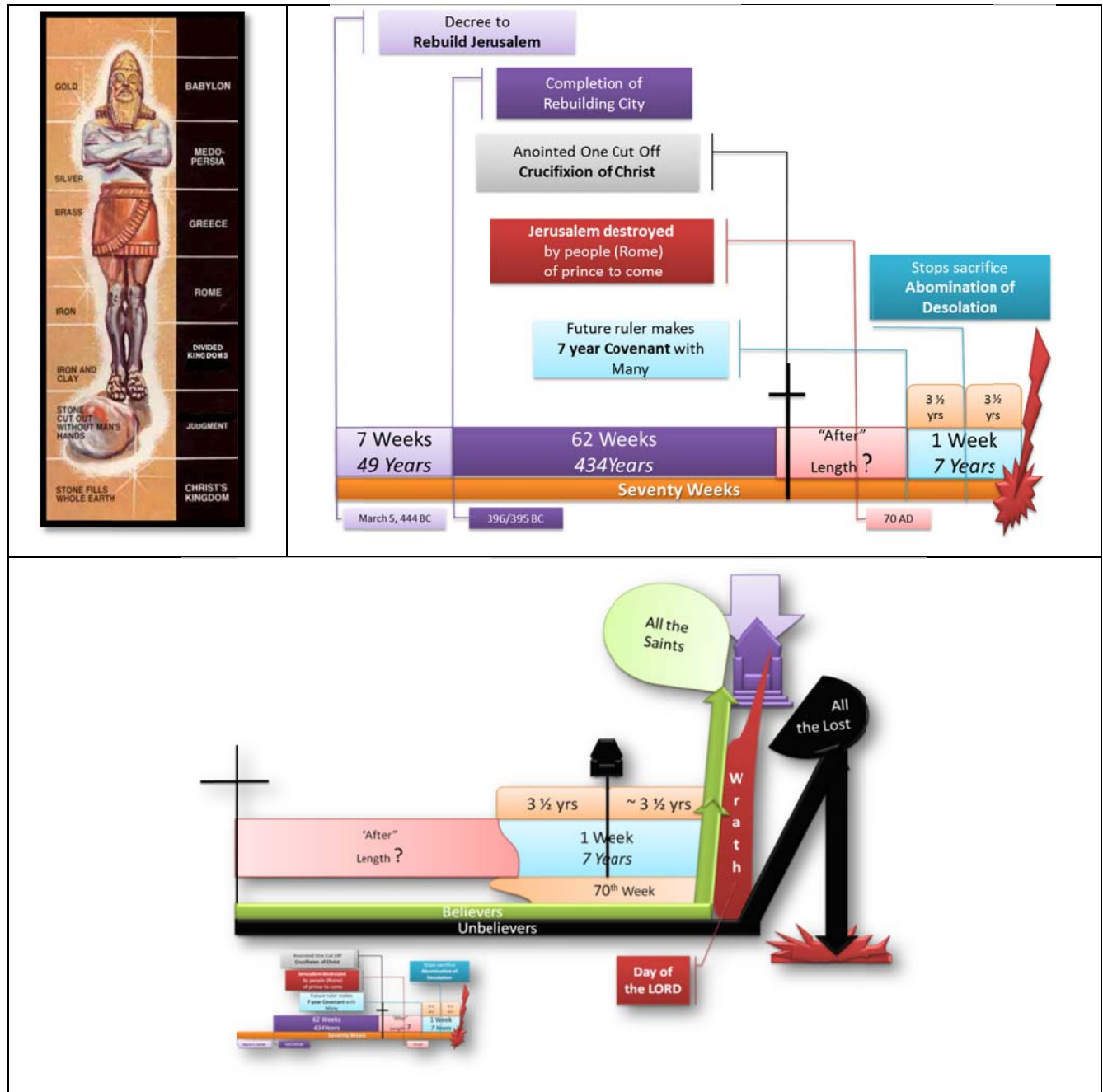


The Conquered and the Conqueror

Revelation 18:1-19:5

Russ Kennedy

I want to remind you “when” we are in the events are unfolding. The following is the schema I have been using throughout this series. The case for it has been made over the whole series. Today, I want just to locate us, particularly those of you who are new.



What does Babylon represent in the Scriptures?

- The effort of man to ascend to God's throne
- The glory of man in human power
- The independence of man through the world's wealth
- The beauty of man in the arts and sciences

So she is not only a city, a country, a nation, she represents the pinnacle of human achievement. But it is an achievement not only separated from God, but also actively raised up against God. Babylon is symbolic of man's striving to be divine, to be god.

And so our text today. When the conquering King Jesus comes in all His magnificent glory, Babylon will be conquered. All her aspirations, all her power, all her wealth, all her beauty will be destroyed. It will lie in the dust. All that man tried to achieve apart from God is shown to foolish and futile.

That is our text this evening. I do not intend to explain every part of this. Much of it is poetry. Some of it is a lament. It combines both apocalyptic and lyrical content. To pick it apart would be to pull the wings off the butterfly.

The Declaration of Condemnation

(v. 1-3)

¹ After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. ² And he called out with a mighty voice,

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!
She has become a dwelling place for demons,
a haunt for every unclean spirit,
a haunt for every unclean bird,
a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.

³ For all nations have drunk
the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality,
and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her,
and the merchants of the earth have grown rich
from the power of her luxurious living.”

The book of Revelation is so populated with angelic beings that at times we are at a loss to know the identity of all of them. Given the connection to Daniel, I think this is Michael the arch-angel who rises for His people (Daniel 12). Some think it is Jesus in His coming down from heaven with strength and glory. It is certainly that moment in redemptive history that is being alluded to here.

The results of Babylon's condemnation are pictured here. This would have been a familiar scene. In John's day, the old city of Babylon lay in ruins. The allusion is larger though. The results of judgment is that the world system is handed over to be occupied by Satan and evil spirits. It has become a ghost town.

The reasons for Babylon's condemnation changes the focus to Babylon as the prostitute. She has seduced the nations and the kings. She has drawn them into adultery with false gods and idols. So, her judgment is near and sure.

The Call to Separation

(v.4-8)

In the light of Babylon's sin and judgment, in all generations we are called to leave her.

⁴ Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,

“Come out of her, my people,
lest you take part in her sins,
lest you share in her plagues;

⁵ for her sins are heaped high as heaven,
and God has remembered her iniquities.

⁶ Pay her back as she herself has paid back others,
and repay her double for her deeds;
mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed.

⁷ As she glorified herself and lived in luxury,
so give her a like measure of torment and mourning,
since in her heart she says,

‘I sit as a queen,
I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see.’

⁸ For this reason her plagues will come in a single day,
death and mourning and famine,
and she will be burned up with fire;
for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her.”

The call to come out of the world system represented by Babylon is an ever present call to the church. This call comes to us today. We must not think that we are exempt from the temptation to flirt with the Babylonian system as it expresses itself in our day. If you want to see the world system today, look at the advertising, the politics and the arts. There it is, plain, bald, naked and putrid.

God has already judged it and is going to execute final judgment one day. He will every expression or form of it. We will not be exempt. We are not exempt. How do we obey this call, this command? Primarily through our hearts' desires, wants and values. What do you treasure, enjoy, spend money for? Why do you do that? Who has the ear of your heart? It is not so much the “what” as it is the “why”.

All that the false values, false system, false religion of the Babylonian system is going to go up in smoke. If it is worthless, it will be consumed. And it will be a sudden and quick end, that day, the Day of the Lord.

The Voice of Lamentation

(v.9-19)

Vain regret and worldly sorrow always flow from loss and an unrepentant heart. The next large section is the world's response to the judgment of Babylon. They take up a lament.

⁹ And the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. ¹⁰ They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say,

“Alas! Alas! You great city, you mighty city, Babylon!
For in a single hour your judgment has come.”

¹¹ And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, ¹² cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, ¹³ cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.

¹⁴ “The fruit for which your soul longed has gone from you,
and all your delicacies and your splendors are lost to you,
never to be found again!”

¹⁵ The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,

¹⁶ “Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen,
in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls!

¹⁷ For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste.”

And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off ¹⁸ and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning,

“What city was like the great city?”

¹⁹ And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out,

“Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth!
For in a single hour she has been laid waste.

When God judges and destroys this system, the people of the world weep and wail. This is drawn from Ezekiel 26-33 where the world system is represented by Tyre and Sidon. The language is almost identical to that of the prostitute in Revelation 17:4.. What is it that they lament? There two repeated causes of their grief.

They are lamenting the loss of commerce and wealth. At the center of there is the destruction of the world’s economies. All the wealth, the worth the work of people is suddenly, totally and completely destroyed. All through this lament, people are crying over the loss of the ability to carry out commerce.

They are lamenting the suddenness and the totality of the destruction. What struck me here is the repetition of this. The sense is of surprise and shock. How could this happen? How could the whole world’s wealth and economy just collapse in a single day?

Because the Lord has come, gathered His people and is now judging every aspect of the fallen, sinful world that has rebelled against Him.

The Act of Destruction

(v.20-24)

Not only are we called on to recognize the evil of Babylon, we are also to rejoice over her destruction.

²⁰ Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!”

²¹ Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying,

“So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence,
and will be found no more;

²² and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters,
will be heard in you no more,

and a craftsman of any craft will be found in you no more,
and the sound of the mill will be heard in you no more,

²³ and the light of a lamp will shine in you no more,
and the voice of bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more,
for your merchants were the great ones of the earth,
and all nations were deceived by your sorcery.

²⁴ And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth.”

We are called to rejoice in this judgment for *it is on our behalf that God judges*. He says so in verse 20 and then tells us why in verse 24. Because the harlot, the city, the system has been drinking deep from the blood of the martyrs, God will bring an end to all that she represents.

In a powerful image, the millstone is not hung around the neck as in Jesus’ warnings. It is dropped into the sea, the seething masses of humanity. The disruption, death and destruction that we have seen in the seals, trumpets and bowls is now reaching its pinnacle in the collapse of the world system.

I love the interplay of the two images: the city and the system. The imagery invokes the flowing life of a grand city. The destruction brings the loss of all that goes on: business, trade, families, arts, tourism. It is all here. But the imagery also paints the picture of a system, a way of thinking that undergirds a way of living. In the destruction of the way of living, God enacts judgment on the way of thinking.

I have to pause and ask us to evaluate our own hearts. Believers will not be here when the wrath of God falls on mystery Babylon. We will be safe with the Lord. However, we do have to ask ourselves how entangled our hearts are in the system of thinking and living that mystery Babylon represents? How broken, grieved, devastated would we be if God chose to judge our own western, American expression of that system? Would we join in the lament? Have we placed our hope in what that system provides? Will such destruction become a heart disaster? While we live in this world and are surrounded by its system, we are not of this world (that is our identity) and thus are not to be entangled with the world (that is our responsibility).

The Worship of Exultation**(19:1-5)**

We have a responsibility and a response. Here is the response of God's people to the judgment on Satan's world.

²⁴ And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth."

¹ After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out,

"Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,
for he has judged the great prostitute
² for his judgments are true and just;
who corrupted the earth with her immorality,
and has avenged on her the blood of his servants."

³ Once more they cried out,

"Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever."

⁴ And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" ⁵ And from the throne came a voice saying,

"Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great."

Our response will be to praise the God who has vindicated Himself and His people by judging mystery Babylon and the prostitute. All of the heaven's citizens and servants lift praises and hallelujahs to God. They praise Him for Who He is. And the praise Him for what He has done.

We can praise Him for what He will do. Part of the point of these two songs is to give voice to God's suffering people today. We struggle with this because we do not suffer like that. And so, may we learn this song, the song of the saved for the Sovereign over His final and ultimate victory over Satan's world system.

Reflect and Respond

Are we too entangled with the world's way of thinking and living? What if God brought an end to all that we prize as the American way of life? Have we so moralized our system of economics, government, arts, and so on that it is hard to conceive of God bringing it to an end in judgment?

Let us rejoice in God's ultimate victory. May our lives today be transformed by the glories of that soon coming day.