

## What Is So Bad About Babylon? (Part 1)

### **Babylon's Foundation Exposed**

**John W. Ritenbaugh**

**Given 11-Oct-03; Tape #FT03-02**

Herbert Armstrong very frequently opened the Feast of Tabernacles sermon with the question, "Why are we here?" He would then proceed to say that we are here to experience a foretaste of *The World Tomorrow*, and thus we are keeping the Feast, looking forward in anticipation of something yet to occur.

That is a decidedly New Covenant approach to these days, but the approach in Leviticus 23 is different. I would like you to turn there, to verse 43. In it God tells why we are to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

Leviticus 23:43 That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Under the Old Covenant one is looking *backward* in time to the wilderness wandering. Both approaches are appropriate for us. The Feast of Tabernacles, under the Old Covenant, was primarily a celebration of God's providence; thus the Feast of Tabernacles is an annual reminder that God is able to supply His children's need under any circumstance, even during a seemingly endless journey even when they had no settled existence, were growing no crops, and were in a trackless wilderness. We need to think about that.

We are going to divide these two concepts—the backward look, and the forward look—right in half, because most of my feast sermons are going to apply to the principle of "*right now*." Our time for preparation for the World Tomorrow, for the Kingdom of God is right now. All of its future is supported by the history of God's providence to Israel in the past and during His strong supporting evidence of His faithfulness. But we are also going to be looking *forward* in some small measure for the inspiration of the vision of a far greater life as it was meant to be lived when God created Adam and Eve.

This particular sermon is one that I have given before. In fact I gave it at the San Antonio feast site six years ago in 1997. On the other hand, it is a sermon that more precisely, I have never given before. That is because I have added and subtracted from what I originally gave (some of which you may have heard before), because my purpose is a great deal different now from what it was then. The title is still the same though, and that is: "What Is So Bad About Babylon?"

The reason I am giving it again is two-fold: (1) God has so ordered that His purpose for the Church is to be worked out from *within* Babylon. Therefore, it is best that we know about it as much as we possibly can. Make no mistake. It is a very deadly enemy. This world has come directly out of the mind of Satan the Devil, our enemy, working through those who are deceived, and it is designed to entrap us and conform us to its image.

The second reason is that it might clarify some aspects of the "Where Is The Beast?" series. It will also serve as an introduction to this series of sermons that I will be giving here, because these events are very clearly related to dangers that church members are living in and through in Babylon. This sermon hopefully will clarify "What is so bad about Babylon?"

We are going to begin in James 4: 4. Think about Israel. Think about the Beast series. Think about the Great Harlot and all of her adulteries.

James 4: 4 You adulterers and adulteresses, know you not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

You do not want God to be your enemy.

Babylon is the code name for the world. At the time of the end its dominant powers are the Harlot Woman and the forming Beast. Right now the Woman, who I believe is Israel, dominates the Beast, but the Woman is weakening as the Beast strengthens.

Babylon is all around us. There is no complete escaping of its influence, whether in religion, education, commerce, the military, government, agriculture, entertainment, or industry. Its influence is visible and invisible, clearly heard and yet silent, always yet impacting overtly or subtly, conforming mankind to its will. If it is not resisted, it will conform any human being to its image. By and large the people are unaware of this and simply accept that this is the way life was meant to be.

Satan has thoroughly and almost completely deceived mankind, but we are not unaware of his devices. Due to God's mercy we must fight it in order to stave off as much of its influence as we possibly can, because it is absolutely essential to our growth and well-being and success as a son of God that we do so.

God, in His mercy, has enabled us to see the contrast between what we live in and what He is planning to create through Jesus Christ at His return. It is God's intention that we assist Jesus following our birth at Christ's return. Our insight should be a prod toward gratitude and increased preparation for that time.

It is essential that we know as much as we possibly can about why Babylon is so bad. Let us go back to Babylon's beginning, because much of the problem is revealed right here in the first eleven chapters of Genesis.

Genesis 11:1-9 And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. And the LORD came down to

see the city and the tower which the children of men builded. And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language: and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down and there confound their language that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth; and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth; and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

Genesis is the book of beginnings. The beginning of Babylon is especially significant to our understanding because it shows here in these first eleven chapters its foundational attitudinal principle—attitudes that continue to this day to be the driving forces in every culture on earth.

Foundations, once laid, rarely change, especially for the better. Of course we have biblical proof in the book of Revelation, and of course many other places, that Babylon never did change. If anything, it has gotten worse. God felt so strongly about the evil potential of what was being done here that He directly intervened to slow down its development.

Genesis 10:8-10 And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: Wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.

There are indications given to us in name. The beginning of Nimrod's kingdom was Babel. God is not indiscriminate with names. They are purposely used. Take note that God says Nimrod was "a mighty man."

The term "mighty" appears in Genesis 6, and it is used here the same way that it is used in regard to Nimrod.

Genesis 6:4 There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.

There is a direct connection between "giants" at the beginning of this verse, and "mighty" at its end, and the fact that in Genesis 10 Nimrod is identified as "a *mighty* man."

First of all, "giants" has nothing whatever to do with being of a tall and muscular build. It has everything to do with being very influential and renown in terms of cultural leadership, especially in the sense that we are given in Genesis 6: 11.

Genesis 6:11 The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence.

These mighty men were providing evil, deceitful, violent and enslaving cultural leadership. Notice again in verse 4 it says that there were giants not only *before* the flood, but it also says "*after*" that—the implication being that there were giants *after* the flood as well as *before* the flood. And so there were *mighty* men after the flood as well, because the giants were mighty men, and Nimrod was a *mighty* man. Nimrod was a *giant* in terms of the context of Genesis 6: 4. Nimrod then was one of those mighty influential men afterward.

We are going to go back now to Genesis 10. The name "Nimrod" comes from the Hebrew verbal root that is transliterated "*marad*." It means, "to rebel." So Nimrod was given a significant name. He was a rebel. The name Nimrod itself means "Let us revolt."

When the Bible says "men of renown," it is literally saying "men of name." That is, men of reputation. When it says, "Nimrod was a mighty one before the Lord," it is using that phraseology in the same sense as "men of renown." Nimrod was a man of great reputation. As we might say today, he was an influential celebrity that people would follow.

Why do you think it is that advertising agencies want to get celebrity endorsements, whether a person is a basketball player or a television-movie actor? It is because people are influenced to follow what the celebrities do. If those celebrities endorse a product, why, that must make the product better. Nimrod was a major celebrity in his day. He was a man of renown. He was a man of name, and he was influencing people into a system that was violent and enslaving to its very core.

The second item to notice is that Nimrod was a mighty man *before* the Lord. This is important. This is so important that it is mentioned twice in the same verse. That emphasis means, "Pay attention to this, because it is going to tell you something about the kind of celebrity that Nimrod was."

Now one can stand "before" or "in front of" another as a friend or as an enemy. I want you to notice that there is not one mention of animals in this whole context regarding Nimrod nor the founding of Babel. Nimrod was a mighty hunter in terms of *men*. He hunted men. He was a Nephilim—a giant of moral and spiritual nature. He hunted down other Nephilim, and he eliminated them. He got rid of the competition and established a despotic and autocratic violent enslaving system of government.

Some translations, knowing some of this background, render that word "before" as "against." "Nimrod, the mighty hunter, *against* the Lord" is not a technically correct translation, but it is correct in terms of revealing God's intent to show Nimrod's relationship with Him. The founder of Babylon was clearly an enemy, even as God calls "this world" and its friends as His enemy in James 4.

It also says that the beginning of Nimrod's kingdom was Babel. That name in itself is an indicator of what the founder thought they were doing, because Babel, in the Accadian language means "Gate of God." In other words, what they were building was to be the Gate of God. They

had very high-blown opinions about their ambition.

They were saying that this city (Babylon) and the government and the system they were putting together was the way of a higher and greater way of life—that it was the gate, the door. Jesus said, "Enter you into the *straight* gate." It is that kind of meaning. Nimrod and his cohorts were saying, "If you become part of us, we are opening up to you the gate of God."

This was one of the ways in which Nimrod and other leaders there sold, convinced, the people on this project. What they were doing was selling them by way of creating lust. Of course that comes out later: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." The groundwork for the whole system was being laid by these men?these influential people.

Notice the arrogance here that came from the mouths of those who were building:

Genesis 11:4 And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven.

God's command, all the way back in Genesis 1, was for mankind "to be fruitful and multiply, and to replenish the earth, and subdue it." These people were in rebellion against that command. They wanted to stay put and combine their resources and to make a name for themselves as a mighty people. A name indicates distinctiveness. Sometimes it means pre-eminence. We say that somebody has a great name. It means they have a great reputation.

What we are looking at here—"Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven"—was very likely a slogan that they (the government, and primarily the leadership) were using in order to get the multitudes of people into building whatever the project happened to be. In this case it was the city.

I think that you understand that people follow, because of sloganeering. Government's use of propaganda is very effective these days in order to get people behind them, and thus follow the leader into battle or the achievement of some project. They call it "*spin*." You put a certain spin on something, and that was what these people were doing. In our time—at least in my generation—Adolph Hitler was very good at selling his people into a socialist dictatorship, and then into war.

You will find, once you have the history behind you, like maybe somebody my age or even younger, that before a nation ever goes into war, the propaganda machine begins to get working in order to prepare the people for following the leader—the commander-in-chief—into battle. People will follow because they can be led to believe that the glory of the despot can be reflected on themselves. But this entire project of Babel was done in rebellion, because they knew that they were to spread abroad over the entire earth. I think that what we are looking at here is the lurking desire for empire and self-grandiosity for the leader.

It is also quite likely that if successful, the leadership would have made slaves of the people, if they were not already slaves even as they were building. Regardless of whether they were slaves, Genesis 11:6 shows the people were unified in their desire to complete the project.

Genesis 11:6 And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they

have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

The people were working to make successful the dream of Nimrod and his cohorts. They had been won over by the propaganda machine that was encouraging them to build the project. They were building the foundation of a system that could become incredibly evil very quickly, so God stepped in while it was still small to forestall the very development of what we have been now seeing taking place before our very eyes for the past 70 years or so. They were concentrating their ambition and power so that they could bring about whatever God would allow them to think upon.

Now what we see under construction here in Genesis 10 and 11 is the foundation of a system *NOT* built on trusting God, but attempting to find achievement and success through the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Genesis 11:4 And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven.

A tower is normally a fortification, but symbolically, figuratively, there are two major pictures that the tower represents. The one is that it represents a place of safety and security, a stronghold, a symbol of strength that one can fall back upon or run to when things really get rough.

Notice the associations David makes in II Samuel 22?the synonyms that he uses before the word "tower."

II Samuel 22:3 The God of my rock: in him will I trust. He is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, *my high tower* and my refuge, my saviour; you save me from violence.

Figuratively, a tower is a place of safety, a place of refuge. They were building a tower in Babel.

The second aspect of a tower's symbolism has both far-more interesting possibilities, considering that in the end-time Babylon is to be a major player on the world scene, once again wielding power and capturing the people's imagination. This time it is not isolated to one small geographical location like the Babylon was in Nimrod's day, but it is *a powerful worldwide system* influencing the lives of people. The tower was what men were building, and thus it symbolically represents mankind's hope and dreams. It represents man's aspirations for his place in the creation.

Notice that the tower was *to reach to heaven*. That gives you an indication that these people were thinking *BIG!* Do you see what it is saying? Spiritually it is saying that *they were going to invade the realm of God!* They were thinking big in terms of how they were looking at themselves, and what they were going to accomplish. They were already thinking that they were deserving of the classification of one who could exist, live, and produce in heaven. What

this does of course is it leads us to the spiritual source of the manner or matter of their anti-God thinking, because in Isaiah 14:12-14 we have the following stated:

Isaiah 14:12-14 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which did weaken the nations! For you have said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven. I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.

Satan had the same grandiose ideas as these men at Babylon did long before he put thoughts in their minds of emulating him in their project, "Babylon the Great." Thus we see that the driving force behind Nimrod, and why they were so against God and were His enemy, is the shadowy figure of Satan the Devil, manipulating the building of the foundation.

The people were not so stupid as to plan on the tower literally reaching the place of God's throne, but the statement reveals the over-weening pride, the hubris regarding how important and how powerful they thought that they were. They took to themselves God-like authority to do as they pleased, but in reality they did not have the foggiest notion of the greatness of God's power, of His intelligence, of His character, and His plans for mankind. This leads me to think that God was not even being thought of here.

Do you think that this is not happening today? Here we are, living in Israel, and they are pushing aside the word of God and doing everything in their power to hide it, to hide its meaning, to denigrate it, to make it look stupid, and to even make the leaders—the founders of this nation—look as though they did not know what they were doing.

We will read Psalm 10:4 for proof of this (confirmation). This is how David distinguished between the wicked and the righteous. Think about what David is saying here in relation to Babylon.

Psalm 10:4 The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.

This leads me to understand that what God requires of us is that we *always* consider Him in *every* undertaking that is a part of our life. God is to get first place, and everything is passed through what we know and understand of what He has already spoken about. His word never changes, and it is pure. Anything taken through there, and then conformed to is going to produce the good things that we want. But if God is not thought of, or God is rejected in terms of the things that He has already said, the end is already determined. It will not succeed.

Babylon and its tower was to be a triumph of human reasoning. It was to be the picture of humanity's ability to control and to master its world. It was their vision of how things might be.

Genesis 11:3 And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had

they for mortar.

What this is of course is God repeating what they said amongst themselves so that we would understand something. He is giving us a clue. God is telling us that there was an inherent weakness in what they were doing.

Notice something that we probably would just pass right over and never think about because we are so familiar with what man does all around us. They were making this tower of brick, which was something that they had to manufacture. God provided stone for men to use. Stone of course would have required a lot of work. They would have had to mine them and trim them and cut them into size and shape. This is what God had Israel do when they built the Temple. The Temple was not made out of brick that men made. It was made out of stone that God made, which shows ultimately, figuratively, that that Temple is going to last as long as stone lasts. We are supposed to get the idea from this that it is going to last forever!

We are part of what God was symbolically representing in that Temple that He built out of stone. But man builds things out of his own inventive genius. There is a big difference between brick (man-made) and stone that God made out of granite, and will go on and on and on and seemingly never wear out.

What we are looking at here is an indication of human technology being used rather than the stones that God provided for man's use. Consider also that they were using bitumen for mortar. That is a fancy word for asphalt. It is not all that good for use as mortar, and again it indicates another flaw in their reasoning. What they were building, God is telling us in verse 3, was not going to last. God is eternal, and what God does has eternal ramifications.

Babylon symbolizes a dream of human civilization intended to be a permanent achievement of his independence and pride, of his inventiveness, cooperation, creativity, and utopian planning. This, you see, was going to be their place of refuge—their high tower.

It is interesting though how God looks at things. Just like the Laodicean, who judges things in one direction. God sees him in an entirely different direction. The Babylonians thought this was going to be a great wonderful achievement. Not God. He says, "Let us go down and take a look at that thing." God saw the thing as a nightmare for man, and Babylon and its tower quickly becomes instead a symbol of the judgment of God.

The story has an ironic twist to it. When we see man's pride in his architectural marvel that he was building, and his hopes and dreams to build a tower whose top reaches all the way up to heaven, compared to the literal fact that this skyscraper of sorts was so small that God had to come *down* to see it. A little bit of Godly humor there!

What we are looking at here is nothing more than idolatry on a massive scale. It is a collective apostasy from God's clear command to spread abroad, and it receives the same scorn from God that God gives everywhere in the Bible. So what began as an energetic attempt for unity to achieve their end through the vehicle of one language, it ends with their dispersal and a multitude of languages that thwarted their attempt. Was it not easy for God to stop that? He just would not let them talk to one another. What would you do without being able to

communicate?

Richard and I have all kinds of fun whenever we go to France to the Boyers and try to communicate with one another. We do a pretty good job of grunts and gestures and facial expressions. We know just a little bit about one another's language to be dangerous, but somehow or another, we get through to each other.

One of the intriguing aspects to this is that on the Day of Pentecost God took many languages and made them all understandable as one. He reversed the process there. He thus showed that He is going to bring about the unity of mankind through His miraculous intervention. That will be accomplished through the Church—an instrument that has proved that it will always faithfully take God into consideration and do according to His will in whatever they set their minds to do.

Babylon is a picture of misguided human hopes and dreams of vain attempts for power, achievement, culture, technology, security, preeminence and fame *against*, and therefore without God. It is therefore a vivid lesson of humanity's attempt for oneness gone awry. It is a picture of God's judgment against the immorally illusion of idolatry, pride, self-reliance, and infinite achievement of men. It began with great hopes that they were building the Gate of God. It ended in purposeless confusion, which is what the word Babel means.

Psalm 127:1 Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman wakes but in vain.

In Genesis 11, and then continuing throughout the rest of the Bible, God is showing what happens when a people ignore or rebel against Him in their thinking. This is one of the most impressive of all lessons that we can learn from Babylon's foundation. It is the *foundation* of what is so bad about Babylon. Leaving God out of the picture leads men to think that by their own devices they can determine their destiny. But brethren, God *RULES!* That is the overall lesson of this.

God rules. He is Sovereign. His purpose stands, regardless of what men think. If men do not think in alignment with God, it will not succeed eternally. It may *seem* to succeed for a while, but it is an illusion. It *cannot* succeed forever, because God will bring it into judgment if He is not part of the building process from the foundation all the way up to the completion of it. He has to be part of every part of it, or we will do it wrong.

If the Church begins to get out of whack, He will take steps to correct it. He will scatter it if necessary in order to make that correction come home to people so that they have to have relationships with Him one-on-one. They will have to get their relationship with Him straightened out if they are going to be part of the foundation that is going to be working for eternity under Jesus Christ. Every part *of that* foundation is going to be right, because it has taken God into consideration in every act of their life, at least as much as God deems necessary for them for what they are going to fulfill in the Kingdom of God. God will not be left out of His purpose by anybody.

Babylon left Him out of their hopes and dreams, and so everything they did was against Him. Despite their ability to communicate with one another, despite the inventiveness of their minds,

despite their creativity, despite the great vision they thought they had, God shows us in very short order that He destroyed it. We all understand that He did not destroy it completely. He stopped their work right there because He had a purpose for Babylon that was going to continue all the way to the end.

Proverbs 16:1-4 The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD. All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weighs the spirits. Commit your works unto the LORD, and your thoughts shall be established. The LORD has made all things for Himself: yes, even the wicked for the day of evil.

Now consider the Pharaohs. They built huge tombs to preserve record of their accomplishment. But where is Egypt? Greece's tower was where knowledge and beauty were. But where is Greece? Assyria and Rome built huge military machines, but where are they today?

Today mankind still has his towers that he looks to for security: immense material resources, scientific inventiveness, becoming an economic powerhouse, a military might that is unmatched in the world. There was the 1,000-year Reich, and the "There will always be an England," and "America—God's country." Now how close are we to the end when once again we find men attempting to build a global government out of the last brick in an effort to supplant the Creator God? Well, God has something to say about that in Psalm 2:1-4.

Psalm 2:1-4 Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sits in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision.

Do you think that a one-world government is not building right now? It is! The Bible calls it *Babylon*. Later it calls it *the Beast*. It shows you a good deal what God thinks about this thing. It is a wild Beast that is going to enslave and devour men in all of its machinations.

Psalm 2:9-12 You shall break them with a rod of iron; you shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise now therefore, O you kings: be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son [meaning Submit to the Son], lest he be angry and you perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him.

Blind pride that gives little or no thought to God and His purpose for mankind and the nation is once again at work. The original Babylon stands as a monument to this truth that God will dash it in pieces. God rules, and mankind has to stop trusting in his self-imagined powers, because there are eternal principles that cannot be defied.

All of history, when understood in the light of Bible revelation, testifies that man must answer to God, and so His purpose will stand because He is Sovereign. That is the counterpoint to the foundation of what is so bad about Babylon. It was begun, and it continues in its rebellion against the laws and even the most clearly-stated will of God.

Let us go back to Revelation 18 to the end-time insight into Babylon, and let us look again at what God shows in regard to the characteristics. In one sense they are no different from what they are in Genesis 11. The difference lies in that God gets a little bit more specific, at least spiritually.

Revelation 18:2-4 And he [the angel] cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of demons and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that you be not partakers of her sins, and that you receive not of her plagues.

Here we leap forward from Genesis 11 about 4,000 years, and are given an end-time view into the system, focused on Israel and the Beast, grown to its greatest extent of influence ever. We are reaching the very conclusion God stopped from occurring there in Genesis 11 when He scattered the people by making communication very difficult. We have reached a time when technology has made possible the very rapid transfer of information on a global basis.

There is no doubt from the description God provides of the system that it is powerful, attractive, and appealing to the senses. Much of its power to conform us lies in its attractiveness of its appeal to ambition. That is what those people in Genesis had. They had great ambition, and that spirit continues right on through to the end-time.

Now is God against power? Is He against greatness, attractiveness and wealth? Not at all. These are things He promised to Abraham and his children, and yet He urges us to come out, or perish with it, because it has been misused and abused, and is destined for destruction. This leads us then to think that the coming out must be spiritual, because the reality is that Babylon is a worldwide system, and we must live in this world. There is *NOWHERE* to run so that one can escape its influence.

For us, it is not a question of retiring from the world as a monk to a cloistered monastery. Escaping it involves a search for different attitudes, perspectives, behaving differently within the world without being molded, shaped and conformed to it by the compelling fascination of its ugly but beguiling sins.

Revelation 18:7 How much she has glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she says in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.

One commentary said in regard to this verse: "Wherever there is idolatry, prostitution, self-glorification, self-sufficiency, pride, complacency, reliance on luxury and wealth, avoidance of suffering, and violence against life—there is Babylon." This is correct, because Babylon is everywhere, and that is the way it is everywhere. But brethren, this description fits nobody in the world better than Israel.

Notice Babylon's three-fold web of sin. Notice the arrogant pride that is so great. It is incapable of self-analysis, and therefore unrepentant. He says "luxury" and "pride." "I sit a queen." "Avoidance of suffering." "I will see no sorrow," she says.

Luxury and pride can lead to boastful self-sufficiency if it is not controlled. A person can allow this to become his high tower. We are going to touch on an interesting proverb in Proverbs 18:11, because I want you to see this truth stated clearly in God's word.

Proverbs 18:11 The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as a high wall in his own conceit.

Pride. Self-sufficient. Esteem.

It also says "avoidance of suffering." Avoidance of suffering can, and very frequently does lead to the dishonest pursuit of ease, and thus compromise with principle. Let me show you something in Hebrews 11:32—a wonderful contrast between what God is talking about in Revelation 18 and the way *His* people, *His* children have acted when confronted with this possibility.

Hebrews 11:32-35 And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah, of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, *not accepting deliverance*; that they might obtain a better resurrection.

The people of God do not avoid pain whenever pain is necessarily gone through, because obedience and submission to God in doing acts of love, either toward Him or some other person, are necessary. God is not saying that it is wrong to avoid pain at all times, but where principles of obedience and attitude are involved, the avoidance of pain is deadly to a Christian's faith. God expects us to make that pain an investment in something that is far greater, and to go through it.

I know that is not fun to hear, because all of us like to avoid pain. I am not saying that we should go through it, but there are times when we must go through it. We must humble ourselves and go through it for the glory of God and the sacrifice that will build the kind of

character that God wants to see in His children—children who stick to their word, stick to their vows that they made at baptism, and follow through despite what it is costing them.

The avoidance of pain can lead to the dishonest fruit of ease and compromise with principle. Babylon avoided suffering through the pursuit of satiety, as she chose to pursue luxurious pleasure. Do you know what satiety is? It is the seeking of fullness. That is its definition. It is eating until you are full, and then eating more.

I want to show you something in Deuteronomy 32:12 what God has to say about His people Israel. This is in Moses' song.

Deuteronomy 32:12-13 So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him [meaning Israel]. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock.

God gave Israel the best gifts that He could give to a nation that was His.

Deuteronomy 32:14-20 Butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat; and you did drink the pure blood of the grape. But Jeshurun [a code word for Israel] waxed fat, and kicked: you are waxen fat, you are grown thick, you are covered with fatness; then [during the midst of its prosperity] he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods; with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto demons, not to God: to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. Of the Rock that begat you are unmindful, and have forgotten God that formed you [because they were lost, submerged in their luxuries]. And when the LORD saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons and of his daughters. And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith.

Now why could God say that? Because their faith was in their money. Their faith was in their luxury. That had become their high tower. It was what they looked to for security. In Revelation 17 and 18 you will find all of those materials mentioned. They are luxury items: gold, clothing, wine, spices, wood, ivory, pearl, and perfume.

I think it is fitting at this point to make a connection between the Harlot's luxury, pride, and avoidance of suffering and Sodom's sin. We all know what happened to Sodom. Again, it is not the luxury itself. It is what people allow the luxury, the wealth, to do to them.

Ezekiel 16: 48-50 As I live, says the Lord GOD, Sodom your sister has not done, she nor her daughters, as you have done, you and your daughters. Behold, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abominations before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good.

Poof! and Sodom disappeared. Well, we are repeating what Sodom did. We are on track using the things that we learned from Babylon. Those things have become part of the character of the Israelitish people, and it is going to lead to the same end as happened to Sodom, except that God promises that He will not destroy Israel completely. It is very interesting that in Revelation 17: 16, He says that He is going to burn the whore with fire.

It is also interesting, because also comparable between Sodom and Israel is their involvement in sexual sin. Sodom was involved in homosexuality, and it became a term forever spoken as "Sodomy." But Babylon's sin is harlotry, which is a little bit broader. It is every bit as bad, but its term is reserved for women. What I am getting at is the combination of these three conditions prevalent in a society out of touch with God and seems to lead to perverse sexual behavior. Do you know why? Because once you begin to have the economic well-being, the people then are led to seek more and more, (there is satiety) because what they formerly did is not enough to excite them and exhilarate them and give them pleasure anymore, and so they go deeper and deeper and deeper into perversion.

We are on track. The track began back in Genesis 11, and we are picking up speed as we go along. One of the attractions of Babylon is its luxury. There is no country that lives as luxuriously as the United States of America does, and it is a deadly trap if it is allowed to lure us into this way of life of pride, avoidance of suffering. This combination overwhelms a person into producing faithlessness, and it is interesting that these three conditions given here in Revelation 18 exist in abundance in Israel today. Our sexual perversity has reached epic proportions through pornography, homosexuality, lesbianism, pedophilia, bestiality, and on and on it goes.

As great as my concern is about these things running rampant in our nation, I am even more concerned, because this environment that we live in is also perfect for producing Laodiceanism in the church member so that we are spiritually distracted into drifting through life rather than coming out of Babylon.

Laodiceanism motivates one to either ignore his spiritual responsibilities, or to be blind, in the worse case, to its reality. Regardless of which, it is Laodiceanism, which is spiritual harlotry. It is the same problem for which God condemned Israel, except that it is spiritual in nature rather than physical and material. Spiritual harlotry is faithlessness.

The Laodicean is wise in his own conceit, and he proclaims, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." There is the pride that precedes the fall, and the sin occurs when he refuses to suffer, and instead compromises in order to avoid it. The avoidance of suffering can be deadly.

There is one more principle here, but I will not go into it because it is a little bit longer, and maybe I will tack it on to the beginning of the next sermon because we are going to continue on Babylon. But I want to give you a summary to this point.

We are surrounded by Babylon, and it is God's will that we be prepared within it. Understand that. We cannot run from it. It is there. There are some problems that we can avoid, that we can run from, but we cannot run from Babylon. There is nowhere to run to. It is an enemy, and it must be faced. Nobody can do it for you. Each person has to do it on his own. God commands us to come out of Babylon.

Babylon is first and foremost a worldwide anti-God system, called in Greek "the cosmos." The coming out is accomplished spiritually by not permitting our lives to be conformed to its anti-God image. Babylon was founded in rebellion, initially stopped by God, but then in the end-time permitted to re-group and seek to carry out its original design, driven by Satan, and accomplished through human intellect and reason.

Finally, Babylon is very appealing to human nature, seducing through inviting appeal to physical gratification, and interestingly, spiritual enlightenment. It is the perfect environment for producing distraction and complacency, and therein lies its danger to us through the spiritual disease we call "Laodiceanism."