

The Book of Revelation
Lesson #16-The Great Babylon-Part I

Introduction: The section that describes the scene just prior to and in the midst of the Battle of Armageddon. The Great Babylon (17-19)

*Who or What Does Babylon Represent?
When do These Events Occur?*

 **Historicist Approach:**

- The fall of Babylon the harlot is the overthrow of the papal system of religion and government; yet to be seen in the future. These chapters feature the divergent reactions of the godly and the ungodly to this final vindication of true religion.
- The rider of the white horse represents the ongoing conquests of Christ through His Word, or else His continuing campaign of judgment upon other enemies.

 **Preterist Approach:**

- Babylon is identified either with Rome or with Jerusalem.
- If the former, these chapters describe the downfall of the Roman Empire and especially of the city of Rome, the harlot.
- If Babylon is Jerusalem, these visions depict the burning of that city by the Romans and the mixed reactions of the wicked and the righteous.

 **Futurist Approach:**

- Babylon may represent the Catholic Church or some great apostate religious entity forming under the Antichrist in the end times.
- Alternatively, Babylon may be a city-either a restoration of the ancient Babylon or a revived Rome.
- In any case, the great enemy of truth and righteousness will be destroyed in the end of the Tribulation, to the chagrin of the wicked but the rejoicing of the righteous.
- Jesus visibly returns to earth in chapter 19, riding a white horse.

 **Spiritual Approach:**

- Babylon represents the world system as the seducer of the godly.
- Its destruction at the end of the age is depicted in terms of its current manifestation in John's time: Rome.
- The ultimate judgment upon this harlot comes through Christ at His Second Coming, who is the rider on the white horse.
- Alternately, the rider may represent Christ's more gradual conquests over the world system through the preaching of the gospel.

IMPORTANT: Chapters 17 and 18 portray God's judgment on the great (notorious) prostitute (harlot) Rome; the center of pagan opposition to Christ.

Chapter 17: Vulgar display of the trappings of wrath and power, drunk with the blood of martyrs.

Chapter 18: A city brought to ruins from her former position of world domination.

NOTE: Two angles that seem to describe the same event; the downfall of Rome (note: important to the early church and in that day the Revived Roman Empire).

- Chapter 17: Describes overthrow of Babylon in terms of the destruction of a prostitute who sits (rules) over the beast and flaunts her vile profession.
- Chapter 18: Reveals that the prostitute is a city. The city is Babylon, or Rome.

Both chapters give detail to the 7th bowl:

Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" 18 And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. 19 Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. 20 Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. 21 And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great. Revelation 16:17-21 NKJV

Tonight: The Harlot and the Scarlet Beast

I. The Vision (17:1-6)

- A. John invited by the angel to see the prostitute or the great harlot with whom the kings of the earth have prostituted themselves.

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, 2 with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication." Revelation 17:1-2 NKJV

NOTE: Compare to:

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." Revelation 21:9 NKJV

(Bride vs. Harlot)

TRUTH: When the harlot is exposed and destroyed, the Bride of Christ will be seen in all her beauty.

1. Old Testament: Imagery of prostitute commonly denotes religious apostasy.

How the faithful city has become a harlot! It was full of justice; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers. Isaiah 1:21 NKJV

A wild donkey used to the wilderness, that sniffs at the wind in her desire; in her time of mating, who can turn her away? All those who seek her will not weary themselves; In her month they will find her. Jeremiah 2:24 NKJV

I have seen your adulteries and your lustful neighings, the lewdness of your harlotry, Your abominations on the hills in the fields. woe to you, O Jerusalem! Will you still not be made clean?" Jeremiah 13:27 NKJV

2. In this case the prostitute is a city so background supposed by these texts:

"I will not have mercy on her children, for they are the children of harlotry. 5 For their mother has played the harlot; She who conceived them has behaved shamefully. For she said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, My wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.' Hosea 2:4-5 NKJV

(Nineveh)

Woe to the bloody city! It is all full of lies and robbery. Its victim never departs. 2 The noise of a whip and the noise of rattling wheels, of galloping horses, of clattering chariots! 3 Horsemen charge with bright sword and glittering spear. There is a multitude of slain, a great number of bodies, Countless corpses — they stumble over the corpses — 4 because of the multitude of harlotries of the seductive harlot, The mistress of sorceries, who sells nations through her harlotries, and families through her sorceries. 5 "Behold, I am against you," says the LORD of hosts; "I will lift your skirts over your face, I will show the nations your nakedness, and the kingdoms your shame. Nahum 3:1-5 NKJV

(Tyre)

"Take a harp, go about the city, You forgotten harlot; Make sweet melody, sing many songs, That you may be remembered." 17 And it shall be, at the end of seventy years, that the LORD will deal with Tyre. She will return to her hire, and commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth. Isaiah 23:16-18 NKJV

3. Harlot is Rome. Adorned in luxury and intoxicated with the blood of the saints, she stands for a dominant world system based on the seduction for personal gain over against the righteous demands of a persecuted minority.
 - a. His vision is timeless; always has been the case.
 - b. Certainly now; world system pushes personal gain (Health and Wealth)
 - c. Final close of history this harlot will be the intensified experience of worldly and godless power.
4. Many nations will be ostracized by Rome/Babylon.
 - B. John carried away to watch the judgment; but a description of the harlot precedes:

So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. 5 And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. 6 I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement. Revelation 17:3-6 NKJV

1. Woman on the beast
 - a. Beast is the antichrist/powers/authority
 - b. Woman sitting on the beast; control
 - c. Blasphemes names (return to Roman emperors/names of deity) "Theios"; divine/"soter"-saviors/"kyrios"-lord

2. Woman's garments

- a. Purple and scarlet; luxury and splendor of ancient Rome
- b. Bride of 19:8; fine linen, bright and clean
- c. Cup is the promise of carnal satisfaction; yet the contents are not what is promised (what a lesson!)

3. The Name "Mystery of Babylon"; more than mystery it is better to understand as a name with secret meaning.

- a. Babylon the Great is the system of godlessness that leads people away from the worship of God and to their own destruction.
- b. Already exists

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. 1 John 4:1-3 NKJV

Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 6 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 2 Thessalonians 2:5-10 NKJV

II. The Vision Interrupted (7-18)

(What follows is a description of the self-destructive power of evil).

A. Angel promises to interpret

But the angel said to me, "Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. Revelation 17:7

- B. Once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction.

The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. Revelation 17:8 NKJV

1. Obvious parody of the Lamb:

I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades. Revelation 1:18 NKJV

"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: Revelation 2:8 NKJV

2. Broad sense that satanically misguided power which although having received the mortal wound (strike of death) returns to hurl himself against the forces of God.

- a. Time and time again
- b. Antichrist, Nero, Hitler, One False leader
- c. One more time but this time revealed for who he is

3. Earth in awe of this revived Roman Empire

- C. Heads, Mountains, Kings

"Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. 10 There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time. 11 The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition. Revelation 17:9-11 NKJV

1. 7 hills; 1st Century reader would see this as Rome. The city built on 7 hills; began as a return of seven hill settlements (all the hostility against the church of that day was Rome)
2. 7 heads are 7 kings; Five fallen, one is, one is to come

3 approaches:

- a. 7 Roman kings; no matter how one calculates the emperors, the number is hard to come by.
- b. 7 secular empires (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greek, Rome and Revived Empire).
- c. 7 is symbolic standing for the power of Roman Empire as a historic whole.
- d. Point is the end is drawing near.

D. Beast is the 8th King yet one of the seven

NOTE: Revived Roman Empire

E. The Ten Horns

"The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. 13 These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. Revelation 17:12-13 NKJV

1. Earthly power who will serve the antichrist
2. Some speculate specific kings of the European Kingdom or a revived empire.
3. These are probably purely eschatological figures, representing the totality of the powers and all nations on the earth which will become subservient to the antichrist.
4. Number 10 is likely symbolic and may indicate completeness.
5. Likely does not point to 10 specific kings or 10 kingdoms of the revived Roman Empire.
6. The forces that rule with antichrist turn over their power and authority to the beast but rule only for a short time.

F. The Battle and its Outcome

These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful." Revelation 17:14 NKJV

NOTE: Points forward to 19:-ff

G. Explanation of the Waters

Then he said to me, "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. Revelation 17:15-16 NKJV

(People, multitudes, nations, languages); stresses universally

NOTE: Description of Babylon

O you who dwell by many waters, Abundant in treasures, Your end has come, The measure of your covetousness. Jeremiah 51:13 NKJV

1. Vastness of this Kingdom of power
2. End is near

H. Fate of the Harlot

And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. Revelation 17:16 NKJV

NOTE: Whatever religious system the woman is; the beast will turn on it; probably at mid-point of the tribulation; 1st seal; conquering and to conquer.

I. Sovereignty of God seen

For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. Revelation 17:17 NKJV

NOTE: Even the purposes of evil serve the purposes of God.

J. Final interpretation of the woman

And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth." Revelation 17:18 NKJV

1. For John, the city is Rome.
2. Wicked seducer.
3. Babylon the Great is more than 1st century Rome.
4. Every great center of power that has prostituted its wealth and influence and compromised the true faith restores the life of the spirit of Babylon.
5. A final Babylon.
6. It too will fall.

Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" Revelation 11:15 NKJV

Conclusion:

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:9-11 NKJV

Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. 27 For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. 28 Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all. 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 NKJV

- Fall of Lucifer:

"How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! 13 For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' 15 Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit. Isaiah 14:12-15 NKJV

- Fall of Man:

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; 3 but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" 4 Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Genesis 3:1-5 NKJV

- Babel

Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. 2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. 3 Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. 4 And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." Genesis 11:1-4 NKJV

- Satan has tried repeatedly to overthrow God
- Will be his last attempt
- Jesus will reign as King of King and Lord of Lords!

(ILL) There's Something About that Name