

F. Wayne Mac Leod

Babylon The Great

*A Devotional Look at the Influence of
Babylon in the Unfolding of God's
Purpose on the Earth*



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Unfolding of God's Purpose on the Earth*

F. Wayne MacLeod

Light To My Path Book Distribution

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Contents

[Preface](#)

[Chapter 1 – Babylon and Creation](#)

[Chapter 2 - Babylon after the Flood](#)

[Chapter 3 – Abraham and Babylon](#)

[Chapter 4 – Isaac and Babylon](#)

[Chapter 5 – Balaam and Babylon](#)

[Chapter 6 – Joshua and Babylon](#)

[Chapter 7 – Babylon in the Time of the Judges](#)

[Chapter 8 – David's Shame and the Horsemen of Mesopotamia](#)

[Chapter 9 – Hezekiah and the Babylonian Envoys](#)

[Chapter 10 – Babylon's Profit at Judah's Expense](#)

[Chapter 11 – Job and the Chaldeans](#)

[Chapter 12 – By the Waters of Babylon](#)

[Chapter 13 – Isaiah's Words to Babylon](#)

[Chapter 14 – Jeremiah's Call to Submit to Babylon](#)

[Chapter 15 – Ezekiel: Lusting After Babylon](#)

[Chapter 16 — Daniel: Babylon's Call to Compromise](#)

[Chapter 17 – The Fleeting Promises of Babylon](#)

[Chapter 18 – Release from Babylon's Grip](#)

[Chapter 19 – God's Grace in Babylon](#)

[Chapter 20 – The Fall of Babylon the Great](#)

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Preface

Some time ago, I was struck by a reference to Babylon the Great in my Scripture reading. This got me thinking about the role Babylon played in the life of God's people. Reflecting on this, I thought about how Babylon is a reoccurring theme from the beginning to the end of Scripture. The more I thought about this, the more I felt the Lord's leading to consider this theme more deeply.

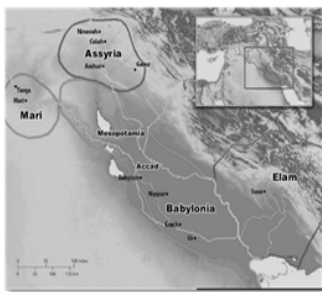
Of all the pagan nations in Scripture, Babylon seems to take a prominent role. From Genesis to Revelation, there are hints of her presence. She is a friend and bitter enemy of God and His work.

I am not a historian, nor will I attempt to trace the history of Babylon. This study examines the role Babylon plays in the unfolding of God's plan in this world. It is a devotional look at an important theme in Scripture. As we examine what the Bible says about Babylon, we will see that there is still an enemy to God's people seeking to strip them of His blessings. That enemy cannot overcome, however, and those who belong to Christ will be victorious over her.

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Chapter 1 – Babylon and Creation

As we begin, let's try to get a basic understanding of Babylon and where it was located geographically. This map from Biblos.com/FreeBibleimages.org is helpful for this purpose.



Babylon was in what was known as Mesopotamia. This region lay between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and was very fertile land. Hotly fought over throughout its history, the land passed from one nation to another. Today Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Kuwait occupy this region. In Bible times, the two dominant forces residing here were the Babylonians in the south and the Assyrians in the north.

This brings us to the book of Genesis and the creation account. After creating man, Genesis 2 tells us that God placed him in a garden to work and keep it.

7 then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. 8 And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. (Genesis 2)

While we do not know the exact location of the Garden of Eden, Genesis 2 goes on to give us a clue.

10 A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. 11 The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah,

where there is gold. 12 And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. 13 The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. 14 And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. (Genesis 2)

Genesis 2 tells us that a river in the Garden of Eden divided and became four rivers (verse 10). The first river was the Pishon that flowed around the land of Havilah. Bible scholars are uncertain about the identity of this river and the location of the land of Havilah. The wording of Genesis 2:11 about the Pishon River, however, should not go unnoticed.

*11 It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah
(Genesis 2)*

When the writer of Genesis recorded the location of the Garden of Eden, he used the past tense to describe the Pishon River— “it is the one that flowed.” When we compare this with verse 14 and his reference to the Tigris River, the difference is striking. Speaking of the Tigris River, the author tells us that it “flows east of Assyria.” In other words, the Pishon River may have already stopped flowing by the time Genesis was written. This may account for the fact that its identity is unknown today.

The second river is the Gihon that flowed around the land of Cush. Notice again that author speaks in the past tense about the river Gihon – “it is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush” (verse 13). Again, the location of the Gihon River has never been confirmed and continues to be debated among Bible scholars today.

Cush was the grandchild of Noah through his son Ham. Genesis 10:6-10 records the genealogy of Cush, the son of Ham:

6 ¶ And the sons of Ham; Cush, and Mizraim, and Phut, and Canaan. 7 And the sons of Cush; Seba, and Havilah, and Sabtah, and Raamah, and Sabtecha: and the sons of Raamah; Sheba, and Dedan. 8 And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. 9 He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD. 10

And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. (Genesis 10)

These verses tell us that Cush had a son by the name of Nimrod. Nimrod, according to Genesis 10:10, was the leader of the kingdom of Babel in the land of Shinar. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia has this to say about Babel:

bā'bel, bab'i-lon (Topographical): Babylon was the Greek name of the city written in the cuneiform script of the Babylonians, bab-ili, which means in Semitic, "the gate of god." The Hebrews called the country, as well as the city, Bābhel. This name they considered came from the' root, bālal, "to confound" (Ge 11:9).

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Nimrod, the son of Cush, was the founder of the people of Babel or Babylon. This places him in the region of Mesopotamia. The land of Cush was likely in this region currently in history.

The last two rivers mentioned in Genesis 2 are the Tigris and Euphrates. The Tigris flowed when Genesis was written and is spoken of in the present tense – "which flows east of Assyria." (Genesis 2:14). Assyria was located to the north of Babylon, and the Tigris flowed east of this nation toward Babylon. The Euphrates was west of the Tigris River, and nothing further is mentioned about it as it may have been well known.

Genesis 2:10-14 would lead us to believe that the Garden of Eden was in the fertile valley of Mesopotamia in the land that would eventually become Babylon. The land Babylon would occupy was a land that provided for the first family God created. It was the centre of His creation and, in those early days, experienced the fullness of His blessing before sin entered the world.

This region also experienced the fall into sin when Satan tempted Eve to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. There in the Garden of Eden, Satan tempted Eve to question the purpose

of God and eat what God had forbidden. Speaking to Eve that day, Satan said:

4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. (Genesis 3)

Here in this region of the world, the devil challenged God's purpose by tempting Eve to lust after what was forbidden to humankind. He encouraged her to surrender to the lust of the flesh and mind. He told her that eating the forbidden fruit would make her like God. Eve yielded to temptation and ate the forbidden fruit.

There in what would become known as Babylon, the first seeds of rebellion were sown. Babylon would become a symbol of the lust of the flesh and the temptation to become our own god, determine our own destiny, and disregard the Creator's purpose.

For Prayer:

Father, as we consider the theme of Babylon in Genesis, we see that this region of the world saw the beginning of creation and its fall into sin. There we see the rise of rebellion against your purpose. There Satan sowed his seeds of doubt and tempted our first parents with the lust of the flesh and mind. There he planted the seed of rebellion and challenged Adam and Eve to break from their Creator to become their own gods.

Father, help us to learn from history. Help us to see that it was this fall that caused all the problems we experience today. Open our eyes to see how that seed of rebellion planted in the soil of Babylon continues to impact people around the world today. Thank you for sending Your Son Jesus to reverse the curse of sin. Thank you that

Babylon's curse can be broken in the person of Your Son and His work on the cross of Calvary.

Chapter 2 - Babylon after the Flood

In the first chapter, we saw that the Garden of Eden was likely located in Mesopotamia in the region known as Babylon. In that garden, Adam and Eve, tempted by Satan, chose to rebel against the authority of God. The evil that began there would multiply in the years to come. Genesis 6 describes the conditions by the time of Noah and the response of the Lord to those conditions:

5 The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. 7 So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them." (Genesis 6)

The Lord God saw the depth of sin in the heart and mind of humankind – “every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). As a result, He determined to destroy all flesh from the earth. Only Noah and his family would remain. Genesis 6-8 recounts the story of the great flood that destroyed all living creatures on the earth except for Noah, his family, and the animals they brought with them on the ark.

As the waters of that flood subsided, God appeared to Noah and his family and commissioned them to multiply and fill the earth:

1 And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. (Genesis 9)

Through Noah and his descendants, the world as we know it would again be repopulated.

As we come to Genesis 11, we discover that Noah's family left the location where the ark came to rest and travelled to a plain in the land of Shinar:

2 And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. (Genesis 11)

The question we need to address here concerns the location of Shinar and why it is important to the topic of this book?

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia has this to say about Shinar:

The name given, in the earliest Hebrew records, to Babylonia, later called Babel, or the land of Babel (bābhel, ‘erec bābhel). In Ge 10:10 it is the district wherein lay Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, cities which were the “beginning” of Nimrod’s kingdom. In Ge 11:2 Shinar is described as the land of the plain where migrants from the East settled, and founded Babel, the city, and its great tower.

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Shinar was in the region of Babylon. We have a clear reference to this when we compare Daniel 1:2 and 2 Chronicles 36:6. Daniel tells us that Jehoiakim was taken by Nebuchadnezzar and brought to the land of Shinar:

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. (Daniel 1)

2 Chronicles 36 identifies the place of Jehoiakim’s captivity as Babylon:

5 Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God. 6 Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and bound him in chains to take him to Babylon. (2 Chronicles 36)

We understand from this that the land of Shinar and Babylon were the same.

Having concluded that Shinar is in the region of Babylon, it falls on us now to see what took place in that fertile plain after the flood. Genesis 11 tells us that those whom God commissioned to fill the earth determined to disregard the command of God, choosing rather to settle in Shinar and build a city with a tower that would reach up into the heavens.

4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." (Genesis 4)

Noah's descendants wanted to make a name for themselves and rebelliously disregarded God's command to fill the earth. In response, God confounded their language and dispersed them from Shinar over the face of the earth. The region of Shinar where the tower and city were built would become known as Babel:

9 Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth. (Genesis 11)

Let me take a moment to put these pieces together. Shinar, where the descendants of Noah settled after the flood, was in the region of Babylon. That fertile plain lured Noah's family away from the purpose of God. Instead of spreading out to fill the earth, they determined to enjoy the blessings of Shinar. There on Babylonian soil, they disregard God's purpose to make a name for themselves instead. The pride of their eyes, the lust of the flesh and the possibility to become "like God" (see Genesis 3:5) were temptations too big to resist. There in Shinar, they broke free from the command of God to determine their own destiny.

Once again, Babylon becomes a place of temptation and rebellion against God and His purpose. The rich plain of Shinar offered them everything they wanted. They became comfortable and fat off its blessings. They had no desire to fill the earth, as God had commanded.

The city and tower they built became a symbol of human pride and desire for independence from God. There in Shinar, the descendants of Noah took a stand against God. They dared to defy His lordship over their lives. They determined, instead, to follow their own path and take charge of their own destiny.

Once again, we see how Babylon becomes a symbol of human independence and the love of comfort, wealth, and prosperity.

For Prayer:

Father, we confess that there is an attraction to sin and rebellion in each of us. We are aware of the sinful nature that desires to be independent and determine its own destiny. May we be mindful of the attractions of Babylon with all its comfort and ease. Keep us from elevating ourselves above You and your plan for our lives. May our heart's desire be to fulfil Your purpose in our lives. Give us the grace to walk in that purpose, no matter how difficult it might be. Give us the grace to resist the temptations of Babylon.

Chapter 3 – Abraham and Babylon

We move from Noah and his descendants to Abraham, the next important figure in the Old Testament. We meet Abraham for the first time in Genesis 11:

27 Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. 28 Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his kindred, in Ur of the Chaldeans. 29 And Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. (Genesis 11)

Abram's father was Terah. The family lived in Ur of the Chaldeans. While Abram was in Ur, the Lord God spoke to him and told him to leave his country and travel to a location He would reveal to him. The Lord God promised to bless him and his descendants.

1 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12)

Genesis 15, the Lord God confirms that Abram was living in Ur of the Chaldeans when He called him:

7 And he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess." (Genesis 15)

What is important for us to note here is the location of Ur of the Chaldeans. Several Old Testament passages can clarify this for us. Speaking out against the rebellion of Israel, the prophet Ezekiel has this to say:

14 But she carried her whoring further. She saw men portrayed on the wall, the images of the Chaldeans portrayed in vermilion, 15 wearing belts on their waists, with flowing turbans on their heads, all

of them having the appearance of officers, a likeness of Babylonians whose native land was Chaldea. (Ezekiel 23)

Notice the phrase "Babylonians whose native land was Chaldea." This shows us that Chaldea was in Babylon. Ezekiel 11:24-25 speaks about how the Spirit of God took Ezekiel in a vision to the Israelite exiles in Chaldea:

24 And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me in the vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to the exiles. Then the vision that I had seen went up from me. 25 And I told the exiles all the things that the LORD had shown me. (Ezekiel 11)

We know from the rest of Scripture that God's people were exiled to the land of Babylon. Chaldea and Babylon were the same place in the mind of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel is not the only prophet to use the words Chaldea and Babylon interchangeably. Isaiah the prophet does the same when he says:

20 Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it out to the end of the earth; say, "The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!" (Isaiah 48)

Also consider the words of Jeremiah:

8 "Flee from the midst of Babylon, and go out of the land of the Chaldeans, and be as male goats before the flock. (Jeremiah 50)

24 "I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea before your very eyes for all the evil that they have done in Zion, declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 51)

35 The violence done to me and to my kinsmen be upon Babylon," let the inhabitant of Zion say. "My blood be upon the inhabitants of Chaldea," let Jerusalem say. (Jeremiah 51)

In these three passages from Jeremiah, the prophet speaks of Babylon and the Chaldeans as the same nation. There can be little doubt that Abram and His family were from Babylon.

Babylon was the likely location of the Garden of Eden, where God began to unfold His purpose for humanity. It was also the location where the descendants of Noah migrated after the flood. Babylon was a place of new beginnings. This is what we see here in the life of Abraham. God chose him while he was in Ur of the Chaldeans and called him to be the father of a new nation under His blessing – the nation of Israel.

Babylon was the location of the fall of Adam and Eve. It was also the location of the rebellion of Noah's descendants. Here in Genesis 12, we see how God reaches out to the very place that had been the source of sin and rebellion to bring hope by showing grace and favour to a single family. God's blessing would be on Abram and his family, but it would not be on the land of Babylon. God chose to remove Abram from Ur and bring him to another land to shower His grace upon him. The favour of God would be removed from the land of rebellion and sin.

While Abram left the land of Babylon, we have evidence of Babylon continuing to trouble him and his family. God's blessing in the life of Abraham was so abundant that there came a time when there was no room left in the land for both Abraham and nephew Lot. They determined, therefore, to separate. Lot chose the fertile Valley of the Jordan and settled in the region of Sodom.

In Genesis 14, we read:

1 In the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, 2 these kings made war with Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). (Genesis 14)

Notice what is happening here. While Lot was living in Sodom, a coalition of four kings made war with Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Zoar. Genesis 14:11-12 tells us that the attackers took possession of Sodom and Gomorrah. They took Lot captive and stripped him of all his possessions.

11 So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. 12 They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions, and went their way. (Genesis 14)

Genesis 14:1 tells us that one of the kings involved in the capture of Sodom and Gomorrah and the capturing of Lot was Amraphel, king of Shinar. We have already determined in the last chapter that Shinar was in the region of Babylon. While God had removed Abram from Babylon, Babylon pursued his family. There are several lessons we should learn from this chapter.

Notice first that God met Abram in the land of rebellion and sin. God stretched out His hand and chose a family from Babylon to bring blessing to the whole earth. Through this one man, the nation of Israel was born. Through Israel, the Saviour of the world came.

Notice second that God removed Abram from Babylon to shower His blessings on him. Abram had to be willing to accept the call of God to leave the land of sin and rebellion for the blessings of God to be realized in his life. That meant leaving friends and neighbours. It required trusting the word that God has spoken to him. Ultimately it demanded a commitment on Abram's part to follow the Lord in whatever path that took him. This was a great step of faith for Abram and his family.

Finally, notice that while Abram left Babylon, Babylon would continue to be an issue in his family's life. Abraham's nephew would be captured by a Babylonian king and stripped of all his possessions. Notice, however, Abraham's response to Lot's captivity.

14 When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. 15 And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. 16 Then he brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people. (Genesis 14)

Taking only 318 trained men with him, Abraham pursued the army that had taken Lot captive. God gave him victory over them, and he rescued Lot from their hands and retrieved his possessions. While Babylon pursued Lot's family in the person of Amraphel, king of Shinar, the Lord God who took him from Ur was greater than any enemy army. Babylon and all its partners could not strip Abraham and his family of the blessing God had promised.

For Prayer:

Father God, I thank you that you are gracious and merciful. Thank you that you rescued me from the land of rebellion and sin. You have blessed me and set me free from the grip of Babylon in my life. Thank you for reaching out to me in my sin and calling me to your blessing. I ask that you protect my family and me from the sin and rebellion that seeks to tempt and enslave us. I thank you for the example in the life of Abraham of the power of faith to conquer this great enemy.

Chapter 4 – Isaac and Babylon

In Abraham's final years, his concern was for his son Isaac. He did not want his son to marry the Canaanites who live in the land. They did not worship his God but walked in pagan ways. Abraham understood that the blessings of God would fall on his son, and so he did not want him to be tempted by the Canaanite ways and turn from the one true God.

Calling his most trusted servant, Abraham commissioned him with the task of returning to the land of his origins to find a wife for Isaac, his son. Genesis 24:10 tells us that Abraham's servant went to Mesopotamia (the region of Babylon) to find a wife for Isaac.

10 Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia to the city of Nabor. (Genesis 24)

Once again, we see the connection to Babylon. While Isaac was kept from the influences of a pagan Canaanite wife, his relationship with a Babylonian wife was not without its problems. When Abraham's servant arrived in Mesopotamia, he met a young girl by the name of Rebekah. Rebekah was the granddaughter of Nabor, Abraham's brother (Genesis 24:15). She would become Isaac's wife.

God would give Isaac and Rebekah two boys by the names of Jacob and Esau. These boys were very different in personality. Esau became a favourite son of Isaac, while Rebekah preferred Jacob. Genesis 25:29-34 recounts how Jacob took advantage of his brother in a time of need and obtained his birth right.

In his old age, Isaac determined that he would bless his son Esau. When Rebekah heard this, she decided to trick her husband into giving it to Jacob instead. While Esau was out hunting for game, Rebekah prepared a meal for Isaac, disguised her son Jacob, and told him to pretend to be Esau. Listening to his mother, Jacob deceived his father and received Esau's blessing (see Genesis 27:5-

13). When the incident was discovered, Esau determined to kill Jacob as soon as his father died.

Understanding the seriousness of what she had done, Rebekah told Jacob to escape by going to live with her brother Laban (see Genesis 27:43). Genesis 28:5 tells us that Jacob went to Paddan-Aram to stay with his uncle.

5 Thus Isaac sent Jacob away. And he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban, the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother. (Genesis 28)

By this means, Isaac ended up in the region of Babylonians with his uncle Laban.

Jacob's life in Mesopotamia was not easy. When he asked for permission to marry Rachel, Laban's daughter, Laban tricked him on his wedding night and gave him his elder daughter Leah instead. Jacob was forced to work many years to obtain Rachel as his second wife.

The conflict between Rachel and Leah would be wearisome for Jacob. Leah often felt unloved and clashed with her sister as she competed for Jacob's attention.

Listen to Jacob's description of his work relationship with Laban, his father-in-law:

38 These twenty years I have been with you. Your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks. 39 What was torn by wild beasts I did not bring to you. I bore the loss of it myself. From my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. 40 There I was: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. 41 These twenty years I have been in your house. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. 42 If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-

handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night.” (Genesis 31)

Jacob's father-in-law took advantage of him. The abusive treatment was such that Jacob determined to take his wives and possessions and escape to the land of his father Isaac. Understand here that Jacob knew his brother Esau wanted to kill him. He was willing, however, to risk his life, rather than stay under the oppression of his father-in-law.

It is worth noting that as they escaped Laban's oppression, Rachel stole his household gods, packing them with her belongings to take with her to her new home. Those pagan idols returned from Babylon with her to become part of their new home.

We see here the connection of Jacob to the land of Babylon. He was driven there because of the influence of a Mesopotamian mother. His uncle and father-in-law from Paddan-Aram oppressed and took advantage of him. The wives he obtained from this region clashed with each other, causing family conflict. His favourite wife, Rachel, introduced pagan idols into his family and brought them back with her into the land of Promise.

The influence of Babylon in the family of Jacob was very subtle. It wearied and oppressed him over his lifetime. It caused intense family conflict and emotional and physical strain. Like a dull headache, Babylon would drain his strength and spiritual vitality. Rebekah, Jacob's Babylonian mother, wanting her way, stooped to deceit and disrespected her husband's wishes. Wishing to become rich and influential, Laban dishonestly profited off the back of his son-in-law to gain his wealth.

Babylon becomes a symbol of the deceptive power of riches and self-interest. It resorts to deception, disrespect, and theft to obtain its wealth. It is a self-centred philosophy of life that stands contrary to the purpose of God. Isaac and his family fell prey to its oppression.

For Prayer:

Father, we see the influence of Babylon in our day. This subtle philosophy promotes self-interests above Your purpose. We see its impact in our secular world but also in the church of our day. We pray that you would break the pride in our hearts that elevates our interests above others. Remove our lust for power, riches, and influence. Break the Babylonian spirit in our churches and our personal lives so we can live in the fullness your purpose.

Chapter 5 – Balaam and Babylon

The people of God lived as slaves in Egypt after the death of Joseph. God raised a deliverer by the name of Moses to set them free. Moses led his people through the wilderness toward the land God had promised Abraham.

Despite their wilderness wandering, Israel prospered under the leadership of Moses. They defeated every nation that opposed them and the purpose of God. The Moabites noticed this blessing, and as Israel approached their borders, Numbers 22:3 describes their reaction:

1 Then the people of Israel set out and camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan at Jericho. 2 And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. 3 And Moab was in great dread of the people, because they were many. Moab was overcome with fear of the people of Israel. (Numbers 22)

Moab was “in great dread” and “overcome with fear.”

Fearing what might happen to them and realizing that they were likely no match for them in battle, the Moabites determined that the best course of action was to curse the Israelites. Numbers 22:4-6 show us exactly how they intended to do this:

4 And Moab said to the elders of Midian, “This horde will now lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field.” So Balak the son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, 5 sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the people of Amaw, to call him, saying, “Behold, a people has come out of Egypt. They cover the face of the earth, and they are dwelling opposite me. 6 Come now, curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.” (Numbers 22)

Balak of Moab sent messengers to a prophet by the name of Balaam. Numbers 22:5 tells us that Balaam lived in Pethor, “which is near the River of in the land of the people of Amaw.” A footnote in the English Standard Version of the Bible tells us that the river referred to here is the Euphrates River. This location is confirmed in Deuteronomy 23:4 where it says:

3 “No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever, 4 because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. (Deuteronomy 23)

Deuteronomy 23:4 tells us that Balaam was from Pethor of Mesopotamia –the region of Babylon. King Balak hired a pagan Mesopotamian prophet to curse Israel.

God spoke to Balaam and warned him not to curse the Israelites. Balaam was faithful to the command of God and chose rather to bless the nation of Israel to the sheer frustration of Balak, who hired him.

While Balaam appeared to be a friend on the surface, it is interesting to note what happened to Israel as soon as Balaam left. Listen to the words of Numbers 25:1-3:

1 While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. 2 These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. 3 So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. (Numbers 25)

When Balaam left the region, the men of Israel began to “whore with the daughters of Moab” and offered sacrifices to their gods. Israel fell into the worship of the pagan god Baal, kindling the anger of God against them.

While it is difficult in Numbers 25 to connect Israel's rebellion against God and Balaam in this passage, the connection is noticeably clear

in Revelation 2:14. Speaking to the church of Pergamum, the Lord says:

14 But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. (Revelation 2)

The Lord rebuked the church of Pergamum because they fell into the teaching of Balaam. The Lord told the church that Balaam taught Balak how to put a stumbling block before Israel, so they ate food sacrificed to idols and engaged in sexual immorality.

While Balaam obeyed the Lord and refused to curse the Israelites, he told the Moabites how to seduce Israel and cause them to fall under the anger of God. The result was devastating for the nation of Israel.

A quick reading of the story of Balaam could lead us to believe that he was a sincere prophet of God who blessed the people of Israel despite tremendous pressure to curse them. He could easily be seen as a friend of Israel. The reality, however, was quite different. Balaam was a great enemy of Israel. While he blessed them in public, he taught their enemy how to defeat them.

Balaam used the lust of the flesh to tempt Israel. He did not do this himself but put it in the mind of Balak to do so. He acted in secret to destroy the people of God while coming across as their hero.

When Moab wanted to defeat the people of God, they called on a prophet from Babylon. He came and secretly taught them how to lure God's people into sin through immorality and idol worship. Once again, we see the influence of Babylon in the life of Israel. God had taken Abraham out of the nation, but Israel was not free of her temptations.

Revelation 2 tells us that Balaam instructed Balak how to cause Israel to stumble in two ways. First by tempting them with sexual immorality, and second by enticing them to eat food sacrificed to

idols. Sexual immorality needs no explanation. I want to say a word, however, about food sacrificed to idols.

Food that was sacrificed to idols was offered to the gods but then cut up and sold or given to neighbours to eat. As they ate, they celebrated these gods and enjoyed the fruit of these pagan rituals.

While our focus here is not on meat sacrificed to gods, there is a principle I would like to take from this example. What should be the believer's response to a secular song promoting an immoral lifestyle? What about a movie or book that uses immorality to entertain? Do these forms of entertainment not encourage a lifestyle that is not from God? Do we not eat meat sacrificed to idols by listening to and being entertained by the immorality of these forms of entertainment?

Babylon's influence is very subtle. Like Balaam, Babylon entertains us and makes us feel good, but it will ultimately destroy us. Its lure has destroyed the testimony of many Christians and ended many ministries. In the days of Balaam, the Mesopotamian prophet, it brought the anger of the Lord upon His chosen nation. May the Lord give us the grace to resist its temptations today.

For Prayer:

Lord God, we see in the example of Balaam of Mesopotamia how he appeared as a friend of your people but was a very subtle enemy. Balaam taught the enemy how to seduce your people with immorality and idol worship. His influence remains today. Babylon's philosophy continues to tempt us. Give us the grace to resist its attraction. Teach us how to recognize its subtle influence in our church and the danger it poses in our ministry and personal lives.

Chapter 6 – Joshua and Babylon

After the death of Moses, the Lord chose Joshua to lead His people into the Promised Land. In Joshua 1:1-6, we read the Lord's commission to Joshua:

1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, 2 "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. 3 Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. 4 From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. 5 No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. 6 Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. (Joshua 1)

In these verses, the Lord God promised to give Joshua every place the sole of his foot tread. No man would be able to stand against him in battle. The Lord assured Him that He would never leave or forsake him and that he would possess the land of Canaan. God would be with Joshua just as He had been with Moses.

Evidence of the presence of the Lord did not delay in coming. As Joshua prepared to enter Canaan, the Lord spoke to him.

7 The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. 8 And as for you, command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, 'When you come to the brink of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'" (Joshua 3)

The first barrier to entering the land God had promised to Israel was the Jordan River. The whole nation had to cross this river, and God

had a plan for this. He told Joshua to send the priests, carrying the ark of the covenant ahead of the people. As soon as the priest's feet rested in the Jordan, the river stopped flowing and provide a way for the nation to cross. (see Joshua 3:13)

What took place that day proved that the presence of the Lord God was with the people as they advanced on the Canaanites. News of the incident created terror in the hearts of the inhabitants of the land. They knew the presence of God was with Israel.

One of the first cities to conquer was the city of Jericho. God showed Joshua how that conquest would take place. Seven priests would carry the ark of the covenant and walk around the city blowing trumpets. The army was to walk silently before and after these priests. They were to repeat this practice once a day for six days (see Joshua 6:8-14).

On the seventh day, they were to march around the city seven times. When they completed the seventh circle around the city, the priests were to blow the trumpet, and the people were to shout. Joshua told them that the Lord would reveal His presence and give them the city when they did so. The Lord told the people that they were to destroy Jericho completely. They were to take nothing from the city but destroy everything in sight. The only exception to this was the silver, gold, and bronze. This was all to be given to the treasury of the Lord:

18 But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction and bring trouble upon it. 19 But all silver and gold, and every vessel of bronze and iron, are holy to the LORD; they shall go into the treasury of the LORD.” (Joshua 6)

When the priests sounded that final trumpet, the walls of the city fell. The army of Israel went in and defeated their enemy, destroying everything in sight.

Before we move on to the subject of our study, we need to see what is happening here. God has been moving powerfully. He miraculously opened the Jordan River for Israel to cross and

flattened the walls of the city of Jericho to the amazement of His people. The fear of Israel and her God was spreading throughout the land. Nations knew they were no match for the power of Israel's God. These were amazing days. The presence of God was evident.

Amid this incredible work of God, we catch a brief glimpse of Babylon lurking in the shadows. One of the soldiers present in the conquest of Jericho was a man by the name of Achan. Joshua 7:1 tells us that he disregarded the command of Joshua to destroy everything and took some articles from the city for himself.

1 But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel. (Joshua 7)

When Joshua sent men to the next town to spy out the land, they came back and reported that the city was much smaller than Jericho and it was not necessary to send the entire army to conquer it (Joshua 7:3). Joshua sent three thousand soldiers to take Ai. When these soldiers attacked, however, the people of Ai defeated them and sent them into flight. This defeat devastated Joshua and the people of Israel.

Joshua asked the Lord why his army had been defeated. The Lord answered in Joshua 7:10-12, saying:

10 The LORD said to Joshua, "Get up! Why have you fallen on your face? 11 Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings. 12 Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become devoted for destruction. I will be with you no more unless you destroy the devoted things from among you. (Joshua 7)

The Lord revealed to Joshua that someone had taken articles from Jericho that had been devoted to destruction. God went on to tell Joshua that he would not be able to stand against his enemies until he had addressed this matter.

Joshua immediately brought each tribe, clan, and family before him until the Lord exposed Achan as the culprit. Joshua demanded that Achan confess to what he had done. Listen to the confession of Achan in Joshua 7:20-21:

20 And Achan answered Joshua, "Truly I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I did: 21 when I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath." (Joshua 7)

That day, Achan confessed that he had taken 200 shekels of silver, a bar of gold worth 50 shekels and a beautiful cloak that had caught his eye.

Notice something about the cloak that captured Achan's eye. He described it as a "beautiful cloak from Shinar." It was a Babylonian cloak. It caught his eye, tempted him, and ultimately led to the death of 36 Israelite soldiers, the humiliation of the nation of Israel and the withdrawal of God's power from them.

The temptation of Babylon has led many Christian workers astray amid their great success. Babylon tempted Achan with its wealth and beauty. To obtain this wealth and beauty, however, required that he turn his back on the command of God. Like Eve, Achan gave into his lust and brought the curse of God upon himself and his nation.

Amid the blessing of God, when victory was assured and God's people were experiencing His rich blessing, that simple cloak of Shinar caught the attention of one man. That is all it took. Achan surrendered to the lust of his eyes and turned his back on the purpose of God.

Scattered among thousands of articles in Jericho was a single cloak from Shinar. That cloak was as deadly as it was beautiful and would ultimately take the life of Achan and his family. The influence of Babylon is very subtle – a single cloak in the ruins of an entire city. Like a hidden trap, it is ready to spring closed on anyone who will surrender to its temptation. It quietly passes in front of us, flaunting

its beauty and pleasure. It catches our eye ever so subtly and causes us to reflect even for a moment on its attraction. It smiles and offers us the world, but the cost is the cost of our life and testimony. The cloak of Shinar defeated an army that no nation dared stand against.

For Prayer:

Father, we see from the story of Achan just how subtle the influence of Babylon is in our lives. We see how easy it would be for us to fall to its temptation. Babylon is ever near us. Give us discernment to recognize its lure. Father, we have not always been able to resist the temptations of Babylon. Forgive us for the times we have surrendered to its deceitful beauty. May our hearts be so in tune with You that the lure of Babylon no longer attracts us.

Chapter 7 – Babylon in the Time of the Judges

After their settlement in the land of Canaan, Israel was governed by a series of judges. This period of history reveals how much God's people were tempted to turn from the Lord and follow the ways of the people around them. Judges 3 tells us that the Lord tested Israel to see if they would obey His commandments. He did this by leaving five nations in their midst to confirm their commitment to Him:

1 Now these are the nations that the LORD left, to test Israel by them, that is, all in Israel who had not experienced all the wars in Canaan. 2 It was only in order that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, to teach war to those who had not known it before. 3 These are the nations: the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived on Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath. 4 They were for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses. (Judges 3)

According to this passage, it was the will of God to “teach war to those who had not known it before” (Judges 3:2) and to “know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the Lord” (Judges 3:4). The Christian life is a battle against our sinful nature and a world contrary to God's purpose. Temptations abound on this earth. If we are going to mature in our walk with God and grow in intimacy with Him, we need to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil. This requires spiritual warfare. Even Jesus had to battle the devil when He lived on this earth.

In Judges 3, the Lord God was teaching His people how to battle the enemy. He was showing them the nature of that battle for their spirit and soul. These pagan nations around them would tempt them to wander from His purpose, but God intended to “teach war to those who had not known it before” so they could learn how to resist the enemy and have victory over the temptations and snares of sin.

Notice how the Israelites did in this battle:

5 So the people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 6 And their daughters they took to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons, and they served their gods.
(Judges 3)

According to Judges 3:6, the Israelites were defeated in this spiritual battle. Ultimately, they surrendered to the enemy in two ways. First, they took foreign wives and gave their daughters and sons to marry into pagan families. Second, they turned from the true God of Israel and served foreign gods instead. This is a picture of defeat. Israel abandoned God to become like the nations around her. Judges 3:7 summarizes what took place in those days:

7 And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth. (Judges 3)

Before moving on to the response of God, let me take just a moment to reflect on what took place in those days. To do this, let's return to the pagan prophet Balaam from Mesopotamia. There are three references to Balaam in the New Testament. 2 Peter 2:15 speaks about him as one who loved gain from wrongdoing:

15 Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, (2 Peter 2)

Jude 11 repeats the same thing when it says:

11 Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion. (Jude)

Finally, Revelation 2 adds that Balaam taught Israel's enemy how to turn from God by tempting them with immorality and idol worship.

14 But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling

block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. (Revelation 2)

Notice that Jude specifically speaks about “Balaam’s error.” What was Balaam’s error? According to the New Testament verses quoted above, it is the willingness to deny God and the principles of righteousness to satisfy the lust of the flesh and eyes. Revelation 2 tells us that Balaam taught Balak, the enemy of Israel, how to put a stumbling block before God’s people so that they fell into sexual immorality and idol worship.

This is exactly what took place in Judges 3. God’s people willingly abandoned their Creator and the principles of His Word to satisfy the lust of their flesh. They did so for personal gain without any consideration of the purpose of their God for their lives. They took pagan wives and surrendered their daughters to pagan men. Ultimately, they chose to serve pagan gods and bow down to idols. They fell into Balaam’s error.

Judges 3 goes on to show us the response of the Lord to what happened that day:

8 Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia. And the people of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years. (Judges 3)

In His anger, God delivered His people into the hands of the king of Mesopotamia for eight years. These people had, under Moses, broken the bonds of slavery in Egypt. Under Joshua, they had defeated many nations in Canaan and established themselves as a powerful nation. They fell, however, into Balaam’s error and were forced into submission to the king of Mesopotamia, the country of Balaam (see Deuteronomy 23:3-4).

As I reflect on what happened in Judges 3, I cannot help but consider the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 1:

22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and

birds and animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. (Romans 1)

The apostle Paul told the Romans how the men and women of their day chose to exchange the glory of God for idols shaped in the form of birds, animals, and creeping things (Romans 1:22). These individuals followed the lusts of their hearts and dishonoured their bodies with their lustful passions for each other (Romans 1:24-27). According to Paul, they would receive “due penalty for their error” (Romans 1:27). What was their error? The lust of the flesh and eyes that denied the Lord God to follow their evil passions. The error that Paul speaks about here was “Balaam’s error,” as described in Jude 11.

Notice what God did to these individuals in Romans 1:24. He gave them up to their lusts and impurities. He surrendered them to the enemy they had committed themselves to follow.

Let’s return to Judges 3. God’s people had abandoned the fight against evil and surrendered to the lusts of their flesh and heart. They fell into Balaam’s error and bowed down to pagan idols. What did God do? He gave them over to Balaam’s nation—Babylon (Mesopotamia). For eight years, they would serve this foreign nation until they came to see their bondage. Notice what happened after eight years:

9 But when the people of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel, who saved them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother. 10 The Spirit

of the LORD was upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand. And his hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. 11 So the land had rest forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

(Judges 3)

After eight years of servitude to the king of Mesopotamia, the people of God came to realize their need for deliverance. They cried out to the God of Israel to save them. In His mercy and grace, God sent a deliverer by the name of Othniel to set them free from Babylon (Mesopotamia). Judges 3:11 tells us that the result was that that land had rest. It was freed from the oppression that had come from Balaam's error.

We see from Judges 3 how important it is for us to learn how to do battle against the influence of Babylon and the teaching of Balaam, the Mesopotamian prophet. Like Israel, we too fight the idols and immorality of our day. Our children are tempted to turn from God's purpose to the paganism and immorality around them. Balaam's influence is still very real. Babylon represents the call to immorality and idolatry. Many hear its voice and surrender to its temptations. How important it is for us to learn how to battle its lure. How important it is that we teach our children how to do battle against its influence.

For Prayer:

Father, we see from Judges 3 how easy it was for Israel to fall into the temptation of idolatry and immorality. For personal pleasure and gain, they turned their back on You. As a result, You gave them over to the king of Mesopotamia. The lure of Babylon still calls out to us. How important it is that we learn how to take up our arms and battle this temptation daily. Teach us how to do spiritual warfare. Judges 3:2 tells us that it was Your purpose that "the generations of the people of Israel might know war, to teach war to those who had not known it before." Father, show us how to stand firm against the enemy's attacks against our body, soul, and spirit. Help us to learn how to

fight the temptations and attacks of the flesh. Help us teach this to our children so that they, too, would be overcomers against all the influences of Babylon's philosophies in their lives.

Chapter 8 – David's Shame and the Horsemen of Mesopotamia

In 1 Chronicles 19, we have the story of an act of kindness offered by David to the king of Ammon. It appears that Nahash, the king of Ammon, died, and his son Hanun ruled in his place. David decided to send messengers to Hanun to pay his respect after the death of his father:

2 And David said, "I will deal kindly with Hanun the son of Nahash, for his father dealt kindly with me." So David sent messengers to console him concerning his father. And David's servants came to the land of the Ammonites to Hanun to console him. (1 Chronicles 19)

The presence of David's messengers among the Ammonites, however, aroused suspicion. The princes of the land interpreted David's sincere act of compassion as a means of spying out the land with intent to "overthrow":

3 But the princes of the Ammonites said to Hanun, "Do you think, because David has sent comforters to you, that he is honoring your father? Have not his servants come to you to search and to overthrow and to spy out the land?" (1 Chronicles 19)

King Hanun listened to these princes and decided to humiliate David's messengers. In doing this, he showed David that he did not fear him. Capturing David's messengers, the Ammonites shaved them, cut their garments at the hips, and sent them away, exposed to the public. 1 Chronicles 19:5 tells us that these messengers were "greatly ashamed."

When David heard what Hanun had done to his messengers, he sent men to them to comfort them and encouraged them to remain in the city of Jericho until their beards had grown back (1 Chronicles 19:5).

When the Ammonites realized that David was angry with them for this shameful act toward his messengers, they knew that they

needed to protect themselves from retaliation. David's military commander Joab was sent to face the Ammonites in battle. The result of that battle, according to 1 Chronicles 19:18-19, was that David's army killed about 47,000 men, and the Ammonites lost a powerful ally in the nation of Syria.

What is of interest to us in this study is 1 Chronicles 19:6:

6 When the Ammonites saw that they had become a stench to David, Hanun and the Ammonites sent 1,000 talents of silver to hire chariots and horsemen from Mesopotamia, from Aram-maacah, and from Zobah. (1 Chronicles 19)

Notice that when Ammon realized the seriousness of his error, he determined to hire soldiers to protect the nation from Israel and her army. 1 Chronicles 19:6 tells us that they sent 1,000 talents of silver to hire chariots and horsemen from Mesopotamia, Aram-maacah and Zobah.

Soldiers from the region of Mesopotamia would come to support Ammon and defend her against the attack of David. For the profit offered them by Ammon, Babylon (Mesopotamia) would willingly stand with those who had mistreated David's servants. Personal gain outweighed any sense of decency. Money was more important than people or the principles of righteousness.

Once again, we catch just a brief glimpse of the spirit of Babylon. Its lust for possessions and wealth takes priority. It casts off any sense of right and wrong to obtain its riches. It will trample and climb over other human beings to get what it wants. This spirit is never far from us.

For Prayer:

Lord God, teach us how to rebuke an attitude that places personal gain over the dignity and worth of another human being. Give us grace, Lord Jesus, to see how You treated even the lowliest person. Thank you that you took on the form of a servant and willingly laid down Your life for us as sinners when you lived on this earth. Teach

us how to respect one another. Teach us how to sacrifice and care for one another. May our profit and gain never become so important that we trample others to obtain it. Help us to resist this spirit of Babylon in our daily lives. Give us the courage to follow the example of our Lord Jesus, who though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Chapter 9 – Hezekiah and the Babylonian Envoys

In the days of the prophet Isaiah, Hezekiah was king in the nation of Judah. Judah seemed to prosper under his reign, but the king's heart became proud. As a result, the Lord struck him with sickness, and he was at the point of death.

Isaiah came to speak to Hezekiah and told him to set his house in order because he was going to die:

1 In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover.'" (2 Kings 20)

Hearing this news, the king cried out to God for healing. The Lord heard Hezekiah's prayer and sent Isaiah back with another message:

4 And before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: 5 "Turn back, and say to Hezekiah the leader of my people, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD, 6 and I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake." (2 Kings 20)

According to 2 Chronicles 32, however, despite his healing, Hezekiah's proud heart was not fully humbled, and the wrath of God would once again fall on the nation of Judah:

24 In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death, and he prayed to the LORD, and he answered him and gave him a sign. 25 But Hezekiah did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud. Therefore wrath came upon him and Judah and Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 32)

Evidence of the pride of Hezekiah's heart can be seen in what took place after his healing. Merodach-baladan was the son of Balaan, king of Babylon. He sent special envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah when he heard that he was sick (2 Kings 20:12). When these Babylonian envoys came to his home, Hezekiah made it a point to show them all his wealth:

13 And Hezekiah welcomed them, and he showed them all his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his armory, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them. (2 Kings 20).

What is striking here is the phrase, "There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them." This phrase tells us that King Hezekiah spared no effort to show these Babylonians how wealthy he was. Clearly, this was an indication of the pride of his heart.

After this incident, the Lord sent Isaiah the prophet once again to Hezekiah with another message:

16 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD: 17 Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD. 18 And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." (2 Kings 20)

That day, Isaiah prophesied that the days were coming when everything in Hezekiah's house would be carried away to Babylon. Even his sons would be taken away and serve as eunuchs in the palace of the Babylonian king.

Isaiah's warning was clear –Babylon would strip God's people of everything they had and take them captive. It would capture their children, and they would live their lives as its servants. What seems to be clear in this passage is that Hezekiah's heart had already been taken captive by the spirit of Babylon. The lust for possessions and

the pride of life had already sunk their claws deep into his soul. His heart had already been captured.

Many years later, the Lord Jesus, speaking to His disciples, would say:

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? (Matthew 16)

Writing to Timothy, the apostle Paul said:

10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. (1 Timothy 6)

This is what seems to have happened in the life of Hezekiah. Money and wealth began to take over his heart. When the envoys of Babylon came to visit and discovered his wealth, it would not be long before they would come back to take it for themselves. God would give Hezekiah's descendants over to the lusts of the Babylonians. They would strip them of all they had and leave them barren and helpless.

For Prayer:

Father God, we know the temptation of wealth and materialism. It offers us an easy life with no worries or concerns. It tempts us with its beauty but leaves us stripped and barren. Teach us that these worldly possessions can never satisfy the soul. Show us that in surrender to You alone can we find true meaning and satisfaction in life. Set us free from the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

Chapter 10 – Babylon's Profit at Judah's Expense

In the last chapter, we saw how Isaiah prophesied to King Hezekiah that the days were coming when Babylon would carry off all that was in his house. His sons would be among those taken as captives. They would serve as eunuchs in the Babylonian palace (see 2 Kings 24:16-18).

It was under the reign of King Jehoiakim that the prophecy of Isaiah came true. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, invaded the region and made Jehoiakim his servant for three years (2 Kings 24:1). After those three years, Judah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar but was constantly under threat from raiding bands of foreign soldiers and never regained their strength as a nation. When Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin, became king after his father's death, the Babylonians returned and captured Jerusalem. Jehoiachin surrendered to the Babylonians, and he and his mother were taken, as Isaiah prophesied, to Babylon as captives.

2 Kings 24:13-16 describe what took place when Babylon was at Jerusalem in those days:

13 and carried off all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold in the temple of the LORD, which Solomon king of Israel had made, as the LORD had foretold. 14 He carried away all Jerusalem and all the officials and all the mighty men of valor, 10,000 captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths. None remained, except the poorest people of the land. 15 And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon. The king's mother, the king's wives, his officials, and the chief men of the land he took into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. 16 And the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon all the men of valor, 7,000, and the craftsmen and the metal workers, 1,000, all of them strong and fit for war. (2 Kings 24)

Babylon stripped the temple of the Lord of all its treasures. Notice from 2 Kings 24:13 that the Babylonians cut the vessels of God in the temple to pieces showing no respect for the God of Israel or what belonged to Him. Babylon captured all the “men of valour,” craftsmen, and metal workers taking them to Babylon where they would be forced to serve their king. Only the poor and unskilled were left to fend for themselves under the leadership of Zedekiah.

When Zedekiah rebelled against this oppression, the Babylonians returned with even more violence and cruelty in 2 Kings 25. This time they captured Zedekiah, slaughtered his officials, and killed his sons. They even plucked out Zedekiah’s eyes and led him blind into captivity.

2 Chronicles 36 describes what took place in those days in these terms:

17 Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He gave them all into his hand. 18 And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon. 19 And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels. (2 Chronicles 36)

Young men were killed with the sword. The Babylonians showed no compassion for the young women or the aged. Notice in verse 17 that they killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary. In doing this, they defiled the sanctuary of God. After committing this atrocity, they stripped the temple of its articles and burned it to the ground. All buildings of any significance in the city were destroyed and burned. The Babylonians pulled down the city’s defensive walls, opening it up to anyone who wanted to loot.

In those days, Babylon enriched herself by taking Judah’s wealth. Judah’s young men and skilled workers would now serve the

Babylonian cause. They were stripped of their freedom and dignity and would live the rest of their lives as servants and slaves in a foreign land.

We may ask the question: Why did the Lord allow this to happen to His people? The answer lies in 2 Chronicles 36:15-17:

15 The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. 16 But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy.

17 Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He gave them all into his hand. (2 Chronicles 36)

God allowed Babylon to overcome and devastate His people because they had mocked His prophets and despised His words. He gave them over to her enemy's lust for power and wealth. Babylon was God's judgement for rebellion.

Babylon is portrayed here in these passages as a nation lusting for power, wealth, and influence. She would stoop to any level to obtain these "treasures." She robbed and killed to enrich herself. She cared nothing for the suffering of others if she could profit from their loss. Her focus was on herself and her interests; nothing else seemed to matter.

2 Chronicles 36:15-17 tells us that God gave His people over to the Babylonians because they would have nothing to do with His messengers. Instead, they chose to do things their own way and rebelled against Him. Instead of living in submission to God, Judah decided to be her own boss. She lived for herself, her interests, and her goals in life. As a result, God gave them over to a nation more powerful than her, who had that same desire. As Judah cared nothing for God, neither did Babylon care for her. As Israel's only interest was herself, so Babylon's interest was only in enriching herself at Israel's expense. God gave His people over to the very

passions and lusts that ruled her life. The spirit of Babylon would devastate the people of God and strip her of her intimacy with God.

This same spirit of greed, self-centeredness, power, and pleasure shouts daily at us through the media. Our sinful nature craves the fruit of this Babylonian spirit, but it will never lead us to God. The Bible calls us instead to die to ourselves and our interests so that we can experience the greater blessing of living for the Lord and His purposes. Babylon destroyed the nation of Judah and stripped her of her intimacy with God. May we be aware of its influence in our day, lest we too fall under its lure.

For Prayer:

Father, we see in this chapter that Babylon, in its lust for power and possessions, went from one nation to another, ravaging their land and stripping them of wealth and treasures. We see how that same spirit affected the nation of Judah, causing her to turn her back on You in pursuit of her own interests. By allowing Judah to be ravaged, You showed her the true nature of the Babylonian spirit. Teach us, Father, that it is not in pleasing ourselves that we find meaning and purpose in life. Show us that it is only in pursuing You and Your heart that we can know the fullness of life. Give us the grace to resist the lure of materialism, the lust for pleasure and influence so that we can experience the joy of being Your servants instead.

Chapter 11 – Job and the Chaldeans

We come now to the book of Job. The first verse of the book describes the man as one who lived a righteous and holy life:

1 There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. (Job 1)

God blessed Job with seven sons and three daughters (Job 1:2) and made him a wealthy man. Job 1:3 gives us a sense of his wealth when it says:

3 He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. (Job 1)

Notice the phrase, “this man was the greatest of all the people of the east” (verse 3). This greatness, however, did not distract him from his relationship with God. As wealthy as he was, Job continued to honour God in all that he did. What was true for Job, however, was not the case for his children.

Job 1:4 describes the lifestyle of Job’s children:

4 His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. (Job 1)

Job’s children lived the lifestyle of the rich and famous. They loved to eat and drink and apparently did so quite often. This was a great concern for Job. Job 1:5 tells us that after these parties, Job would rise early in the morning to offer burnt offerings for each of his children in case they had, in their drunken state, cursed God and sinned.

5 And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job

said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually. (Job 1)

Job's children did not have the same relationship with God their father had. They fell prey to the lure of riches and what it could buy. They enjoyed their drink and parties. They sought the pleasures life offered. They sought to satisfy the lusts of their flesh and heart. The book of Job provides us with a rare glimpse of the spiritual battle that rages for the hearts and minds of humanity.

In Job 1:6-12, we have a conversation between God and Satan. In this conversation, Satan and God engage in a discussion about Job. Satan told God that the only reason Job feared him was because God blessed him so much. Satan went on to say that if God stripped Job of his blessings, he would curse Him to His face:

11 But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." (Job 1)

In response, God gave Satan permission to take Job's blessings away.

12 And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD. (Job 1)

Satan set his mind to stripping Job of God's blessings to get him to curse God. Satan would do this through a series of four attacks.

The first attack came when a group of Sabeans fell on Job's oxen and donkeys as they were plowing and feeding:

*14 "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them,
15 and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." (Job 1)*

Job 1:3 tells us that Job had 500 yoke of oxen and 500 donkeys. The Sabeans took these by force from Job. In the process of stealing these oxen and donkeys, they also killed some of Job's servants.

The second attack came in the form of fire from heaven. Many commentators see this as some form of lightning. This fire struck Job's sheep and killed them. Verse 16 tells us that the servants who watched those sheep were also killed in this great storm:

16 While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you."
(Job 1)

According to Job 1:7, Job had 7,000 sheep—all those sheep were killed.

The third attack came on Job's camels. Verse 3 tells us that Job owned 3,000 camels. This time Chaldeans took all of Job's camels and killed the servants responsible for their care:

17 While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." (Job 1)

Finally, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the house where Job's sons and daughters were drinking. The house collapsed on top of his children, killing them all. (Job 1:18-19). It was by this means that Job was cruelly stripped of all his possessions.

What is important for us to note here in the context of this study is the reference to the Chaldeans who stole Job's camels. Commenting on Job 1:17, the IVP Bible Background Commentary says this about the Chaldeans:

1:17. Chaldeans. The Chaldeans are known from Assyrian annals as early as the time of Ashurnasirpal II (r. 884-859 B.C.). They appear to have been a seminomadic group that had settled in Babylonia and was successful in controlling the area in the late eighth century B.C. Moreover, they succeeded the Assyrians as the great empire builders of the Near East in the late seventh century B.C. The height of their power came during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II (r. 605-562 B.C.), the destroyer of Jerusalem.

(The NP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament and New Testament 2nd Ed.). Marion, IA: Laridian, Inc., 2014. OT: © 2000 by John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas; NT: © 2014 by Craig S. Keener. All Rights Reserved.)

Notice here that the descendants of the Chaldeans would, under Nebuchadnezzar, become the “destroyer of Jerusalem.” Here in Job 1, we find the ancestors of the nation of Babylon ridding Job of his blessings from God. Babylon as an enemy to the people of God strips them of their blessings. These Chaldeans lusted for possessions and power and were quite willing to take what was not theirs to enrich themselves.

What is striking in this first chapter of Job is the response of Job to this series of tragic events. Though stripped of all his material possessions, Job refused to curse God. The day the news came to him, he fell on his face to the ground and worshipped the Lord his God:

20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. 21 And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” 22 In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. (Job 1)

Job did not serve God for what he could get out of Him. Job’s devotion was much deeper than this. Even if God stripped him of every blessing, his commitment was to worship and honour Him. The temptation of Satan in the Garden of Eden, in the heart of Babylon, was to lust after possessions, influence and pleasure. The words Satan spoke to Eve that day continue to echo around the world; “Eat, and you will be like God. Serve and honour God for what you can get out of Him.”

Job did not live under this Babylonian philosophy. When stripped of his possessions, Satan discovered that his commitment to God remained.

For Prayer:

Lord God, how easy it is for us to focus on the blessings you give. Teach us to be thankful for Your blessings but never to hold them so tightly that they take Your place in our heart. May we love You more than what You do for us. May our devotion to you outweigh our devotion to what you have given us. I ask that you give us the heart of Job –a heart devoted to you in riches and poverty, ease, or pain. Set us free from the pursuit of possessions and comfort. Forgive us for times we have been tempted by the Babylonian spirit to desire possessions, reputation, and pleasures more than You.

Chapter 12 – By the Waters of Babylon

Psalms 137 gives us a picture of what took place in the hearts of God's people when they lived in Babylonian captivity.

The scene begins with a group of Jewish exiles sitting down by the river in Babylon, reflecting on what they had lost.

1 By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. (Psalm 137)

Notice how, as they remember Jerusalem (Zion), their hearts broke. They lived now in one of the richest nations on the earth. Babylon was at the height of its power and wealth, but it offered nothing to its captives despite its great riches. There at the riverside, the people of God wept bitterly. They had lost everything. They lived among the wealth of Babylon but were destitute and broken. Like the prodigal son in Jesus' parable, they found that Babylon offered nothing of any lasting value to them.

Notice what verses two and three tell us about the Babylonians.

2 On the willows there we hung up our lyres. 3 For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" (Psalm 137)

The Babylonians demanded to be entertained by their Jewish captives. Verse three tells us that they "required" them to sing songs of Zion. For these Babylonians, the value of these Jewish captives was in the work they did for them and in how they entertained them. Babylon cared nothing for them as a people but took advantage of them for their pleasure and profit.

For the people of God, these Babylonians were "tormentors." It hurt them deeply to remember what they had lost. There would be no joy in singing songs that reminded them of the blessings of their homeland. "How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?" they exclaimed in verse 4. Singing about what they had lost was agony to them.

The Babylonian captivity reminded God's people of what they had lost under the blessing of God.

5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! 6 Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy! (Psalm 137)

There in Babylon, God's people began to long for Jerusalem and the blessing of their Lord. They had taken this wonderful fellowship with God for granted. Tempted to turn their back on Him, they lusted after other gods. When God gave them over to these gods, however, they were deeply disappointed. Babylon had nothing to offer that God could not give in greater abundance. They could not be content to be slaves of the richest nation on earth when they were children of God. Only under God could they experience the fullness of joy.

As the children of Israel sat by the rivers of Babylon, they remembered how their neighbours had encouraged the Babylonians to destroy their city. They recalled the Edomites who cried out, "Lay it bare, lay it bare, down to its foundations!" (Psalm 137:7). These were the words the Edomites spoke to Babylon as they burned down the city of Jerusalem. These words echoed in their ears as they grieved over the loss of their once-great city. All they could do is ask the Lord for justice; "Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem (Psalm 137:7).

As for Babylon, the thoughts of God's people were very harsh:

8 O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us! 9 Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock! (Psalm 137)

Israel blessed those who would repay Babylon for what it had done to them. They blessed anyone who would take young Babylonian infants and throw them forcefully against a rock. The deep bitterness of Israel toward her captives is evident. Babylon was no paradise. Its riches did not satisfy. Babylon stripped them of everything, demanded that they serve their cause and entertain her troops but offered nothing but death and bitterness in return.

The writer of the book of Proverbs warns his son against the deceitfulness of the adulteress when he says:

21 With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. 22 All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast 23 till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life. 24 And now, O sons, listen to me, and be attentive to the words of my mouth. 25 Let not your heart turn aside to her ways; do not stray into her paths, 26 for many a victim has she laid low, and all her slain are a mighty throng. (Proverbs 7)

The adulteress in these verses persuades with smooth talk and seductive speech, but she destroys whatever she captures. He who falls for her temptations goes unwittingly like an ox to the slaughter. She will cost this man his life.

Many of the people captured by Babylon would never return to their homeland. Like the children of Israel, those who fall prey to Babylon will find themselves bitterly weeping their loss. Babylon will take everything she can from us and leave us empty and dying in return.

For Prayer

Lord God, we confess that we have been attracted by the riches and pleasures this world has to offer. There have been times when we have been tempted to compromise just to get a small taste of what Babylon offers. We ask, however, that you would give us the grace to stand firm in our commitment to you. May we have the courage to resist the allure and temptations of this world when they stand in opposition to Your heart for us as Your children. We pray for loved ones who have been trapped in addictions and pursuits of worldly things. We ask that you help them see that none of these can bring them the fullness they crave. Thank you that in You alone, we can find meaning, purpose, and satisfaction. Thank you for the truth of what the psalmist said in Psalm 16:

11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16)

Chapter 13 – Isaiah’s Words to Babylon

In chapter 9, we examined the words of Isaiah to King Hezekiah. After Hezekiah showed all his treasures to the Babylonian envoys, the prophet told him that the day was coming when they would return, strip the nation of Judah of all its wealth and carry off Judah’s citizens into exile (see 2 Kings 20:16-18).

In Isaiah 11, the prophet now speaks about a time when a “shoot from the stump of Jesse” would arrive. Jesse was the father of David, so this person would be a descendant of David. As the prophecy continues, there is little doubt that the “shoot from the stump of Jesse” was the promised Messiah—the Lord Jesus. What is of particular interest to us here is that Isaiah prophesied that this Messiah would recover his people from the enemy’s hands and gather them together once again.

11 In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea. 12 He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.
(Isaiah 11)

Among the list of nations in verse 11 is the reference to Shinar. Isaiah promises that Babylon would not be able to keep those who belong to the Lord God. As powerful and as influential as she was, she was no match for Israel’s God. Shinar would ultimately be defeated.

In Isaiah 13, the prophet goes into greater detail about the devastation that was to come to Babylon. God was angry with her for her pride and arrogance (verse 3). He would gather a great army against her and destroy the whole land (verses 4,5). This punishment would come through the nation of the Medes:

17 Behold, I am stirring up the Medes against them, who have no regard for silver and do not delight in gold. 18 Their bows will slaughter the young men; they will have no mercy on the fruit of the womb; their eyes will not pity children. (Isaiah 13)

Notice that these Medes, according to Isaiah 13:17, had no regard for silver or gold. The wealth Babylon had accumulated off the backs of many nations would not save them from this judgement of God. The Medes would not pity Babylon. They would slaughter their young men, dash their infants in pieces, and ravage their wives (verse 16). Babylon would be destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah, who fell under the judgement of God in the days of Abraham and Lot (verse 19).

Isaiah goes on in Isaiah 14 to say that in the day of Babylon's defeat, Israel and Judah would rejoice and mock the once-great nation saying:

4 you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon: "How the oppressor has ceased, the insolent fury ceased! 5 The LORD has broken the staff of the wicked, the scepter of rulers, 6 that struck the peoples in wrath with unceasing blows, that ruled the nations in anger with unrelenting persecution. 7 The whole earth is at rest and quiet; they break forth into singing. (Isaiah 14)

Isaiah pictures a watchman waiting at his post in Isaiah 21. Day after day, he awaits news from afar. Finally, that day comes, and the words he longed to hear are proclaimed to him:

9 "Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the carved images of her gods she has shattered to the ground." (Isaiah 21)

These Chaldeans (Babylonians), according to Isaiah, were destined for wild beasts (Isaiah 23:13). God would, for the sake of His people, bring down the nation of Babylon with all their wealth:

*14 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:
"For your sake I send to Babylon and bring them all down as fugitives, even the Chaldeans, in the ships in which they rejoice.
(Isaiah 43)*

The nation that had ravaged the people of God would be humiliated and stripped bare.

1 Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans! For you shall no more be called tender and delicate. 2 Take the millstones and grind flour, put off your veil, strip off your robe, uncover your legs, pass through the rivers. 3 Your nakedness shall be uncovered, and your disgrace shall be seen. I will take vengeance, and I will spare no one. (Isaiah 47)

The once-proud Babylon now sits in the dirt with no throne. She who enslaved nations now pushed the millstone to grind flour as a servant. She who had enriched herself off the backs of others now works naked and lives in disgrace.

In Babylon's pride, she felt she would be "mistress forever" (Isaiah 47:7). Listen, however, to the prophecy of Isaiah about Babylon's future:

7 You said, "I shall be mistress forever," so that you did not lay these things to heart or remember their end. 8 Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures, who sit securely, who say in your heart, "I am, and there is no one besides me; I shall not sit as a widow or know the loss of children": 9 These two things shall come to you in a moment, in one day; the loss of children and widowhood shall come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and the great power of your enchantments. 10 You felt secure in your wickedness; you said, "No one sees me"; your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray, and you said in your heart, "I am, and there is no one besides me." 11 But evil shall come upon you, which you will not know how to charm away; disaster shall fall upon you, for which you will not be able to atone; and ruin shall come upon you suddenly, of which you know nothing. (Isaiah 47)

Isaiah predicted that two things would happen to Babylon. First, she would lose her children and become a widow (verse 9), and second, ruin would come suddenly upon her (verse 11).

Isaiah describes Babylon here as a “lover of pleasure” (verse 8). She felt she could indulge in the sinful pleasures of this world, and no one would see her (verse 10). She could not hide her evil from the God of Israel. The day would come when disaster would fall upon her. On that day, she would not be able to charm her way out of her punishment, nor would she be able to pay for a more lenient sentence (verse 11), for the God of Israel was not tempted by these things and would judge her according to her ways.

Babylon ravaged God’s people. She had stripped them of their wealth. She forced them into exile to work for her and entertain her in her pursuit of wealth, power, and pleasure. Isaiah’s reminds Israel of the blessing she had lost to this greedy and pleasure-loving nation:

17 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: “I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go. 18 Oh that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea; 19 your offspring would have been like the sand, and your descendants like its grains; their name would never be cut off or destroyed from before me.”

20 Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it out to the end of the earth; say, “The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!” (Isaiah 48)

The Lord taught Israel how to profit and walk in His purpose (verse 17). Instead of listening to God, however, Israel was tempted by the world with its pleasures and riches. These pleasures and wealth did not bring them the profit they anticipated. God reminded them in verse 18 that had they paid attention to Him, their offspring would be like the sand of the seashore, and their name would never be cut off. Now instead of rejoicing in the blessing of God, Babylon, the lover of pleasure, power, and wealth, had left them destitute.

Notice the cry of the Lord in Isaiah 48:20: “Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea.” God’s people had no business with Babylon. The Lord had redeemed them from its influence, and they would find no

lasting benefit or joy in its philosophy. Their hope and profit would only be in what the Lord their God taught them. He would lead them to peace like a river, righteousness like waves of the sea, and offspring like the sand of their beaches (verses 17,18).

We see here that the future for Babylon was very bleak. She was a “lover of pleasure” and enjoyed great wealth, but all of this would ultimately be destroyed, and she would be left with nothing. Isaiah warned his people about the dangers of Babylon and its philosophy. A whole generation of Israelites, however, lost everything because the temptation of Babylon was greater than their desire for God.

For Prayer:

Father God, we learn from Isaiah that Babylon and the love of pleasure, power and wealth can offer no lasting benefit to the child of God. If anything, it will strip us of our true blessing and leave us destitute and barren. Help us not to fall prey to Babylon’s temptation. All around us, we see men and women caught up in the pursuit of pleasure, possessions, and power. Give us the grace to see that there is something of far greater value. You have freed us from sin and this world. We now belong to you. Help us to listen to your teaching and find our lasting pleasure and delight in You alone.

Chapter 14 – Jeremiah's Call to Submit to Babylon

Of all the prophets in the Old Testament, Jeremiah was one of the closest to Babylon. He ministered in the days when the Babylonians captured Jerusalem and took her citizens captive. Like other prophets before him, the Lord told Jeremiah that the day was coming when He would punish His people for their sin and rebellion against Him. On one occasion, the Lord told the prophet to take a potter's vessel and break it before the people of Judah, telling them that this is what the Lord would do to them:

10 "Then you shall break the flask in the sight of the men who go with you, 11 and shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended. Men shall bury in Topheth because there will be no place else to bury. 12 Thus will I do to this place, declares the LORD, and to its inhabitants, making this city like Topheth. 13 The houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah— all the houses on whose roofs offerings have been offered to all the host of heaven, and drink offerings have been poured out to other gods—shall be defiled like the place of Topheth.'"
(Jeremiah 19)

The words and illustration of the broken vessel were not well received. When Pashhur, the priest, heard the words of Jeremiah, he beat him and put him in stocks (Jeremiah 20:1-2).

When Jeremiah was released the next day from the stocks, the Lord gave him a message for Pashhur:

4 For thus says the LORD: Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends. They shall fall by the sword of their enemies while you look on. And I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon. He shall carry them captive to Babylon and shall strike them down with the sword. 5 Moreover, I will give all the

wealth of the city, all its gains, all its prized belongings, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah into the hand of their enemies, who shall plunder them and seize them and carry them to Babylon. 6 And you, Pashhur, and all who dwell in your house, shall go into captivity. To Babylon you shall go, and there you shall die, and there you shall be buried, you and all your friends, to whom you have prophesied falsely.” (Jeremiah 20)

Jeremiah prophesied that Judah would be handed over to the Babylonians. She would strike them with the sword and plunder her wealth. Pashhur, the priest, would be taken captive and brought to Babylon.

What is striking about the prophecies of Jeremiah is that he told Judah that it was the Lord their God who was sending the Babylonians against them:

4 ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands and with which you are fighting against the king of Babylon and against the Chaldeans who are besieging you outside the walls. And I will bring them together into the midst of this city. 5 I myself will fight against you with outstretched hand and strong arm, in anger and in fury and in great wrath. 6 And I will strike down the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast. They shall die of a great pestilence. (Jeremiah 21)

Notice how God told His people through Jeremiah that He would fight against them in “fury and in great wrath.” God was sending the Babylonians against them because of their rebellion against Him and His purpose.

What is even more striking is that Jeremiah told the people of Judah that they were not to resist Babylon but submit to the ravishing of her land and her captivity:

8 “And to this people you shall say: ‘Thus says the LORD: Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death. 9 He who stays in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, but he who goes out and surrenders to the Chaldeans who are besieging you shall live and shall have his life as a prize of war. 10

For I have set my face against this city for harm and not for good, declares the LORD: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire.’ (Jeremiah 21)

For some time, God would use Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, to punish Judah for her sin. Notice the reference to “Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant,” in Jeremiah 25:

... 8 “Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, 9 behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the LORD, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these surrounding nations. I will devote them to destruction, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. (Jeremiah 25)

While God allowed Judah’s enemy to overcome her and strip her of her possessions, Babylon was not given full control. God used Babylon to show His people that they could have no lasting peace or fullness of life apart from Him, but He would not leave them with Babylon forever. Jeremiah prophesied that God would turn His hand against Babylon after seventy years and make their land a waste.

10 Moreover, I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp. 11 This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. 12 Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste. (Jeremiah 25)

Babylon’s destiny was sealed. According to Jeremiah, she would become an everlasting waste. She had her moment of glory, but that glory would not last. She had become a great enemy to many, but her end would come suddenly.

Jeremiah called his people to submit to God’s discipline through Babylon. He prophesied that God would punish any nation that did not serve Babylon and accept His discipline through them:

8 *“But if any nation or kingdom will not serve this Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, I will punish that nation with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence, declares the LORD, until I have consumed it by his hand. (Jeremiah 27)*

Jeremiah's prophecy did not go over well in Judah. False prophets such as Hananiah told the people that they would break the Babylonian yoke within two years and be restored to prosperity in Jerusalem (see Jeremiah 28:1-4)

Jeremiah, however, writing to captives in Babylon, told them to settle into their lives and seek the prosperity of their enemy:

4 *“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah 29)*

According to Jeremiah, no war waged on Babylon would succeed:

5 *And he shall take Zedekiah to Babylon, and there he shall remain until I visit him, declares the LORD. Though you fight against the Chaldeans, you shall not succeed?” (Jeremiah 32)*

Jeremiah suffered tremendously for the words he spoke. Babylon was Judah's enemy, and Jeremiah's encouragement to surrender to her cruelty was not appreciated. We have already seen how he was put in stocks for preaching submission to the enemy. In Jeremiah 37, we discover that he was also thrown in prison for his prophecies:

13 *When he was at the Benjamin Gate, a sentry there named Irijah the son of Shelemiah, son of Honanie, seized Jeremiah the prophet, saying, “You are deserting to the Chaldeans.” 14 And Jeremiah said, “It is a lie; I am not deserting to the Chaldeans.” But Irijah would not listen to him and seized Jeremiah and brought him to the*

officials. 15 And the officials were enraged at Jeremiah, and they beat him and imprisoned him in the house of Jonathan the secretary, for it had been made a prison. (Jeremiah 37)

Not content with Jeremiah being in prison, the leaders of Judah approached the king and asked that he be put to death because, in their mind, he was not seeking the welfare of the people but siding with their enemy:

1 Now Shephatiah the son of Mattan, Gedaliah the son of Pashhur, Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur the son of Malchiah heard the words that Jeremiah was saying to all the people: 2 "Thus says the LORD: He who stays in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, but he who goes out to the Chaldeans shall live. He shall have his life as a prize of war, and live. 3 Thus says the LORD: This city shall surely be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon and be taken." 4 Then the officials said to the king, "Let this man be put to death, for he is weakening the hands of the soldiers who are left in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man is not seeking the welfare of this people, but their harm." (Jeremiah 38)

When the king gave Jeremiah over to these leaders, they threw him into an abandoned cistern and left him to die.

As predicted, Babylon captured the city of Jerusalem. Skilled workers and influential citizens were taken captive and brought back to Babylon, where they would remain for seventy years. Jeremiah, however, was left in Judah, where he would continue to minister to his people.

Jeremiah's words about Babylon did not end when the people were sent into exile. He prophesied that after seventy years, the hand of God would judge Babylon for her sin. Speaking in Jeremiah 50, the prophet said:

1 The word that the LORD spoke concerning Babylon, concerning the land of the Chaldeans, by Jeremiah the prophet: 2 "Declare among the nations and proclaim, set up a banner and proclaim, conceal it not, and say: 'Babylon is taken, Bel is put to shame,

Merodach is dismayed. Her images are put to shame, her idols are dismayed.’ (Jeremiah 50)

According to Jeremiah, the Lord was preparing a coalition of great nations to plunder Babylon:

9 For behold, I am stirring up and bringing against Babylon a gathering of great nations, from the north country. And they shall array themselves against her. From there she shall be taken. Their arrows are like a skilled warrior who does not return empty-handed.

10 Chaldea shall be plundered; all who plunder her shall be sated, declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 50)

God would set a snare for Babylon, and she would be caught in His trap:

23 How the hammer of the whole earth is cut down and broken! How Babylon has become a horror among the nations! 24 I set a snare for you and you were taken, O Babylon, and you did not know it; you were found and caught, because you opposed the LORD.

(Jeremiah 50)

As powerful as Babylon was, she would be “cut down and broken.” Babylon the Great would be destroyed:

1 Thus says the LORD: “Behold, I will stir up the spirit of a destroyer against Babylon, against the inhabitants of Leb-kamai, 2 and I will send to Babylon winnowers, and they shall winnow her, and they shall empty her land, when they come against her from every side on the day of trouble. (Jeremiah 51)

Jeremiah prophesied that God would take vengeance on Babylon, dry up her sea and leave her as a heap of ruins:

36 Therefore thus says the LORD: “Behold, I will plead your cause and take vengeance for you. I will dry up her sea and make her fountain dry, 37 and Babylon shall become a heap of ruins, the haunt of jackals, a horror and a hissing, without inhabitant. (Jeremiah 51)

Jeremiah’s prophecies about Babylon can be confusing. His call to submit to her and her destruction were perplexing for the people of Judah in his day. What we need to understand, however, is that

God's people had turned their back on Him. They had angered God by their insistence on being like the pagan nations around them. Israel worshipped foreign gods and chose to live like their neighbours, abandoning the law of God.

God chose to punish His people for their sins by surrendering her to the kind of people she wanted to become. Babylon was a power-hungry, pleasuring-seeking nation that lusted for wealth and possessions. God surrendered His people to Babylon to punish and teach her that this was not His purpose for her life. Living in the wealthiest and most powerful nation on the earth at that time, God's people would come to understand what they were missing. They would serve the Babylonian cause for seventy years, always longing for her homeland and grieving over her loss.

When the seventy years were over, God would show them what would happen to the nation that served power, pleasure and possessions and turned from the God of Israel. They would watch as Babylon the great was destroyed. They would see how futile it was to trust in worldly wealth, power and influence. As powerful as Babylon was, she would fall. Her wealth would not protect her from her enemies. Babylon's wealth and influence would all fail her in the end. She who tempted the world would end up deserted and barren. There was no lasting hope in Babylon. This is a lesson we all need to learn. May God give us the discernment to see the futility of Babylon's pleasures. Only in the Lord God can we experience fullness of life.

For Prayer:

Lord God, we have all been tempted by the attractions of this world. Our flesh longs for satisfaction, but all that the world offers is temporary. Teach us not to waste our lives living for the things of this world. Help us understand that only by living for You can we find the satisfaction we need. Father how often has our Christian life been compromised by the world, its pleasures, and its possessions. Help us to see in You the true treasure our heart longs to obtain. Thank

you for the wonderful things you have given us on this earth. Teach us, however, not to allow these things to stand between us and a deep and intimate relationship with You.

Chapter 15 – Ezekiel: Lusting After Babylon

Unlike Jeremiah, the prophet Ezekiel went into exile in Babylon. He began his prophecy by stating that he was among the exiles in the land of the Chaldeans. It was while he was in Babylon that the Lord began to speak through him.

1 In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. 2 On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), 3 the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the Chebar canal, and the hand of the LORD was upon him there. (Ezekiel 1)

In the first of Ezekiel's visions, he saw four living creatures who had the form of a man with wings. Each of these creatures had a different face – a human, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. Ezekiel saw a set of wheels beside these creatures that followed them wherever they went. While these creatures and wheels were awesome, they were nothing compared to what the prophet saw above them. He describes a great throne with someone in human form whose appearance was like fire and brightness. Ezekiel describes this as the "likeness of the glory of the Lord" (Ezekiel 1:28). In fact, upon seeing this, the prophet fell to his face on the ground:

26 And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. 27 And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him. 28 Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I

*saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.
(Ezekiel 1)*

The Lord God spoke to Ezekiel that day and called him into a prophetic ministry. What is important for us to note, however, is that right there in the Babylonian captivity, we see evidence of the presence of the Lord. God punished His people by sending the Babylonians, but He would not abandon them in their exile. He revealed His presence to Ezekiel and commissioned him to be His servant in a time of tremendous unrest for the people of God.

God used Ezekiel's actions to illustrate what Babylon would do to his people. We have an example of this in chapter 12 of his prophecy:

3 As for you, son of man, prepare for yourself an exile's baggage, and go into exile by day in their sight. You shall go like an exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house. 4 You shall bring out your baggage by day in their sight, as baggage for exile, and you shall go out yourself at evening in their sight, as those do who must go into exile. 5 In their sight dig through the wall and bring your baggage out through it. 6 In their sight you shall lift the baggage upon your shoulder and carry it out at dusk. You shall cover your face that you may not see the land, for I have made you a sign for the house of Israel." (Ezekiel 12)

God called the prophet to prepare an "exile's baggage." In other words, Ezekiel was to pack in haste and take what an exile would take if they had to walk at the point of a sword to Babylon. He was to bring this baggage out so that everyone could see it, dig a hole in the city wall and take those bags out with him through that hole. This was to illustrate what would happen to the king of Judah when Babylon captured the city.

In Ezekiel 4, the Lord asked Ezekiel to draw a picture of the city of Jerusalem on a brick. He was then to build siegeworks against that picture with battering rams and mounds of earth. Again, this would illustrate what would happen to Jerusalem when Babylon invaded:

1 "And you, son of man, take a brick and lay it before you, and engrave on it a city, even Jerusalem. 2 And put siegeworks against it, and build a siege wall against it, and cast up a mound against it. Set camps also against it, and plant battering rams against it all around. 3 And you, take an iron griddle, and place it as an iron wall between you and the city; and set your face toward it, and let it be in a state of siege, and press the siege against it. This is a sign for the house of Israel. (Ezekiel 4)

On another occasion, the Lord told Ezekiel to pass a barber's razor over his head and beard. He was to take one-third of the hair and burn it. He was to strike a second third with a sword. The final third was to be scattered to the wind.

1 "And you, O son of man, take a sharp sword. Use it as a barber's razor and pass it over your head and your beard. Then take balances for weighing and divide the hair. 2 A third part you shall burn in the fire in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are completed. And a third part you shall take and strike with the sword all around the city. And a third part you shall scatter to the wind, and I will unsheathe the sword after them. 3 And you shall take from these a small number and bind them in the skirts of your robe. 4 And of these again you shall take some and cast them into the midst of the fire and burn them in the fire. From there a fire will come out into all the house of Israel. (Ezekiel 5)

The shaving of Ezekiel's head and beard was an act of humiliation. The people who saw the prophet would have understood this. God used this practical illustration to show what would happen to His people. They would be humiliated, their city would be burned, and they would be killed by the sword and scattered from their homeland into exile in Babylon.

Probably one of the most shocking illustrations of God's judgment comes in Ezekiel 24. Here that word of the Lord came to Ezekiel, saying:

16 "Son of man, behold, I am about to take the delight of your eyes away from you at a stroke; yet you shall not mourn or weep, nor shall

your tears run down. 17 Sigh, but not aloud; make no mourning for the dead. Bind on your turban, and put your shoes on your feet; do not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men.” (Ezekiel 24)

God told his servant that He would take away the desire of his heart. Ezekiel 24:18 tells us that the desire of Ezekiel's heart was his wife. God forbade the prophet to weep or mourn in any way for her, telling him that this is what would happen to his people. They would lose what they treasure most in life, their nation, their sons and daughters, and their husbands and wives. They would not be given the privilege of mourning their loss but would be driven from their homeland into exile.

In Jeremiah, those who remained in Jerusalem after the Babylonian invasion turned to Egypt for support. Jeremiah prophesied that if they did so, they would perish (see Jeremiah 42). God expected His people to submit to Babylon and not trust in any other nation to deliver them. Ezekiel prophesied a similar thing when he told them that God would break the arms of Egypt by strengthening Babylon against them:

22 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt and will break his arms, both the strong arm and the one that was broken, and I will make the sword fall from his hand.

23 I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them through the countries. 24 And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put my sword in his hand, but I will break the arms of Pharaoh, and he will groan before him like a man mortally wounded. 25 I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, but the arms of Pharaoh shall fall. Then they shall know that I am the LORD, when I put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon and he stretches it out against the land of Egypt. (Ezekiel 30)

In the day when God punished His people, He would strip all human support from them. There would be no help for them from Egypt. They would drink the cup of God's judgement full strength.

The prophet Ezekiel paints a grave picture of the captivity of Jerusalem. God's people would leave with only an "exile's baggage."

Their homes and fields were burned. The sword of Babylon had taken their husbands, wives, and children. Now those who remained were scattered into exile without anyone to support or encourage them in their trial.

The wrath of God was not without reason. Ezekiel 23 explains why God was so angry with Judah. After seeing how God had devastated her sister Israel in the north, Judah still refused to learn her lesson. Despite the fall of Israel to the Assyrians, Judah continued to rebel against God. Ezekiel compares Judah to a whore who lusted after the Babylonians:

13 And I saw that she was defiled; they both took the same way. 14 But she carried her whoring further. She saw men portrayed on the wall, the images of the Chaldeans portrayed in vermilion, 15 wearing belts on their waists, with flowing turbans on their heads, all of them having the appearance of officers, a likeness of Babylonians whose native land was Chaldea. 16 When she saw them, she lusted after them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea. 17 And the Babylonians came to her into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their whoring lust. And after she was defiled by them, she turned from them in disgust. 18 When she carried on her whoring so openly and flaunted her nakedness, I turned in disgust from her, as I had turned in disgust from her sister. (Ezekiel 23)

Judah lusted after Babylon and her ways. God gave her over to her lusts, and Babylon ravaged her. Babylon defiled her and stripped her bare. God's heart was broken as he watched her heart lust after Babylon and its ways. Because of her whoring heart, God turned from her in disgust.

Ezekiel 37 has some important things to tell us about the devastation that took place due to the Babylonian invasion. In this chapter, the Lord gave Ezekiel a vision. In this vision, the Lord brought him into a valley filled with bones. The scene is that of a great battle that had taken place some time ago. The bones were very dry, and the flesh had rotted off the corpses strewn across the battle sight. As Ezekiel took in the scene before him, the Lord asked a question:

3 And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" (Ezekiel 37)

When Ezekiel told the Lord that only He had the answer to that question, the Lord asked him to prophesy over the bones. He explained that as he did, the bones would come alive again (Ezekiel 37:3-6). Ezekiel 37:7-10 describes what took place in Ezekiel's vision:

7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. 8 And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. 9 Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. (Ezekiel 37)

God explained to Ezekiel in verses 11-14 that these bones represented his people who had said:

11 "Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.' (Ezekiel 37)

The day was coming when the Lord would restore life and hope to His people. The dead bones would live again under the blessing of the Lord God (see Ezekiel 37:12-14).

What is important for us to see in Ezekiel is how God's people lusted after Babylon. They were attracted to her lifestyle, riches, and power. To pursue her lust, however, she had to turn from the one true God. She could not follow her desire for Babylon and be faithful to her Heavenly Husband. When she abandoned Him for her lust, God turned away in disgust. Babylon ravaged and stripped God's people bare. Nebuchadnezzar brought her to his homeland, where she discovered that his interest in her was merely to use her for his pleasure, entertainment, and profit. God's people lost everything in their pursuit of Babylon.

Meanwhile, Judah's one true husband, always faithful, promised that He would pursue her, despite her unfaithfulness. He would never forget her. The day was coming when He would rescue His broken wife and restore her to her homeland where He would continue to care for her and love her.

Ezekiel portrays Babylon as a lustful soldier, taking advantage of his victims, stripping them bare, and deserting them when he had taken what he wanted. Judah would find out that hard way that the lure of Babylon was not what she had anticipated.

We need to take Ezekiel's warning seriously. The pleasures, riches and influence the world offers will disappoint in the end. Many before us have taken this route and ended up as dry as the bones Ezekiel found in the valley. Only the breath of God can give us the life we desire. It may not always be an easy life, but it is a life filled with joy, peace, and security. It is a life that God created us to experience. May God give us the grace to resist the temptations before us so that we can experience the fullness God intends for us as His children.

For Prayer:

Lord God, Ezekiel shows us that while Babylon offers us pleasures and possessions, it will ultimately lead to barrenness and death. With all it offers, this world cannot save our souls or bring the satisfaction You intend. We have heard the call of Babylon. We confess that there have been times when we have paused for a moment to consider her claims. We admit that there have been occasions when we have turned our back on You and lusted after Babylon and what it offers. Give us grace, Lord God, to turn to You in these times. Teach us that our allegiance is to You alone. Thank you that in You, there is abundant life. May we learn to rejoice in You and love you in such a way that the attractions of this world mean nothing to us.

Chapter 16 — Daniel: Babylon's Call to Compromise

We have seen how Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Judah and took the skilled workers and influential citizens captive. He brought them with him to Babylon to serve the cause of his nation. Consider the opening paragraph of the book of Daniel in this context:

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. 3 Then the king commanded Ashpenoz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, 4 youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans 5 The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. 6 Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah, (Daniel 1)

Daniel was one of the young men taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar. Here in the opening paragraph of the book of Daniel, we see how the king commanded his chief eunuch to find young men among the Jewish captives who were good-looking, skilful, and intelligent. He was to take these men and train them over three years in the language and literature of the Chaldeans (Babylonians). At the end of this time of training and indoctrination, these young men would become servants of the king.

While in many ways, being selected for such a prestigious training could be seen as a privilege, remember that these young Jewish

men would be required to put aside their Jewish ways and adopt a Babylonian philosophy of life. In essence, this training aimed to make these young men Babylonians in thought and culture.

While many of these young men willingly turned from their Jewish culture and faith to adopt this new life, Daniel held firmly to his roots. He resolved in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's food.

8 But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. (Daniel 1)

Babylon was asking Daniel to deny his faith and change his ways. They offered him rich and luxurious food, but Daniel rejected it. This was a great concern for the chief eunuch, who was fearful of what the king would say if Daniel's health began to fail. Daniel proposed, however, that the eunuch put him on a diet of vegetables and water only for ten days as a trial. At the end of this time, Daniel was in better health than all the other youth. God proved Himself to Daniel when he determined to be faithful.

Daniel 2 recounts how Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that troubled him very much. He called the nation's wise men to interpret this dream for him, and when they could not do so, he ordered that they be killed. When they came to get Daniel and his friends to kill them, Daniel offered to interpret the king's dream. Notice what took place when Daniel successfully interpreted this dream:

46 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. 47 The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery." 48 Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. (Daniel 2)

This new authority stirred up the jealousy of the Babylonians against the Jews. They sought an opportunity to destroy them as a result.

The time came when Nebuchadnezzar had a large image made of himself. The king's officials gathered for the dedication of this great image. When everyone had gathered, a proclamation was made:

4 And the herald proclaimed aloud, 'You are commanded, O peoples, notions, and languages, 5 that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.
"(Daniel 3)

That day, every Babylonian official was to bow down and "worship the golden image".

Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Anyone who refused to do so would be cast into a burning fiery furnace. Babylon demanded submission. They required that every knee worship its idol of gold.

Present that day were Daniel's friends. They refused to compromise in their faith, and the news of this refusal came to the king. Daniel 3:8 tells us that certain Chaldeans "maliciously accused the Jews."

8 Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. (Daniel 3)

The word "malicious" used here shows us the depth of hatred the Babylonians experienced toward anyone who would not submit to their cause. When news of Daniel's friends reached the king's ears, he demanded that they be cast into the fiery furnace. We are quite familiar with the story of how God protected Daniel's friends in that furnace, and their lives were miraculously spared. Babylon demanded that all who served under her conform to her standards and ideas. Daniel's friends risked their lives by refusing to compromise.

As Daniel continued to distinguish himself even under the reign of King Darius, the king determined that he would set him over the whole kingdom:

3 Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. (Daniel 6)

This promotion again stirred up the other officials against Daniel, and they immediately sought a means to find fault with him. This proved to be a huge undertaking because of Daniel's exemplary life:

4 Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. (Daniel 6)

The officials determined that the only way to find any fault in Daniel was in connection with his faith in the God of Israel (see Daniel 6:5). They set up a plan to proclaim an ordinance in all the land that for thirty days, anyone who worshipped any god except King Darius was to be cast into a lion's den (Daniel 6:6-8). The king agreed and signed the ordinance into law.

Once again, Daniel is placed in a situation where he had to choose between the king's ordinance and His God. Daniel 6:10 was his response:

10 When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. (Daniel 6)

Daniel would not compromise his faith to save his life. As we know from the story of Daniel, God would again prove faithful to him, and when he was thrown into the den of lions, God protected him so that he was not harmed.

What does the book of Daniel teach us about Babylon? It shows us that those who are captured by it will be called upon to compromise their faith. Babylon sought to retrain Daniel and his friends, demanding that they turn from their faith in God. They refused to do so. Babylon demanded that they bow down to its image of gold.

Again, Daniel's friends risked their lives and refused. King Darius demanded that Daniel compromise his faith and worship him, but Daniel chose to be cast into the den of hungry lions rather than be unfaithful to the God of Israel.

Babylon demands compromise. We enjoy its privileges at the cost of our faith and relationship with God. We must be willing to exchange its succulent meat and wine for vegetables and water. We risk our jobs and positions for the fiery furnace. We face the den of lions if we do not compromise. The temptation is great, but those who truly belong to the Lord will risk everything for Him. They will not exchange the privileges of Babylon for their relationship with God.

For Prayer:

Lord God, we see all around us the privileges and riches this world has to offer. We thank you that we have even enjoyed some of those privileges as your blessing to us. Lord, we pray, however, that these blessings would never take Your place. We ask that nothing this world has to offer will make us compromise in our relationship with You. Teach us what it means to see You as our greatest treasure. Give us the grace to be uncompromising when it comes to our walk with You. May we be given the grace to risk everything this world has to offer to know You and walk faithfully with You. Help us to resist the lure of Babylon to compromise our faith.

Chapter 17 – The Fleeting Promises of Babylon

The minor prophets of the Old Testament knew that God would judge His people through Babylon. The prophet Micah said:

10 Writhe and groan, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor, for now you shall go out from the city and dwell in the open country; you shall go to Babylon. There you shall be rescued; there the LORD will redeem you from the hand of your enemies. (Micah 4)

Micah prophesied that the day would come when Zion would be in anguish like a woman in labour. They would be taken to Babylon, but God would not abandon them in their exile. The day would come when God would rescue them and redeem them from the hands of her enemy. The experience, however, would be very painful.

As the prophet Habakkuk examined the world around him, he saw violence and injustice everywhere. In the opening paragraphs of his book, he cried out to God, asking why He did not intervene. The response of the Lord was not what Habakkuk expected:

5 "Look among the nations and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told. 6 For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own. 7 They are dreaded and fearsome; their justice and dignity go forth from themselves. 8 Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than the evening wolves; their horsemen press proudly on. Their horsemen come from afar; they fly like an eagle swift to devour. 9 They all come for violence, all their faces forward. They gather captives like sand. 10 At kings they scoff, and at rulers they laugh. They laugh at every fortress, for they pile up earth and take it. (Habakkuk 1)

God told the prophet Habakkuk that if he were perplexed by what he saw that day, he would never be able to understand what was about to happen. God would raise up the Chaldeans (Babylonians), and

they would ravage the land. Notice how God describes the Chaldeans. They were a bitter people who seized dwellings that were not their own (verse 6). They were dreaded and fearsome (verse 7). For them, justice was only what pleased themselves (verse 7). They were a fierce and proud people who came to devour (verse 8). They were filled with violence and took captives like the sand of the seashore (verse 9).

We see here the other side of prosperous Babylon. They basked in their entertainment and pleasures. They were at the top of the world, and people bowed to their every wish. To get to this point, however, they had ravaged and pillaged nations. They had murdered and looted. Their only concern was for themselves, their prosperity, and their pleasures. Babylon tempted her prey with pleasure and riches, but she was not someone to play with. She was cruel, violent and would think nothing of destroying those who joined her if it suited her.

In Habakkuk 2, the prophet warned the Chaldeans (Babylon) of their coming judgement.

6 "Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own—for how long? — and loads himself with pledges!" 7 Will not your debtors suddenly arise, and those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoil for them. 8 Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. 9 "Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to be safe from the reach of harm! 10 You have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples; you have forfeited your life. 11 For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the woodwork respond. 12 "Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity! 15 "Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink—you pour out your wrath and make them drunk, in order to gaze at their nakedness! 16 You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink, yourself, and show your uncircumcision! The cup in the LORD's right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory! 17 The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beasts

that terrified them, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. (Habakkuk 2)

In these verses, Habakkuk shows us that Babylon's prey would one day turn against her. Those she devoured would rebel and destroy her. The judgement of God would fall. There was no hope for Babylon. She offered temporary pleasures and riches, but all this would one day be stripped away.

While Babylon plundered God's people, Habakkuk prophesied that they would revolt against their cruel master. The Lord would come to their defence and set them free. This is also what the prophet Zechariah predicted when he said:

6 Up! Up! Flee from the land of the north, declares the LORD. For I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heavens, declares the LORD. 7 Up! Escape to Zion, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon. 8 For thus said the LORD of hosts, after his glory sent me to the nations who plundered you, for he who touches you touches the apple of his eye: 9 "Behold, I will shake my hand over them, and they shall become plunder for those who served them. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me. (Zechariah 2)

Zion was the "apple of God's eye," and He would not abandon her to the hands of a cruel master. Babylon's grip on His people would be broken, and she would become plunder for His people. The call goes out: "Flee from the land of the north, escape to Zion you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon." God challenges His people to turn from Babylon and its influences. He pleads with her to return to Him. That call still resounds to all who have been deceived by the riches and pleasures of this world.

The prophet Zechariah had a vision about a woman in a basket. Perplexed about this vision, he inquired about its meaning. A voice responded:

6 "This is their iniquity in all the land." 7 And behold, the leaden cover was lifted, and there was a woman sitting in the basket! 8 And he said, "This is Wickedness." And he thrust her back into the

*basket, and thrust down the leaden weight on its opening.
(Zechariah 5)*

As Zechariah watched in his vision, he saw two angels with wings approach. They lifted the basket and carried it away. Zechariah called out to an angel in his vision and asked where they were taking the women in the basket. The angel responded:

11 He said to me, "To the land of Shinar, to build a house for it. And when this is prepared, they will set the basket down there on its base." (Zechariah 5)

The basket was going to Shinar in Babylon. The angel told Zechariah that they would prepare a house for it there. However we interpret this vision of Zechariah, what we see is that this basket of wickedness would be sent to Shinar where a permanent dwelling would be prepared for it. Shinar is the home of wickedness.

There is one final passage I would like to examine in the prophecy of Zechariah. In chapter 6, the word of the Lord came to the prophet, saying:

10 "Take from the exiles Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah, who have arrived from Babylon, and go the same day to the house of Josiah, the son of Zephaniah. 11 Take from them silver and gold, and make a crown, and set it on the head of Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. (Zechariah 6)

Notice that exiles had arrived from Babylon. God asked Zechariah to go to them and make a crown of silver and gold for the head of Joshua, the high priest. Where did these exiles get these precious metals? They had taken it from their place of exile. We see here a fulfilment of the prophecy of Habakkuk, who prophesied that Babylon would be plundered by those she had plundered. The wealth Babylon had taken from God's people would be restored to them.

Zechariah also prophesied that another temple would be built by a man whose name was the Branch. This man would sit on his throne and exercise the role of priest over His people. Notice in Zechariah

6:14 that Joshua's crown would be in the temple of the Lord as a reminder of their exile and victory through the Lord their God:

14 And the crown shall be in the temple of the LORD as a reminder to Helem, Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Hen the son of Zephaniah.
(Zechariah 6)

Zechariah went on to say that people from afar would come to build the temple of the Lord. Those who had been in exile would be set free and prepare a place to worship the Lord God of Israel:

15 "And those who are far off shall come and help to build the temple of the LORD. And you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. And this shall come to pass, if you will diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God." (Zechariah 6)

There is a central theme here in the minor prophets. They speak about Babylon as a cruel master who obtained her wealth by ravaging others. The day would come, however, when Babylon would be exposed for who she was. Those she had plundered would turn against her. God would set His people free from her grip.

Babylon had tempted many and lured them into her net of wickedness. Once in her grasp, she squeezed the life from her victims. God, however, would come to the aid of His people. He called her to flee and escape to Zion (Zechariah 2:6,7). There in Zion, they would find what their heart longed for. God was willing to rescue His people from the stranglehold of Babylon. Can you hear His call to flee and escape to Zion? Are you weary and broken by the world and its elusive dreams and promises? The arms of God are open to receive you. Reach out. Turn from the futility of this world's attractions and find peace and true satisfaction in the purpose of God.

For Prayer:

God, we recognize that this world makes great promises but cannot satisfy the longing of our soul and spirit. The attractions and pleasures of Babylon have lured many, but they have been left

empty and dry. Father, help us to see through the lies that say that this world can satisfy our deepest longings. Help us to look beyond the temporary pleasures to the fullness we have in You. Thank you that there is joy and contentment of soul and spirit in You. We ask that you reveal this truth to those who continue to search for meaning in the world. May our lives demonstrate to them the joy of and delight of knowing You.

Chapter 18 – Release from Babylon's Grip

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah recount the story of the release of Israel from Babylon's grip. In time, the nation of Persia conquered the cruel Babylonians. In the very first year of the reign of King Cyrus of Persia (Ezra 1:1), he made the following declaration regarding the Jews in his newly conquered territory:

3 Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel— he is the God who is in Jerusalem. 4 And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.” (Ezra 1)

Under Cyrus of Persia, the Jews were set free to return to their homeland to rebuild the Lord's house. Cyrus issued a decree that all those who could help with gold, silver, animals, or any other offering were to do so, so the house of the Lord could be rebuilt. This was an amazing declaration from a pagan king. What is even more astonishing is why Cyrus made this decision:

1 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: 2 “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. (Ezra 1)

The Lord God of Israel spoke to Cyrus and told him that he was to build him a house in Jerusalem. This decree of Cyrus would prove to be important. As the people of God busied themselves in the reconstruction of the temple and city of Jerusalem, their enemies began to protest and did all they could to hinder the work of rebuilding the city.

On one occasion, under the reign of Darius, Israel's authority to rebuild the city of Jerusalem was called into question. In response, Israel informed their enemies of Cyrus's decree. News of this decreed surprised Israel's enemies, who immediately wrote a letter to King Darius for confirmation. We have a copy of that letter in Ezra 5:8-17 which reads as follows:

8 Be it known to the king that we went to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God. It is being built with huge stones, and timber is laid in the walls. This work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands. 9 Then we asked those elders and spoke to them thus: 'Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?' 10 We also asked them their names, for your information, that we might write down the names of their leaders. 11 And this was their reply to us: 'We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the house that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished. 12 But because our fathers had angered the God of heaven, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house and carried away the people to Babylonia. 13 However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, Cyrus the king made a decree that this house of God should be rebuilt. 14 And the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple that was in Jerusalem and brought into the temple of Babylon, these Cyrus the king took out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered to one whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor; 15 and he said to him, "Take these vessels, go and put them in the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its site." 16 Then this Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and from that time until now it has been in building, and it is not yet finished.' 17 Therefore, if it seems good to the king, let search be made in the royal archives there in Babylon, to see whether a decree was issued by Cyrus the king for the rebuilding of this house of God in Jerusalem. And let the king send us his pleasure in this matter." (Ezra 5)

When they searched the archives of Babylon, they found the declaration of Cyrus. Because Israel was acting in obedience to an official decree of Persia, their enemies allowed them to continue the work of construction. While God could have spoken to anyone about the rebuilding of Jerusalem, He chose to speak to Cyrus. The decree of Cyrus would ultimately silence Israel's enemies. Israel's enemies could reject a command of God, but they felt bound to follow an official decree of Persia. God knew exactly what He was doing when He commissioned a pagan king to make a declaration to rebuild the city of Jerusalem.

The response of King Darius to the letter written to him is also very astonishing:

7 Let the work on this house of God alone. Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its site. 8 Moreover, I make a decree regarding what you shall do for these elders of the Jews for the rebuilding of this house of God. The cost is to be paid to these men in full and without delay from the royal revenue, the tribute of the province from Beyond the River. 9 And whatever is needed—bulls, rams, or sheep for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, or oil, as the priests at Jerusalem require—let that be given to them day by day without fail, 10 that they may offer pleasing sacrifices to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons. 11 Also I make a decree that if anyone alters this edict, a beam shall be pulled out of his house, and he shall be impaled on it, and his house shall be made a dunghill. 12 May the God who has caused his name to dwell there overthrow any king or people who shall put out a hand to alter this, or to destroy this house of God that is in Jerusalem. I Darius make a decree; let it be done with all diligence.” (Ezra 6)

Darius decreed that Israel's neighbours allow them to rebuild the city and the house of God. He also commanded that the cost be paid from the royal revenue. The Jews were to be provided with everything they needed daily to continue the work. Furthermore, if anyone altered the declaration of Darius or disregarded it, he was to be impaled on a beam taken from his own house. God moved both

Cyrus and Darius to stand firmly behind the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple of God.

Nehemiah lived in captivity and served as a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. On one occasion, Nehemiah learned about the deplorable conditions in his homeland and was deeply saddened. This sadness reflected on his face, and the king noticed his mood. Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah why he was so sad. Nehemiah described the condition of his homeland. Artaxerxes then asked Nehemiah what he could do for him. Boldly Nehemiah asked for permission to travel to Judah to help rebuild the city. He also asked for a letter to the governors in Jerusalem and supplies for the construction. While these requests were very bold for a cupbearer, the presence of the Lord was powerful that day. Nehemiah 2:8 tells us:

8 And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me. (Nehemiah 2)

Once again, God moved yet another pagan king to provide for the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Jerusalem's reconstruction was completed under the ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah.

In the book of Esther, we read about how King Ahasuerus's wife defied and publicly embarrassed him in front of his guests. This resulted in her being removed from her position as queen. A search of the land for a replacement brought Esther into the king's harem. She pleased King Ahasuerus, and he made her queen.

Esther's position as queen proved to be important for the people of God. When a plot to kill the Jews was uncovered, Esther asked permission from her husband to allow the Jews to defend themselves against their enemies. The king agreed to her request, and over 75,000 enemies of the Jews were killed:

16 Now the rest of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also gathered to defend their lives, and got relief from their enemies and killed 75,000 of those who hated them, but they laid no hands on the plunder. (Ezra 9)

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther are important books for what they teach us about the power of God over Babylon and its influence. God overcame Babylon through the Persians. God restored what Babylon had stripped from them using pagan kings. He moved the heart of Cyrus to restore the city of Jerusalem and the temple. He confirmed His commitment through Darius by threatening death to anyone who opposed rebuilding what Babylon had destroyed. The Lord God of Israel provided for the work of reconstruction through King Artaxerxes. He defeated the enemies of His people under Esther through King Ahasuerus.

Babylon's rule was temporary. Like a flower, it bloomed for a time, but it would fade and be forgotten. Those who trusted in Babylon would be disappointed. Those who were held captive by Babylon can be set free. While Babylon fell, Israel remained and prospered under her God.

Babylon offers her pleasures and possessions, but these things are fleeting. They will all be stripped from us, and we will stand before our Creator to give an account of our lives. In Luke 8, Jesus told a parable about a sower. As he sowed his seed, some fell among thorns. Jesus explained the meaning of this to His disciples in Luke 8:14 when He said:

14 And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. (Luke 8)

Jesus told his disciples that the thorns were the riches and pleasures of life. According to Jesus, these riches and pleasures will choke our spiritual life.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Moses, who grew up in the home of Pharaoh's daughter, enjoyed all the pleasures and privileges this life had to offer. He goes on to say, however, that he chose to turn his back on these "fleeting pleasures," deciding rather to suffer for God:

24 By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to be mistreated

*with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.
(Hebrews 11)*

Moses understood that there was something far more satisfying in life than the “fleeting pleasures of sin.” This man turned his life over to God. He experienced God’s presence and power in a way that few individuals have ever experienced. The presence of God would be so powerful on him that his face glowed with His glory. I believe that Moses would never have exchanged this for the “fleeting pleasures” of Egypt. He was satisfied in His God. His life had purpose and meaning. This was something the pleasures of Egypt could never give.

Listen to the words of David as recorded in Psalm 16:

5 The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. 6 The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. 7 I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. 8 I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. 9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. 10 For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol or let your holy one see corruption. 11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16)

David, the psalmist, delighted in the beautiful inheritance the Lord had given him. He blessed the Lord for His counsel. He was confident because the Lord was at his right hand. His heart was glad; his whole being rejoiced. He lived in security. In the presence of his Lord, he experienced “fullness of joy” and “pleasures forevermore.” These pleasures outweighed the “fleeting pleasures of sin.” His soul would delight and be satisfied in God.

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther teach us that Babylon, her riches, pleasures, and position will fall. When our focus is on this world, what will happen when its possessions and pleasures are stripped from us? Will we settle for the fleeting pleasures of sin when there are pleasures forevermore at the right hand of God?

For Prayer:

Lord, you show us that as powerful as Babylon is, her time is limited. She will like a flower but will fade away quickly. Babylon, with its wealth and pleasures, will not last. You show us in Ezra and Nehemiah that You conquered this great nation and rescued your people from its grip. I ask Lord that you would do that today. Even in the church of our day we find many who have fallen prey to the lusts and possessions of this world. Father, we recognize that you have given us many blessings, but help us not to allow these blessings to become gods in our lives. Teach us not to live for the world but You. Help us to be thankful and enjoy the good things You give, but never allow the pleasures of this world to choke our relationship with You. It is in You alone that we find true joy and satisfaction in life. In You alone are pleasures forevermore. Help us to know the fullness of joy in You and your purpose.

Chapter 19 – God’s Grace in Babylon

Apart from the book of Revelation, references to Babylon are quite rare in the New Testament. There are, however, two references that I would like to touch on in this chapter.

The first New Testament reference is in Acts 2. The place was Jerusalem during the celebration of Pentecost. As the disciples gathered, Acts 2:2-3 describes what took place:

1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2)

This event was quite noisy and drew a crowd. A great multitude of confused people came to see what was happening. When they arrived, Acts 2:6 tells us that they heard these disciples speaking a variety of languages:

5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. (Acts 2)

The people who gathered that day were from various nations. Each of them heard the disciples speaking in their language.

7 And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? (Acts 2)

What is particularly interesting here is the list of nations gathered before the apostles that day. Notice particularly in Acts 2:9 that “residents of Mesopotamia” were in the crowd.

*9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia,
Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, (Acts 2)*

It is also of significance to note in Acts 2:5 that Luke, the author of this account, tells us that the Jews who had gathered that day were “devout men from every nation under heaven.” In other words, the residents of Mesopotamia who gathered in Jerusalem were “devout men.” They had come to the Passover to celebrate the Lord God of Israel.

Remember that under Nebuchadnezzar, the Jews had been exiled to Babylon. While many returned to Jerusalem under Cyrus of Persia, not all Jews chose to leave Babylon. Some remained in the land of their exile and built a life for themselves.

We need to understand here that the Jews present in Jerusalem from Mesopotamia were devoted Jews who had come to celebrate the Passover. While they were not believers in the Lord Jesus, they were Jews who practiced their faith. As they stood that day before the apostles, they heard in their own tongue “the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:11).

That day, Peter stood up before the crowd gathered and preached salvation in Jesus Christ. The “residents of Mesopotamia and those from other nations were touched by what Peter said that day and asked the apostles what they needed to do in response:

*37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”
(Acts 2)*

Notice the response of Peter:

38 And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”

Peter called the devout Jews of Mesopotamia to repent and turn to the Lord Jesus. As pious as they were, they were still lost in their sin. Peter offers hope to the “residents of Babylon.” “Save yourselves from this crooked generation,” Peter said. These devout Mesopotamian Jews needed to be saved from the philosophy of a crooked generation. Peter called them to repent and seek the forgiveness of the Lord Jesus and the gift of His Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

The call still goes out to “residents of Mesopotamia.” Save yourself from this “crooked generation.” Repent and turn to the Lord Jesus, and you will be forgiven. There is hope for those who remain under the bondage of Babylon and its philosophy. You may say, “You don’t know what I have done in my pursuit of Babylon’s pleasures and wealth.” Peter does not put conditions on his words here. The call to repent is for those who have fallen short. There is forgiveness for all who come to Jesus.

There is one more passage I would like to examine in this chapter. It seems to be the only other reference to Babylon in the New Testament apart from the book of Revelation. Listen to what Peter told his readers as he concluded his first epistle:

13 She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. (1 Peter 5)

Peter sends greetings from “she who is at Babylon.” Notice that he speaks about her as “chosen.” In other words, “she” was a fellow believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, chosen by Him and forgiven by His death on the cross.

We must address two questions if we are to understand what Peter is saying in this passage. The first of these questions concerns the identity of “she who is in Babylon.” Some commentators interpret this to be a particular individual. Most commentators agree that the reference to “she who is in Babylon” refers to a Christian church. In other words, there were true believers now in the region of Babylon.

When Peter preached at Pentecost, about two thousand people came to know the Lord Jesus and became Christians. Among those

who heard that message were “residents of Mesopotamia.” These new believers would have returned to their homeland with the gospel of Jesus Christ. It would make sense then that a church would be established in that region.

The second question we need to ask concerning 1 Peter 5:13 relates to the identity of Babylon. There are two views here. The first is that Babylon refers to the region around the Euphrates River where the people of God had been exiled.

The second view is that when Peter speaks about Babylon, he is referring to Rome.

Jewish people by this period viewed Rome as the fourth of the four kingdoms in Daniel 7 that would oppress Israel, a successor to Babylon. Some elements of contemporary Judaism had readily transferred prophecies of Babylon's demise in the Old Testament to the new empire of Rome (a transferral readily highlighted after A.D. 70). “Babylon” had thus become a fairly common cryptogram for Rome (although “Edom” was more popular with later rabbis).

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Rome was, under this view, seen as Babylon because she oppressed God's people like ancient Babylon had done. I leave the choice for the reader to decide. What is important to note, however, is that Babylon, in the mind of God's people, came to represent oppression and worldliness. We will examine this in greater detail in the book of Revelation.

From these two passages in Acts and 1 Peter, we need to see that God's grace is offered to all who dwell in Babylon. Peter, speaking to the residents of Mesopotamia in Acts 2, offered them freedom and forgiveness if they would turn to the Lord Jesus and save themselves from the crooked generation. 1 Peter 5 shows us that God can rescue a people for Himself even in Babylon.

The grip of Babylon has been broken in the gospel of Jesus. Peter declared freedom in the person of the Lord Jesus and the good news of forgiveness in His death. Men and women from all nations and languages are experiencing the salvation and deliverance of God through His son. The grip of this world, its attractions and temptations has been broken by the power of God. Do you feel the need to be released from Babylon's endless pursuit of futility and worldly pleasure? There is grace and healing in the person of the Lord Jesus.

For Prayer:

Father, as we look at these two New Testament passages, we are struck by how you offer grace to all who are trapped in the pursuit of this world, its pleasures, and attractions. We have seen countless individuals wander from the path of righteousness in the quest for worldly riches, position, and pleasure. We have seen the price they have paid in broken families, addictions, and emptiness. You extend Your hand to all prodigals who have been disappointed by the world's failed promises. Thank you that you do not forget us in our wandering. We ask Lord for our loved ones whose pursuit of this world has stripped them of all desire for You. We pray that they would see Your beauty and hear Your call before it is too late. We pray that You would show us that we too need Your grace when we are tempted to wander. Teach us that in You alone can we find what our soul truly desires.

Chapter 20 – The Fall of Babylon the Great

The book of Revelation devotes a number of chapters to Babylon. We need to note that the nation of Babylon had ceased to exist long before the apostle John had the vision recorded in this book. The implication is that Babylon, as spoken of by the apostle, is not necessarily the physical nation, but what it symbolized and the philosophy by which it lived. Throughout this study, we have seen that Babylon was an enemy to the people of God. She did not serve the God of Israel but devoted herself rather to pleasure, possessions, power, and position. Evidence of this philosophy of life continues to exist in our day. Jesus, Himself said:

24 "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. (Matthew 6)

In Jesus' parable of the sower, He spoke about a seed that was sown among thorns. He explained the meaning of this to His disciples in Matthew 13:

22 As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. (Matthew 13)

Jesus taught that the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the seed of the Word of God and keep us from being productive and discerning in our relationship with God.

The apostle John would say:

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2)

The first reference to Babylon we want to examine is found in Revelation 14. In this chapter, the apostle saw three angels. These angels announced a coming judgement. The second of these three angels made the following declaration about Babylon:

8 Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality." (Revelation 14)

According to this second angel, Babylon would fall. Notice the reason for her fall—she had made all the nations drink the “wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.” I am sure that there are many ways of interpreting the reference to “sexual immorality” here in verse 8. The simplest is to take the phrase as it is. Babylon represented the endless pursuit of pleasure and satisfaction of the flesh with no concern for the principles of God’s Word. We do not have to look far to see evidence of this philosophy today. Unrestrained lust and the desire for physical pleasure have broken apart families and been the source of great abuse and societal breakdown. It has destroyed many ministries and become a source of deep hurt in churches and families worldwide. According to Revelation 14:8, the influence of Babylon with its unrestrained passion and sexual immorality will one day be destroyed. No longer will it break our families. No longer will its ungodly lusts torment our land.

We move now to Revelation 16. Here the apostle saw seven angels pouring out the contents of seven bowls. Of note to us is the sixth angel who poured out the contents of a bowl on the Euphrates River (Revelation 16:12). John saw unclean spirits coming out of the mouth of a dragon, a beast, and a false prophet (Revelation 16:13). These demonic spirits performed signs and went throughout the earth to gather kings to assemble for battle against the Lord God (Revelation 16:14). The details of that battle are described in Revelation 19:19-21:

19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and

against his army. 20 And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. 21 And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh. (Revelation 19)

What is important to see in Revelation 16 is the description of what was taking place in the region of the Euphrates River. It appears to be a place of demonic opposition to God and his purpose at the highest levels of human government. Revelation 16 describes evil spirits moving from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth, stirring up political authorities to stand against God. The history of this world and even current events shows us that this demonic force from Babylon is still very prominent in our day. The people of God have been persecuted around this world. Political authorities have made legislation contrary to the purpose of God and the principles of His Word. Matters will only get worse as the Day of the Lord approaches. Satan will continue to influence world leaders to take a stand against God and His people.

In Revelation 19, we see that the battle of the nations against God will not ultimately succeed. Revelation 16:17-19 declares that the day is coming when this Babylonian rebellion against God will be broken. God will remember Babylon, the great and will make her drain the cup of His fury:

17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" 18 And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. 19 The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. (Revelation 16)

Babylon represents the opposition to God and His purpose for this world. This demonic opposition will one day be broken.

Revelation 17 describes in greater detail the judgement of Babylon. Notice that she is called the "great prostitute" in this chapter.

1 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, 2 with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk."
(Revelation 17)

Babylon's influence as a great prostitute is quite clear in Revelation 17:1-2. She committed sexual immorality with the great kings of the earth, gaining their favour. She also intoxicated the "dwellers of the earth" with her sexual immorality. Her evil influence was felt around the world.

Revelation 17 goes on to describe this great prostitute. In verses 3-6, we discover that she sat upon a scarlet beast. This beast, according to verse 3, was full of blasphemous names. She boldly stood against God and blasphemed His name. Notice how she was dressed:

4 The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality.
(Revelation 17)

The great prostitute was dressed in expensive clothes made of purple and scarlet material. She wore gold, jewels, and pearls, indicating her wealth and desire for worldly possessions. She drank from a cup "full of abominations and sexual immorality." Verse 5 tells us that her name was written on her forehead:

5 And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations."

Babylon the great was the mother of prostitutes and abominations. She was the source of evil and immorality. She gave birth to this philosophy of life and encouraged many to follow in her path.

As the mother of prostitutes and abominations, Babylon hated those who followed the Lord Jesus. These individuals stood in her way. They opposed her evil. They exposed her deceit and the futility of her ways. In her hatred for believers, Babylon killed many who believed in the Lord Jesus. Revelation 17:6 tells us that she drank the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus:

6 And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. (Revelation 17)

Once again, the angel of the Lord told John what would happen to Babylon, the great prostitute.

16 And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, 17 for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. 18 And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.” (Revelation 17)

The day was coming when Babylon's victims would see the futility of her ways and rebel against her. She would be destroyed as the Lord moved among the nations. Notice particularly in Revelation 17:18 that Babylon had dominion over the kings of the earth. She moved to influence those in authority against God and His purpose. The day was coming, however, when her domination over them would be broken.

Revelation 18:2 describes the extent of Babylon's fall:

2 And he called out with a mighty voice, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast. (Revelation 18)

Revelation 18 is important for what it teaches us about Babylon and its ungodly philosophy. Notice first that Babylon promoted unrestrained lust and sexual immorality:

3 For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her (Revelation 18:3)

Babylon also taught the power of a rich and luxurious lifestyle:

3 and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.” (Revelation 18)

She believed that security came from riches and influence in this world:

*7 As she glorified herself and lived in luxury, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning, since in her heart she says, ‘I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see.’
(Revelation 18)*

Babylon taught that you must take every pleasure and increase your wealth and influence. You must not deny yourself any gain, even if that comes at someone else's expense.

The judgement of God was going to fall quickly on Babylon. She would be paid back double for what she had done to others (Revelation 18:6). On the day of her judgement, the kings of the earth who had committed adultery with her and lived in luxury with her would weep over her death:

9 And the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. (Revelation 18)

All the merchants who sold her wares will weep because no one will buy her cargo anymore:

11 And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, 12 cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, 13 cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls. (Revelation 18)

Many merchants had become wealthy through her philosophy. They bought into her lifestyle and became rich as a result. The fall of this materialistic way of life, however, left the merchants in fear:

*15 The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud, 16 "Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls!"
(Revelation 18)*

Babylon's wealth would be stripped from her. All who sought her riches would be disappointed. Revelation 18 concludes with these words:

*20 Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!" 21 Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more; 22 and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters, will be heard in you no more, and a craftsman of any craft will be found in you no more, and the sound of the mill will be heard in you no more, 23 and the light of a lamp will shine in you no more, and the voice of bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more, for your merchants were the great ones of the earth, and all nations were deceived by your sorcery. 24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth."
(Revelation 18)*

The reality of Babylon's final judgement causes heaven to erupt in joy, crying out:

*1 After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, 2 for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants." 3 Once more they cried out, "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever."
(Revelation 19)*

God will judge Babylon, the great prostitute for her immorality and take vengeance on her for the blood of the saints she had destroyed. Listen to the call of God to all who belong to Him in Revelation 18:

4 Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues (Revelation 18)

As believers, we fight a battle against the Babylonian spirit of our day. We are not immune to its temptations. Even in the church are those who live for this world, its pleasures, and riches. I have spoken with Christian leaders who have been caught up in a spirit of materialism and greed. I have listened to pastors whose great desire was to be seen by others as successful. We have all read stories about other important spiritual leaders who have fallen into the sin of sexual immorality. Our children are bombarded by media, movies and other entertainment forms that promote a Babylonian philosophy of life. In recent years we have seen all the moral and godly principles we believe in as Christians come under attack. The Babylonian spirit is alive in our day.

The spirit of Babylon is no friend to the believer. It will distract us and keep us from experiencing the fullness of what we have in the Lord Jesus. It will strip us of our power and motivation in ministry. It will leave us empty as believers and frail as churches. Jesus teaches that it is in giving that we are blessed, but Babylon calls us to take everything we can get. Jesus teaches us to die to ourselves to experience true life, but Babylon challenges us to put our needs first and satisfy every desire.

Babylon's influences in the church are subtle. Revelation 18:4 calls all believers to "come out of her" lest we partake of her sins and share her plagues. If we want our Christian lives to flourish, we must resist the lure of Babylon. Babylon will choke out our spiritual life and vitality. Babylon will strip us of our spiritual strength and make us useless in a dying world.

The day is coming when the influence of Babylon on our hearts and minds will be broken. In the meantime, we must learn to discern her

voice and resist her temptations. From Genesis to Revelation, Babylon is portrayed as the enemy of God and His people. Do not fall prey to her charms. Let me leave you with the words of the apostle John himself who said:

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2)

For Prayer:

Father, we live in a world that has been heavily influenced by the Babylonian spirit. Babylon teaches us to focus on ourselves, our prosperity, our pleasure, and our position in life. You teach us to die to ourselves and focus on Christ and His purpose. We confess that we have often been tempted by Babylon, the great prostitute and surrendered to our fleshly lusts and desires. We ask for the grace to discern the difference between the philosophy of this world and your purpose. May we be willing to surrender all. May we willingly die to the world so we can know You and Your presence. May this world and its attractions fade, and may You shine brightly in our hearts. May our greatest passion in life be to know You and Your resurrection power in our lives. This world with all its attractions and pleasures will one day pass away, but You will be our God and delight for all eternity.

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