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THE TOWER OF BABEL IS GOING UP AGAIN!

“And the whole earth was of one language and of one speech. And they said, ... let us build us a city and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name” [Gen. 11:1,4]

*The tallest building in the world today is the twin **Petronas Towers** in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It is 1,483 feet (452 metres) high from the sidewalk level of the main entrance to the structural top of the building.¹ However, in terms of number of storeys [American: stories], the **Sears Tower** [1,450 feet or 442 metres] in Chicago, U.S.A., is the tallest. It has 110 floors, compared to the Petronas Towers' 88. Before their destruction by terrorist attack on 11 September 2001, the twin **World Trade Center** towers in New York, U.S.A., also had 110 storeys, each 1,368 feet or 417 metres tall. There are other famous buildings around the world, such as the **Empire State Building** in New York (102 floors), and the **Eiffel Tower** in Paris, France. The **Hanging Gardens** of Babylon and the **Great Pyramid of Giza**, Egypt, were among the 7 Wonders of the ancient world. Therefore, we can conclude that human history has never lacked man's desire to build tall structures. What then makes the **Tower of Babel** different?*

*After the flood in which the whole of the then known world and its inhabitants (except Noah's family and some animals) had been destroyed, God re-enacted His covenant of man's dominion over all His creations on land and in the sea and air [Gen. 9:2-3]. We have all read about the story of the Tower of Babel in the Old Testament, the story of how the generation after Noah tried to build a tower that would reach up to heaven, and how God scattered them all over the world [Gen. 11: 1-4]. Certainly, the Tower of Babel could not have been anywhere near the height of today's **Petronas Towers** in Malaysia, given the technology of the time. So, why is the Malaysian building still standing while a much smaller Tower of Babel was not spared by God?*

In today's lesson, we shall try to understand why the Tower of Babel was destroyed, and to alert that a new one [in various disguises] is already under construction!

¹ “World's Top 10 Buildings,” <http://cpl.lib.uic.edu/004chicago/timeline/searstower.html>

1. Background

After the flood, God blessed Noah and his family, and said to them, “be fruitful and multiply, and *replenish the earth*” [Gen. 9:1]. In other words, God expected them, as their numbers grew, to fill up the whole earth. That would involve groups of families moving apart to occupy empty spaces. But what did the generation after the flood want?

Instead of obeying God, they said, “let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, *lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth*” [Gen. 11:4]. Clearly, the Tower of Babel symbolized:

✓ *Man’s sinful pride and rebellion*

Before the flood, God saw that “the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that *every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*” [Gen. 5:5]. In spite of the fact that only righteous human beings had been allowed to enter the ark, wickedness already reared its ugly head in the generation after the flood, a clear confirmation of God’s word that man’s heart was inherently evil. They did not want to obey God’s command to scatter and fill up the earth.

✓ *Human vanity*

They wanted to make a name for themselves and build a human approach to heaven. Only those who are declared righteous by faith through Jesus Christ can enter heaven, not those who can earn their way by the works of their hands [Eph. 2:9]!

From the foregoing, it is clear that the Tower of Babel represented man’s attempt to play God. God’s reaction to such ventures is quite clear from what He did to Satan and Adam. Adam was expelled from the Garden of Eden and required to fend for himself through the “sweat of thy face” [Gen. 3:19]. In the case of Satan, he and his wicked forces were expelled from heaven and thrown down to the earth [Rev. 12: 7-9]. Then, Satan boasted in his heart, “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High.” For that, God threw him into hell, which has now become his permanent home [Is. 14:12-15]!

2. What made the building of the Tower of Babel possible?

A number of factors promoted the rapid multiplication of man’s evil imagination. Here are some of them:

a) *One language and one speech*

Communication was easy because the whole world “was of one language and of one speech” [Gen. 11:1]. Therefore, it was relatively easy to promote popular ideas and group adoption. That is why the Lord said, “behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do” [Gen. 11:6]. By confounding their language, they were no longer able to understand one another. “So, the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth; and they left to build the city” [vv. 7-8].

It is instructive to note that, today, the world has become a global village, with English gradually becoming the universal language of business and communication. We are heading in the direction of a one-world government, which is driven by globalization and the ICT [Information and Communication Technology]. Democracy and privatization are the dominant philosophies in formulating political and economic policies respectively. Regional political and economic blocks are springing up. For example, the European Union has adopted a common currency, the *Euro*, for all the member-countries, except the U.K. and Denmark. The United States has gone into an economic alliance, NAFTA [North America Free Trade Area] with its neighbours, Mexico and Canada, and a wider economic grouping, FTAA [Free Trade Area of the Americas], for North and South America will soon take off. In Asia, we have ASEAN [Association of South East Asian Nations]. The Organization of African Unity [OAU] recently moved to become the African Union [AU]. Virtually every country in the world is now a member of the United Nations. Certainly, the human beings that God had scattered are regrouping. Could their purpose be to come back and complete the Tower of Babel?

b) *Technology*

The people were already familiar with the technology of making “brick, and burn them thoroughly” in place of stone, and “slime” [bitumen] for “morter” [clay] [Gen. 11:3]. You can now understand why man was expelled from the Garden of Eden, for the Lord God said, “behold, the man is become as one of Us, to know good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever” [Gen. 3:22]. When man fell, his God-given talents were not taken away [Rom. 11:29]. Therefore, it should not surprise us that a remarkable feat like the Tower of Babel could be conceived and executed that early in human history.

Today, man has also developed the technology to go to space, and to do many other things that challenge the sovereignty of God over man. We shall go into more details shortly.

3. Construction of the Tower of Babel has already resumed!

As shown earlier, the Tower of Babel is merely a symbol of man's rebellion against God, an attempt to either play God or build our own image of how to reach heaven. We have also indicated above that the setting is ripe for construction to resume. As in those days, the whole world has become "of one language and of one speech," and the buzzwords reflect it: *United Nations, globalization, Internet, CNN, the Olympic games*, etc. Here are examples of where the construction of the Tower has resumed:

a) *Creation versus Evolution*

The Bible states that God created the world and everything in it in six days [Gen. 1]. The earlier scientists, such as Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727), believed in this. They based their theories on the assumption of an order in nature. Isaac Newton reportedly "possessed a deep religious sense, venerated the Bible and accepted its account of creation. In late editions of his scientific works, he expressed a strong sense of God's providential role in nature."² Isaac Newton is considered one of the most important scientists of all time.

Modern scientists, on the other hand, are naturalists who have built their theories on the "big bang" theory of the origin of the earth. They do not believe in creation. Instead, they believe that man evolved from lower species and animals, especially the chimpanzee! They teach that the common ancestor of humans and chimpanzees lived approximately 6 million to 7 million years ago³ contrary to the Biblical teaching that man has only lived on earth for about 6,000 years. The work of Charles Darwin, a mid-19th century British naturalist, published in his book, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* [1859], has significantly influenced the new scientific thinking. So, in science classes today, while you can teach evolution, you are not allowed to mention creation! In fact, in a United States Supreme Court decision [1987] in *Edwards v. Aquillard*, the court ruled that "creation science is a religious idea and thus an illegal violation of the church-state separation" to teach it in schools.⁴

The implication of the above development is that our children are being fed atheistic ideas that make them question even the existence of God. In some countries, especially in the Western world, prayers in schools have

² "Newton, Sir Isaac," Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2001; <http://encarta.msn.com>

³ "Evolution," Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2001; <http://encarta.msn.com>

⁴ Ibid.

been banned. There is even a move to remove every mention of God from public buildings and records. The construction of the Tower of Babel has resumed!

b) *Cloning*

The Bible teaches that the only way to have children that will be acceptable to God is through the union of a husband and a wife [**Gen. 2:24; Gen. 4:1; Gen. 9:1**]. God has made it quite clear, “if a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination” [**Lev. 20:13**]. Clearly, God forbids same-sex marriages.

In the layman’s language, cloning means making a carbon copy of another creature, such that you cannot differentiate one from the other. Scientists do this by taking genetic material from an adult cell and placing it into an egg whose own genetic material had been removed. If all goes well, the egg with a complete set of genes, with a complete genomic material, could develop into an embryo, which could be placed back into a uterus to develop into a fetus and hopefully into a baby.⁵

Lee Silver is a Professor of Genetics at Princeton University [U.S.A.] who runs a laboratory that is attempting to identify genes that influence personality and behaviour. In an interview on human cloning, these are some of his startling remarks:⁶

- ✓ Human cloning is possible within 10 years, and the technology is being driven by the marketplace, especially lesbian couples.
- ✓ Cloned babies may be called “single parent children or some other innocuous phrase that is going to be used.”
- ✓ There might be confused identities because a daughter would actually be the genetic sister of her mother who would not likely treat her daughter as a sister!
- ✓ Cloning does not achieve immortality. However, the egomaniac will end up with a baby that will grow up into a boy that will not listen to him!
- ✓ A cloned Michael Jordan cannot be the real Michael Jordan [a very famous American basketball hero] who has worked very hard and “it was this hard work *and this spirit*” that allowed him to reach stardom.

Again, we see a kind of Tower of Babel in the making here, just to satisfy the sinful pride and rebellion of man.

⁵ “Human Cloning: How Close is it?”
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/fertility/etc/cloning.html>

⁶ Ibid.

c) *International Space Station*

The International Space Station [ISS] was pioneered by the United States in the 1980s. It is hoped that “by 2004, people around the world will be able to look up into the sky and see the largest man-made object ever put into space orbiting 250 miles above them.”⁷ It is the collaborative effort of 16 countries. So far, America [NASA] has contributed almost US\$96 billion while Canada, Japan and the European Space Agency have pitched in about US\$12 billion. Russia joined the project in December 1993. Ultimately, the station will be approximately the size of an American football field [131 feet high, 290 feet wide and 356 feet long].

The station has already hosted a tourist, California millionaire Dennis Tito [2001]. A second tourist, South African tycoon Mark Shuttleworth, has paid up US\$20 million to visit the station via a Russian rocket in late April 2002. One of the conditions required of all visitors is that they “must be able to read and speak English.”⁸ Clearly, we are again seeing human vanity at work [**Eccl. 1:1-11**].

4. Conclusion

In the words of Jesus Christ, “*no man* hath ascended up to heaven, but he that cometh down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven” [**Jn. 3:13**]. Therefore, just as the pioneer-builders of the Tower of Babel failed, so will their modern successors. The only difference this time is that they will not be scattered into other parts of the world. Rather, the sign of the Judge of the whole world, Jesus Christ, shall appear in heaven, “and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” [**Matt. 24:30-31**].

Therefore, let us lay aside our foolish pride and human vanities, and acknowledge the sovereignty of God over every aspect of our lives. Like the people of Ahab who saw the power of God through Elijah, let us fall on our faces and confess, “The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God” [**1 Kgs. 18: 39**].

⁷ Introduction to the International Space Station, <http://nauts.com/vehicles/90s/iss/intro/index.html>

⁸ NASA issues space tourism rules, no derelicts allowed, <http://www.cnn.com/2002/TECH/space/02/01/tourist.guidelines.ap/index.html>