

## Babylon

I submit that in all the Bible it is Babylon more than any other Gentile nation that is the most deserving of condemnation. Yes, Egypt is on the list, as well as Assyria and Philistia, and of course Rome in the New Testament, but Babylon takes on a more than national identity in Scripture: it is the type or epitome of all the Gentile nations' rebellion against God. It's the rebellious spirit of Babylon, that is, its enduring influence that controls all the geopolitics that's embedded in the Bible.

Babylon is more than an ancient city, more than the ancient nation located where Iraq is today. It is the continuation of the Tower of Babel episode of humanity's rebellion in Genesis 11 and the embodiment of all national rebellions against God through all history. In the series of Gentile empires that dominate history, Babylon is the head. Babylon is the subject of God's future fierce wrath narrated in the Book of Revelation. So, let's discuss it.

The Tower of Babel episode occurred on the plain of Shinar, where the city of Babylon later in time was sited. In that episode, the people didn't merely disobey God's post-Flood explicit command to disperse and fill the earth, they did something worse. They built a tower that, if completed, would reach "to the heavens." The text doesn't say why they did that, but a good surmise is, they wanted a man-made mountain that would reprise the Eden mount of Genesis 2 and 3 for their god to dwell on. Not the God of the Bible, but their own god, a wicked supernatural being. This was hubris beyond anything we can imagine. It was a serpent's nest of evil: self-glory, idolatry and virulent hatred of God. And that's the attitude of all the Gentile nations on earth, from then until today. That is Babylon's influence in the world.

God called Abraham to give rise to the Nation of Israel to be His faithful servant taking the knowledge of the living God to the people of the world trapped in the iron grip of their wicked gods. Most of the Old Testament focuses on the Nation of Israel, but always in the background are those evil Gentile nations whom God also loves in spite of their hatred of Him and His chosen people.

Now let's understand that the God of Israel orders His creation. It is He who in providence maintains life on earth. We don't live in a creation marked by chaos, but one that's finely ordered. There's order in the physical structure of the universe and order in societies; there's justice and there's on-going life. Rain comes and crops grow. The sun shines every day, and the heat of the day yields to the cool of the night. The seas submit to the boundaries God has placed. He has ordained systems of government to serve as His proxy in maintaining societal order. Yes, God's order is distorted by human sin, but the ordering of the world is there nevertheless. God has placed conscience in every human soul. He built the bodies of humans and animals so that they heal when some disruption occurs, or He intervenes in the event of some sickness or accident so that that particular life is preserved until the day He determined in advance for that person's life to end. He sees to it that His creatures are fed and that life goes on. From heaven, the Creator God continually maintains the order that is necessary for life, for history, for His physical creation. God "rested" on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, but that doesn't mean He went to sleep. He sees everything and He is ever diligent supervising and maintaining His creation. God rules!

The Gentile nations of the world from the Babel episode on, all thru history up to today, don't believe that God rules, or that He even exists. The Gentile nations are determined, in supreme hubris, to want to believe that their gods and their rulers (emperors, kings, whatever) are responsible for the ordering of the cosmos. They seek glory for themselves. Babylon, then Persia, then Greece, then Rome, and on to the feet and toes of the Daniel 2 statue – all these are in rebellion against God and His will and His purposes. They arrogantly presume that it is their own gods and/or their own intellect and competence that maintain the cosmic order. They march out with fierce warriors and lethal weapons to build great empires in the supposition that they have the ability to rule over many other nations, indeed over the whole world; they lust for the power to do exactly that. They build great complex economies to rule non-militarily. They prioritize commerce and trade. They build systems of "justice" and government and

construct ideologies intended for human flourishing apart from reference to God, apart from any hint of intent to give glory to God.\* All glory is to themselves.

We must understand the theology of the Gentile nations. Whichever people group's god was more powerful resulted in that nation dominating other nations. So for example, Assyria was mighty, it was believed, because their god, Assur, was so powerful and the gods of the many nations Assyria conquered were weak. Each Gentile nation willed to dominate other nations to glorify their own particular god as well as themselves. Thus incessant warfare characterizes the Times of the Gentiles. The conflict this pagan theology created was, Why then did Assyria defeat the Northern Kingdom? Why did Babylon so easily conquer Judah? Wasn't the God of Israel, the Creator and sovereign God of all? The Scriptures explain that it was because of sin and its necessary judgment (something the Gentile nations knew nothing of) that God allowed His people to be defeated and go into exile. And so, to vindicate Himself, in the future, God must—MUST—restore His people to their land and to splendor and glory. God's honor is at stake.

The city of Babylon, straddling the Euphrates R., occupied some 200 square miles. It had a double wall, magnificent buildings, broad paved streets, canals, parks and temples (about 50 of them!) to their gods, each temple vying for greater grandeur than the others. The city was built mostly by slaves taken from surrounding captured nations, using brick, often coated with blue or brown enamel so as to create beautiful structures. Around the city were vast plantations of palm trees, and many graced the city streets as well. A ziggurat was just outside the city, 30 stories high with a shrine to their chief god, Marduk at the top and a temple to Marduk joined to it. Babylon, at its height of grandeur and influence during the reign of Nabuchadnezzar, was described as the most splendid city of the ancient world. Cyrus took possession of the city for the Persian Empire, and Alexander the Great destroyed the city in ±330-323 BC. Mounds of earth are all that remain of it today. The tracks of a railroad line run past it connecting Baghdad to other Iraqi cities. (In contrast, Jerusalem today is thriving and of central importance in the Middle East, in the same place as when David founded it 3,000 years ago.)

In the Book of Isaiah, Babylon runs all thru the book as the enemy of God, the Gentile empire that, empowered by their god Marduk, pretends to supplant God as the One who orders creation. In Isaiah 7, Isaiah was sent to Judah's King Ahaz to warn him to trust in God and not hope that Babylon would save Judah from a menacing Syrian-Ephraimite invasion. Isaiah then in Chapter 13 delivered a prophecy anticipating Babylon's eventual doom. Why look to Babylon for deliverance when Babylon itself is already condemned? Ahaz stubbornly, faithlessly rejected Isaiah's prophecy, however, and sought help from [gasp!] Assyria. And that set Judah on trajectory to gruesome defeat and exile. Later, Isaiah warned King Hezekiah to not seek an alliance with Babylon to save Judah from the menacing Assyrians. Hezekiah instead foolishly boasted to envoys from Babylon of Judah's wealth, implying that he too was a powerful king worthy of such an alliance. That was so significant a failure of the Nation's monarchy that the Bible narrates it three times. God did miraculously deliver Judah from the Assyrians, but from that point on Judah was condemned to be delivered up to . . . Babylon. The Nation of Israel wouldn't, couldn't endure such faithless leadership.

Isaiah 14 continues Isaiah's denunciation of Babylon. But in verse 12 the text shifts to a mysterious, unnamed, exalted figure who is filled with hubris, but who is cast down into the dust. It refers to someone who is the invisible controlling influence of all Babylonian rebellion. Who is that? Bible scholars suggest names, but no known historical figure conforms to the text. It could be an idealized personification of all the Gentile nations' rebellious stance toward the God of Israel. Or it could be Satan, the personification

---

\* For example, Hammurabi, ruler of Babylon at the time that the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, created a comprehensive code that attempted to unify and organize all society. He had it inscribed on a pillar of basalt that was placed in the temple of one of their gods, Shamash.

of all wickedness. “I will ascend to heaven,” he intends, (14:13) but he will instead be “brought down to the grave,” a reversal that reprises the Tower of Babel episode, the primal idolatrous rebellion against God. If the latter is correct, the text says in essence that Babylon belongs to Satan.

The prophet Daniel, in exile in Babylon, reveals much about the Gentile nations’ hubris. He foretells history in detail so amazingly accurate that one is compelled to believe in God’s existence on the basis of just this one Book. Babylon is to be the head of a series of Gentile empires, controlling the course of all history until the promised Messiah-King comes to end Israel’s Exile and restore Israel’s Kingdom. The Danielic prophecy of the Times of the Gentiles, spanning the empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and a subsequent version of Rome, means that until that end comes, the world will be ruled by violent, evil, rebellious, empire-building Gentile nations. And all of them express Babylon’s controlling spirit of lust for power, violence, boasting of achievements, arrogance toward God, anti-Semitism, self-exaltation, a will to dominate others, and greed. They all reject the authority and the goodness of God, they oppose God and His kingdom.

Babylon reappears in the last pages of the Bible. It has to! The Bible’s story, after all, is that of God’s great self-sacrificing rescue of His beloved human creatures from the clutches of evil supernatural beings, from the powers of sin, disobedience and rebellion to Himself; the Father obtains a Bride for the Son. So the exalted Jesus returns in power and glory to earth to defeat not Rome or an end-time recapitulation of Rome, but . . . Babylon. The arch-enemy of God, whose wicked spirit infused all the Gentile nations on earth and whose armies dared to conquer God’s own chosen people Israel, at last suffers oft-foretold defeat. Interestingly, in this account Babylon is a *she*. A prostitute! Why is that? Because Isaiah referred to Babylon as a she (Chapter 47). That’s because Babylon is a counterfeit bride, a wicked alternative to the lovely Bride for the Son. Babylon is a woman who seeks benefits without offering love in return. Babylon is also a counterfeit city, a wicked alternative to the holy city of Jerusalem (Zion).

But let’s go deeper here. The Book of the Revelation is for the Church what the prophecy of Isaiah was for Judah, a warning about engagement with Babylon. **“Come out of her!”** demands the Lord (18:4). We’re not to be involved with her politically, culturally, or in any sense. Babylon is totally wicked and condemned, so we’re to have nothing to do with that prostitute. We’re to serve the Lord, to glorify the Lord, not provoke the Lord with our modern version of Ahaz’ and Hezekiah’s folly.

America is just another of the hubristic Gentile nations. It too seeks glory for itself and will not give glory to God. The spirit of Babylon suffuses America as well as all of the Gentile nations of today’s world. President Trump may be the most modern iteration of Nebuchadnezzar. Just because we don’t have idols made of stone or wood doesn’t mean our nation isn’t idolatrous. Idolatry is a matter of the heart (Ezekiel 14:2-11) and we have a surfeit of gods to worship. The “Make America Great” movement is [what else but . . .] self-exalting Babylonianism.

Empires and wannabe-empires are ruling now, empowered by Satan. And they will continue to do that until Jesus returns as the Rock that strikes the feet of the Daniel 2 statue and the whole colossus crumbles to dust. Jesus may have been declared King of the Jews, but He is in heaven awaiting His Day to return to rule. In the meantime, emperors and kings and dictators and caliphs and presidents and Supreme Leaders and etc. continue pretentiously to rule as if God doesn’t exist. Jesus has warned us, His followers, to be separate, faithful and committed wholly to Him. If not, although the text doesn’t say this, it implies that we might share in Babylon’s certain judgment.

The Church is embedded in a world that’s alien to the Scriptures, a world that despises God and His will, a world of violence, hatred, lies, injustice, and worse. There’s no such thing as secular, or neutral, or being indifferent to God; we either love God with all our being—or we don’t. And if we don’t, we heap contempt upon God and so face His indignation. We therefore must use great discernment so as to be sure we’re not good citizens of Babylon. If we realize that we are, **“Come out of her!”** says the Lord.