

LECTURES ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

BABYLON: ITS CHARACTER AND DOOM (Concluded) (Lectures 18, 19:1-5)

IN my last address I sought to identify the Babylon of the Apocalypse, and to show just how it was linked with Babylon of old, the literal city in the land of the Chaldeans on the plain of Shinar. Tonight we have more details as to its unholy character and its awful doom. We also get a better idea of the marvelous way in which its principles have permeated the very warp and woof of civilization, affecting the entire civil and commercial fabric of the age in which we live, all of which must be destroyed in order to prepare the way for a higher and happier condition of society to be ushered in at the Lord's return. We read:

“And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils (demons) and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies” (vers. 1-3).

This, I take it, synchronizes with the second angel's message of chapter 14:8, and introduces the judgment of the seventh vial as foretold in chapter 16:19.

Babylon will therefore continue up to the very end of the tribulation period; its destruction by the Beast and his ten kings being a last frantic effort to rid themselves of this dreadful incubus, just before they are destroyed by the appearing of the Lord in glory.

The Antichrist will be the pretended incarnation of the woman's Seed and will be accepted as such by apostate Christendom and apostate Judaism.

Thus Satan's masterpiece will seem to carry all before it; but only until the true Seed of the woman appears from heaven, descending with all His holy ones, to the consternation of His enemies and the joy of His suffering saints, the persecuted remnant of Israel and those from among the nations who will receive their testimony in that day. Not, be it again observed, people who in this present dispensation of grace have refused the message of the gospel, but those to whom that message will not have gone until after the rapture of the church. To this, II Thessalonians chap. 2 bears a clear and convincing testimony.

The description of fallen Babylon as the habitation of demons and the hold of evil spirits and a cage of unclean birds is a most graphic one, and strikingly depicts the horrible end of the apostasy. That which professes to be the spouse of Christ, and which issues its ofttimes blasphemous decrees as under the direction of the Spirit of God, is seen to be but a Satan-inspired and demon-directed system, where every unholy thing flourishes, where evil men can find shelter and are protected in the promulgation of their evil doctrines and practices.

To this the papacy has fully answered in the past, and its character remains unchanged to this present hour. It would be practically impossible to find a viler history than that of the medieval popes and their emissaries. It was a Roman Catholic writer who said of this period, "The annals of the church are the annals of hell."

The proverb, "The corruption of the best thing is the worst of corruptions" is strikingly illustrated in the history of the church. It seems almost impossible to believe that the church to which the apostle Paul addressed his Epistle could, in a few centuries, degenerate into the Roman church as now known. But this is the mystery of Babylon, as we have already seen. And a more amazing thing, if that were possible, is the solemn fact that the Reformation churches, once delivered from this vile system, should now hopefully look for reconciliation with it, so readily be able to forget its dreadful past, and overlook its present wicked pretensions!

We in America, and our brethren in Britain, see Rome at its best, for men do not readily do in the light what they will do in the dark. But, as it has been said, "Character is what a man is in the dark," and we may test this system by the same principle. If, then, you want to know the true character of Romanism, go to the lands where the light of Reformation has barely penetrated; look at the countries south of us, to the great Latin-American republics, where the papacy has borne sway and poisoned the morals of the people for centuries. There you will see the results of Babylonianism unchecked by enlightened Christianity. What a horrible cesspool of iniquity it is, let those tell who have seen it for themselves. There idolatry reigns in most abhorrent form, and the gospel is a proscribed teaching, which would be absolutely prohibited had the church full power as in the days of old.

In the Old Testament, idolatry is branded as spiritual fornication. In the New Testament it is the unhallowed union of the church and the world. We see both in this evil system. Who is so unblushingly idolatrous as Rome? And who has so persistently courted the world's favor as she? And even now we may see how brazenly she is coquetting with the kings of the earth, and by her blandishments endeavoring once more to win their admiration and attentions. Nor will she stop until the scarlet woman again rides the Beast - until the church dominates the State.

Subtly she is enlarging her sphere of influence. By devious ways she seeks to “make America catholic,” and undo the work of the Reformation in England. She largely controls a venal press, and even the theatre, which, alas, is all the church some people attend, is being pressed into her service.

I am told on good authority that it is becoming more and more common, both on the regular stage and in the picture-palaces, to caricature Protestant ministers, and to introduce on suitable occasions representations of Romish priests and nuns in a most attractive and solemn way. All this is part of a studied and far-reaching propaganda that is insidiously working in our midst to turn this nation Romewards.

Commercialism has always flourished under the patronage of the popes, and this is another powerful weapon that Rome knows well how to use. Commerce is the goddess of the present feverish age, and to her everything must be sacrificed. And the Babylon of the future is not only a great church, but a great commercial system as well, for to her men will finally turn for the solution of the problems that now perplex them. How largely is union labor to-day under the power of Rome! And while she is the professed enemy of socialism, she delights to be regarded as the patron of the working-classes on the one hand, and as the protector of capital on the other. She has a veritable genius for the commercial.

“In Rome,” cried Luther, “they sell everything. They would sell the Father, and sell the Son, and sell the Holy Ghost.” The stamp of simony is on her brow, and it behooves all who would glorify God to avoid her principles and flee from “**the error of Balaam.**”

The call of verse 4 is, if I understand it aright, not merely a warning to saints in a coming day who may be in danger of being deceived by her, but it is a message for all who even now discern her true character:

“I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”

Separation from evil is imperative for all who would have the Lord’s approval. This was the call heard by the reformers of the 16th century. But, alas, alas, many who are supposed to be their successors have returned in spirit to that which their fathers left behind, and there is many a Babylonish garment to-day hidden in Protestant tents, or even displayed upon Protestant shoulders. How else are we to account for the widespread return to principles and practices once abhorrent to those whose boast it was that “The Bible and the Bible alone is the religion of Protestants.”

Where that Bible is losing its hold upon the consciences of the people (because its inspiration and authority is being so widely denied by those who have solemnly sworn to teach it and defend it) we need not wonder that Babylonish ways and teachings are coming into vogue again. Men want something stable, something infallible; and if they cannot have the infallible Word of the living God they will turn to a professedly infallible church. But the hour of God’s judgment draws on apace. He will not forever be a silent spectator of all these abominations.

Soon He will pour out the bowls of His wrath upon spiritual Babylon as He did of old upon the city of idolatry on the Euphrates, **“For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.”** Then will go forth the sentence,

“Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works; in the cup which she hath filled, fill to her double. How much she hath glorified herself and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow” (vers. 6, 7).

A comparison of the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah in regard to the fall of ancient Babylon will show how plainly the doom of the spiritual counterpart is there prefigured.

In several instances the same identical figures are used, and this has led some commentators to suppose that the doom of the literal city was not final; and so it is taught by some that Babylon is to be rebuilt on her ancient site, to flourish for a few years as the religious and commercial metropolis of the world, only to be again destroyed, and that finally, at, or immediately preceding the Lord's second coming. These teachers generally agree in making this restored Babylon the seat of the Antichrist, whom they, as a rule, identify with the future world-emperor. But I think we have already shown that a careful comparison of the Old and New Testament Scriptures on these subjects make this view untenable. The city of old has fallen to rise no more. The system that succeeded it is to be judged by God and destroyed as literally as her predecessor, according to the word now before us:

“Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her” (ver. 8).

And we learn that although God will use the ten kings and the Beast to bring this about, yet they will themselves bewail her fall, when they find to their horror that the whole fabric of civilization is falling with her. Something like this was seen in the days of the French Revolution, and has been seen in measure in other lands of late. With the destruction of the church, no matter how corrupt, came the breaking up of all social barriers and a flood of anarchy and violence seemed likely to involve the entire nation in ruin, so that even Napoleon the First saw the necessity of re-establishing the church though largely shorn of its power - on the ground that a poor religion is better than none at all in holding the masses in restraint.

We can readily understand therefore how Babylon's fall will send a thrill of horror through all who have been in any way linked with her, causing the kings of the earth who have enjoyed her favor to bewail her and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning.

Standing afar off, they cry, **“Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.”**

It would seem that, coincident with the fall of the system, comes the fall of the city where she has had her seat; and that, by some act of God, perhaps such as a great earthquake, will be forever destroyed that proud and haughty capital which has borne the title of “The Eternal City” for two millenniums, but whose doom is sure because of her impiety and hateful pride.

It is a well-known fact that all southern Italy is of a peculiarly volcanic character. The very soil seems to be “stored with fire,” to use a Scriptural phrase which is applied in II Peter 3:7 (literal rendering) to the heavens and earth as a whole. In a very remarkable manner is this true of the vicinity of Rome, and it may yet prove to be the means of its complete destruction. In such a case the words “**the smoke of her burning**” may be far more literal than some have supposed.

This seems to be intensified in the lament of the merchants of the earth in verses 11 to 19. It is a magnificent elegy, and deserves more careful consideration than our limited time will permit. It pictures the destruction of the great commercial system that men are building up with such painstaking care, and which some fondly look upon as the panacea for all the disturbances that have wrought such distress among the nations.

How often was it said before the outbreak of the great world-war that labor would not fight and that capital dare not. It was claimed that there was too much at stake; but how false have all such predictions proved. We may however be assured that when it is over, for a time, a tremendous effort will be put forth to build up a financial system that will be world-embracing and that will unite the nations in the bonds of commercial self-interest so securely that the danger of such another world-conflict will be at an end. We know that all such schemes are doomed to disappointment, for the prophetic word has clearly foretold their failure. There can be no lasting peace until the Prince of Peace becomes the Governor among the nations.

And so we are permitted in this present portion of our book to stand by as it were, and look on as Babylon falls, and to hear her merchants bewailing her doom and their own tremendous losses. As her merchandise is tabulated, now with none to buy, we notice among the precious things mentioned are the bodies and souls of men.

And this is the awful thing about Babylon. She has made merchandise of the bodies and souls of her dupes, who, turning away from the rich grace revealed in the gospel, have sought to purchase what God was freely offering, only to find at last that they have sold their souls to a cruel and avaricious system that is conscienceless, and remorseless as the grave. How fearful must be the accounting at the judgment bar of God of those responsible for such terrible deceptions!

No wonder Babylon’s fall brings joy in heaven, though it involves the earth-dwellers in selfish sorrow. “**Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her**” (ver. 20).

She had shed their blood like water, but the vengeance of God, though it seems to slumber long, shall awaken at last, and every upright soul will justify God when He visits her in His wrath and indignation with the judgments here symbolized.

The figure used in Jeremiah 51:63 is repeated in depicting this end. A mighty angel is seen casting into the sea a great stone, like a tremendous millstone (fit symbol indeed of that mysterious power which had crushed the nations and ground the saints of God beneath it for so long); he cast it into the sea, crying,

“Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; and the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived” (vers. 21-23).

How solemnly do the angel’s words fall on the ear, and how solemnly do they contrast with the lamentations of the merchants of the earth, whose only grief is that no man buyeth their merchandise any more.

It is the destruction of the greatest schemes and works of man, to make way for that which has been in the mind of God and promised through His prophets from the beginning of the world.

Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and builded a city, after the murder of his brother Abel.

This was the beginning of man’s boasted civilization.

- All the arts and sciences had their origin there.
- There were artificers in brass and iron.
- Trade and barter, the pursuit of the unrighteous mammon began there;
- and there too dwelt those who handled the harp and the organ.

Music charmed the weary sons of Cain as they sought to make themselves happy and this world attractive apart from God. The Lord blotted all this out in the deluge, but it is evident that Ham, Noah’s son, had learned the same ways.

In his family the world as an ordered system of things, apart from God, had a new beginning. Nimrod builded a city and a tower, as we have seen, and it became the mother-city from whence others went out and built a civilization, godless and selfish. That system eventually crucified the Lord of Glory, and His accusation was written above Him in Hebrew, the language of religion, Greek, the language of culture, and Latin, the language of world-politics - the world, as such, arrayed against God and His Christ.

And this is the world which is to reach its culmination in Babylon the Great, presided over by the greatest geniuses that earth has ever produced, only to be judged by God because of its inveterate enmity to everything holy, and its constant rejection of His Son. Its downfall will prepare the way for the establishment of the kingdom of God and the reign of righteousness and peace, for which humanity has sighed so long. Man’s city must fall to give place to the city of God which shall stand forever. Therefore the joy in heaven at Babylon’s destruction.

“And in her,” that is, in Babylon, **“was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.”**

This closing verse of chapter 18, I think, should make it manifest that while, as I have been trying to show, Rome is the inheritor of the mysteries of ancient Babylon, it also is a world-inclusive system of apostasy. This, and this alone, fully meets the requirements of this last verse. When God makes inquisition for blood, He finds it all shed by this guilty thing, Babylon the Great. For, had man not gone out from the presence of the Lord, this earth would never have been stained with human blood; brotherhood and righteousness would everywhere have prevailed. Babylon therefore is guilty of all the corruption and violence that have darkened the history of the human race; it caused the death of the Christ of God Himself. May grace be given to all to whom this message comes to **“flee from the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul.”**

In the opening verses of the 19th chapter we are given another look into heaven, and permitted to note the exultation that the judgment of the great harlot causes up there:

“And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia! Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are His judgments: for He hath judged the great harlot, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia! And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders and the four living ones fell down and Worshiped God that sat Upon the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia!” (vers. 1-4).

All the redeemed of every age, who when on earth knew something of this awful power of iniquity, will then rejoice that it is forever overthrown. This is the last time the twenty-four elders are seen in the book. The symbol changes in the next section, and the Bride, the Lamb’s wife, takes its place. The elders represent the heavenly saints as a worshiping company of holy and royal priests. But when the harlot-church is off the scene, the true bride appears and the elders are never again mentioned. It is noteworthy that on this their last appearance, as upon their first in chapter 4, they are seen in the attitude of worship. They adore the Lamb as Creator and as Redeemer in chapter 4, and here they adore God as moral Governor of the universe, for the display of His righteous judgment.

In response to their note of praise comes a voice from the throne itself, saying, **“Praise our God, all ye His servants, and ye that fear Him, both small and great.”** This concludes the solemn and soul-stirring portion under consideration, in which the character and doom of the great mystery of Babylon have been so vividly portrayed. Happier scenes lie before us; scenes, however, that could only be introduced by the judgment of that which had so grievously departed from the living God. Happy will it be for us if we learn to judge, not only the unclean system we have been dwelling upon, but every tendency in ourselves to partake of its spirit.

~ end of chapter 19 ~

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