

# Revelation Study Guide

## Chapter 18 – The Fall of Babylon

We ended the last chapter by looking at all of the characteristics of Babylon the Prostitute. As you review that list and as you study God's Word and pray for His guidance who do you envision as the Great Harlot? There are several different possibilities that have been proposed throughout the history of the church and I think that is great reminder for us about the nature of prophecy and that there are often several different foreshadowings that appear before the final revelation occurs. Apparently, the Apostle Peter is the first person to publicly make the connection of a literal Babylon being represented by a spiritual harlot. In 1 Peter 5:13 he writes "She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son." Most commentators believe that Peter is referencing Rome, which was at that time the most prominent and marked opponent of the church. Although Peter most likely uses this reference to refer to Rome complications have arisen from this statement because of the assumption that Rome must forever be Babylon. This was not Peter's point though and distinguishes again the importance of understanding prophecy and its partial and future fulfillments that are often part of the answer. This is also complicated by the fact that at that time Rome was an obvious enemy of the church in every way and was primarily responsible for Christian persecution and martyrdom. Rome today is not evidently this same brash opponent of the church and for many, it is in fact the capital of the church. This means that as we consider the possibility of Babylon's identity that we should distinguish between the definition of Babylon the Prostitute and the antichrist kingdom of the beast.

Although this distinction is unclear throughout church history, I think it helps us to verify the differences since we saw in Chapter 17 that they were two different entities one riding on the other. Although, church historians haven't often differentiated these two entities I believe that Scripture does and thinking in these specific terms helps us determine a more accurate identity for both. For the purposes of this study in order to help us think clearly about their identities I will define the kingdom of the antichrist as those who are openly opposed verbally to Jesus and his work as Messiah. This would again consist of all religions that openly and publicly declare that Jesus is not the Christ. The kingdom of Babylon contains those actively opposed to the true Scriptural life and ministry of Christ followers. They may feign loyalty to Christ but they distort the Gospel and oppose God's people for their own benefit. This group is often referred to as the apostate church that is contained inside the visible church. You could also call them the secret antichurch. The difference between these two groups is that the antichrist kingdom is evident to all and the Babylonian kingdom is not evident. In Louis Brighton's Revelation commentary where he is referring to the harlot he says "She boasted that she was a 'queen' (18:7), whom all people would love and applaud as they participated in her deadly games of wealth and power and immorality. But all the while she was a wicked witch who spun her devilish wiles over the human race, wiles that were presented in sensual and luxurious beauty to make her spiritual dominion attractive and acceptable. Thus, all false spirituality—and in particular *apostate Christianity*—presents itself and acts accordingly." (p.468) The antichrist kingdom is visible; the Babylonian kingdom is invisible. Opposed to both of these kingdoms is the kingdom of Christ which contains the true witnesses committed to the life and teachings of Scripture and its Messiah regardless of the consequences. Hopefully this helps frame our

understanding of who Babylon could be along with all of the characteristics and traits that we saw from the previous chapter.

So, who is Babylon in the last days as indicated in the book of Revelation? There are many different options that have been suggested and I will try and list them and share with you the pros and cons of each.

The Apostate Church – this option appeals in many ways because one of the primary characteristics that we see about Babylon is its hiddenness and prostitution. The apostate church would definitely qualify for all of the immoral and illicit behaviors described for Babylon and could also be identified as being guilty of the blood of the saints through its deception and spiritual harm that it incurs. But where is the great city then? Chapter 18 clearly and profoundly lists kings and merchants and traders that are all devastated by its demise.

The Catholic Church – although this is a popular option in contemporary Christian circles it does not seem to be broad enough to be the answer for Babylon. There may be Babylonian characteristics in parts of the Catholic church or its membership but as we have seen in the churches of Revelation and also talked about throughout this study – every group of believers has its own sinful tendencies.

Babylon – This might seem redundant to say that Babylon could be Babylon but this refers to the rebuilt ancient city that currently lies as a ghost town in Iraq. This possibility could qualify for the great city that is represented by Chapter 18 but there are multiple problems with this identification because of its non-existence, non-influence, and it appears to be too closely related to the antichrist kingdom. Iraq is approximately 95% Muslim and as we have already described this religion would more closely resemble the antichrist kingdom than the Babylonian kingdom.

America – This possibility frightens me personally because I see so many of the characteristics contained in the description of Babylon that could describe America. It is considered a great city or nation, it contains nations of people, it is wealthy and rich, and it is impure and immoral. The only characteristic that is not identifiable is being guilty of the blood of the saints. Two thoughts here – one is that there could be spiritual persecution at a much greater level than people realize or it could be the next step of America becoming the “Great Harlot”. Of course, I pray that this is not the case, but it does appear to be a likely option or one of its cities like New York, San Francisco, Hollywood, Washington D.C., or Las Vegas. If overt persecution begins then watch out. Please pray with me that this would not be the case and that America would repent and return to her former glory as a light to the nations so that she does not become the Babylon of Revelation.

European Union, China, Russia – these options have their most likely resemblance in the ten kings that are represented in Chapter 17 which side with the antichrist not Babylon. I also question the spiritual significance of these regions to be Babylon and wonder what city could be defined as the one that made the world rich.

It is also possible that there will be another great city or nation to rise up in the last days who will fulfill this description but these are the primary options at this time. Throughout history there have been Babylons and kingdoms that have risen and fallen. One of the best examples that I can think of which depicts the end time Babylon harlot is the Holy Roman Empire. That is because during its reign it maintained both spiritual and commercial significance and authority

over the earth. If you look at other kingdoms or examples, they usually maintain one or the other but the way that Babylon is described in the book of Revelation is that it will contain both. That is what scares me about the prospects of America being Babylon because I believe that it is influential and authoritative in both the spiritual and commercial realm today. Louis Brighton says in his Revelation commentary "Human institutions of every kind, and '-isms' of all sorts, come and go. As symbolized by the beast they last for a while as terrifying threats to the saints of God, but then they disappear, only to be replaced by other entities under the control of the dragon." Then in his footnote he adds "An example of such an '-ism' in the twentieth century is Nazism, which arose and terrified the world for a time and then largely disappeared. Another example is Communism which has lost its grip on many of the countries it once terrorized. However, every worldly system is vulnerable. Capitalism and democracy may be corrupted too, and some day could cease to exist." (p.446)

**V.1-3 The First Angel** This chapter of Revelation is divided up into three sections involving angels and three sections involving people affected by the fall of Babylon. (kings, land merchants, sea merchants) We will look at each of these sections individually but the entire chapter is primarily a declaration of Babylon's judgment, then a dirge about Babylon's fall, and finally a prophetic exclamation point detailing Babylon's destruction. The first angel that comes on the scene is different from the bowls of wrath angel that had been showing John the vision in the desert. This angel is described as a 'great' angel and reminds us of the 'great' angel from Chapter 10. We don't know if this is the same angel but it could be and we are told that "the earth was made bright with his glory". We get the impression that this angel has come directly from God's presence and is shining with His radiance for all to see. He cries out with a mighty voice and declares that Babylon is fallen. We saw in the last chapter that God judged Babylon by inspiring the ten kings to endorse the antichrist and consequently declare its demise. We get the picture that Chapter 18 is where this demise is being described and taking place. The angel reminds us in these words why this is happening to Babylon: #1 it has become the gathering place for all that is unclean; #2 the passion of her sexual immorality; #3 she has been a negative influence on the kings of the earth; #4 her luxurious living

**V.4-8 The Second Angel** The second angel might not actually be an angel but I have described it this way because it is the easiest way to characterize the chapter as the activity of the three angels. Literally, John says he hears a voice from heaven so it could be an angel or one of the four living creatures but it is possible that it is God himself. Regardless, his words will compose most of the chapter and provide the description of the three categories of people that are affected by Babylon's fall. This voice is essentially singing a dirge or a song of lament or the blues or a sad, sad song about the effects of Babylon's fall. Whatever you call it the entire earth is in complete disarray after its fall and this voice begins with some admonitions and then a summary of the conditions.

The first thing (v.5) that the voice communicates is actually a commendation for God's people to come out of her. God doesn't want His people to experience the destruction that is about to take place or be affected by it. Although you could literally interpret this like Lot leaving Sodom, I think it is better understood to be talking about being in the world but not of the world like Israel in Egypt or Judah in Babylon. It was not physically plausible or possible to leave ancient Babylon after captivity but there were actions that could be taken to differentiate themselves from their captor. Daniel refused to eat like the Babylonians and also refused to give up his daily prayer time as well. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship the golden

image. These examples give us a vivid picture of what it might look like to come out of Babylon. Regardless of what Babylon is we live in a very hedonistic and secular society that is filled with temptation, self-indulgent luxuries, and immoral excesses. These practices and activities should not define the people of God and we should be different than the world around us. In the Western World we must come out of the materialism that surrounds us and deny the seduction of riches that has claimed the spiritual lives of so many. We are not to love the world we are to love the Lord's appearing. Are you looking forward to the Lord's return or are you so comfortable in this life that you are indifferent to the Parousia?

The second thing (v.6) that the voice communicates is that there is to be some divine retribution that is to take place "pay her back as she herself has paid back others". It is not clear who is to be taking out the vengeance that is declared against her, but we know that it is not "my people" from the previous verse. It is possible that this is commentary that goes along with the Bowls of Wrath as an explanation of why they are being poured out. We get the picture that the judgment of Babylon began with the attack of the antichrist, but God here is making sure that the job is finished. We also get the picture that she is getting what she deserves. It is the very thing that she either has done or tried to do to others and now God says to pay her back in the same manner. This reminds us of the story of Esther when the Jewish people were threatened by Haman and he created a day when the Jewish people would be attacked. He also created gallows to hang Mordecai on and both of these plans backfired and came back on him with the Jewish people being given a day to defend themselves and destroy their enemies and Haman himself was hung over the very steps that he developed for Mordecai.

The third thing (v.7) that the voice from heaven indicates is that Babylon is guilty of living a self-indulgent lifestyle; she has declared with pride that she is royalty; and claimed that she will never see suffering. These types of attitudes and privilege are abhorred by God and He is about to tell her what is going to happen as a result of her selfishness.

The fourth indication (v.8) that we get from the voice is that for all of these reasons and more - she will be destroyed in a single day. She will be burned up with fire and what we see next are the consequences that are felt across the earth due to her destruction.

**V.9-10 The Kings of the Earth** The first group of people that mourn over what has happened to Babylon are described as the rulers and leaders. They have become rich in their own right and understand the consequences to their kingdoms at the loss of Babylon. It is possible that there is also now the realization that they could be next and that if Babylon can be destroyed then there is nowhere that is safe.

**V.11-14 The Merchants of the Earth** The next group of people who mourn over Babylon's condition are the owners and traders of goods. They realize that because of Babylon's demise that they won't have anyone to buy their goods anymore. This will be devastating for them as well and no one will escape unscathed by this destruction.

**V.15-20 The Merchants of the Sea** The final group of people who are devastated by Babylon's destruction are the seafarers and traders on the waters. Babylon's demise means devastation for them as well and there will no longer be any goods to transport by ship or sea. Interestingly, in each of these groups mourning over the loss of Babylon there is a refrain by every one of them that says "in a single hour judgment has come." (v.10c, 17a, 19c) Evidently this will be one of the notable characteristics of Babylon's destruction – it will come suddenly

and swiftly. One day Babylon will be functioning and producing and buying and selling and the next day there will be complete devastation. This is a good reminder for all of us not to trust in earthly riches. Today they are here and tomorrow they are gone and no one can take their wealth with them. Babylon was known for its money and luxury and excess and in one day it has all changed.

At the end of the narration by the voice from heaven that has described the destitution of these three groups of people there is a commendation for the people of God. "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!" (v.20) There is a sharp contrast between the atmosphere on earth and in heaven. On earth it is doom and gloom and destruction but in heaven it is glory and praise and thanksgiving. This shows us the stark differences between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. What the world mourns over heaven rejoices over and what heaven mourns over the world rejoices in. This is not our home and our kingdom is the eternal heavenly kingdom and not the kingdom of the world. Heaven is our home and even though it will be on the new earth it won't be on this one. Sin, death, and destruction has ruled this earth since the fall of man but no more. The destruction of Babylon is the destruction of the kingdoms of the world and there is only one more enemy left - the kingdom of the antichrist. We will talk further about this celebration that has begun in Chapter 19 with the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, but for now it is enough to know that this voice is declaring for heaven – 'the party has started'.

**V.21-24 The Third Angel** This last angel from Chapter 18 provides a final prophetic act regarding Babylon – he throws a large stone into the sea sinking to the bottom never to be seen of again. Something very similar happened regarding a prophecy about Babylon in the Old Testament in the book of Jeremiah.

"Jeremiah wrote in a book all the disaster that should come upon Babylon, all these words that are written concerning Babylon. And Jeremiah said to Seraiah: 'When you come to Babylon, see that you read all these words, and say, 'O Lord, you have said concerning this place that you will cut it off, so that nothing shall dwell in it, neither man nor beast, and it shall be desolate forever.' When you finish reading this book, tie a stone to it and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates, and say, 'Thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more, because of the disaster that I am bringing upon her, and they shall become exhausted.'" (Jeremiah 51:60-64)

After the prophetic act of throwing the millstone to the bottom of the sea the mighty angel proceeds to declare that Babylon will be no more. Six different times we are told they will be found no more, or heard no more, or shine no more. Babylon will be no more. The two concluding statements made by the angel are that the nations were deceived by their sorcery and that she was guilty of shedding the blood of the saints. The sorcery of Babylon appears to be primarily the prosperity Gospel which says that blessing and wealth come with Christ. This has led to many peoples and nations getting into bed with the great prostitute and becoming guilty themselves of Babylon's sins. Ezekiel reminds us of what awaits for all of those who side with Babylon.

"Therefore, O prostitute, hear the word of the Lord: Thus says the Lord God, because your lust was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your whorings with your lovers, and with all your abominable idols, and because of the blood of your children that you gave to them, therefore, behold, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took

pleasure, all those you loved and all those you hated. I will gather them against you from every side and will uncover your nakedness to them, that they may see all your nakedness. And I will judge you as women who commit adultery and shed blood are judged, and bring upon you the blood of wrath and jealousy. And I will give you into their hands, and they shall throw down your vaulted chamber and break down your lofty places. They shall strip you of your clothes and take your beautiful jewels and leave you naked and bare. They shall bring up a crowd against you, and they shall stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords. And they shall burn your houses and execute judgments upon you in the sight of many women. I will make you stop playing the whore, and you shall also give payment no more. So will I satisfy my wrath on you, and my jealousy shall depart from you. I will be calm and will no more be angry. Because you have not remembered the days of your youth, but have enraged me with all these things, therefore, behold, I have returned your deeds upon your head, declares the Lord God. Have you not committed lewdness in addition to all your abominations?" (Ezekiel 16:35-43)

Many have stated that the Bible is the story of two cities Babylon and Jerusalem. The city of confusion and the city of peace. Many have also stated that it is the story of two ladies – Babylon the filthy prostitute and the bride who is pure and holy. God's command is for us to be pure and holy. We will never be perfect in this world but that is our aim and the differences between these two entities will continue to widen as we approach the end of days. Determine in your heart your desire to be pure and holy regardless of what the world around you expects or deteriorates into.