

THE TOWER OF BABEL

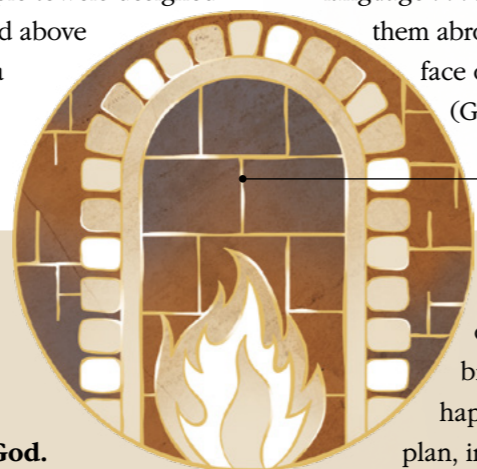
What can this ancient construction project teach us today?

The Tower

- Built of bricks that were baked with fire, as in an oven or a kiln (see Genesis 11:3). Sun-dried bricks had been used for a long time, but baking bricks made them stronger, so larger structures could be built with this new technology.
- Used bitumen (a form of petroleum used today in asphalt or roofing tiles) for mortar.

- Located in Shinar in Mesopotamia and associated with Nimrod (see Genesis 10:10; 11:2).
- Because of its location and materials, usually associated with *ziggurats*, which were stepped temple towers designed to be elevated above a plain, like a man-made mountain.

- Built to “reach unto heaven” and to allow the people to “make [them] a name” and not be scattered (Genesis 11:4).
- Failed to achieve its purpose for the people; instead, “the Lord did . . . confound [their] language . . . and . . . scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth” (Genesis 11:9).



What We Can Learn

The tower of Babel:

Used the latest technology. Our mounting technological triumphs, though they can be used for good, can also cause us to forget God and rely on our own strength. Man’s invention is no substitute for God’s power.

Was completely man-made. The Lord wants us to “trust in [Him] with all [our] heart; and lean not unto [our] own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth

from the Lord” (Jeremiah 17:5).

Was undertaken without authority from God.

It seems that the people at Babel were attempting to build a counterfeit temple to “reach unto heaven,” bind or seal the people together somehow so they would not be scattered, and “make [them] a name” rather than take the Lord’s name upon them—and all this without authority from God and without regard to His commandments. No

project of our own devising will bring us ultimate happiness; only God’s plan, including temple covenants, can do that.

Failed. A world that rejects God and, with pride and arrogance, tries to obtain happiness while disregarding Him and His righteousness will always fail in its quest. “The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day” (Isaiah 2:17).



Mortar

Brick

Tower

Oven or kilns

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAVID S. GREEN

ADDITIONAL FACTS

- The Lord’s people were commanded to build their altars out of stones that had not been cut with tools (see Exodus 20:24–25). And they built their temples out of quarried stone rather than man-made brick (see 1 Kings 5:15–18).
- The word *Babel* in Hebrew means “confusion,” but in Babylonian or Akkadian it meant “gate of God,” in reference to the tower’s temple function.
 - Jewish tradition holds that Nimrod rebelled against God and tried to usurp His authority.
 - One reason the people built the tower was so that they would not be scattered (see Genesis 11:4). Doctrine and Covenants 2:3 says the sealing power would be restored so that the earth would not be “wasted” at the Second Coming. In Joseph Smith’s day, one definition of waste was “to destroy by scattering” (Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* [1828], “waste”).

LEARN MORE

For more ideas about possible Latter-day Saint perspectives on the tower of Babel, see “I Have a Question,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1994, 60–61.