



Type: Book Chapter

---

## Near Eastern History and Archaeology Consistent with the Description of the Jaredite Departure

Author(s): Jerry D. Grover, Jr.

Source: *The Swords of Shule: Jaredite Land Northward Chronology, Geography, and Culture in Mesoamerica*

Published: Provo, UT; Challex Scientific Publishing, 2018

Pages: 75-76

---

## Chapter 8

# Near Eastern History and Archaeology Consistent with the Description of the Jaredite Departure

---

This chapter parallels chapter 4 in that it seeks to place the beginning of the Jaredite chronology using evidence outside the Book of Mormon, in this case by anchoring that chronology to its founding event, the “confounding” of language.

Any discussion of Jaredite chronology will necessarily have to deal with the Jaredite origin in the Old World. The Jaredites initially originated from the “great tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people, and swore in his wrath that they should be scattered upon all the face of the earth” (Ether 1:33). The Book of Mormon does not specifically identify the great tower as the biblical tower of Babel; however, Moroni<sup>2</sup> indicates that the account of Adam to the great tower is “had among the Jews” (Ether 1:3), so there is at least some implication that the great tower is the tower of Babel, or at least a similar tower from that timeframe.

It is generally accepted that the best candidate for the biblical tower of Babel is a ziggurat, a rectangular stepped tower sometimes surmounted by a temple located in ancient Mesopotamia. In order to try to better understand the potential event involving the great tower, it will be necessary to look at events that took place in Mesopotamia that involve both population dislocation and language transitions or difficulties, all of which are consistent with Jaredite chronology constraints.

With regards to the confounding of language, it seems doubtful that each individual began speaking a different language; there are other possible reasonable explanations.

Brant Gardner (2007) reads the biblical story of the tower of Babel as a remembrance of an event of ancient temple building, not as the true origin of multiple languages (6:164). Gardner summarizes: “In this reading of the text, the confounding of languages is related to the mixing (confounding) of different peoples in creating this great tower in Babylon. From such a mixing of people who were attempting to build a temple to the heavens, Yahweh removed some of His believers [e.g., the Jaredites and, at some point, Abram] for His own purposes.” (6:164)

Since Sumerian has been identified as the language of the original Jaredites, it is helpful to look there for some possibilities. In this regard, a segment of a Mesopotamian epic entitled *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* is of special interest. *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* is a legendary Sumerian account from preserved, early post-Sumerian copies, composed in the Neo-Sumerian Period (ca. 21st century BC).

The account speaks of a time when there are no predators and there is peace between nations and rulers. The section ends with a statement about people speaking the same language. Jacobsen (1992) translated it as referring back to a past event: “In those days . . . did Enki . . . estrange the tongues in their mouths as many as were put there. The tongues of men which were one.” (194). B. Batto agrees with the translation in the past, but considers it a description of an inchoate, primitive, uncivilized condition rather than an idyllic or paradisiacal one (Bradshaw 2014).

If Jacobsen is correct, this section of the epic may stand as a parallel to the Babel account in providing an account of the disruption of languages. It would not be out of character, however, for Genesis to have a far different assessment of language diversity than that encountered in the rest of the ancient Near East. Just as paradise was a

negative condition in the ancient Near East and a positive one in the Bible, so the unified language is positive in the Bible and negative in the ancient Near East.

The departure of the Jaredites in the 2500–2600 BC timeframe falls within the Early Dynastic Period. The entire Early Dynastic Period is generally dated to 2900–2350 BC according to the Middle Chronology, or 2800–2230 BC according to the Short Chronology. The chronology of this Early Dynastic era is particularly uncertain due to difficulties in our understanding of the text, our understanding of the material culture of the Early Dynastic Period, and a general lack of radiocarbon dates for sites in Iraq. Also, the multitude of city-states makes for a confusing situation, since each had its own history.

Looking to other possibilities to explain the confounding of language, from a scientific standpoint, there are diseases that might alter speech, such as insect-borne Lyme disease that can result in facial palsy, or various viruses that can cause Bell's palsy. In addition, the confounding of language may be referring to the written language, not the spoken language. When the brother of Jared received the interpreter stones, it is clear that the reference to a confounding of language refers only to written language.

Ether 3:22–24

22 And behold, when ye shall come unto me, ye shall write them and shall seal them up, that no one can interpret them; for ye shall write them in a language that they cannot be read.

23 And behold, these two stones will I give unto thee, and ye shall seal them up also with the things which ye shall write.

24 For behold, the language which ye shall write I have confounded; wherefore I will cause in my own due time that these stones shall magnify to the eyes of men these things which ye shall write.

This being the case, if the language being referred to as being confounded is the written script, one plausible explanation from within the timeframe when the Jaredites departed, in 2500–2600 BC, is the haphazard transition from the Elamite or Sumerian proto-cuneiform to the cuneiform script.

Although more research is needed here, there is at least a plausible likelihood, based on the Mesopotamian archaeological record, that the Jaredites left their Sumerian homeland around 2600–2700 BC.