

THE REVELATION TO JOHN

THE THINGS FUTURE, REVELATION 4 - 22

INTRODUCTION

- John Walvoord, ... in chapter 17 Babylon is seen in its religious character climaxing in a world religion which seems to fit the first half of the last seven years preceding Christ's second coming. Chapter 17 also records the destruction of Babylon by the 10 kings (v. 16) ... Chapter 18, by contrast, seems to refer to Babylon as a political power and as a great city and as the seat of power of the great world empire which will dominate the second half of the last seven years before Christ's return.
- Thomas Constable, *Babylon is not just the name of a city in the Middle East. It is also a name that symbolizes the chief characteristics of that city throughout history, which have been a particular religious system and a particular commercial system. We need to keep this double use of the name—as both a real city and a symbol—in mind as we read these chapters.*
- Warren Wiersbe, *One reason John used symbolism was so that his message would encourage believers in any period of church history. The true church is a pure virgin (Rev. 19:7–8; see also 2 Cor. 11:2), but the false religious system is a “harlot” who has abandoned the truth and prostituted herself for personal gain. In every age, there has been a “harlot” who has persecuted God's people; and this will culminate in the last days in a worldwide apostate religious system.*
- Charles Ryrie gives a glimpse of the religious history of Babylon, *It had its beginnings around 3000 BC under Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-10). The tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) was built to prevent people from scattering throughout the earth, in direct defiance of God's command to do so. Hammurabi made Babylon a religious power about 1600 BC by making Marduk god of the city of Babylon and head of a pantheon of 1,300 deities. Extrabiblical sources indicate that the wife of Nimrod became the head of the Babylonian mysteries, which consisted of religious rites that were part of the worship of idols in Babylon. Her name was Semiramis, and she supposedly gave birth to a son, Tammuz, who claimed to be a savior and the fulfillment of the promise given to Eve in Genesis 3:15.*
- The destruction of Babylon is detailed in Isaiah 13; Isaiah 46-47 and Jeremiah 50-51. Zechariah 5:5-10 indicates that Babylon will be rebuilt in the end times. Mark Hitchcock notes, *The city has never been completely destroyed, as indicated in Isaiah 13 and Jeremiah 50-51 ... For Isaiah and Jeremiah's prophecies to be literally fulfilled, Babylon must be rebuilt to all its former glory and then destroyed once and for all at the end of the time of great horror. To discover Babylon's final destiny, we must turn to the end of the story in the book of Revelation.*
- Henry Morris, *It must be stressed again that Revelation means 'unveiling,' not 'veiling.' In the absence of any statement in the context to the contrary, therefore, we must assume that the term Babylon applies to the real city of Babylon, although it also may extend far beyond that to the whole system centered at Babylon as well.*

REVELATION 17-18

THE DESTRUCTION OF RELIGIOUS BABYLON: REVELATION 17

- A. The destruction of Babylon (1-6a)
1. An angelic invitation (1-2)
 - a. It concerns a judgment (1), *Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters,*
 - 1) Related verses
 - a) Revelation 15:7, *And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever,*
 - b) Revelation 21:9, *Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”*
 - c) Nahum 3:4, *And all for the countless whorings of the prostitute, graceful and of deadly charms, who betrays nations with her whorings, and peoples with her charms.*
 - d) Revelation 19:2, *for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.*
 - e) Jeremiah 51:13, *O you who dwell by many waters, rich in treasures, your end has come; the thread of your life is cut.*

2) Comments

- a) Thomas Constable, *The fact that this chapter is describing the judgment of Babylon, referred to earlier in 14:8 and 16:19, seems clear. It was one of the seven angels who poured out the bowl judgments who served as John's guide as he viewed this part of his vision. This is the only vision in which an interpreting angel interprets the significance of aspects of the vision. In this verse and the next one the angel told John what he was going to show him.*
- b) John Walvoord, *It is evident from these chapters that the events described therein, especially those in chapter 17, precede by some considerable period the events represented in the seven vials ... it is probable that the events of chapter 17 occur at the beginning of the great tribulation ... It must be remembered that from John's point of view all of the events of the book of Revelation were future, and it pleased God to reveal various aspects of future events in other than their chronological order.*
- c) Robert Mounce, *In OT prophetic discourse the imagery of the harlot is commonly used to denote religious apostasy.*
- d) Charles Swindoll on the great harlot, ... *works-based, humanistic religion, called "the mother of harlots" because it is the foundation of all false religions, drawing its inspiration from pride, self-sufficiency, and a denial of God's grace.*
- e) Charles Ryrie, *Four times this false religious system of the Tribulation is characterized as a harlot because she is unfaithful to the Lord (vv. 1, 5, 15-16; cf. 19:2). Furthermore, she is labeled "the great harlot" (v. 1), indicating that she represents the epitome of unfaithfulness. Also, "she sits on many waters," indicating that here system will stretch around the world (though not to the exclusion of the existence of other religions at that time). When believers are taken to heaven in the Rapture before the Tribulation begins, religion does not disappear from the earth. Indeed, it will flourish under this unfaithful Babylon for the first half of the Tribulation, until destroyed by the Beast . . . Babylon will likely build on the remnants of the professing Christian church that existed before the rapture.*
- f) Thomas Constable, *The many waters represent humankind (v. 15), not a specific geographical site. This fact indicates that it is Babylon as a symbol that is in view here, rather than the physical city. Expressed another way, Babylon (the world system) dominates all of humankind by sitting on the beast (Antichrist) beside many waters (peoples; cf. Jer. 51:7). Literal Babylon stood beside many waters. It was built on a network of canals (Jer. 51:13).*
- g) William Barclay, *When we turn our backs upon God, it is not so much a sin against law as a sin against love ... The sin of the prostitute is not only that she sins herself but also that she deliberately persuades others to sin. God will never hold those who seduce others into sin to be guiltless.*

- b. It is widespread harlotry (2), ***with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.***

1) Related verses

- a) Jeremiah 51:7, *Babylon was a golden cup in the LORD's hand, making all the earth drunken; the nations drank of her wine, and so the nations went mad.*
- b) Revelation 18:3, 9, *For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living." 9 And the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning.*
- c) Revelation 14:8, *Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality."*

2) Comments

- a) Thomas Constable, *The kings of the earth are world leaders who personify kingdoms (16:14; et al.). They committed sexual immorality with Babylon by uniting with the system that she symbolizes ... This system made all earth-dwellers, not just kings, drunk. That is, it had a controlling influence on them. When people reject the truth they will believe lies (cf. 2 Thess. 2:10-11).*
- b) John Walvoord, *The picture of the woman as utterly evil signifies spiritual adultery, portraying those who outwardly and religiously seem to be joined to the true God but who are untrue to this relationship. The symbolism of spiritual adultery is not ordinarily used of heathen nations who know not God, but always of people who outwardly carry the name of God while actually worshiping and serving other gods ... False religion is always the worst enemy of true religion, and the moral wickedness involved in the union of the church with the world imposes a stupefying drunkenness as far as spiritual things are concerned.*
- c) Robert Thomas, *Religious compromise necessitated in this kind of association is totally incompatible with the worship of the one true God, and so amounts to spiritual prostitution.*

- d) Warren Wiersbe, *Four times in this chapter, the woman is called a “harlot” (Rev. 17:1, 5, 15–16); and her sin is called “fornication” (Rev. 17:2, 4). Her evil influence has extended to the whole world, reaching even into high places (“the kings of the earth”).*

2. Descriptions of the great prostitute (3-6a)

- a. She was powerful (3), ***And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.***

1) Related verses

- a) Revelation 21:10, *And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.*
b) Revelation 12:3, *Then another portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.*
c) Revelation 13:1, *And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads; and on its horns were ten diadems, and on its heads were blasphemous names.*

2) Comments

- a) *The scarlet beast is the Antichrist who will rule the end-time global empire and will be the object of worship in the world-wide religion. The seven heads are seven world empires who have opposed God and His people. Five were in John’s past (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece), one existed in John’s present day (Rome), and one will arise in the future (the empire of the Antichrist). The ten horns are ten political powers which unite to empower the Antichrist and turn all authority over to him.*
b) Charles Ryrie, *John next saw the woman sitting on the Beast. The Beast is clearly seen to be the man of sin of 13:1-10 by comparing the description in verse 3 with 13:1. The startling feature of this scene is that the whore is sitting on the Beast, indicating that she will have power over the man of sin. This event must occur during the first part of the Tribulation before the man of sin overthrows religion and requires everyone to worship him.*
c) Thomas Constable, *The angel carried John away in the Spirit to a wilderness area (cf. 1:10; 4:1; 21:10). This wilderness may refer to the desert of Saudi Arabia near literal Babylon. But remember that John was seeing a vision. Or it may anticipate the desolate condition of the harlot. 982 Wildernesses were traditional places where God met with people and gave revelations (cf. Exod. 3:1; 1 Kings 19:4; Luke 1:80) ... The description of this beast is exactly the same as the one of Antichrist in 13:1 except that it is scarlet here, perhaps symbolizing luxury and splendor (cf. 14:8–11; Isa. 1:18; Matt. 27:28–29). Or the beast may be scarlet because it is covered with the blood of those whom it has killed.*
d) John Walvoord, *The fact that the woman is riding the beast and is not the beast itself signifies that she represents ecclesiastical power as distinct from the beast which is the political power. Her position, that of riding the beast, indicates on the one hand that she is supported by the political power of the beast, and on the other that she is in a dominant role and at least outwardly controls and directs the beast ...*
e) Warren Wiersbe, *Genesis 2 speaks of a pure bride in a lovely Garden; but by the Bible’s end, civilization has degenerated to an impure harlot in a wilderness! That is what sin does to the world.*
- b. Her appearance was impressive (4), ***The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality.***

1) Related verses

- a) Revelation 18:16, *Alas, alas, the great city, clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls!*
b) Jeremiah 51:7, *Babylon was a golden cup in the LORD’s hand, making all the earth drunken; the nations drank of her wine, and so the nations went mad.*

2) Comments

- a) Charles Ryrie, *The harlot is bedecked with splendor, signifying the glory and wealth with which she will entice people. Even amid the awful judgments of the first part of the Tribulation this false “church” will try to take people’s minds off what is happening and allure them with false comfort.*
b) William Barclay, *She is clothed in purple and scarlet, the royal colours, the colours of luxury and splendour. She is adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls. She has the golden cup with which she makes her lovers drunk.*

- c) Thomas Constable, *The woman's clothing was purple, symbolic of royalty, and scarlet, representing luxury or blood* (v. 3; cf. Matt. 27:28; Mark 15:17, 20; John 19:2, 5). Her ornaments included gold, precious stones, and pearls—jewelry that made her look like a queen. Contrast this woman with the bride of the Lamb, whom John saw adorned with bright, clean linen (19:8). The gold cup in her hand added to her royal appearance, but it contained idolatrous abominations (cf. Deut. 18:9; 29:17; 32:16; Jer. 51:7; et al.), namely, unclean things connected with her spiritual immorality. The prostitute wore expensive, attractive garments and accessories that made her externally appealing, but she was a counterfeit beauty. What was inside her was unclean.
- d) John Walvoord, *While purple, scarlet, gold, precious stones, and pearls can all represent beauty and glory in relation to the true faith, here they reveal a false religion that prostitutes the truth ... The most striking aspect of her presentation, however, is that she has a golden cup in her hand described as "full of abomination and filthiness of her fornication."* The Word of God does not spare words in describing the utter filthiness of this adulterous relationship in the sight of God. Few crimes in Scripture are spoken of in more unsparing terms than the crime of spiritual adultery of which this woman is the epitome. As alliance with the world and showy pomp increase, so spiritual truth and purity decline.
- e) Grant Osborne, *The depravity of the nation provides the contents of that cup, and it has led them not to true pleasure but rather to the wrath of God. "Filth" refers to that which is unclean and further highlights how abhorrent the actions of these nations are to God.*
- f) Gregory Beale, *Any institution or facet of culture that is characterized by pride ... economic overabundance, persecution, and idolatry is part of Babylon.*
- c. She is a counterfeit (5), ***And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations."***
- 1) Related verses
- a) Revelation 14:8, *Then another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."*
- b) Revelation 17:7, *But the angel said to me, "Why are you so amazed? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her."*
- 2) Comments
- a) Charles Ryrie, *Her name is called "a mystery," (Note that the word "mystery" is not an adjective - "mystery Babylon" - but a noun in apposition to Babylon - "mystery, Babylon") . . . Since the true church is also called a mystery (Eph. 5:32), this apostate church is a counterfeit . . . The harlot is also the "mother of harlots" ... In other words, many groups will join together under the one harlot in a kind of federated church. She will incorporate various denominations and religious groups without necessarily amalgamating them.*
- b) Thomas Constable, *The harlot's name was a mystery, namely, something not previously revealed but now made clear. A name in Scripture represents something about the person who bears it—often the person's reputation ... The basic content of the mystery about Babylon is what John revealed here, especially the new revelation about its evil character and judgment (vv. 17–18).*
- c) J. Vernon McGee, *... each group will come into this great world ecumenical system but retain some of its peculiarities ... there is going to be more than the mother harlot—there will be a whole lot of harlots, a regular brothel.*
- d) Charles Swindoll, *Her name, "Babylon the Great," is a mystery—something that requires interpretation (17:5). As the "mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth," she will be responsible for numerous religions that follow her example. Together these will lead the world into untold abominations.*
- d. She persecutes the saints (6a), ***And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.***
- 1) Related verses
- a) Revelation 13:15, *and it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast could even speak and cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.*
- b) Revelation 16:6, *because they shed the blood of saints and prophets, you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!"*

2) Comments

- a) Charles Ryrie, *Babylon will be a persecutor of the believers in Jesus during this time, and she will be successful in doing that.*
- b) Thomas Constable, *The Mother of Harlots had drunk (and was drunk with) the blood of believers: the saints generally, and witnesses to Jesus Christ specifically (cf. 11:10; 13:7, 15). This system had destroyed true believers and rejoiced in their deaths. This revelation amazed John. He wondered greatly at it. A system purporting to honor God was killing His faithful followers!*
- c) John Walvoord, *The woman symbolizing the apostate religious system, was drunk with the blood of the saints. This makes it clear that the apostate religious system of the first half of the last seven years leading up to Christ's second coming will be completely devoid of any true Christians. As a matter of fact the apostate church will attempt to kill all those who follow the true faith.*
- d) Charles Swindoll, *In light of Revelation's penchant for symbolic language, it seems best to identify "Babylon" not specifically as a particular city or country, but as representing a final godless, humanistic, and worldwide religious system.*
- e) Charles Swindoll, *In fact, the woman, Babylon, is portrayed as drunk "with the blood of the saints," those who will be martyred for Jesus Christ (17:6). This means that the false religious system she represents will lead to the zealous persecution and slaughter of countless true servants of God.*

TO BE CONTINUED, LORD WILLING!

B. (6b-14)

C. (15-18)