

Text: Rev 17.1-18

Outline of Revelation:

1. The things you have seen (the vision of Christ) Rev 1
2. The things which are (the letters to the churches) Rev 2-3
3. The things which must come after these things (Rev 4-22)
 - a. The overture: the scene in heaven (Rev 4-5)
 - b. The seal judgements begin (Rev 6)
 - c. (Parenthesis): the believers of the Tribulation (Rev 7)
 - d. The seventh seal which reveals the seven trumpets (four in chapter 8)
 - e. The fifth and sixth trumpets (Rev 9)
 - f. (Parenthesis): Voices in heaven (Rev 10)
 - g. (Parenthesis): The Two Witnesses | the seventh trumpet (Rev 11)
 - h. (Parenthesis): The Long War Against God¹ (Rev 12)
 - i. (Parenthesis): The Beasts (Rev 13)
 - j. (Parenthesis): Triumph of the Saints foreseen (Rev 14)
 - k. (Prelude): Another Sign in Heaven (Rev 15)
- l. The bowl judgements (Rev 16)

m. (Parenthesis): Fall of Religious Babylon (Rev 17)

“Further revelation concerning the destruction of Babylon follows in chapters 17 and 18. Both chapters are parenthetical in that they do not advance the revelation chronologically. They give further supplementary information about matters referred to in the chronological sections (as do 7:1–17; 10:1–11:14; and 12:1–15:8). Babylon in chapters 17 and 18 represents the head of Gentile world power. For this reason many interpreters take the city and empire in view as referring to Rome (cf. 1 Pet. 5:13). Daniel saw Babylon as the gold head of an image that represented Gentile world powers in Daniel 2.

“The focus of attention in chapter 17 is on the religious system that God identified with Babylon in Scripture, and that of chapter 18 is on the commercial system He identified with it. 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 certain religious system and a certain commercial system. We need to keep this double use of the name as a real city and as a symbol in mind as we study these chapters. In a similar way ‘Rome’ may mean the Roman Catholic Church as well as the city of Rome in

¹ I borrow the title of Henry Morris' book of this same name for our chapter heading here.

Italy, and the name 'Hollywood' represents both a town and an industry associated with that town."²

- Each of Constable's points is quite important for understanding what is going on in ch. 17-18.
- We should keep in mind the idea of Babel, where mankind explicitly refused to spread over all the earth according to God's directions after the flood.
- The world we live in is still a "Babel-world," dominated by antagonism towards God.

"... expositors have had difficulty in determining precisely the meaning of the revelation in these chapters.

"In general, however, 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)."³

"The Lord gave the revelation of the divine destruction of the religious system identified with Babylon to enable the readers to understand God's plans for this system more exactly."⁴

I. The judgement of Babylon anticipated (1-2)

A. Invitation to witness the judgement of Babylon (1)

1. The judgement of Babylon is mentioned in 14.8, 16.19
2. Babylon is here described as a "great harlot"
 - a. Immorality is often used to depict spiritual apostasy in the OT
 - b. This aspect of Babylon (harlotry) is something that interests the world leaders but is distinct from those world leaders (see v. 2)

² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Rev 16.21.

³ John F. Walvoord, "Revelation," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 969.

⁴ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Rev 16.21.

3. Babylon sits “on” (perhaps “beside”) many waters
 - a. The many waters are people of all nations (17.15)
 - b. This indicates this “Babylon” is symbolic rather than literal

B. Influence of Babylon the harlot (2)

1. The political leaders are joined to this false system by ‘immorality’ – *i.e.* religious apostasy
2. The people of the earth are drunk (intoxicated, obsessed) with her doctrine (her immorality)

II. The vision of Babylon (3-6)

A. Her position: astride the beast (3)

1. The beast is the same as the Antichrist (13.1), except for the colour
2. The woman riding the beast shows dominance and support
 - a. Woman appears as dominant over the beast
 - b. Beast appears in support of the woman

B. Her appearance: luxurious filth (4)

1. Her clothing makes her appear wealthy and attractive
2. The contents of her cup show that her wine (which she offers to all) is unfaithfulness to God and abominable

C. Her name: Babylon the Great (5)

1. Her name is a mystery (something previously unknown, but now revealed)
2. Her name connects her with Babel of old
3. Her name depicts her as the mother of harlotries (source of all false religion)
4. Every abominable false religion (including corrupt Christianity) has its source in her

See Addendum — Religious Babylon at the end of these notes.

D. Her deeds: death to the saints (6)

1. Her agenda is ever to persecute those who are faithful
2. Her deeds are astonishing, given that she claims to be religious

III. The explanation of Babylon (7-18)

A. More understanding of the beast (7-14)

1. The explanation comes from the angel who is assigned to explain this vision to John (see 17.1, 3) — he promises to explain the woman and the beast (7)
2. The rise of the beast (8)
 - a. The beast is the one who was, is not, and is about to come out of the abyss (see 11.7, see also 9.1-2, 11)
 - 1) The beast is closely connected with Satan (Abaddon of the abyss)
 - 2) The “was, is not, and is” refers to the survival of the beast after an assassination or assassination attempt (see 13.3)
 - b. The people of the world will be amazed at this, see a solution to all their problems, and give their loyalty
3. The identification of the beast by discernible characteristics (9-11)
 - a. The comment about wisdom indicates it will take special insight and skill to get this when it comes
 - 1) Many explanations, no consensus
 - 2) The prophecy is for a day to come, not for the present day
 - b. Declarations of the text
 - 1) Seven heads are seven mountains (9) which support the woman
 - a) Victorinus (d. ca. 303) identified the seven mountains with Rome [martyred under Diocletian]
 - b) However, the seven mountains are symbolic, called “seven kings” in v. 10

2) The seven heads are also seven kings (10)

- a) Five have fallen
- b) One is
- c) The last is to come, and must remain awhile

We have no Scripture that explains this

Constable's suggestion: Empires of the World

- i) Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece
- ii) Rome
- iii) Resuscitated Rome

Walvoord's suggestion:

- i) Five emperors preceding John's day
- ii) One who is (probably Domitian)
- iii) One who is to come: unknown

Neither of these explanations are satisfying.

3) The beast is of their number in a sense, but he is an eighth (11)

- a) Clearly, he is the antichrist
- b) He is "one of the seven" — of the same category, yet not the same as any of them

4. The ten horns are ten kings (12-14)

- a. They will receive their kingdoms in the future
- b. They will reign with the beast (allies/assistants)
- c. Their reign will be short (Tribulation a short period of time)
- d. Their purpose is to promote the agenda and person of the beast (13)
- e. They will wage war against the Lamb (Christ) and be overcome (14)

- 1) The Lamb will overcome
- 2) Those with the Lamb are the faithful elect

B. Revelation of the end of the woman (15-18)

1. The waters are the nations and peoples who consort with the harlot (15)
2. The political leaders are jealous of the harlot and eventually will destroy her when they have opportunity (16)
3. This action will fulfill God's purpose, because he intends for judgement to fall on false religion (17a)
4. These kings have in their mind to direct all worship towards their king, the beast (17b)
5. Last comment describing the woman: she is the Great City (Babylon) who dominates the kings of the earth [ironic statement] (18)

“As stated in verse 5, the city and the woman are a “mystery,” and are therefore a symbolic presentation. Verse 18, however, introduces the next chapter which seems to refer to Babylon more as a literal city than as a religious entity.”⁵

Conclusion:

“The focus of the revelation in this chapter is the age-old apostate religious system and its relation to government during the seven-year Tribulation period. During the first half of the Tribulation it will be an ecumenical, worldwide body that will stand above government and will be aggressively hostile to true believers in God. At the end of the Great Tribulation, Antichrist will terminate it and demand universal worship of himself.”⁶

Addendum — Religion of Babylon:

“The Bible is full of information about Babylon as the source of false religion, the record beginning with the building of the tower of Babel (Gen. 10–11). The name “Babel” suggests “confusion” (Gen. 11:9). Later the name was applied to the city of Babylon which itself has a long history dating back to as early as 3,000 years before Christ. ...

⁵ Walvoord, “Revelation in BKCNT,” 972.

⁶ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Rev 17.18.

“Babylon was important not only politically but also religiously. Nimrod, who founded Babylon (Gen. 10:8–12), had a wife known as Semiramis who founded the secret religious rites of the Babylonian mysteries, according to accounts outside the Bible. Semiramis had a son with an alleged miraculous conception who was given the name Tammuz and in effect was a false fulfillment of the promise of the seed of the woman given to Eve (Gen. 3:15).

“Various religious practices were observed in connection with this false Babylonian religion, including recognition of the mother and child as God and of creating an order of virgins who became religious prostitutes. Tammuz, according to the tradition, was killed by a wild animal and then restored to life, a satanic anticipation and counterfeit of Christ’s resurrection. Scripture condemns this false religion repeatedly (Jer. 7:18; 44:17–19, 25; Ezek. 8:14). The worship of Baal is related to the worship of Tammuz.

“After the Persians took over Babylon in 539 B.C., they discouraged the continuation of the mystery religions of Babylon. Subsequently the Babylonian cultists moved to Pergamum (or Pergamos) where one of the seven churches of Asia Minor was located (cf. Rev. 2:12–17). Crowns in the shape of a fish head were worn by the chief priests of the Babylonian cult to honor the fish god. The crowns bore the words “Keeper of the Bridge,” symbolic of the “bridge” between man and Satan. This handle was adopted by the Roman emperors, who used the Latin title *Pontifex Maximus*, which means “Major Keeper of the Bridge.” And the same title was later used by the bishop of Rome. The pope today is often called the *pontiff*, which comes from *pontifex*. When the teachers of the Babylonian mystery religions later moved from Pergamum to Rome, they were influential in paganizing Christianity and were the source of many so-called religious rites which have crept into ritualistic churches. Babylon then is the symbol of apostasy and blasphemous substitution of idol-worship for the worship of God in Christ. In this passage Babylon comes to its final judgment.”⁷

⁷ Walvoord, “Revelation in BKCNT,” 970–71.