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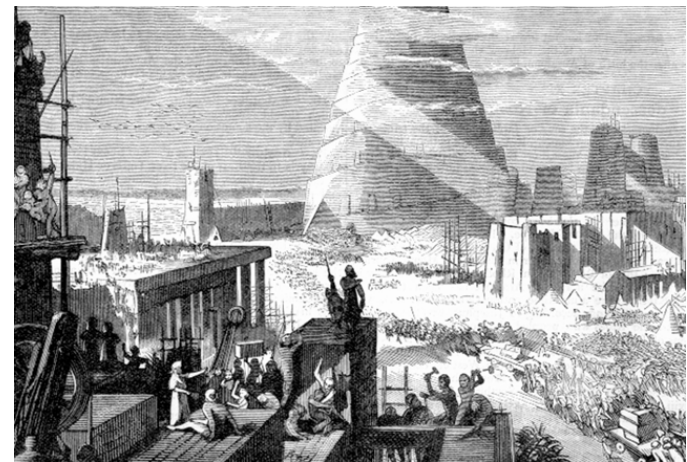
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Babylon

Part 1- The Origin of Babylon
Part 2 - The Identity of Babylon
Part 3 - The Return from Babylon



time of weakness. What is glory? Jesus prayed, “**Father, the hour has come, glorify your Son ...**” (John 17:1) and was then led away to die. God’s wisdom and his ways are higher than ours. The weakness and frailty of the flesh become the glory and power of the Spirit of God.

Restored Walls

The temple was eventually finished and we will move on several decades to the time of Nehemiah. He was a young man who had risen to prominence in the Persian palace. He was the royal cup-bearer. He was content there in his prosperity until a brother came and brought him news of the homeland: “**Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.**” (Neh 1: 3). His heart awoke and he reacted as Daniel had done. He says, “**I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven**” (1: 4). Like Daniel he confessed his sins and those of his people (1: 6,7). Like Daniel he searched the scriptures and found prophecies of exile and restoration. He too risked his life as he stood before king Artaxerxes with a sad face (2: 1,2). Once again God heard his prayer and this time the king gave the command of which Gabriel had spoken to Daniel. Nehemiah had permission to go and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

I have not space to consider the conflicts and difficulties that Nehemiah encountered as he and his men laboured with a tool in one hand and a weapon in the other. God's great building programme could not be stopped till Jerusalem had an altar, a temple and city walls complete.

All these things are the same today for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear in the spirit.

Conclusion

So we reach the end of our study of Babel and Babylon. We have seen two ways pictured in the scriptures. One is the way of the natural man; the other is the way of God. One is a path we can walk by sight; the other a path of faith. The first is a broad road with many travellers; the second is a narrow way which leads to life. Let me finish with some of the parting words of Moses as the Israelites viewed the promised land: “**See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity ... the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them**” (from Deut 30: 15-20).

death, proclaimed, “The Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands ...” (Acts 7:48). With surprising ignorance multitudes today still *consecrate* buildings of stone and brick which they then enter with great respect and call *the house of God*. If you reverence a physical building, it cannot fail to cloud your vision of the true house of God. The new Testament says very clearly, “Do you not know that you are the temple of the living God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”

If people have no experience of the Holy Spirit, they will turn back to imitate the times before his coming at Pentecost. If they do not know reality, they must cling to the shadow. But those who have experienced the indwelling of the Holy Spirit should know better. God sent the Roman armies to make his final statement that he had finished with manmade buildings. They pulled the temple to pieces stone by stone. The church has spent the intervening centuries trying to rebuild it!

In Jerusalem the builders set to work and laid the foundation of the second temple. The people then gathered to praise God. They shouted and wept for joy. The noise was heard far away (Ezra 3:10-13). It was like the prodigal son’s return. The harps, so long silent in Babylon, now burst into music.

Opposition

Alas, their joy was short-lived. Their enemies were soon at work to stop them. First they brought offers of help. “You have nothing in common with us in building a house to our God”, said Zerubbabel and Joshua, the Jewish leaders (Ezra 4:3). They clearly they saw that only God’s people can build God’s temple. He who does not enter by the door ... is a thief and a robber (John 10:1). There is no place for well-meaning foreigners in the Kingdom of God. You must be born from above and become a true citizen before you can have a part in it.

When their offers were rejected, these enemies showed their true character. They discouraged and frightened the builders and slandered them till the work stopped (Ezra 4). For about 16 years no more work was done, while two kings of Persia came and went. Problems and opposition are no proof of God’s displeasure.

The years passed by in apparent defeat, but God was preparing his answer. In time the prophets Haggai and Zechariah arose to call the people again to repentance and encourage them to continue the building. “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit”, says the Lord of Hosts (Zec 4:6). Zechariah brought these well-known words to the leader Zerubbabel, as he looked at his unfinished task. This was the important thing. It was a work of God’s Spirit, accomplished by his power. “Take courage ... my Spirit remains among you. ... The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house;”, prophesied Haggai (2:4,5,9). The glory of God had descended on the temple that Solomon built. Could this weak effort have greater glory? The first temple was built at the height of Israel’s power under King Solomon. This second one was built in their

Part 1 - The Origin of Babylon

Early in the book of Genesis and late in the book of Revelation we read about the city of Babylon. Genesis uses the Hebrew name Babel, while Revelation uses the Greek name Babylon. The subject of Babel or Babylon is one that we can follow right through the scriptures. Its origin is in Genesis chapter 11. Two chapters in Isaiah (13 & 14) and two long chapters in Jeremiah (50 & 51) are largely devoted to Babylon’s judgment. The book of Daniel was written in Babylon and is mostly not in Hebrew, but in Aramaic, the language of Babylon. The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah are mainly about the return from Babylon and the restoration of Jerusalem. Towards the end of the book of Revelation we find two full chapters (17 & 18) describing the judgment and destruction of Babylon. Finally in Rev 18: 4,5 the command goes out: “Come out of her, my people, that you may not participate of her sins and that you may not receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.” If we do not know what Babel or Babylon is, we will not even understand this command - far less will we obey it.

There is much more teaching on this subject than on “going to church”, the Lord’s supper, baptism and many other more familiar topics. We cannot afford to ignore the things on which God places emphasis in the scriptures.

The story of the tower of Babel is one of many Bible stories from which most of us have probably learnt little or nothing since we first heard it in childhood. We were taught that God was offended by the attempts of some rather simple people who thought they could build a tower high enough to reach Heaven. Let us turn to Genesis chapter 11 and examine the story more carefully.

Divine Initiative

The first thing visible to the discerning eye in this story is the total absence of divine initiative. It was all man’s idea. The contrast is sharp when we look at the following chapter of Genesis, which begins with the words, “Now the Lord said to Abram, Go...” Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees not on his own initiative, but at the command of God. Maybe he went unwillingly, but God blessed him and now he ranks among the greatest characters of history. When Moses set about delivering the Israelites on his own initiative he was soon in trouble and had to flee to Midian. When 40 years later he returned unwillingly, but at the command of God he accomplished a mighty deliverance. And many are the stories of those who acted at the command of God and received his blessing. God will only bless his own plans. Jesus said “Every plant which my heavenly Father did not plant shall be rooted up” (Matthew 15:13). We may compare the verse, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). God can only bless that which has its origin in himself. The key to the life of Jesus is

that every word he spoke, and every action he performed came from the mind of his Father.

The opening words of John's Gospel teach us the same lesson, "In the beginning was the word All things came into being through it (or Him)". The first chapter of Genesis shows how God's creative power is in his word. When he speaks worlds are created. When he is silent nothing happens. When God spoke to Abraham and Abraham responded, it was the beginning of God's great redemptive plan for all mankind. The human effort of the tower of Babel soon came to nothing.

Building Materials

The next thing we notice in this story is the choice of building materials. "Let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly". These bricks have a meaning. Firstly they are made of earth, which represents human nature. Earthen vessels containing divine glory have a positive symbolic meaning in scripture; but earth or human nature as a building material is utterly unacceptable. The altars and temples of the Old Testament were made of stone - a natural product not man-made.

Secondly bricks are *mass produced*. They are all the same size and the same shape. That is always the result of man's religion. Its products all look the same. The world wants conformity. It feels secure with people who keep to the party line. We may search the scriptures without finding two men of God who were the same. Noah built an ark. Abraham lived in tents. Joseph became prime minister. Moses delivered his people. David was a king who danced before the Lord. In the new testament we may look at Peter, Paul and John again find a complete diversity of character and ministry. They were not mass-produced. Each was formed and moulded by the Holy Spirit and brought into the spiritual likeness of his Saviour. To the world they were uncomfortable non-conformists and they did not fit in it. To God they were conformed to the image of his firstborn Son. God is building a temple of living stones, all of different shapes and sizes, but all to be fitted perfectly together by the master builder. No one will envy anyone else's position as each will only fit in his own place.

Thirdly, these bricks *were thoroughly burned*. The purpose was to harden them. Few things are sadder to see than indoctrinated members of sects. They are literally like brick wall. They have been thoroughly baked and hardened to make them resist all outside influences. The true child of God is strong, but not hard. His strength is the inward strength of the Holy Spirit. He does not need a hard impenetrable shell to protect his inner uncertainty. His confidence is in God.

Bricks, if simply piled one upon another, will of course fall down. They must be held together. So they *used tar for cement*. In the temple which Solomon built there was no cement. The stones fitted perfectly together. The religion of Babylon tries to find every possible way of creating and preserving a unity which it does

ascends, so the ego and pride grow bigger too. The boasts become louder. Heathen altars are plentiful in Babylon, but it is no place to build the altar of God.

Restored Festivals

After rebuilding the altar and re-establishing the daily sacrifice, the returning immigrants celebrated the festival of Tabernacles. This was the last of the three major festivals God had ordained for his people; the first was Passover and the second was Pentecost. Leviticus chapter 23 gives full details. The Exodus from Egypt had begun with the Passover celebration. God had festivals for his people, then as now, but these festivals could not be celebrated in Babylon or Egypt.

Should Christians also keep these festivals - as Jewish people do? Or did God replace them with Christmas and Easter in the new covenant? In the new testament these festivals are not replaced - instead they are fulfilled. They have a spiritual fulfilment which we can and must enjoy. They point firstly, as do all the scriptures, to Jesus himself. He was born on the first day of the Festival of Tabernacles and died at Passover. He himself was the perfect fulfilment of the festivals, as he also was of the whole old testament.

The festivals speak also of **our** spiritual lives. We must begin with our own Passover when we personally feed on the Lamb of God and are cleansed by his blood. We must learn to feed on the unleavened bread of the pure truth of God. We must experience our own personal Pentecost as the early disciples did in the upper room. And we must go on from there to experience the Festival of Tabernacles, which includes the festival of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement. All these festivals represent spiritual blessings which our Father has prepared for us.

Christmas and Easter are nothing more than heathen festivals, heathen in origin and heathen in present practice, and were introduced to the church by those who had no experience of spiritual festivals. The pagans who poured into the church at the time of Constantine (fourth century AD) needed something to keep them happy. They are Babel's festivals and have no place in Scripture or God's kingdom. Jeroboam, the first king of northern Israel, was condemned for introducing a festival which he had invented in his own heart (1 Kings 12:32, 33). The church has done a hundred times as much as he did in making its own festivals! I have written separately both on Israel's festivals and church festivals.

A Restored Temple

The altar was the first item in God's rebuilding programme for his returning people. The second was the temple. It had been similar at the time of Moses. Soon after the Exodus, God instructed Moses to build the tabernacle for him to dwell with Israel through the time of their wanderings. God must have a dwelling place. But where does he want to live now? Stephen, moments before he was stoned to

was still a son when he was in the far country; but he was living with prostitutes (like Babylon) and enjoying none of the blessings of sonship. (For more on this subject read my writing on Bible Chronology.)

The first fulfilment of Gabriel's prophecy was the command given by Cyrus in the last verse of 2 Chronicles and more fully in Ezra chapter 1 verses 2 to 4. Cyrus told the Jews to return to Judah and build the house of the Lord, the God of Israel. He even commanded their heathen neighbours to support them with freewill offerings of silver and gold and goods and cattle.

Daniel had been a young man when the captivity began, but 70 years later when it ended he was old. He was too old for the long journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. The majority of the Jews in Babylon had grown up there and were unwilling to leave its security for a dangerous journey to an unknown land. For many of the Jews the cost was too great. They felt at home and comfortable in their exile. "Do not disturb us with your impractical idealism", they probably said. "Cyrus is a good king, and we can live good and upright lives here". Maybe; but the purposes of God were in Jerusalem, not Babylon. Jerusalem was the place for rebuilding the temple, and Israel was the land where the Messiah must come.

Many responded to the decree of Cyrus and set out for their fatherland. In Ezra chapter 2 we can read the names and numbers of each family that returned. They trod once more in the steps of their father Abraham when he had left Ur of the Chaldees to go to the land of promise. The same faith took them on the same journey.

A Restored Altar

The first act of the returning exiles was to build the altar of God and to offer burnt offerings on it (Ezra 3:2). Sacrifice is central to all God's purposes. The most important sacrifice of all time is the offering of his son Jesus. Without it we have nothing to take away our sins and we have only darkness and death without God. The departure of the Israelites from Egypt also began with sacrifice and is remembered to this day at the Passover. The acceptance of God's Lamb slain at Calvary is essential for our salvation and the only true foundation for a spiritual life.

The second sacrifice is the sacrifice of ourselves. Jesus calls us to lay down our lives for him on God's altar. Some people are willing to lay down their lives in war for their country. Some give up their lives in the service of others. Some go overseas as missionaries and believe that they have laid down their lives for God. Others give up the world to live as monks or nuns and believe that they are walking the way of total consecration. These actions may be commendable and God may ask us to do some of them, but none of these altars is the altar of God. All of these things can be done with no death of the self-life. God's altar is the place where the self-life dies. Babylon feeds the self-life. As the manmade tower

not have. Such churches need strong leaders to hold them together. They have long conferences to sort out doctrinal differences; and they use all kinds of pressures on those who leave their group. How different it is for the true children of God. They have unity. They are held together by the love of God in their hearts. They are united by one spirit. Neither race, nor class, nor age nor sex divides them. Across these and every other human barrier they find that they are one. They are taught by the Spirit to love one another.

A City

In verse 4 we read about the builders' plans and motives: "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name; lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

They intended to build a city. Cain was the original city-builder of the scriptures (Gen 4:17). He was also the founder of false religion. He offered the fruit of his own work, an offering which God could not accept. The next city-builder of the scriptures was Ham's grandson Nimrod, whose name means *Rebel*. In fact from Gen 10:10 he appears to have been the leader in building Babel. He did not learn his lesson, but continued his rebellion in building further cities. God had commanded Adam and then Noah to fill the earth. To congregate in one place was therefore contrary to his plan. Why did they do it? The Hebrew word *ir* meaning city is from a root meaning to be awake or watch. It implies a fortified defended city. From the day Cain killed Abel he was in fear for his own life (Gen 4: 14). He wanted security and protection and he could not trust God for it. Nimrod, like Cain, was also a man of violence (Gen 10: 8,9). He wanted to build something to protect himself from the fruit of his ill-doing. But for us, God is our refuge and strength.

Abraham presents a wonderful contrast with Cain and Nimrod. He was living a secure life in Ur, one of the most advanced cities of the ancient world. God told him to leave his country and his relatives and his father's house, and he went. Five of his ancestors including Shem, the son of Noah, were still alive, and probably living there. They may have been good and faithful men, but he left them at the command of God. We read the explanation in Heb 11: 10, 13-16. He had seen a vision of a heavenly city and he could not be content with an earthly counterfeit of it. God was a greater security to him than the visible security of Ur. He could not sacrifice his fellowship with God for fellowship with his relations. The eyes of his faith saw the heavenly Jerusalem and he despised earthly cities. Later on when Lot went to live in the city of Sodom, Abraham continued in his tent. He had seen something better. Thus he became the father of the faithful. The holy city, the new Jerusalem, for which he looked, will not be built up brick by brick from earth. It will come down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev 21: 2).

Greatness

Let us now consider the tower that they attempted to build. *migdol*, the Hebrew word for tower, is from the root *gdl* meaning to be great. We could call it a “greatness”. They were building something big! The AV translation “whose top may reach unto heaven” is almost certainly wrong. Did people capable of such technical achievement really think they could build high enough to reach the clouds? You have only to look up at the sky to see the impossibility of it. The Hebrew literally means a tower and its head in heaven. The idea is probably again that of largeness. There may well also have been astrological purposes associated with it.

There are two “greatnesses” in scripture. Firstly there is the greatness of God which he also imparts to those whom he chooses and who walk humbly before him. In Genesis 12: 2 God said to Abraham “I will make you a great nation ... and make your name great”. Abraham did not strive for this greatness. It only came visibly long after his death. Joseph was exalted to greatness in the land of Egypt, but not through his own efforts. It was God who raised him up. Israel became great when God gave her victory under king David. And God highly exalted Jesus because he had humbled himself and become obedient to death. God gave him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow (Phil 2: 8-10).

The second greatness exalts itself against God. Goliath stood up and defied the armies of the living God. King Saul stood head and shoulders above the people; he became lifted up with pride and God rejected him. Nebuchadnezzar erected a great image sixty cubits high in the province of Babylon and later he boasted, “is this not Babylon the great which I have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?” (Dan 4:30). While the words were still in his mouth his sovereignty was removed and he was driven out to eat grass like an animal for seven years. In the end he knew that God reigned and gave the kingdom to whomsoever he wished. And in Revelation we read yet again of “Babylon the Great, the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth” (Rev 17:5).

A Name

“Let us make for ourselves a name”, they said. What an irony! I believe this is the only story in the whole Bible where no one has a name. Not one name from among all these men is recorded. All we read is the pronoun “they”. Their names are all forgotten, while now, 4000 thousand years later, the name of Abraham is known throughout the world. Have you ever wondered why long lists of names are recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah? These are the people whose hearts were set on Jerusalem, who left Babylon; and God had their names recorded in his

Let me summarise what I have said. We see in Daniel firstly a deep conviction that he and his people were in the wrong place. No amount of outward prosperity could compensate for this. He would rather have swept the streets of Jerusalem than sat on the throne of a foreign empire. Secondly we see him searching what scriptures he had to know why they were in captivity and when the judgment would end. Thirdly we see him turning to God in prayer, fasting and repentance for sin, seeking forgiveness and deliverance from their captors. May God grant us the same spirit and the same faith.

The Time to Leave

His prayers did not go unheard. The angel Gabriel came to him and told him not only of the coming restoration of his people, but of God’s further and greater purposes in the coming Messiah. Gabriel’s message went right beyond Daniel’s expectation and beyond his understanding too. These were Gabriel’s words: “Seventy sevens are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven sevens, and sixty-two sevens (9: 24, 25).

This amazing prophecy had a two fulfilments. There were just 70 weeks or 490 days left till the end of the 70 years of judgment; but there were 490 years to run from the command to rebuild Jerusalem till the Messiah would come and make atonement for sin. (One day in prophecy often stands for a year).

Not many people know about time periods in the Bible. Let me explain a few facts. There are four exact periods of 490 years each, running from the birth of Abraham to the death of Jesus. However one fact hides this from our sight. Whenever God’s purposes were suspended because of sin, the clock stopped and God did not record the time. Thus from the birth of Abraham to the Exodus was 505 years as man counts; but God did not count the 15 years from the birth of Ishmael to the birth of Isaac. He saw the time as only 490 years. From the Exodus to the dedication of Solomon’s temple was 621 years in human time. But there were 7 periods of slavery in the times of the judges which in total lasted 131 years. Again God saw only 490 years. From Solomon’s temple till the command to rebuild Jerusalem was 560 actual years; but 70 of these were the years of captivity in Babylon; and God saw 490 years only.

One solemn truth emerges from these facts: if we choose to live in captivity in Babylon, time will stand still in our spiritual lives. Physically we will grow older while spiritually we will remain infants. His great redemptive purposes will wait till we cry out for his forgiveness and obey his call, “Come out of her my people that you may not participate in her sins ...” (Rev 18:4). The prodigal son

he not follow Joseph's example and "forget his father's house and be content to be fruitful in the land of his adversity?" (Gen 41:51,52). Why did this man want to risk his life, when, in his position, he could do so much good if he stayed alive? God had miraculously raised him like Joseph to a high position in a foreign country. Was that not enough? Had he not been serving God in Babylon? Could he not be content to use his position to help his captive people? Was it really wise to risk his life? Such questions could not move him. However much God had prospered him in Babylon, his heart was in Jerusalem, the city of God.

At the height of Israel's prosperity, almost five centuries before, King Solomon had raised his hands in prayer to dedicate the temple he had built. Prophetically he saw forward to the time of their captivity and prayed: ... "if they return to you with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who have taken them captive, and pray to you toward their land which you have given to their fathers, the city which you have chosen, and the house which I have built for your name; then hear their prayer and their supplication in heaven your dwelling place and maintain their cause and forgive ... and make them objects of compassion before those who have taken them captive" (see 1 Kings 8:46-53).

All this had happened. The temple was destroyed, Jerusalem was desolate, but Daniel could still pray with his face towards the land and the ruins of the city where God had set his name. Prosperity in Babylon, even God-given prosperity, did not and could not satisfy him; because Israel was the land God had given to his fathers, and in Israel lay the purposes of God. So Daniel prayed; his enemies reported him and the death sentence was pronounced; he was thrown into the lions' den; but the king and the lions spent the night in fasting, and Daniel continued in prayer!

The book of Daniel does not appear to be written in order of time; Daniel's prayer and revelation in chapter 9 and his night in the lions' den in chapter 6 both occur at the beginning of the reign of Darius the Mede. We can learn much by reading these chapters side by side. Chapter 6 tells the story of the lions' den. Chapter 9 shows what was on Daniel's heart at the time. The Babylonian empire had just fallen to the Medes (Persians), and Daniel was trying to discover the purposes of God. In spite of his recent promotion as one of three ministers over the whole kingdom (6:3), Daniel gave himself first to study of the scriptures (9:2). Then, when he saw what they meant, he prayed and fasted (9:3). (Sadly, such behaviour is not too common in newly appointed politicians). He found twice recorded in Jeremiah (25:11 and 29:10) that Jerusalem would be desolate and her people in captivity for 70 years. He read the books of Moses and the prophets and saw that his people were in captivity for their sins. He then prayed and fasted and repented for the sins of his people. Politics took fifth place in the life of this man of God. Bible study, prayer, fasting and faithfulness to God were all more important.

book for all to read. How perfect are the Scriptures! How infinite is the mind that wrote them!

How people love a name; the name of a group or a leader or a doctrine or a movement with which they may identify; a password which will make them acceptable. Was it not this that Jesus lacked? "We know that God spoke to Moses; but as for this man, we do not know where he is from" (John 9:29). If you really know God, you will not ask people the name of their church or denomination or leader to find out if they are in your party and if you can safely have fellowship with them. Peter did not recognise Jesus in that way. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God", he said. "Blessed are you Simon (which means hearer) Bar-Jonah," Jesus replied, "Flesh and blood have not revealed it to you, but my Father in Heaven."

The more you learn to love the name of Jesus, the more you will hate names of groups and denominations. The more you love him, the more your fellowship with others will be based on that love. "There is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The more precious his name becomes to us, the more insignificant all other names become. "I am of Paul" and "I am of Apollos" has no place with those who love Jesus.

Judgment

How did God react to the men of Babel? The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men built. This language is not mythological. To Abraham, to Moses, to Joshua and to other chosen saints God appeared. To Babel, to Sodom and to his people in Egypt, we read that God went down. He came down because they were low.

God came down and he saw unity, and he broke it up! It was not the sort of unity he wanted. Jesus prayed, "That they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us; that the world may believe that you sent me" (John 17:21). He did not pray for a man-made **organisational** unity. We unite not by getting together, but by coming to Jesus. As we focus on him we are drawn to one another in **spiritual** unity, the unity Jesus had with his Father.

In unity there is strength. How well the world knows it! How important it is to the world! God saw in verse 6 that building Babel was only a beginning, and that unless he acted there were no limits to what would follow. Babel was the beginning of a great rival kingdom. God planned from the very beginning that man should rule the earth; but this must be man in union with and depending on God. The kingdom of God - not the kingdom of man - is the hope of all creation. Babel was the beginning of a great substitute for God's rule, a great counterfeit of his purposes. "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God", we read in the second commandment; and he will not allow any rivals. Judgment fell swiftly on Babel, as it did on the kingdom of Babylon in the time of Belshazzar, and on the spiritual

Babylon in the book of Revelation. God confused their language so that they did not understand one another. He then scattered them throughout the world.

Today we have a world where men do not understand each other's speech. In religion, in politics and in commerce, the judgment of Babel remains to this day. Religion throughout history has been the cause of endless war and bloodshed.

What then does Babel or Babylon represent today? Before we answer that question, we must look at our own hearts and ask: *Is Babel in you or in me?* Is your story written in Genesis 11 or in Genesis 12? Are you led by the Spirit of God like Abraham? Or do you make your own plans and hope God will agree to them? Do you try to build your own building with the bricks of human nature? Or are you being built as a living stone into God's temple? Do you seek a security in the organisations of earth? Or are you learning to trust your heavenly father?

Part 2 - The Identity of Babylon

By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion. Upon the willows in the midst of it we hung our harps How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill... If I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy....
Psalm 137.

Few psalms, indeed few poems in all human literature, are more beautiful than Psalm 137. The exiles sit weeping with silent harps in a foreign land, unable to sing. Babylon with all its riches and prosperity can never satisfy their hearts. Their dream, as the dream of many of their descendants since that time, was of Zion, the city of God. They wept for Jerusalem, the holy city, lying desolate and in ruins, while the proud King Nebuchadnezzar boasted of great Babylon which he had built. How could they, and how can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?

Many years ago I was first moved by the beauty of this Psalm, and learnt it all by heart; but I knew nothing of its spiritual meaning. I understood how the Jews in their exile longed passionately for the land of their fathers, and hated their proud rulers; but I was ignorant of the spiritual Babylon, the great prostitute of the book of Revelation, that for centuries has held the true church of God in captivity; and little did I know that I myself was in a foreign land.

Babylon is one of the *mysteries* of the Bible (Rev 17:5,7). Its meaning is hidden from the natural mind. If you want to understand it properly, you must ask God to give you a revelation of it. No truth of the scripture can really help us without the illumination of the Holy Spirit; but especially is this true of those things that God describes as *mysteries*.

Some people believe that Babylon is God's description of every sect and denomination except their own. They have had some revelation, real or imaginary, that they think makes them different from others. They are clever enough to

Demons of Babylon

In verse 5 of Revelation 18 we see the sins of Babylon piled up to heaven; in verse 2 we read: **"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! And she has become a dwelling place of demons and a cage of every unclean spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird."** In the parable of the sower, Jesus said that the birds that took away the seed represented the evil one. So demons, unclean spirits and birds all have the same meaning. Babylon is full of these evil things.

In recent years there has been a revived interest in exorcism. Many people have genuinely been delivered from evil, but others have failed to understand the real problems. Evil spirits are at home where there is sin. Demon possession and demonic influence are not the same as sin, but are closely linked with it. The heathen world deals with demons by ceremonies and incantations and magic words. Moral values do not matter. Sin is irrelevant. It is a matter of manipulating or appeasing spirits.

Much that appears to be Christian exorcism or deliverance ministry is not very different. Some people call in the priest who comes equipped with a prayer book and recites a mass or communion service. Others expect success if they use commands found in scripture to cast out demons. Paul talks about spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6:10-18. The first two items of armour that he names are truth and righteousness. He speaks also of faith, the word of God and prayer. The foundations of a true deliverance ministry are a righteous life, faith and the operation of the Holy Spirit. Those seeking deliverance from evil spirits must repent and turn from their sin as much as they are able. The powers of evil go where there is sin and then produce more sin. Babylon abounds in both sin and evil spirits.

I have been concentrating so far on the religious aspect of Babylon. In fact I believe it is wider than that. I believe it represents the world's government and economics as well. It is everything that man has set up in independence of God. Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had a dream of a great image that represented the kingdoms of the world. He then saw a stone that smote the image on its feet and destroyed it. That stone, Daniel told him, was the kingdom of God. It became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. All world systems must be destroyed and give way to the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Hallelujah! Amen.

Part 3 - Return from Babylon

Three times a day the prophet Daniel knelt in his roof chamber, with his window open toward Jerusalem, and prayed and gave thanks to God. The threat of death in the lions' den did not stop him. Was it really necessary to have his window open for everyone to see? He was a cabinet minister in a vast empire and could exercise immense influence for good. He knew the scriptures well. Why did

gifts to make himself rich is doing the same thing. Any man who wants to be a pastor because of the salary or status he will get is also a spiritual prostitute.

But money is not the only problem. We must beware of seeing the splinter in our brother's eye and ignoring the beam in our own. If we use the gospel and our spiritual gifts or ministries to build up our own status rather than to edify the body of Christ we ourselves are no better than spiritual prostitutes. Is our service for the Lord motivated by love for him and for our brothers and sisters, or by desire for position, reputation or money? In his sight, are we faithful servants, or are we prostitutes?

Sins of Babylon

Babylon is to be destroyed. Chapter 18 of Revelation describes the destruction in detail. We have seen that Babylon is essentially human religion. Why does it so deserve the wrath of God? The two reasons given in this chapter are *sins* and *demons*. In verse 5 we read that **her sins have piled up as high as heaven**. God hates sin. In old testament times, he taught this truth to his people by commanding them to make sacrifices and offerings for sin. Many prophets also warned them of his wrath against sin. Jesus was so named (Yeho-shua = YaHWeH saves) because he would save his people from their sins (Mat 1:21). This was so important that he gave his life to do it. He not only gave his life, but he also suffered the ultimate horror of separation from his Father as he hung upon the tree; and this was all because of human sin.

The religion of man has neither the power nor the desire to save people from their sins. Good intentions cannot change a corrupt heart. Man's religion breeds every kind of wickedness. Many churches have members who break every one of the ten commandments. Some worship other gods; others bow down before graven images; others repeatedly take the name of the Lord in vain and see no wrong in it; others dishonour their parents in the name of God; others commit murder in their hearts by hatred; some churches have even tried to kill their enemies. Some churches accept all kinds of sexual sin; many have become rich by stealing from their flock; false witness abounds and covetousness is so common that no one thinks it is wrong.

Many people no doubt lead lives that are at least outwardly respectable and may not themselves be guilty of the things I have just described; but all these things are present within the churches that call themselves Christian. Does anyone really imagine that God sees these churches as his representative on earth?

Most of the religious world is simply not prepared to fight against sin. Because it is not righteous it does not hate sin, and you cannot fight what you do not hate. The religious world generally is interested in conferences, politics, human rights, new methods of communication, witness by modern methods etc.; but not in the righteousness of God.

recognise the marks of Babylon in other churches, but blind enough to ignore the same things in themselves. They have never really heard the voice of God. They are certainly wrong, but still we must find out the true meaning of mystery Babylon.

The question of Babylon is especially important because it affects the whole world. **"Babylon was a gold cup in the LORD's hand; she made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad."** Jer 51:7. Ancient Babel or Babylon was the root of all heathen religion. When men tried to build their religious tower independently of the true God, they soon found other gods to worship; and the evil heathen influence spread to the surrounding countries as well. In the end these other gods surrounding ancient Israel led to her downfall and captivity.

In Revelation 18:3 we read, **"For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her."** Spiritual Babylon is also something of universal influence. It is something which has corrupted and contaminated the whole Christian world. In other words **natural** Babylon in the past brought **natural** Israel into captivity. **Spiritual** Babylon has now brought **spiritual** Israel into captivity.

Roman Catholicism

Many students of the scriptures believe that Babylon the Great is the Roman Catholic Church. We will look at some of the reasons for this. Babylon is described as a prostitute sitting on seven hills (Rev 17:9). The city of Rome is built on seven hills. The woman reigns over the kings of the earth (Rev 17:18). For many centuries popes ruled over large parts of Europe. Babylon has vast wealth (Rev 18:12 etc). The riches of the Vatican, the Pope's palace, are no secret. The woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus (Rev 17:6). For centuries true followers of Jesus together with many others who defied the authority of Rome were fined, imprisoned, tortured and burnt at the stake. Even more important than these terrible things, Rome has brought, and still brings, spiritual death to millions of its followers.

The woman in Revelation 17 is described **as the great prostitute (v1) and the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth (v5)**. A prostitute is a woman who offers her body for money. God has created sex for communion between man and woman, but prostitution is a degraded misuse of it for the sake of money. In general the Church of Rome has used man's desire for communion with God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ to make itself rich, powerful and exalted. This great prostitute is the final fruit of the evil seeds sown at the tower of Babel. We see a city and a great tower built up from earth, totally based on man's initiative. At its centre is a man before whom others bow down to the ground and worship.

When I say these things, I am not saying that each individual Roman Catholic priest or church member is corrupt or evil. I am speaking about the church organisation and what it claims to be. Individuals may have real experiences of God and lead righteous lives; but they do so in spite of and not because of the their church. The Catholic church has always preached some truth, and individuals have often responded to this truth and risen above their teachers. “You have a few names (even) in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they will walk with me in white; for they are worthy.” Rev 3:4.

Protestant Denominations

As I have said, it is not difficult for those who study the Bible, and in particular the book of Revelation, to recognise **Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes** as the Church of Rome. However in these days of Bible ignorance it is necessary to repeat these facts. But if Rome is the mother of prostitutes, where are the daughters? Are the Protestant sects and denominations really so different? When we look at them we see the same human towers ascending; the earthy bricks held together by tar. They also love their own names, and forget the name of Jesus and many of their members live in spiritual poverty, disease and death.

Many true followers of Jesus belong to denominations whose leaders deny that he is the son of God and reject the scriptures, and invent their own religion. How can the people of God be unequally yoked together with unbelievers? (2 Cor 6:14). Yet this happens in all the major Protestant denominations. Not only do the blind lead the blind; the blind even attempt to lead those with sight.

Many Protestant denominations are moving closer and closer to Rome. Their theologies may be different on certain points, but their spirit is the same and is the spirit of Babel. They are not led, like Abraham, by the Spirit of God, but simply moved with human motivation. The Holy Spirit could be withdrawn from the earth, and most church programs would continue without knowing anything had happened.

Can it really be true that churches respected by millions for centuries are Babylon in the sight of God? Could it really be true in Hezekiah's day that the high places were heathen abominations in the sight of God? For centuries the Israelites had sacrificed and burnt incense at them

Hezekiah's grandfather Jotham had been a righteous king and he had not pulled down the high places. Jotham's father Uzziah had been righteous and he had not pulled them down. In turn his father Amaziah had been righteous and he had not pulled them down. Neither had Jehoash before him. Could something accepted by four generations of godly kings really be wrong? Had not even Samuel the prophet sacrificed at a high place? Hezekiah rose above tradition - even the traditions accepted by righteous men. He did not follow man, but God. If the high places were abomination to God, then they must be pulled down. Must we

be limited to what our fathers have done? Is what was good enough for them good enough for us? Or do we want to obey God and go further?

Babel in the Heart

If many Protestant denominations are also Babylon, then surely those that hold to the scriptures are alright?

The one group that Jesus denounced more than all others was the Pharisees. These were the people that sat in Moses' seat and claimed to teach and believe the scriptures. Unlike the Sadducees they believed in the supernatural - angels and spirits. But like the people of Babel their religion was not from God but from man. They loved the place of honour at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues. They liked respectful titles attached to their names. They travelled land and sea to make one proselyte. Outwardly they appeared righteous to men, but inwardly they were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (Read Matthew 23 for further details). You can be Bible-believing and still have the spirit of Babel. God gives the Holy Spirit not to those who have correct doctrine, but to those who obey him (Acts 5:32). Without the Holy Spirit and obedience to God, all our scriptural knowledge will only help us to build another Babel.

Mystery Babylon was written in the woman's forehead. You may leave every Babylonian group but if the name of Babylon is still written on your forehead - in your mind and in your thinking - you will have achieved little. You will soon build another Babel, and you will be no better than you were before. The problem is far greater than a question of church membership. Don't go searching your town for a non-Babylonian church; rather search yourself to remove the spirit of Babylon.

The root of Babylon is human pride. “**The heart of the natural man is more deceitful than all things and incurable**”, wrote Jeremiah (ch 17:9). There is where the real problem lies. We love to build something that will glorify ourselves. We loudly say we want to give all the glory to God, and then we quietly steal it from him. We firmly declare we have no desire to please man, and then we pause and wait for people to clap their hands. We don't want to leave the city to come to Jesus outside the camp, bearing his reproach.

If you have only seen the *external* Babylon, you will wander for ever through its streets and never leave it to go to the new Jerusalem.

Prostitution

We must return to the idea of spiritual prostitution. God's intention is that sexual relationships should take place within marriage to unite husband and wife in love and to result in the birth of children. A prostitute uses sex in totally the wrong way to earn money. Any church that uses religion to get money from its members is committing spiritual prostitution. Any evangelist that uses his spiritual