

PREFACE

In our last session, looking at Revelation 17, we saw Babylon as standing for the pervasive system of immorality and apostasy that has infected mankind since the beginning of its time on earth. We understood her to be the insidious monster infecting our churches, even today, with false religion, false promises, false hope—all bringing only death to those who listen to her. Thus, in that context Babylon is a driving force behind the depraved philosophies of a fallen world. In that role she is very real, and very powerful; she is, as John MacArthur puts it, “the symbol of all worldly resistance to God”—but, especially in Chapter Seventeen, she is the driving force behind false religion, apostasy, and *all* manner of corruption of religion.

In a sense, based on her motives and behavior, one might say it is as if she is a female version of Satan.

Now in Chapter Eighteen we see a different *aspect* of Babylon. Here she is associated not with religion, but with immoral commerce, trade, politics, and city life.

David Guzik poses the rhetorical question, “Is this the same Babylon as is described in chapter 17?” and I agree with his answer to this, that the two are “intertwined, yet somehow distinct.” After all, the Babylon in Chapter Seventeen is utterly destroyed—by Antichrist’s coalition—in v16; the Babylon in Chapter Eighteen will be utterly destroyed—by the seventh bowl of God’s wrath—in vv17ff. Also, we place Chapter Seventeen during the *first* half of the Tribulation, culminating in the destruction of Babylon—the false church—at the midpoint, while in Chapter Eighteen Babylon is destroyed just moments before Christ returns at the *end* of the Tribulation.

Though separated by time and sphere of influence during the Tribulation, it is clear that both these aspects of Babylon are ancient and enduring aspects of true evil, at work on earth since the Fall. They both share a common purpose: separating man from his Maker. The most insidious of these two works in the realm of religion; the other, in the realm of commerce and society.

Even in 17:18 the woman is referred to as a “city,” and “the great city” is mentioned repeatedly in Chapter Eighteen—not just by that name, but implied in the passages. For example in v2 she is called “a dwelling place for demons,” and in vv11-17 merchants “weep and mourn” because the city will no longer be purchasing their goods.

The text seems to describe a city next to water, either the sea or a major river—e.g., v11 (cargoes) and v17 (“every shipmaster, passenger and sailor... and [those who] make their living by the sea”). Contrary to many scholars, I do not see the need to pinpoint this city on a map. Walvoord, MacArthur and Seiss see this as a rebuilt Babylon on the Euphrates; Alford says it is Rome.

My position is that it doesn’t really matter *where* it is, or even the future name by which it will be called by those alive at the time. It may be “Babylon”; it may be something else. *God* calls it Babylon, and that is enough for us. Wherever it is, it will be the commercial center for the beast’s kingdom. Some say it will be the city from which he rules. Perhaps. Again, I don’t think it matters that much.

Read Revelation 18:1-3.

v1

After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory.

Some like to make this angel out to be Christ Himself, but the text says that he is “another” of the same kind as the previous angel, and Christ would not be referred to in this way in the Revelation. The angel has been given “great authority,” and if we remember the time frame of this event we can well understand that “the earth would be illumined by his glory.” Recall that just before this event (or perhaps synchronized with it) the fifth bowl of wrath darkened the entirety of the beast’s kingdom. This angel will indeed make a dramatic entrance.

v2

And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.

Once again we see how prophecy in God’s word repeatedly employs the “now—not yet” method, announcing something apparently a *fait accompli*, only to be actually fulfilled later. Verse 8, later, says that she *will be* destroyed, and Babylon does not literally fall until 16:19. The angel’s descent and announcement marks the beginning of the end.

The second part of the verse paints an interesting, if not horrific picture of the city. It has become, “a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.” Let us first consider the words:

- it is a habitation, a dwelling place for evil angels (*daimonon*);

- for foul spirits (*akathartou pneumatos*) it is a prison, a place where they are confined and guarded (*phylake*);
- as well as “unclean and hateful birds” (*akathartou kai memisemenou orneou*). I can find no explanation for the ESV, new NIV, and CSB adding at the end of the verse, “a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast,” other than the obvious, that they are working from a different manuscript. The rest do not have this. I also could discover no satisfactory explanation for the inclusion of “birds.”

Those are the details, but what do they mean? I can imagine either of two interpretations.

This could be a more florid way of expressing the fact that this city is pervaded and controlled by demonic spirits. That is, it is not speaking of literal demons and angels walking the streets, but expressing a supernaturally possessed city overwhelmed by evil. This is possible, but I favor a second, more literal interpretation. Look back with me to several passages that might illumine this statement. [Turn please to Chapter Nine](#). In vv13-19 we have a description of what happens when the sixth Trumpet is blown. Note especially vv14-16:

...one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind. The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.

Note two things here:

- from somewhere around the river Euphrates four angels, who have been waiting for this moment, are *released*;
- they call out an army of 200 million horsemen. As with the angels, this demonic army seemingly appears out of nowhere, as if it, too, is already in place and chomping at the bit. [Now look back at vv1-11](#).

Here the fifth trumpet is blown, which brings forth a plague of “locusts”; the stinging locusts are not numbered, but they are clearly in the millions, and led by “the angel of the abyss,” Abaddon. Finally, [turn to Chapter Twelve](#). [Look at v9](#).

Read Revelation 12:9.

Question: Where have all these demonic beings been as the Tribulation has proceeded? Did they just disappear, or did they remain? If the latter, where have they been garrisoned? I suggest they may have been imprisoned, caged, in or in the vicinity of, Babylon.

These may very well be what are spoken of when v2 in Chapter Eighteen records that Babylon has become “a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird”—a veritable hell-hole on earth.

v3

Last week I prefaced our look at Chapter Seventeen with the following:

One important reason for us to take the time for it is that in these chapters is revealed not just something future for this earth, but something happening *right now*. Let me be clear: I am not at all suggesting that this prophesy is being fulfilled in our midst, in our time. No, I am not suggesting that, but *declaring* that the same abominable practices, evil philosophies—the very same demonic ideas and practices of which we read here are a part of *our* system today.

Verse 3 makes clear that the same holds true for the description of Babylon the city.

“For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.”

Verse 3 is a snapshot of our present-day culture, media, and politics—all saturated with a level of depravity represented here by Babylon the great city.

Sidebar: Need an illustration? After watching a *literally* satanic performance by two “transitioned” biological men during the recent Grammys, Country music singer John Rich tweeted, “The Grammys looked like hell last night. If God doesn’t bring judgment on America he’ll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah.”

vv4-5

I heard another voice from heaven, saying, “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.”

Some claim this now is the voice of God, but, once again, the word “another” means another of the same kind (*allen [from allos] meaning “one like in kind”*). So this is most probably the voice of another strong angel.

One might rightly ask why there would be believers (“my people”) in such a place. There can be any number of reasons: those who have been living there but recently converted; evangelists at work in the city; or perhaps even those who *will* be believers, but are not yet. The point is this: God is saying, just as he did to Lot’s family living in Sodom, *Get out, for the time has come for Me to utterly destroy this place.*

There is a second reason for the people to flee—the same reason we should take to heart today—which is voiced in v4: “... so that you will not participate in her sins.” In this is an echo of Paul’s counsel to Timothy and his congregation; remember that Babylon is, in the beast’s kingdom, the center for world-wide trade.

Read 1 Timothy 6:9-11.

Although at this time the entire world is being bombarded by the bowls of wrath (so there are few places of safety for anyone), the Lord God has reserved much of the seventh bowl specially for Babylon. [Look at 16:17.](#)

Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, “It is done.” And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty. **The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.** (Revelation 16:17–19; emphasis added)

Finally, there is a bit of a jab in “her sins have piled up as high as heaven.” The word translated “piled up” (“have reached” in KJVs), *ekollethesan*, (from *kollao*) means to glue or cement together, as bricks are laid to form a building. Add to that “as high as heaven” and we have a clear reference to the building of the tower of Babel, where this all began: “They said, ‘Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name...’” (Genesis 11:4)

vv6-8

The same voice then goes into detail about why this destruction is merited.

“Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her. To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, ‘I SIT as A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW, and will never see mourning.’ For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.”

The angel hearkens back to the logic of the Mosaic Law that one is to be repaid double, which has the sense of fullness or completeness. For example,

“For every breach of trust, whether it is for ox, for donkey, for sheep, for clothing, or for any lost thing about which one says, ‘This is it,’ the case of both parties shall come before the judges; he whom the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor.” (Exodus 22:9)

And again, just as with Lot's situation, the angel states that the destruction of Babylon will not be accomplished over time, but will be immediate—"in one day."

vv9-19

Verses 9-19 is an extended, anguished lament—with narration by the angel—by those who made their living by dealing with the "great city," over the loss of their livelihood. It is a great read, which I commend to you, but we need not dissect it verse by verse in class.

Walvoord: The time is the second coming of Christ at the end of the great tribulation. The very kings who participated in the wickedness and wealth of Babylon now mourn her passing, symbolized in the burning of the capital city. The lament of the kings over Babylon is most emphatic in the Greek by the repetition of the article: literally "the city the great, Babylon the city the mighty." It was great in its extent of power and accomplishment and mighty in the strength of its rule. In spite of its greatness and strength...it nevertheless falls in one hour.

Let's read just the first and last verses to catch the flavor of it:

vv9-10: "And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'"

v19: "And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!'"

The angel-narrator then turns away from the earthly carnage of the destruction of Babylon and turns toward heaven—I can well imagine with a big grin on his face.

v20: "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her."

The text doesn't say it explicitly, but one gets the impression—not least from the timing of this, almost on top of the return of Christ—that the destruction of Babylon represents the final, conclusive, grand finale—the dramatic *denouement* of all God's acts of retribution and vengeance during the last seven years. It is the scene in all the older James Bond movies where the villain's cavernous headquarters are dramatically blown to smithereens.

But then, even as we are reveling with the angel in this wrath poured out against evil, the last paragraph of this chapter—vv21-24—reminds us that all of this is *prophecy*; even in the timeline of the seven-year Tribulation, this has not yet occurred. The verb tenses in this last passage slap us back to reality, and the tale is picked up by a new character: a third strong angel.

v21

Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer.

So right away we are reminded that these angels have just been painting us a vivid picture of what will be—so vivid that we got carried away thinking that, in the Tribulation timeline, Babylon has already been wiped off the map. But no. The angel demonstrates what is yet to happen in the timeline: the great city’s demise will be as if it has been thrown into the sea, never to be seen again.

vv22-23

Then in vv22-23a the angel describes all that will never again be seen or heard in that once-great city.

“And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer; and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer...

When Jerusalem had been plundered and destroyed, such as when Judah was removed to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, who then returned to break down the walls and burn the city—even then a remnant remained, and under Ezra and Nehemiah the people returned, and the temple and city were rebuilt. When Jerusalem was razed to the ground by Rome in AD 70, a remnant remained and the city was eventually rebuilt. But the destruction of Babylon will not be conducted by mere men; this city will be destroyed by the almighty wrath of a holy God—and it will be no more.

Chapter Eighteen closes, in vv23b-24, by listing just three reasons—among far many more, of course—why the Lord God has done this.

One

These three justifications for Babylon the city being “thrown down with violence” and “not be found any longer” come after a litany of her many sins, followed by a list of all that will no longer exist within her, once the city is destroyed. Considering the context, the inference in this first is that these merchants are guilty of offenses against God.

for your merchants were the great men of the earth,

Although kings are mentioned, most of Chapter Eighteen is about the merchants; not your average shopkeepers, we would call these today titans of industry, merchants of products in the way that Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates are merchants of products: “great men” who have an inordinate influence on culture, commerce, and even politics. These merchants have bought into the sensuality, immorality of Babylon, dallying with her for their own profit.

Sidebar: Need an example? Note today—*every* day—huge corporations and vast media empires are bowing to the insidious woke culture, labeling products, creating programs—even *Disney*, for crying out loud—that exalt prurient distortions of human sexuality. Why? Only one reason: profit.

Two

Still speaking to the merchants, the angel states a second justification: They not only did these things, they did them well. It was effective—implied, disastrously so. The nations were successfully deceived by these merchants.

because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery.

The word translated “sorcery” is *pharmakeia* (far-mah-kee'-ah), from which we have our words pharmacy and pharmaceuticals. Combined with *eplanethesan* (“deceived”) it means these merchants are guilty of leading people astray by their administering of drugs or spells—by intellectually, emotionally, or even physically “drugging” the populace for their (the merchant’s) greater profit. It also implies, as elsewhere in the NT, by means of magic and the occult.

Three

Taking the focus off the merchants and turning to the city itself, the angel and chapter end with v24. Babylon—in *both* of her aspects, both religious and commercial—has been responsible for the slaughter of countless millions of God’s people. This verse expresses how all that is on her. Essentially personifying the city as a murderer saturated with the blood of her victims, the angel accuses Babylon with,

And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.

Let me close by reading the first six verses of Chapter Nineteen, which give us a vision of how heaven will celebrate this horrific, yet righteous event.

Read Revelation 19:1-6.