***Babylon the Great Harlot

RV209-01***

As we come to this combination section of Revelation 17 and 18, we are coming into an area of Scripture which is one of which is one of the harder parts of the Bible to interpret. I very much appreciated one of our young men coming up to me this morning after the service and thanking me for the effort which was demonstrated by the message, and by what was presented, and the enormity of research that that must have entailed. He was exactly right. And because of what he has said. I not only have knocked myself out on behalf of the morning message, but I've been knocking myself out all this afternoon. That kind of talk will bring you no end of good results. These are not things that come off the top of the head. This is an area of Scripture that the more you get into it, the more things begin to come into focus, and the more things are aligned. This is a magnificent part of the Word of God, and it gives enormous perspective to anybody who is willing to listen and to learn where we are in our society today.

Revelations 17 and 18 are flashbacks to events which will have taken place before the events of Revelation 16 with its seven bowl judgments. Revelation 17 describes God's long delayed judgment on Babylon as a source of false religion. Revelation 18 describes God's judgment on Babylon and its political commercial structure. One of the seven bowl angels calls to John to follow him so that he may show them what he refers to as the great harlot. The term "harlot," in this particular context, is used in the sense of spiritual unfaithfulness to God. All false religion, of course, is an act of spiritual fornication. Those who claim a relationship to the true God, but then turn to worshiping idols, are guilty of spiritual harlotry. This, false religion is viewed by God as a very great evil, because false religion is the basis of all spiritual harlotry.

What we're going to discover is that Revelation 17 is going to tell us where all this began. Israel, in the Old Testament, was portrayed as the wife of God, who, in time, betrayed Him, and worshiped the idol gods of Canaan, and so it is guilty of spiritual idolatry. Ezekiel 13:1-43 that we looked at in detail portrayed the heartlessness that is involved in spiritual unfaithfulness to a God whose grace and love cannot do enough for us. In Ezekiel 16, Jerusalem is used as the object of God's love and of traitorous action.

In the New Testament, the church is portrayed as the virgin bride of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:2: "For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. For I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I may present you as a pure virgin." James 4:4, therefore, very appropriately warns Christians, who are related to Christ as the virgin bride, that they should not be friends of the "Cosmos Diabolicus" world system: "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

Following the values (the goals) of Satan's world system inevitably causes a Christian to be guilty of spiritual fornication. It's just that simple.

**The Great Harlot**

So, we come to Revelation 17:1: "One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me," John says, "saying, 'Come here. I shall show you the judgment of the great harlot.'" Then he specifies what, in effect, is a geographic location: "The great harlot who sits (that is, she is located) on that many, numerous waters."

**Babylon**

Who is the great spiritual harlot who is sitting upon many waters? Revelation 17:5 clues that up for us immediately when, we read, "And upon her forehead (this harlot woman), a name was written a mystery: 'Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots (speaking here again of spiritual harlotry) and of the abominations of the earth."

So, the harlot is Babylon, the city on the Euphrates, and all that she has created.

Jeremiah, back in the Old Testament, in Jeremiah 51:13 points out something about the geographic location of the city of Babylon, which is the background of this description of sitting upon many waters: "O you (speaking to Babylon) who dwell by many waters, abundant in treasures, your end has come, the measure of your end." Babylon, as you know, was located on the Euphrates River. Furthermore, she was surrounded by a network of canals which produced enormous fertility in the region, and thus produce an enormous amount of prosperity. John, therefore, is clearly being invited by the angel to view the divine destruction of Babylon, that city on the Euphrates, which has been the fountainhead of all the false religions that Satan has ever put together.

Babylon in John's day itself was not in non-existent frivolity. Babylon on the Euphrates was a strong and active city. When John was actually writing the book of Revelation. It contained a very large Jewish population, from which population, in about 500 A.D., eventuated a very valuable document called the Babylonian Talmud. The "Talmud" is a word which refers to the rabbinical interpretations of Old Testament Scriptures. The Babylonian Talmud is an extremely fruitful source of early interpretations of Old Testament Scriptures. Furthermore, Babylon contained a solid Christian community when John was writing. For this reason, 1 Peter 5 addresses that Christian community in Babylon. 1 Peter 5 says, "She, who is in Babylon (referring to some believers), chosen together with you, sends you greeting, and so does my son, Mark." Some Christian woman here who was residing in Babylon among the Christian community is sending special greeting.

It is true that over the centuries, then, Babylon, since the time of Nebuchadnezzar had fallen by John's day into considerable decay and insignificance from what it was under Nebuchadnezzar. During the tribulation, Babylon, as a city, however, will rise to a new eminence as a commercial and government center on the world scene.

I am personally fascinated by the world's dealing with Saddam Hussein. They just don't put this guy out of his misery. Everything they do is carefully avoided to keep him intact. I don't think that's accidental. I'm not sure that they have some plan. They don't even bomb his headquarters during the day when he's liable to be there and get hurt. They do it at 2:00 in the morning so they know he's off cavorting and sleeping, or whatever he does, but he's not there at the intelligence center. This man is somehow providentially being preserved even in the Desert Storm War. They decided not to touch him when it would have been easy to do so. This man, I suspect, has a providential preservation because he's rebuilding Babylon. His objective in doing it is for tourism, but he is doing it no matter whatever else happens. No matter however else they're short on money, the Babylon rebuilding project continues. This is significant because Babylon is someday going to come into prominence as the antichrist's capital – a commercial and a religious center.

So, one point we have to understand is that when we're talking about Babylon here, we're not talking about some symbol for the city of Rome or someplace else. It is to be understood literally. In fact, there are several specific references in the book of the Revelation to the very literal city of Babylon. In Revelation 14:8, you have Babylon the Great. In Revelation 16:19, you have Babylon the Great. In Revelation 17:5, you have Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots. In Revelation 18:2, you have Babylon the Great. In Revelation 18:10, you have the Great City Babylon. This is clearly not a symbol. In Revelation 18:21, you have Babylon the Great City. So, there are other references very clearly in the Revelation to Babylon, and it means Babylon on the Euphrates.

As I said, we constantly need to keep expanding your background and understanding of this great city, going back to its ancient times and origins, so that when we get more deeply into Revelation 17-18, you will be able to grasp what the book is saying at this point, because it is speaking on the frame of reference of the historical background of this city. So, for a moment, I direct your attention to the origin of Babylon.

**Nimrod**

The city was founded by a man named Nimrod. It was established after the Noahic flood. The earliest civilizations that we have on record indicate to us, and that we have discovered archeological remains of, are to be found in Sumer and Akkad. Both of these places are located in the territory of Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia means "between the rivers" – the rivers being the Tigris and Euphrates. Both of the civilizations, Sumer and Akkad, had contributed culturally and religiously to the Babylonian empire which followed them. But from whatever these empires had contributed to what became Babylon, the founder (the person who brought it together) was this man, Nimrod.

You may read about him in Genesis 10:8-9. He was the son of Cush: "Now Cush became the Father of Nimrod. He (Nimrod) became a mighty one on the earth." We are told immediately that this man Nimrod was a heavy. He was no trivial personality of the time. He was immediately recognized as a forceful leader. He is a personality to be dealt with. Verse 9 says, "Furthermore, he was a mighty hunter before the Lord. Therefore, it is said, 'Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord.'"

In ancient times, the kings liked to portray their prowess by having themselves pictured on walls (and in tile, and in various ways) as out there killing lions and great wild beasts. To be a great hunter was a sign that you were a significant leader. The name of Nimrod himself gives us a clue to something that we should not forget, and that is that his name means "rebel." Therefore, it is understandable that, while the Bible gives us but scanty information about him, the little pieces we have, we put together, and it is not too hard to understand that this man was powerful; he was influential; he was a kingly leader; and, he was in rebellion against God's authority. He was a mighty hunter, and he probably included in that hunting human beings who opposed his control over them.

In Genesis 10:10-11, we're told that Nimrod founded Babel, from which Babylon came, and also certain other important cities: "And the beginning of his kingdom (the kingdom of Nimrod) was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. Furthermore, from Shinar, we're told in verse 11, that Nimrod extended his influence into Assyria which was no small place in territory in itself. From that land he went forth into Assyria, and he built Ninevah, Rehoboth-Ir, and Calah." Shinar in the Bible is, of course, a synonym for Babylonia. The city of Babylon is in the territory of Babylonia. Daniel 1:2 indicates that relationship between the land of Shinar as the location of the Babylonian empire.

Interestingly enough, Micah 5:6 calls Assyria the land of Nimrod. Nimrod keeps popping up in various places in the Bible. This, of course, fits with what we've just read – that Nimrod extended his influence into the territory of Syria. So, Micah calls it the land of Nimrod. The city of Calah itself, that has been mentioned here in the Genesis 10:11, is located about 20 miles from Ninevah, and has been excavated, and it is called by the local inhabitants "Nimrud." And there remains today a step tower (or a ziggurat). That means a tower which is built with steps. It goes up by these various steps. It's called a ziggurat. There is actually such a tower, the remains (the leftover) – the pieces that are left there in a place called Borsippa, which is a suburb of Babylon. Guess what the Arabs call this ancient relic? They call it Birs Nimrud. The word "Birs" means "tower" – "the tower of Nimrod." So, here we are dealing with something that is probably a true archeological discovery of the site of the Tower of Babel. Now, of course, it is in considerable decay.

The thing that we were interested in, along with the building of Babylon, is its religion, because that's what Revelation 17 is all about. Is the religion of ancient Babylon (back there in the misty past) a religion that we are confronted with today, and that has an impact upon us?

Babylon was begun about 200 years after Noah's flood. Mankind had refused to obey God's directive to spread out across the newly cleansed earth, and newly dried up from the flood. Instead, they huddled together on the river Euphrates in the land of Shinar, and we're told that they refused to scatter out as God had directed them. What they decided to do was to build this tall ziggurat-type of tower as a rallying point of unity, and at the top of it was to be a platform for the study of the heavenly bodies which they worshiped as gods. Isaiah 47 points this out to us about Babylon. This gives us one of our first clues about the nature of the religion of Babylon. What were its gods?

Isaiah 47:12-13 say, "Stand fast now in your spells (speaking to Babylon), and in your many sorceries, with which you have labored from your youth." Perhaps you will be able to profit. Perhaps you may cause trembling." Now when it talks about Babylon operating in this from its youth, it's talking about from the very founding of the city, originally way back there. The gods they were worshiping were the heavenly luminaries: "You are wearied with your many councils. Now let the astrologers, those who prophesy by the stars, those who predict by the new moon, stand up and save you from what will come upon you."

God says, "I've had it with you. I'm going to destroy you. For what's coming upon you, and how you may escape it, maybe you want to go out there and climb up on one of your astrological towers, and check the Zodiac signs, and see what they can tell you about what My plans are." God is really ridiculing them because of their worship of these bodies out in space, and calling them their gods. Of course, if they are gods, then where the moon is relative to some other planet, or where the sun is relative to other luminaries, should influence what goes on here on this earth, and have an impact on your life.

So, they made this step-tower of brick with tar as mortar. These were not primitive people. Get over the idea that there was ever such thing in the early days of humanity as people living in caves, running around in loincloths, and snarling at each other, and grunting, and eating raw meat. There never was anything like that, except here and there maybe, on a small scale. People of ancient times were extremely advanced intellectually. Obviously, their minds were not as degenerated as ours. Furthermore, they had great technological information. The more we find out from archeology, were amazed at what these people could do.

The Tower of Babel, however, was a human viewpoint work, seeking to create a false sense of unity without God. It's exactly what the ecumenical movement in the religious world is doing today – trying to get church bodies (religious groups) to come together on the least common denominator; and, anything you want to believe about Christ is all right, as long as unity is what you agree to. This is a human viewpoint unity that most in time, of course, inevitably illuminate God.

Well, Nimrod actually founded Babylon, as his name "rebel" indicates, in defiance of God. He founded it as a basis for a false religion, which was, in fact, worshiping Satan. You cannot build a society without having a religion. You cannot build a culture without having some value system. When you, as our country is doing, discard its Judeo-Christian foundations, you have to substitute something else for that. Thing you substitute is humanism. Humanism is at the heart of all liberal thinking because it exalts man, and believes that man can solve the human problems. It eliminates God from the formula.

**The Unity of Believers**

In contrast to the Tower of Babel, with its false unity built on the concept of the deity of man, there is a true divine viewpoint, unity that I should point out to you, created by God the Holy Spirit – the unity of church believers. This is what 1 Peter 2:5 is referring to when he speaks of us Christians and says, "You also, as living stones."

In Babylon, they put together the bricks that they had cleverly and effectively produced. They had kilns to make them hard, and then had a mortar substance made of tar that would hold things together. In contrast to that, here is a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. You also, believers, are living stones in a structure which God is building for Himself to dwell in – His temple. And it's being built as a spiritual house to be inhabited by a holy priesthood, the priesthood of the believers of the church age, where we offer up those spiritual sacrifices – not those animal sacrifices anymore, but sacrifices like our financial giving; sacrifices like our praise, such as you you've heard this day from our specialists; and, sacrifices of the various capacities of Christian service that He gives us, and so on. These spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Who creates this unity? It isn't the Christians getting together and saying, "Now, folks, we shouldn't squabble. We must develop a Christian unity." That is wrong. We have a Christian unity that's already developed. Ephesians 4:3 tells us about that" "We are to be diligent, not to create Christian unity, but to preserve the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace." Yes, you should be at peace with your fellow believers. Yes, you should learn how to let someone walk over you; to let someone bite into you; and, to let someone abuse you, and for it not to disrupt the peace of the body. That is a very grave sin, and you are greatly out of Christian fellowship if you cause somebody's abuse of you as a believer to bring a fracture in the unity of the body of Christ, and in its local church expression. You and I did not create this unity. It was created by God the Holy Spirit. It does exist, and we are to maintain it in the bond of peace.

So, when somebody is out of line with you: stop bellyaching; stop feeling sorry for yourself; start excusing yourself; start justifying your mental attitude sins; and, learn to say, "I've learned by the grace of God how to live and let live." If somebody has been improper in their treatment of me in some way, then I leave that with God to deal with, and to act accordingly. But the one thing I will not do is say anything; do anything; or, act in any way that causes friction within believers in that local church congregation. We are living stones, not just a stupid Tower of Babel built to worship idol gods. We are living stones built to house the living God. That unity we dare not fracture.

**Confusion**

Well, God stopped, as you know, the Tower of Babel from being completed. The unity center became a total confusion when God came along, and took their one language and confused it, and mixed it up into many languages, and the place became one huge Jurassic Park with nobody knowing what to do. Everything was in total confusion, and people were running around, fleeing wildly from one desperate situation to another, not knowing how to bring it together. They were so completely unable to understand each other that they finally threw up their hands, and they terminated the building of the tower. Because of their inability to communicate, except with a limited number of people, it forced them to get together with those people, and it caused them to then be willing to move out to other places on the face of the earth, and to scatter as God had directed them to do. The name Babylon, therefore, is a fitting name for this place, because it means "confusion."

Noah, as you know, had a son named Shem. ... It is interesting to note that Shem lived for 502 years after the flood. Therefore, Shem lived into the era of Nimrod and the Tower of Babel. ... He saw the development of Nimrod's deliberate rebellion against God. In fact, Shem outlived both Nimrod and Semiramis, his wife. So, Nimrod's satanic religion, we must understand, was perpetrated in a time when men like Shem were still around proclaiming true doctrine, and proclaiming the truth of God, and was assisted by one of the most ancient of the patriarchs of whom we have record, namely Job. One has only to read through the book of Job to see the enormity and the depth of doctrine that was known and was fully grasp at the time.

So, Nimrod was not acting against some terrible lack of the knowledge about God. He was doing it against the worst possible conditions, a God that he knew full well, and whose ways he knew full well. There were powerful voices updating him about the truth relative to this God. But he was not interested.

It is interesting to remember that Abraham himself was called by God from the territory of Nimrod in the city of Ur of the Chaldees, which is a Babylonian territory, to begin the human ancestry of what was to become the Savior of Jesus Christ. So, here we're talking about a stream of the vilest, filthiest, most vulgar and obscene religion that eventuated from Nimrod and his wife, Semiramis, and the Babylonian culture that he developed at the Tower of Babel. And from that same source comes the pristine; the sinless; and, the unique Son of God, the finest human being that has ever lived.

It is amazing how, once you are alerted to this, you have only to keep your eyes open and your ears open to see how the filthy quality on the side of Nimrod's religion is with us today. You'll be getting a handout next week about what teenagers have as their role models upon the TV screen. All you have to do is watch kids and see how they dress, and the expressions they use. If you're well acquainted with these programs (which I'm not, but I can spot some of it), you will see that from a foul-mouthed, vulgar creep like Roseanne, and the lowlife piece of scrape-up off the pavement of the street of her daughter, who is a teenager who is abusive to her parents, and who gets a lot of laughs, and who was startling at first because she wasn't going to go to bed with her boyfriend, but who eventually succumbed. This is what teenagers are watching. Parents sit there, and their kids are watching a piece of lowlifes like this. They're not saying, "Hey, you can't watch. Turn that off." It should not even be coming into your home.

This is the religion of Nimrod, and you need to make the connection, because the religion of Nimrod has a moral code and a value system which is designed by Satan to be exactly opposite that of the Word of God and of the living God.

Well, it has been tough for the devil and his crowd up to now. Now we have every level of society from the political down to the economic and every institution, education, commercialism, whatever – vulgarity, obscenity, and filthiness is an accepted life form and expression. Out of the dirt of Babylon came indeed Nimrod, that piece of lowlife, that is plaguing the human race to this day. But also from there came the Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as a descendant of Abraham.

For this reason, I'm trying to give you a feel for why God looks at Babylon with such loathing, and considers it such an abomination in the human race, because all false religion (which is what Revelation 17 is going to deal with) comes from Babylon. Therefore, God has it in mind to finally destroy this system entirely. It is not the purpose of Almighty God to tolerate this system any longer.

So, somewhere in the tribulation period, beginning at the very beginning of the tribulation, and as time moves on, along comes the work of God in finally bringing down the destruction of Babylon. Revelation 17:2 says of this harlot (the city of Babylon): "With whom (this harlot religious system) the kings of the earth (the political leaders on planet earth) committed acts of immorality." This is the Greek word "porneuo," and it is related to the word "harlot," and it is referring here to immoral sexual acts. You might translate this Greek word as "fornicated." This word is used here again, however, in reference to spiritual fornication, the worshiping of idol gods. This was done at various points when the rulers chose to worship these idols. It was done by the kings, and it's a statement of fact from the living God. The national leaders around the world have, over the centuries, followed Babylon's lead into spiritual idolatry and idol worship.

We are further told that these kings who committed these acts of spiritual immorality: "Along with those who dwell on the earth." You may remember that this is a reference to those who are unbelievers. Revelation 17:8 says, "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to the destruction. And those who dwell on the earth will wonder." He's not referring to believers here. He is referring here to unbelievers who are going to be impressed by the antichrist. Who are these people: "These who dwell on the earth," who will be so awed? It says, that: "They are those whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, and when they see the beast that was, and is not, and will come."

So, those who draw upon the earth are humanity. What are we saying? Babylon, the source of evil, has first contaminated the political leaders. The political leaders will always influence a society in general. So, it has permeated down to the average ordinary citizen.

Now, what those who are ordinary people on the scene will do is that they are "made drunk with the wine of her immorality." "Made drunk" is the Greek word "metheuo," and it means intoxication. Here it means spiritual intoxication with worshiping idol gods and practicing the rituals of worshiping those idol gods, which are basically expressions of illicit and perverted sex. The leaders did this at the point that they drank in the views of Babylon. This is in the passive voice which indicates that this is done to humanity as the result of following this religion. What they are drunk with is what is called "the wine of her immorality" (her "porneia"). This refers to spiritual unfaithfulness to God. The worship of false gods, and the practice of false doctrine, began with the national leaders; then, it permeated downward to the whole society. The whole religious system of Babylon, then, is what we're dealing with. It entices nations to rebel against God, as did Satan and his angels. That's the whole point of the religion of Babylon – to get you to be willing to follow false gods and false doctrines.

The guilt of Babylon, in causing rulers and people to become spiritually intoxicated on false religion, is stated for us in Jeremiah 51:7. God holds this city on the Euphrates responsible for what has spewed out from her in religious adultery: "Babylon has been a golden cup in the hand of the Lord, intoxicating all the earth. The nations have drunk of her wine." What wine? Her false doctrine; her humanism; and, her liberalism – all of the things that constitute her anti-God religious position: "They have drunk of the wine. Therefore, the nations are going mad."

**National Destruction**

Isn't that interesting? Is your religion is wrong in a nation, and if your spiritual principles are wrong upon which you function in a nation, you will go mad. That explains why nations will do the absolutely insane things that political leaders do. Who gets into public office? Those whom God chooses to place there. You can go through whatever rituals you may want, and whatever campaigns you may choose, but ultimately there is a god in heaven, Daniel told us, who chooses those whom He puts in places of authority. When people deserve it, Daniel said, He places there the worst of rulers. A nation finally has so debased itself with practicing all of the elements of Nimrod's religion, which I haven't gotten into with you in detail. That's coming next week. All of the elements will ring bells with you all over this place, and you're suddenly going to realize that that's exactly what's all around me. I do know that Nimrods religion. I'm well acquainted with it. You're going to find that all of these things that are characteristic of Nimrods religion are the things that now control the national life of nations all over the world. And when that happens, that nation will then come under the judgment of God, and that nation is going to its destruction.

Therefore, when God wants to punish a nation for having practiced Nimrod's religion without restraint, such as we're doing it in this country, then He says that He puts the worst possible rulers over you. The system ordinarily works beautifully, and Romans 13 describes it in detail.

On occasion, I've been called upon to go to the Irving City Council to lead in the opening prayer for a month of their sessions. And I always make a point, on those occasions, of including in that prayer the understanding that those men are there by divine appointment and that Romans 13 says, "They are therefore the ministers of God." Was Stalin a minister of God? You betcha. Was Hitler a minister of God? Oh, yes. Was Mao Zedong a minister of God? Yes, he was. They are there as ministers (agents) of the living God to execute what the nation deserves. And when a nation as ours, in the past, has been faithful to God, we've had terrific leaders. But now that our society has so degenerated, and our population has so degraded itself, the people themselves don't want quality leaders. And God leads them in their madness to choose to elect those which are the worst of the lot imaginable.

Babylon as held the cup of the wine of her spiritual immoralities, and from the time of the Tower of Babel, the nations of the world have been drinking deeply from it. The influence of that now upon the nations of the world is what we shall pursue next week.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1993

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