

## THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Week 7 – Babylon

February 27, 2018

We are introduced to Babylon in the book of Genesis and here we see this city again at the end! Babylon has much to do with the big picture of the Bible. Babylon, as used in Revelation, refers to 1) A religious system; and 2) a political and commercial system. The religious Babylon is found mainly in Revelation, Chapter 17. Commercial Babylon is found mainly in Revelation, Chapter 18.

### Revelation 17

*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, <sup>2</sup> with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.” <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> And on her forehead a name was written:*

### *MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH*

The earthly city, Babylon, is seen in Rev. 17 and 18. In Rev. 17 Babylon is depicted as a vile prostitute. What a sharp contrast between Babylon and the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is the heavenly city coming to earth, pictured as the pure chaste (II Cor. 11:2) “bride, the Lamb’s wife” (Rev. 21:9).

There has been a great deal of speculation about the identity of Babylon. This “great harlot” has been identified with the Roman Catholic church and the Vatican, apostate Christendom, the United States, NYC, Rome, or some unknown great metropolis that will emerge in the end times. Let’s allow Rev. 17 & 18 to define Babylon:

- Babylon is a literal city (Rev. 17:18) - *And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.*

- Babylon is a city of worldwide importance and influence. Babylon is thought to be the capital city of the antichrist (Rev. 17:15, 18) - *Then he said to me, “The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues This Babylon is prominent among the masses of humanity in a literal city. The antichrist will be the ruler over the kings in this city of Babylon, it appears.*

- Isa. 14 speaks of the connection between the fall of the King of Babylon and the fall of Lucifer who becomes Satan. Who empowers the antichrist?

- Babylon and the beast (antichrist) are closely connected. The woman (Babylon) is seen riding on the beast (antichrist) (Rev. 17:3-5, 7) - *So he carried me away in the*

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*Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast... 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.*

- Babylon is a center of false religion (Rev. 17:4-5; 18:1-2).
- Babylon is the center of world commerce (Rev. 18:9-19).
- Babylon persecutes the believers (Rev. 17:6; 18:20, 24).
- Babylon will be destroyed suddenly and completely at the end of the Tribulation, never to rise again (Rev. 18:8-10, 21-24).

Some believe that Babylon is symbolic...that it is a code name for Rome, NY, Jerusalem or some other world city. Since the text does not indicate that it's to be interpreted symbolically, it's best to interpret it as referring to a literal city called Babylon. Consider when John wants to indicate that a geographical location is symbolic, he does so. Rev. 11:8 - *And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.* We know from this verse that the two dead witnesses will lie in the street of Jerusalem. Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem. Other geographical places in Revelation are literal: Patmos, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Philadelphia, Sardis, Laodicea, and Armageddon. We have an established pattern of literal geographical locations. It appears that Babylon should be taken literally.

Babylon is significant. Babylon is the second most mentioned city in the Bible – second to Jerusalem. Scripture refers to Babylon 280 times. Jerusalem is mentioned 660 times in the OT and 142 times in the NT.

Throughout Scripture, Babylon symbolizes evil and rebellion against God.

- Babylon is the city where man first began to worship himself in organized rebellion against God in the land of Shinar at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-11).
- Babylon was both a literal city and the entire anti-God system that went with it.
- It appears that Babylon was under the ruler, Nimrod. Gen. 10:8-10 – *Cush begot Nimrod.... He was a mighty hunter before the LORD. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel...in the land of Shinar.* Shinar – “country of two rivers” (Tigris & Euphrates). The ancient name for the territory later known as Babylonia or Chaldea.
- Babylon was the capital city of the first of four Gentile world empires to rule over Jerusalem (Dan. 2:31-45). King Nebuchadnezzar was the King of Babylon.
- And, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 BC.

The city of ancient Babylon is in modern-day Iraq, about 50 miles south of Baghdad on the Euphrates River. Saddam Hussein had for several years been working to uncover the ancient ruins of Babylon with a view to rebuilding the city and establishing himself as the “incarnation” of Nebuchadnezzar, the great Babylonian king who took Judah captive from 606 to 586 B.C.

## BABYLON'S BIBLICAL BEGINNINGS

Babylon comes from the Hebrew Bab-el which means “confusion.” Babel is first found in Genesis 10 in the table of nations – all the nations coming from Noah’s three sons, Ham, Shem, and Japheth. In Gen. 10:8-10 we read of Nimrod, from Ham’s line - *he began to be a mighty one on the earth.*<sup>9</sup> *He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, ‘Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD.’*<sup>10</sup> *And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.* Nimrod means rebellion, revolt, the valiant (prideful). Nimrod was “a mighty hunter before the LORD” – before means “against” as in anger. And, the context confirms such a definition.

Gen. 11:3-4 – under Nimrod’s rulership, the people said - *Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly. 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.* Nimrod’s rebellion is seen in his attempt to build a city and a tower that would reach to heaven (i.e. high in the sky). It’s clearly noted in Gen. 11 that the purpose of this was to make a name in defiance against God’s plan of nationalism. Under God’s direct orders, man was to scatter – to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. This means the establishment of nations divided by geographical boundaries and family ties or races. Ancient history reveals that it was common practice to build huge mounds or towers called ziggurats made of sun dried brick. These were sacred temple towers dedicated to heathen deities. This kingdom of Babel/Babylon was the first attempt at world unity apart from dependence upon God.

In Genesis 14 we read of a number of kings in the land of Canaan. Gen. 14:1 - *And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar....* Abram (his name at the time) defeated these kings. In traveling back to his home in Hebron, Abram was near a place called “Salem” which later came to be known as Jerusalem. Who comes out to Abram to bring him bread and wine? Abram received a blessing from Melchizedek, King of Salem and the priest of the Most High God. Melchizedek means “king of righteousness. As King of Salem, he is the “king of peace. In Scripture, Melchizedek is a type of Christ (king and priest) (Heb. 7:1-3; Psa. 110:4). Are we seeing a tale of two cities?

Babylon’s early history in Genesis:

- Shinar/Babylon had its beginnings in rebellion against God.
- God calls Abram to move from Ur of the Chaldees. The Chaldeans lived in the southern part of Babylon. Abram encounters and defeats kings one of whom is the King of Shinar – Babylon.
  - We are then introduced to the King of Salem, Melchizedek – a king who is a type of Christ in Scripture.
  - In Genesis 15, God appears to Abram to reinforce His covenant with Abram and his descendants. And God gives Abram specific boundaries in connection with the land of promise which includes the Euphrates River which includes Babylon!

Babylon next appears in II Kings 20:12-18. The King of Babylon visited King Hezekiah who was the King of Judah. Shortly thereafter, Isaiah told King Hezekiah, *Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,* says the LORD. <sup>18</sup> *'And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.'* We need to know that Judah was not obeying the Sabbath law for the land, they were worshipping idols, and Manasseh was an evil king [Hezekiah's son]). Isaiah's prophecy of the Babylonian captivity was fulfilled approx. 100 years later. Hezekiah and his descendants were of the line of David. Who would come through David's line? The Messiah. Their city, Jerusalem, was where God dwelled – in the Temple – between the cherubim on the mercy seat on top of the ark of the covenant (I Sam. 4:4) in the Holy of Holies. The ark represented the presence of God; the Temple was the place of worship of God. All of this represented God's reign and kingdom on earth. What does this mean?

- Through the Babylonian captivity, Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land, destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the temple, and deported Judah's king.
- We must remember that the Babylonian captivity was God's judgment against Israel for her continued disobedience. Yet, it is insightful to understand that God used Babylon to attack and destroy the kingdom of God on earth. And, from this point in history, there has not been a king from the line of David sitting on the throne of David in Jerusalem.
- Though temporary, this is the triumph of mankind over God's kingdom.

#### THE ORIGIN OF BABYLON'S RELIGION

Ancient records indicate that Nimrod had a wife named Semiramis who was the founder and first high priestess of the Babylonian mystery religion. She gave birth to a son named Tammuz, whom she claimed was conceived miraculously. This son was considered savior of his people and in effect was the first false Messiah. The son was to have been killed by a wild beast, but brought back to life. The religious system of Semiramis had many secret rites in the worship of its idols. These were called mysteries (secrets) into which new members had to be initiated. When the initiates were initiated they were given a cup containing a mysterious drink made of wine, honey, water and flour. This represented the doctrines of the cult, but these also made the participant intoxicated and prepared for what the participant was about to see, hear and do. These rites involved consecrated male and female prostitution and the most sordid sexual immorality carried out in connection with its idolatrous worship. The fornication is both physical and spiritual.

In Rev. 9:14, four fallen angels are being held at the Euphrates River awaiting the appointed time for them to lead forth a host of demons to destroy one-third of mankind. In Rev. 16:12, the Euphrates will dry up to prepare the way for the kings of the east. These references to the Euphrates point to the fact that something important and EVIL is occurring there. It appears that the city of Babylon on the Euphrates will be rebuilt and will function as a religious and political center for the antichrist is a good explanation for Revelation's emphasis on the Euphrates River.

The prophet Zechariah, writing approx. 20 years after Babylon's fall to the Medo-Persian empire, saw a future time when evil would return to its original place in Babylon (Zech. 5:5-11). In his vision, Zechariah sees a woman who is named Wickedness carried away in a basket to the land of Babylon where a temple will be built for her.

ZECHARIAH 5:5-11  
Woman sitting in a basket (5:7)

REVELATION 17-18  
Woman sitting on the beast,  
seven mountains, and  
many waters (17:3, 9, 15)

Emphasis on commerce  
(a basket for measuring grain, 5:6)

Emphasis on commerce  
(merchant of grain, 18:13)

Woman's name is Wickedness (5:8)

Woman's name is  
"Babylon the Great, Mother  
of All Prostitutes and  
Obscenities in the World"  
(17:5)

Focus on false worship (a temple  
5:11)

Focus on false worship built for the woman,  
(18:1-3)

Woman is taken to Babylon (5:10-11)

Woman is called Babylon (17:5)

God's word teaches that wickedness will again rear its ugly head in the same place where it began – Babylon. The prostitute in John's vision will fulfill Zech. 5 when Babylon is established as the city that embodies evil.

In his book, *The Rise of Babylon*, Charles Dyer (who spoke in this class last semester) wrote, "Throughout history, Babylon has represented the height of rebellion and opposition to God's plans and purposes, so God allows Babylon to continue during the final days. It is almost as though He 'calls her out' for a final duel. But this time (in Revelation), the conflict between God and Babylon ends decisively. The city of Babylon will be destroyed."

However, we read of Babylon's destruction in Isa. 13 and in Jer. 50 & 51. Babylon, in its glory, was conquered by the Medes and Persians in 323 BC. But Babylon continued as a city; however, its glory had dwindled. Babylon was a center of Jewish learning after 70 AD.

We read of Babylon's total destruction in Jer. 51:60-64 - *...it shall be desolate forever.*<sup>63</sup> *Now it shall be, when you have finished reading this book, that you shall tie a stone to it and throw it out into the Euphrates.*<sup>64</sup> *Then you shall say, 'Thus Babylon shall sink and not rise from the catastrophe that I will bring upon her. This will happen – Babylon's total destruction. And, this we shall see in Rev. 17 and 18.*

Revelation 17 focuses on Babylon's religious character. "Mother" means the source, or, in this case, the polluted fountain from which all spiritual prostitution flows.

Rev. 17:1 - *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....* John is shown the judgment of the harlot. Harlotry depicts idolatry in this context. The Bible defines idolatry as the worship of an image or a created object. In Rev. 17:15 we understand these "waters" as *peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues* – the masses who give the religious system power and support. AND, the harlot will exercise control over them during the Tribulation.

Rev. 17:2 - *with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.* The harlot religious system will promote idolatry among the kings of the earth. The earth dwellers will be absorbed with and intoxicated by her.

Rev. 17:3 - *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.* John was taken, in a vision, to a desolate wasteland. This woman, the great harlot, later described as "Mystery" Babylon, is sitting on a "scarlet" beast. "Scarlet" is the color of luxury, splendor, royalty. This beast is the antichrist. He is full of names of blasphemy which speaks of his self-deification. The antichrist is the beast with seven heads and ten horns. It seems as though the beast may be under the authority of the harlot and yet he appears to be supporting her. We are seeing an idolatrous religious system that will exist during the first half of the Tribulation.

Rev. 17:4 - *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.* The woman is wealthy from her trade of alluring others and bringing them into her falsehoods, heresies, false teaching. The golden cup is full of filthiness.

Rev. 17:5 - *And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.* It was customary for Roman prostitutes to wear a headband with their name on it for marketing purposes. "Mystery Babylon" - think of Babylon's religion – the secret rites which are called mysteries.

Rev. 17:6 - *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.* The harlot is a murderer. This religious system actively persecutes and kills God's people.

Rev. 17:7-8 - <sup>7</sup> *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.* <sup>8</sup> *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.* The antichrist will come out of the abyss after his feigned death and resurrection. The antichrist's end...perdition – eternal destruction. Lake of fire (Rev. 19:20). Only those NOT written in the Book of Life will marvel. Those written in the Book of Life will escape the antichrist's deception.

Rev. 17:9 - <sup>9</sup> *Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits.* The seven mountains appear to equate to seven kingdoms/seven kings.

Rev. 17:10 - <sup>10</sup> *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. Five have fallen* (Rev. 17:10) – the five Gentile empires that have fallen prior to John’s day (important to note): Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece. *One is* - Rome was still in power in John’s day. *The other has not yet come* – the antichrist’s kingdom is the seventh kingdom and it’s in the future...in the future for John and in the future from our perspective as well. *And when he comes, he must continue a short time* – when the antichrist’s kingdom rises, he will remain a short time – for the duration of the seven-year Tribulation. The seven Gentile world kingdoms: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and the antichrist’s kingdom (a revived Roman empire [Dan. 7:7-8]).

Rev. 17:11 - <sup>11</sup> *The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition.* The antichrist’s kingdom is the 7<sup>th</sup> kingdom but after his feigned resurrection – he is seen as the 8<sup>th</sup> kingdom (??).

Rev. 17:12-15 - <sup>12</sup> *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.* <sup>13</sup> *These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast.* <sup>14</sup> *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.”* <sup>15</sup> *Then he said to me, ‘The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.* The ten horns noted in Rev. 17:12 are the ten kings who will rule with the antichrist for a short time – for one hour.

Rev. 17:16 - <sup>16</sup> *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.* During the first half of the Tribulation, the antichrist will submit to Babylon – the false religious system. The feigned death and resurrection of the antichrist will prompt worship of him and he will sit in the temple in Jerusalem (II Thess. 2:4). There is no room for worship of another. The great harlot will be made desolate. Her flesh will be eaten and she will be buried with fire!

Rev. 17:17 - *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.* God’s purpose is for the ten kings to pledge allegiance to the antichrist.

Rev. 17:18 - <sup>18</sup> *And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.’* The woman is Babylon, the great city – the literal city. We are given the answer. And, we know from the origin of Babylon – it is the city connected with false religion, apostate religion. The kings and the antichrist hate the harlot and will make her desolate! She will be destroyed. This is the purpose and plan of God!

“Obviously, Mystery Babylon, the apostate pagan church of the last days, will not develop overnight. Such an ecumenical organization, involving many diverse religious groups, will be created by negotiation and conferences over a number of years leading up to the beginning of the seven-year Tribulation period. It is therefore quite probable that

we will witness the initial steps toward this one-world church of the last days before the rapture takes the Christians home to heaven” Grant Jeffrey.

The ecumenical movements under the banner of “religion” are leading to religious Babylon (Rev. 17). World trade is leading to commercial Babylon (Rev. 18). The New World Order that we have been hearing about for decades will be the political Babylon (Rev. 13:1-10).

Revelation 18 drops the word “mystery” and picks up the word “city” regarding Babylon. In Revelation 18 we see the destruction of commercial Babylon.

Rev. 18:1-2 - An angel coming from the presence of God is crying out that Babylon is fallen, is fallen – and that it has become a dwelling place of demons...how fitting!

Rev. 18:3 – the kings of the earth (representing world government) and the merchants of the earth (representing world trade) have become obsessed with and controlled by Babylon.

Rev. 18:4 – God will call His people to come out, to disentangle themselves from this evil system.

Rev. 18:5 – Babylon’s sins have “heaped up to heaven.”

Rev. 18:6 – God’s judgment upon her – double for her works. OT law of retaliation (Ex. 21:24 – *eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot*) - punishment corresponding in kind and degree to the injury.

Rev. 18:7 – *I sit as queen* - included in Babylon’s ancient religion, the rites incorporated the worship of the mother (who was called “the queen of heaven”)

Rev. 18:8 – Babylon will fall in one day.

Rev. 18:9-19 - The lament over Babylon’s destruction is superficial. The kings are weeping over the loss of their power; the merchants are weeping over their business loss; the ship masters are crying over their loss of riches.

Rev. 18:20 – What a contrast – we are told to REJOICE over the demise of this city that has, through the history of the world, represented EVIL - *Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles (holy apostles and prophets), for God has avenged you on her!* God’s righteousness and justice have prevailed. God has avenged the deaths of those slain for their testimonies for Him!

### BABYLON IS FALLEN, FALLEN

Rev. 18:21-24 - *Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore.”<sup>22</sup> The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore.<sup>23</sup> The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived.<sup>24</sup> And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth.*

**QUESTIONS:**

How does this lesson help you to understand the big picture of the Bible better?

How might you better understand the heart of God through this lesson?

Any V8 moments?

What can you share with others from this lesson?

What prayer burdens has God laid on your heart?

What praises has He revealed to you?

How can you apply this lesson to your walk with Jesus?

**STRONGLY SUGGESTED HOMEWORK:**

Reread the handout and the Bible references.

Write out observations and questions. Begin to answer the questions using the Bible.

Share what you learned from Rev. 17 & 18 with someone.

Continue to write in your journal.

Read week 8's handout when you receive it.