

A Journey Into the Heavenlies
The Fall of Babylon the Great
March 23, 2016

In our last lesson we studied the seven bowls of wrath, which are the last of the trio of judgements recorded in the book of Revelation. In those judgements we saw those with the mark of the beast infected with ugly and painful sores, all sea life killed, the fresh water polluted, dramatic changes in the atmosphere so that the sun literally scorched the people, darkness come on the earth, an enormous earthquake, and great hail of stones, each weighing about 100 pounds.

As a result of the judgements of these seven vials, or bowls, the world would be totally devastated. Since the threefold series of divine judgements is now over, the time is ready for Christ to return and claim His inheritance.

However in chapters 17-18 there is another parenthesis, or interlude, inserted. These two chapters describe the destruction of Babylon. John's original readers probably believed Babylon represented the city of Rome, and John's prediction of the fall of Babylon meant impending fall of the Roman Empire. Many scholars and Bible interpreters still hold their view.

Yet, to identify Rome as Babylon is simply not sufficient to explain these two chapters because of the details of John's description of Babylon do not fit any city in past history.

In the Old Testament, Babylon was so often denounced by the Old Testament prophets that the name became synonymous with corruption, pride, and evil. The name Babylon in Revelation 17-18 should be understood as an evil system, not in terms of geographical boundaries.

The destruction of Babylon has already been mentioned in 14:8 and 16:19, but here it is described in detail. Chapter 17 emphasizes the destruction of the religious aspects of Babylon, and chapter 18 details the commercial aspects.

I. The _____ of Ecclesiastical Babylon (17:1-18)

Ecclesiastical Babylon is described in verse 1: the great whore that sitteth upon many waters. According to verse 15, the waters represent... The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.

The religious system during the Tribulation is called “the great whore” because she is guilty of spiritual adultery and fornication. This indicates she has the support of the world leaders, and her teachings are so enticing they are described as “intoxicating.” Apparently, the most deceptive religion the world will ever know will exist during the Great Tribulation.

In verse three John says, “and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.” The beast is the antichrist, and the fact that she sits upon him suggests a religious political coalition.

At the end of chapter 16, John observed the devastation of the world, which culminated with a global earthquake and awesome “hailstorm.” Now, John is translated back in time, prior to the judgements described in chapter 16, perhaps to an earlier part of the tribulation before the man of sin overthrows religion and requires everyone to worship him.

The harlot is described in verse four as “arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls.” This is implying her wealth and influence. The “golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication..” refers to her gross infidelity to God and His Word. It may also indicate she will use the Bible but will distort it to deceive people.

“And upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the Great”. The harlot is called a MYSTERY, indicating use of the name BABYLON THE GREAT is a secret use of the word referring to THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH (17:5).

This prostitute is the MOTHER of all spiritual prostitutes and is the source, or the womb, that gives birth to all historical spiritual deception and resistance to God. She is the unholy opposition of the bride of the Lamb described in 19:7-8. All the cults, false teachers, false prophets of history are her children, for she is the MOTHER of all ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. This could also mean many groups will join together under the harlot to form one federated world religion.

Verse six describes her crimes as “he is drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus...” The same “mother harlot” who has been the prime mover behind the killing of all saints throughout history will participate with the beast in the slaughter of the Christians during the Great Tribulation.

The angel identifies the beast as the one that “shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition (doom)... (17:8). This phrase is future tense, indicating the events of verses 1-7 precede the beast’s rise to power. The beast ascended out of the abyss in 11:7, making this section in chapter 17 precede that event chronologically. The reference to the “beast that was, and is not, and yet is” (17:8) probably means the evil one has a three-stage history. The phrase “that was” could refer to Satan’s ability to keep the world in darkness prior to the coming of Christ. And the “yet is” shows there is a revival of Satan’s power still to come.

The seven heads in 17:3, upon which the harlots sits, are called seven mountains in 17:9 and are interpreted as seven kings in 17:10. The equating of mountains with kings is not uncommon in the Bible. (Isaiah 2:2)

It is impossible to identify the first seven kings in Revelation 17:10 at this point in time, but there can be no mistake about the eighth as according to 17:11 he is the antichrist. According to 17:12-14, this eighth king will rule over a ten-kingdom federation that will “make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them (17:14), as we shall see in chapter 19.

An account of the doom of “ecclesiastical Babylon is given in 17:16. The words naked, eat, and burn refer to the utter destruction of the harlot.

Revelation 17:17 is another example of God's use of evil forces as instruments of executing His divine will.

Finally, the angel said to John, And the woman which thou sawest is that great city... (17:8a). Apparently, the world religion of the harlot will be centered in some great city with such power that it reigneth over the kings of the earth." (17:18b).

Thus chapter 17 tells us that false religion, BABYLON THE GREAT, will flourish during the early part of the Great Tribulation and will exercise great political power, but the beast will see her as a challenge to himself and, with a federation of ten nations, will completely annihilate her.

II. The _____ of Commercial Babylon (18:1-24)

In chapter 18 the emphasis moves from the judgement upon the religious aspects of Babylon to what happens to commercial Babylon. We can see that while the destruction of religious Babylon was attributed to the beast, the destruction of political and commercial Babylon will come directly from God.

In verse two he says the angel cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen... The phrase is fallen, is fallen emphasizes dual judgement on ecclesiastical Babylon and commercial Babylon and enforces the fall is final. Furthermore, Babylon is described as the "habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird (18:2) - a vivid, threefold picture of the demonic influences controlling Babylon.

The commercial aspects of Babylon the great had intoxicated people of the world with riches and pleasure, for the "merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies (luxuries)" (18:3).

In 18:4 John hears another voice from heaven that says "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues". The plagues refer to the vials of wrath in chapter 16, which is further evidence the events in chapter 17-18 precede 15&16.

There are two reasons given for the command to be separated from Babylon and they are given in 18:5-6, and 18:7-8.

Verses 9-19 describe the anguish resulting from the judgement upon Babylon. Three groups are specified as mourning while they see Babylon literally “go up in smoke.” We see the Kings in 18:9-10; the Merchants in 18:11-17a; and the Shipmasters in 18:17b-19.

In 18:9-19 the phrase Alas, alas is used three times (vs. 10,16,19). The English word alas only partly conveys the meaning of the Greek word. It is the same word translated woe in Revelation 9:12 & 11:14. In chapter 18 it is translated alas because the context denotes a sense of grief as well as horror.

Although the earth mourns, heaven rejoices over the desolation of Babylon. Three classes on earth mourn - kings, merchants, and mariners. Likewise, three groups rejoice in Heaven in 18:20 - Saints, Apostles, and Prophets. In other words, Babylon had slain the saints, but now God slays Babylon, which is the answer to the martyrs prayer in Revelation 6:9-11.

The great millstone cast into the sea in 18:21 symbolizes the utter destruction of Babylon.

Verse 22-23 amplify the end of the affluent existence that characterized the lifestyle of this era. The musicians of Babylon are now silent, and the craftsmen who produced the luxurious goods are now gone forever.

The sins of Babylon were numerous, but her destruction was the result of what verse 24 says “And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.”