

Week 11

The Final Judgment

Babylon and Beast

Revelation 17-18

The Vision

Revelation 17:1-7

Revelation 17:1-7 (NIV)

¹ One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. ² With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.” ³ Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. ⁴ The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. ⁵ This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. ⁶ I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. ⁷ Then the angel said to me: “Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns.

As we have noted in the past, visions are difficult to interpret because they require the determination of what is important and what is not. Those determinations come through the explanation of the vision and from those things in the vision that are so out of character that they demand interpretation. Adding to the difficulty of this particular vision is the desire on the part of some to interpret the meaning of Babylon as two distinct entities. Chapter 17 does not detail much of the vision of the woman. The focus of the interpretation is the Beast and the waters. The angel is satisfied with saying of the woman that she is the “great city that rules over the earth.”

The invitation to John is to observe the punishment of the great prostitute. That fulfillment does not happen until chapter 18 where the fall of Babylon the great is described as a past tense hymn of her destruction reminiscent of the prophecies of the minor prophets who promised the downfall of the great kingdoms of Assyria, Babylon and Egypt as so certain in their accomplishment that the words of the observers of the catastrophe are written before the matter takes place. However, before the hymn can be sung the woman and her relationship to AntiChrist must strictly be defined.

The Setting

The vision takes place in a desert. This is not to say that the city is a desert city. We might perhaps have visions of Carthage – a contemporary city to John, though now in ruin; or perhaps Alexandria in Egypt – center of world philosophy and commerce. But the emphasis is not that the city is in a desert but that the vision takes place in a desert. I

think this is to **isolate** the vision from competing thoughts and observations. The focus is on the woman and the beast and their relationship and not geography or interdependence on any other matter.

The Irony

As with so many aspects of the AntiChrist the woman is an **archetype** of Israel pictured as a woman in chapter 12. She is the fruitless, disrespected, provider of sensuality without emotion, issue, or significance. While she rides the beast, it is easy to see who will control in the end

The Cost

Dressed in finery and jewels the woman satiates herself from a golden cup filled with the consequences of her actions and the abuse of the holy. She has **power** and will stop at nothing to get her power no matter what it may mean.

The Title

The word MYSTERY normally defines a matter previously not **revealed** that is now made clear. In this case the mystery is the revelation of the city, but NOT ITS IDENTITY. Prior to the is moment we knew of the kingdom and its leader. Now we know of Babylon The Great.

Babylon continued, in John's day, to be a center for culture and commerce. It was revered for its **science** (one of the oldest astronomical observatories for example), art, and literature. As a **commercial** center it moved goods from China and the east through to the west and would continue to trade in precious commodities and spices through the times of the crusades until its destruction by the Saracen Moslems.

From her (not the real Babylon, but the mystery) comes all that leads people away from God. She is the birth of **false** religion (prostitution) and man's personal **avarice** (abominations). Significantly, Babylon is the cite of the Tower of Babel where man chose his own way and rejected God.

The Reaction

John is astonished by what he sees. The most common and most obvious reason for that reaction is that John identifies the woman and does not expect what he sees

The Beast Revelation 17:8-14

Revelation 17:8-14 (NIV)

⁸ *The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.* ⁹ *“This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits.* ¹⁰ *They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while.* ¹¹ *The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.* ¹² *“The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast.* ¹³ *They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast.* ¹⁴ *They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.”*

By far, the meatiest material in the interpretation of the vision is the character of the beast.

He “once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction.” – First, notice the **imperfect** correlation to the character of Christ who “was, *and is*, and is to come.”

But also note that the kingdom (for that is our focus here and not the AntiChrist himself) apparently will disappear, even die, before a final restoration prior to its destruction. Could the text refer to a resurrected world leader? While such a possibility exists given the astonishment with which the unbelieving world greets the beast, the sharper definition given to the hills as kings and the horns as kings implies that the beast itself is a ruling **Gentile** system.

The Seven Hills

A mind of wisdom is necessary because the matter before us is multi-faceted. As a general rule, Scriptural symbols avoid **double** meaning. (Would that be a triple meaning?) Here we are told that the seven heads are two separate symbols – both identifying foundations of the kingdom. The first is apparently **geographic** as seven hills – an obvious reference to **Rome**. The city is famous for its location on seven hills in the Apennine mountains.

Secondly, the heads are seven world **kingdoms**

Five Have Fallen:

Egypt

Assyria
Babylon
Medo-Persia
Greece

One Is...:

Rome

One has not yet come:

The Kingdom of **AntiChrist**

The Ten Horns

The ten are lesser world leaders who will exercise world power, but surrender world domination to the AntiChrist. These could be ten nations in a contemporary confederacy as is commonly related to the now defunct European Common Market or the current move for a united Europe in the EU. Another theory emphasizes the descriptive phrase “one hour” and identifies ten successive kingdoms who exercise world dominance and leadership Consider that since the fall of Rome ten nations have vied for supremacy and control and could be identified as “superpowers” but none with the power of Rome or ancient Babylon.

Those ten are:

1. The **Ottoman** Turks – controlling the Middle East from a.d.1000 to 1919.
2. The **Spanish** – whose dominance of the New World is only subdued by their own avarice.
3. The **Austria-Hungarian** Empire – whose Hapsburg Dynasty once ruled all of Europe and ends with WWI
4. The **Germans** – The pre WWI Prussian empire touched every continent.
5. The **French** – Napoleon once controlled all of Europe and most of Africa.
6. The **British** – The sun never set on Victoria’s kingdom.
7. The **Japanese** – WWII aggression stretched their influence around the Pacific Rim.
8. The **Russian** – Crushed in the fall of the Tsars only to rise again in world communism
9. The **Chinese** – The most populace nation in the world, today China wants to control world economies.
10. The **United States** – Some have labeled us the “Last Great SuperPower”

The Woman Revelation 17:2, 4-5, 15-18

The identity of the woman is far more enigmatic and historic interpretation of the woman has made the identity far more clouded. Not long ago, a book was published identifying Babylon as the United States and specifically New York City. Within the text, the author's strongest proof of his thesis is that America must play some role in final history.

Our knowledge of the identify of Babylon must be drawn from the limited data in the vision and interpretation and the details identified in the subsequent Psalm of its destruction. Some have attempted to develop two separate, but linked entities from the two chapters. Usually, this interpretation yields a system of world religion such as Roman Catholicism or the World Council of Churches defined in chapter 17 and a specific City, usually Rome described in Chapter 18. I am not convinced that such a division is warranted. Let's explore the evidence...

Revelation 17:2 (NIV)

² With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."

The most convincing evidence that Mystery Babylon is a world religion is this statement about adultery. Within OT history, the practice of worshipping other gods or, more specifically, syncretization between Yahweh worship and other religions was equated to the practice of adultery.

Now, it is true that Roman Catholicism and the WCC have done an amazing job adulterating Christianity. In addition to its many additions to Scripture, Romanism has often incorporated the local religions of a culture as a means of making converts. The WCC in working toward its agenda, has thrown out any concept of justification by faith in an effort to unite as a community of love. Recent efforts to embrace Hinduism, Islam, and Shamanism by both of these "so called" churches make them look like adulterous women prostituting themselves to world opinion and, as pictured in Rev. 17, the result is the contempt of those religions.

Revelation 17:4-5 (NIV)

⁴ The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. ⁵

This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

The woman has **profited** from her position but at a high cost. She is adorned with all of the markers of wealth and prosperity in purple and scarlet. The jewels and gold proclaim that profit of her profession and her golden cup states that she has the best of everything. However, the wine in her cup – the true symbol of prosperity and wealth, is filth and abomination. Everything

that she represents is false and empty. Her offspring are only worse than she. She is the model of everything the Gentile kingdoms have to offer the world.

Revelation 17:15-18 (NIV)

¹⁵ Then the angel said to me, “The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. ¹⁶ The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. ¹⁷ For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God’s words are fulfilled. ¹⁸ The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.”

The **influence** of the woman is universal. She controls all of the nations of the world and even the beast – who hates her – finds her indispensable in his plan. In the end, when her usefulness is consumed the world and the beast turn on her and destroy her as a means of establishing the beast. The beast, then, manipulates the woman until his power is established then destroys her.

Most defining in the evidence list is verse 18 which specifically identifies the woman as the great city that rules over the kings. This statement leaves little doubt that the entity in question is a **community** that exercises great power and authority in the world. It is a place of great wealth and prosperity that influences all of the world in its actions while generating contempt for its position. It is also clear that the city lacks moral and spiritual values and principles to govern its influence and that its influence is based upon a co-dependant desire to get along and enhance itself.

The Fate of Babylon

Chapter 18

The destruction of Babylon is sung in the voices of six **eyewitnesses** to her fall.

An Angel of Judgment

His song is a song of **condemnation** identifying the result of the judgment and the cause of her judgment.

The Result – a haunt for scavenger birds. A similar prophecy of the real city of Babylon is found in Jeremiah 51 where “Babylon will be a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals,” (v. 37) and

Her towns will be desolate,
a dry and desert land,
a land where no one lives,

through which no man travels. (v43)

While Saddam Hussein made efforts to revive the city of Babylon, rebuilding palaces and holding parades, no one has ever stayed in the desert city overnight and no one hosts tours to the once great city.

The Cause – Her focus was upon unprincipled **gain** wooing the kings and merchants of the earth with all of her fineries and luxuries. She lured them into her same valueless lifestyle.

The Angel of Mercy

This voice condemns Babylon as a place where the **faithful** do not belong. “Come out of her, my people” is the cry and reflects the work of God in Sodom and Gomorrah to save Lot. It also reflects back to Jeremiah’s prophecy against the first Babylon for there also the voice of God calls His people to “come out of her” Jeremiah 51:45.

The Kings of the World

These same kings are responsible for her downfall according to chapter 17, yet they watch in awe at her destruction and mourn her loss for in her and her adulteries they find themselves and in her judgment they see their own judgment and fear it coming.

The Merchants

Their weeping arises from the loss of **trade**. With the demise of Babylon comes the end of demand for all kinds of luxury goods.

The Mariners

The end of the **mercantile** system brings great mourning to these tradesmen as well for there is no more need for them.

The Mighty Angel

His destructive work is complete and utter. The city will never be found again and the most common **everyday** events such as cooking and marriage will never be heard in its confines.

SO WHO IS BABYLON?

Here is the list:

Babylon – Some have revised the Jeremiah prophecy to a future tense given the actions of Saddam Hussein. A current theory is that the city of Babylon will be rebuilt and Iraq will become a world power. On a scale of 1-10 for probability, I give this one a 0. The Jeremiah prophecy is currently being fulfilled. Though Hussein attempted to rebuild Babylon it will always be a desert city without trade value or commercial interest. This theory was great for someone who wanted to print a book.

Jerusalem – Revelation 18:24 (NIV) states, “In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth.” This has led some to conjecture that the city is Jerusalem. The city has been a center of commerce for Jew and Gentile alike. On a scale of 1-10 I give this one a 1 because the mixing of metaphors is too great. Jerusalem is not the center of the Gentile philosophy that the prophecy creates.

Rome – In John’s day, Rome was equivalent to Revelation’s Babylon in every way. Over time, the analogy has faltered. Though still a major port, center of commerce, and home of the Roman church it does not have the world prominence to make all of the world mourn its loss. On a scale of 1-10 I would give Rome a 5.

New York City – The contemporary center of the world for commerce, finance, wealth, prosperity and world government, New York City is a bright candidate for world prostitute. We know from recent history that all of the world would weep over its loss while internally smiling. It could even be said that NYC lacks any scruples, values or principles that distinguish it as honorable in any way. On a scale of 1-10 I would give NYC a 6.

Roman Catholicism – A once popular theory based upon the church’s universal presence in the world, syncretism, identification with the Queen of heaven theology (18:7), and a world wealth that seems to have increased by less than scrupulous means. This only works when linked with the city of Rome and since Rome no longer holds the world authority it once did I give this theory a 4.

World Council of Churches – Yes, it is universal, and yes, it is adulterous; but this one just does not start for me. Give it a 0.

Europe – The entire continent united as a single nation state bears some consideration. Europe is a financial, commercial, Theological, and influential powerhouse noted for its Machiavellian ethics which basically means they have no ethics. If Babylon must be geographic this is a good candidate. Give it an 8.

The United States – Okay. Set aside patriotism for one moment. The U.S. has many of the character traits of Babylon. We are rich, influential and held in contempt by the rest of the world who must rely upon our influence. Some

would say we have a form of faith highly adulterated with worldliness and others would say we have made our place in the world through less than scrupulous means. If Babylon were an unknown entity in John's day it would bear some title to describe it. On a 1-10 scale we are definitely up there in the 8 range.

The World Gentile System – Is it possible that Babylon is a broader entity than a single nation/government/city? Returning to Daniel's prophecy remember that Babylon is the head; the beginning; the start of the kingdom of the Gentiles. All of the other kingdoms – Persia, Greece, Rome – all connect to the head. Paul relates Christianity as a connection to the head which is Christ. Is this a statement about the world's system of everything – a gentile system of finance, commerce, wealth, law, and principle-less adultery that begins with Babylon and continues to this day. A system that embraces the entire globe and every nation and people. On a scale of 1-10 I give my idea an 8.

The fact that so many candidates for MYSTERY BABYLON exist illustrates that this text has little consensus and will best be seen in the day that God reveals the answer.