

Midweek Bible Study

Exposition of Revelation

The Mother of Harlots, Babylon the Great

Rev. 17-18

Introduction: Revelation is cyclical, it recapitulates, it is progressive parallelism.

Case in point: Seventh Bowl is the scene of final judgment with the fall of Babylon (16:19). In chapter 14, we also have a final judgment passage, and we read the announcement of the second angel, 14:8.

Now in Rev. 17-18 we have an expanded vision of Babylon and her destruction.

Overview of Revelation 17-18

Introduction to the vision of judgment (17:1-2)

Description of Babylon the Great (17:3-6a)

The Angel interprets the vision (17:6b-18)*

- The beast (17:8)

- The seven heads (17:9-11)

- The ten horns (17:12-14)

- Civil war and destruction (17:15-18)

The angel announces the fall of Babylon (18:1-3)

The call to the people of God to come out of Babylon (18:4-8)

- The basis of her judgment (18:5)

- Her judgment is coming (18:6-8)

The Laments Over Babylon (18:9-19)

- Lament of the kings (18:9-10)

- Lament of the merchants (18:11-17a)

- Lament of sea captains and sailors (18:17b-19)

Rejoicing Over Babylon (18:20)

Destruction of Babylon (18:21-24)

But who is Babylon? Who is the great harlot? The mother of harlots?

This is one of the most intriguing sections in Rev, especially as we consider 17:7-18!

It is one of the lengthiest visions in the book. It prepares us for the marriage supper of the Lamb to His true bride.

Interpretive Perspectives on Babylon

Historicist perspective – the overthrow of Papal Rome.

"MOTHER of HARLOTS, and Abominations of the Earth." Old Babylon was the mother of idolatry, where false religion and false worship first began, and whence it was diffused through the earth. The Church of Rome in this respect was like her, as in her is coined all manner of superstition and false worship, and from thence is spread abroad in the world. (JE, Notes on the Apocalypse)



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Preterist perspectives – Overthrow of Rome or Jerusalem

Revelation: Two Cities: Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem

Jerusalem

The holy city (11:2)

The great city, *mystically* called Sodom and Egypt (11:8)

The city (11:13)

Babylon

Babylon the great (14:8)

The great city - Babylon the great (16:19) *not a Jewish perspective

Babylon is the Great City, cf. 18:10, 21

Woman sitting on a scarlet beast (17:1-3)

Woman is Babylon the great, mother of harlots (17:5)

- persecutes witnesses of Jesus (17:6; 18:24) cf. Mt 23:29-38

The woman is carried by the beast (17:7)

The woman sits on seven mountains (17:9)

The woman sits on the waters (17:15)

The ten horns/beast hate the harlot and eat her and burn her up (17:16)

The woman is the great city (17:18)

Babylon is fallen (18:2)

[exam OT background to 18:4-8]

e.g. v6 > Jer 16:18; 17:18

e.g. vv 23-24 cf. Jer. 25:10

The great city, Babylon, the strong city (18:10)

The great city (18:16)

The great city (18:19)

Babylon, the great city (18:21)

The great harlot is judged (19:2)

[Judgment of the harlot leads right into the marriage of the Lamb]

The New Jerusalem

The Lamb's bride has made herself ready (19:7-8; cf her clothing w/ the harlot's)

The holy city, the *new* Jerusalem (21:2)

The holy city, Jerusalem coming down out of heaven (21:10)

The city (21:16, 21, 23; 22:14)

The holy city (22:19)

The bride, the wife of the of the Lamb (21:9)

Futurist perspectives – Catholic church, apostate religion (one world religion), or a literally revived Babylon or revived Rome.

Progressive parallelism's perspective – *the world's idolatrous economic-religious system*

“Babylon is not simply a cipher for Rome but is a rich biblical theological symbol for the world's idolatrous, seductive political economy – the archetypal godless city, which Rome embodied in the first century.” Brian Tabb, 164.

Proposal –

