

Rebuilding Babel

By David Feddes

Let's listen to the story of the Tower of Babel as we find it in Genesis 11:1–9:

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise, we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth." But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower they were building. The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth (Genesis 11:1–9).

Godlike control

A Crack in Creation—that's the title of a recent book written by Jennifer Doudna and Samuel Sternberg. Its subtitle is *Gene Editing and the Unthinkable Power to Control Evolution*. These are not just sensationalistic writers who grab thirdhand ideas and turn them into a book. Jennifer Doudna won the Nobel Prize for her role in the discovery of CRISPR technology—the ability to slice and edit human DNA and other forms of DNA. So she is a person who knows what she's talking about when it comes to the genetic revolution.

Jennifer Doudna foresees some of the possibilities already underway—such as developing plants that are superfoods, able to grow and be more productive than ever before. She imagines the possibility of dealing with mosquitoes. You can genetically modify a mosquito so that it cannot catch or spread malaria. Millions of people have died of malaria. What if you could engineer mosquitoes so that they can't transmit it? Or what if you just say, "We are sick and tired of mosquitoes on this planet"? You can modify their DNA so that every mosquito born is a male. You release them into the population, and after a while there aren't any more female mosquitoes being born—and those suckers are gone. Now, who wouldn't want to get rid of mosquitoes?

There are some interesting possibilities to explore when it comes to the editing of genes and the things that can be done. You can edit human DNA. The goal might be to edit DNA so that terrible diseases—such as Huntington's or other genetic conditions—could be sliced and altered, never transmitted to another generation. You could do genetic modifications to help a living person with issues they already have.

A riskier and more interesting possibility is what they call germline DNA, in which changes to the DNA will be transmitted to future generations—not just altering the way your own body works. Do you want to take control of how human DNA goes to the next generations and be the

one in charge of that? Do we really know what we're doing? That's a worthwhile question to ask. And of course, someone as smart as Jennifer Doudna asks a lot of those questions.

When we think about the possibilities of Babel, it used to be building a big tower. Nowadays, some of the possibilities of Babel involve smaller things but much greater impact—as in the ability to build babies and mess with the things that make babies what they are: DNA.

Doudna and Sternberg say, "Advances in gene editing are enabling us to rewrite the very language of life—and putting us closer to gaining near-complete control of our genetic destiny. We must do so cautiously, and with the utmost respect for the unimaginable power it grants us." Unimaginable power? Sounds like Emperor Palpatine from *Star Wars*. Doudna and Sternberg write, "In the future, parents may be offered the option of selecting for traits that go beyond disease susceptibility and gender. Parents may want to control aspects of their children such as behavior, physical appearance, or even intelligence." If everybody else is having super-babies, are you going to be one of those duds who has ordinary babies? If you could engineer a smarter, faster, better-looking baby, wouldn't you want to do that?

Harvard professor Edward O. Wilson has been writing in the area of evolutionary biology for years. He says, "Possessing exact knowledge of its genes, collective humanity, in a few decades, can, if it wishes, select a new direction in evolution and move there quickly. Humanity will be positioned, God-like, to take control of its own ultimate fate."

You might wonder: why is David Feddes talking about genetic engineering when he's just read an old Bible story about an abandoned building project at Babel? In building Babel and in genetic engineering, the motivation is the same: people want to be "positioned God-like, to take control of our own ultimate fate."

About twenty years ago, Lee Silver wrote a book titled *Remaking Eden*. Silver says, "Today we can control our own evolution. ^[1]_{SEP} We can decide what genes we give to our children... Already, that is being done to a limited extent with embryo selection in fertility clinics. Even with selective abortions, you are choosing not to put certain genes in your child... The global marketplace will reign supreme." Even if you don't yet have the technology to fully engineer babies, you can screen the embryos for various things. You destroy the ones that don't measure up, and you let the embryos that do measure up be implanted and possibly born. If you wanted a boy and the child was a girl, you abort and try again. "The global marketplace will reign supreme"—that's the summary. With the power that science is granting us, it will simply be a matter of what people want. Once the power is there, people will want it—and they will use it. That's the thinking of Lee Silver. He titled his book *Remaking Eden*. I think he mis-titled it. It should have been titled *Rebuilding Babel*.

A more popular-level book is *Hacking Darwin: Genetic Engineering and the Future of Humanity*. In that book, Jamie Metzl speaks of test-tube babies and selecting the kind of babies we want, of pre-implantation genetic screening. He thinks it will be more common in the future not to have babies by the ordinary means, and that test-tube babies will be more frequently born than babies that didn't involve IVF or that kind of thing, because people will want to screen and alter the kinds of kids they have. He also imagines editing out genetic diseases and editing in

intelligence, good looks, athletic ability, and longevity. In this book, there is a chapter titled "Stealing Immortality from the Gods." Think about that title for a minute. Of course, there's no actual belief in God or the gods, but the idea is that we are going to get immortality on our own terms—if we can figure out how to hack our own genome and fix it. There are a lot of different possibilities in this whole realm of remaking humanity and seizing godlike control over our own destiny.

The idea of doing this isn't new. It's new in terms of thinking we might be getting closer to actually pulling it off, but the idea is an old one. There was somebody about 200 years ago who imagined putting together a human made by a scientist. Mary Shelley wrote a book called *Frankenstein*. She imagined what the likely outcome would be if we could reinvent ourselves and create a human. Frankenstein was the name of the scientist who created a monster that killed its creator. The novel *Frankenstein* warns what might come of attempting to reinvent humanity. If you mess with human genetic material, that you might end up doing terrible damage to the human race.

Brutal brilliance

Advances in technology are originally rooted in God's cultural mandate. God said, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Genesis 1:28). Humanity, even though it has abandoned God, is plunging ahead with "subduing" and "ruling." But we've forgotten the God who appointed us to be stewards in the first place, and we're ignoring limits he put in place on what is appropriate in subduing and ruling.

If we go back to the generations after Adam and after Cain, in Cain's line we find somebody who is very smart and has a very creative and smart family. Lamech gave us the first poem in recorded history. Lamech was not only the person who gave us the first poem, but he had children who were people of genius. Jabal was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock (Genesis 4:20)—in other words, he developed ways of constructing homes and domesticating animals. Jubal was an artist; he gave humanity music—strings and woodwinds (Genesis 4:21). Tubal-Cain developed metal tools of bronze and iron (Genesis 4:22). That was cutting-edge technology—literally. You refined metal and turned it into cutting things, which changed the way farming is done, the way things are built, and the way warfare is conducted. The ability to use different kinds of tools was part of the brilliance of this family.

As I said, Lamech wrote the first poem in history. What's it about? Here's the translation:

I have killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for injuring me.
If Cain is avenged seven times,
then Lamech seventy-seven times" (Genesis 4:23–24).

That's the first poem, written by a brilliant man with brilliant kids. That's what brilliance will do for you if it is not harnessed to God. If the power to subdue and rule is not under the rule of God, then this is what you get.

Also, consider who Lamech was addressing his poem to—his two wives, Adah and Zillah. He had decided that all forms of marriage are equally good. He was going to do it his way, not the way God originally designed in the beginning (Genesis 2:24). He was going to have two wives, not just one. Why? Because he *wanted* two wives. Isn't that enough? Lamech does what Lamech wants. He takes two wives, and he brags to them about a guy he killed. This is our great technological genius.

Splendid sinner

Lamech and his family lived before the flood. But even after the flood, the genius was preserved—and so was the sin and ambition in the human race. Genesis 11 tells about the Tower of Babel, but let's backtrack a little and read about someone in Genesis 10—Nimrod. It's a name that means "we will rebel." "Nimrod became a mighty warrior on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord... The first centers of his kingdom were **Babylon**, Uruk, Akkad and Kalneh, **in Shinar**. From that land he went to Assyria, where he built **Nineveh**" (Genesis 10:8-11).

Does that sound familiar? In chapter 11, we read about building a tower on the plain of Shinar called Babel (Genesis 11:2). Nimrod built Babylon in Shinar. From that land he went to Assyria, where he built Nineveh (Genesis 10:11–12). Those were two of the great early empires of the world. One of those empires—Babylon—eventually carried away the tribe of Judah. Before that, the empire of Assyria, centered in Nineveh, carried away the ten tribes of Israel. Both of those great cities and empires were originally launched by this man, Nimrod.

We don't have a lot of details about Nimrod. We just know he was a mighty warrior and hunter, and it became a proverb: "like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord" (Genesis 10:9). Nimrod was the apex predator, a great hunter. That was considered an important trait in kings of that time. You proved your greatness as a monarch by taking down lions and other kinds of animals. Nimrod is a man's man. You don't mess with Nimrod—or you die. Whether you're a lion or a human, Nimrod is a warrior, he is a hunter, and he will take you out.

This Nimrod is the person who establishes Babel. Later, after the people are scattered from Babel, he establishes Nineveh—two of the mightiest cities and empires of the ancient world. These empires eventually exiled God's own people. Here again is a person with great God-given ability. He's obviously a man of great power, effectiveness, and organizational skill—getting people to do what he wants.

Still today, we have people who have that drive and power. Some entrepreneurs and business leaders do things most people don't think of or don't dare to try—and they do them. Researchers are exploring and finding stuff people hardly dared to imagine—and they discover it and harness it. Great inventors become multi-billionaires by coming up with some new technology and having the drive to get people to do what they want. Charismatic government leaders know how to wield power. It takes genius. It takes drive. It takes ability to lead and organize and motivate.

These are God-given abilities. All of this is part of the great cultural mandate that God gave before humanity fell into sin (Genesis 1:28). The abilities still live on in us after the fall into sin

and even after the judgment of the flood. Those abilities remain and have continued to develop over time. To understand how those work, it's helpful to pay closer attention to Nimrod, to Babel, and to what was going on with Babel.

Building Babel

- **Technology:** remake reality
- **Government:** centralize power
- **Pride:** make name for selves
- **Utopia:** make earth heavenly
- **Religion:** bring god down

I want to highlight a number of things. **Technology** can remake reality. In the story of Babel, there's a very simple phrase which might seem no big deal: "Let us make bricks out of mud" (Genesis 11:3). In those early days of history, if you wanted to build something, you needed natural material. You needed rocks and stone, and you built out of stone. Babel was located in a good agricultural area, but there wasn't any stone in that area. Did that stop them from building? No, they said, "If we don't have stone, we'll make our own stone. We're going to make bricks out of mud, and we're going to bake them. We can make our own rocks." And that's what they did.

There's nothing wrong with that. Humans have been doing that before and ever since. We take stuff that looks like a useless blob and turn it into bricks, turn it into buildings, turn it into magnificent structures. We take silicon, which is basically just sand, and we turn it into computer chips. And so it is with all the tools and machines and other things we've invented. We have the ability to remake reality, and that ability comes from God. But we don't always answer to God for it—at least not right away.

Another element in building Babel is **government**, centralized power. They want to remain one people with one government. They say to themselves, "We shall have one world and one world government." And in Nimrod is their leader. Babel harnesses human know-how and technology with human centralization of power.

Motivating all of this is **pride**: "We want to make a name for ourselves. We want to be known. We want to be important. We want to be admired and remembered. And we want monuments to our own greatness" (Genesis 11:4). Some of the monuments built by such people are still there today. The crumbled ziggurats of that area of the world—those pyramid-like structures—are still there. In Egypt the Great Pyramids still stand thousands of years later. "We want to make a name for ourselves." We might enslave thousands of other people to do that, but we are going to make a name for ourselves.

Another element of building Babel is the dream of building **utopia**, to make earth heavenly. Babel's builders, and today's rebuilders of Babel, have these dreams of utopia: "If I could remake the world, there would be no mosquitoes in it. There would be no genetic defects. All of us would be handsome or beautiful. We'd all be superstar athletes. We'd all be geniuses. If only I

were in charge and not somebody else, we could really improve on the way the world is. If we would just use our technology and get the right ruler, then paradise would come.”

The ultimate reason for building Babel is **religion**, aiming to bring a god down. When I was young, I used to think that the Tower of Babel was intended to reach heaven so that people could get ourselves up to heaven. But if we understand ancient Near Eastern, we find that Babel and other towers were actually built, not to bring people up to heaven, but to bring the god down to earth, where he could be used for human purposes.

Bring god down

Those ziggurats, those towers in Mesopotamia and the ancient Near East, were viewed as man-made mountains, and mountains were considered holy places. These man-made mountains were always built near a temple. The intent was to create a holy place when there wasn't a natural one. If you don't have a mountain, make one. Who cares if you don't have a mountain? Build it yourself! Build it where you want it to be—not where the real mountains were originally put.

So you build your own mountain in the spot where you want the god to come down. The god comes down the stairway of that mountain and inhabits the image you've made for him in the temple that is built right next to that great mountain—that great tower you put up. And once the god is there, you've got him, and he's got you. You do the right rituals, offer the right food, and the god is happy. You're feeding him, and you've got him where you want him. And if you're feeding him, he's going to take care of you.

It's fantastic! You bring the god down, and then you get what you want from him. Who could want more from a religion than that? Get him down to your location. Get his power. And use that power for your purposes and goals. The tower, the manmade mountain, is not so much a stairway to heaven as a stairway *from* heaven—to get the god down to where he's going to do you some good. Isn't that what you want from religion? Of course, you've got to do him a little bit of good if you want him to do you good. That's just how it works, right?

In this mindset, there is no idea that “every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights” (James 1:17), no understanding that God “is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything” (Acts 17:25), no recognition that God created all things and owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Psalm 50:10). All of that—revealed in the Bible—is not part of man-made religion. Man-made religion says: God needs us, and we need the god. And we will figure out the technology and religious practices to get him to do what we want him to do.

Divided

How did God respond to the Babel building project? The Lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other” (Genesis 11:6–7).

In one sense, they got what they wanted: God came down. He came down a long, long way. They thought they had a really high tower, but God had to come down a long way just to get to the top of their tower.

When God comes down and sees what they're doing, he doesn't like it. He knows that he has given humanity these God-like powers. And the sky's the limit. There's nothing they can't do. There's nothing they won't do. That's probably the bigger concern—not just that they will have almost unlimited power if they keep this up, but that they will have no moral limit on how they wield that power. And so, God in his mercy, decides to mess things up for them: “Come, let us go down and confuse their language” (Genesis 11:7).

After creation and again after the flood, God had given a command that people should spread out and fill the earth (Genesis 1:28; 9:1). Instead, the Babel builders under Nimrod decided they were going to stay in one place and centralize. But God wants to scatter them, and he wants to prevent them from becoming too powerful and too awful. It is an act of God's judgment but also an act of God's mercy sometimes to divide us and limit us.

In the times before the flood, when some people lived 900 or a thousand years, they not only lasted a long time but got more and more evil and powerful over the course of such long lifetimes. So God said, “I'm not going to put up with that anymore. I'm going to limit human lifespans.” He made that judgment before the flood (Genesis 6:3), and after the flood, human lifespans shortened. He also gave another judgment. God said, “Not only am I not going to let them live as long, I'm not going to let them centralize completely or cooperate fully or understand each other. I'm not going to let them get on the same wavelength, because if they do, there will be no limit to what they try to do.” So he confuses them and divides them and scatters them (Genesis 11:7).

Still today, when God confuses, he limits what we can do. Nowadays, we've got artificial intelligence, we've got the ability to communicate globally—but even now, there's an awful lot of misunderstanding between humans. In some ways, I wish it weren't so. I wish people could understand each other and not misunderstand each other so much. But in another sense, God is mercifully putting a limit on how far we can go and on how well we can communicate. By dividing us, God is actually doing us sinners a favor—by keeping us from becoming as bad as we otherwise might become. If we had completely centralized government and completely unlimited technology and unlimited ability to communicate and understand each other, what would we do? Where will we go?

What happened when we split the atom? The United States, the nation that prides itself on being the finest on the planet, detonated two nuclear devices against its enemy because we thought we needed to. We felt we had to. We were going to save a lot of lives by doing that. But if anybody else were to detonate a weapon like that, we would say they were very, very, very bad.

When humans get a certain power, and they think they can use it and get away with it, they will do so. That is an established fact of human history. There is no limit to what evils we will do unless God limits us.

Disinherited

When God divided the people at Babel, he did something else. He not only scattered them, but Deuteronomy 32 says he disinherited them: "When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage" (Deuteronomy 32:8-9)

Israel was "the Lord's portion." God delegated rule of other nations to other heavenly beings, "the sons of God." Those supernatural beings were in rebellion against God. People began worshiping them as gods, and those demonic powers were exerting influence in those nations they had under their control.

After Babel God scattered the nations, disowned them, and gave them over to other supernatural beings—but not forever. God chose Abraham. And God chose Abraham's offspring to carry on his purpose for creation as stewards—to display his glory and eventually bless all nations through the seed of Abraham: our Lord Jesus Christ (Genesis 12:1–3; Galatians 3:16).

That's the unfolding of the storyline from the Tower of Babel into the rest of history. Abraham is called out of the land of the Chaldees. Where did the Chaldeans live? Babylon. That area is where Abraham was called out of, and he was told never to go back there again.

City of God

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went... For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:8-10). Abraham was not just moving to a different area or another city; he was eager for the ultimate city. The builder of that city is not Nimrod, not Nebuchadnezzar, not Pharaoh, not Sargon or any other ancient king or modern president. GOD is the architect and builder of the city that Abraham looked forward to. Throughout history, there's been a great contest between the city of man and the City of God. If you want to read about that in more detail, get St. Augustine's great book *The City of God*, in which he contrasts the city of man and the City of God.

Babel rebuilders

- **Tyre:** king backed by demon Baal
- **Babylon:** Nebuchadnezzar, Lucifer
- **Persia:** kings and demon ruler
- **Antiochus:** ruler claiming divinity
- **Babylon:** dragon, Antichrist unites all nations against the city of God

God divided and disinherited the nations after Babel, and he scattered them throughout the earth. But humans aren't very good at taking no for an answer. People are constantly trying to rebuild Babel. I'll give you just a few examples the Bible describes.

One is the great city of **Tyre**, which was just off the coast of Canaan. It was an island city—Tyre and Sidon. One person who came from Tyre and played a big role in the Bible is Jezebel. Anybody recognize that name? She was the daughter of the king of Tyre. She introduced the worship of Baal into Israel, along with her foolish and wicked husband Ahab—the worst rulers the ten tribes of Israel ever had (1 Kings 16:31–33). Jezebel originated in the city of Tyre. In the book of Ezekiel, God declares judgment on Tyre (Ezekiel 26–28). He’s going to judge the king or ruler of Tyre. And behind that king stands a shadowy figure described as having been there in the Garden of Eden (Ezekiel 28:13). The king of Tyre was backed by some sort of fallen angelic, demonic power. Tyre was judged and destroyed.

There was also **Babylon**, rebuilt on the location of Babel. The city of Babylon became the ultimate world power under the great king Nebuchadnezzar. You may remember him—he was the one who led the forces that destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the temple (2 Kings 25:8–10). It was with Nebuchadnezzar that Daniel and Daniel’s three friends had to deal (Daniel 1:1–6). Nebuchadnezzar wasn’t just a military conqueror. He also built the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the wonders of the world, and other magnificent structures. One day Nebuchadnezzar was walking on the roof of his palace and said to himself, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30). At that very moment, a voice from heaven said, “You aren’t king anymore.” The king’s fingernails grew like claws, he tried to eat grass, he was driven away from people and lived like a wild animal (Daniel 4:31–33). After several years of living like a beast, he looked up to heaven and his sanity returned. Then he was restored to the throne of his kingdom (Daniel 4:34–36). He found out that the Babylon project—for *my* glory and *my* majesty—doesn’t work out so well.

Nebuchadnezzar had a descendant named Belshazzar who didn’t learn from Nebuchadnezzar’s errors. Belshazzar was holding a big feast, using dishes that had been seized from God’s temple. He was drinking from the very cups that had been used in the worship of God in a drunken party with his guests (Daniel 5:1–4). Then a hand started writing on the wall. The king didn’t know what it meant, so he called for Daniel. Daniel said: “Here’s what it says: Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin. You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians” (Daniel 5:25–28). Belshazzar and Babylon fell that very night (Daniel 5:30–31). They thought the mighty walls of Babylon would keep out any enemy, but the enemy diverted the river that flowed under the walls. Then they came in under the walls, took the city, and destroyed it. That was the end of Babylon. It was never rebuilt again.

Persia had mighty rulers who gained control over a vast empire. At one point, Daniel describes not only the king of Persia, but a supernatural “prince of Persia” lurking behind that power (Daniel 10:13). After that, he speaks of the prince of Greece, indicating that behind the great conquest of Alexander the Great was some supernatural power as well (Daniel 10:20). Alexander conquered the Persian empire and many other nations. It wasn’t simply Alexander’s genius or human power, though that played a role. There was supernatural power behind those conquests. At the apex of his power, Alexander died, still a young man, and his empire was split four ways.

One of those four kingdoms was eventually controlled by a ruler named **Antiochus**. Antiochus was predicted centuries earlier in Daniel’s writings (Daniel 8:9–14, 23–25; 11:21–35). He called

himself *Epiphanes*—meaning “God made manifest.” He sacrificed pigs in the temple of God that had been rebuilt in Jerusalem. He murdered anyone who had copies of the Scriptures. He tried to wipe out the Hebrew people who followed the Lord. And then, as Daniel had predicted, Antiochus died. That was the end of him.

Again and again and again, there are rebuilders of Babylon, of the city of man. Unfortunately, whenever you think you're a champion of humanism, of humanity taking charge of its own destiny, you know what you're really doing? You're never serving just humanity. If it is not the power of God and the wisdom of God directing you, then it will be the power of the demons. It will be the supernatural "prince of Persia." It will be "the prince of Greece." It will be that shadowy figure lurking behind the throne of Tyre. It will be Lucifer lurking behind the throne of Babylon (Isaiah 14:4–15). It's very hard to be a good humanist, because humans are never just left to themselves. We already have enough sin and ambition of our own, but beyond that there are powers we don't even realize we're messing with. And I'm not just talking about the power of DNA or the power of technology. I'm talking about the power of Satan and the fallen angels.

The Bible eventually speaks of a **final Babylon**. Behind that Babylon stands a great red dragon—a picture of Satan (Revelation 12:3; 17:3–6). There is one ruler, labeled "the beast," seeking to dominate the whole world, like Nimrod, or Nebuchadnezzar, or Caesar, uniting all nations against the city of God.

Babylon never learns. Babylon is always there. The reason the Bible tells us the original story of the Tower of Babel, and of the other Babylons that come along, and of the final Babylon that is headed our way, is so that we don't have to live in ignorance. This pattern is ongoing throughout history. There is always that Babylon impulse. And we need to be aware of it.

Babel reversed

The Bible also tells us of a *great reversal* of Babylon—a uniting of people, but on a different basis than human ambition. On the day of Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples of Jesus. "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them... each one heard their own language being spoken" (Acts 2:4-6).

On Pentecost God reversed the confusion of languages, so people could understand again. What they understood was centered on the praise of God and the good news of the gospel. It was about the Lord who created heaven and earth and calls us back to himself in Christ. That is the reversal of Babel. That is the reversal of the division of peoples and languages. It's on the basis of God's work and God's Spirit and power, not the prince of Persia or Greece or Babylon, but the Prince of Peace and the power of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 9:6; Acts 2:1–11).

Humans are always going to be seeking unity—but on what basis? Humans are always going to be seeking dominion and power—but from whom, and according to whose standards? We Christians want the reversal of Babel just as much as the rebuilders of Babel do, but we are glad that God has reversed Babel in the coming of the Holy Spirit and in the uniting of people not on any human basis, but on the basis of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rebuilding Babel

- **Technology:** remake reality
- **Government:** centralize power
- **Pride:** make name for selves
- **Utopia:** make earth heavenly
- **Religion:** bring god down

In light of the Bible and history, we need to be aware of what's going on in our own time. Technology, the urge to remake reality, is both good and evil. It's good in the sense that God gave us that cultural mandate and the ability to subdue and rule (Genesis 1:28). But when united with our sinful nature, it becomes a very destructive tendency.

And we don't learn from the stories. We don't learn from the story of Frankenstein. We don't learn from the story of the sorcerer's apprentice. In that old story, the apprentice wants the power of the sorcerer. When the sorcerer leaves for the day, the apprentice uses that power. Things get into a really, really big mess because he doesn't know how to wield it. That's what happens when humanity breaks the bonds God has set in our attempts to remake reality or to centralize power.

Do I really have to remind you about **government** and centralized power? It's not that long ago that some of our brightest people took a lot of government funding and messed around with enhancing the deadliness of a virus. When that virus spread and killed millions of people, government authorities insisted humans had nothing to do with causing the Covid pandemic; it just kind of happened. It was just a coincidence that it happened one mile away from a research lab that was engaged in such things. And then we saw the powers of centralized government rise up to solve the crisis they had created in the first place, and their solution was to take away freedoms.

Every so often we get a taste of what happens when humans are too big for their britches, when they break bonds they should not mess with. We had better be cautious. And of course, we should pray for those who are rulers, for scientists, researchers, and inventors. But we need to realize: there is always going to be that drive in humanity—of **pride**—to make a name for ourselves, to be important, to rule others.

C. S. Lewis said, "Whenever you hear somebody say, 'Mankind has to take charge of his own destiny,' here's what it really means: a few men taking charge of all the others." Lewis wrote that in the mid-1900s, but it's just as true today. We are "taking charge of our own evolution." Who is this "we" you speak of? It sure isn't all of us. It's an elite few taking charge of everyone else. There are always going to be a few—a Nimrod, a genetic engineer, a governmental power—who trying to take charge everybody else.

One of the interesting areas of research is, of course, artificial intelligence. There again, our artists are sometimes ahead of our scientists. Go watch *The Terminator*. That might do you more good than reading a bunch of books about artificial intelligence, because it tells you what might happen if we pool all the knowledge we can possibly get from humanity, store it in supercomputers, put it in control of robots and weapons, and then turn it loose. You might not

like how that story ends. Of course, science fiction is not Bible truth. But these possibilities that we get from *Frankenstein* or *The Terminator*—sometimes the novelists and filmmakers see farther than the scientists do.

Here's another thing to consider. I've been talking about genetic engineering and artificial intelligence and the dangers of those. But what if the biggest danger were not the genes or the technology that shape the future, but the *ideas* that govern the next generation? What if education and entertainment and social psychology were more dangerous than artificial intelligence? What if the ideas that you're implanting in people's minds—and even more importantly, the truths you're keeping out of their minds—were the biggest danger that we're passing to the next generation—or failing to pass? You see, it's not ultimately the fact that we have the ability to do great technology or that we need government to organize things. The biggest danger is always this: in our pride, we are going to use God on our terms. And if we can't, we're going to dispense with God.

That was the biggest danger all along: proud dreams of **utopia**, of humanity making earth heavenly. The anti-God ideas of Babel—the idea that we're going to make heaven on earth—have been with us a long time. The French Revolution was going to restart history from day one and bring perfect liberty, fraternity, equality. These dreams ended with the guillotine and the dictatorship of Napoleon Bonaparte.

In the twentieth century, the Russian Revolution was going to give us a worker's paradise. The revolution in China, led by Mao Zedong, was going to create a beautiful paradise for people. Pol Pot was going to get rid of all the intellectuals in Cambodia and then create a new paradise. The net result of utopian communism was the mass murder of countless millions of people. That's what you get when a few humans think they know how to make paradise on earth and create a man-centered **religion** designed to bring divine power into their own hands.

As Christians we should be aware of expanding technologies and their possibilities. Some of you may be involved in computer science and artificial intelligence. Others may be involved in medical research. These are not necessarily bad things; they may be part of the cultural mandate (Genesis 1:28). But if we let them go beyond God's ordained limits, we've got major problems. The kinds of things that are already being done with in vitro fertilization, the discarding of embryos, and the decisions of which baby lives and which baby dies—these things are already happening, not just a future possibility.

Babel burned

We can give thanks that there is a power that restrains, that divides, that never lets humanity get as bad as it could become, that never lets some ruler become as powerful as he might become—at least not until the very end.

The Bible says there is something restraining the man of lawlessness—that final man of sin (2 Thessalonians 2:6–8). There will come a time when what restrains him is taken away. Then Babylon will have its final shot. But when Christ comes again, he will deal with that ultimate Babylon. The Bible pictures a day when it will be said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! ...

Come out of her, my people... She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her. (Revelation 18:2-8) You really do not want to become involved in the Babylon project. It's headed for the flames.

Babylon trades even in the bodies and souls of men (Revelation 18:13). Everything is for sale. As a science writer says, "The global marketplace will decide." Yes, in Babylon, the global marketplace decides, doing commerce with human bodies and souls. But God has the final say: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great!" (Revelation 18:2)

The holy city

After describing the fall of Babylon, the city of man, the Bible describes the city of God: "I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'" (Revelation 21:2-5)

If you want to reinvent humanity, you need to know that humanity has already been reinvented. There is already a second Adam. We don't need to invent him or come up with him—God gave us the second Adam in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:45-47). God gave that man, Jesus Christ—who is also the Son of God—the perfect immortal body, the perfect genius. If we learn to walk with him and follow him, then we will live not in old Babylon, but in the New Jerusalem, the city of God, with foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Hebrews 11:10).

Prayer

O Lord, open our eyes to the two cities that are always at work in this world until the end comes. May we look to the Jerusalem which is our mother—to that great city of God that is going to come down and make all things new in the power of Jesus Christ. Lord, help us to be wary of the attempts right now of Babylon to reemerge. Give us courage, and give us discernment. Keep us from fear and paranoia, but help us to be vigilant.

Help us, Father, to use the powers you've granted humanity for your glory and for the good of others, not for our own pride or for the manipulation and control of others. Help us to live in the light of your Word by the power of your Holy Spirit. May the great mission and power of the Spirit enable us to spread the Word to people of every nation, tribe, people, and language.

Lord, you judged at Babel, but you also gave your mercy at Calvary and at Pentecost. We pray that even today, the nations will experience the power of the truth, the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We pray in his name, Amen.

Rebuilding Babel

David Feddes

Slide Contents

Rewrite life

Advances in gene editing are enabling us to rewrite the very language of life—and putting us closer to gaining near-complete control of our genetic destiny. We must do so cautiously, and with the utmost respect for the unimaginable power it grants us. (Jennifer Doudna & Samuel Sternberg, *A Crack in Creation: Gene Editing and the Unthinkable Power to Control Evolution*)

Designer babies

In the future, parents may be offered the option of selecting for traits that go beyond disease susceptibility and gender and cross into areas like behavior, physical appearance, or even intelligence. (Jennifer Doudna & Samuel Sternberg, *A Crack in Creation*)

Godlike control

Possessing exact knowledge of its genes, collective humanity in a few decades can, if it wishes, select a new direction in evolution and move there quickly... humanity will be positioned godlike to take control of its own ultimate fate. (Edward O. Wilson)

Control evolution

Today we can control our own evolution. [SEP] We can decide what genes we give to our children... Already, that is being done to a limited extent with embryo selection in fertility clinics. Even with selective abortions, you are choosing not to put certain genes in your child... The global marketplace will reign supreme. (Lee Silver, *Remaking Eden*)

Brilliance

- **Lamech:** first poem recorded in history
- **Jabal:** tents, domestic livestock
- **Jubal:** music (strings, woodwinds)
- **Tubal-Cain:** metal tools changed farming, building, warfare

Brutal brilliance: History's first poem is about Lamech killing a young man.

Marriage equality: Lamech redefined marriage to suit himself and married two wives.

Splendid sinner

Nimrod [name means: *we will rebel*] became a mighty warrior on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord... The first centers of his kingdom were **Babylon**, Uruk, Akkad and Kalneh, **in Shinar**. From that land he went to Assyria, where he built **Nineveh**. (10:8-11) [Kingly power was connected with hunting prowess.]

Building Babel

- **Technology:** remake reality
- **Government:** centralize power
- **Pride:** make name for selves
- **Utopia:** make earth heavenly
- **Religion:** bring god down

Divided

The Lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” (11:6-7)

Disinherited

When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the Lord’s portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage. (Deuteronomy 32:8-9) [Israel was God’s portion. He delegated rule of other nations to other heavenly beings, and many of them rebelled against God.]

Chosen

- Humanity sinned at Babel. God scattered the nations, disowned them, and gave them over to other supernatural beings.
- God chose Abraham’s offspring to carry on his purpose for creation, display his glory, and eventually bless all nations.

City of God

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went... For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (Hebrews 11:8-10)

Babel rebuilders

- **Tyre:** king backed by demon Baal
- **Babylon:** Nebuchadnezzar, Lucifer
- **Persia:** kings and demon ruler
- **Antiochus:** ruler claiming divinity
- **Babylon:** dragon, Antichrist unites all nations against the city of God

Babel reversed

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them... each one heard their own language being spoken. (Acts 2:4-6)

Rebuilding Babel

- **Technology:** remake reality
- **Government:** centralize power
- **Pride:** make name for selves
- **Utopia:** make earth heavenly
- **Religion:** bring god down

Babel burned

Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! ... Come out of her, my people... She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her. (Revelation 18:2-8)

The holy city

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. (Rev 21:2-3)