

# A TALE OF TWO CITIES:

## A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF BABYLON & JERUSALEM

Wednesday 'RECHARGE' – September 18, 2024 – Pastor Ben Nistor

Revelation 17:1–2, 5

English Standard Version (ESV)

**1** Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, **2** with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk" ... **5** on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "**Babylon the great.**"

Revelation 21:9–11

English Standard Version (ESV)

**9** Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." **10** And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me **the holy city Jerusalem** coming down out of heaven from God, **11** having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

### REVIEW

- From LAST Sunday: All opposition to God's rule will be defeated (Dreams 2, 3 and 6, 7)
- God will defeat all external opposition: Israel's \_\_\_\_\_ (Babylon, other nations)
- God will cleanse Israel of all internal opposition: Israel's sin and impurity (Flying banners, woman in the flying basket)

### THE BIBLICAL DEPICTION OF BABYLON

The Hebrew (בָּבֶל) and Greek (Βαβυλών) words for Babylon occur more than 250 times in the Bible. It is not just a place; it symbolizes a spirit that rejects God and replaces him with human-centeredness.

- 1) In Genesis 11, the city of 'Babel' represents humanity's \_\_\_\_\_.

**Genesis 11:4:** *Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."*

**Genesis 11:6–9:** God's response...

*6 And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and there confuse (ba-lal) their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." 8 So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. 9 Therefore its name was called **Babel** (literally, Gate of God, or doorway of God), because there the Lord confused (balal) the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth.*

- 2) In the historical and prophetic books, Babylon symbolizes an evil power that oppresses God's people through various means: military, geopolitical expansion, culture, religion, and depravity.

- Babylon was a massive, formidable \_\_\_\_\_ (2 Kings 20; 24:16; 25:1)
  - God used Babylon to punish Israel (2 Kings 20:17; Jeremiah 20:5; 27:19–22)
- Babylon is Israel’s \_\_\_\_\_ enemy (Jeremiah 1:14; 6:1, 22–23)
- Babylon is one of Israel’s strongest oppressors (Isaiah 14:4–23)
- Babylon’s wickedness is ultimately brought to a decisive conclusion by God himself (Isaiah 47; Daniel 1–5, remember King Neb’s humiliation and Belshazzar’s wall)
- Israel’s redemption from Babylon will be like their escape from Egypt (Isaiah 48:20–21; Zechariah 2:4)

3) In the Psalms, Babylon is a place of exile and spiritual separation (Psalm 137)

*1 By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.*

*2 On the willows there we hung up our lyres.*

*3 For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”*

4) In the Psalms, Babylon represents the \_\_\_\_\_ that God invites into spiritual relationship (Ps 87)

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| Jerusalem/ Zion =<br>God’s special<br>presence               | } | <p><i>1 On the holy mount stands the city he founded;</i></p> <p><i>2 the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob.</i></p> <p><i>3 Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God. Selah</i></p>   |
| Israel’s greatest<br>enemies                                 | } | <p><i>4 Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon;</i></p> <p><i>behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush—“This one was born there,” they say.</i></p>  |
| God will restore<br>people from all<br>nations on his terms. | } | <p><i>5 And of Zion it shall be said,</i></p> <p><i>“This one and that one were born in her”; for the Most High himself will establish her.</i></p> <p><i>6 The Lord records as he registers the peoples, “This one was born there.” Selah</i></p> <p><i>7 Singers and dancers alike say, “All my springs are in you.”</i></p> |

5) In the New Testament, Babylon continues to symbolize evil power that rages against God.

- In Matthew 1 and Acts 7, Israel’s historical oppression by Babylon is well-known.
- In 1 Peter 5:13, Babylon is likely a reference to Rome, which has similar characteristics to the OT Babylon.
  - Peter’s letter is to exiles (1:1) who are facing trials (1:6) and who are also experiencing temptation from a seductive society (2:11–12), injustice (3:17), and direct attacks from Satan (5:8).
- In Revelation, Babylon represents the entire system of wickedness and luxurious living – essentially the spirit of Babylon is seen in multiple realms:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ , nationalism, business ventures, high-society, import/export, governments, \_\_\_\_\_ , telecommunication, economics, \_\_\_\_\_ industry, etc..
- God’s final word on Babylon is in Revelation 18:21–19:3.

## THE BIBLICAL DEPICTION OF JERUSALEM

The Bible’s depiction of Jerusalem is not just a geographical city. It is known and developed in the Bible as a symbol of God’s holy \_\_\_\_\_ dwelling with humanity.

1) Jerusalem is first introduced in the Bible in Genesis, and later in the historical books.

- In the writings of Moses, it is known as “Salem” or “Moriah” (Gen 14:18; 22:2; cf. Psalm 76:2)
  - It’s also known as the city “Jebus,” which Joshua recaptured (Joshua 18:28; Judges 19:10)
  - In 2 Samuel, King David moved the capital of Israel to Jerusalem and then put the Ark of the Covenant there (2 Sam. 5-6) – this was HUGE → God’s presence is connected with Jerusalem
  - Solomon constructed the temple there (1 Kings 8).
    - God’s covenant with Israel (Exodus 19–34) would be established completely through the temple.
- 2) In the Psalms, Jerusalem is important as the geographical \_\_\_\_\_ of Israel’s worship:
- Israel strongly associated Jerusalem with the presence of God in their worship (Psalms 122, 125, and 128).
- 3) The Prophets make a big deal of Jerusalem’s purpose in God’s salvation plan:
- God promised judgment against Jerusalem for violating the covenant (Jeremiah 21:4–7)
    - Israel believed the temple was a sure sign of God’s favor.
    - But God required trust and obedience – failure to trust and obey had major consequences (Deut 4–5)
    - Unfortunately, Israel underwent a “\_\_\_\_\_ification” → it became like the nations instead of becoming holy like God. They were guilty of...
      1. Idolatry (Jeremiah 7:17–18; Ezekiel 8:3)
      2. Failing to observe Sabbath (Jer 17:19–23)
      3. Corrupt leadership (Jer 13:13; Micah 3:10)
      4. Lying and Wickedness (Zechariah 5:1–11)
      5. Becoming like Sodom (Isaiah 1:9)
      6. Running after other gods (Hosea 1:1–3)
    - God sent Babylon to destroy Jerusalem (2 Kings 25)
  - God eventually allowed the Israelites to return and rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra-Nehemiah)
    - Israel’s return from exile was a short-term fulfillment of God’s promises (Isaiah 30:19; 44:26–28).
    - Ultimately, the return from exile was \_\_\_\_\_ (Nehemiah 9:32–36).
  - But God’s plan for Jerusalem extended beyond a mere city (Haggai 2:9)
    - God would use Jerusalem to establish a new kingdom (Isa 65:18–19; Joel 3:17–18).
    - God himself would dwell again in Jerusalem as King (Isa. 52:7–10; Zechariah 9:9).
    - The King will be from the line of \_\_\_\_\_ (Jeremiah 33:15–16).
    - From Jerusalem, God would pour out his Spirit to bless the nations (Joel 2:28–32).
- 4) In the New Testament, the ‘city of God’ must experience God’s transformation
- In the Gospels, Jesus recognizes Jerusalem as the ‘city of God’s great king’ (Matthew 5:35), even though Jerusalem rejects Jesus (Matthew 19)
    - Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s OT promises – his arrival in Jerusalem is the arrival of the great king (Matthew 25:31, 34) and his presence fills the temple (John 2).
    - Jesus is greater than the \_\_\_\_\_ (John 1:14; 2:21) → the physical temple is unnecessary because Jesus fulfills all the temple sacrifices (Hebrews 7–10).

- In Acts, the church spreads from Jerusalem, to the nations (Acts 2, 4, 6, 15).
- In Paul's writings, he makes a distinction between an \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ Jerusalem (Galatians 4:21-26).
- In Hebrews, the writer encourages his readers to move away from the *earthly* Jerusalem and set their hearts on the *heavenly* Jerusalem (Acts 13:13-14; 12:22; 11:10, 16).
- Finally, in Revelation, the heavenly Jerusalem is the New City, where God will dwell with his redeemed forever (Revelation 21:2).

### KEY TAKE-AWAYS:

- 1) Babylon represents all that is evil and oppressive in the world \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2) The heavenly city of Jerusalem represents all that is good and perfect in the world to come.
- 3) If we fix our eyes on Babylon, we will become more like the citizens of \_\_\_\_\_.

**Colossians 3:5-9:** *Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another . . . (Mark 7:21-22; Romans 1:28-32; 13:13; 1 Cor 6:9-11; Gal 5:19-21; 1 Tim 1:9-10; Rev 21:8)*

- 4) If we fix our eyes on the heavenly Jerusalem, we will become more like \_\_\_\_\_.
- The heavenly Jerusalem reminds us that Jesus Christ is the only way to have God's presence in our lives.
  - The heavenly Jerusalem reminds us that Jesus Christ's sacrifice was sufficient to forgive our sins.
  - The heavenly Jerusalem reminds us that Jesus Christ's death and resurrection was enough to break down walls between Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:11-22)
  - The heavenly Jerusalem reminds us that truly worshipping Christ is not bound by geography, but in spirit and truth (John 4).
  - Finally, the heavenly Jerusalem reminds us to put on what is heavenly in us:

### **Colossians 3:1-4, 12-17:**

*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

*12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*