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LEGENDARY EVIDENCE FOR THE CONFUSION OF TONGUES

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Legends about a flood are about universal; this fact is strong evidence to show that the Noachian Flood was universal. Some investigation has been made to see whether legends of a confusion of tongues, such as that recorded in Scripture as having happened at the Tower of Babel, are also universal, or at least widespread. While such legends have not been found to be so common as flood legends, there are some about a confusion of tongues, and they are found in significantly separated parts of the world. Of course, belief in the truth of Scripture does not depend upon such legends, yet such corroboration is interesting and worthwhile.

(At one) time all the world spoke a single language and used the same words. As men journeyed in the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them hard"; they used bricks for stone and bitumen for mortar. "Come," they said, "let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and make a name for ourselves; or we shall be dispersed all over the earth." Then the Lord came down to see the city and tower which mortal men had built and he said, "Here they are, one people with a single language, and now they have started to do this; henceforward nothing they have a mind to do will be beyond their reach. Come, let us go down there and confuse their speech, so that they will not understand what they say to one another." So the Lord dispersed them from there all over the earth, and they left off building the city. That is why it is called Babel, because the Lord there made a babble of the language of all the world; from that place the Lord scattered men all over the face of the earth.

—Genesis 11:1-9 (New English Version)

Deluge. Why, then, are there so relatively few surviving accounts of the "Confusion"?

The confusion of tongues occurred only once, as did the Great Deluge. However, there was other widespread flooding during ancient times that depopulated great areas of the earth. Such catastrophes served to embellish and perpetuate the memory of the Great Deluge of Noah's day. Awareness of the confusion was not similarly strengthened.

Ancient Non-Biblical Account

The oldest non-Biblical account of this event is found on an ancient Assyrio-Babylonian tablet now housed in the British Museum. The tablet is not in very good condition, only a few lines

Introduction

Unlike the world-wide proliferation of flood legends, there is no great abundance of extant legends concerning the confusion of tongues. This dearth of accounts seems somewhat strange at first thought for two reasons. First, the Great Deluge is of greater antiquity than the confusion of tongues.

Furthermore, there were many people who experienced the "confusion," and members of each group could contribute to perpetuation of the memory of such an event; whereas the Bible emphasizes that only one family survived the Great

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being in any way complete. It reads as follows:

..... them the father.
(The thoughts) of his heart were evil
the father of all the gods he turned from.

(The thoughts) of his heart were evil
..... Babylon corruptly to sin went and
small and great mingled on the mound.

..... Babylon corruptly to sin went small
and great mingled on the mound.

The King of the holy mound

In front and Anu lifted up to the
good god of his father

Then his heart also which carried a
command

at that time also which carried a
command

At that time also he lifted it
up

Davkina.

Their (work) all day they founded to their
stronghold in the night entirely an end he
made.

In his anger also the secret council he
poured out to scatter (abroad) his face he
set he gave a command to make strange their
speech

..... their progress he impeded

..... the altar

.....

In (that day) he blew and

For future time the mountain

Nu-nam-nir went

Like heaven and earth he spake

His ways they went

Violently they fronted against him

He saw them and to the earth (descended)

When a stop he did not make of the
gods

Against the gods they revolted
violence

Violently they wept for Babylon very much
they wept.

And in the midst¹

Account According of Josephus

The Jewish historian Josephus (37 A.D.-c. 100
A.D.) provides a detailed account:

The three sons of Noah—Shem, Japhet and
Ham—born a hundred years before the de-
luge, were the first to descend from the
mountains to the plains and to make their
abode there; the rest, who by reason of the
flood were sore afraid of the plains and loath
to descend from the heights, they persuaded
to take courage and follow their example.
The plain where they first settled is called
Senaar (Shinar). God bade them, owing to
increasing population, to send out colonies,
that they might not quarrel with each other
but cultivate much of the earth and enjoy an

abundance of its fruits; but in their blindness
they did not harken to Him, and in conse-
quence were plunged into calamities which
made them sensible of their error. For when
they had a flourishing youthful population,
God again counselled them to colonize; but
they, never thinking that they owed their
blessings to His benevolences and regarding
their own might as the cause of their felicity,
refused to obey. Nay, to this disobedience to
God's will they even added the suspicion
that God was plotting against them in urging
them to emigrate, in order that, being divided,
they might be more open to attack.

They were incited to this insolent contempt
of God by Nebrodes (Nimrod), grandson of
Ham the son of Noah, an audacious man of
doughty vigour. He persuaded them to at-
tribute their prosperity not to God but to
their own valour, and little by little trans-
formed the state of affairs into a tyranny,
holding that the only way to detach men from
the fear of God was by making them con-
tinuously dependent upon his own power. He
threatened to have his revenge on God if he
wished to inundate the earth again; for he
would build a tower higher than the water
could reach and avenge the destruction of
their forefathers.

The people were eager to follow this advice
of Nebrodes, deeming it slavery to submit
to God; so they set out to build the tower
with indefatigable ardour and no slackening
in the task; and it rose with a speed beyond
all expectation, thanks to the multitude of
hands. Its thickness, however, was so stout
as to dwarf its apparent height. It was built
of baked bricks cemented with bitumen to
prevent them from being washed away. See-
ing their mad enterprise, God was not minded
to exterminate them utterly, because even the
destruction of the first victims had not taught
their descendants wisdom; but he created
discord among them by making them speak
different languages, through the variety of
which they could not understand one another.
The place where they built the tower is now
called Babylon from the confusion of that
primitive speech once intelligible to all, for
the Hebrews call confusion "Babel." This
tower and the confusion of the tongues of
men are mentioned also by the Sibyl in the
following terms: "When all men spoke a
common language, certain of them built an
exceeding high tower, thinking thereby to
mount to heaven. But the gods sent winds
against it and overturned the tower and gave
to every man a peculiar language; whence it
comes that the city was called Babylon." And

as concerning the plain called Senaar in the region of Babylon, Hestiaeus speaks as follows: "Now the priests who escaped took the sacred vessels of Zeus Enyalios and came to Senaar in Babylonia."

From that hour, therefore, they were dispersed through their diversity of languages and founded colonies everywhere, each group occupying the country that they lit upon and to which God led them, so that every continent was peopled by them, the interior and the seaboard alike; while some crossed the sea on shipboard and settled in the islands. Of the nations some still preserve the names which were given them by their founders, some have changed them, while yet others have modified them to make them more intelligible to their neighbors.²

Various Indian Tribe Accounts

The Thlinkuts are an Indian tribe inhabiting the Pacific Coast of Canada. They possess the following tradition:

There was a great flood. Many persons escaped drowning by taking refuge in a great floating building. When the waters fell, this vessel grounded upon a rock and was broken into two pieces. In one fragment were left those whose descendants speak the Thlinkut language. In the other remained all those whose descendants employ a different idiom.³

From the Swinomish in the Northwestern U.S.:

Three sisters built a very high house, a long time ago. They made it tall because they wanted to go up to the sky to see the Creator. They kept building it higher and higher and higher. By the time the house was finished, they could not speak the same language. They could not understand each other. That is why there are so many languages today.⁴

Indians of the Columbia River Basin have a legend of a good coyote giving different languages to people according to their tribe.⁵

The Skagit Indians of the Northwest United States tell of new people being created from the bones of people killed by the flood. They were then given the power of speech, but they spoke many different languages. They were separated according to their language and sent to places occupied prior to the flood.⁶ Moving southward:

It is found in the histories of the Toltecs that this age and the first world, as they call it, lasted 1716 years; that men were destroyed by tremendous rains and lightning from the sky, and even all the land, without the exception of anything, and the highest mountains were covered up and submerged in water fifteen cubits; and here they add other fables of how men came to multiply from the few

who escaped this destruction in a "toptlipet-locali," which nearly signifies a closed chest; and how, after men had multiplied, they erected a very high "zacuali," which is today a tower of great height, in order to take refuge in it should the second world (age) be destroyed. Presently their languages were confused, and, not being able to understand each other, they went to different parts of the earth. The Toltecs, consisting of seven friends, with their wives, who understood the same language, came to these parts, having first passed great land and seas, having lived in caves, and having endured great hardships in order to reach this land; they wandered 104 years through different parts of the world before they reached Hue Hue Tlapalan, which was in Ce Tecpatl, 520 years after the flood.⁷

The Aztecs also had a tradition of a flood and of a confusion of languages.

They say that humanity was wiped out by a flood, but one man, Coxcoxtli, and one woman, Xochiquetzal, escaped in a boat, and reached a mountain called Colhuacan. They had many children, who were dumb until the time when a dove on top of a tree made them the gift of languages; but these differed so much that the children could not understand each other.⁸

From Guatemala:

After consulting together, Hurakan and Gucumatz (the givers of life) decided to make four men of yellow and white maize. But as they were too perfect, the gods shortened their sight. During their sleep, they created four women, and these were the ancestors of the Quiche tribe. However, they complained that they could not see clearly, for the sun had not yet appeared, so they went off to Tullan where they learned about their gods. It was very cold there, and they received fire from Tohil (Hurakan). But the sun did not appear, and the earth remained damp and cold. Speech was divided, and the ancestors no longer understood each other. They then left Tullan guided by Tohil and came to the Quiche country. There at last the sun appeared, followed by the moon and the stars. In their delight, animals and men sang a hymn, and offered the gods blood from their ears and shoulders. Later they thought it better to shed the blood of victims.⁹

There is yet another Jewish reference.¹⁰

Thereupon God turned to the seventy angels who encompass His throne, and He spake: "Go, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." Thus it

happened. Thenceforth none knew what the other spoke. One would ask for the mortar, and the other handed him a brick; in a rage, he would throw the brick at his partner and kill him.*

The Roman poet Ovid (B.C. 43-c. 17 A.D.) recorded a story that in some respects bears a striking resemblance to the story of the construction of the Tower of Babel, even though it is in a highly mythological context. My opinion is that this account reflects an actual event (natural catastrophe), but one not associated with the Tower of Babel and Confusion of Tongues. Even so, it is an interesting similarity.

. . . they say that the Giants essayed the very throne of heaven, piling huge mountains, one on another, clear up to the stars. Then the Almighty Father hurled his thunderbolts . . . those dread bodies lay o'erwhelmed by their own bulk. . . .¹¹

Half of the above legends are associated with a flood. This generally brings to mind the Great Deluge of Noah's day, and, possibly because of this association, the time of the confusion is assigned to a period of great antiquity. There is also an inclination on the part of many to assume that the Bible infers that the entire population of the world inhabited the region surrounding the Tower of Babel. However, the following points should be considered:

1. The Genesis account states, ". . . the Lord there made a babble of the language of *all the world* . . ." What is the reason for a global-view at this point if the population was relatively confined geographically?

2. In whose eyes were the builders of the Tower concerned about making a name for themselves?

3. There is a Jewish legend that associates the Tower of Babel with the time of Abraham, as follows:

And it came to pass that Abraham, who was then in his 48th year, heard of the mighty tower which was being built in the valley of Shinaar. He travelled to the valley and endeavored to make the builders desist from their sinful undertaking, but they refused to listen to him. Abraham thereupon prayed to the Lord of the Universe: "God Almighty," he prayed, "confuse their language and scatter them over the face of the earth."¹²

Flood Legends

The Bible states that Noah and his family were the sole survivors of the Great Deluge. Since Noah knew and was forewarned by the One True

God, it would not be logical to assume that he and his family fabricated tales of the flood involving mythological gods. However, flood legends from many cultures relate to gods that can be associated with specific planetary bodies and/or astronomical phenomena.

In another article,¹³ I attempted to show that non-Biblical flood legends embody accounts of events associated with two or more flood disasters. The legends attest to many widely scattered groups of survivors following at least one of those catastrophes. The survivors associated the flooding they experienced with the observed planetary deities referenced in the legends.

Descendants of the survivors could make no distinction between similar catastrophes of an earlier time which they did not experience. They related aspects peculiar to the Great Deluge, e.g., forewarning, preservation of other seeds of life, etc., with pagan deities associated by their predecessors with subsequent flooding.

The association of many of the Confusion legends with a flood, the legendary association of the Tower of Babel with Abraham, and the indication that world flood legends reflect two or more flood catastrophes collectively point to a flooding catastrophe after the Great Deluge and prior to the confusion of tongues.* Therefore, any attempt to determine the time of the Confusion is in no way constrained by the antiquity of the Great Deluge.

Some Observations

The legends cited represent a widespread but disjointed geographical distribution. They span nearly the entire length of the North American continent, but other than that are limited to Mesopotamia. That the entire globe had been populated by the time the Confusion occurred might be argued from this distribution and the variances between the legends; although such a conclusion is by no means necessary as legends can be spread and changed when people migrate later. Also one might argue for a great time span between the Great Deluge and the Confusion on the same basis.

Aside from legends, place-names contain another clue to events in the ancient past. On the basis of a fascinating study of such names, J. D. Cohane¹⁴ contends that in ancient times there

*Perhaps this is the implication in Genesis 10:25: ". . . one was named Peleg, because in his day the earth was divided. . ." (by water?)

Velikovsky contends that the Great Deluge occurred between 9,000 and 5,000 B.C. The third millennium B.C. emergence of our earliest civilizations would seem to involve a later flood. When the secular catastrophists point to the re-emergence of these civilizations after the flood, there is reason to argue that it was not the Great Deluge.

*Accounts from Canada and India during the last decade attest to the reality of the difficulties engendered by linguistic differences within a social or political unit.

were two extensive Semitic migrations. The first covered the entire globe. The second covered smaller areas of both hemispheres.

The first migration was a dispersion following the Great Deluge—with the implication that Noah's language would today be classified as Semitic. The second Semitic dispersion radiated at a much later date from the Tower of Babel following the confusion of tongues.

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ON THE RAPID FORMATION OF BEACHES AND A GRADED SERIES OF FLATTENED AND ROUNDED STONES

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Introduction

The question often arises as to whether it is reasonable to believe that the evident and comparatively superficial land formations and surface features could have arisen since the Noachian Flood described in Genesis 7 and 8 in 2349 B. C.

By land formations reference is made to erosion resulting in valleys, flood plains, and terraced beaches far above the present level of relict lakes. Lake Bonneville, Lahontan, and Mono Lake where the shore line is 700 feet above the present lake level are two examples of such remnant lakes.

Flood geologists explain these raised beaches in terms of gradually subsiding flood waters.

However, objections are usually raised that this amount of erosion could hardly have taken place in only 4300 years. Accordingly the following observations at the San Luis reservoir near Los Banos, California, are pertinent. Surprisingly rapid beach and terrace formations have occurred.

San Luis Reservoir Described

This reservoir covers 13,800 acres when full and is 304 feet deep. It has a 65 mile shore line,



Figure 1. General view of San Luis Reservoir. Pacheco Pass is toward the upper right.

took about one year to fill, and was not completely filled until the spring of 1969.

The prevailing winds are from the west, and often in the summer reach a velocity of 40 miles per hour, due to the cool moist coastal air blowing into the warm Great Valley through the Pacheco Pass. (Figure 1)

This strong wind generates waves five feet high which pound against the east side of the reservoir. As a result some remarkable beaches have formed in only four years time.

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