

Thoughts about Babel

Commentary for July 16, 2015 — or ... “Babel Thoughts”

Speaking about the events at Babel with a friend, several ideas occurred to me that I want to present to you. I doubt these propositions can be proven this side of the resurrection, but I intend to raise questions which might yield some insights. I take into account human behavior analysis, especially the depth of human depravity. While I am wary to use human reasoning and apply it to Scripture, please bear with me.

Writing Before the Flood?

Have you ever asked yourself, was there writing before the flood? I am no longer sure there was. Consider Adam and Eve, and the generations of their descendants for the first 1,600+ years of human history until the flood. They had the capability to live lives that lasted several hundred years. The longest-lived person recorded in the Bible was Methuselah, who lived for 969 years (Genesis 5:27).

We have accounts written for us about God’s creation from Genesis 1:1, including the genealogies of Noah’s ancestors, sin in the Garden of Eden, and the ever-increasing evil of Genesis chapter 6 necessitating that God take action, up to the flood. All this pre-flood information was transmitted from Noah, his sons and their wives, to their descendants. We learn about it from Scripture set down for us in writing.

All pre-flood people were nearly perfect physical and mental specimens. Adam and Eve were created to God’s rigorous specifications. Their descendants need to be genetically viable up to Christ’s return.¹ Their immediate descendants had no noticeable genetic deterioration, but after hundreds of generations, accumulated genetic mutations will have a very negative effect on the human population.²

Pre-flood Memory

I postulate that pre-flood people had near perfectly functioning minds and memories every bit as sharp and vital as their physical prowess that allowed them to live hundreds of years. If their memories were near perfect, would they need writing? If they had total recall, why develop a system to write things down? Why would you or anyone need such a system?

¹ After Christ’s return, mankind’s genetics will apparently be healed and long life equivalent pre-flood longevity will return as Isaiah 65:20 says:

“There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that has not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.”

God can do such things, just as He extended the life of King Hezekiah of Judah in Isaiah chapter 38. During the great white throne judgment in New Jerusalem the restorative properties of the tree of life will be available to all who will go and eat (Revelation 22:2, 14).

² See John Sanford, Ph.D., *Genetic Entropy*, 4th ed. (FMS Publications, 2014).

I have one daughter who “understands” things she is taught pretty much the first time she learns them. How much more would the pre-flood people “understand” things? I have another daughter who can memorize great quantities of information quickly and easily. (They get these traits from their mother, of course.) How much more would pre-flood people remember everything? In fact, forgetting might even have been a problem for them.

Some people can memorize entire books. I witnessed a demonstration of Koran memorization at a World Affairs Council meeting over a decade ago in Bakersfield, California. One purpose was to show the devotion of Muslim believers through their memorization. (I suspect another purpose was to shame Christians, who know little about their own holy book, the Bible.)

Some people today have perfect memories of events in their personal lives. American actress [Marilyn Henner](#) (from the sitcom *Taxi*) reportedly has a perfect memory, which she uses to her professional advantage. Her condition is called [hyperthymesia](#), which means, **“possessing an extremely detailed autobiographical memory. Hyperthymesiacs remember an abnormally vast number of their life experiences.”** From the Wikipedia article,

“Individuals with hyperthymesia can recall almost every day of their lives in near perfect detail, as well as public events that hold some personal significance to them. Those affected describe their memories as uncontrollable associations, when they encounter a date, they ‘see’ a vivid depiction of that day in their heads. Recollection occurs without hesitation or conscious effort.”

• *Wikipedia article, “[Hyperthymesia](#),” accessed July 13, 2015*

In fact, people who have such perfect memories about their own experiences can have severe problems in life. This was dramatically portrayed in the 12th episode of season 7 ([You Must Remember This](#)) of the medical drama *House*. Dr. House’s patient was a waitress who had hyperthymesia. She alienated everyone around her because she could not forgive anyone. Memories of how relatives and friends hurt her emotionally were so vivid and real, it was as if they happened that same day. The fictional waitress, and some real people who have hyperthymesia, find it very difficult to forgive others because they cannot put the faults of others “behind them.” They literally cannot “forgive and forget.”³

Imagine that everyone, all people before the flood, were incapable of forgetting any slight, any wrong, any sin, or attack (emotional or physical). Would that lead to violence? Would it be a society where evil would increase, yet people live hundreds of years, forgetting nothing? This seems to be how the pre-flood society is described:

“Yahweh saw that the evil of humanity was multiplying on earth, and every form of the devisings of its heart was surely evil all the day. Yahweh regretted that He had made humanity on earth, and He grieved in His heart.”

• *Genesis 6:5–6 (Concordant Literal Version, see also Jeremiah 7:9–10)*

Every child of Adam and Eve remembered everything — and forgot nothing. They probably forgave little if ever. Evil multiplied. God felt that situation must end and said, He “... **shall**

³ YHWH cannot forget, so King Hezekiah prayed his sins be put behind YHWH’s back (Isaiah 38:17).

wipe out humanity that I have created, off the surface of the ground, ... for I regret that I have made them" (Genesis 6:7, CLV).

On the positive side, it would have been easy for pre-flood people to know their lineage and cite long genealogies of hundreds of people in their extended family, all descended from Adam. A child would ask an elder, "Who was my great-grandfather's second cousin on my mother's side?" A parent would only have to tell their child the facts one time and the child would remember. If this were so, would writing be necessary in such a world? I do not think writing would be necessary, or even desirable.

When Did Writing Start?

I propose that writing began after God confused the languages at Babel (Genesis 11:1–9).

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

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.' And YHWH came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men built. And YHWH 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. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.'

So YHWH scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because YHWH did there confound the language of all the earth: and from there did YHWH scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth."

• **Genesis 11:1–9, KJV**

Note what God did. He limited mankind by **(1) "confounding their language,"** **(2)** diminishing their lifespan,⁴ and **(3)** choosing to **"scatter them abroad."**⁵ Also, God may have **(4)** limited their memory. Memory plays an important part in language. Yet, they could not remember their former "one language." By doing so, God postponed another worldwide judgment.

Social Problems at Babel

Before the flood, there was one language⁶; after the flood, God separated languages

⁴ Consider Genesis 6:3, which may refer to before the flood only, but also read Psalm 90:10:

"The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away."

⁵ The confusion of languages took place a short time before the "earth" was divided, in the days of Peleg (Genesis 10:25; 1 Chronicles 1:19).

⁶ Some scholars believe Hebrew was the original language, but there is no evidence for this. While numbers vary among scholars, the Old Testament is composed of 419,687 Hebrew words formed from a vocabulary of 8,679 unique words, as Blair Kasfeldt notes in his internet article, "[Biblical Hebrew Vocabulary: How Much is Enough? The Law of Diminishing Returns.](#)"

according to families. What “link” determined the bounds of families? Were families divided according to the lineage of the fathers or the mothers? I speculate that families were divided according to fathers.

After Babel, mothers might not be able to speak to their own sisters, brothers, and perhaps not even with their own mothers because they and their husbands spoke a different language from the wife’s mother. Imagine the emotional heartbreak, confusion, and frustration that events at Babel must have had. It broke up their society. And everyone knew that God did it.

Beginning to Write

How could people begin to communicate again after the confusion of tongues? Through the development of written language. I propose that writing was invented after Babel. People were still clever in the generations after the flood, but the diminishing physical vitality, mental acuity, and a shorter life-span trending down to 70 years plus some, limited the ability to learn multiple languages, or to recreate a one-world language.

The Chinese writing system may give us a clue to how things progressed in the post-flood world. The two major Chinese spoken languages are Mandarin and Cantonese. The two language groups are not able to speak to each other, but the Chinese written language can be read by both Mandarin and Cantonese speakers. This is interesting:

“The Chinese writing system developed more than 4,000 years ago; the oldest extant examples of written Chinese are from the 14th or 15th cent. B.C., ... Chinese writing consists of an individual character or ideogram for every syllable, each character representing a word or idea rather than a sound; thus, problems caused by homonyms in spoken Chinese are not a difficulty in written Chinese. The written language is a unifying factor culturally, for although the spoken languages and dialects may not be mutually comprehensible in many instances, the written form is universal.”

- [Information Please, “Chinese: Chinese Writing System”](#)

This boggles my mind. The Chinese written language has some 4,000 characters. What is needed to recall 4,000 characters? A good memory, even though some characters are derived from other characters. Alphabetic writing greatly diminished so many characters.

During the Middle Ages, European languages became localized and separated. Yet there was a scholarly language where communication occurred without speakers of different native languages being able to understand each other. That language was Latin, originally the imperial language of the Roman Empire. It became a scholarly language throughout Europe. Over time “commercial languages” developed such as Aramaic, Koine Greek, and English today. English is close to being a world language, the language of science, technology, and travel (pilots all speak English), yet English is not the world’s most-spoken language.

My theory: writing developed after Babel so people could communicate across time and space, and learn other languages. Before Christ’s return, that process is nearly complete.