

Sermon #25 — *Habakkuk Series*

Title: **“THE MYSTERY OF BABYLON”**

Text: Habakkuk 2:4-20

Subject: *Babylon’s End*

Date: Tuesday Evening — April 19, 2011

Tape # *Habakkuk #25*

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Introduction:

The 2nd chapter of Habakkuk begins with God’s Prophet standing upon his watchtower, seeking God’s word for his people in a time of great trouble. — **“I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me”** (v. 1). Once he had God’s message, the Prophet was commanded to — **“Write the vision, and make [it] plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it”** (v. 2). Then, the Lord God explained to His Prophet that the vision was for an appointed time, assuring him that at God’s own appointed time He would send Christ to redeem and save His people, assuring him also that at God’s appointed time He will destroy Babylon and make His people triumphant over her. That is what the rest of the chapter (verses 4-20) is about.

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Proposition: The Lord God assured His Prophet and assured His people by His prophet that Babylon was cursed and would be destroyed.

Her ruin is sure. Her judgment is just. Read Habakkuk 2:4-19, and see how the Lord God rewards those who set themselves against His people. This is the way God deals with those who seek to destroy His Church.

(Habakkuk 2:4-14) “Behold, his soul [which] is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.”

“5 ¶ Yea also, **because he transgresseth by wine**, [he is] a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who **enlargeth his desire as hell**, and [is] as death, and **cannot be satisfied**, but **gathereth unto him all nations**, and **heapeth unto him all people**: 6 Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth [that which is] not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay! 7 Shall they not rise up

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suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them? 8 **Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men's blood,** and [for] the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein. 9 Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil! 10 Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned [against] thy soul. 11 For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it. 12 **Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity!** 13 Behold, [is it] not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?"

EVERYTHING REVERSED

In the end everything's going to be turned around. Everything shall be reversed. Those who have been

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oppressed shall sit in judgment over the oppressor. God's people, who have been spoiled shall, in the end, be the spoilers of those who spoiled them. And even the "*merchants and great men of the earth*" who have been deceived by Babylon's sorceries and made drunk with her wine, those who have enriched themselves by their league with Babylon shall curse her. Read on...

(Habakkuk 2:15-19) "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to [him], and makest [him] drunken also, **that thou mayest look on their nakedness!** 16 Thou art filled with shame for glory: drink thou also, and **let thy foreskin be uncovered: the cup of the LORD'S right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing [shall be] on thy glory.** 17 For the violence of Lebanon shall cover thee, and the spoil of beasts, [which] made them afraid, because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein. 18 What profiteth the graven image that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the

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maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols? 19 Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it [is] laid over with gold and silver, and [there is] no breath at all in the midst of it.”

But who is the Prophet describing? Is he merely describing the ruin of Nebuchadnezzar and his empire? Is he talking about no more than the overthrow of a wicked nation? — Certainly not! That ancient city and kingdom over which Nebuchadnezzar once sat as king by God’s decree, whom the Lord God raised up to carry Israel into captivity, was typical of another city and another kingdom called Babylon.

REVELATION 17

Turn with me to Revelation 17, and I will show you the Holy Spirit’s inspired commentary on Habakkuk 2:4-20. The title of my message tonight is — **THE MYSTERY OF BABYLON**. Here in Revelation 17 God the Holy Spirit identifies every Babylon. Here

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he tells us what every Old Testament reference to Babel and Babylon ultimately refers to. The historic references are references to historic events; but those events were allegorical. All of them refer, ultimately, to that which is described in Revelation 17.

(Revelation 17:1-18) “And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, **Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:** 2 With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. 3 So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, **full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.** 4 And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, **having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:** 5 And upon her forehead [was] a name written, **MYSTERY, BABYLON**

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THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. 6 And I saw the woman **drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus:** and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.”

“7 ¶ And the angel said unto me, **Wherefore didst thou marvel?** I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns. 8 The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and **they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world,** when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. 9 And here [is] the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. 10 And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, [and] the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, **he must continue a short space.** 11 And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the

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eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition. 12 And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but **receive power as kings one hour with the beast.** 13 These **have one mind,** and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.”

“14 ¶ These shall **make war with the Lamb,** and **the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him [are] called, and chosen, and faithful.** 15 And he saith unto me, **The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.** 16 And **the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked,** and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. 17 **For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.** 18 And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which **reigneth**

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over the kings of the earth.”

A WILDERNESS

When John was carried away to see “*the judgment of the great whore,*” he was carried away “*in the spirit into the wilderness*” (vv. 1, 3). **Wherever false religion occupies the place of the true worship of God there is desolation and emptiness** (Amos 8:11-12). There may be great worldly wealth and glory; there may be a fullness of power, influence, and approval; there may be purple and scarlet, gems and gold, pomp and luxury and everything to gratify the sensual desires of the heart; there may even be worldwide acceptance and dominion; yet, where the Word of God, the Gospel of His grace, and the worship of Christ in all the fullness of His redemptive glory are despised and trampled under foot, there is a bleak, barren, empty, desolate wilderness.

This great harlot is all false religion, all free will/works religion. She is called by the name, “*Babylon the Great.*” Turn back a few pages to **Revelation 14:8**, and you will see another reference

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to Babylon and God's judgment upon her. — “*And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.*” Look at chapter 16, verse 19, and you will see the same thing. — “*And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.*”

Babylon is always under the judgment of God. She always has been and always will be the object of Jehovah's fury. In Revelation 17, 18, and 19 John describes that judgment, assuring us of the fact that all false religion, here represented by Babylon, will be destroyed and the truth of God shall prevail to the glory of Christ.

WHO IS SHE?

Who is this woman? Without question, there is in this vision a representation of Rome, its pagan culture, government, and worship. Certainly, Roman

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Catholicism, the superstitious, idolatrous religion of papacy, is also involved in the picture before us. But it would be a serious mistake to limit the picture to Rome and Romanism. This woman is called — “the great whore that sitteth upon many waters...And upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the Great, Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth” (vv. 1, 5). I repeat myself deliberately. I don’t want you to mistake what I am saying. This woman, Babylon, the great harlot represents all false religion in this world, no matter what name that religion bears.

TWO RELIGIONS

There are only two religions in this world. All religions, when reduced to their essential elements, must be categorized under one of these two: Free-grace or free-will, the religion of God or the religion of man, the church of God or the synagogue of Satan. These two religions are represented to us in the book of Revelation by two women. In chapter 12 we see the Church of God, the religion of free-grace, which proclaims salvation by the blood and righteousness of Christ alone, who is the Man Child,

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represented by “*a woman clothed with the sun.*” Here, in Revelation 17, we see the religion of Satan, free-willism, man centered, works religion, represented by “*The Great Whore...Babylon.*”

The character of all false religion is described in John’s vision of the great harlot. Remember, the picture is a symbol of false religion. Do not try to get a literal picture in your mind. Try to grasp the spiritual meaning of the whole picture. **Notice the features of this woman, by which we are instructed and warned, lest we be deceived by the great harlot, who “with her much fair speech” and “the flattering of her lips” has caused so many to follow her “as an ox goeth to the slaughter”** (Proverbs 7:21-22).

The angel calls her “the great whore.” Not only is she a harlot, she is the mother of all spiritual harlots and abominations in the world. **This is the standing symbol in the Word of God for false religion** (Jeremiah 3:6-9; Ezekiel 16:28-37; Hosea 1-2; Revelation 2:22). This woman is called the great whore and the mother of harlots, because she is the

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embodiment and representative of all idolatry, false worship and false doctrine in the world.

To give an indication of her age and her vileness, she is given the name, Babylon the Great (v. 5).

This is not a prophecy that the ancient city of Babylon will be resurrected and rebuilt. God destroyed that ancient city in His wrath; and He will destroyed mystical Babylon in His fury (Isaiah 13:19-20).

(Isaiah 13:19-20) “And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. 20 It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there.”

This Babylon is any and all religious systems that are opposed to God. Babylon is the religion of man. It is that religion which teaches salvation by the works of man’s hands and the power of man’s will.

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Though it is seen in the sacrifice of Cain, it began as an organized religion, an organized system of worship in opposition to God, in the fourth generation after Noah, with Nimrod, the cursed son of Noah's cursed son, Ham (Genesis 10:8-11). The Bible tells us that Nimrod was "*a mighty hunter before the Lord.*" But that is a very poor translation of the text. Literally, it means, "**Nimrod was a mighty rebel before the Lord, the mightiest rebel before the Lord in the earth.**" His name, Nimrod, means "a rebellious panther." It was this "rebellious panther," Nimrod, who built the city of Babel, or Babylon, and began the religion of confusion (Genesis 11:1-9).

Idolatry is not a gradual decline from truth by well-meaning, but unenlightened men. Idolatry began at Babel in intentional rebellion.

- It was the invention of a proud race who refused to come to God by faith in a Substitute and refused to trust God's grace alone.
- Babylon was born in defiance of God and His Word.

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- The men of Babel despised God's sovereignty, blood atonement, and salvation by grace.
- They attempted to build a tower to heaven by the works of their hands, with no regard for the glory of God.

God scattered those men and brought their religion to confusion.

Yet, wherever these idolaters spread through the earth, their religion is essentially the same. **All the pagan mythologies, idolatrous images, and religious rituals of the world, no matter how much they differ, have an underlying sameness, which proves that they are all from one original source.** That source is Babel, or Babylon, Nimrod's plan to defeat the purposes of the God of Noah. **The one foundational tenet that is always the same in the worldwide religions of Babylon is this: — Man's salvation ultimately depends upon and is determined by man himself!**

This woman has made the inhabitants of the earth drunk with the wine of her fornication (Habakkuk 2:15; Revelation 17: 2). The religion of old Babylon

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is not limited to one race, one time, one place, or even one religious order. It encompasses all. All the kings, and merchants, and inhabitants of the earth, from one generation to another, commit fornication with her and drink from her cup until they are thoroughly drunk, beyond the reach of reason.

The cup which she holds out is **a golden cup** (v. 4). To the carnal, sensual heart, the world's religion is very appealing. It is bright, glittering, and full of blessings, promising happiness, health, peace, and prosperity to all who drink from its cup.

But the cup is **full of abominations**, filthiness and fornication. This is a fact that cannot be disputed. — Wherever false religion gains popularity, wherever free will/works religion is embraced, wherever men are deluded into thinking that righteousness is to be obtained by their good works, moral corruption and decadence always follow. Idolatry produces baseness. Will-worship produces perversity of the most hideous description (Romans 1:18-32). The doctrines of self-righteousness, free-willism, and works salvation always produce moral degradation. The cup is always

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the same. The old harlot has only one cup. It is always filled with the same, head-spinning wine of free-will, self-righteousness, and good works. **Babylon's wine always produces a drunkenness that causes men and women to...**

- glory in their shame,
- expose their nakedness,
- and uncover their foreskins,
- showing themselves to be reprobate (Philippians 3:3).

Notice this too: — **The woman is also drunk** (v. 6). She is drunk “*with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.*” “*In her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth*” (18:24). — **Throughout history, persecution and the murder of God's saints and prophets have been the work of this great harlot.** It is old Nimrod trying still to destroy the kingdom of God. Persecution is not the work of God's church. It is the work of Babylon.

This woman sits upon many waters (v. 1). The angel tells us plainly that these waters are not literal

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bodies of water. They are “*peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues*”(v. 15). That is to say, “The false religion signified by this great harlot is universal in its acceptance.” The prostitution of Divine Truth is supported and accepted by the fallen sons of Adam wherever they are found upon the earth. While the false religions of the world may fight among themselves, at times, they will always be found united in their opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ and the Gospel of the grace of God revealed in him. In this they all “*have one mind*” (Revelation 17:13).

SEVEN HEADS AND TEN HORNS

Then John describes this woman as one sitting upon a scarlet beast, full of the names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns (v. 3). The beast is the same one we see in chapter 13. John is telling us that this woman, the religion of this world, is inspired by and empowered by Satan himself (v. 8). (See 2 Corinthians 11:1-5, 13-15).

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The seven heads of the beast are the kingdoms and empires of this world, by which false religion is both protected and advanced (vv. 9-10). The number seven may be merely a symbolical, figurative number, implying the complete, universal acceptance of false religion, all under the demonic influence of the beast (v. 11). **William Hendriksen** suggests that, the seventh head might be the collective title for all antichristian governments from the fall of Rome unto the second coming of Christ, existing in that short space of time we call “the Gospel Age” (Revelation 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5).

The ten horns of the beast are kings, rulers of the world, raised up by Satan for brief periods of time to make war with Christ and His Church (vv. 12-14). They are not mighty emperors, just little presidents, senators, congressmen, governors, legislators, prime ministers, etc., to whom Satan gives a brief time of power to oppose the cause of Christ. This woman, the great harlot is the religion of this world, which reigns over the kings, people, and nations of the earth in opposition to Christ and his church (vv. 14, 18).

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BABYLON'S END

What shall become of the woman? When John saw this great harlot, this great antichrist religious system, ruling over the people and nations of the earth, making the kings of the earth drunk with her idolatry and will worship, he was astonished. He says, “*When I saw her, I wondered with great admiration*” (v. 6). A better reading would be, “I was astonished with great terror.” And well he might be! But he is comforted and encouraged by the realization that this great harlot shall be brought to destruction by the will of God, and that even she is under the dominion of our great God and Savior, and shall serve his purpose (vv. 16-17).

(Revelation 17:16-17) “And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. 17 For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.”

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Take courage, Christ shall prevail! And in Him we shall prevail too. We are, in Christ Jesus, more than conquerors. **This great harlot, with all her hellish power, shall have no influence over the church of God's elect** (vv. 8, 14).

(Revelation 17:8) “The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.”

(Revelation 17:14) “These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him [are] called, and chosen, and faithful.”

Though all the world is deceived by the charms of false religion, the mother of harlots cannot deceive or destroy any of God's elect. Our names were written,

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immutably, in the Book of Life before the world began (Revelation 13:8). We are called of God; and the gifts and callings of God are without repentance (Romans 11:29). We have been chosen as the objects of God's mercy, love, and grace; and the purpose of God in election must stand. God makes His elect faithful to Christ by the power of His grace; and faithful men and women cannot be turned away from their Master. Our Redeemer and Savior is Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who is the almighty Lord of lords and King of kings (2 Timothy 1:12).

In the end, by the will of God, this woman shall be destroyed (vv. 16-17). It seems at times that antichrist will prevail. But as our God sent confusion to the people of Babel and turned them against one another, as He overthrew Egypt, Babylon, Assyria and Rome, He will utterly destroy all false religion, and make the great harlot desolate in the end, so that **even those who once carried her upon their shoulders shall despise her and devour her**. In God's time, Babylon shall fall. And **even Babylon shall prove, in the last great day, to have been the servant of God to perform his will in the earth** (1

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Corinthians 11:19; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-14; Psalm 76:10).

LESSONS

What are we to learn from Habakkuk's prophecy and John's vision? There are many, many things taught in the picture before us. But I want to give you just five things to remember for the comfort and strength of your soul.

1. **The Lord our God is sovereign over all things.** He is in control. He is performing His will.
2. **Popularity is no indication of the will of God or the truth of God.** If you would follow Christ, you must be prepared to swim against the tide, always be in the minority, and always face bitter opposition from the world.
3. **God's elect are secure at all times, being kept by the power of His grace** (Romans 8:28-39).

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4. **The religion of this world will prove to be empty, frustrating and loathsome in the end.**

Those who revel in it today will despise it at the last. But it will be too late! There will be nothing but hatred in that day, when the lost mother meets her lost son, the lost wife meets her lost husband, and the lost preacher meets his lost hearers in hell! In eternity, all who have served Babylon shall despise her and shall themselves be despised.

5. **The knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall yet fill the earth** (Habakkuk 2:14).

(Habakkuk 2:14) “For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”

(Habakkuk 2:20) “But the LORD [is] in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.”

Amen.