

The Destruction 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: 16 March 2008

Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[0:00] with me to Revelation chapter 14 and you'll find that on page 1245. Page 1245, Revelation 14 and verse 8.

Page 12.

Page 12.

That is preached to the whole world by the second of three angels. And the subject of this sermon is the destruction of Babylon.

Some people believe in giving titles to sermons. There's nothing wrong with that. But if I was going to give a title to this sermon, it would have to be very clear. The destruction of Babylon.

[1:43] And some people who believe that Revelation is all about the future, they believe the only way that this will ever be fulfilled is if Babylon, the city of Babylon, is once again renovated and built up again, becomes an actual city.

And so that sometime in the future, this actual city will be a kind of a world trade center, a center of commerce and business and technology.

And that one day all nations will kind of be attracted to this center. And eventually the Babylon will fall. That's what you would have to believe if you believed in the literal fulfillment of Revelation as a prophecy in the future.

But always remember that if that's the way you're going to read Revelation, you also have to believe in the literalness of everything else.

How can you make a distinction between whether Babylon is literal and whether the beast is literal? And just as we said that the beast and the serpent and every other symbolic element that we have in Revelation, just as we believe that they are symbols of something else, so I'm going to suggest to you that Babylon is also a symbol.

[2:58] We're not to think of Babylon. Actually, Babylon is about 90 kilometers from Baghdad, where the war is at the moment. It's 90 kilometers south of Baghdad.

And there's nothing left of it. It's just ruins. In fact, I was reading the other day that there's a big row at the moment because one of the American helicopters landed on Babylon and shook one of the walls and one of the remaining walls or one of the foundations crumbled.

Of course, they're trying to preserve what remains of Babylon because Babylon, that's all that's left of it. It's just a few walls here and there. And they can't even stand when a helicopter parks nearby.

The tremor that the helicopter made it caused this wall. And there's a big row in Iraq about it. The Americans had to apologize for it.

But that's what's left of Babylon. Babylon. So, when we're looking at Babylon, we're not to think of it as a literal place. We're to think this evening, what does it represent?

[3:59] What does it symbolize of the world? What is being said here? What does it symbolize? Well, if you go back in your Bible and if you go back in your history books, you'll discover that Babylon was one of the most interesting, fascinating places in the world.

There were two times in the history of humanity that Babylon was the biggest, the greatest city that existed in the world. Let's go all the way back to the very beginning because this is one of these places we know a lot about in terms of the Bible.

The Bible tells us of how the city was created in the first place. And you go all the way back to Genesis chapter 10. We read it last week, but we didn't have time to think about it.

Sometime after Noah, after the flood, some generations after Noah, there was the building of this city. Genesis chapter 11, I should say.

The whole earth had one language, we're told, and the same words. And the people migrated from the east and they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.

[5 : 04] Now, here's the point. They said to one another, come, let's make bricks and burn them thoroughly. So they discovered the technology of brick making. You can imagine how that advanced their house building.

So no longer did they go through the laborious process of having to put together the pieces of material to make houses. But now they had a factory going where they had bricks.

And this was the first sign of human technology. And they said to one another, come, let's make bricks. And they had brick for stone and bitumen for mortar. They even had cement on which, now you can imagine the difference that that would have made to the speed at which they would build something.

And all of a sudden, that changed everything. All of a sudden, they realized what they could do, what was in the realm of the possible. And when they started thinking in that way, the sky was the limit, literally.

In fact, it wasn't the limit because they wanted to build a tower as high as they could possibly build it. Then they said, come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens.

[6 : 15] Now, whatever merit there was in building a city or houses, there was absolutely no practical reason at all for them to build a tower. You might say, well, what's the harm in it?

But God knew what they were thinking when they built the tower. God knew their motivations in building the tower. And it's quite clear that their motives were quite wrong and sinful.

And their motives were that they might make a name for themselves. As they discovered their own capability and their own intelligence, God was pushed further and further out of the picture.

They began to realize, they began to be more and more confident in themselves and their own abilities. And the possibilities that lay nothing was outside the bounds of possibility as far as they were concerned.

So they were going to build upwards and they were going to show the whole world what they were made of and who they were. In other words, what you have here is what Francis Schaeffer calls the first declaration of humanism in the world, where humankind says we don't need God any longer.

[7 : 26] God is a thing of the past. Our forefathers needed God in order for them to just get along and for them to have something to believe in. Now that we've discovered what we can do for ourselves and what's within our capability, God is now a thing of the past.

We can now make our own way. Thank you very much for all that you've done, but you weren't really there at all. So we will now carry on ourselves and we have now become our own gods.

That was the message of the Tower of Babel. And that was why God came down in Genesis chapter 11 and they said, Behold, they are one people, they have one language, and this is only the beginning.

Listen to what God said. This is only the beginning of what they will do. God saw that they were on the road to self-aggrandizement and to elevating themselves.

And there was simply no limit to what these men and these women were prepared to do and no limit to what they could do. And us, you and I who live in the 21st century, know that there is still no limit to what even the possibility, they say, of cloning human beings.

[8 : 41] Imagine that. Cloning human beings. What possible reason could there possibly be in cloning a human being? We're taking to do with something that belongs to God and Him alone.

But there is no limit to what we can do. It's the art of the possible. And when God saw that they were playing around with that and He had been pushed out of the picture, He came down and He said, Come, let's go down and confuse their language.

And that's what happened. God, somehow or other, He confused their language so that they weren't able to understand one another. And so they had to scatter all over the world at that time. That was the beginning.

The city that they built at that time, the Tower of Babel, was the first of the city of Babylon, would you believe? Now, if you look further on through the Bible and further on through the history books, you'll discover that Babylon had a huge significance in the world.

There were two times in the history of the city when it was actually the biggest city in the world. The first was in the 18th century BC.

[9 : 50] Not AD, but BC. And it was ruled by a man called Hammurami. And he was one of the cleverest, one of the most astute people that ever ruled at that time.

And he was the first ruler of what's known as the Babylonian Empire. And, you know, this is one of the problems where we don't learn.

And I'm learning things now at the age of 50 that I never knew when I was a youngster. I regret so much not having learned all these things. And I would encourage as many of you as possible to try and learn some of the history of these great places.

Because it actually helps us understand some of the background of the Bible as well. But this was the first time when Babylon was probably the most powerful kingdom in the whole world at that time.

And Hammurami was famous for what they call the Code of Hammurami. In other words, he created laws. And some of these laws have remained as legal principles even to this very day.

[10 : 59] For example, the presumption of innocence until proved guilty was first established by Hammurami all the way 18th century BC. And at that time, it also became a center for learning and academic research and for literature and for poetry and for building and for...

You wouldn't believe the amazing ability that these people had even 1800 years BC. That's almost 4,000 years ago. But this...

But sadly, all of that ability and all of that success, it wasn't for the glory of God at all. Something of the pride of Genesis 11 seems to have remained in Babylon.

And this was self-elevation and self-pride that was propelling people and governments and armies at that time.

Hammurami. You can read a lot about him. You just do a search on the internet. Hammurami. Double M. Hammurami. And you find that the most fascinating details don't have time to go into. And that was the first time that Babylon was the biggest city in the world.

[12:10] That was his heyday, 18th century BC. Then things began to decline. And that's what happens with all empires. There's the rise and fall, not just the Roman Empire, but the Greek Empire and all the empires that the history of human humanity humanity is littered with.

But there was another time, round about the 6th century or the 7th century BC. And the king at that time, once again, the Babylonian Empire rose to power.

The center of power was Babylon. And the king at that time was, you know it, Nebuchadnezzar. Famous Nebuchadnezzar of the time of Daniel.

And again, he was the most single, most powerful king that ruled the world, that ruled in the world at that time. But once again, pride lay at the heart of Nebuchadnezzar.

He was the one who was attributed for creating the hanging gardens of Babylon. And, of course, that's one of the wonders of the world.

[13:20] in Daniel, we read something about what lay at the heart of Nebuchadnezzar. In Daniel chapter, Daniel chapter 4, at that time, Nebuchadnezzar came and one night he was walking on the roof of his royal palace of Babylon.

This is what he said to himself. The king answered and said, Is not this the great Babylon which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence for the glory of my majesty.

You know, it's hard to imagine a powerful king like that not saying these things. I reckon that any one of us would have done the same thing because we're all sinners at heart and a sinner is somebody who elevates himself rather than elevating God.

But God was merciful to him. But Nebuchadnezzar had to learn a hard lesson before he was eventually going to come to know God as his own God and his own saviour as the one he worshipped.

Because at that moment, the moment of his boasting, while the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken. The kingdom has departed from you and you shall be driven from among men and your dwelling will be with beasts of the field and you shall be made to eat grass like an ox and seven periods of time shall pass over you until you know that the most high rules in the kingdom of men.

[14:51] Immediately, he was driven. He lost his sanity. In a moment of time, his mind was taken from him and he became like an animal. He started acting like an animal.

His hair grew and his nails grew and they had to throw him out of the kingdom for a while. They had to put him out in the fields because they couldn't cope with him. And for seven years he lived because of his pride and because of the way in which he saw himself.

Again, characteristic of Babylon. It was a proud place, a place that had built itself up through pride and through self-achievement.

But when Isaiah, when Isaiah was told to prophesy against Babylon, this is most interesting and it has a bearing on what we've been reading in Revelation. Of course, Isaiah's prophecy was before Nebuchadnezzar.

But chapter 13 is absolutely fascinating because it gives a description of the kind of mind and the kind of person that was typically found in Babylon.

[15:56] I will put an end to the pomp and the arrogant to lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless. The sound of a tumult is on the mountains as of a great multitude.

The sound of an uproar of the kingdoms. But I wonder if you noticed something about that chapter as we read it earlier on. The prophecy was against Babylon.

It was telling, it was foretelling that God would one day destroy Babylon and that Babylon that was to, now, the interesting thing is this. When that prophecy was made, Babylon was a has-been.

It was yesterday's city. It had not yet come to its full power once again. So, Isaiah had to believe that one day that Babylon was going to come to fruition once again.

But do you notice something else about this prophecy? That, on the one hand, God is predicting the downfall of Babylon. And sure enough, that's exactly what happened.

[17:07] In the same breath, God is saying this. I will punish the world for its evil.

Now, here's the question. Why is it that God chooses at the same time, in the same breath, as he is foretelling the destruction of Babylon, also chooses to foretell the destruction of the world?

I'll tell you the reason why. Because God was seeing, he was recognising, that Babylon was an encapsulation, a mini world, if you like, a city that pictured and represented the world as a whole, a world that shook its fist at God, a world that was on the run from God and a world that said all these hundreds of years ago, we don't want God in the picture, we want to do our own thing, to make our own rules, to have our own freedom and to go our own way and we don't want to include God in our decisions.

And that is what the world has always been. I'm going to tell something interesting about this chapter and you may want to sort of follow up. Babylon, it's quite interesting that Babylon was, as I said before, it hadn't risen quite to its full power at the time Isaiah was written.

Eventually, it did, through the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. But the destruction of Babylon, if you read this chapter in Isaiah chapter 13, you get the impression that the destruction of Babylon is going to happen overnight.

[18:52] All of a sudden, it's going to collapse from being the greatest city in the world to being a ruin in one night. That's the impression you get. That's not how it happened. And that's a lesson that reminds us to be careful when we're trying to interpret prophecy.

It is impossible to interpret prophecy until it happens. Whatever prophecy was, it was impossible for people to predict exactly how Jesus was to come into the world until it happened.

But when it did happen, they could then look back over centuries and they could say, this is how God fulfilled his word. But when you look at the destruction of Babylon, it didn't happen overnight at all.

There was Nebuchadnezzar, the king of the Babylonians, but then there was, God says, the Medes are going to come. Now it wasn't quite the Medes because the weeds actually were swallowed up by the Persians.

It was the Persians that came in. Nevertheless, the Persians as the suzerains of the Medes, as the superior power, they did come in, but there was no battle.

[20:01] Babylon surrendered without any bloodshed. Then Alexander the Great, and it was when Alexander the Great died, he actually died in Babylon.

When he died, then the ruin started. because the empire, of course, was divided into four, and the attention was taken off Babylon, and Babylon was allowed to become decrepit, and it was allowed to crumble and fall to the point where it's today.

It's just a ruin of what it once was. It's quite interesting, isn't it? Not only how prophecy is fulfilled, but what's far, far more solemn, I think, is the fact that the empires that we look up to today and we think will never, ever come to an end, you look at the great superpowers today, and you think they're never going to come to an end, there always have been superpowers in the world.

You may not have a television where you could see what these superpowers did, but believe me, they were superpowers. All you have to do is read the history books, the grandeur and the pomp and the might and the power of these great empires in the past, and you would think if you lived, you could never stand up against these powers, and yet today they're nothing, they're just relics.

You go and see like Hammurabi, one of the greatest men that ever lived in his time, king of Babylon, and yet today Hammurabi's code is a pillar that you can find in the Louvre in Paris.

[21 : 44] that's all that's left. And you know, you never think when you think of the superpowers today like Russia, and America, the states, and even Europe, you never think that one day that these powers could actually be a desert one day.

It's hard to think, isn't it? It's really hard to believe that. But yet, that's what happened to other superpowers. if you go back in history, they were just as great.

They maybe didn't have nuclear weapons, but they had the nuclear weapons of their time. And yet, there's nothing. And you know, when you think about the kind of precarious situation that we're on at the moment, where you get the credit crunch.

Now, I don't know what's going to happen. But you know, everybody's a bit worried. And yet, even the price of wheat. It's incredible to think of how much of your life and my life depends on the price of wheat.

And if it goes the wrong way, the world begins to really suffer. It could happen. It could happen in our lifetime. We could see radical change in the structure of politics and the future.

[22 : 57] Now, again, this is how some people look at Revelation. They say, oh, this is going to happen and that's going to happen and the next thing. That's not the point. My point is, don't put your trust in man and in man's institutions.

Because the very way in which humankind tries to elevate ourselves, God has a way of bringing us down. And you see other nations on the sidelines just waiting.

Nations like India. We think India today is a poor nation. nation. But what they're telling us is that India is the next superpower. China.

The Indo-China alliance they're talking about. Building a massive road between the two countries. Who knows what's going to happen? Once again, from the Far East, where these very people came from that we read about in the Bible.

We really have to become much more educated as far as human history is concerned. Once we do it, then we really discover our own vulnerability and how frail and how weak we are and how nothing is guaranteed.

[24 : 11] Just because it's here today does not mean it's going to be here tomorrow. So Babylon represented the world in which John could go back to in the Bible.

Fallen. Fallen is Babylon the gray. Now, why is she fallen? Well, here we go. She who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.

humanity. That's what's referred to more than anything else. Now, anytime we talk about this, some have to be careful because there's young, there's children here and we don't want to be too explicit.

And yet, we have to be absolutely clear about what God thinks of the way we live in this world and what God thinks when human beings decide to go their own way sexually.

It's all down to the Garden of Eden. Therefore, God says, shall a man leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they shall be one flesh.

[25 : 25] Therefore, who God has joined together, let not man put asunder. That's the rule. And in a sense, we don't need to get complicated and explicit about anything because that's it.

Sex is designed for one man, one woman, in the bond and in the covenant of marriage given by God. That's the simple rule. Is that too complicated for anyone?

It seems to be too complicated for a world, but not surprising in a world that has left God behind and that acts on the impulse of their own instinct.

And it's possibly the most powerful instinct that there exists within the human person.

person. And that's why God had to regulate that instinct. People say, I want to be happy. And what they mean is, if I'm free, the only way I'm going to be happy is if I have no restrictions whatsoever sexually.

[26 : 39] But God says, I want you to be happy as well. And that's why I have given you restrictions in order for you to act and for you to live in a way that is stable.

And in order for you to enjoy all my gifts, all the gifts that I have given to you within the context in which I have given them to you.

It's a very simple context. One man, one woman, in marriage, till death has to part. I know that there are casualties, I know that perhaps many of us here this evening, we come confessing our own sinfulness in this area in many ways.

I'm not saying that God is not a forgiving God. I'm not saying that this area is beyond God's ability to forgive or his willingness to forgive. Of course, he said to the woman at the well, if you knew the gift of God, you would ask him and he would give you living water.

He said to the woman who was brought to him, having been caught in adultery, he said, go and sin no more. God is in the business of forgiveness, cleansing, washing.

[27 : 56] But this is not about forgiveness, this is about deliberate, deliberate steps to disobey and to rebel against what God has created.

and we would do well tonight to listen to what God has given us and to take what God has given us for our own stability and our own happiness.

One man, one woman in marriage. And that, of course, answers all the questions that we might ask. And that's it. she, but there's one other thing I want us to look to and the time is passing.

She who made all nations drink the wine. Because it certainly appears here that Babylon is representative of a world that hasn't just disobeyed God, but that has openly done so and that has encouraged others to do so as well.

a world in which disobedience and sinfulness and I don't believe it's just this area of sexuality at all. I believe that, again, it's representative of all areas of sinfulness in every way in which we have gone against God of what God has said.

[29 : 16] You'll notice if you're reading from the authorized version that there's a difference between what this verse says in verse 8. She who has made all nations drink of the wine of the passion ESV of sexual immorality and the AV says the wine of the wrath of sexual immorality and perhaps you'll say well there's a difference there isn't there because the authorized version says that all nations will drink of God's wrath.

ESV doesn't say that. It says the wine of the passion over sexual immorality. I'm going to suggest to you that there's one and the same thing and I'll prove it from Romans chapter 1. Romans chapter 1 is an announcement of God's righteous anger on the world and remember whenever we're thinking about God's anger God's anger is always something right and good and proper.

God never God's anger is never uncontrolled. He never gets angry at the wrong things. He never gets angry hurriedly like we do but it tells us in no uncertain terms verse 18 in Romans 1 for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

This is the reason why for what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them for his invisible powers namely his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened claiming to be wise they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles verse 24 here's the point therefore God gave them up in the lust of their hearts to impurity now how does this answer the question I had before but the difference of this word the answer is this when you want to find what God's wrath is as it exists here and now in this world God's wrath is where he says you want to go your own way go your own way that is the wrath of God there's a wrath to come because the

Bible tells us what you sow you reap whatever a man sows that shall he also reap make no mistake but there is a sense in which God's wrath is what says to us you want to be free be free you want to do what you're like no restrictions you want to sleep with who you want go ahead I'm not going to stop you perhaps many of us here tonight have discovered that you deliberately take a step that's sinful and there's something there's a voice within you that says God is going to really punish me for this and you discover he hasn't punished you and you think okay maybe I can continue and you do continue you do something else maybe he'll punish me for this and he doesn't punish and you think well maybe sin is not so bad after all that's exactly what Paul is saying in Romans where your conscience becomes seared and where your sensitivity to what is sinful becomes less and less and less it becomes less and less serious to you and you carry on and carry on but it never ever brings you the satisfaction that you long for once you start going down that road there's actually no end to the road it never ever brings you the contentment and the joy and the peace you'll never have peace with

[33:12] God until you stop and until you turn back to God and until you confess your sinfulness to him and you come like the woman at the well and you discover that Jesus the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin from all sin but you understand we have to know the nature of sin in order for us to discover how terrible it is and where we're at tonight so I hope that as we've looked even at this verse that you thought at first referred to some obscure prophecy in the Bible it all comes back to me am I living in Babylon am I reveling tonight in what the world preaches and what the world teaches am I making the most of this world you only live once let's make the most of it let's enjoy everything while it lasts no restrictions no restraints no God let me just let loose on this world if you've no thought of God then sure of course

I can understand why you'd want to do that but God says to us you'll never have peace with God until you stop where you are until you hear God's voice and until you see that only God can give you the kind of peace with God and the kind of new life that he promises to you if you come now and trust in Jesus as your savior are you in Babylon you're in the wrong place come to the king city and enter through the gate that's open and that will remain open as long and just as long as we live and not a moment longer let's pray our father in heaven once again we ask that your word will speak to us we ask lord that your searchlight will reach deep into our hearts and that we will benefit greatly from hearing your voice we pray lord that where we're made conscious of our own sin and who amongst us tonight is not conscious of having sinned in the areas that we've been talking about this evening either in our minds or with our bodies or in some other way we ask for forgiveness we ask for cleansing from all sin from every form of sin we ask that we will see jesus and that our lives will be changed and renewed and that we will know what it is to be born again in jesus name amen jesus name jesus name