

## THE SYSTEM AND THE CITY OF BABYLON THE GREAT

It appears that Revelation speaks of Babylon in two separate aspects:

**Chapter 17** describes the ancient idolatrous religious **system** that will be destroyed by human agency.

**Chapter 18** describes this idolatrous religious **system** in its final form as an end-times idolatrous commercial **city/empire** that is to be destroyed by God.

### IDOLATROUS SYSTEM

This is described under the figure of a Woman, the Harlot—She has existed since the time of Nimrod.

“A woman sitting upon a scarlet-coloured wild beast...upon her forehead was written a name, **A mystery**: ‘Babylon the Great, *mother of the harlots*’” (Rev. 17:3).

*Pagan Rome and later Papal Rome are among the many daughter systems.*

### THE DATA IS DRAWN FROM JEREMIAH AND ISAIAH

#### *BABYLON SITS ON MANY WATERS*

- ❖ “...**The judgment** on the Great Harlot who **sits on many waters**” (Rev. 17:1).
- ❖ “The waters that you saw, where the harlot is sitting, mean peoples... and nations...” (Rev. 17:15).
- ❖ “A woman residing on abounding waters, abundant in treasures, your end has come” (Jer. 51:13).

#### *SHE MAKES EARTH DRUNK FROM A GOLDEN CUP*

- ❖ “Those who inhabit the earth were **made drunk** with the wine of her fornication ... The woman...had in her hand **a golden cup** that was full of disgusting things” (Rev. 17:2, 4).
- ❖ “Babylon was a golden cup in Yahweh’s hand, she made the whole world drunk” (Jer. 51:7 *NJB*).

#### *SHE IS DESTROYED SLOWLY*

- ❖ “And *the ten horns*...and the wild beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her devastated and naked, and **will eat up her fleshly parts** and will completely **burn her with fire** ... The woman whom you saw means the great city that has **a kingdom over the kings of the earth**”  
(Rev. 17:16, 18).
- ❖ “The wall of Babylon...will be **set aflame with fire**” (Jer. 51:58).
- ❖ “She has fallen! Babylon the Great has fallen” (Rev. 14:8).

*This occurs before the beast is worshipped and the mark is forced on everyone (14:9).*

- ❖ “O daughter of the Chaldeans...**Mistress of Kingdoms**” (Isa. 47:5).

**The Babylonian System** [*The Woman*] is destroyed by human agency of the **10 horns**. These same 10 horns (kings of the earth in Revelation 18:9 and 19:19) are seen later to bewail the loss of the Idolatrous City showing that its destruction occurs later than that of the Idolatrous System. The “*eating up her fleshly parts*” means that the 10 horns enrich themselves from her. There is a process of destruction. This is not stated to happen **in one day** or **in one hour** as is the case with the Idolatrous City. This begins to occur before the beast is worshipped and the mark is forced on everyone (14:8, 9). Hence this occurs either immediately before or *early on in the Great Tribulation*.

COMMENTARY ON THE HIGHLY SYMBOLIC  
REVELATION 17

17:1: **The mystery harlot Babylon the Great** = the system of false religion which is essentially commercial in spirit. It originated with Nimrod in Babel. It is not called an adulteress therefore it never belonged to Yahweh.

17:3: **Scarlet Beast** = Beast's Empire *in its final phase*.  
7 heads, 10 horns      No diadems.      It exists in John's time.

The heads come first in time then the uncrowned horns. Daniel's 4<sup>th</sup> Beast arrives with one head and 10 horns and the 11<sup>th</sup> grows from among them **after** the Beast has left the sea (Dan. 7:8) and is therefore not from the Mediterranean as are the 10 horns. It is scarlet after slaughtering the saints.

17:5: **The mother of harlots** = Nimrod's Ancient Babylon. The daughter harlots are those with the doctrines of Babylon i.e. all false religion.

17:6: The Woman was drunk with **the blood of the holy ones** (*O.T times*) and of the witnesses of Jesus.

17:7: **The beast that carries her** = Beast's Empire *in its final phase*.  
7 heads, 10 horns      No diadems.      It exists in John's time.

17:8: **The Beast** = antichrist: the same as comes out of the abyss (11:7).  
Also 17:11 "the beast which was and is not is **himself** an 8<sup>th</sup> king."  
"was" = during 1st half of 70<sup>th</sup> week ... "is not" = momentarily.  
"is about to come out of the abyss" = reigns 3½ years then goes into destruction.

17:9: **Seven heads are 7 mountains** = Governmental power (Focus) connection to Babylon indicating that the Woman's seat of paganism is at Rome in John's day but will eventually return to Babylon.

17:10: **Seven Heads are 7 kings** = the Empire corporate through the ages.  
**Individual kings from a future perspective.** See STUDY 9: NOTES ON DANIEL  
"5 have fallen" = Four Persian Kings and Alexander the Great.  
"One is" = The 1<sup>st</sup> King of the North appears in the end-time (Dan. 11:6-19).  
"The other has not yet come...he must remain for a little while" = The 2<sup>nd</sup> King of the North (Dan. 11:20) who is shattered *within a few days*.

17:11: **The 8<sup>th</sup> King**...**"He is of the 7"** = The 3<sup>rd</sup> King of the North—the Antichrist from Greco-Syria (Dan. 11:21-45).

Antichrist [*the little horn*] comes from one of the Greek four horns (Dan. 8:9). "*The other that is yet to come*" is either Syria or Asia Minor because Daniel 8:9 shows that the little horn "*grew exceedingly great toward the south (Egypt), toward the east (Persia), and toward the beautiful land (Israel).*" The north must refer to either Syria or Asia Minor. It is clinched by the fact that in 167 B.C **Syrian** Antiochus Epiphanes became a type of the Little horn.

"**He is of the 7**" i.e. of the last 2 because it does not say he is one of the five. He originates from Greco-Syria as does the little horn of Daniel 8:9. He so perfectly represents the fourth beast that he may be regarded as its embodiment.

17:12: **10 kings who have not yet received a kingdom but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour** = 42 months, a short period compared to the ages of Satan's kingdom.

17:15: “**The waters** that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are **peoples** and multitudes and nations and languages.” *Also see Isa. 17:12.*

= Symbolic of Satan's domain. *This might include the rivers and springs of water.*

17:16: **The 10 horns** = as on the Fourth Beast of Daniel 7:7 and Revelation 13: which comes out of the Mediterranean. These are the feet and toes of iron/clay that are the end-time development from the iron legs of the Islamic Empire. **The Arab** (Possibly Islamic) **confederacy described in Psalm 83:2-9**: Edom, Ishmael, Moab, Hagarenes (Syria), Gebal, Ammon, Amalek, Philistia, Tyre, Assyria. These come from the fourth kingdom—the fierce beast.

17:18: **The woman is the great city** = The final false religious system.

It makes its final appearance in the form of a literal city with its dominating religion of worship of antichrist's image based on Islam/commercialism. The city becomes the greatest commercial centre. It is linked with “Wickedness” in the ephah (symbolic of commercialism) described in Zechariah 5.

#### WHY BABYLON IS DIFFERENT IN REVELATION 18

- A different and superior angel comes from heaven to deliver this message “*After these (mystery Babylon) things.*”
- This is **a city** which is suddenly destroyed “*in one day*” (verse 8). But Mystery Babylon is left naked and her flesh eaten i.e. it is a process.
- The city's site remains and is inhabited by demons etc—unlike Mystery Babylon.
- It is called *the great city* 5 times which is similar to Nebuchadnezzar's: “Is this not great Babylon which I have built.”
- The many details of life give a picture of literal city life.
- Destruction of the city comes at the very end, not early in the Great tribulation.
- The city is not destroyed by the 10 horns (kings) as is Mystery Babylon, but by God.
- These kings bewail the loss of the city.

#### THE FINAL IDOLATROUS CITY/EMPIRE

18:10:

**The great city Babylon** = the literal city as the antichrist's capital.

The background information is found in Isaiah 13, 14, 47, 48 and Jeremiah 50:51 which all apply in “*the day of Yahweh*” (Isa. 13:6, 9) and at the sun, moon and stars event (13:10, 13). Babylon will be the centre of the dominating religion, yet is attacked at the very end apparently by the Medes (Isa. 13:17 and Jer. 51:11, 28). This is the news from the east that disturbs the King of the North. But full destruction is by earthquake (Rev. 16) and therefore by God.

*This is destroyed when the 7th Bowl is poured out:*

“And the Great city split into three parts...and Babylon the Great was remembered in the sight of God, to give her the cup of the wine of the anger of His wrath” (Rev. 16:19).

#### HER HAUGHTY ATTITUDE

- ❖ “For in her heart she keeps saying, ‘I sit a queen, and **I am no widow**, and I shall never see mourning’” (Rev. 18:7).
- ❖ “The one saying in her heart: I am and there is nobody else. I shall not sit as a widow, and I shall not know the loss of children” (Isa. 47:8).

#### A DWELLING PLACE OF DEMONS

- ❖ “She has fallen! Babylon the Great has fallen and she has become a **dwelling place of demons**” (Rev. 18:2).
- ❖ “And goat-shaped demons themselves will go skipping about there” (Isa. 13:21).

#### GET OUT OF HER BECAUSE OF HER SINS

- ❖ “**Get out of** her my people ... For **her sins** have massed together clear up to heaven” (Rev. 18:4, 5).
- ❖ “Get out of the midst of her my people” (Jer. 51:45).
- ❖ “For clear to the heavens her judgement has reached” (Jer. 51:9).

#### VENGEANCE UPON HER

- ❖ “**Render to her** even as she herself rendered” (Rev. 18:6).
- ❖ “Take your vengeance on her just as she has done to you” (Jer. 50:15).

### THE BABYLONIAN CITY/EMPIRE IS DESTROYED BY GOD AFTER THE GREAT TRIBULATION

#### SHE IS GUILTY OF MURDER

- ❖ “In her was found **the blood of prophets** and of holy ones and of all those who have been slaughtered on the earth” (Rev. 18:24).
- ❖ “Not only was Babylon the cause for the slain ones of Israel to fall but also at Babylon the slain ones of all the earth have fallen” (Jer. 51:49).

#### HER DESTRUCTION IS SUDDEN

- ❖ “That is why **in one day** her plagues will come...she will be completely burned with fire” (Rev. 18:8).
- ❖ “To you these two things will come suddenly, in one day: loss of children and widowhood” (Isa. 47:9).
- ❖ “**Suddenly** Babylon has fallen, so that she is broken...” (Jer. 51:8).
- ❖ “Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon...For **in one hour** your judgement has come” (Rev. 18:10).
- ❖ “...for **in one hour** such great wealth has been laid waste!” (Rev. 18:17).
- ❖ “...the great city...**in one hour** she has been devastated” (Rev. 18:19).
- ❖ “Then a strong angel lifted up a great stone like a millstone and hurled it into the sea, saying: thus with **a swift pitch** will Babylon **the great city** be hurled down, she will never be found again” (Rev. 18:21).
- ❖ “This book, you will tie it to a stone, and you must pitch it into the midst of the Euphrates. And you must say, ‘this is how Babylon will sink down and never rise up...’” (Jer. 51:63).

#### HER DESTRUCTION IS TOTAL

- ❖ “No light of a lamp will ever shine in you again, and **no voice of a bridegroom**” (Rev. 18:23).
- ❖ “The exhortations of the tambourines has ceased, the noise of the highly elated ones has discontinued...” (Isa. 24:8).

## THE TEN KINGS MOURN HER DESTRUCTION

- ❖ "...the kings of the earth...will weep and lament over her ... and the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her" (Rev. 18:9, 11).

WHY THE JEREMIAH AND ISAIAH PROPHECIES HAVE  
NOT YET BEEN FULFILLED

In his *Jeremiah* Professor Keil states that:

Finally if any questions be asked regarding the fulfilment of the prophecy against Babylon, we must keep in mind these two points: 1) The prophecy, as is shown both by its title and its contents, is not merely directed against the city of Babylon but also against **the Land** of the Chaldeans. It therefore proclaims generally the devastation and destruction of the **Chaldean kingdom** or the fall of the Babylonian empire; and the capture and destruction of Babylon, the capital, receive special prominence only in so far as the worldwide rule of Babylon fell with the capital, and the supremacy of the Chaldeans over the nations came to an end, 2) in addition to this historical side the prophecy has an **ideal background**, which certainly is never very prominent but nevertheless is more or less to be discovered. Here Babylon as the then mistress of the world is the representative of the God-opposing influences on the earth, which always attempt to oppress and destroy the Kingdom of God. The fulfilment of the historical side of the prophecy began with the capture of Babylon by the united forces of the Medes and Persians under Cyrus and with the dissolution of the Chaldean empire brought about by that event. By this means too the people of Israel were delivered from the Babylonian captivity while Cyrus gave them permission to return to their native land and rebuild the temple ... **But Babylon was not destroyed when thus taken and according to Herodotus** even the walls of the city remained uninjured while according to a notice of Berosus in Josephus, Cyrus appointed Babylon, after Susa and Ecbatana, the third city in the kingdom and the winter residence of the Persian kings. Darius Hystaspes who was obliged to take the city a second time [So it did not fall the first time permanently] in consequence of its revolt in 518 was the first who caused the walls to be lowered in height. These were diminished to 50 ells and the gates were torn away. Xerxes spoiled the city of the golden image of Belus and caused the temple of Belus to be destroyed. Alexander the Great had intended not merely to rebuild the sanctuary of Belus but also to make the city the capital of the empire: but he was prevented from his plan by his early death. The decay of Babylon properly began when Seleucus Nicator built Seleucia on the Tigris only 300 stadia distant. Strabo says (60BC) that even in his time the city was a complete wilderness. This decay was accelerated under the rule of the Parthians so that within a short time only a small space within the walls was inhabited while the rest was used as fields ... John the evangelist has taken the ideal elements of this prophecy into his apocalyptic description of the great city of Babylon (Rev.16) **whose fall is not to begin till the kingdom of God is completed in glory through the return of Our Lord** pp. 320, 321.

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## SUGGESTED READING

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 277-310 George H. Lang

*Babylon in the Last Days*. A presentation by Greg Deuble at the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Theological Conference in Atlanta, Georgia