

Beacons of the Bible

Babel

By Henry Law

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"That is why the city was called Babel, because it was there that the Lord confused the people by giving them many languages, thus scattering them across the earth." Genesis 11:9

Many millions throng the earth. But from one home they spread. The source is the same. The ark contained the parent stock. The progenitors of the human race all sat around Noah's table. The family and the speech were one.

Presently, the languages are many and unlike. The medium of vocal communication varies more than the changing climate. A multitude may speak together, and all be strangers to each other's minds.

Whence came this discrepancy? It obviously exists. But the existence is not the fruit of original constitution. It is no natural result of time's advance. The lapse of ages would not produce it. Ingenious guesses may attempt a solution, but flimsy guesses contradict themselves. Research may weary itself, and gain no safe conclusion.

One book alone conducts to the reply. The Bible is that Book. One author only fixes the date. Moses alone gives the explaining story.

Reader! come now, and in this sacred record learn the origin of diverse languages. It will be no surprise to find, that sin opens the sluice-gate. *There is no jar--no discord--no confusion in this world, of which sin is not the baneful root.*

The scene commences as a tranquil morn. The first word of our chapter simply tells, "The whole earth was of one language and of one speech." Genesis 11:1. When common prayer sought common blessings, one sound approached the throne of grace. When common praise proclaimed the common gratitude, one chorus swelled with melody. All joys--all sorrows were related in one note. One was the language of business--of sport--at home--abroad. None spoke but every hearer understood. Through the whole family uniform utterance prevailed.

Thus the progeny of Noah reached Shinar. Here is an area of widely-spreading

plains. It invites them to construct a settled home, that weary wandering may cease. The tempter suggests the thought. They yield. *The waters of the deluge had not extinguished evil passions.* Outward judgments expel not rebellious lusts. The heart is still strewn with the stubble of iniquity. A little spark will kindle quick combustion.

Thus at Shinar impiety works impatiently. They murmur, "Shall it be that we thus roam, unsettled as a rolling stone, or chaff of summer threshing-floor--hurried from place to place, a homeless horde? Is it not wisdom to concentrate our numbers? Unification will secure our fame--oneness will consolidate our power, and raise us high in firm magnificence--free--independent--feared."

In accordance they concoct a godless plan. "Let's build a great city with a tower that reaches to the skies—a monument to our greatness! This will bring us together and keep us from scattering all over the world." Genesis 11:4. Let mighty walls extend around, and shield with defense our one vast dwelling. Let a gigantic tower arise, whose top may scale the skies. Let the whole earth admire our impregnable abode. The skill is ours. Materials abound. Arise, then, let us build.

We have not far to search for the vile motives of this impious plot. The sacred narrative withdraws the veil. "Let's build a great city with a tower that reaches to the skies—a monument to our greatness!" Genesis 11:4. Vainglory says--"let us build a monument to our greatness!" Believer, do not attempt to construct a name for SELF. There is a name provided for you. It is a refuge, high, glorious, sure. No enemy can level it. No skill can strengthen it. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower--the righteous runs into it, and is safe." Prov. 18:10. Build not with rubbish of your own, when such a fortress is prepared.

Vain-glory ("ostentatious pride, especially in one's achievements" –editor) where is the heart in which this monster has no nest? It is the common rudder of man's life--the pole-star of his course. Self-exaltation is the secret spring of exploits--labors--toils. It urges the warrior to the camp and field--it nerves his arm, and drives him undaunted through unnumbered perils. The student, intoxicated by this cup, refuses rest, and leaves no stores of literature unexplored. Behold the splendid palaces--the noble castles which adorn the land. View the monuments of ingenious art--the grand productions of elaborate skill. Read volumes in which rare genius sparkles in each page--the mighty exploits of commanding mind. On these a true inscription would record--"These works were designed to win a name among the sons of men."

If such be the prompting motive, the end is disappointment's bitter cup. The world pays only misery to its poor slaves. A mocking shadow is pursued. No substance is ever grasped. Did Babel-builders gain renown? A name, indeed, they have obtained. But it is a name of ignominy. They raised a monument which tells their shame.

In after days, at this same spot, we find this passion ruling the Chaldean king. See him walking in the palace of his vast empire. His words proclaim the inner pride, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" Dan. 4:30. Did he long strut in this self-exaltation? While he yet spoke, Divine displeasure frowned. Men cast him out, as lower than the human race. He herded, fit comrade, with the mindless boasts. Thus soaring pride earned low contempt. The haughty monarch groveled with the brutes.

He best subserves his fame, in whom all SELF is slain. Jesus in all things is our perfect model. In Him SELF had no life. He "pleased not Himself," He never sought His own renown. One zeal consumed Him--to glorify His heavenly Father's name, and to bring honor to His holy attributes. Paul ranks the chief of heroes. How was his fame won? Mark the principle of his heart--the precept of his lips. "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves." Phil. 2:3. He thus walks humbly in humility's low valley--"according to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death--for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Phil. 1:20, 21.

How dismal is Babel's contrast. Indeed, the constant history of the unrenewed will is a mirror reflecting SELF. Here is the common impulse, "Let us make us a name." Where SELF is thus the idol, God must be dethroned. These builders give proof. The wide city--the high tower are planned, "lest they be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." God's will is here defied. That will had said, 'By them the earth shall be replenished.' To accomplish this prohibited idle clustering in one spot. It required constant march and wide diffusion. Ease must be denied. God called them to move. They willed to tarry. The command is, 'Let earth be visited in all its parts.' The reply is, 'We will not be thus scattered.'

How sweet again to turn to Jesus. How lovely are these earliest words, "Don't you know that I must be about my Father's business?" How refreshing is the continued echo, "I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me." John 6:38. How brightly consistent is the sequel, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." Matt. 26:39. In that prayer which soars on sublimity's high wing, we are taught to eschew this Babel-building spirit. "Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done in earth as it is in heaven."

At Shinar this vainglory and self-will resolves to have no Lord. Therefore the work advances. The scene is busy. What rapidity of motion! What energy of mind! What industry of hand! Each look betokens fervent interest. Strength is put forth. Sinews are strained. Deep are the foundations laid. Firmly the walls are cemented. What can withstand them? Success seems sure.

But is God oblivious of the daring effort? Are His eyes closed? Is His mind indifferent? Are not His ears open to this din? Is His hand shortened? Have His resources failed? Has He no power to check? Shall worms of earth now triumph? Shall their name eclipse His? Shall their impiety prevail? How easy again to open the windows of heaven, and pour down an overwhelming deluge! How easy to cause earth to gape, and swallow in one grave the workmen and the work! How easy to bid lightnings from above and flames from beneath to make wide Shinar one smoking furnace! But no--judgment shall go forth indeed; but in new form. The scheme shall be most marvelously blighted, and all succeeding ages shall bear a brand to tell the tale of this sin's due reward. The Lord decrees, "Let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand each other's speech." Genesis 11:7. God speaks, and it is done.

Return to the scene. The morning dawns. Fair nature smiles in usual beauty. The heavens--the earth--foreshow no coming marvel. All things around are ready for advance. The men are conscious of no inner change. They speak as heretofore. They shout--they cry--they call--they joke. But now amazement fills them. All is confusion. Each marvels at his neighbor's barbarous tongue. Each stares and questions, What does this dissonance mean? Is it insulting mockery? Has reason lost its seat? Doubtless they revile--reproach--expostulate and rage. Anger can only augment disorder. Discord is universal. Means of communication are utterly departed. Intelligence has ceased. There is no common tongue. There is no intelligible word. Thus the work finds a pitiable end. Humbled--defeated--mortified--disgraced--they part, because all mutual communion is gone. "In that way, the Lord scattered them all over the earth; and that ended the building of the city. That is why the city was called Babel, because it was there that the Lord confused the people by giving them many languages, thus scattering them across the earth." Genesis 11:8-9

From that day earth has been Babel. Language continues diverse. But the difference warns solemnly. It tells the sure defeat of all vain-glory. It derides pigmy creatures boasting to defeat Divine decrees.

Stop, proud man--stop! Let Babel check your childish dreams. You will awaken to the inheritance of scorn. Stop, rebel--Stop! You rush against the shield of Omnipotence. If God has spoken, it will surely be. All His resolves stride gloriously onward to their glorious end.

But Babel is not all dark. A Gospel ray here shines. Doubtless its main feature is requiting wrath. But look again; there is a smile of grace. Division of languages proclaims God's hatred of vain-glory. But for all evil a remedy is ordained, and gift of languages shall spread the Gospel tidings through earth's surface. Behold the miracle of Pentecost. "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Acts 2:4. Thus inspired heralds sounded salvation's glories, and the name of Jesus in every

tongue--in every climate.

Think, also, of heaven's one harmony. No dissonance shall vex those blessed abodes. One chorus shall swell from the countless multitude of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues. The one loud cry shall be "Salvation to our God, which sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!" Rev. 7:10

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