

THE VISION OF BABYLON (17:1-18)

Why are you astounded? I will interpret for you ...

Father,

We know that you do not want us to be astounded by the World and what it does. Help us as we study this week to grasp the imagery of this vision and what it is teaching us about facing the pressures of the World in our day.

Amen

^{17:1}Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke to me.

“Come,” he said, “I will show you the condemnation and punishment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters, ²with whom the kings of the earth committed sexual immorality and the earth’s inhabitants got drunk with the wine of her immorality.”

³So he carried me away in the Spirit to a wilderness, and there I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. ⁴Now the woman was dressed in purple and scarlet clothing, and adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls. She held in her hand a golden cup filled with detestable things and unclean things from her sexual immorality. ⁵On her forehead was written a name, a mystery:

“Babylon the Great, the Mother of prostitutes and of the detestable things of the earth.”

⁶I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of those who testified to Jesus. I was greatly astounded when I saw her.

⁷But the angel said to me,

“Why are you astounded? I will interpret for you the mystery of the woman and of the beast with the seven heads and ten horns that carries her.

⁸The beast you saw was, and is not, but is about to come up from the abyss and then go to destruction. The inhabitants of the earth – all those whose names have not been written in the book of life since the foundation of the world – will be astounded when they see that the beast was, and is not, but is to come. ⁹(This requires a mind that has wisdom.)

The seven heads are seven mountains the woman sits on. They are also seven kings:¹⁰five have fallen; one is, and the other has not yet come, but whenever he does come, he must remain for only a brief time.¹¹The beast that was, and is not, is himself an eighth king and yet is one of the seven, and is going to destruction.

¹²The ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but will receive ruling authority as kings with the beast for one hour.¹³These kings have a single intent, and they will give their power and authority to the beast.¹⁴They will make war with the Lamb, but the Lamb will conquer them, because he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those accompanying the Lamb are the called, chosen, and faithful.”

¹⁵Then the angel said to me,

“The waters you saw (where the prostitute is seated) are peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages.¹⁶The ten horns that you saw, and the beast – these will hate the prostitute and make her desolate and naked. They will consume her flesh and burn her up with fire.¹⁷For God has put into their minds to carry out his purpose by making a decision to give their royal power to the beast until the words of God are fulfilled.¹⁸As for the woman you saw, she is the great city that has sovereignty over the kings of the earth.”

MONDAY

Today we begin a study that includes chapters 17 and 18. A quick glance at the content of these two chapters shows that they are both about a city called *Babylon*. Throughout this lesson we will occasionally refer to verses in chapter 18.

1. Considering who is speaking and the influence of *Revelation 16:19*, what connection is there between the bowls of judgment and the Fall of Babylon?

2. How was John carried away into “a wilderness” (17:3)?

There are allusions in 17:3 to the prophecy of Babylon's fall in *Isaiah 21:1-10* (compare 18:2). A wilderness was a place where prophets went to get visions (*Isaiah 40:3*), it was the place where God protected Israel in their wanderings, but also a place of evil and desolation (*Isaiah 13:21*).

3. What do you discover about “the great prostitute” from the description in 17:1-6?

4. From these descriptions, what do you think John is communicating to us about World Power in these verses?

TUESDAY

The Revelation was written by John to seven specific churches in Asia Minor. These churches were suffering persecution and needed to make corrections to their doctrine and way of living in order to

be what God wanted them to be. This vision is not merely about the future, it is indicative of their world and likely also our own.

5. **What was John’s response to this vision(17:6)?**
6. **Why do you think he reacted this way?**
7. **What two things does the angel promise to interpret for him (17:7)?**

The angel’s explanation includes the beast (8), the seven heads (9b-11), the ten horns (12-14), the waters (15), and the woman (18). We will be looking in great detail at these over the next three days.

8. **What do you learn about “the beast” in (17:7-17; compare 13:1-10)?**
9. **What is similar and different about the beast’s description compared with God’s description (16:5)?**

Why do you think this is so?

WEDNESDAY

10. What two different things do the “seven heads” represent (17:9)?

“Mountains” often have a figurative meaning in the Scripture (e.g., *Jeremiah 51:25*). It is also well-known that Rome was built on seven hills.

11. In this context, do you think John meant for the seven mountains be understood literally or figuratively? Why?

12. What is true of the seven kings (17:10)?

13. What are the “ten horns” and what is their purpose (17:12-14)?

Some have suggested that the seven kings represent World Powers which ruled over the people of God, Israel.

14. What nations had ruled over Israel prior to John’s writing?

15. Who was ruling over them at the present time?

16. Who do you think the future king might be?

17. Does the expression “one hour” (17:12) refer to a 60 minute hour or to an indefinite period of time (1 John 2:18; Revelation 3:3,10; 9:15; 11:13; 14:7,15; 17:12; 18:10,17,19)?

18. Who comes with the Lamb (17:14)?

Why do you think this is important for believers to know?

THURSDAY

19. What does the “water” represent and what does this mean (17:15)?

20. What will the beast and the kings do to the great prostitute (17:16-17)?

Perhaps it is surprising that these 10 kings turn against what apparently is their capital city. This place would be the source of their strength, supply, and culture. In a sense this is a type of cultural suicide.

21. How have you seen evil people turn on themselves?

FRIDAY

22. Who is the “woman” who is the great prostitute (17:18)?

“The woman” represents *“the great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.”* The term *“the great city”* was used earlier to refer to earthly Jerusalem (cf. 11:8). Some have suggested from 17:9 that this is a coded reference to Rome. Others think it should be taken literally as Babylon on the Euphrates rebuilt.

23. Which do you believe John meant? Why?

24. What have you discovered about the way the world works from what you have read this week?

UNDERSTAND THE WORLD (18:1-24)

"Come out of her, my people, so you will not take part in her sins and so you will not receive her plagues ..."

Father

Give us your perspective on the world and how we are to live life here. We want you to be glorified in everything that we do. You promise wisdom and we ask now that you Holy Spirit will impart that to each of us. Guide us into not only your lifestyle, but also your heart.

Amen

^{18:1}After these things I saw another angel, who possessed great authority, coming down out of heaven, and the earth was lit up by his radiance. ²He shouted with a powerful voice:

"Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great! She has become a lair for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detested beast. ³For all the nations have fallen from the wine of her immoral passion, and the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have gotten rich from the power of her sensual behavior."

⁴Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,

"Come out of her, my people, so you will not take part in her sins and so you will not receive her plagues, ⁵because her sins have piled up all the way to heaven and God has remembered her crimes. ⁶Repay her the same way she repaid others; pay her back double corresponding to her deeds. In the cup she mixed, mix double the amount for her. As much as she exalted herself and lived in sensual luxury, to this extent give her torment and grief because she said to herself, 'I rule as queen and am no widow; I will never experience

grief!’ ⁸*For this reason, she will experience her plagues in a single day: disease, mourning, and famine, and she will be burned down with fire, because the Lord God who judges her is powerful!”*

⁹Then the kings of the earth who committed immoral acts with her and lived in sensual luxury with her will weep and wail for her when they see the smoke from the fire that burns her up.¹⁰They will stand a long way off because they are afraid of her torment, and will say,

“Woe, woe, O great city, Babylon the powerful city! For in a single hour your doom has come!”

¹¹Then the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn for her because no one buys their cargo any longer –¹²cargo such as gold, silver, precious stones, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all sorts of things made of citron wood, all sorts of objects made of ivory, all sorts of things made of expensive wood, bronze, iron and marble,¹³cinnamon, spice, incense, perfumed ointment, frankincense, wine, olive oil and costly flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and four-wheeled carriages, slaves and human lives.¹⁴(The ripe fruit you greatly desired has gone from you, and all your luxury and splendor have gone from you – they will never ever be found again!)

¹⁵The merchants who sold these things, who got rich from her, will stand a long way off because they are afraid of her torment. They will weep and mourn,¹⁶saying,

“Woe, woe, O great city – dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet clothing, and adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls –¹⁷because in a single hour such great wealth has been destroyed!”

And every ship’s captain, and all who sail along the coast – seamen, and all who make their living from the sea, stood a long way off ¹⁸and began to shout when they saw the smoke from the fire that burned her up, *“Who is like the great city?”*

¹⁹And they threw dust on their heads and were shouting with weeping and mourning,

“Woe, Woe, O great city – in which all those who had ships on the sea got rich from her wealth – because in a single hour she has been destroyed!”

²⁰(Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has pronounced judgment against her on your behalf!)

²¹Then one powerful angel picked up a stone like a huge millstone, threw it into the sea, and said,

“With this kind of sudden violent force Babylon the great city will be thrown down and it will never be found again! ²²And the sound of the harpists, musicians, flute players, and trumpeters will never be heard in you again. No craftsman who practices any trade will ever be found in you again; the noise of a mill will never be heard in you again. ²³Even the light from a lamp will never shine in you again! The voices of the bridegroom and his bride will never be heard in you again. For your merchants were the tycoons of the world, because all the nations were deceived by your magic spells! ²⁴The blood of the saints and prophets was found in her, along with the blood of all those who had been killed on the earth.”

MONDAY

- 1. How does the angel’s appearance contribute to the impression of this message?**
- 2. Why is “Babylon the great” fallen (18:2-3)?**
- 3. Read the description of this fall in *Isaiah 13:19-22* and *Jeremiah 50:39*. How does this compare with what is said here?**
- 4. What does the fact that historical Babylon had already fallen tell you about the interpretation of what city is meant here?**

TUESDAY

- 5. What is the warning in 18:4-5?**

- 6. How would you apply the principle of this verse to life today?**

- 7. Why does God take vengeance (18:6-7)?**

- 8. What form does God's judgment take (18:8)?**

- 9. How likely is any city to avoid a massive calamity sometime in the future?**

WEDNESDAY

- 10. What groups lament the fall of Babylon (18:9, 11, 17)?**

- 11. What is wrong with the merchandise of Babylon (18:12-13)?**

- 12. Do you think greedy people devalue human lives? How?**

THURSDAY

13. Who mourns the fall? Why (18:9-19)?

14. Who should rejoice? Why (18:20, 24)?

FRIDAY

15. Why do you think there is a three-fold mention (“one hour”) of Babylon’s quick judgment: (18:10, 17, 19)?

16. What does it mean that Babylon “*will not be found any longer*” (18:21)?

17. How were all the nations deceived by Babylon’s sorcery (18:23)?

18. What does the fact that he closes by again mentioning martyrdom tell you (18:24)?