

The Fall of Babylon

📖 Revelation 17-18

👤 Pastor Jeremy Thomas

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🌐 fbgbible.org

📍 Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin Street

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

(830) 997-8834

Last time we introduced the seventh bowl in Rev 16:17-21. The seventh bowl is poured out very near the end of the 70th week while the kings of the earth are making their way to the place called Har-Mageddon for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. In 16:17 the bowl is poured out on the air and the voice of God comes out of the temple saying, "It is done." The judgments upon the kingdoms of this world are complete in the seventh bowl and the kingdom of God is about to come. When it was poured out 16:18 tells us there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder in heaven, coming from the throne, and on earth a great earthquake. The earthquake is totally unparalleled, as the text tells us, "such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth." It had six results. First, in 16:19 the great city was split into three parts. This is the city of Jerusalem. Second, the cities of the nation's fell. These are the cities of the Gentiles. They will be leveled. Third, Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. The fierce wrath of God upon Babylon is described in detail in Rev 17 and 18. It will happen under the seventh bowl as a prelude to the gathering at Har-Mageddon for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. Fourth, in 16:20, every island fled away. The word fled away is the same word used in Rev 20:11 when the present heavens and earth fled away. So there will no longer be any islands. Fifth, and the mountains were not found. The earth will be flattened in preparation for the new topography in the millennial kingdom when the King reigns from the uplifted plateau upon which Jerusalem and the Temple and the land of Israel will be. And sixth, in 16:21, huge hailstones about 100 pounds each will fall upon the men who worship the beast and have taken his mark. The seventh bowl is described as an extremely severe plague or blow upon the kingdom of the beast.

Now in Rev 17 and 18 a detailed excursus is given on Babylon, in much the same way that we have seen patterned earlier in Revelation. For example, Revelation 6 gave a chronology of the seals and then Revelation 7 gave us an aside on the commissioning of the 144,000 and the results of their ministry. Then you have the trumpets in Rev 8-9 and then an aside on the two witnesses in Rev 11 and the strategy of the counterfeit Trinity in Rev 12 and 13. And now with Rev 15-16 outlining the bowls, we have an excursus on Babylon. We already discussed how this city was mentioned as early as Rev 14:8 when an angel flew in earth's atmosphere and warned the world, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the

passion of her fornication." And then, of course, again in Rev 16:19, "Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath." Let's just say, God has it out for Babylon because Babylon is the source of corruption. However, people disagree as to exactly what Babylon is. The idealists only understand one thing in Revelation, and that is that God wins. They argue that Babylon is symbolic for the world system that is opposed to God, and that what we have in Rev 17-18 is an indication that God will win the battle over the world system. The preterists claim that Babylon is a city, but that it is a code name for the city of Jerusalem. They argue that Rev 17-18 is a description of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70 by the Romans. The historicists claim that Babylon is a city, but that it is a code name for the city of Rome. They argue that Rev 17-18 describe the destruction of Rome in AD476 by the Visigoths and northern Germanic tribes. Others claim there are two Babylon's and that Rev 17 is describing a religious Babylon while Rev 18 is describing a commercial Babylon. The eclectics combine two or more of these views, probably the most prevalent is a long description of how the mother-child cult began at Babel and was passed down through Egypt and Greece and Rome and eventually Christianized by Constantine in the Roman Catholic Church. So what is described here is the destruction of the Roman Catholic Church. One problem with all this is that Babylon means the city of Babylon every other time it's used in Scripture and Rev 17:18 even says it is a city here and there are prophecies in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Zechariah that have not been fulfilled. Therefore, we will approach this chapter as if Babylon is Babylon, an actual city that will be rebuilt in the future, right on its present ruins, on the banks of the Euphrates River.

When this approach is taken we learn some things about the world and cities. First, cities are corrupt and extremely corrupting. Even most unbelievers in the world know this. They even made a movie about it, called Batman, and the city that was corrupting was Gotham City. The evil just spread until all that could be done was just destroy the city, at least, that's what the evil guys thought. But the philosophy behind the movie is that the right ruler at the right time would come along and salvage the city. In other words, Batman is actually a Messiah, appearing to be good in every facet, but actually prolonging evil, and setting up the world to accept the anti-Messiah as the one who looks like he will save the world. In any case, it's interesting that cities become cesspools of evil. Second, every city has its own aura, its own persona, Rome is Rome, Moscow is Moscow, Dallas is Dallas, LA is LA, and so forth and so on. We should really take note of that, because it's indicative of something. Something is operative behind the scene of every city. Third, cities actually vie for power among one another, it's seen most obviously in sports, but it's also seen in city municipalities, building projects and in every aspect of cities, almost as if cities are living forces competing with one another. There is a reason for all of this. Fourth, the reason is stated in chapter 18, demons. Demons are behind these cities at work in the sons of disobedience. Most people don't take Eph 2:1-2 seriously enough. Observe how pervasive Satan and the work of demons are in the lives of unbelievers. "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ²in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." I hope you take that seriously. Every step of an unbeliever's life is taken

according to the prince of the power of the air. They are fulfilling his will. And when they combine in large numbers in cities the whole city becomes extremely corrupt and corrupting. Fifth, Christians often forget that these two chapters immediately precede Christ's coming in His kingdom. What happens to the demons when He comes? He locks them away for the thousand years. Why does He do that? So they won't be able to interfere with man and cities in the kingdom. The world is going to be a much different place in the kingdom. So what we see in Rev 17-18 is not just a judgment on men and a city and a religion and an economy, but a judgment on demonic powers that animate and work in and through men and cities and religions and economies.

One of my hopes with this lesson, is that you will walk away looking at cities and the world as very different places from what you might have thought before. The lesson is not, don't go to cities. We are to be in the world, just not become of the world. But the lesson is to know what you are looking at when you see the allure of the city. The city is tempting, the city is somewhere you can get lost, and yet the city is full of wickedness. The Bible really has it out for cities from Babel onward.

Let us look at wickedness in 17:1, **Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality.** When you read that word **immorality** in this chapter, the Greek word behind that is *πορνεία* or *πορνεύω* and refers to "fornication." The word **harlot** also comes from the same root, *πορνη*. All the words refer to "fornication." Fornication is a very broad word referring to all kinds of sexual sins, but metaphorically stands for all kinds of spiritual idolatry. Therefore, John was shown the judgment of the great spiritual idolater. It's feminine, so the great spiritual idolater is a woman. She is sitting **on many waters**. We don't have to guess the meaning of the **waters** because verse 15 tells us "The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues." Since the great spiritual idolater is sitting on the people of the earth, it means she has control or influence over them.

In verse 2 **the kings of the earth committed** spiritual idolatry with her, **and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her** spiritual idolatry. Spiritual idolatry is intoxicating to all who partake of it. It brings them under its controlling influence. Why? Because it is worship of beings that are not God. It is the worship of demons. And when they are worshipped the worshipper comes under the controlling influence of the demons. And here **the kings of the earth** fornicated with her, they practiced spiritual idolatry, they worshipped demons, and so did those **who dwell on the earth**, they are the earthdwellers, those who worshipped the anti-Christ and took his mark, and so they too came under the controlling influence of demons. Verses 1-2 are the judgment of this spiritual idolatry that the angel told John he was now going to show him.

In 17:3 here is what he was taken to see, **And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns.** Now the **beast** we already know. He is the anti-Christ. This exact description as a **beast, full of blasphemous names,**

having seven heads and ten horns is found in Rev 13:1, with the exception that here we are told that he was **scarlet** in color. The **blasphemous names** indicate he will claim to be God. The **seven heads** refer to seven consecutive kingdoms including Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, ancient Rome and future Rome, each of which had an anti-Christ that ruled in them and tried to destroy the Jewish people. So the anti-Christ is the scarlet beast but he is also the seventh head, because he is the ruler and incarnation of future Rome. The **ten horns** are ten contemporary kings that will reign during the 70th week. The anti-Christ is not one of them, Daniel says he is an eleventh. So this gets complicated, but it's actually clear when you study it out.

But who is the **woman**? We don't have to guess because 17:18 tells us, "The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth." So the **woman** is the great city, and this great city is Babylon. She is called a city five more times in chapter 18. 18:21 is indicative. "Then a strong 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 not be found any longer. ²²"And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer; ²³and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the 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 the earth." The description of the activity in the city indicate that it is a literal city that will be totally destroyed. The **woman** John saw represents this city that is also spiritual idolatry, because it is the source of spiritual idolatry.

So what John saw in 17:3 was a **woman** sitting upon the **scarlet beast**. What does this mean? It means two things. It's like the relationship of a horse to its rider. The horse carries the rider and the rider controls the horse, unless the horse bucks, which is what will happen here. The city of Babylon, which is the center of spiritual idolatry, will control the anti-Christ, but he will carry and support the city until such time as he sees fit to buck it off and move his capital city to Jerusalem, his hope at the battle of Har-Magedon.

In 17:4-5 we are told more about the **woman**, more about Babylon and spiritual idolatry. **The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality.** The city will be extremely wealthy. Where this wealth comes from I don't know. It could come from the Arab Gulf which has 65% of the world's proven oil reserves, or it could come from money taken by the anti-Christ in his military conquests. Either way, the city will be immensely wealthy, beyond anything the world has ever seen, a golden metropolis with all the allures of the greatest city ever in the history of the world, but also **full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality.** The stark contrast is meant to shock us; a **gold cup**, but within it **abominations and unclean things.** **Abominations** are detestable deeds, things that arouse the wrath of God. The chief ones

mentioned in Scripture are idolatry, sexual fornication and sacrifice. These always go together and are connected to demons. They will take place en masse in Babylon.

In 17:5 the woman had **on her forehead a name written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."** The word **mystery** signifies that this is something previously unrevealed, now revealed. What is now being revealed for the first time is the **name** of the woman. "A name in Scripture represents everything about the person who bears it...."¹ The name of this woman is **"BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."** By stating that part of her name as **BABYLON THE GREAT** we know that the woman represents the city of Babylon. By **THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS** we know that Babylon is the source of all spiritual idolatry on the future planet, not just Roman Catholicism or Eastern Mysticism, but all false religion. By **THE MOTHER OF...ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH**, we know that future Babylon is also the source of all detestable deeds that arouse God's wrath. So her spiritual idolatry that she spreads and the detestable deeds connected with that spiritual idolatry are what is intended. Babylon will be the source or fountainhead of all of false religion and detestable deeds in the last days.

In 17:6 John **saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus.** Babylon will be an execution center. There will be mass executions of tribulation saints in the city. When John saw it he says, **I wondered greatly.** The Greek says "And I wondered when I saw her a great wonder." John was astonished or perhaps disturbed, The word can mean disturbed. In 17:7 the **angel said to him, "Why do you wonder? Or why are you astonished or disturbed? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.** So she sits on the beast and the beast carries her.

And now more about the **beast. The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss, and go to destruction.** The **was, is not and is about to** come up is a description of the first and second careers of the anti-Christ. Remember, the first career of the beast is described as the beast out of the earth, that is his natural career during the first half of the 70th week, described as **the beast that you saw was.** Then he is described as **is not**, which is his death wound. And then he is described as **about to come up out of the abyss.** This is his supernatural career, when Satan restores him to be the center of world worship at the midpoint for the second half.

So let me explain the story up to this point. Babylon will be rebuilt, my guess is after the rapture. It will become the spiritual center of the world. The anti-Christ in his early years will support this city and use it to rise to power. When it is exposed by tribulation saints the executions will begin in this city. The results are the martyrs seen

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Re 17:5.

under the fifth seal. At the midpoint the anti-Christ will receive a death wound, be restored by Satan and go off to make war with the two witnesses, killing them. Verse 8 picks up with the story saying that **those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.** In other words, the anti-Christ will become the central object of worship at the midpoint, and those who worship him, of course, will receive the mark and benefit from the new economic system that he and the false prophet will implement. The spiritual center of Babylon will continue to thrive as a great metropolis deep into the second half of the tribulation.

In 17:9 we are told, **Here is the mind which has wisdom.** In other words, this is difficult. **The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction. The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour.** Easy, right? Sure, it really is, if you've stayed up to speed from Daniel. **The seven heads are seven mountains.** And who are the **seven heads** which are **seven mountains? They are seven kings.** These are consecutive kings through history. But **kings** represent kingdoms or are identified with their kingdoms. So John says, **five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come.** This is viewed from the standpoint of John's day. Who are the **five** who **have fallen?** Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece. What is the **one** that **is?** Ancient Rome. It ruled when John saw the vision. What is the **other** that **has not yet come?** Future Rome. And who is the one who rules Future Rome? The anti-Christ. So John says, **and when he comes, he must remain a little while.** So the anti-Christ is the seventh **head** and seventh **mountain.** But that's not all, he is the seventh as he was in his natural career, but when he receives the death wound and is restored we are told he **is himself also an eighth,** which is in his supernatural career. So he is the seventh in his natural career, and he is the **eighth** in his supernatural career. But we are told **he goes to destruction.** He won't be victorious. He will not establish his kingdom over the face of the whole earth. He will go down in flames. And lastly there are **the ten horns which John saw** and these **are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom,** that's because they were future to John's day, and are contemporaneous with the anti-Christ. The angel says, **they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour.** So there are your ten and the eleventh from the book of Daniel. All the pieces are there. It's difficult, but it just takes time and careful study and you'll see it. Seven kingdoms throughout history that have hated Israel, Satan behind them all, coming to a head in a kingdom ruled by one man who has two careers, the anti-Christ, first as a natural ruler, making him the seventh, and second as a supernatural ruler indwelt by Satan, making him an eighth, and with him ten kings ruling with him for one hour, making him also an eleventh.

Now what's more difficult is to catch that in verse 9 **the woman sits** upon all seven of these king/kingdoms, but she does not sit upon the eighth or upon **the ten** who receive power with him for one hour. And so, I think what this means is that in the first half of the Tribulation, the woman will control the anti-Christ and the anti-Christ will

support her, but when the anti-Christ receives the death wound and is restored at the midpoint, he will no longer be controlled by Babylon and support her. He will become immensely powerful and will buck her off. And this is indicated clearly by verse 16, when **the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire.** The anti-Christ and the ten kings have no more use for Babylon. They will hate her and will destroy Babylon.

And what is happening is Satan's kingdom is crumbling. You see in verse 13 that **These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast.** The ten kings relinquish their power temporarily so that all **power and authority** will be in one man, the anti-Christ, who upon his conquest promises to give them back their power. So they put him in command of all their armies, the armies of all nations that come up on the plain of Har-Magedon. But verse 14, **These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful.** That's a foretaste of Christ's victory at Har-Magedon in chapter 19. There are two things going on here. The destruction of Babylon will take place first, as the ten kings and the anti-Christ turn against her and destroy her. Then he will make his move to Har-Magedon to destroy all the Jews and move the center of his kingdom to Jerusalem. But he will be destroyed. This is their purpose, as verse 13 says, the ten have one purpose or mind, which is to rule the world with the anti-Christ, so they will forfeit their power temporarily in hopes that at Har-Magedon, he will successfully lead the campaign to destroy the Jewish people and establish the kingdom at the new Jerusalem. But verse 17 says that **God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled.** So truly it is God's purpose that he has put in their hearts. What does Proverbs 21:1 say? "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes." God is in control, and these men are doing what they want to do, but it is exactly what God wants them to do. He wants them to destroy Babylon and He wants them to come up against Him in the land of Israel, because this is how the **words of God will be fulfilled.**

All chapter 18 does is describe the actual destruction of Babylon as the precursor to Armageddon in chapter 19. So let's walk through Babylon's destruction. **"After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. ²And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird."** See, the city was controlled by **demons.** They had taken up residence there and spawned idolatry, sexual deviance and sacrifice as part of demon worship. Verse 3, **"For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality."** Lots of money is going to go to this city, it will be the Wall Street of Wall Streets. Fortunes will be made overnight. Verse 4, **I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; ⁵for her sins**

have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.” Believers will need to leave the city before its’ destruction. The language is that of Lot being told to leave Sodom and Gomorrah. It was hard for him to leave because the sin was so seductive. Verse 6, **“Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her.”** ⁷**“To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, ‘I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning.’** ⁸**“For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.”** ⁹**“And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, ¹⁰standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’”** ¹¹**“And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more— ¹²cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, ¹³and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives. ¹⁴“The fruit you long for has gone from you, and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you and men will no longer find them. ¹⁵“The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, ¹⁶saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls; ¹⁷for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!’ And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance, ¹⁸and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, ‘What city is like the great city?’” ¹⁹**“And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!’ ²⁰“Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.” ²¹Then a strong 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 not be found any longer. ²²“And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer; ²³and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the 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 the earth.”** And so comes the end of the city of Babylon, and all that will remain will be the city of Jerusalem, on the brink of destruction, but chapter 19 describes its rescue in the final battle that will take place. At this time Babylon will be**

destroyed and it will never raise from its ruins. For the entire 1,000 years Babylon will burn with fire and be uninhabited as an object lesson to all millennial inhabitants, that the crime of sin does not pay, and that there is a wealth to righteousness unparalleled.