

CHAPTER 8

Babylon Fallen, Part 1

We will begin this chapter by returning to the 144,000 we considered earlier. You will need to read Revelation 14:1-8. As you read, it should not surprise you that when you see the redeemed community in worship before the Lamb on Mount Zion, in the same context you read that Babylon is falling. For there is constant conflict between Babylon and Zion, and as Zion emerges so Babylon falls.

A Tale of Two Cities

The opening chapters of the Bible are very important for us because they reveal to us the essence of everything that God is going to say from this moment on and indicate everything that the Spirit of God wants to achieve. When we come to chapter

11 in the Book of Genesis, we read that men sought to build a city for themselves, and it notes: "*As men moved eastward, they found a plain*" (Gen. 11:2). Now everything in God's creation teaches us something about God. When Adam sinned, he was cast out of the garden eastward. When Cain killed his brother, he went from the presence of the Lord eastward. After the Flood and the beginning of the repopulation of the world, men traveled eastward. This idea of moving eastward conveys to us a departure from God. It is symbolic. It does not mean that people who live in the East are more sinful than those in the West, because the simple fact is that we all live east of somebody else! But in the Bible eastward represents a departure from God. That is why, whenever the tabernacle was erected and when the temple was built, their doorways faced the east, which means you have to turn around from the way you were going by nature and come back to God. If you look at a map in the back of your Bible and find Ur of the Chaldeans from which Abraham came, you will notice that his pilgrimage took him from the east to the west. That is also why when Jesus came into the world, wise men from the East came to worship Him. God is showing us that He is calling the world to turn around from its headlong departure from His presence and come to seek Him again.

And here we find men traveling east, and as they travel, they come to a plain. It is upon this plain that they want to build their city. Of course, we have already noted many times that Zion is a hill and that the holy city of God is built on a hill, not on a plain. It is much easier to build a city on a plain than it is to build a city on a hill. So sinful men take the easy option and say: "*Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves*" (Gen. 11:4).

We, on the other hand, are looking for a city that comes down out of Heaven. Arrogant humanism believes it can build a city that will elevate man up into the heavens so that men become gods. It is not at all without significance that it is in this eleventh chapter that we are first introduced to Abraham. Right at the beginning of the Bible we see a conflict of ideals. There are those who are eastbound plain dwellers who want to make a name for themselves and who intend to ascend into the heavens by their own efforts. They are contrasted with a man who has left a city, a highly fortified and sophisticated city, because he has seen a city of infinitely greater value. He has seen the City of God, "which has foundations," whose builder and maker is not these eastward travelers but God (see Heb. 11:8-10). He is looking for a city that comes down out of Heaven from God. He is not looking for a city built of man-made bricks, but he is looking for a city that is constructed with living stones. Right at the beginning we find this conflict of concepts and ideologies.

This conflict is developed all the way through the Scriptures. Babylon, which has its beginning in the Tower of Babel, is the place that stands opposed to the things of God. It is a humanistic alternative to God's spiritual reality. But it is destined to fall. Everything it stands for is destined to collapse. As Zion arises, Babylon crumbles. In fact, when we look in chapter 16 of Revelation and see the outpouring of the bowls of wrath, it is the final outpouring that actually begins the end of Babylon:

The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been

on earth, so tremendous was the quake. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of His wrath. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible (Revelation 16:17-21).

God's judgment is coming upon everything that is of Babylon, but because she is so fixed in her hostility, so determined to pursue her rebellion rather than repent and call for mercy, she curses God. We live in an arrogant world where people will curse God without any fear. But their retribution is at hand. God will not let the world go unpunished. Chapters 17 and 18 are all about the fall of Babylon. It gets huge coverage in the Book of Revelation because ultimately this is what the Book of Revelation is about—the triumph of the God of Zion over Babylon.

Babylon Is Jerusalem!

The very sobering thing, however, is that what John calls Babylon here is actually what was historically known as Jerusalem. The covenant-breaking people, who were chosen to display the glory of God, have now rejected their king. They have said, "*Let His blood be on us and on our children!*" (Matt. 27:25). They have cried, "*We have no king but Caesar*" (John 19:15), so now their fig tree has withered, their house is left to them desolate, and all that is left to occur is the

pouring out of God's wrath on these unbelieving and ungrateful sons. Jerusalem has become Babylon.

Let me explain why I believe that this is so. Babylon is described in the Book of Revelation as the great prostitute. Now that is the accusation that is continually made by the prophets of God not to the world, not to the heathen nations, and not to those who are locked in pagan darkness, but to God's own people. The accusation of adultery and of prostitution is made not to the Gentiles but to Jerusalem.

This is a constant and recurring theme, but because it may be new to some readers and controversial to others, let us look at several Scriptures. We will start with the prophet Isaiah:

See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her—but now murderers! Your silver has become dross, your choice wine is diluted with water. Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow's case does not come before them (Isaiah 1:21-23).

The faithful city has become a prostitute. That is the prophetic accusation against Jerusalem.

Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, "I will not serve You!" Indeed, on every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute. I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against Me into a corrupt, wild vine? (Jeremiah 2:20-21)

How has she become corrupt? She is lying down and is opening her legs for everybody! She is wanton and rebellious.

This is your lot, the portion I have decreed for you," declares the Lord, "because you have forgotten Me and trusted in false gods. I will pull up your skirts over your face that your shame may be seen—your adulteries and lustful neighings, your shameless prostitution! I have seen your detestable acts on the hills and in the fields. Woe to you, O Jerusalem! How long will you be unclean? (Jeremiah 13:25-27).

These are serious accusations. These are awesome and awful words. The faithful city, the pure bride, the one whom God betrothed himself to, has turned into a wanton prostitute. In fact, if we were to search all the Scriptures we could almost compile a whole book of the accusations that God makes, for not only is she the prostitute who loves the wages of her prostitution, she actually pays lovers to come and defile her. This is what God says about this city. So when we find, in the Book of Revelation, that there are accusations against a city that is full of prostitution and in fact has become a prostitute, we know that that was the very accusation that all the prophets carried about the Jerusalem of God.

The fullest and most appalling description of Israel's prostitution and adultery is found in the twenty-third chapter of Book of Ezekiel. The prophet speaks of the two kingdoms, the Northern Kingdom, which comprised ten tribes, and the Southern Kingdom, which was called Judah but was actually the two tribes of Benjamin and Judah. He tells how the Northern Kingdom vanished after it was captured, overcome, and exiled by the Assyrians. Then he goes on to speak of the

Southern Kingdom, which is later in the Scriptures called Judea, whose capital was Jerusalem; and this Southern Kingdom carries her prostitution even further than the Northern Kingdom. It is not a pleasant read and is the kind of passage you quickly pass over in your quiet time! It is not the stuff for Sunday School. It is embarrassing just to read it. We feel uncomfortable listening to the words, but this is God's word.

It raises the question as to why some Christians believe that God has reserved natural Israel in special favor when she has defiled and betrayed him so wantonly. She is the prostitute. Israel of today, when they worship God, are not worshiping the God we worship. They are worshiping a god of their own imagination, of their own invention. Modern Judaism is not the religion of Old Testament: it is prostitution. So when John speaks of the mother of harlots, he is not speaking of natural Babylon. He is not speaking of natural Rome. He is speaking of Jerusalem! How sad! How awful! But we should not be surprised, because the descriptions of her harlotry have filled the books of the prophets. The terrible descriptions that they give, the detail that they recount, is embarrassing and shocking. We would rather not read it. We would rather close our eyes and pretend it was not there—but it is there, and it is there to tell us that those people who reject God have taken on the very nature of the worst kind of prostitution.

The Prophet Hosea

Let us consider the prophet Hosea. One of the things that prophets have to do is to feel what God feels. We have to know how God feels because, for example, it is the love of Christ that constrains us. We therefore have to feel what Christ feels.

If Christ feels great love, then it is only as we feel great love that we are motivated to do the work that Christ calls us to do. We have to identify with God, not only theologically but emotionally. And Hosea has to enter into the heartache of God. God calls him to marry a prostitute. Of course, if he were in your church, he would be out of it in double quick time! But he is doing it in obedience to the word of God. He is enacting and experiencing a prophetic drama. He is not just saying he will pick up some girl on the street corner and go through some kind of Las Vegas marriage with her that does not mean anything. It would not have worked like that. He went and married a prostitute, and the Bible makes it very clear that he loved her. His feelings had to be touched. He had to be totally involved. He could not just act.

When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord" (Hosea 1:2-3).

And then we need to read on into the second chapter:

Rebuke your mother, rebuke her, for she is not My wife, and I am not her husband. Let her remove the adulterous look from her face and the unfaithfulness from between her breasts. Otherwise I will strip her naked and make her as bare as on the day she was born; I will make her like a desert, turn her into a parched land, and slay her with thirst. I will not show My love to her children, because they are the children of adultery. Their mother has been unfaithful and has conceived them in disgrace. She said, "I will go after my lovers, who give me my food and my

water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.” Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes; I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way. She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them. Then she will say, “I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now.” She has not acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold—which they used for Baal (Hosea 2:1-8).

This is a remarkable history of adultery, prostitution, and unfaithfulness. What does John say happened when their own king came, when their true husband arrived? *“He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him”* (John 1:11). They were given to another. They belonged, they claimed, to Caesar and had no king but him. Therefore, they were going to inherit the wages of their prostitution. Listen to what Hosea says again:

Do not rejoice, O Israel; do not be jubilant like the other nations. For you have been unfaithful to your God; you love the wages of a prostitute at every threshing floor (Hosea 9:1).

Now I apologize for taking so much time to make this one point, but I have not exhausted the Scriptures by any means that speak in this way. What we need to understand is that God had an ongoing problem with the faithfulness of His people. You will be aware of the many times that they forsook him, when they turned away from Him and began to worship other gods, and in the Scriptures, particularly in the prophets, idolatry is identical to adultery. For when they worshiped

other gods, it was as if they were betraying their husband in an adulterous relationship. That is the history of Jerusalem.

Of course, because Jerusalem is being likened to Babylon, we find historic references to Babylon that are now applied to Jerusalem. For instance, we see the prostitute come riding out on a red beast, and she is the one described as sitting on many waters. Back in Jeremiah that is how Babylon is described, the city by many waters (see Rev. 17:1,15). But we have already seen that in the Book of Revelation waters represent peoples, the restless heathens, the rebellious nations; Babylon is exerting her influence over the nations. With her, the Scripture says, the kings of the earth committed adultery. This is the great accusation of the prophets to Israel. Not only that, but Paul claims that God's name was blasphemed among the Gentiles because of Israel's apostasy (see Rom. 2:24).

So this is not just an historic event that has all been patched up. This is not a breakdown in a relationship that has gone to marriage guidance counseling and been all sorted out. This is an ongoing and a recurring habit that Jerusalem has had of betraying the faithfulness and trust of God. In Jesus' day and generation He looked at those who were alive at that time. Now He was not speaking historically, He was speaking to those alive at that time when He said, "You are an adulterous generation" (e.g., Matt. 16:4). This is not just an insult. He has not just lost His temper and not been able to think of a better swear word to use! He is actually describing the spiritual attitude of the people among whom He has come, a people who reject Him, who will not receive Him, and who determine in their hearts actually to murder Him.

There was a conspiracy between the harlot and the beast upon which she rode, for the prostitute rode upon the political power of her day. The apostate religion rode upon the political tyrant to get her own way. Read the Acts of the Apostles again and just make a mark every time that it tells you that the Jews complained to the Romans about the Christians and provoked the Romans to act against the Christians. What is happening? The prostitute is riding the beast to persecute the saints! That should not surprise us, because that is exactly what happened when they crucified Jesus. They came and complained to the Romans, who told them to deal with it, but they responded by saying that they could not inflict the death penalty, so they insisted that the Romans do it. The prostitute guided the beast to this terrible conclusion, but it was all in the plan and the purpose of God.

These things are not difficult to discover. Throughout the Word of God we see where the harlot has intoxicated the world with her wine. The prophet Jeremiah said, "*Babylon was a gold cup in the Lord's hand; she made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad*" (Jer. 51:7). The Book of Revelation echoes, "*All the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries*" (Rev. 14:8). Remember the persecution that came on the church in the second and third chapters of Revelation, where Jesus wrote to the churches. He spoke of those who said they were Jews and were not. He spoke of the place where the synagogue of satan is. They are not Jews anymore. They are prostitutes. They are not the sons of God anymore. They are of their father, the devil.

Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast

that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls (Revelation 17:3-4).

I do not have any firsthand experience of this, and I am sure none of you do either, but if a prostitute is successfully going to ply her trade, she is not going to get very far if she looks like the back of a bus. She has got to be glamorous. At least she has got to have some kind of surface glamour, some kind of attraction. The problem with deception is that it is very attractive. It does not work otherwise. The problem with the prostitute is that she looks all right, but she is all wrong. She is a phony and a fraud. But she has yet to be unmasked, and right now she looks pretty good. That is why when John sees her he is amazed. She is not a wizened old hag with warts. She is an incredible-looking creature.

She could be a contender for Miss World, but she is bad news and, as John looks, he notices that she has a name written on her forehead. Now that should not surprise us. We have found that throughout this book. Those who stand on Mount Zion and worship the Lamb have His name and His Father's name on their foreheads. But this women has something else written on her forehead:

MYSTERY

BABYLON THE GREAT

THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES

AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH

(Revelation 17:5).

This is a foul parody of the holy priesthood, of the man who stood in robes of righteousness in the presence of God,

who worshiped in the beauty of holiness, who came and gave himself on behalf of the people to the worship and the work of God, and who had "Holy to the Lord" written upon his forehead. Here comes a whore in a blasphemous act of worship, blatantly displaying her corruption and wearing on her head a sign that marks her out as a worshiper of the beast.

She is the prostitute. She is the mystery. There are many mysteries in Scripture, and a mystery in the Bible is just a truth that you have not seen yet. That is all it is. Much of the New Testament is about unveiling mysteries. The Book of Revelation is about unveiling a mystery, and Paul speaks about the mystery of iniquity that is at work at this present time (see 2 Thess. 2:7). The mystery of Babylon is still real. It is still happening. It is still out there. And just as the Book of Revelation is an unveiling of Jesus, it is an unmasking of the devil. Just as it is a revelation of Him who is the holy Lamb of God, it is also an exposure of her who rides upon the beast. We need to know who is who and what is what. We need to know not that which is attractive and appeals to the senses, but that which is true and calls to the spirit.

When Israel was coming into the land of promise to inhabit the land and bring in the kingdom, their first great success was Jericho, where, by the seven horns of the anointed lamb, the walls fell down. Their great failure was Ai, and the reason they failed at Ai, or one of the reasons they failed at Ai, is because a man found a gorgeous, beautiful, and enticing Babylonian garment that he hid in his tent. Right from the beginning Babylon has been seeking to divert the people of God. Babylon had been seeking to deceive the people of God, and it is still at work today. Are we going to trust the Lamb, or

are we going to ride the beast? Well, we now know what our choice is, but we need our eyes open to see what is happening in our world and in our church in these days.