

REVELATION – SERMON 64

THE IDENTITY OF THE HARLOT

Revelation 17:1-2

INTRODUCTION

- Karl Marx famously stated that “religion is the opiate of the masses”
- He felt that religions acted as a drug to enable people to cope with hardship, but which blinded them to the realities of life
- Yet Marx in his railing against religion failed to acknowledge the religious nature of his own system of communism
- Modern day Marxists (socialists/progressives) serve their cause with a religious fervour
- All political movements have a religious element, whether they acknowledge it or not
- The most powerful rulers throughout history have used religion as a means of consolidating their rule
- This is exactly what the beast will do in the tribulation, using the one-world religion (the harlot) to establish his dominion
- Chapter 16 deals with the seven vial plagues poured out at the close of the tribulation, ending with Armageddon and the glorious return of Jesus Christ (see 19:11-21)

- Chapters 17-18 are parenthetical in nature, giving us a detailed description of Babylon, both religious (ch.17), and commercial (ch.18)
- We have noted previously that just as Genesis is the Bible's book of beginnings, so Revelation is the book of conclusion, consummation and fulfilment
- Genesis records the building of Babylon and the establishment of its Satanic religion and system; Revelation records the destruction of the same
- Revelation—indeed, the entire Bible—might be described as an age-old conflict between two cities: Zion vs Babylon
- Revelation also catalogues four contrasting women: Jezebel (2:20-23), the woman of chapter 12, the harlot (17,18) and the Lamb's wife (19:7-9)
- 12 percent ($\frac{1}{8}$) of the book of Revelation (14:8; 16:19; 17:1-19:4) is devoted to Babylon's judgment
- Throughout the book we are shown:
 - ✓ The revealing of Babylon's downfall (14:8)
 - ✓ The remembrance of Babylon with displeasure (16:19)
 - ✓ The review of Babylon's depravity (17:1-18:24)
 - ✓ The rejoicing at Babylon's destruction (19:1-4)
- The identity of this whore of Babylon is of profound importance and requires diligent study discern who she is
- Babylon is much more than a city, it is a *system* – religious, political and economical

- The religious part is described in chapter 17, and will be destroyed by the antichrist (17:16) while the commercial part is described in chapter 18, and will be destroyed by God (18:8)
- Babylon “expresses Satan’s system of evil, as especially developed from Babel onwards after the Flood, and including all those various systems of idolatry and false worship which have had their spring, or root, or direct teaching in Babylon.” (William Newell)

I. BABYLON’S WICKED PROVENANCE

A. Babel

1. Babel’s founder was Nimrod, the grandson of Ham, and son of Cush (Genesis 10:8-10)
 - a. He bore the character of cursed Ham, who had received abundant mercy from God, yet turned the grace of God into lasciviousness, and became the founder of a race of idolaters and rebels against God
 - b. Nimrod was a “mighty hunter” not merely of beasts, but of the souls of men, gathering to himself and his cause a whole generation, in defiance of God
2. The tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9)
 - a. Its purpose was to “make us a name” (Genesis 11:4); to exalt and glorify man

- b. It was an act of rebellion against God, who commanded man to go forth and replenish the earth (Genesis 9:1)
 - c. It was an act of idolatry, the tower being a *ziggurat*, used for idolatrous worship
- 3. All the elements of false religion can be traced back to Babel
 - a. Nimrod's mother and wife, Semiramis, founded the idolatrous mystery religion
 - b. She bore a son, Tammuz, who she claimed was miraculously conceived
 - c. The mother-child cult thus began, a *mystery* religion whose rites were known only to the initiated
 - d. The zodiac was also developed there

B. The spread of Babylonian religion

- 1. God judged the people by confounding their languages and forcing them to separate
- 2. Though they went out from Babel with new tongues, they retained their old religion, at whose core was defiance of God, and idolatry, worshipping and serving the creature more than the Creator
- 3. Romans 1:21-32 may be regarded as Paul's commentary on these events, when man chose to

reject the knowledge of God and instead worship idols

4. The mother-child cult has overspread the earth, under different names—Ashtoreth and Tammuz in Phoenicia; Isis and Horus in Egypt; Aphrodite and Eros in Greece, Venus and Cupid in Italy
5. Israel was continually being corrupted by this Babylonian idolatry (1 Kings 11:5; Ezekiel 8:14; Jeremiah 7:18; 44:17-19,25)
6. Rome later became the centre of this Babylonian mystery religion, first under its pagan form, then under its “Christian” guise
 - a. Peter may have used the name Babylon for Rome, signifying the spiritual state of the city (1 Peter 5:13)
 - b. When Constantine made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire in 324 AD, the pagan temples, rites and idols were given Christian names, but still retained their pagan nature
7. While many see the Babylon of Revelation 17-18 as being a rebuilt Babylon in modern-day Iraq, the city was destroyed and Isaiah 13:20 states it shall never again be inhabited
8. Rome more closely fits the description of the city, and it is Rome that will be the final world kingdom under the beast (Daniel 2:40-43)

9. Throughout history, Christians have identified the great whore with Papal Rome
10. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that Babylon here is not so much a city in one location, but a *system* that overspreads the whole earth

II. BABYLON'S WANTON PROSTITUTION

- A. The angel the angel that poured out the vial judgment shows John the vision
 1. To the unbeliever, the angel brings misery and death
 2. To the believer, the angel is a “ministering spirit” (Hebrews 1:14)
 3. He shows John not only the *nature* of the harlot, but her *judgment*
- B. She is the “great whore”
 1. She is great in that she is the “mother of harlots” (v.5), from whence all others originate
 2. Her harlotry speaks of her abominable practices and spiritual idolatry
 3. Any deviation from the true worship of God is spiritual adultery (James 4:4)
 4. This spiritual immorality manifests itself in all manner of outward acts of immorality (cf. 2:20)
- C. She makes her followers drunk with her fornication

1. False religion has an intoxicating effect
2. Adherents of false religions fall under the spell of the whore and lose control of themselves
 - a. Muslims who destroy themselves and others
 - b. Catholics who brutally afflict their bodies in penance
 - c. Charismatics who behave like wild animals
 - d. Earth worshippers who glue themselves to roads and buildings
3. But true religion makes a person truly rational and gives him self-control (Ephesians 5:18; 1 Corinthians 14:33)
4. She corrupts the earth with her fornication (19:2)

III. BABYLON'S WORLDWIDE POWER

- A. She sitteth upon many waters
 1. These waters represent “peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues” (17:15)
 2. She sits as a queen ruling over them
 3. She “reigneth over the kings of the earth” (17:18)
- B. The kings of the earth commit fornication with her

1. The union of political and religious power (church and state) has been used by Satan for thousands of years to oppress multitudes and keep them in darkness
2. The world powers of today are under the influence of Babylon

CONCLUSION

1. Many people see problems in the world, both on a macro and micro level, yet fail to understand the spiritual forces behind them
2. They fail to see Babylon, this ancient system whose architect is Lucifer himself, and before whom nation after nation has eventually succumbed, even God's own nation of Israel
3. The war against Babylon cannot be won cannot be won with swords or guns; nor can it be won by using the arguments of mere logic and reason; it must be fought using spiritual weapons (Ephesians 6:10-18)
4. Wherever you find rebellion against God you have found Babylon
5. Babylon has crept into many hearts and is given a place of residence there
6. God hates and utterly abominates Babylon
7. Let us search our hearts and lives for any trace of this harlot and seek God's grace to purge her entirely from us