

LESSON NINE

THE BABYLONIAN EMPIRE

A. BABYLON'S BEGINNING:

The place that the Babylonian Empire has had in the history of God's people can never be understood without going back to its beginning.

It began with Nimrod and the Tower of Babel about 100 years after the flood and 326 years before the call of Abram.

1. NIMROD:

The story of Nimrod is found in Genesis 10:8-10. Nimrod was Ham's grandson; his father was Cush. Nimrod is a type of Anti-Christ. The word "Nimrod" means "rebel." This points forward to one of the titles of the Anti-Christ given in II Thessalonians 2:8, "The Lawless One." Nimrod's rebellion was to lead a movement in revolt against God.

Three times in this passage and also in I Chronicles 1:10, it states that Nimrod was mighty. In Genesis 10:9, he is described as being a "mighty hunter BEFORE THE LORD." This infers that he pushed his own designs in defiance of his Creator.

2. THE TOWER OF BABEL:

In Genesis 10:10, it states, "*And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel.*" Here we have the first mention of Babel. In the language of that time, Babel meant "the gate of God" but afterwards because of judgment, it meant "confusion." Here we find that Nimrod had a kingdom and therefore was "king." Not only did he start a new kingdom, but also he instituted a new and idolatrous worship.

"Let us build us a city" - This refers to a political system, a world empire.

"Let us build us a tower" - This refers to a religious system, a religion of good works, reaching heaven without any help from God. It was a system of deifying man. It was Cain's religion beginning again.

"Let us make us a name" - This refers to a desire for fame and power. Salvation was to come in their name. However God had a name through which there would be salvation (Jesus) and it was not yet God's time to reveal that name.

Everything about Babel was in opposition to God. It was because of this that Judgment fell and God scattered them.

Let us ever remember that the root of all sin is rebellion and the result is always the same, confusion and a scattering.

B. THE BEGINNING OF THE BABYLONIAN RELIGION:

In chapter seventeen of Revelation, we have pictured the false idolatrous religion of the last days, a harlot sitting upon a scarlet colored beast, a politico-religious system of great power. In Genesis chapter eleven, we find the history recorded of the beginning of this false religion.

After the fall, God clothed our first parents and instituted the true plan of salvation and worship. We find this continued by Abel, Noah and other men of faith. Following the flood, God instituted the principle of human government, a system by which God would maintain law and order, and preserve peace and harmony.

Both of these two institutions were of divine origin. However, God ordained that these two institutions, religion and government, would be kept separate until Jesus Christ would come who would unite the principle of priest and king in one person. Until that time came, these two institutions were to be administered by different individuals. The king must come of the tribe of Judah and the priest must come of the tribe of Levi. In the New Testament, Jesus confirmed this principle when He said, "*Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's.*"

Nimrod married a girl by the name of Semiramis who bore a son called Tammuz. Going back to the promise of Genesis 3:15, Semiramis claimed that she was a woman of the promise and that her son was the seed of the woman. Although they had turned their backs upon God, they could not eliminate the knowledge that had come down to them. Semiramis set herself up as a high priestess of the Babylonian religion. It was a religion that centered in the worship of the mother and the child. The sign of this religion was a mother who held a baby in her arms and was known as the "mother-child" cult. Semiramis took for herself the name "The Queen of Heaven" and taught that access into the presence of God was through her high-priestess ministry. She became a mediatrix between God and man.

When Tammuz came to young manhood, he was slain while hunting a wild boar. Semiramis gathered a number of virgins and after a forty-day period of prayer and fasting, Tammuz was supposed to be resurrected from the dead by the power of his mother, "The Queen of Heaven." That forty-day period became an annual time of mourning throughout Babylon. At the conclusion, they had a feast in honor the Semiramis and Tammuz. They made the egg the sacred symbol, which was a symbol of life out of death. On the birthday of Tammuz, they erected evergreen trees as the symbol of eternal life.

This religion spread to Phoenicia, Egypt and Greece, but Babylon continued to be the center of this false religious system until her destruction. The system then moved to Pergamos and from there to Rome. After the professed conversion of Constantine, this pagan religion that started with Nimrod was superimposed upon the Christian church.

C. THE CITY OF BABYLON:

Babylon was the "wonder city" of the world. It was located in the cradle of the human race near the Garden of Eden region. Babylon was situated in central Mesopotamia on the river Euphrates, some fifty miles south of modern Baghdad, capital of Iraq.

It was within easy reach of the Persian Gulf and being situated on an important caravan route, it was in contact with all the most important centers of the near East. During the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BC), it was probably the largest and most elaborate city in the ancient world.

Nebuchadnezzar's objective was to make his capital the most notable city in the world. He constructed new canals, erected magnificent buildings, and laid out extensive parks. A permanent water supply assured fertility for the surrounding areas.

The city occupied an area of two hundred square miles and was built on both sides of the Euphrates, which divided the city into two almost equal parts. A double brick wall reinforced with towers protected it.

Ancient historians have written that its walls were fifty miles around, fifteen miles on each side, three hundred feet high, and eighty feet thick extending thirty-five feet below the ground. There were two hundred & fifty towers on the wall, guardrooms for soldiers and gates of brass. The walls were protected by wide and deep moats filled with water.

Both banks along the Euphrates were guarded with a brick wall. There was one bridge one half-mile long, thirty feet wide with drawbridges, which were removed at night. There was a tunnel under the river fifteen feet wide and twelve feet high.

In the days of ancient warfare, the city was simply impregnable.

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. There were terraces supported by arches on, which were carefully tended gardens laid out at different levels.

D. THE BABYLONIAN EMPIRE:

The Babylonian Empire was the most powerful empire that had up to that time existed. It was sometimes called the Neo-Babylonian Empire. This was the empire that broke the power of Assyria and swept westward destroying Judah and conquering Egypt.

The Babylonian Empire lasted seventy years (606-536 BC) and Daniel was there from its rise to its fall.

Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest Babylonian king and one of the greatest monarchs of all time. He reigned for forty-five years. He extended the power of Babylon over most of the then known world.

In the second chapter of the prophecy of Daniel, we read where Daniel said to Nebuchadnezzar in interpreting his dream, "*Thou art this head of gold.*" Of all the Gentile kingdoms that were to come, Babylon was the greatest. The Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar was the beginning of what is known as the "times of the Gentiles."

Babylon fell to Cyrus, King of Persia, in the year of 536 BC. In the same year, Cyrus authorized the return of the Jews to their own land.

Although the kingdom of Babylon fell, the influence of Babylon is still with us. The religious system of Babylon is predominately in the religious world and the apostate church receives its name from Babylon (Revelation 17).

LESSON NINE

SELF HELP TEST

Fill in the following blanks with the correct word:

1. _____ His name meant "rebel."
2. _____ These institutions were meant to be separate.
3. _____ This river flowed through Babylon.
4. _____ One of the seven wonders of the world.
5. _____ God said that he was the head of gold.
6. _____ This word originally meant "gate of God."
7. _____ She was Nimrod's wife.
8. _____ He was claimed to be the seed of the woman.
9. _____ He was Nimrod's grandfather.
10. _____ He conquered Babylon in 536 B.C.
11. _____ He reigned in Babylon for 45 years.
12. _____ This city is located fifty miles north of ancient Babylon.
13. _____ State the area of Babylon.
14. _____ She claimed to be the "Queen of Heaven."
15. _____ At the fall of Babylon, the system moved to this city.
16. _____ This is the root of all sin.
17. _____ This started 100 years after the flood.
18. _____ Nimrod is a type of what future person.
19. _____ A symbol used at Easter which originated at Babel.
20. _____ The period of time known in prophecy which began with Nebuchadnezzar.