

CHAPTER 18

"After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury'" (18:1-3).

Are we now able to answer the question, "Who, or what, is Babylon the Great"? That there are two aspects to Babylon the Great--the religious and the political--nearly all conservative commentators agree. Four excerpts shall suffice to make this point.

According to Seiss,

The twice-repeated word describes two separate parts or stages of the fall, answering to the two aspects in which Babylon is contemplated, referring first to Babylon in mystery, as *a system* or spirit of false worship, and second to Babylon as *a city*, in which this system or spirit is finally embodied. . . . The first fall, or the fall of Babylon in mystery, is accomplished through the agency of the Beast in confederation with the ten kings.¹

According to Walvoord,

The destruction of the harlot in chapter 17 is the fall of Babylon in its ecclesiastical or religious sense . . . it probably occurs when the beast assumes the role of God at the beginning of the great tribulation. . . . It seems that chapter 17 deals with the religious aspect and chapter 18 with the political and economic aspects of Babylon.²

According to Frost,

The two Babylons described in the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters, representing the two systems which first fall under God's judgment, do not appear to be the same. . . . "Mystery Babylon" is, in a special sense, Rome (17:9, 18), and it stands first, for the apostasy which characterizes the Roman Catholic Church, and second, for all apostasy, whether Roman, Greek or Protestant Catholic, such as will prevail in the last days of this age. "Great Babylon" is evidently the ancient city which Nebuchadnezzar built and named (Dan. 4:28-30), which, in the record, is set forth as rebuilt and glorified. These cities--Rome and Babylon--will be two centres to which Antichrist will give his kindly favor and from which he will exert his powerful but corrupting influence over the kings and nations of the earth, the one from a religious standpoint and the other from a commercial one (17:1-5; 18:1-3).³

1 Seiss, *Lectures*, pg. 165.

2 Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 259.

3 Frost, *Matthew Twenty-Four and the Revelation*, pp. 258-259.

According to Smith,

We have here the fall of the papal beast,--the fall of popery from being a reigning power, under the fifth vial; not her final destruction under the seventh. . . . In this fall, papal Babylon had exhibited to the world that her realms were but a "habitation of devils, a hold of every foul spirit; and a cage of every unclean and hated bird." The abominations of this system were, to a great degree, exhibited to the world, at the time of the Reformation; and the same thing had ever since been more and more manifest. . . . It is plain then, that after the papal mystery Babylon the great "is fallen, is fallen," as in our text, verse 2 (fallen under the fifth vial) . . . yet in verse 21 of our text a great Babylon is still to fall; to fall under the seventh vial, as a millstone sunk in the ocean. . . . Thus evident it is, that the Babylon in verse 21 of our text is that great beast; and the Babylon which has already fallen, in verse 2 of our text, is fallen popery. In this fall of the system of infidelity and popery, the beast of Rev. xvii. executes his commission upon the filthy papal harlot mounted on his back, who herself had been Mystery, Babylon the Great, so long as she reigned over the kings of the earth. But she fell from that dominant state under a military power, which under a succeeding vial of wrath, the seventh, "eats her flesh, and burns her with fire," and is the means of her and its own destruction.⁴

In regards to its political sense, do the commentators agree on where the city called Babylon the Great, if it has a physical location, is located? That there is a real city seems obvious from the fact that her demise is bewailed by men in every station of life. The answer is no, they do not. From Frost's quote above, we know he thinks it is ancient Babylon rebuilt. Seiss and Walvoord agree:

I conclude, then, that such a great commercial city, different from all that now exist, will yet be, and that it will be old Babylon rebuilt. . . . And when the wisdom, progress, and harlotries of this world come to their final culmination and embodiment in Great Babylon, there is corresponding reason to believe that it will be centralized upon the very spot where it first started, and meet its ultimate doom in the selfsame locality in which it was born.⁵

The destruction of Babylon according to Jeremiah 51:8 was to be sudden. . . . As far as the physical city of Babylon was concerned, this was not true of ancient Babylon as it continued for many years after its political downfall. Further, it is pointed out that the prophecy of Isaiah 13:6, 9-11 . . . indicates that the destruction of Babylon would be in the day of the Lord. . . . It is simpler to postulate a rebuilt Babylon as fulfilling literally the Old Testament prophecies as well as that embodied in this chapter."⁶

Sauer leans to the same view:

4 Smith, *Key*, pp. 337-340.

5 Seiss, *Lectures*, pg. 157.

6 Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 262-263.

World kingdoms have only come fully into the prophetic vision when they have united themselves with Babylon in the Middle East and have regarded it as their centre. Thus Nebuchadnezzar, the sovereign of the first world empire of prophecy, had Babylon as his capital. The Medes and Persians had existed for centuries, but they only became a world empire in the prophetic sense by the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus and the removal thither of the Persian capital. It was the same with the Greeks. The development of their high civilization through centuries was not included in the prophetic outlook. They did not come to pass until Alexander the Great, after the overthrow of the Persians, conquered the Orient and chose Babylon as his capital. Only from then is the Grecian kingdom the third world empire within the meaning of prophecy. And may it not be that Daniel's fourth world empire also will only have reached its culmination and perfection if it likewise rebuilds Babylon in Mesopotamia as the centre of Anti-christianism? . . . In the consciousness of our insufficiency we search the prophetic word. But this we already see clearly, that the path of world history moves steadily to the Orient as its centre and that the course of events leads ever more plainly into the foreground of the final development.⁷

Benjamin Newton also favors this view: "The question is to be determined from Scripture, and the question is, Whether the circumstances which the Scripture connects with the destruction of Babylon have or have not come to pass? The answer must be, that they have not."⁸

What does Archer think? "She seems to represent . . . the city of Latter-Day 'Babylon', the capital of Antichrist's empire."⁹

Zahn is in agreement with Archer:

Babylon . . . is the capital of the world empire as such. It was situated formerly on the Euphrates, now on the Tiber, in the language of the prophets later perhaps it will be on the Seine or the Bosphorus; but through all historical changes it retains its old name.¹⁰

Alan Stibbs, in commenting on 1 Peter 5:13, states,

It is far more likely that 'Babylon' stands for Rome. We find it used in the Apocalypse with this signification; and, bearing in mind that the way was already prepared in the Old Testament [e.g. Is. xiv], its use as a code-word among Christians is readily intelligible.¹¹

Chapter 18 reveals a disturbing picture. There we see the kings of the earth "living in luxury," merchants trading in the "bodies and souls of men," and men in all walks of life weeping and

7 Sauer, *The Triumph of the Crucified*, pp. 134-135.

8 B. W. Newton, *Thoughts on the Apocalypse*, pg. 291. Newton devotes a whole chapter to this subject, pp. 288-303.

9 Archer, unpublished class notes.

10 Zahn, *Introduction*, pg. 446.

11 Alan M. Stibbs, *The First Epistle General of Peter*, pg. 65.

wailing because the city on which they depended for their wealth was destroyed. It was, no doubt, profit by illicit means; otherwise Babylon would not have been so utterly destroyed.

After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!" For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury For her sins have reached to heaven and God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her (vss. 1-3, 5-6).

The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, "Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! For in one hour such great riches came to nothing. Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, "What is like this great city?" They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing and saying, "Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate." (vss. 15-19).

Though men will weep, those in heaven will rejoice. God will have avenged the "*blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth*" (vs. 24).

Back in 1865, Joseph Seiss wrote the following, so pertinent for today.

Naked covetousness is not attractive. Even the natural heart is repelled by it and is ready to condemn and denounce it. When the possession of wealth is made the final end, when it is treasured in the coffer and not expended, or when means disreputable are adopted for its attainment, [then] the pursuit of riches is regarded with disdain. The acquisition under such circumstances . . . meets openly with frowns and disfavor. To array it in honorable garb, to dignify it, to make it appear good and praiseworthy so that men may love, bless, and follow it as something noble and beneficent--this is what calls for the magician's wand and the wizard's power. And here it is that Great Babylon's delusive witchery comes in. If a godless and unscrupulous commerce can be made to appear as the great and only availing civilizer; if it can show its end to be not only the welfare of individuals but the prosperity of nations and people; if its office is the development of the resources of the whole earth, and for that end [it] visits every land and traverses every sea; if it is really the great stimulant to intellectual effort, the helper of science, the procurer and disseminator of all useful wisdom and intelligence, the rewarder of inventive genius and engineering skill, the self-sacrificing handmaid of all social, moral and legislative improvement; if it is not the mere possession of wealth for its

own sake, but to secure the beneficent power and influence and glory to result from its wise and proper employment that makes up the end and aim of its endeavors; then will the ugliness of avarice be voided, bitter will have been made sweet, and all attendant deflections from right and truth swallowed up in the grandeur and beauty and beneficences of its purposes. The demon of covetousness would then have become an angel of light. . . . And here is the sorcery with which Great Babylon leads all the nations astray. Linking the false doctrine of human progress and perfectibility to the worst of passions, she lures the world to her support and makes mankind the willing slave of her base idolatry. And already, from pulpit and platform, from philosopher and political economist, from orator and poet, are we compelled to hear just these very glorifications of the cupidities of man as the forerunner, if not the instrument, of this world's regeneration."¹²

These are times for serious thought. Let us not be so confident in our own strengths that we neglect to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling."

Now, there is still a sense in which even *"the righteous scarcely is saved."* After all that God has done by sending His Son, and the Son by sending the Holy Spirit, it is only with difficulty, exceeding difficulty, that the work of saving the righteous advances to its consummation. As the gate is strait, so narrow is the way which leadeth unto life. The entrance into the kingdom lies through much tribulation--through fightings without and fear within--through the world's seductions and its frowns--through the utter weakness and continual failures of the flesh, and the many fiery darts of Satan. That any single believer comes off at last victorious against so great apparent odds is to be accounted for only on the principle, that what with men is impossible is possible with God.

But if it be so with "the righteous"--if he who has made his peace with God through the blood of Christ must still be saved so as by fire--*"where shall the ungodly and sinner"*--the alien from God and sin's willing servant, who persists all his life through in rejecting alike the atonement and the aids of grace--*"where shall he appear?"* Not, you may be sure, in the congregation of the righteous, nor at the marriage-supper of the Lamb, nor on the streets of the New Jerusalem, nor anywhere throughout God's house of many mansions. For him there is no room, no welcome, there. *"Where,"* then, *"shall he appear?"* Again the Apostle [Peter] simply asks the question, and again he seems to shrink from answering it; as if faith itself feared to follow the outcast into that outer darkness.¹³

Before concluding this chapter, perhaps a brief recap of the major figures in chapters 12 through 18 might be helpful. We have,

1. The woman clothed with the sun (ch. 12). She probably represents Israel.
2. The woman's child (ch. 12), who is undoubtedly Christ.

¹² Seiss, *Lectures*, pp. 184-186.

¹³ John Lillie, *Lectures on the First and Second Epistles of Peter*, pp. 297-298

3. The dragon (ch. 12), unquestionably representing Satan.

4. The Beast from the sea (ch. 13). He has 7 heads and 10 horns, and all agree he is the political ruler (world dictator) during the tribulation. He first appears as a "little horn" in the midst of the ten, "plucking up" three (Dan. 7:8 and 8:9). His empire is in all likelihood a revived Roman Empire, though Zahn is of the opinion it is a Grecian one. He is probably a Gentile in any event and his number is 666. He is the "man of sin, the son of perdition" (2 Thes. 2:3). Most would say that he is the Antichrist.

5. The Beast from the earth (ch. 13). He is a false prophet/religious leader and has two horns like a lamb. Though commentators differ, it is this beast from the earth which seems most likely, in my opinion, to be the Antichrist. Opinion is divided on whether he is a Jew or Gentile. In any event, he is the leader of the apostate church of the end times.

6. The woman clothed in scarlet (ch. 17). She represents the religious establishment whose power moves the Beast (political leader). She is the mother of harlots, perhaps the reprobate "Christian" church encompassing Protestantism and Catholicism (or perhaps just the Roman Catholic church in and of itself), and is under the sway of Antichrist. At the end she will be cast aside by the Beast after his need of her is finished.

7. The scarlet beast (ch. 17). This is another description of the beast from the sea (ch. 13), since it has 7 heads and 10 horns. This beast "was, is not, yet is." This beast most likely encompasses both a kingdom and its ruler.

8. Great Babylon. This city can be regarded in two aspects: a religious (the reprobate church), and a political (capital of the revived Roman Empire). Where it is located is not agreed upon by the commentators, even whether it is one city or two.

Keeping track of all these figures can be confusing, but, hopefully, this will provide some help. You may wish to go back at this point and refresh your memory. Perhaps you might also consider delving into Revelation on your own and recording your own conclusions. The Lord will indeed bless you greatly.