

BABYLONIAN RELIGION

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As we go back into the dim twilight of history with Scripture, we learn that the founder of Bab-el, or Babylon, was Nimrod, of whose unholy achievements we read in the 10th chapter of Genesis. He was the arch-apostate of the patriarchal age. He is described as a "mighty hunter before the Lord" -- "a hunter of the souls of men," the rabbis said. Going out from the presence of the Lord, he impiously sought to gather a multitude about himself, and in defiance of the express command of God to spread abroad upon the face of the earth, he persuaded his associates and followers to join together in "building a city and a tower which should reach unto heaven."

Not surely as some of us were taught in our childhood a tower by which they might climb up into the skies to escape another possible flood, but a tower of renown, rising to a great height, to be recognized as a temple or rallying center for those who did not walk in obedience to the word of the Lord. With all the effrontery of our modern apostates, they called their city and tower Bab-El, the gate of God; but it was soon changed by divine judgment into Babel, Confusion. It bore the stamp of unreality from the first, for we are told, "they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar." An imitation of that which is real and true has ever since characterized Babylon in all ages.

Nimrod, or Nimroud-bar-Cush, as he is called on the monuments, was a grandson of Ham, the unworthy son of Noah, whose character is revealed in his exposure of his father's shame. We know that Noah had brought through the flood the revelation of the true God, for he was a preacher of righteousness, and his utterances on more than one occasion show that he had the prophetic gift. Ham on the other hand seems to have been all too readily affected by the apostasy that brought the flood, for he shows no evidence of self-judgment, but the very opposite. His name, as spelled out upon Egyptian monuments is Khem, and this agrees with the literal sound of the Hebrew word rendered Ham in our Bibles. It means "swarthy," "darkened," or more literally, "the sun-burnt."

Ancient lore now comes to our assistance, and tells us that the wife of Nimrod-bar-Cush was the infamous Semiramis, the First. She is reputed to have been the founder of the Babylonian mysteries and the first high-priestess of idolatry. Thus Babylon became the fountainhead of idolatry, and the mother of every heathen and pagan system in the world. The mystery-religion that was originated there spread in various forms throughout the whole earth, and as we shall see in a few minutes, it is with us today. It is identical with the mystery of iniquity which wrought so energetically in Paul's day, and shall have its fullest development when the Holy Spirit has departed and the Babylon of the apocalypse holds sway.

Building on the primeval promise of the woman's Seed who was to come, Semiramis bore a son whom she declared was miraculously conceived, and when she presented

him to the people, he was hailed as the promised deliverer. This was Tammuz, whose worship Ezekiel protested against in the days of the captivity. Thus was introduced the mystery of the mother and the child, a form of idolatry that is older than any other known to man. The rites of this worship were secret. Only the initiated were permitted to know its mysteries. It was Satan's effort to delude mankind with an imitation so like the truth of God that they would not know the true Seed of the woman when He came in the fullness of time. To this Justin Martyr bears definite witness.

From Babylon this mystery-religion spread to all the surrounding nations, as the years went on and the world was populated by the descendants of Noah. Everywhere the symbols were the same, and everywhere the cult of the mother and child became the popular system. Their worship was celebrated with the most disgusting and immoral practices. The image of the queen of heaven with the babe in her arms was seen everywhere, though the names might differ as languages differed. It became the mystery-religion of Phoenicia, and by the Phoenicians was carried to the ends of the earth. Ashtoreth and Tammuz, the mother and child of these hardy adventurers, became Isis and Horus in Egypt, Aphrodite and Eros in Greece, Venus and Cupid in Italy, and bore many other names in more distant places. Within 1,000 years, Babylonianism had become the religion of the world, which had rejected the Divine revelation.

Linked with the central mystery were countless lesser mysteries, the hidden meaning of which was known only to the initiates, but the outward forms were practiced by all the people. Among these were the doctrines of purgatorial purification after death, salvation by countless sacraments (such as priestly absolution), sprinkling with holy water, the offering of round cakes to the queen of heaven (as mentioned in the book of Jeremiah), dedication of virgins to the gods (which was literally sanctified prostitution), weeping for Tammuz for a period of 40 days prior to the great festival of Istar (who was said to have received her son back from the dead); for it was taught that Tammuz was slain by a wild boar and afterwards brought back to life. To him the egg was sacred, as depicting the mystery of his resurrection even as the evergreen was his chosen symbol and was set up in honor of his birth at the winter solstice, when a boar's head was eaten in memory of his conflict and a yule log burned with many mysterious observances. **(First Resurrection Fellowship Note: Easter/lent)**

The sign of the cross was sacred to Tammuz, as symbolizing the life giving principle and as the first letter of his name. It is represented upon vast numbers of the most ancient altars and temples, and did not, as many have supposed originate with Christianity. From this mystery-religion, the patriarch Abraham was separated by the divine call, and with this same evil cult the nation that sprang from him had constant conflict, until under Jezebel, a Phoenician princess, it was grafted onto what was left of the religion of Israel in the northern kingdom in the day of Ahab, and was the cause of their captivity at the last. Judah was polluted by it, for Baal-worship was but the Canaanitish form of Babylonian mysteries, and only by being sent into captivity to Babylon itself did Judah become cured of her fondness for idolatry. Baal was the Sun-God, the Life-giving One, identical with Tammuz.

When Christ came into this world the mystery of iniquity was everywhere holding sway, save where the truth of God as revealed in the Old Testament was known. Thus, when the early Christians set out upon the great task of carrying the gospel to the ends of the earth, they found themselves everywhere confronted by this system, in one form or another; for though Babylon as a city had long been but a mystery, her mysteries had not died with her. When the city and temples were destroyed, the high-priest fled with a company of initiates and their sacred vessels and images to Pergamos, where the Symbol of the serpent was set up as the emblem of the hidden wisdom. From there, they afterwards crossed the sea and immigrated to Italy, where, they settled on the Etruscan plain.

There the ancient cult was propagated under the name of the Etruscan Mysteries and eventually Rome became the headquarters of Babylonianism. The chief priests wore mitres shaped like the head of a fish, in honor of Dagon, the fish-god, the Lord of life- another form of the Tammuz mystery, as developed among Israel's old enemies, the Philistines. The chief priest when established in Rome took the title Pontifex Maximus, and this was imprinted in on his mitre. When Julius Caesar (who was an initiate like all young Romans of good family) had become the head of the States, he was elected Pontifex Maximus, and this title was held henceforth by all the Roman emperors down to Constantine the Great, who was at one and the same time, head of the church, and high priest to the heathen. The title was afterwards conferred upon the bishops of Rome, and is borne by the pope today, who is thus declared to be, not the successor of the fisherman-apostle Peter, but the direct successor of the high priest of the Babylonian mysteries, and the servant of the fish-god Dagon, for whom he wears, like his idolatrous predecessors, the fisherman's ring.