

Babylon

Rev. 17, 18.

from **Musings on Scripture, Volume 1.**

J. G. Bellett.

"Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth." This is a saying much to be remembered. It teaches us that we are not to make ourselves the judges of what sanctification or holiness is; God's word is to determine this, because holiness is that character or mind which is formed by God's word or truth.

We are apt to think that our own moral sense of things is the rule of holiness. But the word of God claims to be such a rule: "Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth" (John 17: 17). An act may be unholy, though done with a good conscience, because "the truth," and not the conscience, is the rule of holiness.

If that rule were applied to many a thing which the moral sense or the religious sense of man approves, how it would change its character! And the Lord cannot change His standard of holiness, though He may be infinitely gracious to the shortcomings of His saints.

Those other words, "For their sakes I sanctify my. self, that they also might be sanctified through the truth," which stand in connection, have their own force and value also. Thus, in the whole of His utterance in John 17, the Lord strongly takes a place apart from the world, and puts His saints in the like place, praying that they may be kept there. In this sense, I believe, He speaks of sanctifying Himself. Through all this church-age He is apart from the world and the earth; and sanctification depends on our communion with Him in that separated place. "The truth," testifying as it does of Him, links us with Him in that place; and sanctification is thus "through the truth," leading us to fellowship with an unworldly Jesus.

We may see instances of such sanctification from the beginning.

When the ground was cursed for man's sake, holiness was separation from it, as in the persons of the antediluvian saints; uncleanness was cleaving to it, as did the family of Cain.

When the earth again corrupted itself, and God judged it by the scattering of the nations, holiness was separation from it, as in Abraham; and apostasy was a clinging to it in spite of judgment; as Nimrod did.

When Canaan was judged, Achan's sin savoured of the apostate mind; but Israel became a holy people by separating from it, and from all people of the earth, by the ordinances of God and the sword of Joshua.

But Israel revolts. The circumcision becomes uncircumcision, and with them all on the face of the earth or in the world becomes defiled, and holiness is separation from it in companionship with a rejected and heavenly Christ.

The whole system, the world, is the judged or cursed thing now. It is the Jericho. While the camp lingers in the wilderness, we may be at charges or in labours on a mission to draw out the Rahabs; but we cannot seek the improvement of Jericho, or display the resources and capabilities of the world. The world, as including other thoughts, is also any moral or religious system or undertaking which does not act in company with a rejected and heavenly Christ. Such doings would be unholy, not according to

"the truth," however morally conducted or benevolently intentioned.

To glory without going on to "perfection" in a crucified Christ will not, if alone, be the "perfection" in this age; there must be companionship with a rejected Christ also. Babylon, I believe, the mystic Babylon of the Revelation, may be brought to boast in a crucified Christ, and be Babylon still. For what is it as delineated by the Spirit? Is it not a thing worldly in character, as well as abominable and idolatrous in doctrine and practice? Revelation 18 gives us a sight of Babylon in its worldliness, as, Rev. 17 more in its idolatries. Babylon of old, as in the land of Chaldea, was full of idols, and guilty of the blood or of the sorrows of the righteous. But it had also this mark: it displayed greatness in the world in the time of Jerusalem's depression. So with the mystic Babylon. She has her abominations in the midst of her, and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus stains her; but still more fully is she disclosed as great and splendid and joyous in the earth during the age of Christ's rejection. She is important in the world in that day when the judgment of God is preparing for the world; she can glorify herself and live deliciously in a defiled place.

It is not that she outwardly ignores the cross of Christ. She is not heathen. She may publish Christ crucified, but she refuses to know Christ rejected. She does not continue with Him in His temptations, nor consider the poor and needy Jesus (Luke 22; Psalm 40). The kings of the earth and the merchants of the earth are her friends, and the inhabitants of the earth are her subjects.

Is not, then, the rejection of Christ the thing she practically scorns? Surely it is. And again, I say, the prevailing thought of the Spirit about her is this — she is that which is exalted in the world while God's Witness is depressed, and in defiance of that depression, for she knows of it. Babylon of old well knew of the desolation of Jerusalem; Christendom externally knows and publishes the cross of Jesus.

Babylon of old was very bold in her defiance of the grief of Zion. She made the captives of Zion to contribute to her greatness and her enjoyments. Nebuchadnezzar had done this with the captive youths, and Belshazzar with the captive vessels.

This was Babylon, and in spirit this is Christendom. Christendom is the thing which glorifies herself and lives deliciously in the earth, trading in all that is desirable and costly in the world's esteem, in the very face of the sorrow and rejection of that which is God's. Christendom practically forgets Christ rejected on the earth.

The, Medo-Persian power is another creature. He removes Babylon, but exalts himself Dan. 6). And this is the action of "the beast" and his ten kings. The woman, mystically Babylon, is removed by the ten kings; but then they give their power to the beast, who exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, as Darius the Mede did.

This is the closing crowning feature in the picture of the world's apostasy. But we have not reached it yet. Our conflict is with Babylon and not with the Mede, with that which lives deliciously and in honour during the age of Jerusalem's ruins (i.e., of the rejection of Christ).