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Sermon Notes

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Wicked Babylon's Fall from Its Lofty Throne

Isaiah 47:1-15

Main Idea: Babylon is portrayed as a pampered and wicked Sorceress Queen which God will throw from her lofty throne to vindicate his chosen people.

There is more going on in this world than meets the eye... there is an entire spiritual world around us at every moment... a world that cannot be perceived with the five senses. It is a realm of spiritual existence that cannot be proven or disproven in the laboratories of MIT or the Research Triangle Park. It is a world that can only be perceived **BY FAITH IN THE WORD OF GOD**

This invisible world preceded the physical world in which we feel so at home... it includes above all things Almighty God... the invisible God, whom no one has ever seen or can see. But it also includes many spiritual beings as well... angels of various types who serve God passionately and with perfect holiness; but also demons—fallen angels—and their dark King, called Satan or the Devil... they are called in some places in Scripture “rulers, authorities, and powers of this dark age”

In mysterious and immeasurable ways, the devil and his angels run this world—they orchestrate the world system in its patterns of rebellion against God

Satan is called “the god of this age” or “the ruler of the power of the air.” During the temptation of Jesus Christ in the desert, the devil took Christ to a very high mountain and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of this world and their splendor. He said to Jesus, “All this has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So, if you will bow down and worship me, it will all be yours.” Jesus refused, saying “Away from me Satan, for it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.’”

Yet Satan mess lesser forms of that same offer to the great leaders of this world, the great movers and shakers... “Bow down to me, worship me, and I will give you a large section of this world to rule.” The **WORLD SYSTEM** is completely under Satan’s invisible domination, and it is a bitter enemy to God and to Christ.

1 John 2:15-16 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

In Scripture, sometimes this sinister enemy of God, this organized WORLD SYSTEM is called by another, more mysterious name: **BABYLON**.

Babylon was a literal city, built in the fertile lands alongside the mighty Euphrates River in what is today called Iraq.

1. (Genesis 10) Babylon founded by Nimrod, a mighty hunter and warrior who also established Nineveh and thus could be seen as the first tyrant conqueror emperor... Babylon was built on GREAT FARMLAND, and they prospered economically and became mighty traders all over the world
2. (Genesis 11) The Tower of Babel: the Power of United Sinners Retarded

Genesis 11:4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

- a. at the core of this effort was self-worship... pride... ambition... the desire to be like God and to ascend to heaven

3. Babylon was conquered and dominated by Assyria
 - a. At one point, Babylon was friendly toward King Hezekiah and sent emissaries to congratulate him on the defeat of Assyria and his healing from a fatal illness... Hezekiah welcomed the emissaries and showed them all his riches; Isaiah the prophet predicted at that point the exile to Babylon

B. The Exile to Babylon

1. 586 B.C.: King Nebuchadnezzar fulfilled God's warnings and threats against his sinning people and conquered Jerusalem
2. they destroyed the city, burned the temple to the ground, slaughtered all but a small remnant of the people... those people they exiled to Babylon
3. there the Jews, the People of God, dwelt for seventy years as a punishment for their many sins
4. while there, the Jews settled down and lived their lives
5. some of them prospered greatly, like Daniel who became the third highest ruler in the land and a special counselor to King Nebuchadnezzar
6. the Book of Daniel gives a glimpse into a fruitful life lived in a pagan land under the domination of pagan government

7. Daniel himself is a godly government leader who maintains his integrity and his walk with God by faith and obedience, while at the same time being an indispensable member of the government... highly skilled and influential
8. Daniel also recorded clear visions of the rise and fall of the world

C. The Fall of Babylon: Prophesied and Fulfilled

Isaiah 13:19-22 *Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians' pride, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah. ²⁰ She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there, no shepherd will rest his flocks there. ²¹ But desert creatures will lie there, jackals will fill her houses; there the owls will dwell, and there the wild goats will leap about. ²² Hyenas will howl in her strongholds, jackals in her luxurious palaces.*

1. the Fall of Babylon to Cyrus the Great and the Medes and Persians described plainly in Daniel 5

D. The Spirit of Babylon Rises from the Ashes

1. God predicted the total destruction of Babylon and stated that it would remain desolate forever, though this did not happen immediately...

BUT the “Spirit of Babylon” lived beyond it

2. key passage: 1 Peter 5:13

1 Peter 5:13 *She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark.*

3. this proves the “Spirit of Babylon” infused the Roman Empire of Peter’s day
 - a. Babylon itself was a howling empty wasteland at that time
 - b. Church tradition puts Peter in Rome where he would later die
 - c. “she who is in Babylon, chosen together with you” is code language for the Church of Rome
 - d. Thus the Spirit of Babylon rises from the ashes of the last world dominating empire and takes over
 - e. It goes from Babylon to Persia to Greece to Rome to the Huns to the Vikings to the Mongols to the Turks to the Spanish to the French to the British to the Germans... right up to the present day
 - f. TWO ASPECTS of world domination through the “Spirit of Babylon”: POLITICAL DOMINATION thru MILITARY CONQUEST and

ECONOMIC DOMINATION through the marketplace, buying, selling,
and trade

The Book of Revelation... ch. 17-18

Revelation 17 pictures Babylon as a great prostitute, dressed in scarlet and pearls, alluring, mysterious, occultic... tempting the people of God to sin with her by her worldly enticements, but also slaughtering them with her persecutions... she is darkly beautiful and alluring but also deadly dangerous... drunk with the blood of the saints, drunk with the blood of those that bore testimony to Jesus Christ

This mysterious woman in scarlet is identified at the end of the chapter:

Revelation 17:18 The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.

In the next chapter, Babylon falls finally and eternally under the wrath of God...

Revelation 18:2-3 With a mighty voice [an angel]shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. ³ For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries.

she was made wealthy through trade in every imaginable commodity...

Revelation 18:12-13 cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; ¹³ cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men.

She is portrayed as having a mysterious and occultic allure over the hearts of people:

Revelation 18:23 Your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray.

but her time of wealth and wicked prosperity comes to an end...and God specifically judges Babylon at the end of the world for one thing above all: her treatment of His people, the saints of God:

Revelation 18:20 Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you."

Revelation 18:24 In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth.

This is the true story of BABYLON... the story of a corrupt world system that Satan runs, alluring people by economic prosperity, dominating people by military might, slaughtering the people of God who will not bow the knee to her

Isaiah 46 and 47 are partner chapters... predicting the fall of Babylon under Cyrus the Great... Isaiah 46 predicted the downfall and exile of Bel and Nebo, the primary gods of Babylon... Isaiah 47 predicts the corresponding fall of Babylon itself

Isaiah 47 portrays the City of Babylon as first, a pampered princess with a wicked heart, sitting enthroned on the perch of the world... living in the luxury that the conquests of her father have bought her... she is a spoiled virgin daughter, drinking in luxury on the backs of the people Babylon's armies conquered; she is also portrayed as a pampered Queen, a wife sitting secure in the protection of her husband's power, boasting in her children.

Isaiah 47 says this pampered daughter will be thrown down from her lofty throne, stripped of luxury, and made to do the work of common slaves.

Isaiah 47 says this arrogant, wealthy, secure matron Queen will lose her husband and her children in a single day—she will become a widow with no children and no future.

Not only does Isaiah 47 predict the fall of Babylon in world history to take on the menial roles of enslaved exiles... it explains why: because of the harsh way she treated Israel, the people of God. God is going to take vengeance on her and crush her for what she did to the Jews.

But the fall of Babylon was far more significant in redemptive history than just another world empire conquered by the next one... in the Bible, Babylon represents

II. Humiliated Babylon Commanded to Vacate Her Throne (vs. 1-4)

Isaiah 47:1-4 "Go down, sit in the dust, Virgin Daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, Daughter of the Babylonians. No more will you be called tender or delicate. Take millstones and grind flour; take off your veil. Lift up your skirts, bare your legs, and wade through the streams. Your nakedness will be exposed and your shame uncovered. I will take vengeance; I will spare no one." Our Redeemer-- the LORD Almighty is his name-- is the Holy One of Israel.

A. The Virgin Daughter of Babylon Pampered and Enthroned

1. "Virgin Daughter" image used frequently in Scripture to refer to what is most delicate and precious in that nation... the protected, even pampered daughter of a mighty conqueror... the girls that go out with tambourines and celebrate

the military victories and then live in luxury off the plunder from those victories

2. She is pictured as pampered and enthroned here
3. She has been sitting on the top of the world
4. BUT that time is suddenly over!!!
5. Babylon has fallen, and the Virgin Daughter of Babylon is forcibly evicted from her lofty, pampered throne of luxury

B. The Virgin Daughter of Babylon Commanded to Sit in the Dust

1. The days of luxury have suddenly come to an end
2. She will never again be called “tender” or “delicate”
3. She will never again be waited on hand and foot... plates of grapes carried to her by slaves; slaves eager to wash her feet and rub her back
4. She will come down from her throne and SIT IN THE DUST! Total humiliation

C. Babylon Enslaved to Hard Labor

1. She will have to take millstones and grind someone else’s flour
2. She will develop hard callouses on her previously soft and manicured hands

D. Babylon Stripped and Humiliated

1. Now she will be stripped of her veils and fine dresses and be commanded to do the work of the lowest slaves
2. She will have to bare her legs and cross streams to do hard labor
3. Her glory and luxury are gone forever
4. Instead, her nakedness and shame will be exposed for all the world to see

E. Israel Avenged by God Her Redeemer

1. God says very plainly:

Isaiah 47:3 I will take vengeance; I will spare no one."

2. Verse 4 is a hinge verse between verses 1-3 (what happens to Babylon) and verses 5-6—the REASON FOR IT; Isaiah speaks his heart on behalf of the

exiled Jewish nation... the remnant who have been oppressed by the Babylonians

Isaiah 47:4 Our Redeemer-- the LORD Almighty is his name-- is the Holy One of Israel.

III. God Takes Vengeance on Babylon for Israel's Sake (vs. 5-6)

Isaiah 47:5-6 "Sit in silence, go into darkness, Daughter of the Babylonians; no more will you be called queen of kingdoms. I was angry with my people and desecrated my inheritance; I gave them into your hand, and you showed them no mercy. Even on the aged you laid a very heavy yoke.

A. Babylon's Sentence an Act of Vengeance

1. This tremendous humbling, this shocking reversal is NO ACCIDENT OF FATE... it's not merely HOW THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE TURNS
2. No... this is a direct act of wrath and vengeance from Almighty God!!
3. God is going to act on behalf of His CHOSEN PEOPLE, the Jewish nation

B. God's Purpose: To Punish Israel Within Measure

1. God gave Israel into the hands of the Babylonians
2. He did this for a very specific reason: to punish the Jews for their SINS... for their REBELLION... for their IDOLATRY
3. God was ANGRY with His people, and He desecrated His inheritance
4. He specifically refers here to the destruction of Jerusalem, the City of Zion, where God dwelt with His people... and even more specifically, the temple which the cloud of His glory had filled to show His special dwelling presence with His chosen people
5. But God allowed the Babylonian army under Nebuchadnezzar to storm in with rage in their hearts and axes in their hands and totally destroy that temple

Psalm 74:4-7 Your foes roared in the place where you met with us; they set up their standards as signs. ⁵ They behaved like men wielding axes to cut through a thicket of trees. ⁶ They smashed all the carved paneling with their axes and hatchets. ⁷ They burned your sanctuary to the ground; they defiled the dwelling place of your Name.

C. Babylon's Two Sins in Doing EXACTLY WHAT GOD Sent Them to Do

1. First: they did not do it for His glory and out of zeal for His holy name... they were pagans who celebrated the victory of Bel and Nebo over Yahweh, the God of Israel
2. Secondly: they were excessively harsh and cruel over the Jews for years to come

Isaiah 47:6 you showed them no mercy. Even on the aged you laid a very heavy yoke.

3. This cruelty was the very thing Daniel rebuked King Nebuchadnezzar for

Daniel 4:27 Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.

4. The astonishing cruelty of the Babylonians was wicked in God's sight... and He would get revenge on them for what they did to the Jews, how they oppressed them, how they crushed them in exile

IV. Babylon's Arrogant Security Comes to a Shocking End (vs. 7-11)

Isaiah 47:7-11 You said, 'I will continue forever-- the eternal queen!' But you did not consider these things or reflect on what might happen. "Now then, listen, you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.' Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells. You have trusted in your wickedness and have said, 'No one sees me.' Your wisdom and knowledge mislead you when you say to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me.' Disaster will come upon you, and you will not know how to conjure it away. A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom; a catastrophe you cannot foresee will suddenly come upon you.

A. Babylon's Arrogant Security

1. The image here shifts from the pampered "Virgin Daughter" to the arrogant luxurious Queen, lounging in her security
2. She boasts that she will continue forever THE ETERNAL QUEEN!!
3. How easy it is for us to forget that we are DUST, sinners in the sight of God, and that someday we will all die and stand before God in judgment
4. She refused to look ahead to what would happen for all her wickedness
5. She was lounging in her security and assuming that things would only get better and better

6. She should have CONSIDERED and PONDERED... lived a thoughtful, reflective life... seeing what was coming in the future

Hebrews 9:27 man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment

B. “No One Sees Me” and “No One is Like Me”

1. She makes two particularly offensive boasts:
2. First, “No one sees me”

Isaiah 47:10 You have trusted in your wickedness and have said, 'No one sees me.'

- a. She is doing dark, secret, wicked things... things at night, things in hidden, things in her cellar and in her bedchamber (we’ll talk more in a moment about her occultic activities)
- b. Because it seems no human eye can see her, she thinks her actions are completely hidden
- c. But she forgets this:

Jeremiah 23:24 Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares the LORD. "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" declares the LORD.

3. Secondly: She boasts that she is a GODDESS!!

Isaiah 47:8 'I am, and there is none besides me.

- a. That is God’s special message... we just saw it in the previous chapter

Isaiah 46:9 I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me.

- b. But her arrogance has caused her to soar in her own mind as though she were a goddess

C. Sudden Devastation Comes: Widowhood and Loss of Children

Isaiah 47:8-9 I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.' ⁹ Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells.

1. She feels completely secure behind her lofty walls that had never been breached
2. She feels completely secure behind her powerful armies that conquered the world

3. She thinks her husband will never die... and her children will live securely forever
4. Her husband represents the MILITARY POWER of Babylon... but widowhood comes upon her when all the strong men of Babylon fall in battle to Cyrus the Great and his invading Medo-Persian army
5. Her children represent the Babylonian population... and they will die or be scattered as refugees

V. Babylon's Occultic Powers Fail to Save Her (vs. 12-15)

Isaiah 47:12-15 "Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with your many sorceries, which you have labored at since childhood. Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps you will cause terror. All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you. Surely they are like stubble; the fire will burn them up. They cannot even save themselves from the power of the flame. Here are no coals to warm anyone; here is no fire to sit by. That is all they can do for you-- these you have labored with and trafficked with since childhood. Each of them goes on in his error; there is not one that can save you.

A. Babylon's Occultic Powers Give False Confidence

1. Verse 9 specifically mentions Babylon's occultic powers and activities

Isaiah 47:9 They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells.

2. These are the secret, dark things she does in verse 10 when she thinks no one can see her
3. The Babylonians (also called Chaldeans) were well-known for their incantations and black arts, their divination, especially their stargazing and predictions based on dreams
4. They studied omens and uttered dark spells and this was a great source of their false confidence about the future
5. God mocks that false confidence

Isaiah 47:11-12 Disaster will come upon you, and you will not know how to conjure it away. A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom; a catastrophe you cannot foresee will suddenly come upon you. ¹² "Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with your many sorceries, which you have labored at since childhood. Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps you will cause terror.

B. Babylon's Occultic Powers Are Stubble in the Inferno

1. These demonic powers are real, they achieve supernatural things, they are sinister and wicked... but ultimately they are NOTHING compared to the power of Almighty God

Isaiah 47:13-14 All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you. ¹⁴ Surely they are like stubble; the fire will burn them up. They cannot even save themselves from the power of the flame. Here are no coals to warm anyone; here is no fire to sit by.

2. They have NO MASS! God's glory is weighty and nothing can resist it
3. But these spells and magic arts are like crackling thorns and chaff on a raging fire... the raging fire of God's wrath

C. Babylon Cannot Save Herself

Isaiah 47:15 That is all they can do for you-- these you have labored with and trafficked with since childhood. Each of them goes on in his error; there is not one that can save you.

VI. Applications

- Understand the infinite power of God both to destroy and to save... fear Him and flee to Him
 - As always, the primary issue is salvation through faith in Christ
 - Babylon was under judgment from God, and they should have fled TO God for salvation... instead, they were arrogant and at ease
 - Now is the day of salvation; now is the time to flee to Christ!!
 - Babylon could not save herself from God's judgment, and neither can we
 - This is exactly why God sent His Son into the world to die on a cross for us!!
 - FLEE TO CHRIST!!!
- Understand the arrogance and luxury and ease of Babylon; how confident her people felt behind their high walls
 - America is the most powerful nation on earth militarily; we spend 640 billion dollars per year on defense—equal to the next nine nations put together

- America is the most powerful nation on earth economically; Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 16.8 trillion dollars—almost double the next highest, which is China
- If Babylon was tempted to feel secure behind her military, so is America
- If Babylon was living in luxury because of her empire, so is America
- Each of us needs to take stock of our own hearts are be sure that we are not sucked along in the worldly drives and ambitions and arrogant security of these two lofty walls—military and economy
- We need to humble ourselves before Almighty God and seek His protection from worldliness and the wrath to come (more on this next week, when God calls on His people to come out from Babylon)

1 Peter 5:6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

- Understand that the Spirit of Babylon is still moving and working on earth... alluring us with materialism and false security
- Be generous to the poor and needy—this is something the arrogant Virgin Daughter of Babylon, the lofty Queen of Babylon never did... they oppressed the poor and needy
- GIVE MONEY AWAY... be generous!!!
- The magic spells of Babylon: beware the OCCULT
 - Babylon was immersed in a sea of occultic practices... witchcraft, dark spells, omens, divination... seeking insight about the future from the stars or the omens; seeking to ward off calamities by occultic powers
 - America's culture is more and more drawn to the same kinds of things... there is a growing paganism in our land... a growing fascination with the occult—with witchcraft, the gods, Ouija boards (there's even a movie out), demons, worship of angels, zombies, etc.
 - Understand that these things are evil and that God will judge all who practice these magic arts
 - When the gospel came to Ephesus, many who had been practicing black arts and magic repented of their sins and burned their valuable scrolls of magic spells—the value came to 50,000 silver pieces
 - We need to be aware of this rising danger of the occult

- Understand God's zeal to take vengeance on behalf of His suffering people, the Church around the world
 - In many nations, the Spirit of Babylon is alive, drunk on the blood of martyrs—that is of the essence of God's wrath and judgment in Revelation 18
 - Pray for the persecuted church
 - Realize that God will not long delay His wrath and vengeance on those who attack His precious people