

What To Do In Babylon

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"Babylon...is fallen, is fallen!"

We all know these words (recorded in Revelation 18:2) are prophetic; their *final* fulfillment is yet future. We also understand that today we live in "that mighty city" (as we read in verse 10).

Today, I want to talk about Babylon. What are we to do here? What do we do in Babylon?

What is Babylon? Babylon is an *economic* system built by, and in accordance with, *human nature*. It sustains and gratifies human nature. Elements of that economic system overreach into *all* areas of our society, pervading its educational, military, governmental and judicial systems.

If anything is inclusive, it is Babylon. Babylon crosses racial, political, national, gender, and ideological boundaries. That is to say, it is just as much alive and kicking today in Afghanistan as it is in Zambia. It is Satan's A to Z system, seen everywhere in many guises, but always manifesting itself (as Mr. Armstrong so accurately put it) by "the **get** way of life," as opposed to God's way of giving.

Do not think of the Babylonish system as man or woman, socialist or capitalist, liberal or conservative, white or black, democrat or republican. It crosses all of those lines. Those distinctions, which mean so much to many people in the world, have little if anything to do with defining the *essence* of Babylon—the get way of life.

You do not leave Babylon when you join the Republican Party, or when you listen to commentators like Art Bell, or when you move your household to Utah, Idaho, or wherever. Babylon is ubiquitous—it is everywhere!

The Apostle John tells us:

Revelation 18:4 "And I heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, my people.' "

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But to this day we have not heard that voice John heard in vision. We have not been called to come out of Babylon *physically*. For right now, the Father continues to honor Christ's prayer, recorded in John 17:15: "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world."

Babylon is all around us. And maybe, for the rest of our lives, we are stuck with it. For now, Babylon *is* the around and about.

There is a whole lot more to the story, as you all know. In good part, the Feast of Tabernacles looks forward to a time *after* Babylon's fall, a far better time for the inhabitants of the planet, whether they remain physical or become spirit beings.

Hebrews 11 tells us what the faithful of long ago looked forward to, what they longed for.

Hebrews 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims of the earth.

The apostle Paul, writing in Philippians 3:20, assures us that, "our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."

I will read I Peter 1 from the *Amplified Version*, because that is where the dynamite is. The Apostle opens his first epistle with these words:

I Peter 1:1 "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect exiles of the dispersion scattered aboard...."

Another version calls Peter's audience "aliens," and yet another, "chosen sojourners." The point both Peter and Paul make is that God's people are *not* part and parcel with this world's system, the *kosmos* as we call it, "this present evil world" (Galatians 1:4). Those are all monikers of Babylon. We are living smack dab in the middle of it!

For now, we, like the faithful before us, are foreigners in a strange land, pilgrims just passing through, whose citizenship is elsewhere. We all know these concepts. Right now, we are here in Babylon—physically in Babylon. What are we supposed to do here?

Get A Job

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We will be spending most of our time in Jeremiah 29. It records a letter from God to some exiles, *His* exiles, in the sense that He arranged for them to be forcibly carried from Jerusalem to Babylon. They, like we, had no choice. *They just were there.*

Be aware, as a matter of context, this letter was written *before* the final destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar's forces (during the reign of Zedekiah) a little later on. The Babylonians had removed some of the royal family, the elders and the artists—about 10,000 of them—a bit earlier than this letter. Daniel and his buddies were among this first group of captives.

Jeremiah writes the words of God to these folks. God tells them, and He tells us, what we are to do while we are in Babylon.

Jeremiah 29:4 Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and dwell in them, plant gardens and eat their fruit.

Now, understand: These people were not the weak of the world. They were not laborers the Babylonians had drafted off the streets of Jerusalem to do task work. Rather, they represented what we would call the Jewish ruling class, princes, as well as artists and technicians—the intelligentsia—the elite of their day. The Babylonians wanted to exploit their abilities, as we see clearly in the case of Daniel. In many cases, these were young and vigorous people, "gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand," as Daniel 1:4 puts it.

In today's context, it would be as though some conquering power removed from America our successful lawyers, doctors, scientists, writers, artists, engineers, and such.

The Babylonians, I think we can assume, ensured that these people were fully occupied with their assigned work. But God tells them to use their spare time and money to build houses. Houses connote a certain degree of *permanence*, at least when compared to the ram-shackle, make-shift sheds, and the fabric tents and lean-tos that characterize the substandard housing of a concentration camp. God instructs the exiles not to live in hovels thinking that this captivity will end next week. And conversely, do not give up in despair, thinking it will *never* end.

The Babylonians may have initially warehoused these exiles, put ten or twenty families

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in dormitories. But as John mentioned earlier this week, God enables us to do what He requires of us. In telling them to build houses, God is telling them that He will ensure that the Babylonians afford them the opportunities to build. Notice He does not say the Babylonians will build these things for them. God was not about to induce the Babylonians to create CHUDD for the exiles—you know, not HUDD but CHUDD—the Chaldean Housing and Urban Development Department.

No. God says, as soon as opportunity affords, get to work and build your houses and your gardens, and tend your gardens. All this would take time and effort. In effect, God is saying, "Join the economy. Do not fight it."

He is not telling them to live as like the corrupt Babylonians. But, He is saying, in effect: "*Do not drop out of the economy.*" In today's context, there are any number of ways a person can drop out of the economy.

A young person can literally drop out of high school, thereby relegating him or her to a life on the lower level of the financial ladder. Other young people stay physically in school, but do not exploit the opportunities afforded by their education; they do not make efforts to discover their natural talents, they do not take classes to develop their abilities, and they do not work hard. They just get by with easy classes, easy teachers, putting in their time until they graduate.

These young people have not taken Ecclesiastes 9:10 to heart: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might." In our society, what a young person should do is discover, and then develop his abilities and talents over a number of years. Any adolescent or young adult who fails to do that with all his might has, unwisely, dropped out of the economy (or is in the process of doing so). He is not building his house. And—lifelong—he will pay for it!

Adults can drop out in any number of ways. How many able-bodied men now stay home, becoming Mr. Mom, taking care of the kids, while their wife goes to work every morning? I have run across this in my neighborhood and among my co-workers. There are reasons for this. In our society, it is often easier for a woman to find a job than a man. So, the man just drops out of the job market. Yet, there is something extremely disturbing about a strong, able-bodied man letting his wife earn his living.

Another example of adults dropping out—this one enabled by our welfare system—is men and women who seek jobs but, after a while, perhaps discouraged, just *stop* looking. They get on the dole, and stay there indefinitely. They, too, have dropped out.

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Another way to drop out, and this one especially has infected *some* people in God's congregations at times, is to run off to a mountain-top, usually in Utah or some other wilderness area, where they find little or no gainful employment, but just putter around and pray. They might do this for a decade or two, and then, like old soldiers, they just fade away. They too have not built their house, but have simply dropped out.

God sings a different tune. It goes like that song of the 1950s, "Get a job!" Develop your abilities and talents to the fullest in your youth, then find a job and work hard to keep a job. Discover your abilities and talents and develop them. In principle, He is counseling that His people dig in for what might be a long haul, and *achieve economically*.

Get a Spouse

Now, turn back to Jeremiah 29 where God tells us what else to do in Babylon.

Jeremiah 29:6 "Take wives and beget sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished.

More than just "get a job," God instructs us, while living in Babylon, to get a *spouse*. Once you build a domicile and can support life with a garden, then build a domestic life-style. In other words, life goes on. Babylon is around for a while, so do not drop out of the marriage market.

And, that does not mean couples should develop a self-indulgent, yuppie lifestyle where the wife works to develop a career, only to find, wonder of wonders, she cannot bear when she is 46. In California, there are actually dozens of fertility clinics kept in business by middle-class, career-oriented, 40-plus women who have become panicked by their inability to conceive, and who look to modern medicine to provide a way out of their predicament. Many of them never find it. It is too late.

We can put any number of scriptures together to get a big-picture of God's will in general here. Moses, in Genesis 1:28, records God's command that man and wife be "fruitful and multiply." And, at the other end of the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi, in Malachi 2:16, tells us that God "hates divorce." So, God is saying to those of us in Babylon, "Get a spouse, keep a spouse, and produce children."

In the world around us, many peoples, especially Israelite (but Japheth as well), have dropped out of the marriage scene, opting for cohabitation and various other

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"alternative" lifestyles. And, those who marry often do so late, defer having children, or have too few children to replace themselves when they die.

Question: If Japan's current birth rate was to continue for another 1,300 years, do you know how many Japanese there would be in Japan? Just one. By then, it is too late, is it not? Now, of course, we all know that is not going to happen. God will intervene long before then. But, that is the trend in Babylon today. Japan's statistical fact—her low birth rate—points out how fast her population is falling. Satan, who hates people, and who seeks to depopulate the planet, to return it to the confusion and chaos of Genesis 1:2, must exalt in that statistic. He has really done a job on materialistic, self-absorbed people in the Babylonish system, has he not? He has even convinced them not to reproduce, an action which, taken to its extreme, is just plain suicidal. It is a type of genocide.

Notice that God states His reason for marriage in verse 6 of Jeremiah 29: "That you may be increased there, and not diminished." Increase in Babylon? Go figure. God wants increase in Babylon!

A couple needs to have at least two children to replace themselves when they die. That is not increase, nor decrease. It is just holding even—station keeping. And indeed, since some will die of disease or war before they themselves reproduce, the replacement rate is about 2.1 children per woman. Every woman must have 2.1 children in her lifetime, just to keep the population even. In many places in the Orient and in Europe today, the rate is far below 2. Do you know that in Singapore, it is actually less than one? When the mom and dad die, there is statistically less than one person to replace them. Think where that reproduction rate will leave Singapore in two or three generations!

Population growth is something God wants, but is anathema to many in this world, especially environmentalists—tree-huggers. They are out of step with God. In the US, the birth rate is slightly above the replacement rate, but that is because "the stranger among us" is reproducing so fast. The Israelites in this country are reproducing at a rate far below the replacement rate. In Jeremiah 29:6, God is telling **His exiles** that they should produce at least three children. That would produce *increase*, population growth.

I do not have any church-wide stats, but judging empirically, it appears that God's people are reproducing at a higher rate than the general population. That being said, we all know young people who remain unmarried, or married couples who have no children. I have actually heard of church people who discourage their young adult children from marrying, telling them it is too late in the age for that, and there is no time to fulfill the 20-year commitment it takes to raise children. Well, young people need to consider that

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advice, which I feel is wrong-headed, in the light of Jeremiah 29:10.

Jeremiah 29:10 For thus says the Lord: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place **[Jerusalem]**.

God told *those* people how long they would reside in Babylon. But, in our case, God has not told us how long **we** will be residing in Babylon. Do we presume to tell God we have figured out His time-table, and therefore feel justified to turn aside His instruction to marry and to reproduce in Babylon? In the light of Jeremiah 29:6-10, we need to consider that question. This is something to think about.

Pray for Peace

Now, please notice Jeremiah 29:7. Here is the third thing God instructs His people to do while they are in Babylon. This may be a blockbuster to some in God's Church.

Jeremiah 29:7 And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace.

We live in an age where government-bashing is popular, if not chic. In the Church of God today, many people have become infected with the world's cynicism and skepticism toward government. I spend all too much of a Sabbath day hearing God's people bash governor and government alike. The idea that we should pray for "the city" of Babylon seems wrong-headed to many in God's Church. Many of us do not even show our national leaders the common courtesy of attaching a proper title to their name. So Mr. Bush becomes just Bush. Yet, we would be aghast if our children called their teacher just Smith.

Now, think about this: If God had no intention of *heeding* His peoples' prayers for peace, He would not have included verse 7 in His instruction to His people in Babylon. The implication here is that He will listen and respond to their prayers for peace. We, under the new covenant, have far more access to God than the carnal Jews who were carried to Babylon. We can be sure God *does* hear our prayers for peace. Emphatically, God *is* saying He wants us to become *involved* in government.

No, we are certainly not to become involved by voting, or by serving in the military

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where we may kill others, or by serving on a jury. *Prayer* is the way God wants us to become involved in government. This is a truly effective—effectual—involvement. Too often, though, we *bash* rather than pray.

Our prayers count—if we *utter them*. Consider the act of war that took place a while back over New York City, the encapsulation of all that Babylon stands for today. If there is today any "city" of Babylon, I would argue that it is New York City. Who was to blame for this terror? God? Satan? Osama bin Laden? Was it, as some liberals would have us to believe, Americans in general who caused the destruction by our short-sighted foreign policy and materialism?

Or, did God's people have a hand in it, also, to the extent that we were not *praying* ardently enough for the peace of the city? It depends how you look at it, of course. But, in light of verse 7, we can wonder if 9/11 would not have happened at all had we been praying for the peace of the "city" more and bashing the president less. Bashing is counter-productive. Prayer is productive.

And indeed, "in its peace you will have peace." When the twin-towers fell, we lost a whole bunch more than an impressive architectural accomplishment. We lost a whole bunch of our freedoms. The causalities were not limited to those 3,000 or so people who died miserably in the conflagration, but extends all the way to us, who lost so much in the attack's aftermath, the horribly misnamed, Patriot Act. Our peace is indeed implicit in the peace of Babylon. We had better pray for peace. God will heed. Do not drop out of the quest for peace.

Conclusion: Never return to Babylon

I will close, near where I began, in Hebrews 11. God asserts, in verse 14, that, in sustaining themselves as pilgrims in a strange land, the faithful are declaring "plainly that they seek a homeland." He goes on in verse 15:

Hebrews 11:15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.

We live in Babylon, but we must *never* seek to call it to mind—long to return to its way of life in the same way our forefathers sought to return to Egypt. For Babylon is indeed a ghastly and hideous place.

Look at how bad it is in the context of America.

When I was a youngster, I heard a little one-line joke in a cartoon several times before it sank in. The narrator said, "The open door policy let in the draft." Now, I realize it is not even mildly funny. Let me explain.

In the 1880s and afterwards, American policy-makers came to believe that America's economic survival and health *depended* on overseas markets where America could purchase raw materials and sell manufactured goods. American foreign policy hence became one of the **open doors**.

We do not use that term *open door* much any more, but it is much the same as today's globalism. Through this open door the goods mentioned in Revelation 18 flow. Notice the quality and the diversity of these goods: Gold, silver, precious stones, fine linen, silk, wood of every kind, ivory of every kind, bronze, iron, marble, cinnamon, incense, oil, frankincense, wine, fine flour, cattle, horses, and chariots (probably a reference to automobiles).

A corollary of this open door doctrine was that America had the right to intervene in the affairs of any nation to protect her own economic interests. This included *military* intervention. This doctrine was the beginning of today's internationalism. China and Japan were places where America exercised her muscle from time to time, as with the expeditions of Perry. South and Central American countries were not exempt of course, as we made and broke nations for our purposes. (Consider the machinations of Theodore Roosevelt in the creation of the Panama Canal.) Later, of course, we became deeply involved in European wars.

America had expanded to an empire. Joseph, the fruitful bough, has indeed run over the wall, as Jacob foretold in Genesis 49:22. In general, God hedged in Joseph with the oceans, her coasts. It is not by accident that God refers to the lands of Israel as the coastlands in the Old Testament. These oceans— the oceans around Australia, New Zealand, Britain, Canada and the United States— are her rightful bounds, her wall. But, through a foreign policy of economic expansionism, today called globalism, coupled with military intervention, Joseph has overgrown his wall big time.

The best example of the workings of the open door policy is the *first* example of it, the Spanish American War, as fought first in Cuba, then in the Philippines. The president of the United States at that time was a devout Methodist. In an address to a Methodist convention, he told how he had sought "divine guidance" in the execution of the war and the governance of the new lands. He went on to say that his prayer was answered, that he heard "the voice of God" telling him to "take them all and educate the Filipinos, and uplift and Christianize them." He concluded by saying he did so all in the name of his

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dear Lord, Jesus Christ, and did so without apology.

Sound familiar? Well, what exactly did President William McKinley do?

What he did was destroy a Spanish naval fleet of such weak fire-power that its weapons could not reach his vessels. He simply stood off and fired at will, until the enemy was destroyed. At the time, this was referred to as the "splendid little war," but it was not war at all. It was really just a turkey shoot.

The Spanish-American War was rather quick and easy, like the Iraq War started out to be. But, then came what is called the Philippine Insurgency, which for lasted years, in some areas, for more than a decade. So fierce were some of these insurgents that the United States Army felt the need to commission and build a new weapon—a bigger bullet—just to deal with these people. Theodore Roosevelt's strategy was simply to irradiate the enemy, every man, woman and child of them. In all, 220,000 were killed by American soldiers; however, only 15,000 were combatants. Most were women and children. The open door swings violently, crushing all who get in its way.

The ugliness of Babylon lay open for all to see at that time. Yet, what I have just described has happened, in various degrees, over and over again since. Babylon is not pretty, and the consequences of living the get way of life are not pretty. The president, who lived by the sword, died by it; an assassin's bullet felled William McKinley. Yet, his way of life and his crushing, bruising open door, swings relentlessly to this day. It is Babylon at work.

No, there is really nothing attractive about Babylon at all. Babylon is all about empire, mercantilism, slavery, economic exploitation, military conscription, prevarication at the highest levels, and murder. Never seek to return to it, to its way of get.

Jeremiah 29:1-7 speaks to *us* today, unwilling residents of Babylon as we are. There, God gives us sound and practical advice concerning our time in Babylon:

First, build your barn. That is, *work* hard (and, while young, work hard at preparing yourself to work hard as an adult in a productive occupation.) Get a job.

Second, build your house. By that I mean, build your *family*. Once you have a domicile and a garden, build a quality domestic life-style which produces godly offspring, the increase which God wants.

Third, *pray* for God's peace on the city. Pray for peace, an environment in which we can

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grow spiritually and where our children will be safe from war and conscription.

While you are living here in Babylon, work hard, build a family, and pray a whole lot. That is sound advice for any pilgrim.