

Towers of Babel

“Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves”
(Genesis 11:4)

Why do we build enormous skyscrapers that remain mostly empty? Why do we drill bore-holes exceedingly deep into the earth for no special reason? Why do we send people to walk on the moon and bring back souvenir dust and rocks? Or send robots to Mars to take pictures of its surface? Why do we build exceedingly complicated devices into automobiles so the cars can drive themselves? Why do we synthesize genes to transform the human genome; build massive instruments to replicate the sun’s interior; and send thousands of satellites into orbit around earth so we can all communicate with, and sell stuff to, each other; and view each other; and listen to music; know where we are at any moment; and turn on our air conditioners remotely. Why all this? Because we’re idolaters. Just like those people on the Plain of Shinar 4500 years ago. We’re really no different, just more capable.

We do all the foolish things in the above paragraph because we worship our idol, Technology. We have been worshipping many idols, but now we worship technology; it’s our latest and greatest idol. Secular people call it “the technological imperative,” meaning, if it can be done, we must do it. Seculars boast that we’re an advanced and modern civilization. And that indeed is so. But the deeper and more spiritual and more important explanation is, crass idolatry. We are a godless, pagan people, out of *hubris* building another Tower of Babel.

Societies all thru history have been building their Towers. People groups all over earth remembered their glorious past at Shinar and took with them in the great Dispersal the knowledge of that Tower. So they tried to replicate the idolatry by building pyramids and ziggurats wherever they settled. The Babylonians, the Egyptians, the Mayans, other indigenous peoples in North America and elsewhere, all built their towers. We today, however, are too “advanced” to simply build a great big pyramid. Yet we retain a primal urge, an atavistic impulse in our society to rebuild the Tower. Our god wants to be worshiped by having us build something more subtle yet more grand: a technology-based civilization.

So we have computers now that can “think.” We want our computers to be living. So we’re thrilled at “artificial intelligence.” We refer to those robotic computers not as an “it,” but as “he” or “she.” Next, we’ll want these computers to have consciousness. Self-awareness. Maybe even moral sensibilities. Christians wonder if such super-advanced machinery might need to be “born again.” Did God predestinate to salvation *even computers*? The idols that Judah worshiped in the time of the prophet Isaiah were man-made, but couldn’t see or hear or speak. Our idols today are vastly more superior because, although man-made, they see, hear and speak! And think. We really are “advanced.”

How do we worship this idol? (i) By participating in the building of the Tower, in all or any of its many facets; (ii) by delighting in the Tower; and (iii) by making use of the Tower to enrich our lives. We love technology and all that it has done for us: it has given us an easy and comfortable life and it has thrilled us with all it has accomplished. Anyone not in love with technology, that is, who refuses to worship it, is mocked and scorned; if fortunate such a one is merely called a “technophobe,” a Luddite. All humans worship. We all worship something or someone; it’s innate. If it’s not our Creator God, then our worship is idolatrous. I’m arguing that for us moderns, we’re worshipping our technology (among other idols). The deeper issue is, idols represent a spiritual entity, and that would have to be one of the wicked gods that exist.

Someone will argue, “You’re being extreme! Our technology is just a tool. It’s neutral. There’s nothing “spiritual” about technology.” Well, wrong! Nothing is neutral. Everything has moral value because God made everything that exists, and He is holy. And how we approach or use technology determines its value. We’re here to serve God. So if we put technology to use in the service of God as we’re serving God, the technology has good moral value. If we’re not serving God but ourselves, the technology we use has the same value that we ourselves have, it’s sinful, idolatrous. The problem is *us*. The problem wasn’t the Golden Calf; it was the Israelites, who didn’t have God in their hearts. The idol had to be destroyed, but the ones who made and worshiped it were culpable and suffered for what they did. The idols later on in the Nation of Israel’s history – including even the Temple – had to be destroyed. But it was those who made and worshiped them whom God severely punished. Why? Idol worship is really demon worship (1 Corinthians 10:19-21).

It should be no surprise that Americans worship an idol. It’s to be expected that we’d be building a Tower of Babel. All the Gentile nations of earth are spiritually arrested at Genesis Chapter 11. All the pagan, godless people of earth are there. It’s

only the elect descendants of Abraham, the people of the Nation of Israel, and those who are in Christ, who have escaped from Genesis 11 and have gone further into a relationship with the living God as the rest of Scripture narrates. The Gospel message is to be taken to all those godless pagan peoples so that some of them also might escape that spiritual arrest and join Christ. So our nation, America, is just another of the many godless, pagan nations on earth, like Babylonia of the ancient world, or like India of today's world. And it will be judged for its idolatries during the Great Tribulation described in the Book of Revelation.

We have a hugely distorted understanding of our nation. It's largely due to patriotic zeal, of course. This is where we live and it's what we know. So, sure, we view our nation as special. We assume that God has blessed us. We see our nation as exceptional among the nations on earth. We may even assume that all our formidable technological accomplishments come to us as a blessing from God. We say, "Our technological genius displays the wonderfully creative mind that God has put into humanity that can find expression because our unique American political and economic milieu allows it." In massive conceit, we are fiercely proud of our nation and its technological accomplishments. This is all wrong. Our understanding of history, of the nations, of everything spiritual, must come from the Scriptures. Not from what we assume how things should be.

At the outset of history, right after the Fall, Cain murdered his brother. God punished him by declaring he was to be a wanderer all over earth. Instead, Cain went and built a city. His descendants continued that city-building project, adding technology and culture. But they were wicked people. After God destroyed that entire civilization, saving only Noah and his immediate family, those who repopulated earth were just as wicked as the ones before. Rebelling against God's explicit instructions to spread out and repopulate earth, they renewed Cain's city-building project, adding now the building of a great tower. Why a tower? Because at creation, Eden was a mountain, and God lived atop it, and man was placed in the Garden at the bottom, around the mountain. So that tower at Babel was man's willful, sinful attempt to recreate the world *without* God. Because sin and wickedness would be concentrated in that city they were building, God dispersed them all over earth. But the nations that resulted from that dispersal were still pagan, godless, in rebellion against God. They all built their cities and towers and idols wherever they went. That's where America is today. More advanced, yes. Lots of modern technology and culture, yes. Some biblical values borrowed from the Church. Yes. But spiritually we're still back at Genesis 11, another of the godless, pagan Gentile nations in rebellion against God.

"But wait," someone will protest. "Isn't it possible that God has uniquely blessed America and made it a special nation?" My answer is, Of course that's possible. God is sovereign and free to do whatever accords with His holy will and purposes. But we cannot know that. All that we can know is what He's revealed to us, and that's in Scripture and nowhere else. We must form our worldview solely on the basis of the Bible's revelation. The writing prophets indicate that there will be a special role for the Gentile nations during the Millennial Kingdom. We're not there now. To understand life, to understand the world we live in, we must – *must* – have the Bible's perspective. All reality fits into a context, and that context derives from Scripture. Anything we surmise or assume or imagine otherwise is fantasy. The Bible's narrative is absolutely true because it comes from God.

My chief concern is idolatry in the Church. I suspect most Christians have no idea how offensive idolatry is to God. (See 1 Corinthians 6:9; Ephesians 5:5; and Revelation 21:8 and 22:15. See also especially 1 Corinthians 5:10-11, where Paul directs us to not even have contact with idolaters.) We're commanded – *commanded!* – to love God with all our being, full time. Idolatry means we're not loving God; we're in love with something or someone else. The temptation to idol worship is compelling in America because so many idols are on offer. We need to use extreme care and be exceedingly discerning about . . . *everything*. That's because we dwell in a thoroughly pagan and godless society that's in rebellion against God, in a society hard at work building its Tower. We mustn't suppose that we're under grace so if we fail in some small way, God will forgive. No! We don't presume upon God, not ever. Two reasons I suspect this concern about idolatry isn't taken seriously are (i) indifference, both to God and His will and to the idolatries that surround us. And (ii) refusal to commit to serving Christ in the way He's revealed we're to serve Him; empty minds yield to temptation.

Dear Reader: John concludes his 1st Letter with this stark admonition: "**Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.**" Take seriously this issue of idolatry! Be discerning. Be responsible. We need to live purposeful, holy lives, with our hearts firmly set upon God and His revealed will and the blessings promised and waiting for us if we're faithful.