

The Fall of Babylon

Revelation Series #11

Revelation 17-18

Introduction: There are three women of importance in the book of the revelation. In revelation 12:1 the nation of Israel is represented by a woman. In revelation 19:7-8 the church is called the bride of the lord Jesus Christ. Today we read about the *scarlet harlot*. She represents the devil's apostate church in the last days.

What we see here is the figure, the future, and the ultimate failure of religion. Now notice I did not say the church. There is a difference between God's true church and the devil's false religion. The church has a glorious future, but religion is doomed to fail miserably.

There are two central figures in this chapter. There is the Babylonian mother: and the Babylonian monster. The Babylonian mother represents the one-world religion that is coming upon the earth. This Babylonian monster represents the one-world government that is coming upon the earth. One preacher entitled this chapter "**beauty and the beast.**"

As we look at this chapter, we are going to see religion exposed for what it really is, what it has always been, which is Satan's substitute for a relationship with God.

So, Revelation isn't just a map of end-time events. It's a letter that was written by John the Apostle around 95 AD, to a group of churches. We are seeing that as time goes on, being all-in for Jesus becomes more and more difficult.

So, if you take your faith seriously, get ready for a battle. You will feel tremendous pressure to abandon your faith and blend in with the darkness. But here's the thing-and this is what today's message is all about: that voice that's calling to you away from God, will not seem like darkness. The voice will seem like the good life, because our spiritual enemy, Satan, might be evil, but he's a master deceiver. This part of Revelation prepares us, so we can stand firm in our faith.

So... today we're going to be in Revelation 17 and 18. And in this section, that voice that calls us to abandon our faith is represented by a city called Babylon.

We're going to see three things today: The Attraction of Babylon, The Fate of Babylon, and The Alternative to Babylon.

Pray

I. The Attraction of Babylon

Revelation 17:1 *"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 by 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 wilderness. 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. 5The name written on her forehead was a mystery: Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes, and of the abominations of the earth."

Let me repeat something I said two weeks ago: A lot of Revelation is apocalyptic literature, which uses a lot of imagery and symbols to teach spiritual truth. We do not believe there is a literal beast and a literal prostitute riding on its back.

So, the city of Babylon and the prostitute are two different images for the same thing. The question is: what do they represent? In Revelation 17:9, it says the seven heads on the beast she's riding are the seven hills on which the woman sits.

Anyone know what city famously sits on seven hills? Rome. So, when the original readers read this, they said, "This is talking about Rome-this is the Roman Empire-trying to pull us away from God!" And they were right! But it's not only that. It's obviously more.

In the bible fornication, adultery, and prostitution symbolizes false religion. It symbolizes spiritual adultery. You remember the story of the prophet Hosea and how God commanded him to marry a woman by the name of Gomer?

Hosea obeyed God and married her, but she was unfaithful. Gomer represented the nation of Israel who was unfaithful and prostituting herself and joining herself to other gods. She was committing the sin of spiritual adultery.

You see, our lives belong to Jesus. Our love belongs to Jesus, our loyalty belongs to Jesus. But when you allow the world to defile your life, dilute your love and divide your loyalty, you have committed spiritual adultery.

We see she **"sits by many waters."** (v.1) Now what does this mean? We are told the meaning in v.15; **"Then the angel said to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages."** In other words, this lady in red will hold sway over the entire world.

Everybody and anybody who is somebody will join this one-world church. Every nation, tribe, tongue, and people will worship at the shrine of this one-world religion. Denominations will cease to exist. Religious liberty and religious freedom will be a thing of the past.

Jesus said, **"upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."** But this church will be built on the gates of hell.

Verse 5 says, "The name written on her forehead was a mystery: Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes, and of the abominations of the earth." (NIV)

Now understand that in the bible Babylon is a code word. It is a word that is meant to symbolize something else; to conjure up a certain image in your mind. Babylon was actually a great city. What makes it great? It rules over the world. In a sense it is the anti-Jerusalem.

There was a time when humanity spoke one language. All people were the descendants of Noah. Eventually they developed a large settlement in a plain in the land of Shinar. In Genesis 11:3-4 it says, **"They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. 4Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise, we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."**

What was wrong with this.

1. They decided to reach for the heavens not by God's provision but by man's own effort. All religions, other than Christianity, are based on man's effort, or a works system to attain salvation and get to heaven.

2. Instead of doing something for the glory of God, these people wanted to make a name for themselves. This is like today's TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram generation where everyone wants to be a social media star.
3. The people at Shinar did not want to follow God's directive to spread across the earth. So, God intervened and confused their language.

Where did all of this take place? In the city of Babel, which means "**confusion.**" Babel eventually morphed into Babylon. To understand this city, we need to look at its original founder, Nimrod. He was the architect of the "mystery religions" of that area. His wife was named Semiramis, who was a high priestess of idol worship. Babylon has always been deeply involved in astrology, sorceries, and magic.

Here's how I would describe it: Babylon represents the unrestrained pursuit of humanistic power, materialistic luxury, and sensual pleasure. Let me say that again: Babylon represents the unrestrained pursuit of humanistic power, materialistic luxury, and sensual pleasure. Let's look at those one by one.

First, humanistic power. On the woman's forehead, it says, "Babylon the great." If you're familiar with the book of Daniel, from the Old Testament, those words might sound familiar: it's exactly what King Nebuchadnezzar said before God humbled him. In Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar was walking on the roof of his palace, and he said, "Is this not Babylon the great, that I have built by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" And right after he says that he gets humbled for failing to acknowledge God. So, the city of Babylon in Revelation represents power that cuts God out of the picture. This is my power. This is for my glory.

So, here's what Revelation is saying: watch out for those persuasive voices that say, "You can build something great with your life, and you don't need God to do it. If you follow Jesus, he's going to give you rules and limitations and guilt-you don't need! Manifest your own glory and your own greatness. If you believe in yourself, and visualize the reality you want, you can have it."

That's the seductive call of Babylon, and those voices are going to keep getting stronger.

Secondly, Babylon represents materialistic luxury. Verse 4 says the woman is covered in gold and precious stones and pearls. This is not costume jewelry. In

Revelation 18:3, it says **“the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.”** Revelation 18:12 talks about Babylon’s ivory and costly wood and bronze and marble and cinnamon and spice wine and olive oil. So, Babylon represents the highest of high-end living. The good stuff. Gourmet food and drink, expensive clothing, luxury cars and high-end vacations. Babylon represents all those people that you walk past in the first-class section of the airplane, on the way to your seat in coach.

The media does a great job of reminding us of the luxuries we don’t have, don’t they? If you’re not careful, the more you see what’s out there, and the more you see what other people have, you subtly find yourself running after things instead of pursuing intimacy with Jesus.

So, Revelation is warning us of that seductive voice of materialism. Craving nicer things; demanding better stuff; working long hours so you can keep upgrading your lifestyle. And as we get closer to the end, that seductive call of materialism is going to get stronger and stronger.

And then, third, Babylon represents sensual pleasure. The woman on the beast is strikingly attractive. She’s dressed in purple and scarlet; she’s glittering with gold. Even John the Apostle-when he sees this vision-look what it says in the second part of verse 6: **“When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.” (NIV)**

She’s a head-turner! Verse 7 says: **Then the angel said to me: “Why are you astonished?”** Like, “Hey John, really? So, this woman-the city of Babylon-represents outer beauty. The kind of beauty that millions of young girls are trying to emulate, because they see these perfect images on social media. “If I could just stick to my diet, and work out, I could look like her.” That’s Babylon.

But remember, she’s a prostitute, and what do prostitutes represent? Pleasure without the hassle of a relationship. My needs; my gratification; my pleasure.

This is the city of Babylon. This is the image of the woman on the beast. She sits by many waters, all over the world, and she calls to people: “You don’t need God. What you really want is power and luxury and pleasure. And you can have all of that if you come to me?”

And Revelation 17:2 says all the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries. In other words, she’s good at what she does. And she’s not

just effective with those people “out there!” Remember, Revelation is a letter written to...whom? Churches! Jesus is warning the church about this! Like, be careful! This woman is more seductive than you think. And she’s going to keep pulling people down; she’s going to keep turning people away from Christ, and if you don’t think any of this is real, she’s got you exactly where she wants you.

Notice:

1. Her Alliance

“With her the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.” (v.2)

These kings represent the various heads of government. During the Tribulation, there will be a fatal attraction between church and state that will result in a marriage made in hell.

But this harlot will also join herself to the beast. ***“Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns.”*** (v.3)

Now obviously, this is the same beast referred to in revelation 13 that we talked about last week. This scarlet beast represents the coming world empire that will be headed up by the Antichrist, the beast, which will oppose God, the church, and the lord Jesus Christ. The woman sits upon this beast symbolizing the commitment the church and the state will have to each other.

This beast will take a bride described here as a prostitute, because she will be to the antichrist what the church, the true bride, is to the lord Jesus Christ.

This Babylonian mother and this Babylonian monster will unite to form a mixture of secularism, socialism, materialism, and humanism which we are seeing formed today right before our very eyes.

2. Her Affluence

Verse 4 says, ***“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”***

In this day religion is going to be big business. The aisles will be empty, but the offering plates will be full. Success will be measured in riches, not righteousness; in gold, not godliness. Material prosperity and political position will mean more than spiritual power.

We see in v.6 that this worldwide apostate church of riches and royalty will use its alliance, its allegiance, and its affluence to slaughter millions of true believers and they will do it in the name of religion, thinking they have done their god a favor.

This is what surprised John, to see a day coming when the righteous will be murdered by the religious.

So, in this vision that Jesus gave to John, he shows us how attractive Babylon is. And he says, “Okay-now that I’ve got your attention, let me show you what’s going to happen if you choose Babylon over Christ.

II. The Fate of Babylon.

A. The explanation of the Babylonian mystery

Verse 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.”***

Now understand that in the bible a mystery is not some secret that can only be figured out by Scotland yard or Sherlock Holmes. A mystery is a truth which previously has been hidden, but now has been revealed to the people of God, through the word of God, by the spirit of God. This mystery is revealed in two parts:

1. The king that will Reign

The first mystery that is revealed is the mystery of the beast. We are told that this beast has 'seven heads.' (v.7) now we know that these seven heads represent seven kings. ***“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 only a little while. (Vs. 9-10)

When the apostle John wrote the book of the revelation five prominent Roman emperors had fallen - Julius Caesar, Tiberias, Caligula, Claudius, Nero. Even as John was writing this book the emperor Domitian was on the throne. Now the other who has not yet come is the antichrist who will be the last emperor of the revived Roman Empire.

How will this antichrist come to power? How will he get the entire world to follow him, to make him a worldwide dictator. The answer is found in v.8 ***“The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and yet will come up out of the Abyss and go to its 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 it once was, now is not, and yet will come.”***

This verse refers to chapter 13 and verse 3. ***“I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast.”*** This coming worldwide dictator, this beast, will live for a short time, will somehow be killed, but then he will rise again. Satan will duplicate the resurrection of Jesus. This tremendous miracle will deceive everyone who has not received the lord Jesus Christ.

Now this turn of events explains v.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.”***

The beast that comes to power in these last days will be the seventh emperor of a revived Roman Empire. But he will die. He will then come back as the eighth emperor. In other words, the seventh ruler will be the beast in his human form, but the eighth ruler will be the beast in his superhuman form which he assumes after he is raised from the dead.

2. The Kingdom that will Rise

1. Not only does the beast have seven heads, but he also has "ten horns." (v.7) now what do these horns represent? This part of the mystery is revealed in v.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.”***

A. The explanation of the Babylonian mystery and now we see...

B. The exaltation of the Babylonian monster

For a short time there will be a marriage between this unholy church and this ungodly state. For you see the state has never been afraid to use the church to control the people.

But this marriage is not going to last. There is going to be a consolidation of power as these ten nations unite and submit themselves totally to the beast. ***"They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast."*** (v.13)

They will say to him in effect, 'you do whatever you want to do, and we will back you up totally.' at that moment the death warrant of the scarlet harlot will have been signed. For this beast will immediately do three things:

a. He divorces the Prostitute

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."

Now after the first 3 1/2 years of this marriage the honeymoon will be over. For all the time this marriage was one of convenience, not one of conviction.

b. He devours the Prostitute

"Bring her to ruin and leave her and naked." (v.15b) the beast strips the harlot of all her wealth. Her cupboard will be bare, it reminds me of a poem:

A smiling young lady from Niger took a ride on the back of a tiger; they came home from the ride with the lady inside; and a smile on the face of the tiger.

For a while the harlot will ride the beast, but it is only a matter of time until the beast devours the harlot.

c. He destroys the Prostitute

"eat her flesh and burn her with fire." (v. 16b) this harlot played with fire and in the end got burned. Friend, any time the church bellies up to the state she is going to get burned. Now why does the beast destroy the harlot? Why does the monster destroy the mother? Why does the state in the end destroy all religions?

First, for ***selfish reasons***. Do you know why communism is so humanistic and antireligion? Do you know why our government is becoming increasingly hostile toward the church? It is because the state views the church as a threat to its own power. Say what you will, but no one can deny the power of religion over the minds of men. There are hundreds of millions of Muslims today who are held together not primarily by culture, or politics, or by wealth, but they are held together by an almost fanatical devotion to religion.

But this destruction is also for ***sovereign reasons***. ***“For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to hand over to the beast their royal authority, until God’s words are fulfilled.”*** (v.17)

It may appear that this world is on a run-away train down a long hill, with no brakes, facing certain doom. But this verse reminds us that the sovereign hand of an omnipotent God is on the throttle.

Finally, it is done for ***strategic reasons***. ***“The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.”*** (v.18)

Without fail or exception, history has proven that every time a dictator rises to power the first institution he attacks and subdues and attempts to eradicate is the church.

In other words, as the Antichrist calls people to abandon Christ and declare their allegiance to the state, part of that appeal will be the luxury and wealth and sensual pleasures of Babylon. “Look what you could have if you join with me! You’ll get into the best schools; you’ll get the best jobs. You can have the good life!”

But then at some point, the beast will turn on the woman. Look what it says: 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. So at some point, the Antichrist will decide that, to get people to follow him, it’s no longer necessary to offer them luxury and wealth and pleasure-he doesn’t need this woman anymore-so he’ll turn on her and destroy her. And I believe at that point, this world leader will simply coerce people to follow him, using sheer power and fear: “Get on board. Take the mark, or you die.”

But in the meantime-even if we never live to see the day of the actual Antichrist-here's the deeper point: the whole attraction of Babylon is one big bait and switch. You know what a bait and switch is, right?

You think you're signing up for something, and it turns out to be totally different. And listen when you choose Babylon-when you give your life to humanistic power and materialistic luxury and sensual pleasure-it's one big bait and switch.

The woman on the beast will not deliver what she promises. So, if you take the bait, it will turn on you and devour you. If you think working 60-hour work weeks to get rich is going to deliver happiness, you will be severely disappointed, and you'll realize that everything you gave up wasn't worth the tradeoff.

In fact, here's how you'll wind up-look at Revelation 18:1-2

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 dwelling for demons

and a haunt for every impure spirit,

a haunt for every unclean bird,

a haunt for every unclean and detestable animal.

The city of Babylon is going down.

This teaching from Revelation is God trying to save us from crashing. He's trying to keep us from having to learn this on our own. When you choose Babylon-when you try to build a life of success and power without God; when you run after luxury and sensual pleasure, religion and not a relationship, this is how it ends.

So...now that we're all sufficiently traumatized and depressed, let's end this on a positive note-because Revelation ends it on a very positive note.

III. The Alternative to Babylon.

Look at Revelation 18, verse 4: ***Then I heard another voice from heaven saying “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;***

In other words, now that you see what Babylon is really all about, choose to live differently. This doesn't mean withdraw from the world; or live in a commune so you won't get contaminated by sinners. Jesus said, ***“I'm sending you into the world, but don't be of the world.”***

Live in a way that's distinctly different from the culture around you. So...what does that look like? Well, it's exactly the opposite of the values of Babylon:

Instead of living for humanistic power-trying to build your kingdom and make life work without God-you live for God's kingdom. So, every day you wake up and say, “Thy kingdom come. Lord, not my will, but yours be done.”

Instead of being obsessed with sensual pleasure, you choose to honor God with your sexuality. You don't rationalize things like porn and sex outside a marriage covenant-even though Babylon says that's fine, you know it's destructive. And when you fall, you repent and receive God's grace to go in a new direction. It's very countercultural, but very doable, by God's grace.

And instead of constantly upgrading your lifestyle and pursuing luxury, you choose to live with contentment and generosity.

Quick story: Billy Graham once visited a Caribbean Island with his wife, Ruth. And they were invited to the home of one of the wealthiest men in the world, for lunch. And throughout the meal, this guy was close to tears. He said, “I can't understand why I'm so unhappy. Did you see my yacht? I can go anywhere I want. I have a private plane, helicopters. I literally have everything you could want. But (and these are his words) I'm as miserable as hell.” Later that same day they visited a guy who pastored a little church on the island. He was a widower, and he spent most of his time taking care of his two sick sisters. And this guy was alive with joy. He was excited about his church and his family.

At one point in the conversation, he said, “I don't have ten dollars to my name, but I think I might be the happiest guy on this island.” So, as they were leaving the island, Billy said to Ruth, “So who do you think is the richer man?” And Ruth just shook her head and smiled; the answer was so obvious.

That's what it means to come out from Babylon. To resist that seductive call and choose to live in a way that's distinctly different.

We have an incredible opportunity to show the world that there's something better than Babylon. When you choose to live different, you might get ridiculed for it. So what? Jesus said, ***“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.”***

The kingdom of Babylon is on its way out; the kingdom of God will endure forever.

I believe it tells us this: the answer to man's problems is not religion, it is Jesus. This chapter tells us that religion ultimately is a dead-end to hell. This world, which is drowning in a sea of sin, suffocating under a cloud of darkness, choking on its own iniquity, does not need religion, ritual, or righteousness. What it needs is an eternal relationship with the lord Jesus Christ.