

23.03.2019 JUDGMENT ON BABYLON

And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues for her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities." Revelation 18:4, 5

This week we study the judgment and fall of Babylon, that great city that represents every entity that sets itself up as an enemy of God and God's people. We are now living in the time of the end as revealed by the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation. Daniel and John speak of a time to come (at the climax of the time of the end) when Babylon rebelliously refuses to repent and wages war against God's people. But God will be victorious and Babylon will be destroyed.

In Revelation, symbols refer to systems, not individuals. Religious systems and political and business systems.

Below is a description of the symbolic meaning of Babylon:

Babylon

As we have seen earlier in our studies, the Old Testament Babylon was the enemy of Jerusalem, the capital of the nation Israel. In the prophecies of the New Testament, Israel is now spiritual Israel, the worldwide church, not confined to a particular geographical place. Spiritual Israel (the church, the Body of Christ) has the true, eternal gospel of God and lives only to give God glory.

Likewise, Babylon (literal Babylon does not exist today) in Revelation refers to spiritual Babylon. Spiritual Babylon is also worldwide: the spirit of Babylon is found wherever persons or institutions give glory to themselves instead of giving glory to God. The spirit of Babylon will be manifested in religion (Revelation 13), in politics (Revelation 17) and in business (Revelation 18).

Whenever Babylon offers a gospel, it is a false gospel of salvation by works. Apostate Christianity and any religion that does not acknowledge the saving work of Christ by grace alone, through faith alone, are preaching a false salvation. In politics and business, the Christian ethic of self-giving love and service is rarely seen; instead men pursue the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. This is not surprising, for Babylon describes herself as the Great City, while Jerusalem is the Holy City.

Religious Babylon deceives people by presenting a counterfeit gospel. The Bible calls it spiritual fornication or adultery. While pretending to worship God, it is worshipping self. It does not serve God; it serves itself. It lives for self-glory, not God's glory. Behind Babylon is the Dragon (Satan) and his agents on earth, the beasts of Revelation 13.

Political Babylon is described as those nations who give their power and authority to the beast (Revelation 17:13).

The merchants of Babylon have the spirit of Babylon and their practice is described in Revelation 18. They sell the lies of Babylon and thus become wealthy.

Revelation 14:8 announces the fall of Babylon. Revelation 16:19 pronounces its collapse. Revelation 17 and 18 (our study for this week) describe how Babylon will collapse.

The Vision of the Great Harlot, Babylon: Revelation 17:1-6

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...

We must bear in mind that Revelation 17 is about the future; a description of end-time Babylon and her fall.

Before the description of the destruction of Babylon, John has a vision. In vision, one of the angels who had the seven bowls of plagues comes to him. He hears the angel say, *“Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters”* 17:2.

What John sees however, is *‘a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns’* (17:3). Symbolically, the waters and beast are similar entities who have the spirit of Satan.

The angel tells John, *“The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.”* (17:15).

The harlot who sits on many waters commits fornication (immorality) with *‘the kings of the earth’* (political powers) and *“the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication”* (the people, the masses). The world leaders deliberately commit adultery with the harlot, but the masses are made drunk by following her false teachings. (17:3).

Identification of the Harlot

And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. 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. And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. 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 marvelled with great amazement. (17:3-6)

Revelation is a symbolic book. In the Bible, a woman always symbolises the church. A pure woman represents the church in purity (a pure church); an impure woman (a harlot or a prostitute) represents the church in apostasy (an apostate church).

So this harlot symbolises an apostate church or union of churches which preaches a false gospel and/or takes unto itself the powers and prerogatives that only belong to God.

In the Old Testament the language of fornication is often used with reference to the relationships between Israel and the surrounding nations. Isaiah mourns: "How the faithful city has become a harlot" (Isa. 1:21). Jeremiah speaks of Israel as "a harlot with many lovers" (Jer. 3:1; cf. Hos. 3-4; Mic. 1:7). Ezekiel mentions Israel playing the harlot with "many nations" including the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans (Ezek. 16:26-29; 23:3-30). *Stefanovic: Revelation*.

Unlike the pure woman dressed in white, this woman is dressed in purple and scarlet. The colour of purple symbolises royalty and political power. Babylon calls herself a queen in Revelation 18:7. Red is symbolic of both prostitution, sin and the blood that this church has shed throughout centuries of martyrdom.

The harlot increases her seductive powers with her adornments and jewellery. This behaviour is described in the Old Testament when Jeremiah laments over unfaithful Judah:

“And when you are plundered, what will you do? Though you clothe yourself with crimson, though you adorn yourself with ornaments of gold, though you enlarge your eyes with paint, in vain you will make yourself fair; your lovers will despise you; they will seek your life.” Jeremiah 4:30

In the Old Testament, the High Priest had a mitre engraved *‘Holiness to the Lord’* (Exodus 28:26-38). In contrast, the harlot has an inscription on her forehead, *‘Babylon the Great’* (17:5). The true church seeks holiness; the false seeks greatness.

The mother of harlots...all apostate forms of religions arise from Babylon.

'...Having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication' (17:4).

Instead of the pure wine of the gospel, this harlot has a golden cup full of 'the wine of her fornications and abominations' Revelation 14:8; 17:4.

I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus...

This woman who has made all nations drink of the wine of her abominations, is herself drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs she persecuted.

And when I saw her, I marvelled with great amazement (17:6)

John marvels at the appearance of this woman because the last time he saw the woman (Revelation 12) she was a pure woman. Now she has become a prostitute. This suggests that the once faithful church has become unfaithful to God; she is now a harlot. The devil is no longer enraged with her; he is only enraged with the 'remnant of her offspring' (Revelation 12:17) who remain faithful to Jesus, proclaim His testimony and do His will.

The Beast of Revelation 17:3

And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

The woman is sitting on a scarlet beast that is very similar to the description of the beast of Revelation 13:1; the beast that acts with the full authority and power of the Dragon (Satan).

The angel tells John who the beast is... *'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.'* (17:7)

The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition (destruction). 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. (17:8)

This is a reference to the sea beast of Revelation 13. It is a power that 'was' (past tense), and 'is not' (currently) and 'will' (in the future) 'ascend...and go to destruction'. It was a power that was active in the medieval religious system, and 'is not powerful currently, due to the deadly wound inflicted on it (Rev 13:3), but in the future when its deadly wound is healed, 'all the world will marvel and follow the beast and worship the Dragon who gave authority to the beast (13:3, 4).

When the deadly wound is fully healed sometime in the future, the angel tells John in Revelation 17:8 that all who have rejected God and do not worship Christ the Lamb of God will worship the beast:

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.(17:8)

Having seven heads... 'Here is the mind of wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come' (17:9, 10)

The angel tells John that only those with spiritual wisdom can understand the symbolic meaning of the heads and the ten horns. The activities of the beast are carried out by its heads.

The seven heads are seven kings (kings symbolise kingdoms e.g. Daniel 7:17). They are political powers that provide support for Babylon. They are powers that throughout the ages have troubled and persecuted God's people.

'Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come'...Referring to the kingdoms, the angel says to John of the sixth kingdom, 'one is...' i.e. the sixth kingdom existed in John's time. This was Rome. In the Bible, the five kingdoms that opposed God's people prior to Rome (the fallen kingdoms) were Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece.

Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come... (17:10)

And when he comes, he must continue a short time. The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition. (17:11)

The seventh kingdom was future to John's time. It refers to the medieval papacy (papal Rome). The language again is descriptive of the sea beast of Revelation 13.

And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name... (13:1)

And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. (13:5)

The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marvelled and followed the beast. (13:2, 3)

The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition. (17:11)

The 'beast that was and is not' is the seventh kingdom. After his deadly wound, he 'is not' i.e. his power to persecute is taken away. But once his deadly wound is healed, he will arise, and the world will marvel and follow him. Though it seems there is an eighth kingdom, it is really a continuation of the seventh kingdom.

Who are the Ten Kings of Revelation 17:12?

"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." (17:12)

John makes it clear that they were a future reality from his perspective; they "have not yet received a kingdom." They will receive it at the eschatological (end-time) appearance of the beast. Whoever or whatever these ten kings are, they evidently constitute the last phase of the beast's power. They represent an end-time unity of the governing political powers of the world which will submit to the authority of the Satanic trinity. The ten kings will become the backbone in the creation of the religious-political confederacy in the final crisis. The beast will use them to enforce his plans and purposes. *Stefanovic: Revelation.*

We are given no information about who exactly these kings will be. We do know however, that they represent the sum total of political powers that will join the harlot and the Dragon in the battle of Armageddon. They give their authority to the beast. But they will be defeated.

These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. 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 17:13, 14

Here, in a nutshell, is the battle of Armageddon described. It will be described in detail in Revelation 19:11-21. It is not a military battle; it is a spiritual battle. Those who are with the Lamb are called, chosen and faithful. The outcome of the battle is that the Lamb will overcome once more as He did at Calvary.

The Destruction of Babylon, the Harlot: Revelation 17:15-18

Then he said to me, "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. 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. For God has put it into their hearts to fulfil His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to

the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth."

When the battle is lost, the kings of the earth will turn against the apostate church, the harlot, symbolised as that great city, Babylon. They will destroy her, for she has deceived them and led them to defeat against the armies of God Almighty.

The ten kings make Babylon *'desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire'*.

This is reminiscent of Ezekiel's prophecy of the fate of unfaithful Jerusalem, who played the harlot, despite being the beloved and chosen of God. They would be given to the hands of her lovers who would bring destruction to Jerusalem:

I shall gather all your lovers.... So I shall gather them against you from every direction and expose your nakedness to them that they may see all your nakedness.... Thus I shall judge you, like women who commit adultery or shed blood are judged; and I shall bring on you the blood of wrath and jealousy. I shall also give you into the hands of your lovers, and they will tear down your shrines, demolish your high places, strip you of your clothing, take away your jewels, and will leave you naked and bare...And they will burn your houses with fire and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women. Then I shall stop you from playing the harlot. Ezekiel 16:37-41

The Judgment on Babylon in Revelation 18:

While the preceding chapter describes Babylon's judgment in terms of a prostitute's execution under the Mosaic Law, Revelation 18 describes Babylon's end as a wealthy city sinking into the sea.

After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. Revelation 18:1

The glory of this angel outshines the glory of Babylon. His message is similar to the second angel of Revelation 14:8.

And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!" (18:2)

Babylon's religious, political and economic entities are all judged and condemned.

"For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury." (18:3)

Before Babylon is finally judged, God sends a final message of warning to the many God-fearing people still in Babylon. He calls them *'my people'*. Either through ignorance or because they have been deceived they are still in Babylon. But God, who knows the heart, calls these sincere people to come out of Babylon so they do not receive her judgment.

And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues." (18:4)

This call is similar to the call God sent to the nation of Judah through the prophet Jeremiah. He does not want anyone to perish in Babylon.

Flee from the midst of Babylon, and every one save his life! Do not be cut off in her iniquity, for this is the time of the LORD's vengeance; He shall recompense her. Jeremiah 51:6

Those who refuse to leave Babylon will share in her judgment. Her sins have reached to heaven as did ancient Babylon's (Jeremiah 51:9) and she will reap the consequences of what she has done to God's people; her punishment will fit her crime.

“For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her. In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow...” (18:5-7)

Babylon’s arrogance is portrayed as glorification of self and seeking the place and prerogatives of God. This was true of ancient Babylon as well.

“...for she says in her heart, ‘I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.’” (18:7)

“Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans... “Therefore hear this now, you who are given to pleasures, who dwell securely, who say in your heart, ‘I am, and there is no one else besides me; I shall not sit as a widow, nor shall I know the loss of children’. Isaiah 47:1, 8, 9.

Babylon’s fall will demonstrate the power and justice of God.

Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her. (18:8)

Earth laments for Babylon: Revelation 18:9-19

Three groups of people will mourn for Babylon and share in her condemnation:

1. The kings of the earth... *‘who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her’ (18:9)*
2. The merchants of the earth... *‘who became rich by her’ (18:15)*
3. The sailors of the sea... *‘as many as trade on the sea’ (18:17)*

They all cry out... *‘Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’ (18:10, 16, 17, 19)*

Heaven Rejoices with God’s People over the fall of Babylon

“Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!” (18:20)

Then the heavens and the earth and all that is in them shall sing joyously over Babylon...as Babylon has caused the slain of Israel to fall, so at Babylon the slain of all the earth shall fall. Jeremiah 51:48, 49

Revelation reminds us over and over again that God will judge the evil in the world. He is with us even unto the end of the world. We may have to endure injustice, but the promise is that if we patiently endure, we will see the justice of God manifested against evil and unrighteousness. We will rejoice with the Lamb on Mount Zion, in the city of our God, New Jerusalem.

We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life...Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen. 1 John 5:19-21

By identifying Babylon as the counterfeit New Jerusalem, the city of Christ, John endeavors to draw the contrast between

the two last-day major religious systems. As God's gift to humanity, New Jerusalem stands for the system of salvation founded by God. It signifies the presence of God among human beings, giving life with joy and happiness, and giving the future with hope.

Babylon, on the other hand, signifies the religious system established by Satan, characterized by a separation from God, suffering, and death, without any hope for the future. While New Jerusalem represents God's method of redemption, as

Alan Johnson states, Babylon "represents all human attempts to provide the way of salvation, all those plans and programs that, because they are built alone on human reason and devices, attempt to frustrate the divine plan for the world." While New Jerusalem stands as the expression of God's grace, Babylon represents a futile human endeavor to obtain salvation apart from God.

John makes it very clear that the religion of Babylon—regardless of the city's appearance and attractiveness—deprives human beings of safety and security both in the present life and in the future. The only hope for lost humanity is to look "for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb.11:10). This city of grace represents the reconciliation of mankind with God, the realization of the everlasting covenant. *Ibid.*

The prophecies which the great I AM has given in His word, uniting link after link in the chain of events, from eternity in the past to eternity in the future, tell us where we are today in the procession of the ages and what may be expected in the time to come. All that prophecy has foretold as coming to pass, until the present time, has been traced on the pages of history, and we may be assured that all which is yet to come will be fulfilled in its order.

Today the signs of the times declare that we are standing on the threshold of great and solemn events. Everything in our world is in agitation. Before our eyes is fulfilling the Saviour's prophecy of the events to precede His coming: "Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars. . . . Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places." Matthew 24:6, 7.

The present is a time of overwhelming interest to all living. Rulers and statesmen, men who occupy positions of trust and authority, thinking men and women of all classes, have their attention fixed upon the events taking place about us. They are watching the relations that exist among the nations. They observe the intensity that is taking possession of every earthly element, and they recognize that something great and decisive is about to take place—that the world is on the verge of a stupendous crisis.

The Bible and the Bible only, gives a correct view of these things. Here are revealed the great final scenes in the history of our world, events that already are casting their shadows before, the sound of their approach causing the earth to tremble and men's hearts to fail them for fear.

"Behold, the Lord makes the earth empty, and makes it waste, and turns it upside down, and scatters abroad the inhabitants thereof; . . . because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate." Isaiah 24:1-6. Prophets and Kings: 536-537.
