Research article

THE TOWER OF BABEL AND THE WATERSHED OF MORAL CIVILIZATION

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What is the significance of the Tower of Babel narrative in the Bible, seemingly abruptly inserted between Noah and Abraham- The two crucial figures of monotheism? Who led the building of the Tower of Babel, and what impact did it have on later human society? The Bible has no direct interpretation, thus making it available for the reader to interpret. Based on the biblical commentaries and other rabbinical texts related to the Tower of Babel incident, this article puts forward the argument that the Tower of Babel is a watershed of human moral civilization and discusses it from the three aspects: the event of Tower of Babel brings two types of religion bases (Human-based and God-based), brings two philosophical categories (theocentrism and anthropocentrism), and brings the two cultural societies (Babel style and Abraham styles), which conducts some analysis around the theme from three sources that influence the definition of morality: religious belief, philosophy, and culture.
From the perspective of the character clue, Bible describes Noah and Abraham, the key figures in the fate of humankind, all known as “the righteous man in the eyes of God” (Gen.7:1; Gen.15:6). However, just between the two biblical epics, the main character narrative, a seemingly in-coordination story, “Tower of Babel,” is suddenly inserted. This story happens to be about the opposite case of “righteousness in God’s eyes”: “Unrighteous,” which is explained like this according to the result of Babel tower- God confounded the speech of the whole earth (Gen.11:9), and the tower was stopped for this (Gen.11:8). Unrighteousness, which involves moral issues. So how did this “unrighteous action-building Babel tower” connect the narratives of two righteous men (Noah and Abraham)? What were the consequences or effects of Babel Tower work? What is its impact on today's human society radiation?

Since the Bible does not explain how the Babel story is associated with the context, it leaves readers some space to annotate and think more, which commentators try to understand. Bible text illustrates the different language formations and the people thus scattered across the ground. The commentator Daniel Gordis considers the connection between biblical text and the narrative of the Tower of Babel placed between the Great Flood and the picking of Abraham. It demonstrates the concept of nationhood—of distinct group identity based on common language, culture, land, and blood tie. However, Daniel Gord does not refer to this event's pivotal role in future religious beliefs and moral thought. Therefore, this article provides an in-depth reading of the Tower of Babel narrative and biblical commentary to reveal its far-reaching impact on human society: the incident of building the Tower is a critical event that becomes a watershed moment in human moral civilization.

Although the text about the Tower of Babel has only 9 verses (Gen. 11:1-9), and there are not explicitly labeled as ‘moral issues’ within the text itself, this part of the Hebrew biblical narrative deals with the roots of moral cognition and fundamental issues of morality. This issue needs to be analyzed from the definition of morality. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, the conception of “Morality” can be a body of standards or principles derived from a code of conduct from a particular religion, philosophy, or culture. It also derives from a standard that a person believes should be universal. This article will mainly discuss the influence of the Tower of Babel event on human moral civilization from
three perspectives (religion, philosophy, and culture). The way of discussion is based on the understanding and analysis of the Bible commentaries.

Here we first discuss morality from the perspective of religious belief.

1. Two types of belief bases Human-based and God-based

Based on the biblical account of the Great Flood, it is clear that Noah was a model of the monotheistic beliefs of that time, as God saw him as “righteous” (Genesis 6:9) with his wife and three sons and daughters-in-law must be of the same faith and thus be saved. Then, their moral standards are based on “one-God belief,” and a series of behavioral rules of morality is developed from “believing in Jehovah.” However, their descendants began to have fission of beliefs, which evolved into an extreme representative event, “building Tower of Babel.” However, the Bible does not specify which descendant(s) started the fission of faith - no longer believe in and obey the one true God. Why did he or they fight against God? What does this have to do with the previous event- The great Flood? And what does it have to do with the later event- God’s calling and election of Abraham? This question leaves room for readers to ponder, and some notes from commentators of the Bible in the past also provide commentary references worthy of our consideration.

In the biblical text, it is clear that the event of the Tower of Babel is against the Will of God and brings about the dissatisfaction of God “confound their speech there...and they stopped building the city.” (Gen.11:7-8). This generation is in stark contrast to Noah’s piety and the obedience of Abraham to the one true God. It also contrasts with the subsequent obedience of Abraham to the one true God. Considering that the bible does not explicitly introduce who built the tower of Babel and how about the sins of people in the tower’s age. Commentators must try to understand who was building the tower of Babel and how about the sins of people in the tower’s age. What are their sins in God’s eyes, and how did their fission in monotheism happen? These issues inherently belong to the moral category.

Germany's Orthodox rabbi Samson Rav Hirsch explicitly mentions the builders of the Tower of Babel (note: this article will refer to “the Builders of the Tower of Babel” simply as BTB as plural noun in the following description) jeopardized the future of morality. He
emphasized that BTB began to despise God's status when they united to obtain some power for their plans, pursued greatness and transcendence in the collective power, and then gave up their respect for God and God's moral law. Hirsch commented that BTB believed that they, as a whole, could rely on themselves, but in fact, their praise for the group was not the purpose. It was to win the laurels on their heads from the power of the whole and make themselves the glory and honor. They pursue the glory of the individual or the group as a whole rather than being willing to serve God for the glory of God. Rav Hirsch further points out: But this is the most pernicious delusion that society may pursue ends, not within the bounds of God's moral law, but deviating from God's moral law. In Rav Hirsch’s comment, he does not recognize that “the event of the Tower of Babel was a watershed in human moral civilization.” Still, he emphasizes the departure of BTB from the previous moral law of God, which Noah believes in.

More Bible commentators do not think BTB “merely deviated from God's moral law” but commented that they were “hostile to God.” If God's Word is the only correct moral standard, BTB was very immoral according to the view of most biblical commentators. Summarizing the comments of the commentators, it can be seen that the way BTB opposed God was a process of gradual escalation, which can be summarized in the following three aspects:

(I) To incite dissatisfaction and hostility against God

According to the Bible, the Great Flood was “Fifteen cubits higher did the waters swell, as the mountains were covered.” (Gen. 7:20). It is conceivable that the world was a tragic scene after scene of the disaster because corpses of people and animals were scattered everywhere, and buildings were destroyed. The whole earth needed to be restored and rebuilt. If people at this time only look at the environment and fail to recognize their problems, they will quickly fail to understand God’s actions in bringing down the Great Flood, and they will easily be afraid to go to a farther place to face the reconstruction of the destroyed ground. Therefore, they will be afraid of “scattering”. The Will of the “Great Flood” and the “scattering” of people was all from God (Genesis 6:11; 9:1). If some people rebel against God and provoke their relationship with Him, they would quickly become dissatisfied. The Torah has worded its report in that it did not spell out these people’s evil intent in detail, nor does it describe the
provocative details of the rebels. Hence, the biblical commentators supplemented it through biblical commentaries.

Rabbeinu Bahya mentions a Midrashic comment in Midrash Tehillim 1 that the word הבָּרָה (Let’s) introduces an evil thought, an evil intention, as it does in Judges 20,7 “come up with a plan here and now!” He mentioned that the flooding caused people to have emotional resentment against a foreign power (God who brought disaster), just as the leaders of BTB instilled evil thoughts and intentions into their followers, inciting people’s dissatisfaction and hostility against God. Floods are an essential topic with breaking the relationship between people and God.

Rabbeinu Bahya further stated that the primary purpose of BTB was to overcome God’s decree on Adam, which also made all of them mortal. All their plans for building the Tower are for immortality. God had to disperse them because they planned to cancel the world order that God had instituted. Here, we don't know how Bahya knew that “the main purpose of of the Tower of Babel” was to “overcome the decree that God gave to Adam,” and he didn’t say what the decree that God gave to Adam was? According to the Torah, we only know that what God gave to Adam was not to enter the Garden of Eden again but to toil for life, from dust to dust. Suppose Bahya’s opinion “decree against Adam” is based on God’s punishment for Adam after eating the forbidden fruit. In that case, he believes that the primary purpose of the builders of the Tower of Babel was to “return to the Garden of Eden.” But the way chosen is not to be reconciled to God but to be against God.

According to the Torah, “God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, ‘Be fertile and increase, and fill the earth.’ ” (Gen. 9:1). Here we can see that “scatter” is God’s Will and is full of goodness and blessings. However, BTB was quite afraid of being scattered. Siftei Chakhamim specifically said that BTB dispersion phobia was because they believed that the flood of God was to disperse them. Based on his explanation that “not being scattered” is the reason for building the tower. So, Siftei Chakhamim implies that BTB is a group that rebelled against the will of God, and the reason was because of “fear”. But who is provoking them collectively to produce this kind of atmosphere of terror? Who is inciting them to rebel against God’s Will of “scatter”?
Many commentators think that the rebel representative of the Babel Tower event was Nimrod, as Noah’s great-grandson, that is, Ham’s grandson. Firstly, the name Nimrod-נמרוד, which means rebel in Hebrew, and the biblical description of “Nimrod, who was the first mighty figure on earth.” (Genesis 10:8). Philo reads the end of Gen. 10:9 as “a giant before God’, which is opposition to the Deity.” Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer described in his commentary text as if he stayed there to hear at that moment, “Nimrod said to his people, come on, let us build a big city for ourselves and live in it. I am afraid that we are scattered on the earth like the first people. Let us build a great tower among this, rise to heaven, because the power of the Holy is only in the water, let us have a great name on the ground, as people say, “Let us call ONE name.” This explanation is to imply that Nimrod was the caller and leader of the construction of Babel Tower at that time. Maybe Rabbigot this information from his prayer or supernatural view or just guessed, but his commentaries offer us to think: about how Nimrod did for people to “make a name for ourselves” (Gen.11:4) through building Babel Tower.

(2) Leading people to worship idols and false god

The problem for BTB, as shown in Genesis 11:4-6, was “make a name for ourselves.” It seems that spreading a name does not hurt anybody, and it does not seem to be a sin or “immoral,” but why does it cause God to personally look at it? What about the consequences of being punished by God's making confusing language” which made the building process stop? The original Torah does not explain. However, some commentators have commented on this, arguing that the phrase “let’s make a name for ourselves” is associated with idolatry. Rabbi Natan believes that BTB wanted to “make a name for themselves” and were essentially idolatrous. He talked about the connotation of “name” is idol worship. Similarly, the term “name” is idol worship. He concluded that its builders for idolatry-built Babel.

And Rabbeinu Bahya suggests that the words “make a name for ourselves” indirectly refer to idolatry. Bible commentator Sforno linked the purpose of BTB to “make a name for ourselves” to God's prohibition of the worship of idols. He comments, “And they said, ‘Come, let us build us a city’ -- this was at the advice of their leaders who wanted to enthrone Nimrod as king over the entire human race. Thus we will make for ourselves a name. This ‘name’ was the idol to be placed in the tower. They hoped that on account of the grandeur of
the tower and the city, this idol would come to be recognized universally as the supreme deity. In this way, the king of the city would achieve dominion over the entire world.” Sforno’s commentary presents the ambition behind the purpose of “make a name for ourselves,” that BTB achieved dominion through idolatry. In other words, the way to "make a name for ourselves" is to worship false gods as the path. Worshiping idols or false gods touches the bottom line of God, so He will personally come to inspect the built city and tower, not just because of judicial procedures but for judicial decisions. In Exodus 20, God gave the Ten Commandments. Idolatry will bring the curse to humanity as the rules from the Creator to the created ones (Exd.20:5)

From this point of view, it can be understood that terminating the construction of the Tower of Babel by confounding their speech is God’s protection for humankind so as not to fall into the curse of more idolatry. Rabbeinu Bahya believes that these people do something dangerous if left unchecked, which would lead to the demise of humanity. He further analyzed that humans tried to separate the role of the attributes of אֱלֹהִים from the role of the characteristics of the name of Yahweh God. God proved to them that, if successful, such an attempt would bring disaster to them and the earth on which they depended. Suppose the “Ten Commandments” are God’s basic moral standards for humankind as a kind of protection. In that case, the idolatrous behavior of the builders of the Tower of Babel is seriously “immoral” and “lost protection”. And after the Flood, this immorality came to the fore.

Rabbi Yirmeya bar Abba demonstrates his optimism in the Talmud commentary: he did not take the problem of idolatry seriously by BTB, and he shows his logic in his commentary: those who built Babel, the idolaters of the tower did not pursue idolatry persistently after being dispersed. He quotes Rav Hirsh saying that the Temple of Nimrod, the remains of the Tower of Babel (see Genesis 11:1-9), was considered a place of idolatry. However, he believed that it was only a former place of idolatry because when the Mercy dispersed the towers' builders, the situation was like wartime as they were forced to leave. However, if they wanted to come back, they could come back. Since they did not return, they chose to abandon the place of idolatry, thereby taking away its status. From his commentary, it seems that Yirmeya does not notice that idol worship is an external place and form and a
kind of internal worship and involves moral issues at the level of thought and behavior, which has nothing to do with the place. Therefore, this article insists that BTB still exists as a problem of worshiping idols. Although the initial rebels had already left the tower of Babel, they brought the belief to the world.

Unlike Rabbi Yirmeya bar Abba's optimism, Rav Hirsch's commentaries are cautionary tales. It insists that BTB have serious idolatry because he analyzed the relationship between idolatry and immorality. He further pointed out the relationship between idolatry and redemption. He believed that idols were created for an empty, nonredemptive purpose and that the price of idolatry by BTB was to give up respect for God and moral law. He further pointed out that BTB wanted to make a name for themselves. This was to build up man's own glory for the whole, and they were in danger of perishing. This pursuit of personal glory is a means to an end without morality in God, but that end is futile. In my opinion, Rev Hirsch has done a key consideration, which involves: the original standard of morality is God’s standard; what people want to achieve through idolatry is to spread their name and gain the glory of others, which is meaningless even moving towards the dangerous road to perdition.

(3) Rebel action against heaven-Fight God

“Idolatry” is more directly aimed at gaining man's selfish desires and brings an indirect opposition to God. It is more severe than idolatry, which is a war against God. We do not know how some commentators “see” the idea and scene of the “war” between BTB and God can only be understood from the logical reasoning of idolatry: the essence of idolatry is to obey the devil Satan. Once you become its servant, you will naturally go against God, even try to fight with God.

Rabbeinu Bahya said, “I have read in a Midrash on the Ten Commandments that these people proposed to take spades planning to invade heaven to flood it drains it to ensure that another deluge could not originate from that source. They wanted to take large chunks and engage in war with the King of heaven. The Tower had seventy steps in an easterly direction and seventy steps in a westerly direction on its opposite side. God descended those seventy steps accompanied by seventy angels, and He confused their language and dialects. Thus far, Midrash. BTB systematically invaded Paradise, flooded it, and drained it to ensure that another flood would not be produced from that source. They want to seize a large celestial
world and go to war with the king of the heavens. On the opposite side of the tower, there are seventy levels east and seventy levels west. God descended those seventy steps in the company of seventy angels, who confounded their language and tongues.” Midrash’s commentary is mystical, sometimes resembling the words of a movie script, such as it shows the original words of BTB: “We do not agree that God should have exclusive rights to heaven, and we are only assigned to Earth. Let us fight against him.” Sometimes Midrash’s annotations describe the scene at the time, which is not easy to understand by modern people, and seem to need a second explanation, for example, the construction of the Tower of Babel. The fighters sought to isolate and tame the power of fire to counteract its deadly effects, preventing it from engulfing their cities. Midrash’s authors cite what appears to be a scientist of the era who was trying to similarly “tame” the power of “fire” but it’s hard for us as people living in the modern era to understand what that means. Rabbeinu Bahya commented (similar to secondary interpretation: explain others’ comments) that this may be about the construction of lightning rods. But the direction of Midrash’s comments is clear: Their approach is against God. As Rabbeinu Bahya offers his understanding, “The Midrash believed that they were prepared to fight against the heavenly forces (such as angels) against the will of the Lord.”

Regarding the analysis of the reasons for fighting against God, in addition to the reason that some commentators mentioned that the fear of “the great flood” made BTB want to rely on building towers to prevent disasters, some other commentators mentioned another possible reason “Fear of the plague leads to be scattered.” Siftei Chakhamim believes that “not scattered” is the reason for this tower. He figured that if he brought some plague to disperse them, they would ascend the tower to fight Hashem. We don’t know whether the builders at that time had this plague fear. Still, such a comment will bring more realistic thinking to people living in today’s plague epidemic: whether people are afraid of the plague zone coming and scattering them when they rise against God?

In fact, "scatter" was initially God’s will (Gen. 9:1) to give people dominion over the earth. People’s fear shows their lack of understanding of God, their far relationship with God, and even opposition. It is a matter of faith. According to the definition of morality in this article, the first aspect is the source of religious belief. The escalating conflict between BTB
and God mentioned in the Bible commentary above involves a change in the ultimate moral standard: according to God's Will or to man's thought based on worshiping idols?

So, who is this leader worshiping idols and rising Man’s will? Indeed, an influential leader who was hostile to God. People will be interested in finding out the answer. Some commentators, represented by Rav Hirsch, believe that Nimrod was the leader. He mentioned in his comments that it was the earlier Jewish wise men who told everyone that the cause could only flourish under the leadership of Nimrod and that only a man like Nimrod could enable people to make such a sacrifice, that is, to fight against God to achieve his purpose. However, the leader (s) of the tower of Babel or other rebel characters are not usually named and described in Bible. Bible does not record their names, perhaps because it does not reveal the name of the evil one, as this commandment Make no mention of the names of other gods; they shall not be heard on your lips (Exo.23:13). The leader(s) who built the Tower of Babel are not shown in the Bible. Instead, the names of God-fearing men, such as Abraham as the opponent of the leader(s) of the tower of Babel, are recorded in the Bible.

Since Torah does not mention the name of the leader of the tower builders, some biblical commentaries give references. Talmudic interpretations describe Nimrod as one who “led all the world in rebellion against him [i.e., God].” Midrash mentions that Abraham was born when idolatry ruled the world. Chabad commentary says that Abraham is born at a time when idolatry ruled everywhere. Even his father, Terah, was an idolater. People at that time almost all fell into serious idolatry. And at that time, according to rabbinical commentary and literature, the most prominent idolatrous leader was Nimrod, and Abraham faced Nimrod's confrontation from his birth. Nimrod decided to kill Abraham since Abraham came into the world. However, in the end, Nimrod did not successfully kill Abraham, but he finally died at the hands of Abraham’s grandson. But a few Jewish commentators argue that Nimrod is not an evil rebel but a man who respects God. For example, Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra oppositely explained the matter through the plain meaning of Scripture. He interpreted the verses thus: He began to be mighty over the animals in hunting them. Before the Eternal, Ibn Ezra explained, he would build altars and offer the animals as whole offerings before God. But Ramban points out that Ibn Ezra’s words do not appear correct, and lo he justifieth the wicked, and Ramban rejects Ibn Ezra’s interpretation, claiming that it diverges from the
traditions of Chazal regarding Nimrod. Non-Jewish commentators are more supportive of Nimrod's existence as a positive image. However, some other early scholars found the text defended Nimrod's nobility and bravery. Ephrem the Syrian asserted that Nimrod acted "according to the will of the Lord" and that the comparison of a leader with Nimrod was a blessing.

Because Bible does not mention the leader who built the Tower of Babel, the meaning of these commentaries to us is not about the name Nimrod. Still, a kind of reflection: a man endowed with power by God, should the power be used to serve God or against God? In this regard, Chullin in Talmud made notes supplement and expanded cognition: God granted Nimrod greatness, but he said, “Come, let us build a city and a tower with its top in heaven, and let us make a name for ourselves” (Genesis 11:4). God granted Pharaoh greatness, but he said, “Who is the LORD” (Exodus 5:2). God gave Ḥiram the king of Tyre greatness, but he said, ” I sit on the throne of God in the center of the sea”(Ezekiel 28:2). This series of biblical commentaries by Chullin in Talmud begins with the construction of the Tower of Babel. In other words, we can see an essential change in human moral civilization starting from the Tower of Babel: from the God-centered Noah belief to the self-centered belief of BTB. This is the source of the moral system directly related to belief types.

We can see that The Babel Tower event indeed brings moral thought diversion. Therefore, this article tries to give two definitions from the perspective of religious belief: the moral system based on Monotheism & the moral system based on Humanism.

(1)The Moral System based on Monotheism - a series of standards or principles derived from Monotheism's code of conduct. God is the center and to obey Him is ethical.

(2)The Moral System based on Humanism - a series of standards or principles derived from Humanism's code of conduct. Human power is the center, and satisfying human needs is ethical, including seeking Atheism and Polytheism. Atheism is based on the belief that man can overcome all difficulties by his ability and that man is superior to the sky. The essence is to worship man himself, especially the great men; Pursuit, in essence, is people-centered service. Therefore, atheism and polytheism fall under the category of the same moral system.

After the Tower of Babel incident, the focus of monotheistic belief was Abraham. Abraham is an important “God’s chosen patriarch of His kingdom” in the Torah, after Noah,
the new originator of the monotheistic faith. Is his birth related to the Tower of Babel? Torah has not directly described. But according to the verse order of the Torah, we see that the event of the Tower of Babel is inserted between the Great Flood and the rise of Abraham, and the connection can be seen indirectly. For more Abrahamic background, it is in Second Temple period documents such as “The Life of Abraham” and the Midrash Commentary. Midrash’s version tells that Abraham is born with a special celestial and divine mission, and he was opposed to Nimrod, the leader of the Tower of Babel, the idolatrous representative. According to Midrash's commentary, Abraham had a critical mission to come to this world, first to challenge the leader of BTB. This is essentially a conflict between monotheism and idolatry, and the result is just an important new starting point for the two moral civilizations of humankind after the Great Flood. After that, some chose to follow the faith of Abraham, and some decided to follow the religion of BTB.

Then, we discuss morality from the perspective of Philosophy

II. Two kinds of Philosophical Thoughts: Theocentrism & Anthropocentrism

The definition of morality discussed in this article is the second-largest source of moral standards—philosophical thoughts. They can be attributed to two aspects, Theocentrism & anthropocentrism. This corresponds precisely to the source of belief of Abraham and BTB.

Encyclopedia Britannica defines theocentrism as the belief that God is the central aspect of existence instead of anthropocentrism and existentialism. In this view, the meaning and value of actions done to people or the environment is attributed to God. The tenets of theocentrism are that human beings should be in the way God wants them to be. It is popular in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The Bible knows that these three major religions are all derived from the "Abrahamic Faith" and have developed philosophical views based on theology: Jewish philosophy, Christian philosophy, and Islamic philosophy. And based on religious philosophy, developed a corresponding series of moral cultures.

And according to God’s promise to Abraham in the Torah, referring to Isaac, “I will confirm the covenant with him. I will confirm the covenant with him, an everlasting covenant for his descendants.” (Genesis 17: 21). Jacob (Israel) fulfilled it. So here is Judaism as an example. Its core teaching is that God is the supreme setter of action. However, the word “morality” does not appear directly in the Bible. The word is of Greek origin, so the Jewish
tradition itself is centered on the law of monotheism. However, moral culture also exists in Jewish society, and people will also mention “does this person have morality?”, “moral nobility,” and so on. In other words, the moral standards of Jewish society were based on the laws of typical monotheistic beliefs. Correspondingly, the core philosophical thought that affects morality in Jewish society is also an extension of theocentrism. Modern Jews are also exploring more moral philosophy theories, such as the Journal of Jewish Ethics, “The Journal of Jewish Ethics,” The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Ethics and Morality (Elliot N. Dorff and Jonathan K. Crane, 2012), etc. In the book “Why Study Jewish Ethics,” Elliot and Jonathan speak of their view that the Torah, like the Torah, is a guide to moral standards. The Torah promulgated both general moral values and moral standards for voters. The most significant moral standard is that the greatest commandment is “Love the Lord your God with your heart/your mind” (Deut.6:5). The basic moral standard expressed through the Ten Commandments is “you shall not worship other gods” (Exo.20:5), which is fundamentally opposed to the moral philosophy of “anthropocentrism”.

Anthropocentrism refers to the belief that humans are the universe's central or most critical entity. The term is used interchangeably with anthropocentrism, a concept some refer to as human hegemony or human exceptionalism. Anthropocentrism interprets or views the world in terms of human values and experiences. The idea of anthropocentricity is not contradictory to atheism and polytheism. On the contrary, its opposite is monotheism (theocentric theory). It is deeply embedded in many modern human cultures and conscious behaviors. The most typical feature of anthropocentrism is that everything is centered on people, for people, and believes that human beings can overcome difficulties, which is the exact opposite of monotheism.

Rabbeinu Bahya mentioned that the story of the Tower of Babel should be viewed from a rational point of view, insisting that the phrase “to make a name for ourselves” must be understood in this way: that generation was very advanced in philosophy and even technology. However, they sinfully use their wisdom because they submit to the power of idols and work out plans contrary to God’s will. In other words, their philosophical views are non-theocentric and centered on human needs. Rav Hirsch said that the builders at that time had no desire to glorify God but were full of desire for fame and fortune and were self-
centered in philosophy. Commenting on the verse “make your name known” (Genesis 11:4), Sforno said that BTB “all agreed with the false philosophy of idolatry that was common to all mankind at that time”. He thinks there will be times when they disagree, even when building the towers, but they don't misunderstand each other until God punishes them for messing up their language. His comments are explicit; the “identity” of BTB in their philosophical views, values, and outlook on life these concepts support them in accomplishing this task of “avoiding distraction and promoting their name”.

The “identity” in thought brings unity and cooperation in action to jointly complete a plan that ordinary people find challenging to achieve. Abbeinu Bahya speaks of what he read in Bereshit Rabbah 38,6, “Let us make a name for ourselves” must be understood this way: that generation was very advanced in philosophy and technology. They have their philosophy of action. However, they sinfully use their wisdom. “He believes: At this time, it has been developed into philosophy by knowledgeable people who have learned the value of cooperation, solidarity, working towards a common goal. That’s why their newly developed method is so dangerous”.

In the society after the Tower of Babel, the typical representative of "cooperation, solidarity, and working towards a common goal" as a philosophical thought and practice is "communism," which emphasizes that "man can conquer nature, and unity is strength." The representative of Atheism is "the philosophical thought of communism," represented by the philosophical thought of Marxism, Lenin, and Mao Zedong thought. Feuerbach (L. Feuerbach, 1804-1872) and the subsequent Marx (K. Marx, 1818-1883) believed that God and religion caused people to be alienated from their nature (alienation). In the twentieth century, the totalitarian regimes of Lenin, Stalin, Mao Zedong, and Pol Pot (1928- ), who took Marx as their prophets, pushed them to the extreme of atheism. Nietzsche (F.W. Nietzsche, 1844-1900) even announced the death of God. Sartre (JP Sartre, 1905-1980), who followed Nietzsche's desire to restore value, still used "humanism" to advertise the proposition that "the death of God leads to the disappearance of man" by H. de Lubac (1897-1990).

The essential features of communist philosophical thought are also very similar to Nimrod’s thought appearing in biblical commentaries and rabbinical literature: denying the
existence of God or treating God as an enemy, encouraging people to unite to conquer
difficulties by their power for their objectives, trying to build a new world for making their
names, and letting their ability reach the sky. One typical sample is the “Internationale” of the
communist world.

Let us gather together, and tomorrow

The Internationale

Will be the human race

There are no supreme saviors

Neither God, nor Caesar, nor tribune.

Producers, let us save ourselves

To the bottom and then

We are ours. We will build a new world,

Who was nobody - he will become everything!

This is our last

And decisive battle;

With the International

The human race will rise!

The song corresponds explicitly to the 11 chapters of Genesis. (Gen.11:4) And they said,
“Come, let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for
ourselves; else we shall be scattered worldwide.”

When the song was translated from French to Russian as a revolutionary song in the
former Soviet Union, added the lyric “Rise, damn it, the whole world of starvation and
slaves! Make our minds angry and ready to fight to the death. We will destroy the whole
world with violence!” It is full of hatred, provocation, and violence. The Soviets began to call
themselves “a godless, fighting nation”. When the song was translated into Chinese, the
Communist Party of China added the lyrics, “Who is the world’s leader and who created the
human world? Not else, but us. Quickly burn the fire to read, and beat the iron to be
successful!” Nimrod’s thought can be in communist thought. And the song Internationale looks like the song of Tower of Babel.

The lyric "burn the fire red quickly" conveys one of the core ideas of communism: the members of the Communist Party are bricks, and they need to be burnt through. To make a red brick so that it can be better used and become a brick of communism is the members’ ideal. In Marxism, Lenin and Mao Zedong Thought emphasized: "work very hard together as bricks for the ideal that the whole world becomes red to build the communism society." This reminds people of Tora's text about the Tower of Babel: They said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and burn them hard.”(Gen.11:3)—Brick served them as stone, and bitumen served them as mortar.

Through Bible commentaries, we can see that some rabbis have already noticed that the “brick” in this verse in the Torah has a special meaning, which is opposed to the natural stone created by God. Rabbi Netsiv pointed out that these bricks were considered more valuable during the Tower of Babel than the workers who laid them because if a worker fell from a height, no one would notice, but every brick was valuable! He said, “This brick symbolizes a regime. Such a regime poisons society as a whole. There is an inhuman element; the brick becomes more important than the person.” In Orwell's words, the dissident became an “enemy” and needed a “revolution”. The brick, the national project, became the most important. The individual was merely a cog. In such a society, the inability to communicate with others was an extension of xenophobia, and the Tower of Babel was accepted. People with poisonous thoughts will be blindly arrogant and xenophobic, fill the emptiness of their hearts and satisfy their self-righteous vanity through hostile foreigners. This statement is an extension of Babel's Tanimrod thought.

For this point, Rashi just thought that the reason of making bricks was “there is no stone in Babel which is plain.” Because the environment he lived in was limited to understanding this aspect. But Rabbie Netsiv lived under a kind of totalitarianism in Tsarist Russia, and he was sensory about the word “bricks” in verse. “The symbolism is more visible”, he mentioned. In Orwell’s terms, the dissident becomes an “unperson” as if he had never existed. The brick, the national project, becomes paramount, the individual a mere cog. And Talmud comment that the unity of builders of the Tower of Babel is “love and
friendship,” but the commentators living in the totalitarian environment of Tsarist Russia or the Chinese Communist Party disagree with it. They think that the builders of the Tower of Babel did not have true “love and friendship” with each other but united for a hostile God who “will conquer heaven” just for the same benefits, not for love and friendship. Once the goal/common benefits collapse, they will leave each other soon because people are just “bricks” without normal emotion and love.

Chabad’s commentators disagree with the kind of interpretation that the Tower of Babel is free of stones as the plains. They think that the real reason to use “bricks” is that bricks have a spiritual meaning because they are artificial. Still, the stone is natural, and God makes the stone. When people don't believe in God, they don't like God’s way but their ways. People in that era regarded their achievements as bricks, just like today’s chip technology. Both are to show man-made achievement, so they built a tower with bricks. They stretched brazenly to heaven with the tower, and they built it out of bricks, literally telling God that they had power. On the contrary, the qualities of God's natural stones are: they are not made by human hands, nor are they uniformly used like bricks, which symbolize that anybody should get respect - They are not interchangeable. From a people-centered perspective: the Tower of Babel was built to serve man’s reputation. According to the God-centered philosophy, building cities is for serving God.

The influence of philosophy on people’s moral outlook is sometimes more expansive than religious belief because philosophy does not exist in “black or white” but often stands on gray areas - dialectical conception. In other words, it is difficult for people with different beliefs to communicate with each other. Still, philosophy can be freer to communicate among different beliefs and affect different people’s moral values. Philosophy can bring both polytheism and monotheism influence or bring substantial repercussions, reflection, or criticism. Philosophical thought affects the culture of a society, and culture affects people's moral standards from a broader level.

Last but not least, we discuss morality from the perspective of culture.
III. Two Cultural Traditions: Babel-Tower Style & Abraham Style

When different philosophical ideas become political guidelines, we will see different social systems, such as countries that advocate autocratic totalitarianism or democratic freedom. Countries with different systems have different cultural traditions and thus have different moral standards.

Culture is considered a central concept in anthropology, covering principles of social organization (including practices of political organization and social institutions), mythology, philosophy, literature (both written and oral), etc. Different social phenomena often reflect the cultural traditions of this society, and cultural traditions often become people’s moral standards. For example, in China, an authoritarian and totalitarian country, “Working very hard and fighting for national politics” and “no rest 24 hours a day, seven days a week” are “the virtues of laborers”. But in Israel, it is impossible to take non-rest as the moral standard just to work hard, under the covenant with God for Sabbath. This difference just reflects the Babel faith and the Abraham faith through culture.

In real life, the philosophical thought of communism has also become a culture that exists in an atheistic society. For example, it has two alternative names, “Red Culture” and “Fire Culture”. These names are reminiscent of the verse about the Tower of Babel, “We will make bricks and burn them through” (Genesis 11:3). “Burning” seems to have a profound connotation and even radiates to today’s social and cultural life and moral standards. According to the comments of some rabbis, it appears that the “worship of fire” in the post-Babel society is closely related to the beliefs of the builders of the Tower of Babel. Genesis Rabbah’s version of the story confirmed the identification of Nimrod as the leader of building the tower of Babel, also as a fire-worshipper, and mentioned the incorporation of a theological debate between Abraham and Nimrod over the worship of the fire god and other natural elements. By presenting Abraham as the hero saved from a fire, and Nimrod the fire-worshiper (=Zoroaster) as the evil king who cast Abraham into the flames, the authors of the Midrash reverse the (apparently) popular association between Abraham through the fire story. The resulting “fire culture” has impacted religion: one is Nimrodian Zoroastrianism, such as African Zoroastrianism; the other is the monotheistic belief of Abraham, who and his descendants from Isaac and Jacob are called “chosen people of God.”
According to the Midrash text, although Nimrod relied on the “fire god” he worshiped, he failed to burn Abraham to death. Instead, Abraham walked out of the furnace unscathed; Abraham also defeated Nimrod in the War of Four Kings and Five Kings; in the end, he failed to kill Abraham but died at the hands of Abraham’s grandson; Torah records that BTB wanted to use the Tower of Babel to achieve their great names, but none names of builders including Nimrod to be shown for Babel Tower in the Holy Bible. Abraham humbly obeyed God, never built a high tower and made a name for himself, but built altars to worship the true God. Finally, God used Abraham’s name to call Himself “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...” (Exodus 3:6)

Haamek Davar makes a more in-depth analysis of the “fired brick” of the scriptures, and he proposes that it is indispensable to think about the choice of building materials by BTB. They used not stone but fired brick. He also mentioned that the furnace was not for the needs of bricks but for “the needs of burning men”, saying that the scriptures tell us that the furnace was for the needs of cities and towers, and from this, we know how big and how much deep this furnace was. Avraham Avinu (אברהם אבינו) was put into this furnace, but God also protected him from this furnace.

When we put the above notes together and think about it, we can see that the idol worship of the “Vulcan” by BTB extends from the religious beliefs to the cultural reflection in life—with the help of the power of the furnace to burn what is needed. The bricks of different faiths are treated like bricks, thrown into the furnace. It becomes a tool for burning people. When building the Tower of Babel, the “bricks” and “furnaces” used to burn the bricks played an important role. These two are fundamental concepts in communist culture, and they are also common “mantra”, “I am a brick of the revolution, where I need to move it”, “I am willing to be tempered in the melting pot of the revolution”. The idea of communism, the cultural concept is: to burn people in the furnace and to be proud of this “refinement”. In a socialist country, for example, “Persistence in work while sick” is a virtue, “Dedicating one’s youth and life to violent revolution” is a virtue, “No rest on holidays and working hard” is a virtue, and these moral cultures are monotheistic. It is incomprehensible to the people of the country of faith. In other words, in the moral culture of Abraham, who opposed the Tower of Babel, these practices could be immoral.
Shadal makes a simple comment on the verse “to make bricks”: bricks may have been derived from, replace stone. The word “replace” is worth thinking about. What God made is a natural stone. Each one is different. Just like everyone has their uniqueness, they represent “the work of God’s hand,” and brick, although derived from stone, is artificially produced from a mold and, together with the firing of the furnace, represents the “work of the hands”. The final tower built, if it is a natural stone, is the glory of God, and if it is a brick, it is the glory of man. Replacing the glory of God with the glory of man is the social culture of an atheist country, which is entirely different from the social culture of a monotheistic country. From this, the corresponding social culture is extended. In atheistic countries, plastic flowers are used instead of real flowers, and fakes are used as genuine products. These do not glorify God and can be considered immoral.

The culture of the Tower of Babel presents a picture of "they speak the same language and do the same things with the same goals" (cf. Gen. 11:1, 4,6). We need to note that the fourth verse presents "fear" - lest you be distracted. In other words, the builders of Babel did not work together in a loving harmony to accomplish a goal but under the pressure of fear. Atheistic representations of communist culture are very similar. On the one hand, "Unity is strength" is the core culture of communism, but this kind of "unity" does not love. It is united with the goal of fear, even fighting with each other and being forced by the dual threat of leader idolatry and political collaboration. Therefore, this article argues against Avot D'Rabbi Natan's interpretation of the relationship between BTB as "Love all people." in the Talmud. Avot D'Rabbi Natan thinks because they loved one another, the Holy Blessed One did not want to wipe them off the face of the earth but instead only scattered them to the four corners of the world. Such an interpretation does not incorporate scriptures, it is just a subjective assumption, and it is inappropriate to explain God’s ideas by human will. First, the scriptures do not show any "love" of the builders, and the dispersion itself was God's long-established plan (Genesis 9:1) to rule the land. Second, God only dispelled them, not because their love touched God, but God's mercy and plan. The pre-Flood society was almost completely wiped out because of the intercourse between fallen angels and human beings, genetically modified human beings and animals, which destroyed God's original creation structure "each according to its kind," thus bringing about destruction, except for Noah. A family of eight; however, the biggest sins of the builders of the Tower of Babel were idolatry and personal worship, which
had not destroyed the basic structure of God's creation, so God continued to have mercy on them by disrupting their language.

Rabbie Lazer Gurkow gives a challenging question to Bible readers “What is your Tower?” This raises the question, do our possessions and achievements bring glory to us, or are they for God’s glory? His answer shows the two results of life choice after the babel of the tower “But they came out of Egypt and built the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was like a city, and the Holy of Holies was like a tower. But it was not a tower for man. It was a tower for God.”

Indeed, among the nation as God's chosen people from Abraham, further sanctified were the descendants of Jacob (Israel) became the backbone of God's kingdom. As the basic Jewish moral standards, Torah was written by Moses, and the antithesis to the Tower of Babel is the Tabernacle. Those who built the Tower of Babel wanted to reach the sky and make their names. Still, the Holy Bible did not leave a name for the builders, even we have to depend on biblical commentaries to find out, and those who built the Tabernacle according to God’s command did not want to make their names but lift high God’s name. Still, their names were recorded by the Holy Bible, such as Moses. Moses is called “the humblest one” in Torah. With God's other chosen people, they can reach “reach into the heaven” in the low tabernacle tent through the flaming pillar of cloud above the Holy of Holies.

Conclusion

Through the case of the biblical narrative of the Tower of Babel, we can see that biblical commentaries indeed help us unfold the background picture of the events at that time, from the visible material world such as culture, to the more intangible world of thought such as philosophy, to the deeper spiritual world such as religion or faith, the author of this article is inspired to study the development and changes of human moral civilization from a clue of morality. No matter the individual commentaries of individual Bible commentators are correct or not, when we put the interpretation of many different commentators into one basket, we can gain more wisdom and inspire us to understand Bible well and social phenomenon in a broader and deeper view.
Notes


2. There are different definitions of morality. This paper chooses the definition from Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, because it matches the main opinion of morality. The article supports that morality is a set of standards of behavior that are affected by religion, philosophy, and culture.

   The major aspects outlined by this definition are representative.


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