As human knowledge and technology advance at an exponential rate, we consider the questions, Where are we heading? and, Where might this end?

It is a sad reflection on the moral calibre of mankind that, only approximately 1,600 years after its creation, the sole solution for the ills of the human race was to wipe it out and start again. What were the key factors that led to this sorry state of affairs?

We can deduce that, despite the curse, the combination of long life and the lack of barriers to communication, coupled with the godlessness of human hearts, resulted in the moral state of mankind deteriorating rapidly, to the point at which “every imagination of the thoughts of [man’s] heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). This was a source of distress to our heavenly Father, even though He knew that it would come to this point. Yet actually to witness the great wickedness wrought by those early men, their complete disregard for Him and His ways, and the evil this led to, appears to have generated particularly acute sorrow on God’s part, such that He “repented . . . that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart” (v. 6).

The civilisation that existed at this time was probably more advanced technologically than we appreciate. Whilst they did not, of course, have the high-tech innovations that many of us take for granted today, such as computers and Smartphones, they may have been as advanced as modern man was immediately prior to the Industrial Revolution. Some may scoff at such a thought, but with life expectancy around 900 years, and no language barrier, there was plenty of time to learn and innovate, to develop ideas and disseminate them. It is not inconceivable, therefore, that an advanced society with a population at least in the hundreds of millions, and possibly much higher, existed at the time when “the flood came, and took them all away” (Mt. 24:39).

Our own dispensation is reserved for judgement, as was Noah’s. “As the days of Noe were,” says the Lord Jesus, “so shall also the coming of the Son of man [in judgement] be” (v. 37). Noah’s age was judged by water, and none but Noah and his family were saved. Our age will be judged too, and, although there will not be the total annihilation that accompanied the Flood (Gen. 9:11), nevertheless there will surely be great destruction and loss of life as a result of the judgement process.

A fresh start

It did not take long for things to deteriorate again after the Flood. Perhaps as little as one hundred years passed after Noah and his sons left the Ark until the rebellion at Babel. What were the key components that helped to facilitate this rebellion? Why was it that God intervened so overtly and so promptly? On this there is no need to speculate, for as we read through the Genesis record of Babel the reasons are clearly articulated.

The character of man had not changed, and once again he had departed from the ways of God. The instructions and promises given to Noah and his sons (vv. 1-17) had been rejected by the vast majority of Noah’s grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Within just three or four generations they had become like their forebears before the Flood, thoroughly self-centred in all that they did, eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage—all to the exclusion of God, and with no regard for His Word and His Way. They excluded Him from their plans (11:3, 4) and cemented their rebellion in their desire to establish an alternative, man-centred form of worship, with their great tower devoted to the worship of the host of heaven at the centre of their new religion and way of life.

The other principal factor in this rapid deterioration is indicated in two key verses in Genesis 11. The record begins by telling us that all the earth had “one language, and . . . one speech” (v. 1), and it becomes clear that by this means the people were able to unite and work well together to achieve their aim. When the aim is to follow God and encourage one another to keep His commandments, or to spread the good news of the gospel, then such unity is a powerful force for good. These men, however, had rejected the
God of Noah and His Word, and were following their own path in the pursuit of the evil intents of their own hearts. The fact that they had a single language facilitated the rapid spread of their sinful ideas and made it easy for others to hear and follow their example.

**An act of judgement or an act of mercy?**

When the Lord came down to view the men and their work, He identified their one language as central to their ability to unify and accomplish such great evil (v. 6). In intervening and confounding their ability to communicate (v. 7) He not only dealt specifically with the immediate problem at Babel, but more generally hindered mankind from reuniting with a common godless purpose. The ability of men to share ideas and coalesce in opposition to God and His will was removed. Thus God slowed the corruption of the human race, which had once again been accelerating toward destruction. One wonders, had He had not intervened, how long it would have been before the whole race was as irreversibly corrupted as before the Flood.

**The post-Flood world is shaped**

In the genealogy of Genesis 10 there are seventy families described which, we are told, were separated by language, by family and by nation (10:5). Perhaps there were not seventy different languages at this time, but a smaller number, leading to family groupings from which a rich linguistic variety developed over time.

As these families were forced by their languages to separate into tribal units, and then spread abroad, we can see how this would lead to the ethnic, cultural and demographic make-up of the world today. We can imagine them settling in new locations, perhaps at first living in caves or temporary shelters, then later exploiting local resources to build more permanent dwellings. As populations expanded, further migration would occur and the same process would be repeated time and again. Small groups of people speaking the same language, marrying and reproducing within the group, would develop distinctive physical characteristics. This is what we observe in the world today.

Over the ensuing centuries the ability of mankind to innovate collectively and communicate *en masse* was hindered. Empires waxed and waned, but mankind has never again been in a position to acquire the unity of thought and action described at Babel—that is, until now!

**Knowledge greatly increased**

Today’s increase in knowledge and technological understanding is in itself a sign of the times (Dan. 12:4). The transformation in the world that has occurred over the past 150 years is staggering, and with a sudden further acceleration in technological advancement in the last fifty years or so due to the invention of the computer, the microprocessor and the Internet, a fundamental shift has occurred in human endeavour, particularly in relation to communication.

We can now communicate effortlessly across continents, cultures and languages. We can send messages around the globe in seconds, celebrate success, commiserate with loss. In the course of my daily work I regularly participate in WebEx calls (meetings with video links made via the Internet) with colleagues from nations as far-flung as Singapore and Sweden, the Netherlands and the United States, all on the same call, sharing ideas and learning from one another. When this technology is used positively then it is a powerful force for good, yet we appreciate that mankind is not fundamentally ‘good,’ and herein lies the problem.

Further illustrations of the power of technology to unite men in a common purpose can be seen in the Arab Spring, the riots in London in 2011 and the current civil war in Syria. The trouble with man is that his heart is “desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9), and today’s advances enhance his effectiveness at being thoroughly evil.

“**Religious and spiritual leaders offer hope for 2013**”

This was the headline of an article in the *Huffington Post*¹ that drew together New Year messages from forty religious and spiritual leaders from around the world. What was fascinating about these messages was their predominant theme: ‘Let us build a better world through human endeavour and ingenuity’—rather more subtle than, but in essence the same as, the sentiments expressed by the men of Babel 4,500 years ago. The combination of such sentiments with the ability to communicate them and to spread ideas rapidly across the entire human race makes it possible to see how we could again reach a situation (if we are not already there) like Babel, with all mankind unified behind a humanistic, anti-God, anti-Christ philosophy.

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1. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-raushenbush/hope-for-2013_b_2385220.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-raushenbush/hope-for-2013_b_2385220.html)
The unclean frog-like spirits have gone out into all the world to summon the nations to “that great day of God Almighty” (Rev. 16:13,14). The humanistic spirit of rebellion against God and His Word, so clearly portrayed at Babel, will once again bring all mankind together, this time to the valley of judgement. Mankind today is no different from Nimrod and his followers at Babel; still he wants to do things in his own way, building ‘a better world’ without God and His Word.

Our world is ripe for judgement, and surely it will not be long before God once again looks on the human race with the verdict, ‘They are one, and look at what they begin to do!’ When that time comes God will again intervene openly to bring to naught the vain imagination of the hearts of men and usher in a glorious new age, an age where all men and women will share a “pure language” (Zeph. 3:9) under the kingship and guidance of His Son.