

The Bad God's Tower

Hippolytus says that the Anti-Christ imitates Christ in every particular: each sends out his apostles, gives his seal to believers, does signs and wonders, claims the temple as his own, has his own church and assembly, etc.

(Nibley, *Enoch the Prophet*)

The counterpart to the world (or Babylon, as the scriptures have nicknamed the world) is Zion.

(Glossary, "Zion")

There is a not very surprising connection between the City of Melchizedek and the Tower of Babel. And the connection is simply this: whenever God ordains a thing, Satan is right there with a bogus substitute. The reason for the substitution is obvious if you think about it. God's programs have beauty and power, and Satan recognizes this but can't provide the real thing for his followers. So, he gives us sex in lieu of love, combinations instead of covenants, half-truths where there should be the whole truth. He is a counterfeiter and a copycat and a liar from the beginning. So, what lie does Satan offer us in place of God's temple? He is so dependable in his guile that we should expect a counterfeit for the temple too. And he doesn't disappoint.

After the flood, and during the time when Shem/Melchizedek,¹ maintained the city and temple of Salem,² there was an alternative building project being pursued by a different developer just down the road.

"And they said, Come, go to, let us build us a city, and a tower whose top will be high, near unto Heaven." (OC Genesis 6:6)

Like Zion, Babylon too wanted a city. Like Zion, Babylon too wanted a temple that reached to heaven. In fact, the Greek name "*Babilon*" is a rendition of the Akkadian "*Bab-ilani*," which means "the gate of the gods." Babel, being the capital of Babylon at the time, was a fitting place for Satan to locate his "gate of the gods."

According to Jewish custom, Salem was located in the same spot where Jerusalem would rise. And Babylon was the site of modern-day Iraq. So, Babel and Salem were about 500 miles apart. A fair way if you're travelling by camel, but close enough that the two communities could have (and probably would have) been aware of each other, and informed about what the other was up to. The scriptures mention Babylon and Jerusalem many times of course, and use these two

¹ Early in the restoration the Church taught that Shem was Melchizedek. That truth was lost to the Church but was reclaimed as part of the ongoing restoration. See, for example, Podcast 142, Shem part 1, about paragraph 40.

² D.S. Blog, June 14, 2010, on Alma 13:15. "Second, why were tithes paid to a great high priest who would shortly be translated? What need was there for tithing? The form the tithing took was not a check or bank draft. It was animals, food and usable material. What was provided would be used in sacrifices, feasts, celebrations and decoration of the temple maintained by Melchizedek."

places as symbols of opposing values. Knowing what we know of Satan's MO, does it seem likely that Babel was a reaction to and imitation of Salem?³

There is a pretty little word play⁴ in the account of Babel that suggests that the tower was indeed a reaction to Melchizedek's project in Salem. After announcing that they would build a "city and a tower," the people of Babel said this:

"And let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." (OC Genesis 6:6)

The word "name" in Hebrew is **שם**, and is pronounced "shame," but in fact means the opposite of shame. When the inhabitants of Babel said they wanted to make themselves a "name," they were using the word in the same way that English speakers use the word when they employ the expression, "making a name for themselves." As in, "Wow, the Utah Jazz are really making a name for themselves this season."

But it was more than this; the Hebrew word for "name" is also the proper name "Shem." So, it appears, the people of Babylon knew that God would not be giving them a new name, as the righteous, like Abraham, could expect. Instead, they would create their own "Shem," and they would be his people. They would build up a city and a tower and a king – a replacement Shem – both in defiance of and homage to Melchizedek and his temple and city. The replacement Shem was named Marduk, and according to the old traditions was a giant and the same individual that we know as Nimrod. The people of Babylon came to regard him as a deity, and built a shrine to him on the seventh level of the Tower.⁵

In the Louvre in Paris there is a tablet in cuneiform that comes from the ancient city of Uruk,⁶ which was located in what is modern-day Iraq. The tablet describes the ancient tower of *Etemnanki*, which some historians believe was the same structure as the tower of Babel. Maybe it was, and maybe not. But what is true is that the description of the tower of *Etemnanki* should make us sit up and take notice. "(T)he tower was made up of seven terraces ... (A) gate in the east connected *Etemenanki* with the sacred procession road. Seen from the ... gate, the Etemenanki must have resembled a true "stairway to heaven," because the gates on the higher terraces seemed to be standing on top of each other."⁷

This style of stepped or terraced tower is called a ziggurat, and it is found in the archaeological ruins of Babylon, Guatemala, Mexico and in any number of other places. They are stylized reproductions of the "Mountain of God," a place where heaven and earth almost touch. Many

⁴ This is a short explanation of the nuances of the word "shem" in Hebrew
<https://yhwhisone.wordpress.com/2016/07/29/the-hebrew-word-shem-meaning/>

⁵ Noah, Shem, Abraham, and the Tower of Babel. Leisa Baysinger. <https://www.ourancientpaths.org/post/noah-shem-abraham-and-the-tower-of-babel-a-lesson-for-history-lovers>

⁶ <https://www.livius.org/articles/place/babylon/etemenanki/>

⁷ Ibid.

commentators have observed that the “ladder” in Jacob’s dream would better be described as a ziggurat complete with seven levels, rather than as a ladder with seven rungs – as we westerners envision it. And perhaps there is some truth in this observation, because the spot on which Jacob had his famous dream was apparently Mount Moriah, the Temple Mount: the spot where the temple of Melchizedek had been, and the temple of Solomon would be.

If so, then Jacob’s statement about this place takes on new significance. “And Jacob awoke out of his sleep and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. And he was afraid and said, How dreadful is this place; this is none other but the House of God, and this is the Gate of Heaven!” (OC Genesis 9:21)

So, perhaps this is one of those times that we see the reflection better than the original; the dream is clearer than waking reality. The Ziggurats were false temples, but did their architecture reflect a true pattern? Did the true temple of God also have seven levels – as with Jacob’s ladder? And will God’s temple in the future follow that pattern? Speaking about the fractured and incomplete state of today’s LDS temple ceremony, Denver has stated, “Had Joseph survived, he may have been able to provide a ceremonial tour back through the seven heavens to the Throne of God.”⁸

The scriptures contain many accounts of patriarchal figures, like Noah, crossing a water in order to save a family. Although these accounts are no doubt historically accurate tellings of real events, they are also metaphor. The arks represent temples, and the waters they cross represent “the great deep,” or in other words, the heavens. In the temple, initiates learn to walk the paths in heaven: to ascend the Mountain of the Lord.⁹ Although it is easy to miss, the account of Babel affirms that that tower too was a temple, and that its intended purpose was similar to true temples of God. The imagery is subtle.

“And they said one to another, Come, go to, let us make brick and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone and they had tar for mortar.” (OC Genesis 6:6)

Why on earth tell us about the building materials used in the tower of Babel? How is that relevant to anything? Well, the answer seems to be that these materials made the tower waterproof. Baked bricks become waterproof, and tar could seal the whole edifice. The word “tar” is translated from the Hebrew word חֵמָר (*chemar*), and whether it is rendered “bitumen,” or “asphalt,” or “slime,” in modern English translations, the underlying Hebrew word is always the same. And here’s the important bit; it is the same word that names the sticky substance used to waterproof the ark of bulrushes that carried baby Moses as it bobbed upon the Nile.

⁸ Civilization Talk, pg. 20. Thank you, Julie.

⁹ “The mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.” The paths of God lie in the heavens. So, if you’re going to learn to walk in His paths, you are going to have to learn how to walk in the heavens. (Isaiah 2: 2-3, and D.S. podcast 14, “The Heavens”)

That ark carried the babe to safety in the Egyptian royal household – symbolically, a good choice to represent the royal courts of the Divine. And *chemar* is also the substance used to seal the ark that Noah built. An ark that protected Noah and his family as they braved the flood on their way to a land swept clean.

Whatever else you want to say about the writers of scripture, they were remarkable for both their economy and their subtlety. By telling us what the Tower of Babel was built out of, they communicated its purpose: to withstand “the waters of the great deep.” The Tower of Babel was a temple, designed to elevate people to heaven by an alternative and unauthorized route. Josephus can be forgiven for misapprehending this purpose.¹⁰ He believed that Nimrod built the tower so that if God ever again sent a flood to destroy the Earth that the Tower would defeat God’s design by rising above the deluge. That interpretation of events comes close, but it’s two-dimensional. The flood that the builders of the Tower of Babel were worried about was the one that stretched over their heads on a starry night.

And what does it mean for us? Well, give the Devil his due. He’s nothing if not consistent. He just keeps trying the same old tricks. So, when God’s true temple is built, we may again see a rival tower rising in the distance.¹¹

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¹⁰ The works of Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 1, chapter 4.

¹¹ For Evan. As always Tolkien got here first. Here is his description of the two towers that strived for dominance in Middle-Earth.

"Then the watch upon the walls of Mordor slept, and dark things crept back to Gorgoroth. And on a time, evil things came forth, and they took Minas Ithil and abode in it, and they made it into a place of dread; and it is called Minas Morgul, the Tower of Sorcery."

"For the fashion of Minas Tirith was such that it was built on seven levels, each delved into the hill, and about each was set a wall, and in each wall was a gate... The entrance to the Citadel also looked eastward, and was delved in the heart of the rock... (T)here the banner of the Stewards floated a thousand feet above the plain."

