

God Judges the Great City

Scene Five: The Fall of Babylon and the Lament

Chapters 17-18



The Woman and the Beast

¹One 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. ²With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."

³Then 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. ⁴The 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. ⁵This title was written on her forehead:

MYSTERY
BABYLON THE GREAT
THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES
AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF
THE EARTH. ⁶I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

“The Great Prostitute”: Babylon

- A Parody of the Heavenly City (17:1 cf. 21:9)
- Picture of Judgment vs. Salvation

The Identification of the City

- “Wilderness” (12:6, 14) \
 - Protection and Provision
 - Israel/ Jesus
 - And Escape-Lot- Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19)
- A City as a Prostitute
 - Jerusalem as a Virgin (Isa. 37:22; Lam. 2:13)

- Faithful Wife and Mother (Isa. 66:7-14)
- Unfaithful Wife (Ezek. 16)
- Ninevey and Tyre as a Harlot (Nahum 3:1-7; Isa 23)
- Rome (cf. 17:9-10)
 - The Goddess Roma is not a Great Mother but a Whore!
 - Patriotism
 - “Enthroned upon many waters (or enthroned above the Ocean, NEB; or Built near many rivers, TEV)” (Jer. 51:13 Babylon and the Euphrates)
 - Multinational Commerce (17:15)
 - Idolatry:
 - Caesar Cult
 - Roma Cult
 - Rome is the Orientation for life in this world
 - Persecutor 17:6
 - “Rome Dresses well and drinks fine wine, but her clothes are the harlots finery and her wine is made from the blood of God’s people.”¹
- The Beast is Rome (see 13:1-8)
 - Seven Heads: Seven Hills of Rome and the Seven Kings (17:9-10)
- Mystery: Revelation not Puzzle
 - 1:20; Eph. 3:3-5
 - “Babylon the Great”
 - See 1 Peter 5:13: code for Rome

¹ Boring, Revelation p.180

When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. ⁷Then 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. ⁸The 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. ¹⁰They 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. ¹¹The 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. ¹³They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴They 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."

¹⁵Then the angel said to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. ¹⁶The 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. ¹⁷For 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. ¹⁸The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

Rome, the Beast and the Christians

1. Beast
 - a. The resurgence of the power of Chaos
 - b. Held in check but finally to be destroyed
 - c. Beastly empire vs. Humane Empire of "Son of Man" (Dan. 7:1-14)
 - d. "was, is not, and is to come" (parody cf. 1:4, 8; 4:8)
 - i. Imperial Persecution Nero 64 AD
 - ii. Not Currently
 - iii. Is Coming...get ready!
 - e. Recognize he is a defeated foe—do not get discouraged!
2. What Time is it? Discern the context of the Seven Kings:
 - a. 5 have fallen
 - b. 1 is – Current Lull
 - c. 1 is yet to come
 - d. 8th King will share power with 10 Kings
 - i. Parody of Jesus
 - ii. Reincarnation of Nero-only worse!

Is Roman/ Human Culture Utterly Depraved?

- Battle is not against Flesh and Blood (Ephesians 6)
- One sided picture of culture, economics and politics
- Compare Genesis 1-2 with Rev. 21:14-16!
- The Sin of the Tower of Babylon Compare: Gen. 11 with Gen 12

The Self Destructive Power of Evil

- "goes to destruction"
- Already Accomplished by the Lamb 17:14 (cf. 5:1-14)
- Self Destructive Battle (17:16-18)

Revelation 18

¹After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. ²With a mighty voice he shouted:

"Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!

She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil (unclean) spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird.

³For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries."

⁴Then I heard another voice from heaven say:

"Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her

plagues;

⁵for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.

⁶Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done.

Mix her a double portion from her own cup.

⁷Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself.

In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.'

⁸Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her:

death, mourning and famine.

She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.

The Fall of Babylon Celebrated/Lamented

1. Literary and Historical Context
 - a. Not hindsight but foresight
 - b. The Height of Splendor
2. Source and Model
 - a. Dirges and Laments from the OT
 - b. Isa. 13:21; 23:1-16; 34:11-14; 47:7-9; Jer. 50:39; 51:37; Zeph. 2:14-15
 - c. Fulfillment of the OT Prophets
 - d. God is Faithful to his word!
 - e. Paying back "Double" of her own Drink! (cf. Jer. 16:18; Isa. 40:2)



⁹"When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. ¹⁰Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry:

" Woe! Woe, O great city,
O Babylon, city of power!
In one hour your doom has come!"

¹¹"The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more— ¹²cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; ¹³cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men.

¹⁴"They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.' ¹⁵The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn ¹⁶and cry out:

" Woe! Woe, O great city,
dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet,
and glittering with gold, precious stones
and pearls!

¹⁷In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!"

"Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off.

¹⁸When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?' ¹⁹They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out:

" Woe! Woe, O great city,
where all who had ships on the sea
became rich through her wealth!

In one hour she has been brought to ruin!

²⁰Rejoice over her, O heaven!

Rejoice, saints and apostles and

prophets!

God has judged her for the way she treated you.' "

²¹Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said:

"With such violence
the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.

²²The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters,

will never be heard in you again.

No workman of any trade
will ever be found in you again.

The sound of a millstone
will never be heard in you again.

²³The light of a lamp will never shine in you again.

The voice of bridegroom and bride
will never be heard in you again.

Your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray.

²⁴In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints,

and of all who have been killed on the earth."

The Laments for Babylon the Great

- Actual judgment is not seen but heard through the songs of those who loved her...
- Do we "rejoice" at their distress?
- Do we love her too?
- "The hearer/ Reader may take the lamentations ironically and celebrate what is lamented by the speakers on the visionary stage, and/or they may actually join with them in lamenting what was good in human culture but which has now been perverted and consequently subjected to the judgment of God."²

² Boring, 186.

What is Wrong with “Babylon”?³

1. “The idolatrous and blasphemous worship offered and encouraged by Rome, especially the emperor cult.”
 - Rev. 13:1-18
 - “Harlot”, “Fornication” (See Hosea)
 - Violates the 1st and Great Commandment...no other gods before me.
2. “The violence perpetrated by Rome especially against Jews and Christians” (18:20, 24)
 - Jerusalem, cf. Matt 23:37, Luke 13:34
3. “Rome’s Blasphemous Self-Glorification/Self-Gratification” (18:7)
 - “luxury or sensual, to live in luxury or sensuously” Rev. 18:3, 7, 9
 - Gen. 11
 - Economic Pressure against Christians
 - i. Exclusion (see “Mark of the Beast” 13:16ff.)
 - ii. Temptations (Nicolatians)
4. “Babylon’s Wealth” (18:3, 11-19, 23)
 - God is the Source of Wealth--Deut. 8:11ff.
 - “She has fallen, to be sure, but the poet walks among her ruins feeling the weight of the loss and singing God’s victory with a heavy heart.”⁴
 - Loss of some good things:

- i. Music
- ii. Marriage
- iii. Art

- All that is Good will be redeemed in the Holy City (see 21:1-22:6; esp. 21:24-26)

What are Christians to do?

- Overthrow Babylon and establish a more just rule???
 - i. It was not a real possibility
 - ii. It had been tried and failed with disastrous results for the Zealots of Israel 63-73AD.
 - iii. God’s Power and Victory is exercised in self sacrificing crucified love and martyrdom. 5:1-14
 - iv. Unnecessary because of imminent end of History
 - v. God will be the one to judge Babylon and establish justice.
 - vi. Are modern day Christians to have passive acceptance toward injustice, corruption and tyranny in the cultural economic and political systems of our day??
- Two injunctions:
 - i. “Come out of Her my People” (18:4)
 1. Not Geographical relocation...
 2. but inner reorientation toward:
 - a. The Holy City
 - b. The Judgment of God against Babylon
 - ii. “Rejoice” (18:20)
 1. In our hope in God’s Sovereign Decree of Judgment
 2. For You against Her

³ Adela Yarbro Collins, “Revelation 18”, p 203.

⁴ Craddock, “Preaching the Book of Revelation” p.277