

Babylon and the city of God (continued)

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[0 : 00] And give him glory, for the wedding of the Lamb has come. And his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.

! Fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. And the angel said to me, Right, blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

And he added, These are the true words of God. At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, Don't do it!

I am a fellow servant with you, and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

And that's where we stop. Let's pray. We thank you. Well, to recap, this morning we were looking at what I call a tale of two cities, and that's what it is.

[1 : 04] A city A, Jerusalem, which, as you go through the Bible, originally is God's headquarters on earth. So geographically and literally, if you wanted to go to meet God, you would wend your way to Jerusalem.

And there are psalms about doing exactly that. That's the Old Testament. And if you look carefully at Jesus' last entry into Jerusalem, I would say that he denounces Jerusalem as having failed in that calling and removes that privilege from her.

That's what I would say is happening. I guess that's something that Christians would differ on, but as far as I can see, that's a very key understanding of Jesus and Jerusalem.

And Paul tells us that we have a Jerusalem that we belong to. Our mother is Jerusalem in heaven. That's our current headquarters and our current citizenship.

But the Bible also says that the end of all things is that the city comes down to earth. And we have a resurrection city, a city that is physical in the new creation, which is physical in the sense that the resurrection is physical.

[2 : 31] That's the future. So there's Jerusalem in a nutshell. And then we looked at Babylon, looked at the story of Babylon as she goes through the Bible, goes back to the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, reaching to God by human power and technology, scattered by God in judgment, and there was pride, which I didn't write in this version of it by the look of it.

And also we see the story of Babylon there by the waters, by the waters of Babylon. We sat down and wept. It's the city which attacked God's city and defeated God's city and took her people into exile and where they lived for 70 years as strangers.

So it's got a number of things to it. And one of the things is that Babylon is the place where the exiles had to live. So Daniel and Esther, that was their calling to live in this hostile enemy city.

And my thesis, the thing I'm trying to say is that we're in the same position as that. We're living, as it were, in an enemy city. And as John sees Babylon in chapter 17, he sees her as a woman.

So I think that's an innovation, to see a city as a woman. The two cities, two women portrayed, the beautiful woman by the many waters of Babylon.

[4 : 04] She's accused of prostitution. Chapter 17, verse 2. The great prostitute with her, the kings of the earth, committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adultery.

So there's an immoral relationship going on. The kings of the earth. She's closely associated with the beast.

Click. The beast, that's the one that looked as though it was dead, but came alive again, representing state power as it tries to gain worship, as is what happened in the Roman Empire.

And in these chapters, the identity of Babylon is revealed to us.

The mystery, the revelation, the secret of this beautiful woman who is in fact not as beautiful as you might think because in verse 6, she is not just cheerful, she is drunk, and she is drunk with the blood of the saints.

[5 : 19] Those who bore testimony to Jesus. So, as we, we'll continue on into chapter 18 now. I'll give you something about the Roman context.

So I haven't done the map of this, but if you would imagine a map of the Mediterranean, going back in the time when this was written, Rome did indeed trade, trade routes all over Europe.

And we know that Julius Caesar came here, was it 50 BC, something like that, and conquered Gaul, and, you know, we've got Roman roads, we've got the places where the Romans had their villas and their luxury apartments, and it's not just England, not quite sure whether they got quite as far as Scotland, and they stopped at Hadrian's Wall to stop the barbaric Scots interfering with things.

But the fact of history, Rome was immensely successful, economically, militarily, and in terms of trade. And she did trade all over the place. And her trade went hand in hand with pagan worship, and indeed with emperor worship.

So if you got involved with that trade, it would be very difficult not to get involved with, you know, the worship of the emperor that was part and parcel with that.

[6 : 59] So Rome made many people rich, but at the cost of cruel exploitation. And you remember that it was said of the church in Laodicea, they were saying, we're rich, we have acquired wealth, and we do not need a thing.

And I suppose you could interpret that in a spiritual sense, but why not try it in a literal sense? You know, if you looked in the church car park, there'd be BMWs, and maybe even a Bentley or two, and you think, these people have done really well out of Rome, and they're saying, yeah, we have done really well out of Rome, and we're rich, and we're wealthy, and we don't need a thing.

You know, we live in the southeast of Laodicea, and property prices are going up, and, you know, it's just, we're riding the crest of an economic wave, and the risen Christ says to them, well, you poor things, you don't realise that you are wretched, and pitiful, and poor, and blind, and naked, and you need to buy from me.

Gold refined in the fire, so that you can become rich, and white clothes to wear, so that you can cover your shameful nakedness, and something to put on your eyes, so that you can see what's what.

So Rome made many people rich, and that in itself has its own spiritual pitfalls. Now let's look at the charges against Babylon, the indictment against Babylon in chapter 18.

[8 : 41] In chapter 18, the call is to God's people to come out of her, verse 4. You know, you might have to live in the Roman Empire, which you haven't had much option really, but don't belong to the Roman Empire, don't let it claim you body and soul, as it wants to do, come out of her.

So some observations on this chapter. I think the writer to Revelation sees himself as being at the final fulfillment point of all the strands of prophecy in the Old Testament.

And here in chapter 18, he combines a number of prophecies that were uttered against cities in the Old Testament. So, depending on how much detail you would like to go into, if you care to flip back to Ezekiel chapter 28.

So we're Old Testament. And here, Ezekiel is taking to task not Babylon and not Rome, but Tyre. And in those days, Tyre was the big, you know, sort of eBay capital of the ancient world. It was the trading place. You know, it's more like the Hong Kong of the trading world, shall we say.

[10 : 12] And, although not as big, but nevertheless a sort of peninsula or an island, I think. The word of the Lord came to me, son of man, say this to the ruler of Tyre.

This is what the Lord says. In the pride of your heart, you say, I am a God. And I sit on the throne of a God in the heart of the seas.

But you are a man and not a God. Though you think you are as wise as a God, etc. And you go down to verse 5. By your great skill in trading, you have increased your wealth and because of your wealth, your heart has grown proud.

I will bring you down, says the Lord. And that's one of the strands that he's echoing in the book of Revelation. While we're in Ezekiel 27, while we're in Ezekiel, go to chapter 27 and you'll see more about Tyre and a list of the people that Tyre did business with.

And the list, for example, verse 15, talks about the men of Rhodes traded with you and many coastlands were your customers.

[11:30] They traded you with ivory tusks and ebony. And then the next people traded in purple fabric and embroidered work and fine linen and coal and rubies and the list goes on.

And I think John is taking that sort of idea of a list and applying it to Babylon and saying, you know, the things that Tyre was accused of, they find their fulfilment in you.

Because there's a list there, isn't there, in Revelation 18, gold, silver, precious stones, pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth, etc. And also, I've got Isaiah 47, in which, this is the daughter of Babylon, you say, I will continue forever the eternal queen, but you do not consider these things or reflect on what might happen.

And of course, that's echoed, is it not, in Revelation where she says, I am a queen. Where does it say that? Lost the place.

She says it in verse 7. So, it's the fulfilment of these criticisms of the ancient cities as they became successful but proud and went beyond what was right in their estimation of themselves.

[13:14] So, what happens in Revelation 18? Well, one of the things that happens is there's an emptying of all that is God-given and good. So, if you look at verse 2, fallen is Babylon the great.

She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit. Again, that's quoting Old Testament things. But the idea being that it's a ruin. So, if you don't have people living there, filling up the space and decorating it and putting down carpet and things like that, you end up with an empty run-down warehouse of a place where you get all the undesirable animals and things living. It's this idea of ruination and emptying. Verse 3, the idea of prostitution, which I've mentioned already, the idea of coupling of trade, which is an honourable thing, and coupling that with having to worship such and such a pagan god.

And I think that's what he's referring to in verse 3 where he says the kings of the earth have committed adultery with her. So, there's something about that coupling.

The chapter also has quite a bit about payback. Verse 6, give back to her as she has given.

[14:48] Pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. My comment on the double is I wonder if it means double in the sense of an identical matching pair.

So, I remember when I was little in the Reader's Digest book of something, there was somebody wrote a story which was I was Monty's double.

going back into the wartime and somebody was paid to look like Field Marshal Montgomery and wander around and the enemy was supposed to think, oh, that's where he is when really he was over there.

The idea of being a double. I don't know why I bothered to explain that. You knew that was anyway, wasn't it? It's a matching and here, I think what this is, match up what you pay her back with what she dished out.

Pay her back the double, if you like, the match for what she has done. Give her a double portion in her own cup. I don't think it's saying, let's be unfair, she did this, pay her back twice as much.

[15:57] I think it's saying pay her back what matches. That's my thought on that and Alec Mateer, I got that from Alec Mateer in one of his commentaries, so it might well be correct. A payback.

Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. Match it up. Look at her pride.

She says, I sit as a queen, I am not a widow, and I will never mourn. She believes her own publicity statements.

It's always dangerous to believe your own publicity statements, isn't it? We are the best. Google, what is it Google? Do no harm. Do no evil.

Is that what it is? I hope they don't believe that because that would be a bit of a, you've got to be careful. She says, I'm the greatest.

[16:57] I think a boxer said that once, didn't they? I'm the greatest. And she thinks, I'm a queen. Ah, well, the greatest, yeah, maybe the greatest boxer, but the greatest seems to say more than that.

I am not a widow, I will never mourn. That's really a very, a very, what shall I say, contestable statement, isn't it? I'm impregnable.

And this is what Babylon is saying, and he's saying that is the opposite of what human beings should be saying. Human beings should be saying, every breath that I take comes from God, every

good thing I have comes from him.

All my peace and security is not to be found in my insurance policy, in my health, in my income, in my stocks and shares, all my real security comes from the living God.

That's what people are meant to say, and this system, this Babylon city is saying the opposite of that. And another point of criticism is her luxury.

[18 : 09] And you will have noticed that in verse 3. The merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries. And you have the same thing in verse 9. They committed adultery with her and shared her luxury.

And is it anywhere else? No, I think those are the... Now, Rome was in fact notorious for her luxury. I've got a beautiful quote here. The excessive luxury of Rome and its passion for the extravagant are well known. At one of Nero's banquets, the Egyptian roses alone cost \$100,000.

So, would you like to put that into sterling? So, should we say £50,000? £100,000, roughly £50,000? £50,000 worth of roses.

That's a lot of money to spend on Egyptian roses, isn't it? At one of Nero's banquets, the Egyptian roses alone cost that. Vitellius had a penchant for delicacies like peacock's brains and nightingale's tongues.

[19 : 28] In his reign of less than one year, he spent \$20,000,000, so call it £10,000,000 mostly on food.

Let's work that out per day, what that is, £10,000,000 in one year on food. One Roman, after squandering an immense fortune, committed suicide because he could not live on the pittance that remained, which was about \$300,000,000.

Whenever this was printed, it's not too old. In the Talmud it was written, ten measures of wealth came down into the world. Rome received nine, and all the rest of the world won.

So you have luxury and the inequality of resources. And I always think when we look at this passage, I say, well, isn't it a good thing that we don't have anything like that now?

Isn't it a good thing that we don't have any sense anywhere in the world that some people, some societies indulge in huge and extravagant luxury? It's a good thing that doesn't happen anymore, isn't it?

[20 : 47] And isn't it a good thing that we don't have this inequality, so of ten measures of wealth, one group of society has nine of the measures, and the other measure has to be spread out throughout the rest.

And in fact, the global figures on poverty have been improving, but I don't think we should be too quick to say, ah, it's nothing like that anymore, because I think it is, isn't it?

And that was the criticism of Babylon, her luxury. I think we have to be a little bit careful. And another criticism, although I think the last one I'm going to draw our attention to, is at the end of verse 13, the trading list.

So honest trade is something that God is pleased with, but look what's on this list. Cinnamon, so I like cinnamon with my porridge, and wine and olive oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle, sheep, horses and carriages, so probably substitute vehicles for there, and the bodies and souls of men.

I think at the end of that list, what did they trade in? They traded in people, their bodies and souls, and the up-to-date name for that is human trafficking, isn't it?

[22 : 24] There's a definition on the web, which I couldn't fit into the space there, but it's something like to get somebody into a position of employment by force or fraud or coercion, by making false promises, by making threats to them, limiting their freedom or taking away their money or preventing them to go to religious meetings.

Human trafficking, that's happening today. There's still a Babylon-ish thing going on today.

So the responses to her fall, and the way the text goes is it gives us all these people who are up to the eyes in involvement with Babylon and how sad they are when Babylon falls.

They're not sad because they love her and they think she's a beautiful person. They're sad because, well, one thing they're shocked and the other thing is that they've lost trade.

So in verse 9, the kings of the earth, they will weep and mourn for her. Verse 10, they will stand far off. They all stand far off. None of them go to help. They all stand far off.

[23 : 45] And they say, woe, woe, oh great city, Babylon, city of power, in one hour your doom has come. How quickly? We thought you were impregnable. You thought you were impregnable.

And in one hour, it's all changed. And the merchants of the earth, verse 11, they weep and mourn because no one buys their cargoes anymore. I've got a lorry waiting at Dover with 20 tons of citron wood and I don't even know what citron wood is and how am I going to offload that onto people or whatever it is.

But they weep and mourn because nobody will buy their cargoes. And they say, verse 17, in one hour, such great wealth has been brought to ruin.

And the sea captains who have their container ships and their tracking systems and their little sign for things that you write on makes your writing look like the writing of a five year old, all that sort of stuff.

And they are astonished too. They go out of business. Woe, oh great city. where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth.

[25 : 01] In one hour, verse 19, she has been brought to ruin. And the mighty angel throws a millstone into the sea, representing the fall of Babylon, and says, with such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.

sea captains, when the sea captains speak, the heavens are told to rejoice because this is deserved judgment.

And when the angel speaks, the angel speaks in terms of removal, again, about the harpists and musicians, the flute players and the trumpeters, all the good things.

So I think there's a list of good things. I think music is a good thing. I think milling flour is a good thing. Lighting a lamp is a good thing. People getting married is a good thing.

And Babylon had that inside her, but that is all removed. And you're left with the bare bones of the corruption of the whole thing.

[26 : 12] You take out the good stuff. And that's the responses to her fall. And we end up with these hallelujahs.

So Christians are in the habit of saying hallelujah. Praise God is what it's meaning.

It's not used so often in the Bible. And as you can see in this chapter, it is hallelujah because of the punishment on Babylon. Christianity and it's a little bit, you know, it gives us pause for thought really because the modern way of Christianity would be to say, well, we want to emphasize God's love and that's great, but we want to really, really be very, very agnostic about whether God actually punishes anybody.

and even more distant from the idea that could be a good thing. Well, here in Revelation 19, there are no doubt God does punish and it is a good thing.

It's part of his glory that he does this. Hallelujah, chapter 19, verse 1, salvation and glory and power belong to our God for true and just are his judgments.

[27 : 36] he has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. I think that's quite a demanding thought, isn't it?

Because I think we would find it difficult to rejoice in somebody being punished. I don't think it's just something being punished.

This involves people. But here in the holiness of heaven, they're able in a holy way and in a right way to say this is for God's glory.

So I think we do need to be cautious and careful about it. We don't want to be, I don't think it's a Christian thing for us to gloat over anybody's downfall here on earth.

earth. But there is something here of the holiness of God expressed in judgment.

[28 : 41] She corrupted the earth by her adulteries, verse 2, and God has avenged on her the blood of his servants. And the chapter leads us to, we've gone from the fall of the prostitute to the next thing is the wedding of the bride and it moves into that.

So I've taken us through the chapter as best I can in this particular situation this evening. If you like, I've got a couple of, a few questions that we might like to discuss for a minute or two.

So do you agree that Babylon was Rome? And if so, has Babylon disappeared now? Is every state or system in every time and place equally to be deplored as Babylon-ish?

So should we deplore everybody who's employed in the current banking system, Ross? And just in case we think it's all to do with, what about cricket and football?

Some of the footballers get astronomical amounts of money. Should we denouncing that as Babylon-ish? And we might sort of broaden it a bit about the internet.

[30 : 05] So we would say the internet is a wicked thing, and yet we probably find that there's quite a number of people that we know, maybe even sitting here, who are actually employed in software development and website development.

I know what Adam is, so perhaps we should discipline him for doing that. Is every involvement with industry or banking or trade tantamount to worshipping the beast?

And what should we be aware of in relation to Babylon? Okay, there's one, two, three, four, four questions. So if we do that in about one and a half minutes and then we finish, okay.

So anybody, anybody, any thoughts that they would like to offer on any of those things? Say that again?

Exactly, that's exactly the point I was making. Well, existed, you're saying that it's still... Yeah, I think what I'm going to say is that what we have there is how it used to be and Babylon, that historical site, is now a ruined site and when he was writing Revelation, it was a ruined site and yet he could still warn people about Babylon.

[31 : 38] So I don't think it's the geography, I think it's the spiritual principle that we should be thinking about. Good, well that's answered all the questions.

We'll give it a couple of minutes more, shall we? Because I think this is really quite a searching subject, isn't it? To what extent most of us, well perhaps many of us are employed in employment, how do we know that we're not involved with Babylon in that sense?

So Ben, what do you think? Yes, I think that's right, I think that's where the historical Babylon was, which is what Carl was saying.

let's let somebody else have a thought on this now. It's like the spiritual thing, it's like a, it's almost like a temptation to live in a certain way, to have a certain attitude, lifestyle, towards our fellow human beings, you know, I suppose, cliches like a throwaway culture, and so it's a subtle thing that isn't easily grasped, but I think people who are caught in it might not even know that they are caught in it, but I think this morning you were talking about, either we can be on this side or this side, and which city are you going to live in, and

I think a lot of people, you know, the Bible talks about people being blinded by the world, and until God removes the blindness of their hearts, they won't see the truth, you know, they won't be able to escape that their lives, so it's almost like people, almost like it's a bit extreme, but zombies kind of walking in a certain direction, and until the great light shines, they can't actually see that that's the way they're living, and in fact, society teaches them to live that way, to strive, for those things, and so I think, yeah, so I think that's my take on it, but it's not something that you can actually really sit down and say, you know, you know you're living by the

[34 : 54] Babylonian spirit there, you know, I mean, you can have up front conversations out with people, but I think it's something that they know they call to.

Okay, so, I think you said some really insightful things in your first sentence there about it being a way of life, was it, an outlook, and a way of treating people, and a way of thinking, I can't remember what, but attitude, yeah, and it's something that one might not necessarily realise one has, unless you're, well, unless in this sense there is revelation, yeah, thank you, I think that's very helpful.

Camel go through the eye of a needle, was that the right way around, a camel to go through the eye of a needle, yeah, yes, yeah, he did, didn't he, he warned about the temptations of wealth, yeah, he didn't say that it's absolutely impossible and absolutely wrong to be wealthy, but he did say that it has a really limiting effect, or an inhibiting effect, yeah.

thank you, yes, a really need a need a need a need a need a need a need a need a