

The Church of the Servant King

www.cotsk.org

PROPHECY SERIES

(Proph21T_Revelation_chp18_The Destruction of Babylon – The Economic Angle)

INTRODUCTION

The Scriptural and Historical Roots of “Babylon”

In Revelation 17, we are introduced to a harlot, a woman identified as “Babylon the Great.” The name was the name of a city (Rev 17:18), not the name of a woman per se. However, this name denotes even more than the name of a tangible, material city. It denotes the vast system of religious idolatry that will be connected with it.

As we observed from our examination of Genesis 10:8-12 and 11:1-9, Babylon is the mother or fountainhead of all the systems of idolatry which have existed in the earth since the Noaic Flood, i.e. the post-diluvian world. Satan wasted no time after the Flood to once again corrupt the human race with his lie after having just failed in his pre-Flood attempt, an attempt that reached a crescendo in “Operation Superhuman” – the corruption of the human race via demonic copulation (Gen 6) that ended with the destruction of these ancient forerunners of mythological lore at the Flood. The Tower of Babel in ancient Babylon combined with the religious system of its prominent founder/leader, Nimrod, represented Satan’s introduction of a counterfeit religious system designed to exalt man to god-like status on the basis of his own works.

So, Babylon has roots as a city founded in rebellion against God. Satan’s human agents of antiquity were men such as Nimrod. His human agents of the Tribulation, the last days of the Age of Israel will be the Antichrist and other “kings” (Rev 17:10) who align with his purpose (wittingly or unwittingly). In our passage (Rev 17 & 18), Babylon corresponds to the city and the system that is anti-Christ in orientation and nature.

Unfulfilled Prophecies Related to Babylon’s Destruction

We have examined several of the passages in Jeremiah 50-51, two chapters in which Jeremiah, a 7th and 6th Century B.C. prophet foretells the future judgment and fall of Babylon – the capital city of the Babylonian Empire that took Judah into captivity under the 5th Cycle of Discipline (Lev 26:27ff) beginning with the 1st deportation in 605 B.C. However, as we noted, the fall of the ancient capital city of Babylon to the Medo-Persian Empire did not fulfill all of the prophecies contained in Jeremiah 50-51. She was not completely and utterly destroyed by fire. All the stones of the city were not destroyed.

Some students of prophecy classify predictions such as found in Jeremiah 50-51 as belonging to some type of destruction genre; accordingly, these students of prophecy indicate that Jeremiah 50-51 should not be interpreted literally. However, the fact that we find several passages in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah also containing yet unfulfilled prophecies Babylon is compelling evidence to support the literal nature of these references to a future city Babylon and its destruction – especially when combined with the fact that two chapters in Revelation are devoted to the subject of the destruction of this city in the future Tribulation period.

Isaiah 13:19-22

And Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, the glory of the Chaldeans’ pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. 20 It will never be inhabited or lived in from generation to generation; nor will the Arab pitch his tent there, nor

The Church of the Servant King

www.cotsk.org

will shepherds make their flocks lie down there. 21 But desert creatures will lie down there, and their houses will be full of owls, ostriches also will live there, and shaggy goats will frolic there. 22 And hyenas will howl in their fortified towers and jackals in their luxurious palaces. Her fateful time also will soon come and her days will not be prolonged.

Isaiah 47:8-9

Now, then, hear this, you sensual one, who dwells securely, who says in your heart, I am, and there is no one besides me. I shall not sit as a widow, nor shall I know loss of children. 9 but these two things shall come on you suddenly in one day: loss of children and widowhood. They shall come on you in full measure in spite of your many sorceries, in spite of the great power of your spells.

Zechariah 5:5-11

Then the angel who was speaking with me went out, and said to me, "Lift up now your eyes, and see what this is, going forth." 6 And I said, "What is it?" And he said, "This is the ephah going forth." Again he said, "This is their appearance in all the land 7 (and behold, a lead cover was lifted up); and this is a woman sitting inside the ephah." 8 Then he said, "This is Wickedness!" And he threw her down into the middle of the ephah and cast the lead weight on its opening. 9 Then I lifted up my eyes and looked, and there two women were coming out with the wind in their wings; and they had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heavens. 10 And I said to the angel who was speaking with me, "Where are they taking the ephah?" 11 Then he said to me, "To build a temple for her in the land of Shinar; and when it is prepared, she will be set there on her own pedestal."

The Zechariah reference is a bit more obscure, so an explanation is in order. An ephah was a basket or container that held about a half-bushel or about five gallons. The angel lifted up the lead cover on top of the basket and revealed a woman sitting inside. A lead cover would be heavier than the customary stone cover and would guarantee that what was inside would not get out. The ephah and the woman inside represented wickedness and Zechariah is being provided a vision of how wickedness will eventually cover the earth.

In Zechariah's vision, either the ephah was oversized or the woman was a miniature. The angel explained that the woman represented wickedness. He picked her up, threw her down into the middle of the basket, and shut the lead cover over her (cf. 2 Thess 2:6-8). Obviously some conflict was involved since wickedness does not want to be restricted.

The prophet next saw two other women flying through the air with stork wings. Storks are strong, motherly birds capable of carrying loads a long distance in flight. The word "stork" in Hebrew means "faithful one."

These women would faithfully carry the ephah and its contents to God's appointed destination – the land of Shinar (ancient Babylon). They lifted up the basket into the air flying off from earth to heaven with the divine assistance of the wind (Spirit, Heb. *ruah*). These two women with storks' wings were God's agents carrying out His will. At the appointed time the woman Wickedness would set atop a pedestal as an object of worship, an idol (cf. our passage – Rev. 17-18).

DO REVELATION 17 & 18 DESCRIBE TWO DIFFERENT BABYLONS?

Due to the distinctions in the descriptions of Babylon in the two chapters, some have concluded that the two chapters reference two different Babylons – one religious Babylon

(frequently associated with the city of Rome) and one commercial Babylon (interpreted to refer to various cities). Some of the common arguments for the future existence of two different entities as well as a rebuttal to those arguments follows.¹

Argument #1 – There are Different Settings for the Two Chapters

This argument centers upon the introductory phrase “after these things.” Proponents for a distinction of entities in the two chapters argue that this phrase indicates that there is a chronological gap in time denoted by this phrase – thus, two different destructions of two different cities. However, this phrase is used here as in many other passages in Revelation to indicate the sequence in which the Revelation was unveiled to John. (For instance, see Rev 4:1a, 7:1, 9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1).

Argument #2 – There are Seemingly Different Destroyers Mentioned

The Babylon of chapter 17 is indicated as being destroyed by kings, man, whereas the Babylon of chapter 18 is destroyed by fire, God (17:12 cf. 18:8). However, this fails to observe that in 17:16, we see the Babylon of chapter 17 destroyed by fire as well. In 17:17, we are informed that the destruction of Babylon by these “10 kings” who constitute the “beast” is all a part of God’s sovereign will. Thus, both the Babylon of chapters 17 & 18 are destroyed by similar agents used by God to accomplish His purposes.

Argument #3 – There are Different Responses to Babylon’s Destruction

In 17:16, the kings are said to destroy the harlot woman – the city Babylon. However, the kings of 18:9 mourn and lament the destruction of Babylon. The reconciliation of this apparent distinction lies in the fact that two separate sets of kings are involved. In chapter 17, it is the 10 kings that constitute the coalition known as the “beast.” In chapter 18, the reference is to the “kings of the earth” who have profited from commerce with her.

Argument #4 – There is a Different Character Ascribed to Babylon in Chapters 17 & 18

Chapter 17 has many references to religious idolatry and exploitation. Chapter 18 has many references to commercial exploitation. In reality, the two chapters are describing the destruction of the same city that is the center of religious and commercial exploitation of the earth during the Tribulation.

Chapters 17 and 18 are an interlude in the Revelation narrative. The destruction of Babylon the Great is predicted in 14:8 and 16:19. Heaven is pictured as rejoicing over the fall of Babylon in 19:1-3. The interpretation of chapters 17 & 18 to be referring to the same city’s destruction fits with the greater flow of the narrative in Revelation.

The Fall of Babylon the Great (Revelation 18:1-8)

After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. 2 And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, “FALLEN, FALLEN IS BABYLON THE GREAT! AND SHE HAS BECOME A DWELLING PLACE OF DEMONS AND A PRISON OF EVERY UNCLEAN SPIRIT, AND A PRISON OF EVERY UNCLEAN AND HATEFUL BIRD. 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.” 4 And I heard

¹ See Charles H. Dyer, “The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17-18 – Part 1” in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144 (July-September, 1987): 306-310.

another voice from heaven, saying "COME OUT OF HER, MY PEOPLE, THAT YOU MAY NOT PARTICIPATE IN HER SINS AND THAT YOU MAY NOT RECEIVE OF HER PLAGUES; 5 FOR HER SINS HAVE PILED UP AS HIGH AS HEAVEN, AND GOD HAS REMEMBERED HER INIQUITIES. 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.

In these verses, we observe that there is another angel of the same kind as in 17:1 (i.e., one who descends from heaven to fulfill a special mission). The fact that this angel is described as having great glory that illuminated the earth probably suggests that he had just come from God's presence similar to Moses' experience when he spent forty days and nights in God's presence (Exod. 34:29-35).

The repetition of the word "Fallen" probably indicates that God guaranteed this judgment and that it will happen quickly. This is another proleptic announcement in which the angel described a future action as already having happened.

The description of Babylon in this verse is what it will be after God judges it. Ancient Babylon fell to Cyrus the Persian in 539 B.C., but as we have seen, that fall did not fulfill Old Testament prophecies about Babylon completely. Here, Babylon will become utterly desolate.

Apparently, it is the city that will be the prison of demons, a place where they are safe but kept against their wills. A prison (or haunt) for unclean birds is a figure of desolation (cf. Isa. 34:11, 13; Jer. 50:39).

Here we find evidence that Babylon will be the headquarters of spiritism and demonic practices and influences that is condemned elsewhere in Revelation (e.g. 9:20; 16:2, 14).

He called God's people to leave a city (cf. Jer. 50:8; 51:6-9, 45), but beyond that to forsake the enticements of the idolatry, self-sufficiency, love of luxury, and violence that the city symbolizes. The people addressed are faithful believers living in the Tribulation. Unless they separate from her sins, they will be hurt by the judgment coming on her, but if they do separate, they will enjoy protection (cf. 12:14; Matt. 24:16). They should not have the attitude of Lot's wife who continued to desire to return to the city that God destroyed (cf. Gen. 19:26; Luke 17:32).

The angel further called on God's enemies whom He will use to pay Babylon back fully for its wicked deeds, pride, and self-indulgent conduct. This is a call for God's application of the *lex talionis*, the law of retaliation (cf. Matt. 7:2; Gal. 6:7-8). To pay back double is a way of saying to pay back fully. Babylon had persecuted and murdered the saints (v. 24; 19:2). The cup she used to seduce others will become the instrument of her own punishment (cf. v. 3; 14:10).

Luxurious living provides another reason for Babylon's judgment. Her claims of superiority and self-sufficiency echo those of ancient Babylon (cf. Isa. 47:7-9; Ezek. 27:3; 28:2; Zeph. 2:15).

The "one day" should be interpreted literally (cf. Dan. 5:1, 3-5, 3). It also expresses suddenness, as does the "one hour" in verses 10, 16, and 19. Rebuilt Babylon and the cities that are the centers for this worldwide network of political, commercial activity will evidently burn up in the great earthquake associated with the Seventh Vial Judgment (16:18-19). She will collapse suddenly, not decline gradually. The strength of the Lord God will accomplish this destruction, but He will use earthly agents as He has frequently done (17:16-17).

The World Mourns Babylon's Fall (Revelation 18:9-20)

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, 10 standing 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; 12 cargoes 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 made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, 13 and 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 "And 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, 16 saying, '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; 17 FOR 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, 18 and 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."

World government (i.e. "the kings of the earth") leaders will mourn when they see the collapse of the system that has sustained them and enabled them to live luxuriously. Babylon will fall quickly, in "one hour" (v. 10, cf. v. 19; Jer. 51:8; Ezek. 27). These kings mourn because they have lost their power suddenly.

They sorrow over the loss of customers and profits that its destruction causes. However the city itself is a treasure that they also regret losing, largely because of the wealth that is hoarded there (cf. Ezek. 27:25-31).

They bemoan the loss of customers, but they previously denied the right to buy and sell to anyone who did not have the mark of the beast (13:17).

The variety of the goods John listed suggests how extensive trade will be at this time in history. The market is the world. Most of the items listed were luxuries in John's day (cf. Isa. 23; Ezek. 16:9-13; 27:12-24).

The speaker is evidently the angel (v. 4; cf. 12:12). Saints are all believers. Apostles (ones who are sent) who died as martyrs is probably a reference to the 144,000 Jewish evangelists of chapter 7. The similar exhortation in 12:12 suggests that all these believers are now in heaven.

The Finality of Babylon's Fall (Revelation 18:21-24)

21 And a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "THUS 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 THE SOUND OF A MILL WILL NOT BE HEARD IN YOU ANY LONGER; 23 AND 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 angel gave three reasons for this devastation, two in verse 23 and one in verse 24. First, men whom the world regards as great have enriched themselves and lifted themselves up in pride because of Babylon's influence. Second, as a result of the first reason Babylon has seduced all nations. She deceived all the nations into thinking that joy, security, honor, and meaning in life come through the accumulation of material wealth. She used sorcery to seduce the nations into following her.

The third reason for Babylon's judgment is that she slew the saints (cf. Jer. 51:35, 36, 49). The angel stated this reason as a fact rather than as an accusation.

The Babylon John describes in these chapters is a center for a system that exercises control over the people of the earth through both an ecumenical type religion and commerce / financial extortion used to accumulate wealth.

Elements of this system have always been manifest in human history in some form; however, it will exist in a super-form during the Tribulation.