

CHAPTER 9

Babylon Fallen, Part 2

John gives more than two chapters to the destruction of Babylon, which should impress us with the enormity of what it is referring to. It conveys to us that what John is dealing with is no passing affliction with a quick-fix solution but something of extreme importance. He goes into great detail about the destruction of this prostitute city. He claims that the sinful influence of this city has corrupted the whole world. It is interesting to note that the Jews had been dispersed to all the nations of the Empire. Their influence was felt in every nation; in fact, as you read in the Acts of the Apostles, in every nation they became the instigators of the attacks against the Christians. Paul says that the name of God is blasphemed among all the nations because of their apostasy and their false testimony that they bear to the covenant of

God. The Jews were spread far and wide. Jesus said to the Pharisees, "*You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are*" (Matt. 23:15). There was clearly a Judaistic influence throughout the Roman Empire and in all the cities where the Gospel was to be preached.

It is true that Paul always went first to the Jews, and Jews became the first fruits of his Gospel endeavors in the city. He went to the synagogue and preached the good news of the Kingdom. We invariably find, however, that, somewhere along the line, the Jews refused to listen. Eventually, he takes those converts that he has made and sets up his operation in some other part of the city. He was living in perpetual pressure from the opposition of the religious leaders.

Initially, then, Babylon stands for Jerusalem, but it also represents everything that is not of Christ; it is anti-Christ. Everything that is not the bride is a prostitute. Everything that is not true Zion is Babylon. Babylon is bigger than just Jerusalem. Babylon embraces in its adulterous arms everything that stands against Jesus and the knowledge of His glory. Therefore, humanism, "Christian" heresies, and other religions are all incorporated into the Babylonian concept that Scripture communicates to us. First, it is Jerusalem because she is the harlot and the adulteress. But everyone who takes a stand with her, who compromises with her, comes into an adulterous lifestyle. Remember when Jesus addressed the churches, and He confronted some of them with the peril in which they stood because of the compromise they were making with the world. One of the accusations He made was of the woman Jezebel. Whether there was actually a woman in

that church with that actual name is irrelevant. What He is doing is identifying her with the terrible prostitute queen who was married to King Ahab and who seduced the whole nation to follow a false religion. He is saying she is just like her and, having identified her, He also identifies what she does. She teaches them to eat food offered to idols and to indulge in sexual immorality. And that is what those who held to the teaching of Balaam did.

Do you remember Balaam, who was hired by Abimelech to curse Israel but could not do it? That is our confidence: no one can curse us, because we are the people of God. If we are in the blessing of God, there is nowhere for a curse to land. That is actually the words of the writer of the Proverbs, who says that an undeserved curse is like a fluttering bird. It cannot find anywhere to land (see Prov. 26:2). They can send it out, but it cannot land on you. When Balaam discovered that he could not curse them, he encouraged the king to seduce them. He sent women among them to persuade them to eat meat offered to idols and to commit adultery.

What we are seeing here is the ultimate collapse of Israel, who was meant to be the wife of God but who has become a prostitute. Prophetically, however, we are seeing the collapse of everything that stands against God, everything that will not submit to Him and bring its glory into His city.

The Prostitute and the Beast

Now one of the interesting things about this woman is that she is in league with the beast, and yet in the end it is the beast who is going to destroy her. Jesus said, when He was accused of casting out demons by the power of satan, "*A house divided*

against itself will fall" (Luke 11:17). The truth about the house of satan is that it is divided. There is not one clear agenda or one cohesive aim. There is not one demonic fellowship that has its eye on an ultimate goal. Everybody is out for himself or herself. That is what it is like to be in the kingdom of darkness. It is to do your own thing. When we saw those terrible locusts issuing from the abyss, every single one of them wore a crown because, although they have a king—which natural locusts do not (see Prov. 30:27)—every one of them was the boss of his own life. That is the kind of society in which we live today. That is what the pit has spawned: individualism to the extreme, individualism that revolves around what I want and what is good for me. There is no moral standard. There is no socially accepted behavior. Whatever you want goes. That is the sign of a society that has lost the concept of responsibility. We live in an age when everyone has rights and no one has responsibilities. That is Babylon.

One of the things we discover about Babylon when she falls is that it causes worldwide consternation. Everyone is upset—not because they have sympathy for her, but because their own livelihood is now under threat. All the kings, the merchants, and the ship owners are in deep mourning and distress because of Babylon's fall—not because they care for Babylon, not because their heart goes out to her in her time of trial, but because they have suddenly lost their profit. This is a society that needs to fall. It has no compassion. It does not care. It does not look after the fatherless. It does not support the widow. Everyone is out for himself or herself. And let us note this:

When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off (Revelation 18:9-10a).

I would have thought in a time of such terror, turmoil, and need, you would want someone who would support you, comfort you, put an arm around you. But as they see her torment they stand far off, they distance themselves. They are concerned because their profit margins have suddenly been drastically reduced.

Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: "Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!" The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more—cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men (Revelation 18:10-13).

That is the stock in trade of Babylon. It trades in the bodies and souls of men. Babylon, true to her nature, is a slave trader. She captivates, captures, and incarcerates men. Babylon not only captures their bodies, but their souls. She not only sells them into slavery, she sells them into deception and despair, into lies and error and ultimately into death. What a wicked city. What an awful place. What a happy moment that she should collapse and her smoke go up forever. God has

treated her in exactly the same way as he treated Sodom. The smoke of her destruction goes up forever and ever, and all the things that she once delighted in have suddenly, in one hour, come to an end. God, when He determines to move, can move very swiftly. In one hour He destroys her, brings her to nothing, to devastation. That is terrible news for the godless but great news for the righteous—that God can move swiftly.

In the Old Testament a prophet had asked a rhetorical question, one that demands an affirmative answer. The rhetorical question was this: Can a nation be born in a day? (see Isa. 66:8). Well, yes—and a nation can be brought to nothing in an hour. A city can be laid bare in a moment. Destruction can come upon them suddenly, and, if God can pull down the empires of this world, if God can destroy the principalities that have influence over our world in a moment of time, God can bring forth His purpose, manifest His people, and demonstrate His glory quicker than our imagination can grasp. When God moves by His Spirit he can achieve more in a moment than our strategy will achieve in a lifetime. That is why we call on God to move. We cannot go out and pull down Babylon. But God, in a moment, can destroy everything that stands against Him. God will use to His own ends those who are actually opposed to Him. God will use those who are His enemies to destroy His enemies. God will use, like some divine puppeteer, everything that will blaspheme and rile against His name and holiness and make it fulfill His purpose.

You see, the prostitute burdens the beast. She is riding on him to bring destruction to humanity. This is another of those dreadful parodies of a humble King riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, who came to bring redemption and deliverance, a

humble king who was greeted by the cries and the shouts and the hosannas of the multitude, of people who laid down their clothes before Him as a drama of how their very lives would be brought into submission to His lordship. But in a moment their cry was changed to "Crucify him! Away with him! We will not have this man to reign over us!" (see Matt. 27:22; Luke 19:14; 23:18). Jesus came humble and riding on a donkey, and instead of receiving the King on the donkey, they welcomed the prostitute on a beast. Instead of welcoming Him whose name is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, they welcomed her whose name was Mother of Prostitutes and of the Abominations of the Earth. They got what they deserved.

Do you remember that we heard the altar respond to an angelic cry, that when God had turned the waters into blood, the angel said, "*They have shed the blood of Your saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink as they deserve*" (Rev. 16:6). God will always give you what you deserve. When He comes to apportion prize or punishment, it is always what you deserve. That is nothing to do with salvation. Salvation is getting what you do not deserve, but reward is getting what you do deserve. Retribution is getting what you deserve, and Jerusalem received what she deserved. Babylon is visited by God's retribution in utter justice, for the beast itself attacks the woman. It strips her bare, eats her up, and burns her with fire.

It is like Jezebel again. Jezebel dealt in the souls of men and sold them to demonic powers that were exercised through the prophets of Baal. When God came to deal with her, she was cast down, literally, out of a window, smashed on the ground. And the dogs ate her. Beasts devoured her; the prostitute was

eaten by a monster. The monster that she was once in partnership with, on whose back she once rode, whom she urged on to persecute the people of God will now turn on her and eat her up. We do not have to fight against Babylon. Babylon will destroy itself.

Come Out and Be Separate

There is another cry in Heaven:

Then I heard another voice from Heaven say: "Come out of her, My people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to Heaven, and God has remembered her crimes" (Revelation 18:4-5).

Notice how God describes her sins—they are piled up to Heaven. That is how Paul, by the way, speaks about the Jews:

For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16).

God says Israel, in its hostility to the Church and to Jesus, in its murder of the prophets and its rejection of the apostles, has piled up its sins to the limit, and when it reaches the limit, God's wrath comes upon them at last. And when Babylon's sins are piled up to the limit, God retaliates. He says, "You have

reached the limit!" Remember that Abraham's offspring came into Canaan when the Amorites had filled up the fullness of their sins. So when Babylon's sins are fulfilled, Babylon falls; but as Babylon falls, Zion emerges. Jesus said something almost identical to this.

So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers! (Matthew 23:31-32)

In chapter 18 of Revelation, that is exactly what we see them do. They fill up the sin of their forefathers. They fill it up to the limit, and God's wrath comes upon them at last, for the harlot's sins have reached up to the heavens, and God has responded. But God knows those who are His, and God knows how to rescue the righteous (see Isa. 48:20; Jer. 50:8; 51:6,9,45; 2 Cor. 6:17; Rev. 18:4;). So God sends a call, an alarm, a challenge: "Come out of her, My people!" Now the amazing thing is that there are genuine people of God, true saints, born-again men and women, who are in Babylon. God will not utterly destroy Babylon and bring it to an end until his people have come out of her. He does not want them to share in her sin. He does not want them to be affected by her plagues. A very obvious and current situation to compare this to is the homosexual issue in many denominational churches. Such churches have compromised with Babylon and have been infected by her spirit: "*A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough*" (1 Cor. 5:6). Because of this and a multitude of other issues, it's time for real believers to separate themselves. He wants to bring everything that is Babylon to an end, but He will not do it while you are there. This is a strange thing for those of us who believe in a sovereign God,

who believe that the King will do as He desires and none can withstand Him. But there is a sense in which God has bound Himself in partnership with us. God has limited Himself to our response. Now that does not diminish God at all. It does not stop Him from being God. It is just that when God entered into covenant with us, He put boundaries around Himself. He has entered into covenant relationship with His people, and that covenant has parameters. It has clear guidelines and clear standards by which He operates.

God saw the wickedness of Sodom and came down to destroy the city because, like Babylon, its sins had reached Heaven. He had heard the cry of its wickedness and its evil, and He had come down to destroy it. And as He came down to destroy the city, He stopped off at Abraham's tent, He fellowshiped with Abraham, and He told him what He was going to do. Abraham, in Scripture, is spoken of as a prophet of God. As God's prophetic people, we should know what God wants to do. That is what being prophetic people means, to know what God is doing. So God stopped off at Abraham's tent to let Him know what He was doing. He said, "*Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?*" (Gen. 18:17). God does not want to hide His purposes from us. God is going to destroy Babylon. We need to hear that loud and clear. Abraham heard that Sodom was about to be destroyed.

And Abraham began his plea to God: "Surely you will not do that if there are twenty righteous people."

"No, if there are twenty I will spare it."

"What about ten?"

"If there are ten I will spare it."

Of course the sad thing was that there was not even that many. There was only one righteous man in the whole of the city, and God had determined to bring the city to destruction, but He would not do it while Lot was there. God knows how to deliver the righteous, and God sent an angel to bring Lot out of Sodom, and as soon as he was away, the fire of destruction fell and the judgment of God came (see 2 Pet. 2:7).

Now Babylon is a worse scenario. It is worse than Sodom because Sodom was never the bride of Christ. Sodom was never the people of the Lord, but Jerusalem was. Jerusalem has become Babylon, and its destruction is therefore inevitable. But before He destroys it, God still rescues His people. In fact, church history tells us of believers in Jerusalem at this time who, because of a prophetic word, fled the city before the destruction came. And so God's call, "Come out from her, My people," which was first heard back in the Old Testament when God was calling His people back out of Babylon into the land of their inheritance, is heard again. God continues to call, and He calls again and again until all His people are safe, until all His children are home, until everyone has escaped from the horrors, the drunkenness, the wantonness, the adultery, and the evil that is rampant in Babylon.

The Two Cities

As we have seen, the Bible is a story of two cities. If Charles Dickens had not taken it already, we could have called the Bible "The Tale of Two Cities." It is the story of two women, two sons, and two mountains. It is the story of conflict between those contrasting characteristics. There is war between Zion and Babylon. There is war between Isaac and Ishmael.

There is war between Sarah and Hagar. There is war between the prostitute and the bride. You are either one or the other. There is no middle ground. There is no neutral land in which both sides can feel secure. You cannot belong to both. Paul says you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons, and Babylon is described as this wanton harlot with a cup full of adulteries and abominations that she holds out for the world to drink and get drunk on. Listen to what happens to Babylon:

They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: "Woe! Woe, O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin! Rejoice over her, O Heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you." Then 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. The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth" (Revelation 18:19-24).

Her whole society, whether it is her commerce, her arts, or just the activities of everyday family life, have all come to ruin and the reason is that she is the one who was drunk on the blood of the saints. She was the one whose insatiable appetite and blood lust drove her to kill the people of God, and the blood of all the saints and the prophets was found in her. Back in Matthew's Gospel we find Jesus saying to the Jewish leaders, "*Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!*" (Matt. 23:32), just as the sin of Babylon was filled up. He then continues,

You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation (Matthew 23:33-36).

We cannot escape the fact that it was this generation that was visited by the judgments of God, that it was this generation, these inhabitants of Jerusalem, that were visited with God's judgment. For God will remove all that defiles, all that breaks covenant, all that rebels.

The Entrance of the Bride

The fall of Babylon means the emergence of Zion. The fall of the prostitute leaves the way open for the bride to come forth. Just as Babylon's hill crumbles and Zion's mountain emerges,

just as the prostitute collapses and the bride comes forth, both those things will happen together. We have seen this strange enigma, and yet this continual spiritual truth that the same event means death to some but life to others, condemnation for some but salvation to others. Here God is enacting His judgments, and not because He is a vindictive God. Rather, He is a God of justice, and justice demands that judgments be made. But He removes the prostitute because He has something better. He removes Babylon because He has something of greater beauty. He has a bride to bring forth. He has a bride to show to the world. Babylon is cast into the sea like a great millstone. Jerusalem is cast into the sea like a great mountain. For those who offend God's little ones, it would be better that a millstone be tied around their necks and they be cast into the sea. Egypt went down into the depths of the Red Sea, the prophet tells us, like a stone. Everything that offends will go back to the abyss. Everything that offends will be dropped into the deep. Everything that withstands God will be plunged into the depths of the rebellious ocean, kept there until the final Day of Judgment when all will stand before His throne. The Book of Revelation says there is coming a time when the sea will give up its dead.

After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in Heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are His judgments" (Revelation 19:1-2).

When Abraham stood before God and was told of the judgment that was going to come upon Sodom, he found solace and confidence in this conviction: surely the judge of all the earth will do right (see Gen. 18:25).

After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, For true and just are His judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of His servants." And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: "Amen, Hallelujah!" Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you His servants, you who fear Him, both small and great!" Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready" (Revelation 19:1-7).

You see, these two great events are intimately related. As God pulls down Babylon, He builds up Zion. As Babylon devours herself, the bride makes herself ready. There is a time coming, and already is, when everything that defiles is removed, everything that corrupts will be vanquished, everything that dares to take its stand against Christ and dares to revel in its own lordship will be overcome so that only the Kingdom, the King and his bride, the Church, will be seen. What a great day! What a glorious day! What a day to anticipate! What a day to dream of! And when it arrives we will discover that the reality is greater even than the dream.