

The Fall of Babylon

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 May 2021

Preacher: Dylan Marais

[0:00] Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your Word, the ability to meet together so that we can learn from it and encourage each other in it.

Lord, we need your Holy Spirit to not just understand your Word, but to have it live and grow inside our hearts and minds so that it becomes part of us. Lord, we ask for you to send your Spirit now and do that work in our hearts and minds that is needed to make us understand it, to make us live by it and obey it, and to glorify you.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, if we were in wartime, I wonder how we would greet each other when we met like this on a Sunday.

And we normally have a morning greeting when I'm leading, Adrian did this morning. Hello, everyone. Welcome. Nice to see you. Nice to speak. If you're in wartime, when we gather, our greetings would be, you know, if we so, I don't know what word I'd use to describe that kind of greeting, normal.

It would be more intense, wouldn't it? We'd be like, oh, you guys are here. It's fantastic. Oh, it's so good to see you. Have you heard of what happened to so-and-so? Are they all right? What's going on?

[1:17] You'd be glad when you're meeting in wartime not to be on the front line. So, if you've ever been, I wonder if any of us have been, some of us have been in the army, and you get the roll call that doesn't happen normally in the front line, it's way back from the front line, so you're just happy that you're not facing the enemy at that stage.

Good to see people. Can you imagine what their reaction would be when they meet and they hear the news, guys, the war's over. The enemy's been defeated.

We've won. We wouldn't be going, oh, that's good. That's good. Would you like some tea? You know the scenes, you've seen the scenes in the movies and in real life.

We would break heart in song, congratulations and praise. Well, we're in the book of Revelation. Revelation reminds us that we're in a war, that our enemy is real, and there is real danger that we face.

But we're assured of ultimate victory. And in Revelation 17 and 18, there's a sea change in the story.

[2:30] It's not a major hinge, but there is a big change in the storyline of Revelation, in that for the first time we begin to see that our enemy is getting defeated.

Like when I think of the Allies landing in Normandy in Europe in 1944, 6th of June, 1944. Everyone knew this was the beginning of the end for Nazi Germany.

And in Revelation 17 and 18, we get a picture of the change that's going to happen as God begins to take over victory over his enemies and over our enemies. God is showing us what our enemy looks like again in Revelation 17 and 18.

We've done this before. Back in Revelation 13, God gave us an insight into the enemy that we face. Remember, we face those beasts from the sea and beasts from the land.

But he wants to show us what our enemy looks like so we can take appropriate action. And in Revelation 13, we've got those beastly nations.

[3:36] And in Revelation 17 and 18, it's a unit, 17 and 18. We only read from chapter 18, but we'll dig into chapter 17 a bit. We don't have beastly nations, although the beast is there.

The major image throughout 17 and 18 is of a prostitute. And this prostitute is like a city.

And so we're going to spend a bit of time learning what this enemy looks like in this particular part of Revelation. Some very interesting imagery for us to get our heads around.

And then we're going to spend a little bit of time asking how are we to respond. If that's how we know what the enemy looks like, what is our response meant to be? Right? Happy? So, the first thing we see in Revelation, we've got to dig into Revelation 17.

Revelation 17, the main image that John sees is this image of a prostitute sitting in all her pride and shame as a mighty city.

[4 : 44] Indeed, one of the mightiest cities of the ancient world, Babylon. Sitting like a giant spider in the center of a web, controlling a host of lesser cities and kings as they pay allegiance to her, but who are nonetheless exploited by her.

So, keep your Bibles there. Well, maybe just turn over to chapter 17, if you have to turn. I do. And we'll just look at the first few verses there. One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters.

With her, the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries. And so, what we find out is that this new enemy that seems to arise in Revelation 17 and 18, we've been introduced to her already in the course of our story of Revelation, but here we're getting a full, we've sort of had a preview, and this is the full movie version of what she's like.

So, we're going to go through her characteristics and see, okay, what is this enemy, this Babylon that John talks about, that's going to be destroyed? What is she like? What is she doing? And the first thing we see is she's full of sexual immorality.

The Greek word for prostitute is *porneia*, porn. But it's both a sexual imagery as well as a spiritual imagery as we shall see in a bit.

[6 : 22] But notice she's enticing and alluring and wants everyone to do business with her. So, Babylon pretends to be beautiful, but she's filled with all kinds of gross and horrible and really, really yucky things.

Just a little bit later in the next few verses. From verse 4, The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup.

Hmm. And you look inside the cup, full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. And of her, it was written a name of mystery, Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations.

And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. There's a city full of sexual immorality. That's the image you've got of a city.

So you say, oh, you live in Babylon. Oh, yes, you live in that great prostitute. That's what John is telling us. That's the main image he's getting of this city, this enemy of God's people.

[7 : 32] Secondly, she's full of violence and hatred towards Christians. She's a persecutor, a huntress. She seeks out and wants to destroy Christians and anything they stand for.

And then she's got hatred towards God and Christ as well. She wants to take aim at him and makes war against the lamb. That comes out in verse 14 of chapter 17.

The prostitute and the beast and people who follow her, verse 14, They will make war against the lamb, but the lamb will overcome them, because he is lord of lords and king of kings.

And with him will be his called, chosen, and faithful followers. That's us. The third thing is she is greedy and lusts after money and wealth.

She will use economic exploitation to make herself obscenely rich. We read a little bit of that in chapter 18. From verse 11 to verse 13, there's this list of the cargoes that she trades in.

[8 : 45] It's an amazing amount of wealth. Gold, silver, precious stone, pearls, fine linen, every sort of cotton, scarlet cloth, ivory, wood, bronze, cinnamon, etc., etc., etc.

But how does she get it all? Well, at the end of that list, it tells you that it's carried on the bodies and souls of men.

In some translations, slaves and souls of men. So she earns it on the backs of dead men. Slave trade.

And then fourthly, she is haughty and proud. She's totally self-reliant, not relying on God, not even acknowledging Him, but only reliant on her own abilities and her own authority and her own ability to stay rich and to weather whatever storm comes her way.

In chapter 18, in verse 7, she says, in her heart, she says, I sit as a queen. I am no widow and no mourning I shall ever see.

[9 : 54] So she's happy. She's fine. But zero reference to God. Zero reference to anything to do with anything other than this world and her riches and her power and what she can gain.

Sitting on top of the waters of the world, on top of this beast, controlling everything that she sees and pulling people, more and more people, into her power. So we know that in chapter 17 and 18, John is saying, look, be careful, there's this big city called Babylon.

She's looking like a prostitute. She's full of sexual immorality. She's full of violence, full of greed and full of pride. But who or what is she? What does John mean by calling her Babylon?

Now remember, we are dealing with symbolic imagery in the book of Revelation. And Babylon, at the time of Revelation, was a broken city. John is writing to the churches in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, and he's not warning them about Babylon far to the east, which doesn't even pose a threat anymore.

It's no longer a world power. Instead, the city that was their biggest threat was the city of Rome. Though funny enough, Babylon is never actually called Rome in Revelation.

[11 : 16] And remember what our decoder tool is, if we want to find out what he's talking about and what he wants us to do with this information. Remember what our decoder tool is in Revelation?

Right? The Old Testament. And when we look in the Old Testament, we find this kind of symbolic imagery used fairly often to describe various cities that interact with God's people at that time.

We read a portion of it in our Old Testament reading from Jeremiah 51. But other cities, too, are described as prostitutes and who are judged for getting rich of economic exploitation and enticing others into their idolatry.

And we don't have time to go and look at them, but I'm going to put them on the screen, and it's well worth just jotting down and then going to read up on these chapters to see how the Bible talks about them. Other examples include Tyre from Isaiah chapter 23, Nineveh, the capital of Assyria in Nahum chapter 3, and then perhaps shockingly, although if we kind of knew our story of the Old Testament, it wouldn't take us by that by surprise, but Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16 and 23.

And in fact, the most striking images that burn in your mind you'll dig out in Ezekiel 16 and 23. And those things almost carry a PG rating, so if you're going to read them at home with your kids, folks, read them with your kids.

[12 : 42] Don't just go and tell them to read those passages. So then, Babylon in Revelation 17 is acting as a representation of all these types of cities.

For the original recipients of John's letter, she's Rome. But because Babylon is an image or symbol, she's not tied to a particular location in time and space.

In other words, our world is filled with Babylon's even today. And what Revelation wants us to do is to use the imagery as a grid with which to assess our own situation, our own time and space.

So we ask ourselves, where do we live? Well, we live in South Africa. But what's our closest city?

Well, it's Cape Town. So then let's ask, how Babylon-like is the city of Cape Town?

What about other cities of the world? London, Beijing, Washington, D.C. Now, when we do this, we're not going to say that Cape Town is the Babylon of our time.

[13 : 56] But it's worth seeing the world the way God sees it, and Revelation helps us with that, with doing that. So let's spend a little bit of time looking at using the grid of Revelation, saying, yes, Revelation is talking about Babylon, but for, at the time of John's listeners, that's Rome.

It's a composite image of the kinds of cities that will appear in human history with which God's people need to deal, deal with. And so we're going to be doing that a little bit of, spending a bit of time doing that now.

So, how Babylon-like is the city of Cape Town? Well, let's talk a little bit about sexual immorality. Sorry, I think we can tick that box in the city of Cape Town.

I remember I was once working in a township, when I was working at U-Turn, and we were building houses, RDP houses, every second Friday, the people working on the houses got paid.

They didn't live in the township, they were the only people making money in the township. So, every second Friday, they get paid about lunchtime, and what would happen is the schools were out, and the moms would bring their children, their teenage girls, to go and do business with these guys that have got money.

[15 : 20] I saw it, saw it with my own eyes. Shocking. But the city itself, the city of Cape Town, like South Africa in general, wants to literally legalize prostitution.

I don't know if you're aware of that, but you might have seen it in the news. That's their answer to sexual immorality as well. Let's make it more available. Cape Town is also very woke, and inclusive, and wants what it calls equality, but what that really is doing is pushing very unhealthy sexual practices into places that it shouldn't go, particularly the schools.

Greed. What is Cape Town like as a city of greed? Well, we pay a lot in rates and taxes. Do you know how much the city of Cape Town's budget is now? Just come out. It's close to 60 billion rand. Wonder what we could get for that. What are we going to get for that? Our city works for us. How are the poor being helped? How much are the counsellors being paid? What are the living conditions like of those who get assisted living? Can't they afford better services for 60 billion? The scary thing is, the city of Cape Town is probably one of the best-run cities in South Africa.

[16:38] Can you imagine what the greed and the corruption is like in our other cities? Arrogance and pride. The city of Cape Town, like most cities, I imagine, looks down on all that she needs to help.

Have you ever tried sorting out an issue with the city of Cape Town? We've been trying to change our electricity tariffs since, I think, January or something. Phone call after phone call.

Diversion after diversion. Does the city acknowledge God? We know it doesn't anymore. They organize multi-faith tea parties, not to mention actual pride parades.

So Cape Town's got its own pride parade and it's organized by the city. So you can see the direction that they're going in. What about violence and hatred for Christians?

Well, our city is full of violence. That's not particularly aimed at Christians and it's not from the city itself. But why is our city full of violence?

[17:46] What's happening? What is our city doing about it? What is happening is that the city is becoming increasingly intolerant of Christians and what we stand for.

The current gender legislation in the Western Cape schools is pushing hard for accepting very unbiblical and, what I've mentioned, unhealthy sexual practices. And if you, as a Christian, want to object, we can just imagine what will happen.

And in fact, members of our congregation are facing that issue right now. So, what we're doing is we're just taking the grid of revelation, using it as a grid, saying, okay, they're saying what Babylon is like.

Let's apply that in our local situation and see what's happening around us. And we see that there's a lot of overlap between the two. Now, again, please remember, I'm not saying the city of Cape Town is the ultimate Babylon that we're ever going to face, but whichever city we find ourselves in, whichever part of the world, Revelation tells us that we must interact with it using the Bible as a way of doing that.

We're not just to use the Bible as our own private, personal, devotional material. It's got more to say about our world than just what happens between me and Jesus and us on a Sunday together.

[19:03] I hope you can see that. Otherwise, John, or God, wouldn't have shown or talked about our enemy as this big city, Babylon. Okay, so that's what Babylon is like.

What should our response be? What are we supposed to be doing if Babylon is alive and kicking? Babylon's going down, but it's still there in certain parts of the text.

Well, in chapter 18 and verse 4, we get our answer. Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues. And so what God wants is for His people to come out, be separate, don't participate, and don't touch. Babylon is full of evil, but it's evil that appears alluring.

That's why it's got to be warned. That's why we've got to be warned not to take part in it. Don't touch. It'll be fun. And the sin nature in our hearts calls out to the dark side.

[20:11] It's enticing. It's alluring. It's interesting. I just want to see what she offers, what it tastes like.

I just want to see how far I can go without getting burned. I want to see what this pill does. It looks like fun. It'll be fun. We hear. Well, the reason we think like this is we don't realize the danger we're in.

We don't realize the danger that cities that live like this are in. Like the baby at the zoo behind the plexiglass window. He thinks he wants to go and play with a nice little kitty cat.

Yeah, that's fine, but just let them wander into the open enclosure and see how far they get. The reason God doesn't want His people to have anything to do with this, with a city like Babylon is that it's dangerous and the whole thing will end in tears if we decide to stay and play with her. Now, we're not called to physically come out of Babylon. We're not to develop into little holy huddles pretending that there's no evil in the world. After all, if Babylon is Rome, where is John going to tell his people to go?

[21 : 23] Rome is a worldwide empire. No matter what city you move to, you're still within the Roman Empire and you have to deal with the same issues. Likewise, in our day, Babylon is as active and just as ubiquitous all over the place.

So, to come out is to leave spiritually, to separate from her in terms of loyalty and allegiance and desires and hope. We come out when we don't participate in her sins, when we are the opposite of what she stands for.

And the best way to participate is to do the opposite. So, we come out of Babylon by standing out, by living as Christians. In our context, if Babylon is haughty and full of pride, we are to be humble and full of sacrifice.

We acknowledge God in all we do, even in the business place or at school. we go the extra mile to help the hurting, the poor and the needy.

We're not boastful about our achievements, but quietly get on with the business of loving God and loving others. Babylon is sexually immoral. We are, well, we're not monks, we're not nuns, but we are to express our sexuality, which is a gift from God, in the correct place.

[22 : 48] And the only place for that is a healthy, the only place is in a marriage relationship. The only place that is healthy is in a marriage relationship.

We stay away from sleeping around, from streaming content or sending messages that we shouldn't. But more than that, we harbor, we're a haven, a place of healing for those who have been hurt and abused by their sexual past.

Babylon wants to hurt and abuse victims. We want to heal sexual wounds and grow healthy marriages. Probably one of the strongest antidotes to Babylon's sexual allure is the allure of a godly Christian marriage.

Babylon is greedy and exploitative, always wanting more, never having enough. We are content, happy, and joyful for whatever God has given us.

We don't glut ourselves on food or alcohol, toys, cars, clothes, phones, stuff. We're circumspect, thrifty, sober, and responsible in our spending and buying habits.

[24 : 00] We give things away freely, especially investing in kingdom building work. We trust God to provide what we need for our daily bread. If we're in business, we create a good product and we sell it at a good price.

We don't cut corners, we don't make a quick buck, we don't invest in dodgy deals. We're not jealous of others' wealth and don't covet other people's possessions. We're content with what God has given us and place what we have at His disposal to do with as He would prompt us.

Babylon is full of violence, hatred, jealousy, and anger. we are forgiving. We're peacemakers. We're soothing. We're sweet. We're kind.

We have words that heal and encourage and help. We're peace-loving. We're not warmongering. We let go of the hurts and wounds that people inflict on us. We don't stand on our soapbox and demand that everyone be just like us.

We reach out and try and accommodate others as much as we can. So we come out of Babylon when we realize what kind of city she is and want something better for ourselves and for our children and for our community.

[25 : 17] We're in the world but we're not of the world and we simply show by our words and actions that we are citizens of heaven, of a heavenly Jerusalem, not citizens of the kind of city that the world wants to build.

And in fact, that's exactly how the early Christians used to live their life and there's a lovely quote that I'll just read out from a letter that was written by a guy called Diognetus. I've read it out to us once before but this was written about mid-100s talking about how Christians are different from the world.

He says, Christians are not distinguished from the rest of humanity by country, language or custom. They follow local customs in dress and food and other aspects of life but at the same time they

demonstrate their remarkable and certainly unusual character of their own citizenship. They marry like everyone else and have children but they do not kill unwanted babies. They share their food but not their wives. They're in the flesh but they do not live according to the flesh. They live on earth but their citizenship is in heaven. They love everyone and by everyone they are persecuted. They're poor yet they make many others rich.

[26 : 33] They're in need and yet they abound in everything. They're cursed yet they're blessed. They are insulted and yet they offer respect. As a soul benefits from the deprivation of food and drink so Christians flourish under persecution.

Such is the Christian's lofty and divinely appointed function from which he or she is not permitted to excuse herself. So that's how we act while we live in Babylon.

But these chapters tell us that Babylon's end is going to come. That her doom is certain and that therefore we must rejoice in that fact.

Which is a bit of a strange thing. We don't often think like this. when we stand out or show ourselves to be different when we come out in that way you can be sure that we're going to be targeted.

The cities of the world that are like Babylon want conformity. Want us to be and look like them and they won't allow anyone to be different.

[27 : 41] She will come after us. But this is precisely what will seal her doom. God is going to destroy every evil city that comes up against his people.

That's what God does throughout the Bible. He's doing it in Revelation and he will do it in time and space in history with cities like Cape Town, like London, like Washington, like Beijing.

Every city that doesn't follow God is going to be destroyed by him. Have a look at chapter 18 from verse 20. Well, let's start a bit earlier than that.

Let's start from verse 18. When they see the smoke of her burning, this is Babylon, this is the section of people who used to do trade with her, they will exclaim, was there ever a city like this great city?

Verse 19, they will throw dust on their heads and with weeping and mourning cry out, whoa, whoa, oh great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth.

[29 : 07] In one hour she has been brought to ruin. Rejoice over her, oh heaven. Rejoice saints and apostles and prophets.

God has judged her for the way she treated you. And then, verse 21, a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea and said, with such violence, the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.

Now this is, of course, is a fulfillment of what God said he would do for his people way back in Genesis chapter 12. When he made the promise to Abraham to create a nation, he says, I will bless you, you'll be a blessing, but whoever curses you, I will curse.

Now we are not used to thinking like this, but maybe we need to make a shift in our theology to come into line with the theology of the Bible. When people in cities and nations act like big bullies, we can rely on God as our big brother who's going to sort them out.

Now we don't mean harm to bullies, we just want to get on with everyday living. The problem with bullies is they pick on us. Bullies mean harm, and bullies need to be stopped.

[30 : 33] We can't stop them because they're so big, and God doesn't call us to take up arms. what he does call us to do is to warn the bully to stop being a bully, because we have a big brother who will come and sort them out if they don't.

Now some Christians use this in the wrong way. Get him, God. Get him. And they pray and pray and pray and hope and hope and hope. There's that famous church, I don't know if you've seen the images, I don't know if they do it anymore, the Westboro Church in America, with their signs, just Google that if you need to, they were happy that America's armies were being shot and killed, and every time they shipped the bodies over, they were like, yeah, well that serves you right for serving Babylon.

I'm not sure we're called to do that. But, on the other hand, others say that God isn't like this at all. God isn't going to hurt people, God loves everyone.

And if we talk about judgment, we must do it with tears streaming from our eyes. We must cry every time we talk about hell. Well, God doesn't. But we're not to be like either of those.

We don't wish the death of anyone, but we do want God's will to be done. And when we who are good people see arrogant, hurtful, bad people bullying and harming others, and when they want to

harm me, and then they want to come after my family and our kids, well it's natural for us to call out and say, God please come and help us and save us.

[32 : 10] And when God does that, it's natural for us to break out in praise and say, thank you God for saving us. More on that in chapter 19 and chapter 20.

Well, let's pray. Dear Lord God, what a striking reminder of who you are, a God that doesn't allow evil in the world to stay going on and on forever.

And a warning to the cities of the world, to the city that we live in, here in Cape Town, in this beautiful part of the world, to repent of her evil and to turn to you and to receive mercy and forgiveness and blessing.

Lord, will you raise up people, your church, to stand and to say and to call to people, our cities, to account that they cannot continue bullying and hurting the world.

Lord, help your church to be on the forefront of bringing change and life and goodness to planet earth. Lord, when you do bring judgments, help us to understand it properly and to give you thanks.

[33 : 24] And to honor and obey you in all that we do. In Jesus' name, amen.