

## Notes on the Old Testament.

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1. **The Site of the Tower of Babel** (Gen. xi. 1-9).—In Dillmann's *Genesis* (ed. 4, p. 191) we read: "In this Babel there must have been a gigantic, towerlike, but uncompleted building of much notoriety, and to this our story attaches itself." A little later, on the same page, Dillmann says: "Now there exist on the west side of the Euphrates, nine kilometres south of Hillah, huge ruins of such a tower, called Birs Nimrud, and long ago this ruin was identified with the Bel sanctuary of Herodotus, the tower of our passage." He then goes on to call attention to the fact that, "There are still similar towers in many places in that country, always built in the same style, some with three, some with five, some with seven diminishing stages, so that it is not probable that it was precisely this Borsippa building to which our narrative refers. It is rather to be supposed that the present ruin of Babil, to the north of the city of Babylon itself, on the left side of the river, the most imposing of all the ruins, and the ancient temple of Bel-Merodach, rising as a high pyramid, likewise later rebuilt by Nebuchadrezzar, is the building referred to."

It was my good fortune to visit and examine both Babil and Birs Nimrud in January of 1889. I also revisited the former the following year. Babil has been used, I presume from time immemorial, as a quarry for bricks, and the deep holes and trenches enable one without excavation to study to some extent the character of the mound. I found on the summit a mass of unbaked brick, some thirty feet or so in height. Beneath this was a solid but not homogeneous structure of baked brick. Most of the bricks which we observed bore the inscription of Nebuchadrezzar. One bore the inscription of Nabopolassar. At one point a deep excavation revealed a door. This had been built up, and later a solid mass of baked brick had been built against the wall through which it had formed an entrance. In another place some piers had been built up in the same way. Originally there had been a structure resting on the piers, between which there were openings. These openings had been built up, and then a solid

mass of brick erected by the side of them. What would be revealed by scientific and systematic excavations on this mound it is difficult to conjecture, but what the present excavations reveal is unlike any Ziggurat of which we have information, and while *a priori* I should expect to find in this enormous and most prominent mound of Babylon the remains of the famous Ziggurat of the Temple of Bel-Merodach described by Herodotus, the Esaggil of the inscriptions of Nebuchadrezzar, it seemed to me after examination of the place very improbable that Babil could represent that Ziggurat.

Now Ziggurats are not by any means so numerous in Babylonia as Dillmann's statement would imply. A great many temples and some of the most famous temples are built without Ziggurats. There was no Ziggurat in connection with the Temple of the Sun at Sippara. There was no Ziggurat in connection with the temple unearthed by de Sarzec at Tello. The only Ziggurats discovered up to this time in Babylonia are those at Borsippa, at Nippur, at Erech, and at Ur, nor could there have been many more than this in Babylonia. A Ziggurat by its very nature must have, we should suppose, ruins of a peculiar shape and of considerable prominence. Now most of the ruin sites in Babylonia, while they have not been excavated, have nevertheless been visited by explorers, and from the description given by those explorers it would seem that there are comparatively few in which it is likely or even possible that the remains of any Ziggurat can be found.

This being the case, our choice of sites for the legend of the tower of Babel is really very limited. Moreover, the name Babel, if it does not compel us to look for the place in Babylon itself, would certainly seem to require a site in the immediate neighborhood of that city. I admit that the name of Babel would be best satisfied by a site in Babylon itself. On the other hand, the description of the ruins of the Ziggurat of Nebo at Borsippa before Nebuchadrezzar's time, as given by Nebuchadrezzar, is most suggestive in connection with this story of the eleventh chapter of Genesis.

That description is contained in the clay cylinders of Nebuchadrezzar found in the corners of the Ziggurat of Birs Nimrud. The inscription on these clay cylinders reads as follows :

Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon, the rightful ruler, the expression of the righteous heart of Marduk, the exalted high priest, the beloved of Nebo, the wise prince, who devotes his care to the affairs of the great gods, the unwearying ruler, the restorer of Esagila and Ezida, the son and heir of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, am I.

Marduk the great god formed me aright and commissioned me to perform his restoration ; Nebo guider of the universe of heaven and earth placed in my hand the right sceptre. Esagila, the house of heaven and earth, the abode of Marduk, lord of the gods, Ekua, the sanctuary of his lordship, I adorned gloriously with shining gold. Ezida I built anew, and completed its construction with silver, gold, precious stones, bronze, *musukkani* wood, and cedar wood. *Timinanki*, the Ziggurat of Babylon, I built and completed; of bricks glazed with lapis-lazuli (blue) I erected its summit.

At that time the house of the seven divisions of heaven and earth, the Ziggurat of Borsippa, which a former king had built and carried up to the height of forty-two ells, but the summit of which he had not erected, was long since fallen into decay, and its water conduits had become useless ; rainstorms and tempests had penetrated its unbaked brick-work ; the bricks which cased it were bulged out, the unbaked bricks of its terraces were converted into rubbish heaps. The great lord Marduk moved my heart to rebuild it. Its place I changed not and its foundation I altered not. In a lucky month, on an auspicious day I rebuilt the unbaked bricks of its terraces and its encasing bricks, which were broken away, and I raised up that which was fallen down. My inscription I put upon the *kiliri* of its buildings. To build it and to erect its summit I set my hand. I built it anew as in former times ; as in days of yore I erected its summit.

Nebo, rightful son, lordly messenger, majestic friend of Marduk, look kindly on my pious works ; long life, enjoyment of health, a firm throne, a long reign, the overthrow of foes, and conquest of the land of the enemy give me as a gift. On thy righteous tablet, which determines the course of heaven and earth, record for me length of days, write for me wealth. Before Marduk, lord of heaven and earth, the father who bore thee, make pleasant my days, speak favorably for me. Let this be in thy mouth, "Nebuchadrezzar, the restorer king."

Nebuchadrezzar describes the ruined condition in which the Ziggurat was when he found it. It was built long before his day, and built with very ambitious ideas. It was forty-two ells in height, but the summit had never been completed. The consequence of this failure to erect the summit was that the water struck into the unprotected mud bricks forming the mass of the interior of the Ziggurat, dissolved them, and broke and bulged out the casing walls of baked bricks by which the different terraces were held in, reducing the whole to a huge mass of ruins. The water conduits referred to are such as Mr. Haynes found on the sides of the Ziggurat at Nippur, designed to carry off the water from the surfaces of the upper terraces, and save the whole structure from decay. These conduits are useful only in case proper arrangements are made to carry into them the water falling on the surfaces of the upper terraces. The failure in this case to "erect the summit," and the consequent soaking of the water into the clay bricks of the interior soon rendered these conduits useless.

The striking similarities of this story to that of the tower of Babel are, outside of the site, the extremely ambitious nature of this Ziggurat of Borsippa which Nebuchadrezzar found in ruins, and the fact that after it had been raised to a great height the work was suddenly abandoned, leaving the building in such an incomplete condition that its ruin was inevitable.

As Nebuchadrezzar found it, the tower was little more than an enormous mass of ruins. He built it over entirely, and made it a seven-staged Ziggurat. It is the ruins of Nebuchadrezzar's Ziggurat which constitute the present Birs Nimrud, and the explorations which have been conducted there revealed the seven stages still existing.

Now Nebuchadrezzar gives no similar description of the ruined and incomplete condition of any other Ziggurat which he rebuilt. He rebuilt among other places the Ziggurat of Esaggil in Babylon, but he has nothing to tell us of its ruined condition. Evidently the ruined condition of the Ziggurat at Borsippa, in connection with its great size and ambitious design, made a strong impression upon his mind, or the mind of the writer of his inscription. This is not a positive proof that it made a similar impression on the world at large, yet the natural induction is that the ruined condition of this Ziggurat was notorious and impressed all beholders. How long before the time of Nebuchadrezzar it had fallen into such a condition it is impossible from our present information to say. Nebuchadrezzar says "long since," and does not mention the name of the original builder, calling him merely a "former king," as though its original construction were a thing of the remote past, the details of which were long since forgotten. But whatever the date, Nebuchadrezzar's account of the ruins of this Ziggurat corresponds so well with the story of the eleventh chapter of Genesis that one is inclined to attach that story at least tentatively to this ruin.

I need scarcely call attention to the fact that the story, as we know it in the eleventh chapter of Genesis, comes from the Yahwistic narrative, and was written down probably somewhere in the early part of the eighth century before Christ, two hundred years or so before Nebuchadrezzar. How much older the story itself may be it is difficult to say. It certainly, however, implies connection by travelers, merchants, and the like with Babylonia, from which place the story would seem to have been imported into Judæa.

**2. The Three Children in the Fiery Furnace** (Dan. iii.; Jer. xxix. 22).—It is a matter of great surprise to me that I have