



BODIE HODGE

TOWER OF BABEL

The Cultural History of Our Ancestors

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture of three or less verses in the text are denoted in the footnotes except for Genesis 11:1–9 and Genesis 10, which are found in chapter 4.

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Dedication

To my family (which I guess, includes everyone)! But specifically, I would like to dedicate this book to my wife (Renee), and children (Kylie, Caleb, and Lacey) as well as my parents (Jim and Cheryl Hodge).

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Introduction

Genesis 1–11 is under attack in today’s culture. In many cases, we read of attacks on Genesis 1 and 2 where attempts are made to add millions of years to the creation week.¹ We see attacks on the Fall of mankind in Genesis 3 where there is a denial of the reality of Adam and Eve and original sin and the need for a Savior. We observe further attacks with the denial of Satan’s involvement by claiming he is not reality.²

We see attacks on Genesis 4 and 5 with alleged gaps in the genealogies, and attempts to squeeze thousands of years into them (even though this does not help the case for millions of years).³ Genesis 6–9 have come under attack with some claiming the Flood was just a local event and reinterpreting Flood rock layers as evidence for millions of years.⁴

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1. A book that tackles this subject is Ken Ham’s *The Lie: Evolution/Millions of Years* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2012).
 2. A book that addresses attacks on Genesis 3 is Bodie Hodge’s *The Fall of Satan* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2011).
 3. There are three chapters that deal with this in *The New Answers Book 2*, Ken Ham, gen. ed. (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008): “How Old Is the Earth?” by Bodie Hodge, “Are There Gaps in the Genesis Genealogies?” by Larry Pierce and Ken Ham, and “Doesn’t Egyptian Chronology Prove That the Bible Is Unreliable?” by Dr. Elizabeth Mitchell.
 4. There are numerous books that tackle this subject from the time-honored classic *The Genesis Flood* by Drs. Henry Morris and John Whitcomb to Dr. Andrew Snelling’s treatise *Earth’s Catastrophic Past*. Also, *The New Answers Books 1, 2, and 3* have a number of chapters discussing these attacks.

And, of course, Genesis 10 and 11 are under severe attack as well. Scholars write off what occurred at the Tower of Babel as mythology and deny that it was a historical event. And racism runs rampant, fueled by the false belief in “higher and lower evolved races.” Sadly, this has even infiltrated many churches, causing them to believe evolutionary ideas instead of relying on biblical authority.⁵ People simply deny, on their own authority, that Genesis 10 and 11 are trustworthy. But this book will examine many of the attacks and false claims (other than racism, which has been dealt with thoroughly elsewhere) surrounding Genesis 10 and 11 by using the Bible as the authority and systematically responding to these attacking questions with solid answers.

The questions answered in this book are serious questions that have been proposed to those who believe the Bible is true, and in many cases they are questions this author has heard over and over again. Join me as we dive into the Bible and look into history and theology in a God-honoring fashion to refute these attacks. Not only will you understand a bit more about how to defend the authority of the Word of God in today’s age, but you may actually learn a little about yourself and your ancestry as well — we all go back to Babel, after all.

5. A book that challenges evolution and racism is Ken Ham and Dr. Charles Ware’s *One Race, One Blood* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2010).

CHAPTER 1

How Do You Pronounce *Babel*, Anyway?

Before we even get started on the meat of the issues, and before we examine attacks on the account of the Tower of Babel, we need to address a very common question. And it is hard to believe that a chapter on this subject is worthy of such a discussion, but, believe it or not, this is one of the most-asked questions I get on the subject of Babel: “How do you pronounce it?” So let’s take some time to look at this rather amusing question!

What Do Dictionaries Say?

Depending upon where you are in the English-speaking world, you will probably get one of two answers (and a few variations of these):

1. bā-bəl
2. ba-bəl

I’m going to call these two *bay-bel* (i.e., rhyming with table) and *ba-bel* (i.e., rhyming with dabble), respectively, in an effort to make this easier. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* online gives both of these pronunciations.¹ My printed version of *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (as well as *Thorndike-Barnhart*) lists both of these as well. Dictionary.com listed both

1. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “Babel,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/babel> (accessed February 8, 2012).

pronunciations under its entry for Babel as do most dictionaries that were consulted.²

What about the Etymology of the Pronunciation?

The etymology of how British English arrived at *bay-bel* comes from Old English and a slightly faulty transliteration of the Hebrew, which we will discuss below. I did further research on the origin of the English word and its pronunciation and found that it was in use in Old English, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.³ This makes sense since Wycliffe also translated the Bible into Middle English from the Latin Vulgate; so the word *Babel* already existed in English and had a particular pronunciation prior to this.

As many know, Old English was Germanic in its origin. In fact, it was in the style of West Germanic, which is where Northern Germanic languages (Norse) also arose. This is because the Jutes and Angles (where we get the name English/England from) were well settled in the British Isles (with their Germanic languages). Later, the Saxons conquered and spread throughout Britain (also Germanic), though much of the timing and details herewith are shrouded in history as this took the Britons back into paganism.⁴

Old English changed into Middle English, largely because Norman (French/Latin) roots entered the language, beginning in 1066 when William the Conqueror's Normans took over with the Norman conquest of England. The altered language then gave rise to more modern forms of English and even several variants of Middle English. Modern English is still sub-classed in the German language family.

What about Foreign Pronunciations That Influenced English?

For this reason, it is helpful to know how Germans pronounced Babel. The German pronunciation is in our laymen sense *baw-bul*, which is closer to our second pronunciation in American English. So far, I have not been able to find where variant Germanic dialects deviate from this pronunciation.⁵

In the French language, it turns out they say "baw-bel" with a stress on *bel*. This is almost identical to the Hebrew, as we will see in a moment. To double check on Latin-based roots, I looked at Babel in Spanish, another Latin-based language; it is *ba-bael* (note the different second syllable) with a short *a* as well.

2. Dictionary.com, s.v. "Babel," <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/babel> (accessed February 8, 2012).

3. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Babel," (accessed October 8, 2012).

4. Paganism involved savage, immoral, polytheistic, uncivil, and often animistic practices.

5. At the following link, listen through verse 9, (this pronunciation is from Luther's day): www.sermon-online.de/search.pl?lang=de&id=2747.

So both German and French/Latin roots say *Babel* with a short *a* like Hebrew (not bay-bel), and this is closer to the second pronunciation listed in Webster's (ba-bel). So it seems that the Queen's English is the only one that has bay-bel, and that carried over to the States (and presumably other former and current British possessions).

English Great Vowel Shift

At some point in English history, there was a corruption from the short *a* (ba-bel or baw-bel) in *Babel* to the long *a* (bay-bel), because it does not come from German or French (or Hebrew or Greek). It is possible that it is due to accents or a previous language family, but this is beyond the scope of this chapter. Aaron Profitt of God's Bible School and College pointed out in correspondence (and gave us permission to cite him):

English's Great Vowel Shift (GVS) may explain the "long-a" pronunciation of *Babel*, at least in part: in Old and Middle English, a "long a" was pronounced roughly as <a>, as in *father*. In the Great Vowel Shift — which took place over a number of years with intermediate pronunciations — vowel pronunciation (but not spelling) shifted "up" in the mouth. Essentially, this meant that the old "long a" ended up with the sound formerly assigned to *e*, which is the "ay" sound we now have in *babe* or *cave*.⁶ (Previously *babe* would have been pronounced something like "BAHB-uh.") Assuming *Babel* to have been pronounced "BAHB-uhl" before the GVS, after the shift it would likely have acquired the "ay" sound, making it "BAYB-uhl."

As a "big picture" point, this history is revealing. Some quickly assume there was an American corruption from *bay-bel* to *ba-bel* because of presumed influence of words like *babble* or *babbling*.⁷ But this may not be the case. The pronunciation with the short *a* may simply have been brought by European immigrants speaking French or Germanic languages. In fact, the United States was largely dominated by Western European settlers from largely Germanic language family nations (Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Austria, Switzerland, etc.) and France up until 1970, and, as they learned English, the American language deviated more and more from British English.⁸

6. C.W. Millward, *A Biography of the English Language*, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 1996).

7. My experience has been that most Americans say "bah-bel," although certain regions tend to favor saying "bay-bel" still.

8. "Immigration Explorer," *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/03/10/us/20090310-immigration-explorer.html.

From here, this author found that the Hebrew pronunciation in both *Strong's* and *The Hebrew-English Dictionary* is *baw-bel'*. The stress is on the second syllable with the short *a* sound. It is the same Hebrew word for both Babel and Babylon, the latter empire. The Greek equivalent is *Babulwn* (bab-oo-lone'). The Greek yields a short *a* sound similar to the second pronunciation (ba-bel) in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, and this Greek influence may be why the second pronunciation gained popularity.

When one listens in Hebrew to Genesis chapters 10⁹ and 11,¹⁰ where it mentions Babel in verse 10 and verse 9, respectively, it is pronounced the way *Strong's* and *The Hebrew-English Dictionary* indicate (baw-bel').

Conclusion

Both English pronunciations differ slightly from the Hebrew, but the "second" pronunciation (ba-bel) is actually a bit closer. In American English, we would normally say either *bay-bel* or *ba-bel*, since *Merriam-Webster* is one of the primary standards for the American English language. In England though, *bay-bel* is the Oxford standard. To be true to the Hebrew, it is *baw-bel'*. Perhaps the best point that can be made on this is that people are still affected by language division that occurred at Babel, and this is obviously the case, to a lesser degree, with the word *Babel*. And after the events at Babel, it was probably pronounced a multitude of ways and they were all correct!

Significantly, man's thoughts of rebellion have been in effect since the Fall of mankind (Genesis 3). Babel was no different. God said to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth (Genesis 9:1,¹¹) but man's rebellious heart was again disobedient *so soon after the Flood* that these men tried to defy God's command by building a tower so they would not be scattered (Genesis 11:4¹²).

Often today, we get caught up in the details of something like how to pronounce *Babel*, and yet we don't reflect that due to rebellion against a holy God, this scattering of languages and people occurred. As we study Scripture, we need to keep in mind the big picture of sin, rebellion . . . and, of course, Christ's sacrificial work to save us from God's righteous judgment.

But let's now turn our attention to a serious problem in today's culture and examine some of the attacks associated with the Tower of Babel.

9. "Genesis 10," Hebrew Audio Bible, Academy of Ancient Languages, http://www.aol.org/Hebrew/AudioBible/01_Genesis/01-Gen_10.mp3.

10. "Genesis 11," Ibid.

11. Genesis 9:1: So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth."

12. Genesis 11:4 And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."