that Enoch and his city will come again to meet our city, and his people our people.[85] And the air will be pure and the Lord will be in our midst forever.

Whether or not this sermon is remembered correctly in every detail, the idea that the builders of Babel were seeking to obtain the blessings of those who had been translated with the city of Enoch is significant in light of the previous discussion of the Tower of Babel as a counterfeit temple. From the perspective of earthly and heavenly temple ordinances, the idea that Melchizedek's people "obtained heaven"[86] in their quest for the city of Enoch means that they "came by the Gospel into God's presence,"[87] i.e., that they obtained "the blessings of the Second Comforter."[88] In addition to the possibility of divine tutorial with the Father and the Son that is typically associated with the Second Comforter,[89] the blessings of the Second Comforter include the privilege of communion with other mortals who have been sanctified, i.e., to come "unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant."[90]

From the previous discussion the relationship between the Tower of Babel of Genesis 11 and the "great and spacious building" that "stood as it were in the air, high above the earth" of Lehi and Nephi's vision[91] is made clear: they are one and the same. Indeed, Ellen van Wolde points out that the Hebrew term for "heaven" in Genesis 11:4 "can also mean air, and the word is frequently used in the Hebrew Bible in connection with impressive buildings such as fortresses or towers, as in Deuteronomy 1:28 and 9:1, which speak of 'great cities and fortresses in the air.'"[92] Nephi described the inhabitants of the building as "the world and the wisdom thereof" and the building itself as "vain imaginations" and "the pride of the world."[93] Like the Tower of Babel, "it fell, and the fall thereof was exceedingly great."[94]

The aspirations of the builders that the top of the tower "may reach unto heaven"[95] are contradicted by the statement in Genesis 11:5 that the Lord had to come down to it. Gordon Wenham observes:[96] "With heavy irony we now see the tower through God's eyes. This tower which man thought reached to heaven, God can hardly see!"

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85   See Moses 7:63.
86   JST Genesis 14:34. See S. H. Faulring et al., *Original Manuscripts*, pp. 127-128, 641-642.
87   H. L. Andrus, *Doctrinal (Rev.)*, p. 252.
88   H. L. Andrus, *Doctrines*, p. 52. See H. L. Andrus, *Perfection*, pp. 366-400; J. M. Bradshaw, *Temple Themes in the Oath*, pp. 73-79.
89   J. M. Bradshaw, *Temple Themes in the Oath*, pp. 73-74.
90   Hebrews 12:22-24. Compare D&C 107:18-19.
91   1 Nephi 8:26. See also 1 Nephi 8:31; 11:36; 12:18.
92   E. van Wolde, *Words*, p. 92. See *Endnote G11-14*, p. 436.
93   See 1 Nephi 11:35-36; 1 Nephi 12:18.
94   1 Nephi 11:36. Cf. J. Smith, Jr., *Documentary History*, August 1832, 1:283; 13 August 1843, 5:530.
95   Genesis 11:4.
96   G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 240.

Figure g11-13. *Elbphilharmonie,* **Hamburg, Germany**

Noting that the Book of Mormon was written "for our day," John Mansfield,[1] with tongue in cheek, has been keeping his eye on the Hamburg Elbe Philharmonic Hall as a possible successor to the "great and spacious building" described in 1 Nephi:

> 1 Nephi 8:19: *"And I beheld a rod or iron, and it extended along the bank of the river."*

Hamburg has been redeveloping part of its port on the Elbe [River] as a new quarter called HafenCity.

> 1 Nephi 8:26: *"And I also cast my eyes round about, and beheld, on the other side of the river of water, a great and spacious building."*

"In the middle of the flow of the river Elbe on approximately 1,700 reinforced concrete piles a building complex is emerging, which, in addition to three concert halls, will encompass a hotel, 45 private apartments and the publicly accessible Plaza. The … world-class concert hall [has] a height of 50 meters with seating for 2,150."

> 1 Nephi 8:26-27: *"And it stood as it were in the air, high above the earth. And it was filled with people both old and young, both male and female; and their manner of dress was exceedingly fine."*

"At a height of 37 meters visitors will be treated to a unique 360° panoramic view of the city. Measuring some 4,000 square meters the Plaza will be almost as big as the one in front of the City Town Hall and will be an ideal place for Hamburg's citizens and tourists, concert-goers and hotel guests to stroll."

If nothing else, the building's budget is "great and spacious." Reputed as Germany's most expensive cultural project, the cost of the Hamburg Elbe Philharmonic Hall is reckoned at almost 800 million euros, ten times more expensive than the estimate of 77 million euros proffered by the mayor in 2005.[2]

1   J. Mansfield, Great and Spacious Building.
2   M. Klemm, Hamburg: Elbphilharmonie.

"Let Us … Confound Their Language"

The first chapter of the book of Ether describes the origins of the Jaredites at the time of "the great tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people and swore in his wrath that they should be scattered upon all the face of the earth; and according to the word of the Lord the people were scattered."[97] This and related references[98] have encouraged LDS scholars seeking independent evidence from the Book of Mormon for the biblical story. However, in his lucid commentary on the Book of Mormon, Brant Gardner cautions that things are not so simple as they seem.[99] He reminds us that Mosiah did not actually translate the "first part" of the record of the Jaredites that spoke of "the creation of the world, and also of Adam, and an account from that time even to the great tower."[100] Thus, it is unlikely that the passing references to that early history we have in the Book of Mormon are based on the Jaredite record. Rather, it is more probable that they have been carried over by Moroni into the book of Ether from what he had learned previously in his study of the brass plates. Specifically, he argues that "the material being translated and Mosiah's understanding of the [biblical story of the Tower of Babel] had enough resemblances that Mosiah shaped the Jaredites' original story to match the brass plates' story at a crucial point" — namely the description of how the language of the builders was confounded. Continuing, he explains:[101]

> Based on what we know of how Joseph Smith translated Nephi's plates, we might expect that Mosiah used a similar method. Thus, when Mosiah saw similar content, he used the familiar language from the brass plates, much as Joseph Smith used the familiar KJV language of Isaiah and Jesus' 3 Nephi sermon. It would be dangerous to assume that Mosiah used a better or more accurate or literal translation method than Joseph Smith did while translating a document from an unknown language through the same [Nephite Interpreters].

By this means, whatever textual and interpretive difficulties were present in the version of "Genesis" on the brass plates could have made their way into Moroni's summary of the events surrounding the departure of the Jaredites from the Old World. In the words of Gardner, "By the time Moroni adapted Mosiah's adaptation, we have the story as given in Genesis *because* of Genesis, not as an independent confirmation."[102]

Gardner reads the biblical story of the Tower of Babel "similar to the way Nibley has, as a remembrance of an event of ancient temple-building,[103] but not as the true origin of multiple languages."[104] He writes:

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97   Ether 1:33. Nibley taught that the "great tower" of the Jaredites was linked with Nimrod, and that the "Tower of Babel" was later (H. W. Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, 1:345. Cf. H. W. Nibley, *Lehi 1988*, pp. 165-167; H. W. Nibley, *Approach*, p. 329).

98   Mosiah 28:17 ("the building of the great tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people and they were scattered abroad upon the face of all the earth"), Ether 1:3 ("the great tower"). See also Mosiah 27:17; Helaman 6:28, and the Title Page and the Testimony of Three Witnesses in the Introduction of the Book of Mormon.

99   B. A. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:163.

100 See Ether 1:3-4.

101 B. A. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:162.

102 *Ibid.*, 6:166. Some might object to this interpretation of events, thinking that since Moroni and Mosiah were prophets they would have surely known what happened of their own accord, not through the medium of the written record. However, Elder John A. Widtsoe explained (J. A. Widtsoe, *Evidences*, p. 127): "when inspired writers deal with historical incidents, they relate that which they have seen or that which may have been told them, unless indeed the past is opened to them by revelation."

103 H. W. Nibley, *Lehi 1988*, pp. 164-165.

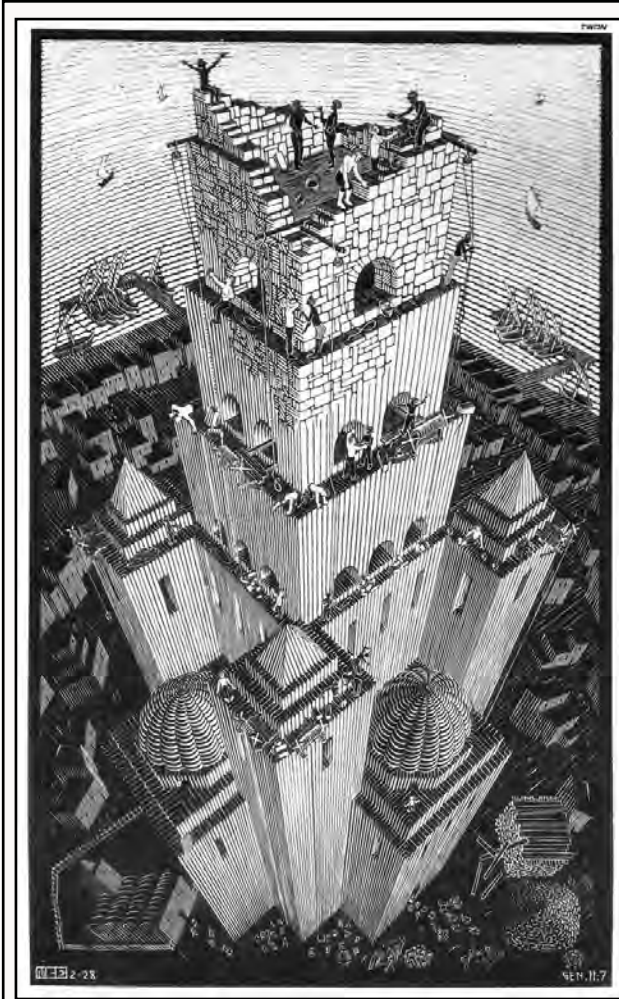104 B. A. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:164-165.

Figure g11-14. *Tower of Babel, 1928*
M. C. Escher, 1898-1972

"Although Escher dismissed his works before 1935 as of little or no value as they were 'for the most part merely practice exercises,' some of them, including the Tower of Babel, chart the development of his interest in perspective and unusual viewpoints that would become the hallmarks of his later, more famous, work.

In contrast to many other depictions of the biblical story, … Escher depicts the tower as a geometrical structure and places the viewpoint above the tower. This allows him to exercise his skill with perspective, but he also chose to centre the picture around the top of the tower as the focus for the climax of the action."[1] He later commented: "Some of the builders are white and others black. The work is at a standstill … Seeing as the climax of the drama takes place at the summit of the tower which is under construction, the building has been shown from above as though from a bird's eye view."[2]

Catherine A. Callaghan wrote the following verse about this engraving:[3]

> Almost we shared
> one tongue, one tower,
> one sphere in heaven.
>
> Now winches lock
> while we stay ledge-bound,
> look back, look down,
> founder in words
> or scale the unset bricks
> to strain toward sky.

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1   Tower (Escher).
2   I. L. Finkel *et al.*, *Babylon*, p. 204.
3   C. A. Callaghan, *Other Worlds*, p. 47.

Historical linguistics cannot trace languages with absolute precision, but there are tools for reconstructing language families and tracing their history by their development. None of the known history of languages can account for a single language splitting into the multitudes of world languages around 2000 BCE or even 3000 BCE, or at all.[105] Nibley suggests that we need to be cautious of such simplistic readings of the scriptural text:[106]

> The book of Ether, depicting the uprooting and scattering from the tower of a numerous population, shows them going forth [in] family groups [and] groups of friends and associates …[107] There was no point in having Jared's language unconfounded if there was no one he could talk to, and his brother cried to the Lord that his friends might also retain the language. The same, however, would apply to any other language: If every individual were to speak a tongue all his own and so go off entirely by himself, the races would have been not merely scattered but quite annihilated. We must not fall into the old vice of reading into the scripture things that are not there. There is nothing said in our text about every man

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105   See *ibid.*, 6:171-176. See *Endnote G11-15,* p. 436. See also gleanings Genesis 11, Assumptions About the Jaredite Language, p. 428.
106   H. W. Nibley, *Lehi 1988*, pp. 172-173.
107   Ether 1:41.

suddenly speaking a new language. We are told in the book of Ether that languages were confounded with and by the "confounding" of the people: "Cry unto the Lord," says Jared,[108] "that he will not confound us that *we* may not understand our *words*" (emphasis added). The statement is significant for more than one thing. How can it possibly be said that "*we* may not understand our *words*"? Words we cannot understand may be nonsense syllables or may be in some foreign language, but in either case they are not our words. The only way we can fail to understand our own words is to have words that are actually ours change their meaning among us. That is exactly what happens when people, and hence languages, are either "confounded," that is, mixed up, or scattered.[109] In Ether's account the confounding of *people* is not to be separated from the confounding of their languages; they are, and have always been, one and the same process: the Lord, we are told,[110] "did not confound the language of Jared; and Jared and his brother were not confounded … and the Lord had compassion upon their friends and their families also, that they were not confounded."[111] That "confound" as used in the book of Ether is meant to have its true and proper meaning of "to pour together," "to mix up together," is clear from the prophecy in Ether 13:8, that "the remnant of the house of Joseph shall be built upon this land; … and they shall no more be confounded," the word here meaning mixed up with other people, culturally, linguistically, or otherwise.

In this reading of the text, the confounding of languages is related to the mixing (confounding) of different peoples in creating this great tower in Babylon.[112] From such a mixing of people who were attempting to build a temple to the heavens, Yahweh removed some of His believers [e.g., the Jaredites and, at some point, Abram] for His own purposes.

Studies of historical linguistics provide further evidence of the hegemony of the Babylonians, making confounding (mixing) of the culture and language of the peoples of its empire an inevitable consequence. Nicholas Ostler[113] reminds us that "Babylon … was notable throughout its history for the leading role of a single language," and for "almost two thousand years this language was Akkadian."[114] Further, he explains:[115]

Throughout the second millennium BCE, the land of Sumer and Akkad already enjoyed serious cultural prestige. This is clearly reflected in the spread of its cuneiform writing system to all its neighbors, including even Elam, which had independently developed its own alternative. Besides the script, its language, Akkadian, was in this period the lingua franca for diplomacy, even where the Babylonians or Assyrians were not a party to the matters under discussion .…

In the second millennium, Akkadian was being taught and used in every capital city that surrounded Mesopotamia, essentially regardless of the ambient language.

If we take the "one language" of Genesis 11:1 as being Sumerian,[116] Akkadian, or even Aramaic[117] rather than a supposed universal proto-language,[118] some of the puzzling aspects of the biblical account become more intelligible. For example, "Genesis 10 and 11 would make linguistic sense in their current sequence. In addition to the local languages of each nation,[119] there existed 'one language'[120] which made communication possible throughout

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108   Ether 1:34.

109   In Hosea 7:8, the Lord uses the same Hebrew verb to condemn the way that Ephraim has become "confusedly mixed with nations" (A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 37). Cf. Hosea 9:1.

110   Ether 1:35-37.

111   See *Endnote G11-16,* p. 437.

112   Cf. the mixing of peoples in Nebuchadnezzar II's temple building project in overview Genesis 11, p. 384.

113   N. Ostler, *Empires*, p. 59.

114   See *Endnote G11-17,* p. 437.

115   N. Ostler, *Empires*, pp. 42, 62.

116   See *Endnote G11-18,* p. 437.

117   Aramaic would presume a setting for the story no earlier than the beginning of the first millennium BCE.

118   Whether one thinks about this in terms of the LDS tradition of an "Adamic language" or in some other way.

119   Genesis 10:5, 20, 31.

120   Genesis 11:1, 6. It may be significant that the JST for these verses reads: "*the same* language," not "*one* language."
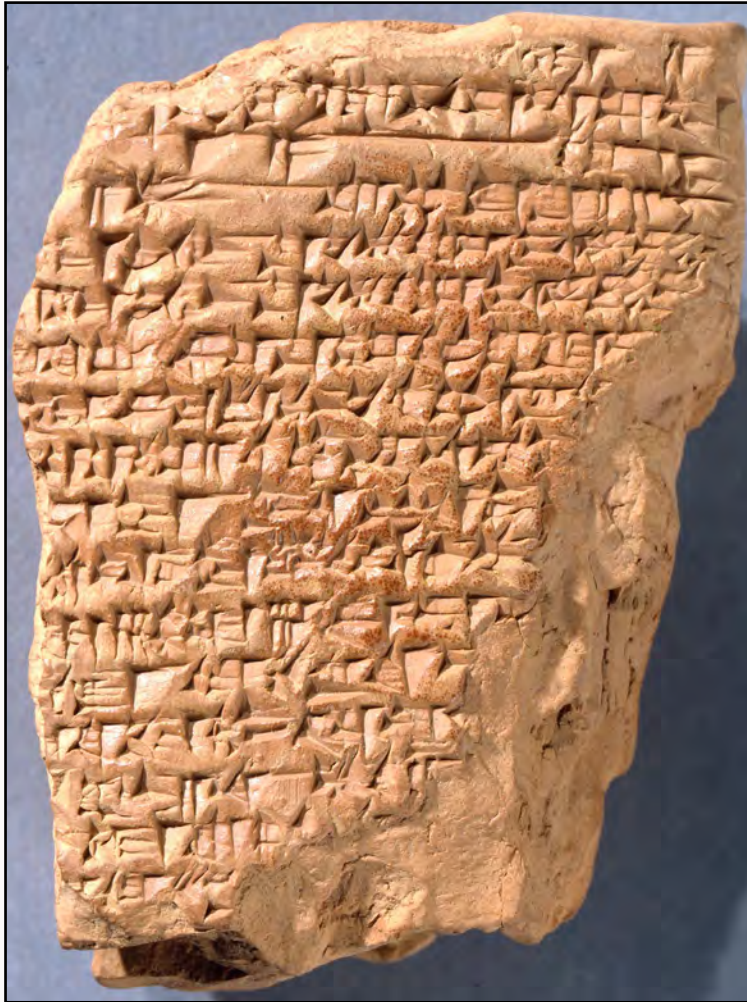
FIGURE G11-15. *Tablet with Fragment of Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*

"The account of Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta probably dates to the Ur III period, but takes its literary form in the Old Babylonian period a few centuries later, so it is roughly contemporary to the patriarchal period. A segment of this epic entitled *Nudimmud's Spell* has occasioned a lot of controversy. It speaks of a time when there are no predators and there is peace between nations and rulers. The section ends with a statement about people speaking the same language.

The dispute is whether this refers to a time in the distant past or a time in the anticipated future. Vanstiphout, following Alster, translates: "For on that day … shall Enki[1] … change the tongues in their mouth, as many as he once placed there, and the speech of mankind shall be truly one." This indicates an ideal situation in the future.[2] Jacobsen, in contrast, translated it as referring back to a past event: "In those days … did Enki … estrange the tongues in their mouths as many as were put there. The tongues of men which were one."[3] B. Batto agrees with the translation in the past, but considers it a description of an inchoate, primitive, uncivilized condition rather than an idyllic or paradisiacal one.

If Jacobsen is correct, this section of the epic may stand as a parallel to the Babel account in providing an account of the disruption of languages. It would not be out of character, however, for Genesis to have a far different assessment of language diversity than that encountered in the rest of the ancient Near East. Just as paradise was a negative condition in the ancient Near East and a positive one in the Bible, so the unified language is positive in the Bible and negative in the ancient near East.

In Mesopotamia people had pride in their bilingual character. At this stage, however, we must exercise patience and caution until the literature becomes more transparent."[4]

Wenham sums up his view of the implications of the "past vs. future" readings of this passage as follows:[5]

On Kramer's interpretation, the Old Testament is offering an alternative explanation of the diversity of languages. Genesis is affirming that the diversity of languages represents a divine judgment on mankind and is not the product of rivalry between the gods Enlil and Enki. Here, as in the flood story, Genesis explains things in terms of a moral monotheism, whereas Mesopotamia saw things in terms of polytheistic competitiveness.

Alster's view of the earlier tradition suggests that Genesis may be making a different point: the Sumerian gods saw the diversity of languages as undesirable because men were thereby prevented from joining in the worship of the great god Enlil, but Genesis holds that the confusion of languages is a divine antidote to human arrogance. Whereas Mesopotamia saw the human condition as improving, Genesis sees it as deteriorating. On Alster's view, the Sumerian epic is vaunting the superiority of Sumerian civilization because one day the Sumerian language, the chief expression of that culture, will be adopted by all peoples. And certainly the Hebrew story is adamant that this is not so.

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1   Note that Enki is the god of the E-temen-anki, the ziggurat in Babylon.

2   The idea that the text "is really looking forward to a time when all mankind would speak the same language, the Sumerian language … would be closer to Zephaniah 3:9 which looks forward to an age when God 'will change the speech of all peoples to a pure speech'" (G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, pp. 236-237). For an overview of the topics of language and speech in the biblical tradition, see P. M. Sherman *Babel's Tower*, pp. 69-77. Samuel Morris Brown has written extensively about the history of the Mormon quest for a "pure language" (S. M. Brown, *In Heaven*, pp. 115-141. Regarding Babel, see especially pp. 129-131). See also J. Smith, Jr. *et al.*, *Documents, July 1831-January 1833*, pp. 214-215.

3   T. Jacobsen, Enmerkar, 147, 148, 155, 156, p. 290. Cf. S. N. Kramer, Babel of Tongues, p. 281: "Changed the speech in their mouths, [brought(?)] contention into it, Into the speech of man that (until then) had been one."

4   J. H. Walton, Genesis, p. 64.
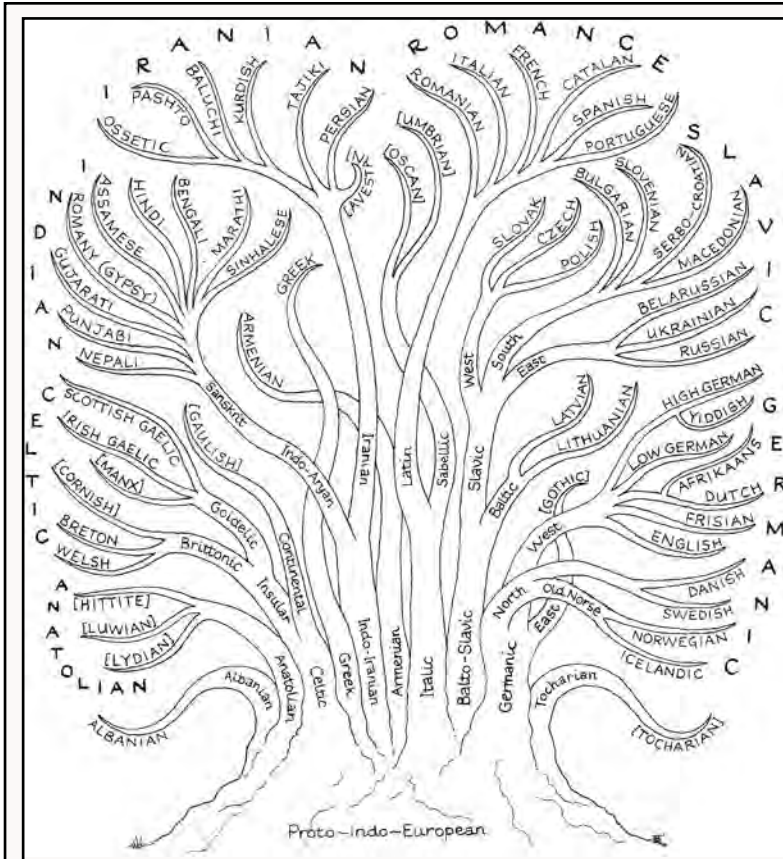
5   G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 237.

GENESIS 11

FIGURE G11-16. *Family Tree of the Indo-European Languages,* 2005
Katharine Scarfe Beckett, 1972-

"It transpires that languages did not need any divine intervention in order to proliferate, for given half a chance (and sufficient time), they multiply quite happily of their own accord. Just imagine two groups living in two neighboring villages, speaking similar varieties of one language. With the passing of time, their language undergoes constant transformations, but as long as the two communities remain in close contact, their varieties will change in tandem: innovations in one village will soon spread to the other, because of the need to communicate. Now suppose that one of the groups wanders off in search of better land, and loses all contact with the speakers of the other village. The language of the two groups will then start wandering in different directions, because there will be nothing to maintain the changes in tandem. Eventually, their varieties will have strayed so far apart that they will no longer be mutually intelligible, and so turn into different languages.

Incidentally, the decision about when to start calling such varieties different 'languages,' rather than 'dialects' of the same language, often involves factors that have little to do with the actual linguistic distance between them. An American linguist once quipped that 'a language is a dialect with an army and a navy,' and his point is illustrated by recent cases such as Serbian and Croatian, which before the break-up of the former Yugoslavia were regarded as dialects of one language, Serbo-Croatian, but afterwards were suddenly proclaimed to be different languages …

Linguistic diversity is thus a direct consequence of geographical dispersal and language's propensity to change. The biblical assertion that there was a single primordial language is not, in itself, unlikely, for it is quite possible that there was originally only one language, spoken somewhere in Eastern Africa, perhaps 100,000 years ago. But even if this were the case, the break-up of this language must have had much more prosaic reasons than God's wrath at Babel. When different groups started splitting up, going their own ways and settling across the globe, their languages changed in different ways. So the huge diversity of languages in the world today simply reflects how long languages have had to change independently of one another."[1]

1   G. Deutscher, *Unfolding*, pp. 55-56.

the world"[121] — or, perhaps more accurately, throughout the land.[122] "Strictly speaking, the biblical text does not refer to a plurality of languages but to the 'destruction of language as an instrument of communication.'"[123]

In summary, we agree with Hamilton[124] that it "is unlikely that Genesis 11:1-9 can contribute much, if anything, to the origin of languages … [T]he diversification of languages is a slow process, not something catastrophic as Genesis 11 might indicate."[125] The commonly received interpretation of Genesis 11 provides "a most incredible and naïve explanation of language diversification. If, however, the narrative refers to the dissolution of a Babylonian lingua franca, or something like that, the need to see Genesis 11:1-9 as a highly imaginative explanation of language diffusion becomes unnecessary."

121   V. P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, p. 350. See *Endnote G11-19,* p. 438.
122   See GLEANINGS The Whole Earth?, p. 428.
123   A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 66, citing Paul Ricoeur.
124   V. P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, p. 358.
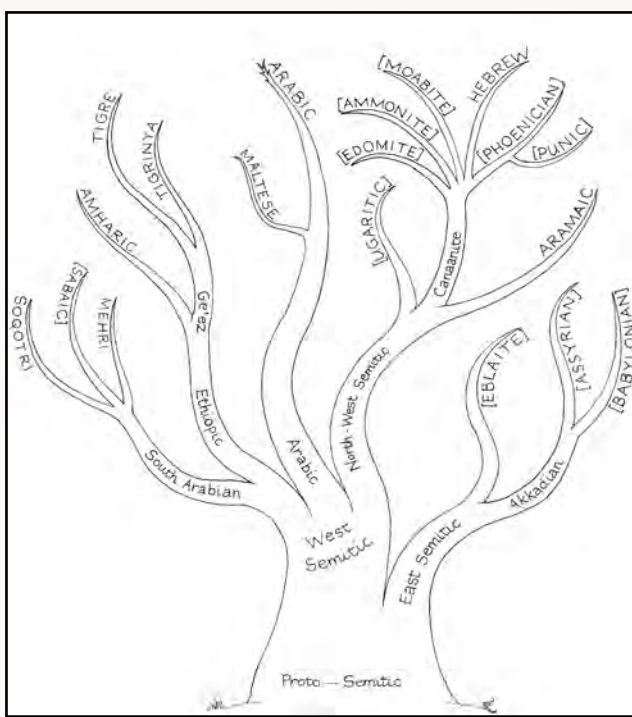125   See *Endnote G11-20,* p. 438.

FIGURE G11-17. *Family Tree of the Semitic Languages*, 2005
Katharine Scarfe Beckett, 1972-

"The [Semitic] language family is named after Noah's second son, Shem, [because] many of the peoples named as the descendants of Shem in Genesis 10:21-31 spoke languages of this family, notably Hebrew (coming via Arphaxad), Assur, and Aram. But the term is not well chosen: Shem also had among his sons Elam and Lud, the patriarchs for Elamite and Lydian, which are quite unrelated languages; and Canaan (first of the Sidonians, as well as Amorites and Arwadites) and Nimrod (first of the Babylonians and Akkadians) are given as descendants of Ham, though their languages are in fact closely related to Hebrew, Assyrian, and Aramaic."[1]

"The oldest known member of the [Semitic] language family is Akkadian, which is attested from around 2500 BCE, and is thus one of the earliest written languages of all. (Only Sumerian and Ancient Egyptian can beat that record.) Akkadian was spoken in Mesopotamia, the land 'between the rivers,' the Euphrates and the Tigris, in an area roughly corresponding to today's Iraq. The name of the language derives from the city of Akkade, founded in the twenty-third century BCE as the imperial capital of the first 'world conqueror,' King Sargon. Later on, after 2000 BCE, Akkadian diverged into two main varieties, Babylonian in the south of Mesopotamia and Assyrian in the north, both of which were to become the languages of powerful empires. Speakers of Akkadian (both Babylonian and Assyrian) dominated the political and cultural horizon of the Near East up until the sixth century BCE. Their political star may have waxed and waned, but for a good part of 2,000 years, Mesopotamian emperors, from Sargon in the third millennium BCE to Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar in the first, would lay claim to the title 'King of the Universe,' ruling over the 'four corners (of the earth).' More stable than the power of the sword, however, was the cultural hegemony of Mesopotamia over the whole region. The Akkadian language shaped the dominant canon for much of the Near East in religion, the arts, science, and law, and was used as a lingua franca, the means of diplomatic correspondence. Petty governors of provincial Canaanite outposts, mighty Anatolian kings, and even Egyptian Pharaohs wrote to one another in Akkadian. Languages across the Near East also borrowed many scientific and cultural terms from Akkadian, a few of which may even be recognized by English speakers today. The Jewish expression *mazel tov* 'good luck,' for example, is based on the Hebrew word *mazal* 'luck,' which was borrowed from the Akkadian astrological term *mazzaltu* 'position (of a star)' .…

The other languages of the Semitic family are attested from a much later period. The next in line is the Canaanite branch of Semitic, which includes Hebrew and other closely related varieties such as Phoenician, Moabite, and Ammonite. Sometime in the second millennium BCE, the Canaanites developed the first ever writing system for the common man, the alphabet. (Which group among them was the first to do so is still a moot point.) Hebrew was spoken by the Judaeans and the Israelites until the last few centuries BCE, when it was displaced by Aramaic, but it survived as the religious and literary language of the Jews, and was revived in the twentieth century as the language of modern Israel. Phoenician was the language of the seafaring people of the Lebanese coastal cities Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos. The entrepreneurial spirit of the Phoenicians is responsible, among other things, for the exportation of the Canaanite alphabet to the Greeks, and for the word "Bible." (The Greeks called papyrus-paper Byblos, because that was the city from which they imported this commodity. The word then assumed the sense of "book," and thence "The Book.") The Phoenicians also founded various trading colonies in Europe and North Africa, one of which was Carthage (Kart-hadasht or "Newtown" in the Punic dialect of Phoenician).

Another sibling in the Semitic family, Aramaic, has its roots in today's Syria. During the first millennium BCE, Aramaic speakers spread across a much wider area, so that Aramaic eventually became the street-lingo in Palestine and even in Assyrian and Babylon … Varieties of Aramaic are still spoken in some towns and villages of Syria and Northern Iraq today.

Classical Arabic is attested from a much later period, and is the language of the *Qur'an* (seventh century AD). Many words in European languages, especially those to do with science, medicine, and mathematics were borrowed from Arabic. Notable examples are the words "cipher" and "zero," which through different routes both derive ultimately from the same Arabic word *tsifr*, meaning "nothing" … The word "algebra" is also a loan from the Arabic *al jabr* "the setting-together (of broken things)." With the expansion of Islam, Arabic spread from the Arabian peninsula to large parts of the Near East and North Africa, and is today spoken by around 150 million people.

Finally, on the southern tip of the Arabian peninsula, there are Semitic languages quite different from Arabic, which belong to another branch of the family. These are the South Arabian languages, one of which was spoken in the Kingdom of Saba (biblical Sheba). Speakers of South Arabian languages also emigrated to Africa by crossing the narrow straits between the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, eventually giving rise to the Semitic languages of Ethiopia, such as Amharic and Tigré."[2]

1   N. Ostler, *Empires*, p. 35 n.
2   G. Deutscher, Unfolding, pp. 178-179, 181-183.

Scattering and Gathering

Neither the Bible nor the Book of Mormon attributes the scattering of the people to the confusion of tongues. In Genesis, no explicit cause and effect is described — we are told only that "from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth."[126] Likewise, as Nibley describes:[127]

> After the brother of Jared had been assured that he and his people and their language would not be confounded, the question of whether they would be driven out of the land still remained to be answered: That was another issue, and it is obvious that the language they spoke had as little to do with driving them out of the land as it did with determining their destination.

Nibley cites Jewish accounts of the destruction of the Tower when it was toppled by wind.[128] Using historical sources, he outlines reasons for believing that such winds and accompanying drought led to sure and swift dispersion of the peoples of the land.[129] He also draws for confirmation on the descriptions of the Jaredites' journey to the New World which include phrases such as "The wind did *never cease* to blow"[130] and "the Lord God caused that there should be a *furious wind* blow upon the face of the waters; … they were *many times* buried in the depths of the sea, because of the mountain waves which broke upon them, and also the great and terrible tempests which were caused by the fierceness of the *wind.*"[131]

Was such scattering inevitable? Does the Lord oppose the concerted effort of peoples to gather and build as a matter of principle? Some commentators lean in this direction. For example, van Wolde opposes the supposition of Christian exegesis "that the people are punished for the sin of building the Tower by their dispersion over the whole earth .… If there is any question of human shortcomings or faults, then it is not a sin against God, but a shortcoming in respect of the earth, because they do not disperse over the whole earth but bunch together in one place in the east, in a valley, in a city and next to a tower."[132]

However, LaCocque[133] differs with van Wolde's thesis that God's edict for the "spreading of nations and multiplicity of languages was ideal. On the contrary, the plurality of the languages epitomizing the human dispersion in the world is also a loss of something that needs to be eventually retrieved with the advent of 'one language with identical notions,' only this time not in Babylon." While God's near-term initiative in this regard is centered in the election of Abraham, the ultimate eschatological achievement of this ideal will be the return of the city of Enoch to the earth and its uniting with a prepared people on earth who are "of one heart and one mind" — not because their speech is repetitively narrow, evincing a "severe limitation of interest on the part of the crowd,"[134] but rather because their souls embrace the expansive expressions of "righteousness."[135]

126   Genesis 11:9.
127   H. W. Nibley, *Lehi 1988*, p. 175.
128   See, e.g., J. C. VanderKam, *Book of Jubilees (2001)*, 10:26, p. 63; F. Josephus, *Antiquities* 1:4:3, p. 30; J. J. Collins, Sibylline Oracles, 3:101-103, p. 364.
129   H. W. Nibley, *Lehi 1988*, pp. 174-181; H. W. Nibley, *Approach*, pp. 331-334.
130   Ether 6:8, emphasis added.
131   Ether 6:5-6, emphasis added.
132   E. van Wolde, *Words*, pp. 102, 103.
133   A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 12.
134   See *ibid.*, p. 26.
135   Moses 7:18. See COMMENTARY Moses 7:62-65, pp. 158-162.

FIGURE G11-18. *Old Al 'Ula*, 2011.

This lonely scene comes from Old Al 'Ula, an abandoned town in Saudi Arabia. The stairs of the castle from which this photograph was taken go back 2600 years. The town once consisted of more than 800 two-story houses with lanes passing in front of them. The first story of the house was for guests and storage; the second story was for the living area. The attachment of each house to the others provided fortification against enemies. Gates that opened in the morning and closed at night protected the two narrow lanes (less than two meters wide) that penetrated the town's interior.

Closer to home, Detroit, Michigan has seen a significant outmigration of its inhabitants. "A city of 1.8 million in 1950, it is now home to 700,000 people, as well as to tens of thousands of abandoned buildings, vacant lots and unlit streets .… About 40 percent of the city's streetlights do not work … More than half of Detroit's parks have closed since 2008."[1] The causes for the city's decline are many and varied and the subject of heated debate.[2] However some see the trend in Detroit as a portent of the future for other cities in America.[3]

There are regions within the developed world that expect to witness a dramatic population decline in the coming decades as a result of low fertility rates. In one of the most striking examples, "the Japanese Health Ministry estimates the nation's total population will fall by 25% from 127.8 million in 2005, to 95.2 million by 2050." Complicating the situation, low mortality rates are expected to lead to a significantly greater proportion of older citizens: "Japan's elderly population, aged 65 or older, comprised 20% of the nation's population in June 2006, a percentage that is forecast to increase to 38% by 2055."[4]

1   M. Davey *et al.*, Billions in Debt.
2   J. E. Stiglitz, Wrong Lesson; S. G. Richter, What Really Ails.
3   C. LeDuff, Come See Detroit.
4   Aging of Japan.

Donald Parry points out the contrast between the scattering of Babylon and the gathering out of His saints in the last days:[136]

> The word "scatter[ed]" is found three times in the story of the tower.[137] Nations are scattered as the result of wickedness. The opposite of scattering is gathering, and this dispensation is the

136   D. W. Parry, *Flood*.
137   Genesis 11:4, 8–9.

era for gathering. The rebellious people … were scattered from Babel, and in our dispensation the Lord's people are to gather from Babel, or Babylon: "*Gather* … upon the land of Zion …. *Go ye out* from Babylon …. Go ye out of Babylon; gather ye out from among the nations, from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other …. *Go ye out* from among the nations, even from Babylon, from the midst of wickedness, which is spiritual Babylon."[138]

The Prophet Joseph Smith testified that "the salvation of Israel in the last days … consists in the work of the gathering."[139] "Men and angels are to be co-workers in bringing to pass this great work," said he, "and a Zion is to be prepared; even a New Jerusalem."[140] Another temple city is to be built, but this time under the direction of the true and living God:[141]

> What was the object of gathering … the people of God in any age of the world? … The main object was to build unto the Lord a house whereby He could reveal unto His people the ordinances of His house and the glories of His kingdom, and teach the people the way of salvation; for there are certain ordinances and principles that, when they are taught and practiced, must be done in a place or a house built for that purpose.
>
> It was the design of the councils of heaven before the world was, that the principles and laws of the priesthood should be predicated upon the gathering of the people in every age of the world. Jesus did everything to gather the people, and they would not be gathered, and He therefore poured out curses upon them ….
>
> It is for the same purpose that God gathers together His people in the last days, to build unto the Lord a house to prepare them for the ordinances and endowments, washings and anointings, etc.

From Shem to Abraham

The brief story of the Tower of Babel is deliberately sandwiched between two genealogies of Shem. The genealogy of Shem, given before that story, is that of the second son of Eber, Joktan.[142] The second genealogy of Shem, given after that story, is that of the first son of Eber, Peleg:[143]

> In arranging the genealogy of Shem in such a way, the author draws a dividing line through the descendants of Shem on either side of the city of Babylon. The dividing line falls between the two sons of Eber, that is, Peleg and Joktan. One line leads to the building of Babylon and the other to the family of Abraham. The author supplies a hint to this division of the line of Shem with the comment that in Peleg's day "the earth was divided."[144] As throughout the biblical text, the "earth" is a reference to the "inhabitants of the land." Thus not only is the land divided in the confusion of languages,[145] but, more fundamentally, two great lines of humanity diverge from the midst of the sons of Shem: those who seek to make a name (Hebrew *shem*) for themselves in the building of the city of Babylon[146] and those for whom God will make a name (Hebrew *shem*) in the call of Abraham.[147]

138   D&C 133:4-7, 14.
139   J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, November 1835, p. 83.
140   *Ibid.*, p. 84.
141   *Ibid.*, 11 June 1843, pp. 307-308. See also pp. 310, 312.
142   Genesis 10:26-29.
143   J. H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, p. 102. See Genesis 11:10-26.
144   Genesis 10:25.
145   Genesis 11:1.
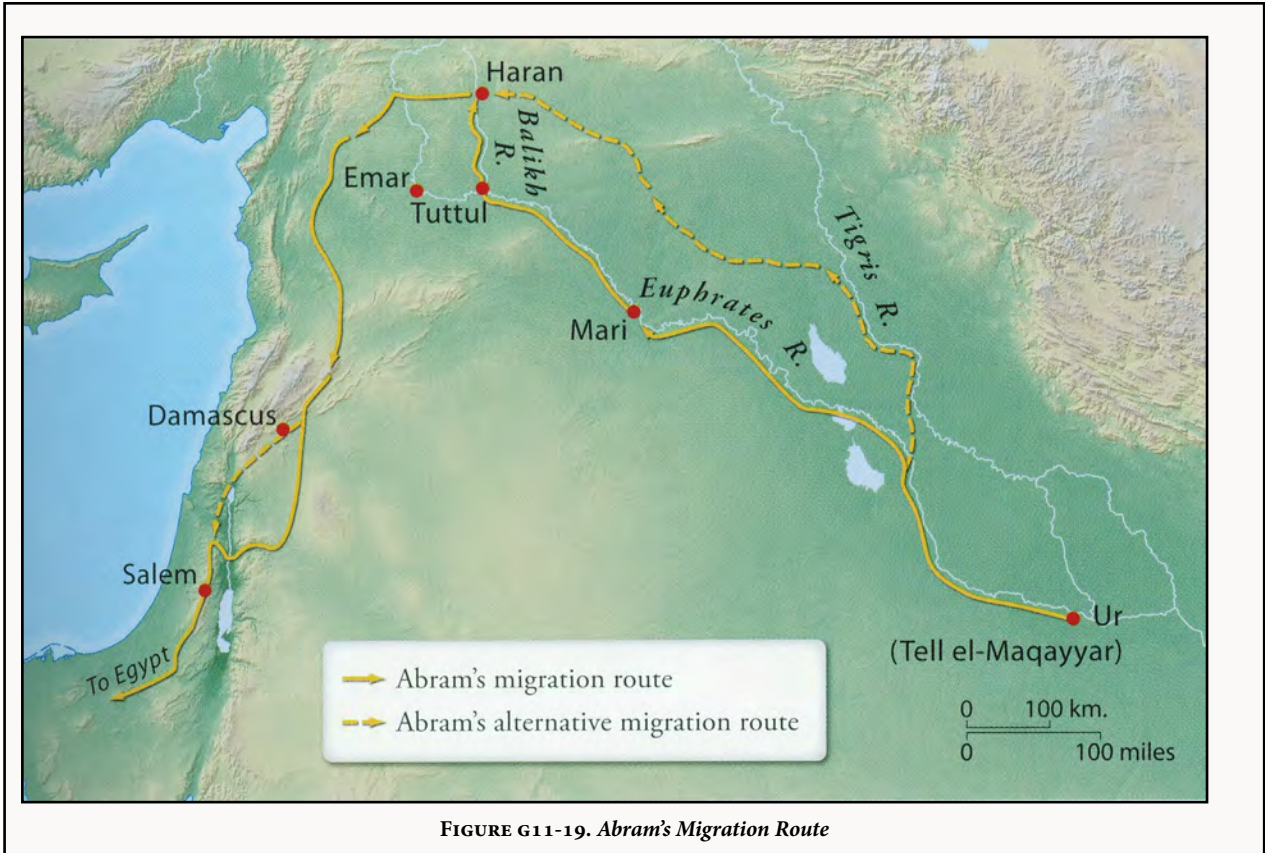146   Genesis 11:4.
147   Genesis 12:2.

FIGURE G11-19. *Abram's Migration Route*

Leon Kass comments as follows:[148]

> Shem has gained a name for himself, not by pursuing it proudly but rather for his leadership in the pious covering of his father Noah's nakedness … Shem fathers Arphachshad two years after the Flood, and is followed by a succession of sons — Shelah, Eber, Peleg, Reu, Serug, and Nahor — each of whom, because of life spans measured in centuries, is still alive when, 222 years after the Flood, Terah is born.

> It is with Terah, Abraham's father, in fact, that the lineage of Abram become interesting. Terah, mysteriously and on his own, leaves his family home in Ur of the Chaldees and sets forth, with Abram, Lot, and Sarai, to go to the land of Canaan. "Chaldees" is a biblical synonym for "Babylonians"; Ur, though not Babylon itself, was a Babylonian city, historically a center of moon-god worship, as was Haran, the city on the way to Canaan where Terah stopped. Abram will continue and complete the migration of his father, from Babylonia to Canaan, but in obedience to God's command … Abram is the rootless, homeless, godless son of a wanderer (or radical), one who has grown out of, but who has outgrown and rejected, the Babylonian ways and gods. Two more things we know about Abram: he is married to a beautiful woman, Sarai, and he is still childless at age seventy-five when God calls, for Sarai is barren.

> In his circumstances, Abram is as far as possible from the self-satisfied and secure condition of the builders of Babel: he has no gods; he has no city; he has no children; he has no settled ways; he is discontent, yet he is not despairing; he is capable of loving a beautiful woman even though she is barren. Everything else we know about Abram is speculative. He was almost certainly a man longing for roots, land, home, settled ways, children, for something great, and for the divine. About the divine, perhaps he has learned something important — albeit negatively — as a result of his experience of the Babylonian way.

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148   L. R. Kass, *Wisdom*, pp. 240-241.

"O Babylon, O Babylon, We Bid Thee Farewell"[149]

In light of the literary beauty and importance of the story of Babel, André LaCocque[150] finds it striking that:

> The tale is never again explicitly mentioned in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. The present narrative on Babel has not stirred any echo in the Hebrew Bible, in spite of its intrinsic power of evocation … Nevertheless, the astounding response that the myth of Babel has since received in a variety of literary compositions and with all forms of art for over 2500 years is itself an indication how much the [author of Genesis] and his readers share a common interest in the story of Babel and see in it a paradigm of the human condition. At the level of imagination, no translation is necessary. The readership of the tale is immediately universal and timeless.

The story of Babel has never been more relevant that it is today. The expanding global monoculture replicates with cold precision the essential conditions for human projects in the style of Babel to sprout and flourish. In light of the scattering of the Babylonians, Kass poses these penetrating questions:[151]

> Did the failure of Babel produce the cure? Has the new way succeeded? The walk that Abram took led ultimately to the biblical religion, which, by anyone's account, is a major source and strength of Western civilization. Yet, standing where we stand, at the start of the twenty-first century (more than thirty-seven hundred years later), it is far from clear that the proliferation of opposing nations is a boon to the race. Mankind as a whole is not obviously more reverent, just, and thoughtful. And internally, the West often seems tired; we appear to have lost our striving for what is highest. God has not spoken to us [speaking of Western civilization collectively] in a long time.

> The causes of our malaise are numerous and complicated, but one of them is too frequently overlooked: the project of Babel has been making a comeback. Ever since the beginning of the seventeenth century, when men like Bacon and Descartes called mankind to the conquest of nature for the relief of man's estate, the cosmopolitan dream of the city of man has guided many of the best minds and hearts throughout the world. Science and technology are again in the ascendancy, defying political boundaries en route to a projected human imperium over nature. God, it seems, forgot about the possibility that a new universal language could emerge, the language of symbolic mathematics, and its offspring, mathematical physics. It is algebra that all men understand without disagreement. It is Cartesian analytic geometry that enables the mind mentally to homogenize the entire world, to turn it into stuff for our manipulations. It is the language of Cartesian mathematics and method that has brought Babel back from oblivion. Whether we think of the heavenly city of the *philosophes* or the post-historical age toward which Marxism points, or, more concretely, the imposing building of the United Nations that stands today in America's first city; whether we look at the [Internet], or the globalized economy, or the biomedical project to re-create human nature without its imperfections; whether we confront the spread of the post-modern claim that all truth is human creation — we see everywhere evidence of the revived Babylonian vision.

> Can our new Babel succeed? And can it escape — has it escaped? — the failings of success of its ancient prototype? What, for example, will it revere? Will its makers and its beneficiaries be hospitable to procreation and child rearing? Can it find genuine principles of justice and other non-artificial standards for human conduct? Will it be self-critical? Can it really overcome our estrangement, alienation, and despair? Anyone who reads the newspapers has grave reasons for doubt. The city is back, and so, too, is Sodom, babbling and dissipating away. Perhaps we ought to see the dream of Babel today, once again, from God's point of view. Perhaps we should pay attention to the plan He adopted as the alternative to Babel. We are ready to take a walk with Abram.

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149   *Hymns (1985)*, Ye Elders of Israel, #319.
150   A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 1.
151   L. R. Kass, *Wisdom*, pp. 242-243.

FIGURE G11-20. *Babel Revisited,* 2004
Julee Holcombe, 1972-

Paying homage to the 1563 work by Pieter Bruegel the Elder,[1] Julee Holcombe's Tower of Babel is "built of collaged digital images of various buildings from crumbling cheap housing to neo-classical palaces and topped by skyscrapers reaching for the heavens." According to the artist: "*Babel Revisited* takes an allegorical gaze at history and modernity and how human beings, like nature, are doomed to the continual repetition of what has gone before."[2] André LaCocque concludes that the author of Genesis 11 "wants his readers to realize that, among other things, they participate in Babel's building. 'Babel' then becomes the symbol of all of our constructions and fabrications, with their inexorable outcome: confusion (of our life messages) and scattering (of all the pieces of our projects)."[3]

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1   See FIGURE G11-2, p. 380.
2   Julee Holcombe.
3   A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 21.

Genesis 11: Text and Commentary

CHAPTER 11

MEN ATTEMPT TO BUILD (PP. 411-416)

AND ᵃthe whole earth was of ᵇ,ᶜone language, and of ᵈone speech.

2 ᵃAnd it came to pass, ᵇas ᶜthey journeyed ᵈfrom the east, that ᵉthey found a ᶠplain in the ᵍland of ʰShinar; and they dwelt there.

3 And ᵃthey said one to another, ᵇ,ᶜGo to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly. And ᵈthey had brick for stone, and ᵉslime had they for mortar.

4 And they said, ᵃGo to, let us build us a city and a tower, ᵇwhose top may reach unto heaven; and ᶜlet us make us a name, ᵈ,ᵉlest we be ᶠscattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

THE LORD SCATTERS (PP. 416-420)

5 And ᵃthe Lord came down ᵇto see the city and the tower, which the ᶜchildren of men builded.

6 And the Lord said, ᵃ,ᵇBehold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and ᶜthis they begin to do: and ᵈnow nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

7 ᵃ, ᵇGo to, ᶜlet us go down, and there ᵈconfound their language, ᵉthat they may not understand one another's speech.

8 ᵃSo ᵇthe Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

9 ᵃ,ᵇTherefore is the name of it ᶜcalled ᵈBabel; because ᵉthe Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

GENERATIONS OF THE SHEMITES (PP. 420-423)

10 ¶ ᵃThese are the generations of ᵇShem: ᶜShem was an hundred years old, and begat ᵈArphaxad ᵉtwo years after the flood:

11 And Shem lived after he begat Arphaxad five hundred years, and begat sons and daughters.

12 And Arphaxad lived five and thirty years, and begat ᵃSalah:

13 And Arphaxad lived after he begat Salah four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters.

14 And Salah lived thirty years, and begat ᵃEber:

15 And Salah lived after he begat Eber four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters.

16 And Eber lived four and thirty years, and begat ᵃPeleg:

17 And Eber lived after he begat Peleg four hundred and thirty years, and begat sons and daughters.

18 And Peleg lived thirty years, and begat ᵃReu:

19 And Peleg lived after he begat Reu two hundred and nine years, and begat sons and daughters.

20 And Reu lived two and thirty years, and begat ᵃSerug:

21 And Reu lived after he begat Serug two hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters.

22 And Serug lived thirty years, and begat ᵃNahor:

23 And Serug lived after he begat Nahor two hundred years, and begat sons and daughters.

24 And Nahor lived nine and twenty years, and begat ᵃTerah:

25 And Nahor lived after he begat Terah an hundred and nineteen years, and begat sons and daughters.

26 And ᵃTerah lived seventy years, and begat ᵇAbram, ᶜNahor, and ᵈHaran.

TERAH AND HIS FAMILY (PP. 424-426)

27 ¶ Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat ᵃLot.

28 And ᵃHaran died before ᵇhis father Terah in the land of his nativity, in ᶜUr of the Chaldees.

29 And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was ᵃSarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, ᵇMilcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah.

30 But Sarai was ᵃ,ᵇbarren; she had no child.

31 And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and ᵃthey came unto ᵇHaran, and dwelt there.

32 And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and ᵃTerah died in Haran.

*1 And **the whole earth** was of **one language, and of one speech**.*

1   **a**   ***the whole earth.*** Does this phrase necessarily imply that the same language was being spoken by every person on the globe? Nibley points out that the Hebrew word *eretz* can mean either "earth" or "land," and it is impossible to know which except from context.[1] It is possible that Book of Mormon is taking a more limited view of the events than Genesis when it refers to the protagonists of the story simply as "the people."[2]

From a different perspective, Kass observes:[3] "Unlike the previous chapter's account of the differentiation of peoples, the text accentuates the unity [to the point of] exaggeration, identifying all mankind as 'all the earth.' The project that human beings are about to undertake is not the work only of Nimrod and the line of Ham, it is the universal human project. This is the first clue that Babel is not just any city but is *the* city, the paradigmatic or universal city, representing a certain universal human aspiration."

   b   ***one language, and of one speech.*** The JST gives this as: "of *the same* language, and of *the same* speech."[4] Ronald Hendel gives this as "one language and the same words."[5]

The chief challenge of commentary for this verse is to explain why it was necessary to repeat seemingly similar phrases: "one language" and "one speech."[6] See Phillip Sherman[7] for a broad survey of the reception and interpretation of the account of the Tower of Babel within Second Temple and Early Rabbinic texts in light of its many textual ambiguities and difficulties. Sherman also gives an overview of controversies in modern commentary.

   c   ***one language.*** Literally "one lip" (Hebrew *safah 'echat*). If we take the "one language" of Genesis 11:1 as being Sumerian, Akkadian, or even Aramaic rather than a supposed universal proto-language, some of the puzzling aspects of the biblical account become more intelligible. For example, "Genesis 10 and 11 would make linguistic sense in their current sequence. In addition to the local languages of each nation,[8] there existed 'one language'[9] which made communication possible throughout the world."[10] "Strictly speaking, the biblical text does not refer to a plurality of languages but to the 'destruction of language as an instrument of communication.'"[11]

In summary, we agree with Hamilton[12] that it "is unlikely that Genesis 11:1-9 can contribute much, if anything, to the origin of languages … [T]he diversification of languages is a slow process, not something catastrophic as Genesis 11 might indicate."[13] The commonly received interpretation of Genesis 11 provides "a most incredible and naïve explanation of language diversification. If, however, the narrative refers to the dissolution of a Babylonian lingua franca, or something like that, the need to see Genesis 11:1-9 as a highly imaginative explanation of language diffusion becomes unnecessary.[14]

   d   ***one speech.*** Literally "one [set of] words" (Hebrew *devarim achadim*, using a rare plural form of "one"[15]). Zlotowitz reads this as "of common purpose."[16] "The *Midrash* interprets *achadim* ("one") in its Aramaic meaning of 'closed,' and comments: 'That means… veiled deeds, for

1   H. W. Nibley, *Lehi 1988*, p. 172. See GLEANINGS The Whole Earth?, p. 428.
2   Ether 1:33.
3   L. R. Kass, *Wisdom*, pp. 222-223.
4   S. H. Faulring *et al., Original Manuscripts*, pp. 120, 634.
5   In H. W. Attridge *et al., HarperCollins Study Bible*, Genesis 11:1, p. 19.
6   See COMMENTARY Genesis 11:1-c, d, p. 411.
7   P. M. Sherman, *Babel's Tower*.
8   Genesis 10:5, 20, 31.
9   Genesis 11:1, 6.
10   V. P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, p. 350. See *Endnote G11-19,* p. 438.
11   A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 66, citing Paul Ricoeur.
12   V. P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, p. 358.
13   See *Endnote G11-20,* p. 438.
14   For more on this topic, see OVERVIEW Genesis 11, p. 398.
15   G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 238.
16   M. Zlotowitz *et al., Bereishis*, 1:333-334.

*1 And the whole earth was of one language, and of **one speech**.*

*2 **And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east**, that **they found a plain** in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.*

the deeds of the generation of the Flood are explicitly stated, while those of the Dispersion are veiled."[17]

LaCocque translates the phrase as "with a few subjects/utterances" and takes it "as an indication of the severe limitation of interest on the part of the crowd. The subject of their discourse was narrow; they all were talking of identical things. Rashi understands, 'one plan, a common counsel" ... André Wénin goes in the same direction. He writes that humanity uttered *'le même discourse ... des paroles identiques ... une pensée unique'* [the same discourse ... identical words ... a single thought]. He stresses the repetitiveness of their sayings, 'to brick bricks, to flame in the flame.'[18] They speak to no one else but themselves. Their 'we' is autistic. (When God duplicates the human 'we' in v. 7, whatever is conveyed here by the plural form indicates a *communication* with someone else ...)." The situation can be compared to the Newspeak language described in George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: "[T]he Newspeak vocabulary was tiny ... Each reduction was a gain, since the smaller the area of choice, the smaller the temptation to take thought."[19]

2   a   *And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east.* In the JST, we read: "And it came to pass *that many journeyed from the east*, and as they journeyed from the east."[20]

    b   *as they journeyed.* LaCocque, following Fokkelman, observes that "the people arrive 'there' 'more or less accidentally' as indicated by the verb *nasa'* ('to journey') 'typical of nomadic mobility.'"[21]

    c   *they.* The narrative is unusual in that it "begins with a subject that is neither introduced nor described in more detail than 'they.' The reference is undoubtedly to 'the people.' But it is striking that they are not presented with a personal name or a collective name but with an undifferentiated 'third person plural.'"[22] "They are only once identified by a generic name *benei 'adam*, which allows [the narrator] to make an alliteration with *banu* ('they built')."[23] The people seeking to make themselves a name are, appropriately at this point, nameless.

    d   *from the east.* Hebrew *miqqedem*. Normally this is translated "in (or from) the east" but it can be read equally well as "in the beginning."[24] The most plausible reading in a larger context, however, is "eastward," that is toward Mesopotamia from an orientation point in the west.[25] Throughout the first half of Genesis, "eastward movement is repeatedly associated with increasing distance from God."[26] Whereas "Abraham's subsequent "return from the east is [a] return to the Promised Land and ... the city of 'Salem'"[27] being "directed toward blessing."[28]

    e   *they found a plain.* The Hebrew verb "implies that they came upon what they were seeking."[29]

17   M. Zlotowitz *et al., Bereishis,* p. 334.
18   See COMMENTARY Genesis 11:3-b, p. 413.
19   Cited A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 43.
20   S. H. Faulring *et al., Original Manuscripts*, pp. 120, 634.
21   A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 28.
22   E. van Wolde, *Words*, p. 96.
23   A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 41.
24   N. Wyatt, *Space*, p. 179.
25   U. Cassuto, *Noah to Abraham*, p. 240; A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 27.
26   J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Likeness 1*, COMMENTARY 3:8-b, p. 161. Cf. A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 44: "[H]umanity is going eastward, prolonging the initial migration since the exit from Eden ... Their settlement in the east is already in and of itself a token of their rebellion against God."
27   J. H. Sailhamer, Genesis, p. 59. See Genesis 14:17-20.
28   T. L. Brodie, *Dialogue*, p. 117.
29   M. Zlotowitz *et al., Bereishis*, 1:335.

*2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a **plain** in the **land of Shinar**; and they dwelt there.*

*3 And **they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly**. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.*

f **plain.** "Ironically, the action occurs in a valley.[30] (settling in a valley contrasts with erecting a huge tower that will compensate for the absence of mountains in Mesopotamia) … In ancient Israel, valleys are seen with a certain suspicion.[31] God's locales of predilection for his epiphanies are mountains: Sinai, Horeb, Nebo,[32] and Zion. Nothing good is expected to happen in a valley.[33] The Israelite aversion to valleys explains the Aramaeans' taunt that yhwh is a God of mountains, not a god of the valleys."[34]

g **land of Shinar.** I.e., "southern Mesopotamia or Babylonia, the ancient land of Sumer."[35]

h **Shinar.** See Genesis 10:10; 14:1, 9; Joshua 7:21; Isaiah 11:11; Zechariah 5:11. "Significant is the text of Daniel 1:2, where 'Shinar' is used in a clearly disparaging way; the context comments about 'the treasury house of his [Nebuchadnezzar's] gods' and again associates Babylon with an idolatrous shrine."[36]

3 **a** **they said one to another.** "As the story more than hinted from the start, the project for building the city depends on human speech."[37]

b **Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly.** "The placement of construction material before discussion of building projects is not entirely out of keeping with what is known of literary reportage of building practices in the ancient Near East."[38] Thus, in *Enuma Elish*, bricks were molded for a whole year before the process of construction began.[39]

"The repetition of a small number of words reinforces the idea that there is a "severe limitation of interest on the part of the crowd."[40] In an effort to reproduce the Hebrew more literally, LaCocque[41] gives this as: "Come! Let us brick bricks (Hebrew *nilbena leveniym*) that we'll flame in the flame."[42] Each brick is to "become wholly transformed into a burnt object."[43] Wenham notes that "the Hebrew words for 'make bricks,' 'for stone,' and 'build for ourselves' contain the consonants *n*, *b*, *l*, which spell "mix up" (v. 7) or 'Babel' (v. 9) and evoke the word 'folly' (Hebrew *nebalah*)."[44]

Rabbinic commentary remarks on the inversion of values that accompanied the work of building: "If someone fell to their death, they paid no attention, but if a single brick fell they sat down and wept, saying: 'Woe unto us! How long will it take now for us to get a replacement?'"[45]

c **Go to.** Kass comments:[46] "[S]peech is here used by human beings to exhort to action and to enunciate a project of *making*, for the first time in Genesis. 'Come' (or 'go to'; Hebrew *havah*)

30 Hebrew *bia'a* is often rendered in English as "valley" (U. Cassuto, *Noah to Abraham*, p. 240).
31 See, for example, the plains of Moab in Numbers 22; Sheol evidently is underground and is foreshadowed by the Hinnom valley in Jerusalem.
32 Set in opposition to the plains of Moab, says Deuteronomy 34:1.
33 Cf. the valley of death (Psalm 23:4).
34 A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 27. See 1 Kings 20:28, the word here is *'amaqim*.
35 H. W. Attridge *et al., HarperCollins Study Bible*, p. 19 n. 11:2. See commentary Genesis 10:10-f, p. 363.
36 A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 28.
37 L. R. Kass, *Wisdom*, p. 225.
38 P. M. Sherman, *Babel's Tower*, p. 27.
39 See overview Genesis 11, p. 382.
40 A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 26.
41 *Ibid.*, Genesis 11:3, p. 25.
42 Similarly, others (e.g., U. Cassuto, *Noah to Abraham,* p. 241; L. R. Kass, *Wisdom*, p. 218) give this as "burn them to a burning" (Hebrew *venisrfah lisrefah*).
43 U. Cassuto, *Noah to Abraham*, p. 241.
44 G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 239.
45 M.-A. Ouaknin *et al., Rabbi Éliézer*, 24, p. 146.
46 L. R. Kass, *Wisdom*, p. 225.

*3 And they said one to another, **Go to,** let us make brick, and burn them throughly. And **they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar**.*

*4 And they said, **Go to**, let us build us a city and a tower, **whose top may reach unto heaven**; and **let us make us a name**, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.*

means 'prepare yourself,' 'get ready to join in our mutual plan.' Each man thus roused his neighbor to the joint venture: 'Let us *make.*' Hortatory speech is the herald of craft. And craft enables man to play creator: God, too had said, 'Let us make.'"[47] Kass further notes:[48] "The verb used [in the story of Creation] is *'asah*, 'to do or make,' while the verb used here by the men of Babel is *banah*, 'to build or make,' the same verb used in the second creation story when the Lord God builds woman from the rib of man. The Babel builders will use the verb *'asah* in the sequel, 'Let us make for ourselves a name.'"

d　***they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.*** The point of this little excursus is to explain Babylonian construction techniques in contrast to Israelite practice, driven as they were by the rarity of stone. Cassuto hears mockery in the expression, namely: "the poor creatures did not even have hard stone for building such as we have in the land of Israel, and which we bind together with mortar!"[49] It is also easy to hear echoes of the contrast between Mesopotamian structures built upon the river flood plains and Israelite structures built on rocky elevations within Jesus' parable of the foolish man and the wise man.[50]

Reproducing the sound-play of the Hebrew words (*levena … le-aven, hemer … la-homer*), Fox gives this translation: "So for them brick-stone was like building-stone, and raw-bitumen was for them like red-mortar."[51] "The accent is on the artificiality of the enterprise: counterfeited materials to build the sham mountain that the ziggurat imitated. This purely *human* production parallels the Hebrew slavery in Egypt, according to Exodus 1:14 (where incidentally the words 'bricks' and "mortar' are found). So even the term 'brick' in Genesis 11 is loaded with bad memories in Israel."[52] According to Exodus 20:25 and Joshua 8:31, the use of iron tools to build an altar (as opposed to uncut stone) would "pollute" the altar.[53]

e　**slime.** "Asphalt, used for making cement."[54]

4　**a**　***Go to.*** The JST reads: "*Come*, go to."[55]

　　b　***whose top may reach unto heaven.*** The JST softens this expression: "whose top *will be high, nigh* unto heaven."[56] "To be stressed is the ludicrous paradox of building such a column in a valley or a depression."[57] The idea that the top of the Tower reaches to the heavens, along with the idea that "the Lord came down"[58] "gives textual confirmation that the tower is a ziggurat. This would have been transparent to the ancient reader."[59]

　　c　***let us make us a name.*** Notes van Wolde:[60] "The unity of language[61] evidently leads to a desire for a single spot, *sham*,[62] and to a desire for a single name, *shem*.[63] The one place is

47　Genesis 1:26: "Let us make man in our image."
48　L. R. Kass, *Wisdom*, p. 225.
49　U. Cassuto, *Noah to Abraham*, p. 241.
50　Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 6:47-49.
51　E. Fox, Books of Moses, p. 48.
52　A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 29. See also P. M. Sherman, *Babel's Tower*, pp. 58-60.
53　See A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 29.
54　E. Fox, Books of Moses, p. 48.
55　S. H. Faulring *et al.*, *Original Manuscripts*, pp. 120, 634.
56　*Ibid*., pp. 120, 634.
57　A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 30.
58　Genesis 11:5.
59　J. H. Walton, Genesis, p. 63.
60　E. van Wolde, Facing the Earth.
61　Genesis 11:1.
62　Genesis 11:2.
63　Genesis 11:4.

*4 And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and **let us make us a name***, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.*

actually represented by the one name: *sham* stands for *shem*. In response to this striving for one place and one name, God goes into action and set himself in motion."

To "make a name" for oneself means to achieve fame and renown. The phrase "men of renown" in Genesis 6:4 and Moses 8:21 literally means "people of name."[64] These verses link to Nimrod[65] by their common reference to "mighty man/men" (Hebrew *gibbor/gibborim).* "The desire for a name anticipates God's promise of a great name to Abraham,[66] who serves as a counterpoint to the men of Babel."[67] Of course, "Abraham does not make a name for himself."[68] Though the KJV of 2 Samuel 8:13 ("David gat him a name") can be seen as a positive parallel to Genesis 11:4, LaCocque points out that it is "stronger in the English translation … than in the Hebrew text. The latter does not say that David wanted to make a name for himself (intention) but that his fame spread (result). The difference is substantive."[69] John T. Strong argues that the effort of the Babelians to make a name for themselves amounts to "defacing the image of God … scratching off the name of God and replacing it with their own name."[70]

Because the Babel story is set in the explicit context of the construction of a temple city, we should not neglect the possibility that the desire of the builders to make a name for themselves has its roots in temple ritual. The importance of naming as it relates to Mesopotamian rites of investiture and Israelite temple ritual is well known.[71]

Hess notes additional parallels in the ancient Near East:[72]

> The matter of "making a name" has an interesting parallel in the Mesopotamian myth known as the *Gilgamesh Epic*, which is associated with Genesis 1-11 for other reasons … In the story itself Gilgamesh seeks to make a name by finding immortality, which he fails to do. In the prologue and epilogue to the story,[73] Machinist[74] observes that his "name" is made through the city wall, which the reader is invited to admire (though this itself may point to the foundation text that is normally placed underneath the wall of a new structure). Both immortality and the construction of a large structure suggest parallels with the Tower of Babel.

Exploring additional Near East parallels, Sarna associates "name" with "monument":[75] "The royal name and titles were inscribed on bricks and cylinder seals that were deposited in the foundations of the ziggurats. Thus, a temple of Gudea of Lagash records that 'on account off the great name he made for himself, he was received among the gods into their assembly.' Nebuchadnezzar, who restored the ziggurat at Babylon, records in a commemorative inscription: 'The fortifications of Esagila and Babylon I strengthened, and made an everlasting name for my reign.'"[76]

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64   See COMMENTARY Moses 8:21-f, p. 230.
65   Genesis 10:8.
66   Genesis 12:2.
67   H. W. Attridge *et al., HarperCollins Study Bible*, p. 19 n. 11:4.
68   A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 31.
69   *Ibid.*, p. 32.
70   Cited in *ibid.,* p. 45.
71   See OVERVIEW Genesis 11, p. 390.
72   R. S. Hess, *Israelite Religions*, p. 178 n. 24.
73   A. George, *Gilgamesh*, 1:18-21, p. 2, 11:323-326, p. 99.
74   Cf. L. R. Kass, *Wisdom*, p. 228.
75   Cf. Isaiah 56:5.
76   N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 83.

*4 And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, **lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth**.*

*5 And **the Lord came down to see** the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.*

4   d   ***lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.*** "Both city and Tower will be instrumental in keeping the people in a compact block like a beehive. They will all live in a city, Babel, and the Tower will serve as an umbilicus, pumping life from heaven."[77]

"As a sequel to the present verse focusing so strongly on discourse, the tale will soon feature a contrasting and heavy silence from the Babelians … Construction has become a substitute for speech … Even when the work … is interrupted and the workers dispersed, not one word is uttered — not in surprise, protest, anger, or sorrow. It is a silence that speaks volumes: after the sacred silence of the ritual comes the sullen silence of emptiness."[78] LaCocque compares this silence to the speechless actions of Adam and Eve in making their aprons after the transgression.[79]

e   ***lest we be scattered.*** The following reading is implied: "lest we be scattered *again*." "This revealing motivation is to be read against the background of Genesis 11:2. There the crowd is changing its collective identity from nomadism to sedentary life … The Babel story starts with dispersion and ends with dispersion."[80] "[W]hat man did his utmost to prevent, he is condemned to suffer by the decree of heaven."[81]

Nolan Fewell here evokes "the city of Zion that the returnees [from exile] build — with a city wall and a temple, so as not to be scattered from their center … They too gather 'as one man'[82] — and, according to her, part of the outcome is as deplorable as was Babel, the antitype."[83]

f   ***scattered.*** The Hebrew verb used here for "scattered" (*puts*) "always conveys a negative sense … [I]t denotes the loss of identity … [I]t has to do with the dissolution of Babylon itself by means of the same weapon (the scattering over the whole earth) used by Babylon at the time of the destruction of Judah and especially of Jerusalem."[84] The ruin implied is absolute; *naphas*, a cognate of *puts*, is used elsewhere to mean "shatter"[85] and "pulverize."[86]

5   a   ***the Lord came down to see.*** The JST reads "the Lord came down, *beholding*."[87]

b   ***to see.*** Sarna notes: "This figurative usage implies no limitation on God's omnipotence, for the divine 'descent' presupposes prior knowledge of human affairs from on high."[88] LaCocque further observes that the term "conveys a deeper sense than just simple anthropomorphism" — God's sight is not a mere physical phenomenon but rather the means by which the secrets of the human heart will be revealed: "With God's vision of things, we expect the unveiling of the veritable Babelian purpose in building city and tower. Here God's vision is of the same quality as in Genesis 7:1 where it is said that God 'saw' that Noah was just, or in Exodus 2:25, where God is said to have seen the people's misery."[89]

77   A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 53.
78   *Ibid.*, p. 41.
79   See J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, COMMENTARY Moses 4:13-a, p. 258.
80   A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 52.
81   G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 240.
82   Ezra 3:1.
83   A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 62.
84   J. Severino Croatto, cited in *ibid.*, p. 32.
85   Jeremiah 13:14; 48:12; Psalm 2:9; 137:9.
86   Isaiah 27:9; Jeremiah 51:20-23. See A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 33.
87   S. H. Faulring *et al., Original Manuscripts*, pp. 120, 634.
88   N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 83.
89   A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 34.

*5 And the Lord came down **to see** the city and the tower, which **the children of men** builded.*

*6 And the Lord said, **Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do**: and **now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do**.*

Ironically, God "sees" but the people do not. As in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah,[90] there is no theophany. The people "do see one another, but what they see and hear alienates them from one another."[91]

c   *the children of men.* Or "the children of Adam." Sarna sees here a "satirical note" in the use of "a phrase heavily charged with the consciousness of man's earthly origin, his mortality and frailty."[92] Unlike the temple building project at Babylon depicted in *Enuma Elish*,[93] the construction crew is staffed by ordinary men — not gods.

Kass further observes:[94] "The term 'children of Adam' assimilates the meaning of the project of Babel to the first activities of the first man: not only his naming of the animals, but his project of appropriating autonomous knowledge of good and bad … [I]n Adam's individual case, autonomy — choosing for yourself — is the opposite of obedience; in the builders' case, independent self-re-creation — making yourself — is the opposite of obedient dependence, in relation to God or anything else."

6   a   *Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do.* The JST reads: "Behold, the people *are the same*, and they *all* have *the same language*; and this *tower* they begin to *build*.[95]"

b   *Behold.* The Hebrew word *Hen* is used in Genesis 3:22; 4;14; 15:3; Exodus 4:1; 5:5; 8:22, etc. to introduce "a rhetorical reflection occasioned by regret or sorrow."[96]

c   *this they begin to do.* As in the reference in Genesis 10:8 to the doings of Nimrod ("he began to be a mighty one in the earth), the Hebrew verb *chalal* ("to begin") in this verse "has become decidedly negative."[97] LaCocque sees ambivalence in the meaning of the verb as used here: "this is what they have started [they have profaned] to make."[98]

d   *now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.* LaCocque sees here, correctly, an echo of God's assessment of the consequences of Adam and Eve's transgression in Moses 4:28.[99] The expression is found again only in Job 42:2, referring to God's omnipotence.[100]

LaCocque also sees here the connection of the Hebrew verb for "scatter" (*puts*) "with the widespread motif, in the Bible and in texts celebrating Hammurabi's kingship for example, or the scattering of a people or its army by enemy forces."[101] The verb for "restrained" (= to be inaccessible) in Genesis 11:6 "is then taken in the sense that this root frequently has, alluding to defensive fortifications: 'Now nothing that they propose to do can be defended against.' That is, with such a fortified city as a base for empire, no other power will be able to withstand their imperial aggression.'"[102]

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90   See Genesis 18:21.
91   A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 55.
92   N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 83.
93   See OVERVIEW Genesis 11, p. 382.
94   L. R. Kass, *Wisdom*, pp. 231-232.
95   S. H. Faulring *et al., Original Manuscripts*, pp. 120, 634.
96   A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 34.
97   *Ibid.*, p. 35.
98   *Ibid.*, p. 34. See also p. 58.
99   *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 139.
100 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
101 *Ibid.*, p. 56.
102 *Ibid.*

*6 And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and **now** nothing will be restrained from them, **which they have imagined to do.***

*7 **Go to, let us go down,** and there confound their language, **that they may not understand one another's speech**.*

e   *now.* LaCocque argues that the Hebrew term "indicates a turning point: 'and now/but now/ from now on/henceforth' … [It] is a caesura in text and in time. That is why I see v. 6 as the pivot between the two parts of the story, rather than v. 5 as several critics prefer. For in Genesis 11:6, the interjection announces the drawing of a line between the human endeavor and the divine decision to keep human history in check. True, the Babelians do not repent, but the U-turn implied in the Hebrew word for 'repentance' (*teshuvah*) is implicitly present, albeit as God's initiative."[103] "Building Babel is evil, and it augurs a very bad future with more and worse evils. It must be nipped in the bud."[104]

f   *which they have imagined to do.* LaCocque argues that "the verb is to be read with the sense of plotting or scheming."[105]

7   a   *Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language.* The JST gives this as: "*Except I, the Lord*, confound their language."[106]

b   *Go to.* Mocking the speech of the builders in Genesis 11:3-4. "As many commentators have noted, the story exhibits an intricate antithetical symmetry that embodies the idea of 'man proposes, God disposes.' The builders say, 'Come, let us bake bricks," God says, 'Come, let us go down'; they are concerned 'lest we be scattered,' and God responds by scattering them."[107]

c   *let us go down.* On the use of the plural expression "let us," see J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, commentary 2:26-a, p. 111. Cassuto notes the "apparent discrepancy between this verse, which tells us that the Lord said, 'Come, let us go down,' and the earlier statement in v. 5 that 'the Lord came down.'" He explains: "The correct way of understanding the passages is to compare [them] with similar instances where 'and said' is used not in the signification of actual speech but of thought, and not of thought preceding the action described earlier, but of reflection that took place at the same time as the action."[108]

d   *confound.* LaCocque observes that while the use of the Hebrew verb *bālal* (= to confound, to mix, to mingle) is not always negative,[109] "in texts that can really be allied with Genesis 11:7, the sense is definitely negative: Hosea 7:8 says Ephraim is confusedly mixed with nations.[110] Isaiah 64:6 presents a confession in the first-person plural in which the term means 'to be rotten' or, at least, 'to be withered.'"[111]

e   *that they may not understand one another's speech.* Or "'that they will not listen.' God will make them break all relationships." This insight is crucial. God has no need to "confound" the people — they are already thoroughly mixed-up, and that is the problem.[112] What He needs is a way to end their work, and this can be accomplished when their "one language and one speech"[113] is no longer directed single-mindedly toward their one project, and their will to cooperate evaporates.

103   A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 35.

104   *Ibid.*, p. 58.

105   *Ibid.*, p. 26.

106   S. H. Faulring *et al., Original Manuscripts*, pp. 120, 634.

107   R. Alter, *Five Books*, pp. 58-59.

108   U. Cassuto, *Noah to Abraham*, pp. 246-247.

109   E.g., mixing of ingredients for the daily sacrifice: Exodus 29:40; Leviticus 14:10; Numbers 6:15, etc.; to anoint with oil: Psalm 92:10.

110   Cf. Hosea 9:1.

111   A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 37.

112   *Ibid.*, following W. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 103.

113   Genesis 11:1.

*7 Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, **that they may not understand one another's speech**.*

*8 **So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.***

*9 **Therefore is the name of it called Babel**; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.*

In his discussion of this verse, Walter Brueggemann[114] cites another example of deliberate refusal to listen in Genesis 42:21: "They did not listen because they feared, resented, and hated. Failed speech is linked to the disappearance of trust. Not listening is related to death in a relationship. To fail to listen means to declare the other party null and void. A society which suffers failed speech, as in our text, not only cannot build towers, it cannot believe promises, cannot trust God, cannot be human. The consignment of humanity to 'not listening' subsequently becomes an indictment against Israel[115] .… Our Genesis text ends with a scattering. There is not listening."[116]

8   a   *So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.* The Jewish Masoretic text mentions only the city, not the Tower. LaCocque notes that some critics "exaggeratedly stress" the absence of the Tower, and argues that it "is simply due to a *hendiadys*[117] with the city. It is evident that the interruption of the construction of one is also the interruption of the other. The end of the narrative comes with a play on words with Babel/Babylon (not on the tower), because only the city receives a name here."[118] The Samaritan version (with the *Septuagint*) says that "they stopped to build the city and *the tower*."[119] The JST gives the following reading of this verse: "So I, the Lord, *will scatter* them abroad from thence upon *all* the face of the *land, and into* [OT2: *unto*] *every quarter* of the earth: and they *were confounded and* left off to build the city; *and they hearkened not unto the Lord*."[120]

b   *the Lord scattered them.* The Hebrew verb for "scatter" is the same as in v. 4.[121] Westermann[122] sees the motif of the confusion of language as something that was deliberately joined to the theme of the dispersion of mankind "at a later stage" in the development of our current text: "In the older form of the narrative it was: God intervenes against the building — the builders abandon their work — they are dispersed … There is no indication at all of the means God used to effect the dispersion."[123] Likewise, Westermann sees the etiological conclusion of the narrative in v. 9 that links the confusion of languages with the name Babel as being "a relatively late accretion in the growth of the narrative."[124]

9   a   *Therefore is the name of it called Babel.* "The desire of the men of Babel to 'make a name' for themselves[125] … comes to naught with anonymous infamy, but the ruined city gets a name."[126]

114   *Ibid.*, pp. 103, 104.
115   Cf. Jeremiah 5:21; 7:13; 11:10; 13:10, 11; 22:5; 29:19.
116   See *Endnote G11-21,* p. 438.
117   I.e., the expression of a single idea by two words connected with "and."
118   A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 39. Cf. U. Cassuto, *Noah to Abraham*, p. 248.
119   B. Tsedeka *et al., Israelite Samaritan*, Genesis 11:8, p. 25.
120   S. H. Faulring *et al., Original Manuscripts*, pp. 120, 634.
121   See COMMENTARY Genesis 11:4-f, p. 416.
122   C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, pp. 552-553.
123   *Ibid.*, p. 553.
124   *Ibid.*
125   See COMMENTARY Genesis 11:4-c, p. 414.
126   H. W. Attridge *et al., HarperCollins Study Bible*, p. 19 n. 11:4.

*9 Therefore is the name of it **called Babel**; because **the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth**: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.*

*10 ¶ **These are the generations of Shem**: Shem was an hundred years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood:*

9 **b** *Therefore.* Hebrew *'Al-ken* ("that is why") — this formula is typical of stories with an etiological conclusion.[127]

c *called Babel.* Rather "*He* called" — "God is the subject of the verb."[128]

d *Babel.* I.e., Babylon. The Akkadian word *bāb-ili* means "gate of the god (Marduk)." "Babylon was one of the most famous cities of antiquity, but it is mocked here as a ruined site of ancient hubris [excessive pride], transgression, and confusion."[129] A possible allusion to this imagery may be found in Jeremiah 51:53: "Though Babylon should mount up to heaven, and though she should fortify the height of her strength, yet from me shall spoilers come unto her, saith the Lord."

Fishbane[130] notes that "the very bricks (*li-be-na*) out of which the tower of human pretension is constructed are themselves symbolically deconstructed and reversed when God babbles (*nu-bi-la*) the language of 'all the earth'[131] and scatters the builders 'over all the earth.'" In an effort to capture the sound play of the Hebrew passage in English, Alter gives the following translation: "Come, let us go down and *baffle* their language …. Therefore it is called *Babel*, for there the Lord made the language of all the earth *babble*."[132] "The Hebrew *bālal*, to 'mix' or 'confuse,' represented in this translation by 'baffle' and 'babble,' is a polemic pun on the Akkadian 'Babel' … As for the phonetic kinship of babble and *bālal*, *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (1966) notes that a word like 'babble' occurs in a wide spectrum of languages from Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit to Norwegian, and prudently concludes, 'of echoic origin; probably not of continuous derivation but recoined from common experience.'"[133]

e *the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth.* The JST reads: "the Lord *was displeased with their works and* did there confound the language of all the earth."[134]

"In Genesis 12 and the vocation of Abraham, God speaks, and thus the confused language of 'all the earth' retrieves its glorious function of divine discourse. As confused monoglossia, language used to express hubris, arrogance, 'sound and fury.' Now language becomes a divine call to cooperate, and a promise of a 'name to Abraham that will be a blessing for 'all the families of the earth.'"[135]

10 **a** *These are the generations of Shem.* The position of the story of the building of Babylon falls after the tracing of the genealogical line that extends from Shem and Eber through Joktan[136] and before the record of the line from Shem and Eber through Peleg that leads to the birth of Abram.[137] "One [line] ends in Babylon, the other in the Promised Land. It is hard not to see this positioning of the account of Babylon as deliberate on the part of the author of Genesis,

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127 A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 39.
128 *Ibid.*, p. 39.
129 H. W. Attridge *et al., HarperCollins Study Bible*, p. 19 n. 11:9.
130 M. Fishbane, *Biblical Text*, p. 38.
131 Genesis 11:1.
132 R. Alter, *Five Books*, Genesis 11:7, 9, p. 59, emphasis added.
133 *Ibid.*, p. 59.
134 S. H. Faulring *et al., Original Manuscripts*, pp. 120, 634.
135 A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 141.
136 Genesis 10:22, 24, 26-29.
137 Genesis 11:10-26.

10 ¶ These are the generations of Shem: Shem was an hundred years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood:

especially in light of the continuous interplay between the name Shem (*shem*) and the quest for making 'a name' (*shem*) both in the account of the building of Babylon[138] and in the account of God's election of Abraham."[139]

By way of contrast to the connection of the story of Abraham to Shem, the story of the Tower of Babel and Sodom are linked with the sons of Ham (via Nimrod and Canaan respectively). "[I]n both instances God came down to see what was going on.[140] This comparison is made more directly in Isaiah 13:19."[141]

Alter comments:[142]

> There are ten generations from Shem to Abraham (as the universal history begins to focus down to a national history) as there are ten from Adam to Noah. In another formal symmetry, the ten antediluvian generations end with a father who begets three sons, just as this series of ten will end with Terah begetting Abram, Nahor, and Haran. This genealogy, which constitutes the bridge from the Flood to the beginning of the Patriarchal Tales, uses formulas identical with those of the antediluvian genealogy in Genesis 5, omitting the summarizing indication of life span and the report of death of each begetter. Longevity now is cut in half, and then halved again in the latter part of the list, as we approach Abram. From this point, men will have merely the extraordinary life spans of modern Caucasian mountain dwellers and not legendary life spans. The narrative in this way is preparing to enter recognizable human time and family life. There is one hidden number-game here, as the Israeli Bible scholar Moshe Weinfeld has observed: the number of years from the birth of Shem's son to Abram's migration to Canaan is exactly a solar 365.

b *Shem.* See COMMENTARY Genesis 10:21-a, b, p. 368.

c *Shem was an hundred years old.* JST OT1 is consistent with the KJV ("an hundred years old"[143]) whereas OT2 gives Shem's age as "an hundred and ten years."[144] Sarna concedes that the figure of one hundred "is approximate since Shem would now have been 102 according to the data of Genesis 5:32 and 7:6."[145] For a comparison of differences in chronologies from Adam to the Flood in the Masoretic, *Septuagint*, and Samaritan versions of Genesis, plus *Jubilees*, Josephus' *Antiquities*, and Pseudo-*Philo's Biblical Antiquities*, see Hendel.[146]

d *Arphaxad.* See COMMENTARY Genesis 10:22-d, p. 370. "Inexplicably, in Genesis 10:22 he is the third son of Shem, whereas here he seems to be the first-born."[147]

e *two years after the flood.* "This is the last mention of the Flood in Genesis. The narrative is now entering a new phase."[148]

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138   Genesis 11:4.
139   J. H. Sailhamer, Genesis, pp. 103-104. See Genesis 12:2.
140   Genesis 10:10-19; 11:7; 18:21.
141   G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, pp. 245-246.
142   R. Alter, *Five Books*, p. 60.
143   S. H. Faulring *et al.*, *Original Manuscripts*, p. 121.
144   *Ibid.*, p. 635.
145   N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 85. On the other hand, Cassuto asserts that it is an exact number, if the counting is reckoned from the end of the Deluge itself, not after the drying up of the earth (U. Cassuto, *Noah to Abraham*, pp. 260-261).
146   R. S. Hendel, *Text*, pp. 71-77. See also U. Cassuto, *Noah to Abraham*, pp. 252-268; G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, pp. 250-251; C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, pp. 559-562.
147   N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 85.
148   G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 250.

11 And Shem lived after he begat Arphaxad five hundred years, and begat sons and daughters.

*12 And Arphaxad lived five and thirty years, and begat **Salah**:*

13 And Arphaxad lived after he begat Salah four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters.

*14 And Salah lived thirty years, and begat **Eber**:*

15 And Salah lived after he begat Eber four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters.

*16 And Eber lived four and thirty years, and begat **Peleg**:*

17 And Eber lived after he begat Peleg four hundred and thirty years, and begat sons and daughters.

*18 And Peleg lived thirty years, and begat **Reu**:*

19 And Peleg lived after he begat Reu two hundred and nine years, and begat sons and daughters.

*20 And Reu lived two and thirty years, and begat **Serug**:*

21 And Reu lived after he begat Serug two hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters.

*22 And Serug lived thirty years, and begat **Nahor**:*

12   a   Salah. See commentary Genesis 10:24-a, p. 371.

14   a   Eber. See commentary Genesis 10:24-b, p. 371.

16   a   Peleg. See commentary Genesis 10:25-a, p. 371.

18   a   Reu. "Reu's name bears witness to a continued interest in religious matters in the line and, less likely, may provide an example of a geographical name."[149] "There may be a connection with the name Reuel (= Jethro), son of Esau[150] and also Moses' father-in-law.[151] Others have suggested a connection with the Ruʿu, an Aramaean tribe, mentioned in neo-Assyrian inscriptions. Or it could be a place name, Til Rahaua, like Peleg, Nahor, Serug, Terah."[152]

20   a   Serug. Wenham conjectures that it may come from a root giving it the meaning of "offshoot, descendant."[153] "The well-known city of Sarugi, not far north of Haran in the Balikh Valley, is the site of the modern village of Suruc on one of the important Near Eastern trade routes."[154]

22   a   Nahor. "Joshua 24:2 describes both the elder Nahor and his son Terah as polytheists. The Bible also alludes to the religion of the younger Nahor[155] … [In Genesis 31:53], we read how Jacob and Laban concluded their agreement by swearing by the deities representative of their ancestors; by the God of Abraham and by the god(s) (*ʾelohe*) of Nahor. Although we do not know the specific identity of these deities, we may observe the association of both Nahors with Ur and Haran, both of which held a tradition in the ancient Near East as cult centers of the lunar deity Sin.

149   R. S. Hess, *Studies*, p. 153.
150   Genesis 36:4, 10, 13.
151   Exodus 2:18.
152   G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 251.
153   *Ibid.*, p. 252.
154   N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 85.
155   See Genesis 11:26.

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*22 And Serug lived thirty years, and begat **Nahor**:*

23 And Serug lived after he begat Nahor two hundred years, and begat sons and daughters.

*24 And Nahor lived nine and twenty years, and begat **Terah**:*

25 And Nahor lived after he begat Terah an hundred and nineteen years, and begat sons and daughters.

*26 And **Terah lived seventy years**, and begat **Abram**, **Nahor**, and **Haran**.*

"Nahor is a place name in the region of Haran[156] … It fits into the broader context of Genesis insofar as the associations of the name bearer with cult centers of an important pagan deity point to the worship of a god different from that of Abram and his descendants."[157]

24 a *Terah.* Each of Terah's three sons will play some role in the story of Abraham. Writes Sarna:[158]

> Assyrian sources mention a place-name Til(sha) Turahi, situated on the Balikh River not far from Haran and Nahor.[159] The name may well be connected with *yareah*, "moon." Several members of Terah's family, as well as some of the sites connected with him, bear names that are associated with moon worship. Joshua 24:2 explicitly designates Terah as having been an idolater.

26 a *Terah lived seventy years.* "Terah begets posterity at an age at least twice that of all his forebears in the line of Shem. This fact insinuates into the text the motif of prolonged childlessness, a condition that is to be characteristic of his descendants, the patriarchs of Israel."[160]

b *Abram.* No precise parallel to the name "Abram" has been found in the ancient Near East. "It could mean 'exalted father' or 'the father is exalted,' which would then make it a variant of Abiram, Abarama, found in Akkadian texts of the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries BCE."[161] God gives Abram the new name of Abraham in Genesis 17:5.

c *Nahor.* Nahor is named after his grandfather. See COMMENTARY Genesis 11:22-a, p. 422.

d *Haran.* Hess comments:[162]

> We have no connection between the personal name Haran (*haran*) and the place name Haran (*charan*) in the biblical text. However, the name may have a geographic location in the same area as those already identified in the line of Shem; the northern Euphrates region with its river valleys, planes, and significantly its mountains. It also fits as a religious confession, something already observed with the personal names of Haran's two daughters.[163] Haran thus remains another testimony to the religious sensitivities of the family of Terah.

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156 "Cuneiform documents record both the personal name Naharum and a city Nahur. The latter is frequently mentioned and was an important site in the upper Balikh Valley, which had a West Semitic population" (N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 86).

157 R. S. Hess, *Studies*, pp. 153-154.

158 N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 86.

159 The neo-Assyrian prefix "til" indicates that the city was built on previous ruins (G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 252).

160 N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 86.

161 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

162 R. S. Hess, *Studies*, p. 154.

163 "The name seems to be derived from the element *har*, 'a mountain,' used in the sense of 'mountain-god' in some West Semitic personal names found in Egypt, such as shem-har, ya'akob-har, anat-har" (*ibid.*, p. 86).

*27 ¶ Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat **Lot**.*

*28 And **Haran died** before **his father Terah** in the land of his nativity, in **Ur of the Chaldees**.*

*29 And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was **Sarai**; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah.*

27 a *Lot.* The name "Lot" is related to a Hebrew root that signifies "wrap closely, tightly, enwrap, envelop,"[164] and has the meanings of "covering; veil; covered; concealed; myrrh."[165] The name is arguably related to the character of Lot who, in contrast to Abraham, "is quite an ambivalent figure."[166] In Brian Doyle's brilliant exegesis of Genesis 18-19, he shows that Abraham, when encountering heavenly visitors on their way to Sodom, "recognizes immediately and gains access to the divine," whereas "Lot gets off to a poor start but the 'veil' cloaking his understanding is gradually lifted as he is brought into the presence of the divine."[167] The key Hebrew term in the story (*pethach* = door) "is a point of access, a place of encounter with the divine, associated with the Tent of Meeting and the Temple."[168] The righteous are admitted through this door, whereas the wicked are excluded.[169]

28 a *Haran died.* This detail explains why Abram took Lot with him in Genesis 12:4-5.

    b *his father Terah.* JST OT1 is identical to the KJV ("his father Terah"[170]) while OT2 gives it as "his *fathers* [*sic*] Terah."[171]

    c *Ur of the Chaldees.* Hendel explains these term as follow:[172]

        As scholars have long recognized, the use of the ethnic term 'Chaldeans' to denote southern Mesopotamia can only refer to the period after the eighth century, when the Chaldeans gained political and economic power in the region. 'Chaldeans' is used as a synonym for 'Babylon' in biblical writings during the Neo-Babylonian period (late seventh-early sixth century, e.g., in Jeremiah, Second Isaiah, and the latter chapters of 2 Kings) and thereafter.

        As an alternative to concluding that this is an anachronism in our text, some scholars have associated this place name with one of the sites named "Ur" in upper Mesopotamia (e.g., Urfa (also known as Edessa), about twenty miles northwest of Haran or Ura in Hittite territory.[173] "These were possibly founded by citizens of the famous city in the south and named after it. An Upper Mesopotamian Ur would have been much closer to Haran, which is central to the patriarchal narratives."[174]

29 a *Sarai.* Sarai means "princess" in Hebrew, but "'queen' if based on Akkadian *šarratu*, a term used for the female consort of the moon-god Sin, the principal god of Ur."[175] God gives Sarai the new name of Sarah in Genesis 17:15.

164 F. Brown *et al.*, *Lexicon*, 3874, 3876, p. 53.
165 J. Cornwall *et al.*, *Exhaustive Dictionary*, p. 160.
166 Y. T. Radday, Humour in Names, p. 63.
167 B. Doyle, Knock, p. 446.
168 *Ibid.*, p. 447.
169 A similar theme is implicit in the story of Noah — see, e.g., OVERVIEW, Moses 8, p. 215; OVERVIEW Genesis 9, p. 309, echoing the ubiquitous motif of the transgression of divine boundaries that is found throughout Genesis 1-11 (INTRODUCTION, p. 4).
170 S. H. Faulring *et al.*, *Original Manuscripts*, p. 121.
171 *Ibid.*, p. 635.
172 R. S. Hendel, Historical Context, p. 61.
173 V. P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, p. 364.
174 N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 87.
175 *Ibid.*

*29 And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was **Sarai**; and the name of Nahor's wife, **Milcah**, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah.*

*30 But Sarai was **barren; she had no child**.*

*31 And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and **they came unto Haran, and dwelt there**.*

"Though the parentage of Nahor's wife is given, that of Sarai is not. This omission is so extraordinary that it must be intentional. The Narrator withholds information so as not to ruin the suspense in Genesis 20 when Abraham, in order to extricate himself from an embarrassing predicament, reveals that Sarai is his half sister."[176]

b   *Milcah.* "The name, as vocalized, is a variant form of Malcah, 'queen.' Akkadian *malkatu* is a title of the goddess Ishtar, who as known as 'Queen of Heaven,' daughter of the moon-god Sin. Nahor married his niece, the orphaned daughter of his departed brother Haran. The granddaughter of this marriage was Rebekah, who became the wife of Abraham's son Isaac, as told in Genesis 24:24, 27. This is another example of the narrative technique of introducing information into the text with an eye to later developments."[177]

30 a   *barren, she had no child.* Such doubling of expression is common in Hebrew poetry. "The notice … is an anticipatory announcement of the central problem of the Abraham narrative, which will come to the foreground in gradual stages after God's promise that Abram will be a father of a great nation in Genesis 12:2."[178] The theme recurs in the stories of Rebekah, of Rachel, and of the mothers of Samson and Samuel.[179]

b   *barren.* "Hebrew *'akarah* simply means 'childless' but not necessarily infertile."[180]

31 a   *they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.* "The reason for Terah's detour to Haran is not given, but it may have had to do with Haran as a focus of the international donkey caravan trade and with the fact that both it and Ur were centers of the moon-god cult. Of course, the problem disappears if a northern Ur is intended. We are not told why the family migrated from Ur in the first place. If Ur was the southern city, the migration could have been prompted by the gradual decline of the city and the increasingly harsh economic conditions, along with overpopulation, known to have been its lot in the course of the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 2100-1600 BCE)."[181]

b   *Haran.* In Hebrew, Haran, the city, is pronounced with a fricative "h" (*charan*), whereas the name of Abram's deceased brother is pronounced with an aspirated "h" (*haran*).[182]

Hendel writes:[183]

In the case of the biblical memory of the patriarchal homeland, we may be able to trace a chain of memory and cultural tradition that long predates the biblical text. Haran (Akkadian *Charranu*) was a strategically located site in the Upper Euphrates region of Mesopotamia and was a station along important trade routes. During the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 1800-1500 BCE), it was a central meeting place of a major confederation of

176   *Ibid.*
177   N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 87.
178   H. W. Attridge *et al.*, *HarperCollins Study Bible*, p. 20 n. 11:30.
179   N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 87.
180   *Ibid.*
181   *Ibid.*, p. 88.
182   R. Alter, *Five Books,* p. 61.
183   R. S. Hendel, Cultural Memory, pp. 40-41. See also R. S. Hendel, Historical Context, pp. 66-69.

*31 And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and **they came unto Haran, and dwelt there**.*

*32 And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and **Terah died in Haran**.*

tribes whose grazing land extended from the Haran region all the way to western Syria. This confederation was called the Yaminites (*banu-yamina*), meaning "Southerners" (literally, "sons of the right [hand]"). As Daniel Fleming observed, Haran was in the heart of the Yaminite territory and, as a prominent site with a famous temple, it was well-suited to be a tribal center.

Continuing, he asserts:[184]

These geographical details make a genetic connection between the Israelite memory of the tribal homeland and the ancient Amorite tribes a distinct possibility.

32   a   *Terah died in Haran.* "A calculation based on the data of verse 26 and Genesis 12:4 shows him to have been 145 years of age when Abram left Haran for Canaan; thus Terah lived on in Haran for another sixty years after Abraham's departure."[185]

Cassuto comments:[186] "Throughout his life, [Terah] did not find the strength to continue his journey and reach the goal that he originally had in mind under his son's influence. Although he made an effort to get away from the center of the moon-cult in Ur of the Chaldees, yet when he came to another city dedicated to this worship — to Haran — he did not succeed in freeing himself from the spell of idolatry, and stayed there. Where he halted he also died." And the legacy of Babylon, within the line of Abraham, died with him.

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184   R. S. Hendel, Historical Context, p. 67.
185   N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 88.
186   U. Cassuto, *Noah to Abraham*, p. 283.

Gleanings

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André LaCocque: Genesis 1-11 Starts with a Vacuum and Ends with a Vacuity[1]

The story of Babel concludes *J*'s[2] survey of pre-Abrahamic humanity. From the start, the humans have looked to any means to retrieve immortality. But all issues of flight from death are blocked; all escapes are circular and lead nowhere. All monuments to human prowess crumble. All social consolidations under the same flag and in the name of the same slogans drown their adherents. A common stupidity smothers them to death. *J*'s protohistory (a universal condition that forever permeates human existence) started with a vacuum[3] and ends with a vacuity.[4] Now, as Rabelais said, "Nature abhors a vacuum." It calls for and is eventually filled by the triumphant breakthrough of Genesis 12 reporting Abraham's departure and trajectory.

André LaCocque: The Order of Genesis 10 and 11 Is Purposeful[5]

The oft-repeated remark that Genesis 11:1-9 should have been set before Genesis 10 (the Table of Nations) is ill-inspired … The eventual arrangement of Genesis 11 following Genesis 10 is intentional and purposeful. The final redactor or the Pentateuch clearly wanted to end the primeval history on a negative note and introduce Abraham in Genesis 12 as the initiator of a new history, the history of promise and fulfillment .…

From highlighting the builders of Babel to focusing on the people's patriarchs and matriarchs, however, the contrast is stark. We shift from a plot psychology to a character psychology. The builders indeed remain carefully anonymous. The sole character in Genesis 11:1-9 is God Himself. But with the call of Abraham, we leave cosmology and enter history, the incipient history of a nation as projected to its ancestors, their faith, their hopes, and their actualization of a divine promise.

<div style="text-align: right">GENESIS 11</div>

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1   A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, p. 13.

2   "J" stands for "Jahwist," the presumed anonymous author of major portions of the primary history of the Old Testament according to the Documentary Hypothesis.

3   Genesis 2:5.

4   Genesis 11:8-9.

5   A. LaCocque, *Captivity of Innocence*, pp. 8, 9.

Hugh W. Nibley: The Whole Earth?[6]

[An] important biblical expression receives welcome elucidation from our text: though Ether says nothing about "the whole earth" being of "one language and one speech,"[7] he does give us an interesting hint as to how those words may be taken. Just as "son" and "descendant" are the same word in Hebrew and so may easily be confused by translators (who have no way of knowing, save from context, in which sense the word is to be understood), so "earth" and "land" are the same word, the well-known *eretz*. In view of the fact that the book of Ether, speaking only of the Jaredites, notes that "there were none of the fair sons and daughters upon the face of the whole earth who repented of their sins,"[8] it would seem that the common "whole earth" (*kol ha-aretz*) of the Old Testament need not always be taken to mean the entire globe. Certainly it is quite as legitimate to think of the days of Peleg as the time when, as the old Jewish writers describe it, "the children of Noah began to divide the earth among themselves,"[9] as, without the least authority, to visualize the drifting of the continents or the rending apart of the terrestrial globe. A reader's first reaction to an ancient and fragmentary text usually becomes a lifelong credo, though research and revelation have combined in the last days to discredit this obvious and easy solution of the mysteries. The book of Ether, like First Nephi, is, when we come to examine it, heavily weighted in the direction of sober and factual history and was never meant to be a springboard for the imagination; for example, our record does not attribute the scattering of the people, as one might innocently suppose it does, to the confusion of tongues. After the brother of Jared had been assured that he and his people and their language would not be confounded, the question of whether they would be driven out of the land still remained to be answered: That was another issue, and it is obvious that the language they spoke had as little to do with driving them out of the land as it did with determining their destination.

Brant A. Gardner: Assumptions About the Jaredite Language[10]

A more scientific understanding of the linguistic history requires the reconsideration of some popular assumptions made about the Jaredite language. For instance, Thomas R. Valletta, an Institute instructor, asserts:[11] "In the opening scenes of the book of Ether, the reader is presented with a people being driven out of a land, but promised that the Adamic language would not be taken from them." Ascribing the Adamic language to the Jaredites is based on assumptions that cannot be demonstrated conclusively even with the most generous readings.[12] First, the idea that the Jaredites spoke Adamic is predicated on the idea that there was only a single language in the entire world until about 2000 BCE. That assumption is contradicted by all of the best evidence of historical linguistics.[13] Second, seeing the Jaredite language as Adamic depends, not only on assuming that the Jaredites originally spoke Adamic but that, after Yahweh did not confound their language,[14] they

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6   H. W. Nibley, *Lehi 1988*, pp. 173-174.
7   Genesis 11:1.
8   Ether 13:17.
9   See J. C. VanderKam, *Book of Jubilees*, 8:8, p. 51.
10   B. A. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:165-166.
11   T. R. Valetta, Jared, p. 310.
12   More generally, John Robertson wisely cautions that the "concept of the Adamic language grew among Latter-day Saints out of statements from scripture, comments of early Church leaders, and subsequent tradition. It does not play a central doctrinal role, and there is no official Church position delineating its nature or status" (J. S. Robertson, Adamic Language, p. 18).
13   See B. A. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:171-176.
14   Ether 1:35.

continued to speak Adamic. The text supports only the conclusion that Jared and his group spoke a language they continued to understand. Since any group whose language changed would continue to understand themselves, how would they know that it was their own language that had changed? As long as the Jaredites spoke any language that they could all understand, they would not be confounded.

Third, for the reasons discussed above,[15] the points of resemblance between this story and the Bible's account are not an independent confirmation of the Bible, since our account is Moroni's abridgment from Mosiah's translation, not a quotation from Ether's record.[16] Moroni noted the similarity to the brass-plate text[17] on the history from Adam and declined to include it because it was so similar.[18] By the time Moroni adapted Mosiah's adaptation, we have the story as given in Genesis *because* of Genesis, not as an independent confirmation.

Ellen van Wolde: *Shem* and *Sham* in Genesis 11[19]

The story opens in Genesis 11:2 with a description of the human actions. These actions are spatially oriented: they move in the east, to the land Shinar, to a valley, so the direction of their movements becomes increasingly closely identified. Finally, they settle there, *sham*, and build a city and a tower on this spot, which indicates an even narrower focus of place. On that spot they express their ideal: by remaining in this place and according themselves a name (*shem*), they will not be dispersed over the entire earth.[20] The name and the place refer to the human beings themselves, because the earth is not given a name (*shem*), nor the place or the tower. The unity of language[21] evidently leads to a desire for a single spot, *sham*,[22] and to a desire for a single name, *shem*.[23] The one place is actually represented by the one name: *sham* stands for *shem*. In response to this striving for one place and one name, God goes into action and sets Himself in motion. He expresses His opposition in word and deed: in Genesis 11:7 He expresses his intention of confusing there language "there" (*sham*) and consequently He disperses them "from there" (*mi-sham*).[24] And the result is obvious: instead of one place (*sham*) and one name (*shem*) for the human beings, the place has received a name; "her name" is Babel. And the word (*shemah*) shows how the one language and the one place come together in that place, since in this word there is both the *a*-sound of *sham* and the *e*-sound of *shem*. In other words: while the *a*-sound dominates in *shemah*, this word is still a form of the word *shem*. The name "Babel" carries the same connotation too: it is a single name which expresses confusion, and, by implication, non-singularity.

Meir Zlotowitz: A Brick Was More Precious Than a Life[25]

Many years were spent building the Tower. The ascending steps were on the east, and the descending steps were on the west. It reached so great a height that it took a year to mount to the top. A brick was, therefore, more precious in the sight of the builders than a human being. If a man fell and died they paid no attention to him; but if a brick fell down they

15   See OVERVIEW Genesis 11, p. 398.
16   Ether 1:5.
17   Ether 1:3.
18   Ether 1:4.
19   E. van Wolde, Facing the Earth, pp. 42-43.
20   Genesis 11:4.
21   Genesis 11:1.
22   Genesis 11:2.
23   Genesis 11:4.
24   Genesis 11:8.
25   M. Zlotowitz and M. Scherman, *Bereishis*, 1:337, as culled from rabbinic sources.

wept because it would take a year to replace it. They were so intent in their project that they would not permit a pregnant woman to interrupt her work when her hour of travail came upon her.

Robert Alter: Man Proposes, God Disposes[26]

As many commentators have noted, the story exhibits an intricate antithetical symmetry that embodies the idea of 'man proposes, God disposes.' The builders say, 'Come, let us bake bricks," God says, 'Come, let us go down'; they are concerned 'lest we be scattered,' and God responds by scattering them." The story is an extreme example of the stylistic predisposition of the biblical narrative to exploit interechoing words and to work with a deliberately restricted vocabulary. The word "language" occurs five times in this brief text as does the phrase "all the earth" … The prose turns language itself into a game of mirrors.

Percy Bysshe Shelley: Ozymandias[27]

I met a traveller from an antique land
      Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
      Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
      Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
      The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
      "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
      Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
      The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Arthur Guiterman: On the Vanity of Earthly Greatness[28]

The tusks which clashed in mighty brawls
      Of mastodons, are billiard balls.

The sword of Charlemagne the Just
      Is Ferric Oxide, known as rust.

The grizzly bear, whose potent hug,
      Was feared by all, is now a rug.

Great Caesar's bust is on the shelf,
      And I don't feel so well myself.

26   R. Alter, *Five Books*, pp. 58-59.
27   P. B. Shelley, Ozymandias.
28   A. Guiterman, *Gaily*, p. 26.

Guy Deutscher: Everyone Would Always Have Spoken French[29]

Before the nineteenth century, musing about the history of languages and the relationships among them was the pastime of dilettanti, who often had rather rusty axes to grind. In 1690, for instance, a certain Père Louis Thomassin wrote in all seriousness that French and Hebrew were so close to each other that "one may truthfully say that, basically, they are no other than one and the same language." Even as late as 1765, well into the enlightened eighteenth century, the article on "language" in Diderot's respected *Encyclopédie* affirmed that French was closely related to Hebrew. The linguists of the time were thus not much more advanced than the Madame from Versailles, who was overheard by Voltaire as saying; "What a dreadful pity that the bother at the Tower of Babel should have got language all mixed up; but for that, everyone would always have spoken French."

Elder Charles A. Didier: French Is the Language of Heaven[30]

My dear brothers and sisters, I suppose that everybody knows, even if it is not yet Church doctrine, that French is the language of heaven. Yes. And if you didn't know it, I think there is still time to repent before the next conference.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf: I Have Strong Suspicions It Was German[31]

Have you ever wondered what language we all spoke when we lived in the presence of God? I have strong suspicions that it was German, though I suppose no one knows for sure. But I do know that in our premortal life we learned firsthand, from the Father of our spirits, a universal language—one that has the power to overcome emotional, physical, and spiritual barriers.

Joel S. Kaminsky: Abraham Will Undo the Earlier Curses[32]

It seems quite likely, based on the heavy use of the [Hebrew] root for "bless," employed five times in [Genesis 12:2-3], that Abraham and his descendants are the ones who will undo the earlier divine curses connected to human evil doing.[33] The use of the word "earth" at the end of Genesis 12:3 calls to mind the curses that both Adam and Cain brought upon the earth.[34] That v. 2 promises Abraham a great name may suggest that Abraham's obedience to God will succeed where those who sought to make a name for themselves by building a tower (as an assault on heaven) failed.[35] While Noah is invoked as one who will provide comfort from the curse,[36] the fact is that after the Flood God merely promises not to curse the ground again due to human misbehavior.[37] Yet Ham's behavior[38] along with the Tower of Babel incident indicate that the divine-human rift remains unhealed.

It is clear that Abraham is part of a larger divine plan which will bring blessing to the whole world …

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29   G. Deutscher, *Unfolding*, p. 101.
30   C. A. Didier, My Gratitude, p. 57.
31   D. F. Uchtdorf, Your Wonderful Journey, p. 128.
32   J. S. Kaminsky, Theology, p. 644.
33   Moses 4:23; 5:36; 8:9; Genesis 8:21; 9:25.
34   Moses 4:23; 5:36.
35   Genesis 11:1-9.
36   Moses 8:9.
37   Genesis 8:21.
38   Genesis 9:22.

Elder Spencer W. Kimball: The Confusion of Babel Is in Reverse[39]

Someone said yesterday, there never should have been a Babel. There having been a Babel, it is in reverse now. The confusion of Babel is being overcome. The Finns and the Dutch and the British, the Germans and the French and the Hollanders, the Scandinavians, Italians, Austrians all meeting under one roof! All of them heard the voice of the prophet of the Lord. Everyone of them heard his message in his own tongue. Every one of them heard the ordinances of the Gospel, the ordinances of the temple, in his own tongue. The confusion of Babel is in reverse.

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39   S. W. Kimball, Report on Europe, December 1955.

Endnotes

G11-1 Compare D. H. Oaks, Plan, p. 73, where Adam and Eve's actions are also seen as a transgression of the limits of Eden but, in contrast to Hendel, this transgression is characterized in relationship to the barrier between the Garden and mortal life, as opposed to the Garden and divine life.

G11-2 Mettinger quotes from R. A. Oden, Jr., Divine Aspirations, p. 211, making the point that it is not the Tower itself but the motives of the builders that spoil the project of Babel. Ephrem the Syrian contrasts the Tower of Babel with the true Tower given by Christ.[1]

G11-3 Alexander further comments:[2]

> While the Old Testament biblical meta-story moves to something of a peak with the construction of the Jerusalem temple during the reign of Solomon, thereafter comes a period of sustained decline, halted occasionally only by the reigns of a few righteous Davidic kings. Eventually, the accumulated failure of the kings and citizens of Jerusalem leads to the destruction of the temple and the overthrow of the city. That this should be undertaken by the Babylonians is highly ironic in light of how Genesis 11 portrays Babel as being the antithesis of God's creation blueprint.

G11-4 In the March 1842 history of the Church written for John Wentworth, the settlement of the Jaredites, "a colony that came from the Tower of Babel"[3] is mentioned, however the wording of this passage is taken directly from a previous history written by Orson Pratt.[4] In a November 1843 appeal to the Green Mountain Boys of Vermont, the readers are admonished to remember selected incidents when God overthrew the wicked in the Bible, including "the dispersion and confusion at the Tower of Babel,"[5] but this letter was drafted by William W. Phelps.[6]

G11-5 As an example, Elder Orson Pratt taught that the "one language" referred to in Genesis 11:1 "is that same language that was spoken for nearly two thousand years after the Creation; that was spoken by Adam and by his children, from generation to generation that came down to the Flood, and was taught extensively among the children of Noah until the Lord by a direct miracle caused the people to forget their own mother tongue, and gave them a variety of new tongues that they had no knowledge of, and by this means scattered them abroad upon the face of the whole earth."[7]

At the time Elder Pratt wrote this statement, the history of languages was in its infancy. He had very little formal schooling but was an avid student of philosophy, mathematics, and science in general. His lectures on these subjects were widely appreciated by the Saints living on the Utah frontier. Elder Pratt's teachings on the history of language in Genesis should not be seen as unscholarly, but rather as using the science that was available to him to inform his understanding and defense of scripture.

G11-6 For example, John Walton attempts to date various developments that were necessary precursors to the building of Babel (baked brick technology, the ziggurat, urbanization, government by ruling assembly) to the late fourth and early third millenniums BCE.[8] He also describes changes in climate and water levels that favored migration into southern Mesopotamia toward the end of the fourth millennium. In light of these findings, he argues for Eridu as a possible site for the occurrences described in Genesis 11.

Two popular alternative sites to Babylon for early modern adventurers in the Middle East were Borsippa (Birs Nimrud, i.e., "tower of Nimrod") and Dur-Kurigalzu ('Aqar Qur), but these sites were eclipsed by the discovery of Babylon's ruins.[9]

Nibley taught that the "great tower" referred to in the book of Ether was associated with Nimrod, and that the "Tower of Babel" was a later structure.[10]

1   R. Murray, *Symbols*, pp. 222-223.
2   T. D. Alexander, *From Eden*, p. 48).
3   J. Smith, Jr. *et al., Histories, 1832-1844*, p. 495; J. Smith, Jr., *Documentary History*, 1 March 1842, 4:537.
4   J. Smith, Jr. *et al., Histories, 1832-1844*, p. 531.
5   J. Smith, Jr., *Documentary History,* 29 November 1843, 6:91.
6   R. L. Bushman, *Rough Stone*, p. 512.
7   O. Pratt, 22 October 1854, p. 100.
8   J. H. Walton, *Mesopotamian Background*. See also J. H. Walton, *Ancient*, pp. 120-121; J. H. Walton, Genesis, pp. 60-65.
9   See A. George, Truth; J. E. Reade, Search.
10 H. W. Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, 1:345. Cf. H. W. Nibley, *Lehi 1988*, pp. 165-167; H. W. Nibley, *Approach*, p. 329.

G11-7 Wiseman gives the following addition information on the ancient name of the city:[11]

> When Shar-kali-sharri, son of Naram-Sin rebuilt the temple of Anunitum and Ilaba there he referred to Babylon by its Sumerian designation *ká.dingir.ki* or the fuller and more frequent name of *ká.dingir.ra.ki*, i.e., "Gate of God." Whether this denoted the place of entry into the deity's presence or even the gate as the place of divine judgment or both is uncertain. Should this be the original name, Babylon is unique in that no other place in ancient Mesopotamia is designated either by its function or by an Akkadian translation of a Sumerian geographical name, *bāb-ili*. Even if the latter is taken to be merely *Volksetymologie* [i.e., a folk tradition for the origin of the word] this would then be shown to go back at least to Akkadian times. The occurrence of other logographic writings of the city name (*ká.diš.diš = Bāb-ilān*) in the reign of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal may merely be instances of scribal idiosyncrasies. Though the syllabic spelling *ba-bi-luli* is rare, it is likely that the reading *bāb-ilāni* "Gate of the gods" or *bāb-ilān* (dual), "gate of the two gods" from which the Greeks took the name *Babulon* as early as the seventh century BCE is of earlier origin. The suggestion that the name *Bāb-ili* may also be a play on *bāb-elli* "Holy gate" is unlikely.
>
> Since the writing *d/tin.tir.ki* is frequently used in correspondence and judicial and official texts from the time of Shalmaneser III it is possible that this was the name of a district used for all the city as *pars pro toto*. The meaning of *d/tin.tir.ki* is still uncertain there being no occurrence with *giš.tir* (*qishtu* = wood) to support the correspondence made with *tir.Babilla* forest in the Lagash region mentioned in Ur III texts. However, a text dated in Uruk in Nebuchadrezzar's twenty-third year mentions both *tin.tir.ki* and *nun.ki*, the latter also a rare designation of a city quarter. The same applied to *šu.an.na* used as a reference to Babylon by Sargon and Ashurbanipal.

G11-8 The work is dated variously to the eras of Hammurabi (19th century BCE), the early Kassites (16th century BCE), or of Nebuchadnezzar I (12th century BCE, though "there is now good evidence to show that such a date for composition is too low."[12] If scholars are correct that the version of the epic that mentions Marduk (as opposed to the Assyrian version that puts Asshur in his place) is earlier, then it "cannot have been composed before the reign of Sumu-la-el (1936-1901 BCE), an Amorite ruler under whom Babylon, with Marduk as its patron god, first achieved eminence."[13]

G11-9 A French translation of this inscription by Jules Oppert that was based on the limited scholarship of a century and a half ago is still sometimes quoted. The italicized phrase in Oppert's obsolete translation misleads in its implication that the text refers to a flood and to some kind of difficulty with speaking:[14]

> The Temple of the Seven Lights of the Earth … was built by an ancient king (reckoned to have lived 42 generations before) but he did not complete its head. *People had abandoned it at the time of the Flood, without order uttering their words (French: Les hommes l'avaient abandonné depuis les jours du déluge, en désordre proférant leurs paroles).* Earthquakes and lightning had shaken its sun-dried bricks; had split the baked bricks of the encasements, and the retaining walls had collapsed in heaps."

> One sometimes sees a similar English translation mistakenly attributed to William Loftus.[15] However the book by Loftus that contains this inscription actually relies on a better translation by Henry Rawlinson that neither contains a reference to the Flood nor to any phrase similar to "without order uttering their words."[16]

G11-10 E.g., *Jubilees* 11:2-4:[17]

> During this jubilee Noah's children began to fight one another, to take captives, and to kill one another; to shed human blood on the earth, to consume blood; to build fortified cities, walls, and towers; men to elevate themselves over peoples, to set up the first kingdoms; to go to war — people against people, nations against nations, city against city; and everyone to do evil, to acquire weapons, and to teach warfare to their sons. City began to capture city and to sell male and female slaves. Ur, Kesed's son, built the city of Ara of the Chaldeans. He named it after himself and his father. They made molten images for themselves. Each one would worship the idol which he had

11   D. J. Wiseman, *Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon: The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy 1983*, pp. 44-45. See also I. J. Gelb, Name of Babylon, pp. 266, 267, 268, 269.
12   S. Dalley, *Epic*, p. 229.
13   *Ibid.*, p. 229.
14   J. Oppert, *Textes*, p. 192, translated from the French original.
15   E.g., *Inscription on Borsippa by Nebuchadnezzar II, translated by William Loftus.*
16   W. K. Loftus, *Travels*, p. 29.
17   J. C. VanderKam, *Book of Jubilees*, 11:2-4, pp. 64-65.

made as his own molten image. They began to make statues, images, and unclean things; the spirits of the savage ones were helping and misleading (them) so that they would commit sins, impurities, and transgression.

G11-11 The roles of Ea and Marduk can be understood by analogy to Christian conceptions of Deity: "if we understand the Father as Ea and the son, the Creator, as Marduk. It is Ea who advises his son and gives him the plan, the idea, leading to his victory over Ti'amat. Later, at the end of the myth, Marduk eventually assumes the name of his Father, Ea, and thus all of his powers."[18] Seen in this light, a better title for *Enuma Elish* might be *The Exaltation of Marduk* ….[19]

G11-12 Talon explains, "The importance of the names is not to be understressed. One of the preserved Chaldaean Oracles says: 'Never change the Barbarian names' and in his commentary Psellus (in the 11th century) adds 'This means: there are among the peoples names given by God, which have a particular power in the rites. Do not transpose them in Greek.' A god may also have more than one name, even if this seems to introduce a difficult element of confusion, at least for us."[20] Ultimately, one might suppose, he would have passed the guardians of the sanctuary gate to reach the throne of Ea where, as also related in the account, he finally received the god's own name and identity.

G11-13 Observes Miller:[21]

> In [Mesopotamian stories of beginnings], the building or providing of the cities is a divine or a divine and human enterprise, i.e., the responsibility of gods and rulers … In [*Eridu Genesis*], Nintur institutes kingship so that the king may build the cities, a primary desire on the part of the deity, cities which are then given by Nintur to other deities, presumably as cult centers for their worship and service.[22] In the biblical stories of beginning, the building of cities is a subject of interest three times: Genesis 4:17; 10:10-12 (Nimrod); and 11:1-9. All of these references, of course, have to do with the Mesopotamian centers. In all of the cases the building of cities and the interest in cities is a purely human enterprise and, as such, subject to the ambiguity of all human enterprises ….

> So Genesis 11:1-9 is about the human plan to build cities and cult places, or, to use Jacobsen's term, "cult cities." But such a move is seen as precisely the opposite of divine plan and divine instruction, in contrast to the way the *Eridu Genesis* tells of the building of the first cities. Rather than the building of a great city and cult center being seen as the divine intention or plan, it is perceived by the deity as human ambition, the usurpation of divine prerogatives,[23] again a violation of the distinction or separation between divine world and human world. So the human effort is thwarted by the divine command.

G11-14 This reading of the account obviates the need for more elaborate explanations of Nephi's terminology. For example, it is sometimes assumed, erroneously, that the building hovered above the earth. For example: "[The building] is apparently detached from the 'world' because the large and spacious field in which Lehi stands is directly connected to celestialization (the Tree); and the building, though visible to and interactive with those in the field, has no true place in the world of the Tree."[24]

G11-15 Umberto Eco has written an engrossing survey from ancient to modern times of the quest either to recover or to invent the perfect language.[25] John McWhorter and Nicholas Ostler have written accessible "natural histories" of language[26] and Robert Pennock has argued against both old creationism and "intelligent design," using linguistic evolution as a test case.[27] Guy Deutscher[28] provides an accessible account of the genesis and evolution of language. Merritt Ruhlen (controversially) attempts to demonstrate widespread under-appreciated connections between the world's language families.[29]

18   P. Talon, *Enūma Eliš*, p. 276.
19   R. J. Clifford, *Creation*, p. 93.
20   P. Talon, *Enūma Eliš*, p. 275.
21   P. D. Miller, Jr., *Eridu*, pp. 156, 159.
22   T. Jacobsen, *Eridu Genesis*, pp. 131-133.
23   Contrast Genesis 11:4 with 12:2 as well as 1 Samuel 7:9.
24   B. A. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 1:178. See also S. K. Brown, *New Light*, p. 68, cited in B. A. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 1:178, for a description of the "so-called sky-scraper architecture" of ancient south Arabia that may have contributed to the imagery of Lehi's dream.
25   U. Eco, *Search*.
26   J. McWhorter, *Power of Babel*; N. Ostler, *Empires*.
27   R. T. Pennock, *Tower*.
28   G. Deutscher, *Unfolding*.
29   M. Ruhlen, *Origin*.

For a critique of Ruhlen's approach and ones similar to it, see, e.g., McWhorter.[30] According to McWhorter: "The main problem is a very simple one: 150,000 years of language transformation by thousands of offshoots of Proto-World [the hypothesized world in which speakers of this first language would have lived] are certain to have hopelessly obscured any sign of what any word in that original language would have been."[31] It is not that linguists oppose the idea a priori that there may have been a common origin to all or at least many languages (though their concept of such a distant past far exceeds the antiquity of the biblical time scale), rather they argue for the irretrievability of direct evidence for this idea.

G11-16 This sort of "confounding" is always relative to a particular group of people. For example, in Ether 3:24, the Lord tells Jared that "the language which ye shall write I have confounded," however, in this case He means simply that the language of his record "cannot be read"[32] except by those who will later make a translation using the stones that He had prepared for this purpose.

G11-17 Mesopotamia, explains Ostler:[33]

> … is a region of so many world firsts for linguistic innovation. Unlike Egypt, China, or India, its cities and states had always been consciously multilingual, whether for communication with neighbors who spoke different languages, or because their histories had made them adopt a foreign language to dignify court, religion, or commerce. This is the area where we find the first conscious use of a classical language [i.e., Sumerian]; but also, by contrast, the first generalized use of a totally foreign language for convenience in communication, as a lingua franca [i.e., Akkadian], an early apparent triumph of diplomatic pragmatism over national sentiment.

Ostler gives a more detailed history of Akkadian as follows:[34]

> Akkadian is named after Agade or Akkad, once the major city of southern Mesopotamia but whose location is now a mystery. (It was possibly not far from Babylon.) Records of the language began in earnest with the middle of the third millennium, with an early climax in those conquests by Sargon (whose long reign centered on the turn of the twenty-fourth and twenty-third centuries BCE). He campaigned successfully in all directions, thus not only spreading the official use of Akkadian in the north (Mari and Ebla), but also beginning a millennium-long official dominance of the language in Elam to the west. We have seen that this first fit of imperial exuberance was followed by a collapse in the fourth generation (end of the twenty-second century BCE), and a brief linguistic resurgence of the subject populations, with the return of Sumerian and Elamite to official use for a century or so. Soon, however, the Amorites, Semitic-speaking "Westerners," began to make their appearance all over Mesopotamia. Their movements did not strengthen Akkad politically, but did seem to crowd out the wide-scale use of anything but Akkadian as a means of communication; and the written record (outside literature) from the beginning of the second millennium is exclusively in this language …

> [The] "Old Babylonian" period (2000-1600 BCE) turned out to be as significant for Akkadian as it was for Sumerian, but in a different way. It was in this period that some fairly slight dialect differences are first noticeable between the south (Babylonian) and the north (Assyrian). Different dialects of Akkadian also become visible farther afield, in Mari, in Susa, and to the east in the valley of the Diyala …

> At the same time, the dialect of Babylon (which even the Babylonians still called *Akkadu*) became established as the literary standard, the classic version of which would be used for official purposes throughout Mesopotamia. This privileged position endured for the rest of the language's history, essentially regardless of whether Babylon, Assyria, or neither of them was the current center of political power. The great model of classic Babylonian is the Laws of Hammurabi, compiled in the eighteenth century BCE when this dialect was still the vernacular. But the best-known literary texts, such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and *Enuma Elish* ("When on high …," *The Creation Epic*), are also in this dialect, written down when it was no longer current.

G11-18 Hamilton[35] cites the work of D. S. DeWitt for its "explicit identification of this one language as

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30   J. McWhorter, *Power of Babel*, pp. 287-303.
31   *Ibid.*, p. 290.
32   Ether 3:22.
33   N. Ostler, *Empires*, p. 34.
34   *Ibid.*, pp. 60-62.
35   V. P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, p. 351 n. 7.

Sumerian, and the possible linkage of the scattering motif to the eclipse of the Ur III period."

G11-19 Drawing a modern comparison, Nibley quipped that it was "like some of these space thrillers on the TV where everybody knows English. No matter where you go in the universe, the all speak the same language."[36]

G11-20 Drawing a rough analogue between the development of genetic and linguistic differences, Cavalli-Sforza [37] writes:

> During modern humanity's expansion, breakaway groups settled in new locations and occupied new continents [cf. the Jaredites]; from these, other groups broke away and traveled to more distant regions. These schisms and shifts took humanity to very remote areas where contact with the original areas and peoples became difficult or impossible. The isolation of numerous groups had two inevitable consequences: the formation of genetic differences and the formation of linguistic differences. Both take their own path and have their own rules, but the sequence of divisions that caused diversification is common to both. Their history, whether reconstructed using language or genes, is that of their migrations and fissions and is therefore inevitably the same.

G11-21 Looking ahead with hope, Brueggemann notes that "in Genesis 50:21 Joseph is able to practice 'new speech' with his brothers."[38] He also speaks hopefully about Acts 2, where "the usual connection [to] Genesis 11:9 … is 'speaking in tongues.' But the accent of Acts 2 would seem to lie not on *speaking*, but on *hearing*[39] … Perhaps the miracle of Pentecost concerns a new gift of speech. But we should not miss the hint of the text. The newness concerns *a fresh capacity to listen* because the word of God blows over the chaos one more time (cf. Moses 2:2)."[40]

36   H. W. Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, 4:266.
37   Cited in R. T. Pennock, *Tower*, p. 143.
38   W. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 104.
39   Acts 2:6, 8, 11, 14, 37.
40   W. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, pp. 103-104.