

Review of “The Tower of Babel Account: A Linguistic Consideration,” for *Science Religion and Culture*.

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The article, “The Tower of Babel Account: A Linguistic Consideration,” proposed for publication in *Science Religion and Culture*, does seem to meet the criteria that the journal lays out for itself. The author argues for the possibility of a monogenetic account of linguistic diversification that would cohere with the Biblical account of the Tower of Babel found in Genesis 11:1-6. The author’s primary argument seems aimed at both the academic linguistic community and conservative Christians who read the Bible literally. A number of observations follow.

Firstly, the author writes from a very conservative Christian perspective. The assumptions contained within this perspective are not shared by the majority of contemporary biblical scholars, apart from anthropologists and linguists. He reads the Tower of Babel as history more than myth. His argument includes a relatively literal reading of the generations provided in Genesis. This means that the perceived time of human evolution and history of linguistic change changes from hundreds of thousands of years to just thousands of years. Most biblical scholars read Genesis, especially its first 11 chapters, as myth, written by a number of people, and probably compiled in its current form during the Babylonian Exile of the Jewish people in 586-538 BCE.¹

Another problem with the author’s literal reading and interpretation of the Tower of Babel account is found in its immediate preceding literary context. In Genesis 10:32 the descendants of Noah already branch out over the earth after the flood. This seems to make his primary argument that it was the scattering of the peoples which is of major importance in the Tower of Babel account. This previous verse would imply the scattering of peoples and speaking of different languages before the Tower of Babel, and yet once verse later all the people gather speaking one tongue.

¹ Berlin, A. and Marc Zvi Brettler, Eds., *The Jewish Study Bible*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

Secondly, in my own estimation, the author's use of multiple similar stories to the Tower of Babel account found in diverse cultures and regions of the world, is one which respects neither their significant differences, nor the influence of mainly early Christian missionaries in the recording of these stories. The author appears to employ those parts which support his reading of the Biblical Tower of Babel account. His own interpretation of the biblical account differs from the traditional reading, and again the author seems to twist the simple reading of the text to support his linguistic argument.

Thirdly, his argument for a monogenetic account of linguistic diversity is contended within both anthropological studies of human evolution and linguistic understandings of the development of human languages. The author recognizes this fact, but, in my opinion, does not deal with it sufficiently using the most recent anthropological research.

In conclusion, this is an interesting article for those people who accept the author's primary assumption: Genesis can be read reliably, even if incomplete, as history. For myself as both a biblical scholar and anthropologist, the argument seems somewhat contrived in its attempt to bring together the history of linguistic diversity and the biblical account of the Tower of Babel.

Thank you for the opportunity to write this review. I would be interested in writing more reviews for your journal.

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