

UNDERSTANDING THAT WEIRD BOOK OF REVELATION - Part twenty-two

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GOD'S COMING JUDGMENT (Part 1)

Revelation 18:1-24 - "After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. [2] And he called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast. [3] For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living." [4] Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; [5] for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. [6] Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed. [7] As she glorified herself and lived in luxury, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning, since in her heart she says, 'I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see.' [8] For this reason her plagues will come in a single day, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her." [9] And the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. [10] They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, "Alas! Alas! You great city, you mighty city, Babylon! For in a single hour your judgment has come. [11] And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, [12] cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, [13] cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls. [14] "The fruit for which your soul longed has gone from you, and all your delicacies and your splendors are lost to you, never to be found again!" [15] The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud, [16] "Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls! [17] For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste." And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off [18] and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, "What city was like the great city? [19] And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out, "Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! For in a single hour she has been laid waste. [20] Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!" [21] Then a mighty 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 be found no more; [22] and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters, will be heard in you no more, and a craftsman of any craft will be found in you no more, and the sound of the mill will be heard in you no more, [23] and the light of a lamp will shine in you no more, and the voice of bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more, for your merchants were the great ones of the earth, and all 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 earth."

This chapter continues the theme of the judgment of Babylon. The angel had announced to John that he would show him the coming judgment on **"the great prostitute who is seated on many waters"** (17:1). Now John will see both the fall of Babylon and the reaction of those who witness it. First, John will show the reaction of the **kings and merchants of the earth**. Then he will show the reaction of the **people of God**.

I underscored once again last week the fact that these three agencies of the great dragon, Satan, line themselves up against God in the last days. There will come **antichrist** and his political kingdom. Then, the **false prophet** will have enormous influence over the religion of the last days. Finally, **Babylon** represents this world's agenda, under the influence of antichrist, to seduce and lead the people of the earth into materialism and idolatry.

These three agencies, or powers, function so closely together that I don't believe it is always possible to know where one begins and another leaves off. And I don't think we are **intended** to cookie cut the book of Revelation that way. John is painting **pictures** in these visions, not writing sequential editorials. That's why chapter seventeen can treat the fall of Babylon as an already accomplished fact, while chapter eighteen picks up the story of Babylon and depicts its fall as yet to come. Unlike us, John isn't so much interested in **chronology** as **theology**. It's not the **timing** of the events that we're meant to focus our attention on, but the **meaning** of the times and how we can **avoid** being deceived by the world around us.

1) THE JUDGMENT OF BABYLON AND ITS REASON

Revelation 18:1-3 - "After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. [2] And he called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.[3] For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living."

John's vision unfolds a picture of Babylon, not in her present splendor, but as she looks after judgment. John sees the **future** as though it were already **present**. He can't believe the contrast between the might and splendor of Babylon **before** - **17:4** - "The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality...." - and the way she looks **after** God has dealt with her - **18:2** - "And he called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast."

Notice, there is the **appearance** of iniquity and this is contrasted in John's vision with the **ultimate end** of iniquity. The appearance and the path aren't the same. John's visions reveal what can't be quickly seen with the physical eye.

But the real thrust of John's vision is the **reason** for such destruction and judgment - **Revelation 18:3** - "For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living."

This verse repeats the sin of Babylon already mentioned in **Revelation 14:8** - "Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality."

Not only is Babylon rich and excessive in her material and sensual pursuits, she actively **engages** others in her own sins. First and foremost, Babylon is a **recruiter** of others in the cause of immorality and materialism. This is the primary **nature** of her sin. This is why she is repeatedly called a "**prostitute**." It is her very business to **feed on the sinful inclinations of others**.

Also, and very importantly, John pinpoints those most vulnerable to Babylon's temptations. He specifically sites the **kings of the earth** (that is, the political leaders) and the **merchants of the earth** (those who align themselves with Babylon to advance their own economic might) - vs. 3. These two groups will be most naturally aligned with antichrist in his end-time kingdom. They will also be the first to fall with Babylon in judgment.

2) **A PLEA FOR SEPARATION GIVEN TO THE GODLY**

Revelation 18:4-5 - "Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; [5] for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities."

As you read through the visions of Revelation you see an interesting thing happening. All of the **future** works of God in either judgment or deliverance are framed in reference to **past** works of God in Israel's history.

For example, we've already seen how those around the throne sing the "**song of Moses and the song of the Lamb**" (15:3). And we've already seen how the final plagues of God's judgment are almost exact duplicates of the plagues poured out on Pharaoh and Egypt (**Revelation 15 and 16**). In other words, God's final judgment and deliverance will be after the likeness of the Exodus.

But Egypt wasn't the only period of captivity described in the Old Testament. Israel experienced **three prominent periods** of captivity and judgment - under **Egypt**, then under **Babylon**, and finally, under **Rome**. Now, when John wrote the Revelation Israel was just experiencing the bondage of Rome. That's why much of the Revelation is framed in the imagery of Rome and its emperor. The early church would have been thinking about Rome as they read John's Revelation.

But **all three** periods of judgment are used as **models** throughout the whole book of Revelation. God's final work

will have something in common with each of them, but will still be distinct from them in its end-time scope and intensity. But, because their ancestor's Old Testament history, and their own present persecution under Rome which all these Jewish believers had as a reference point to understand God's judgment and deliverance, John's visions of the future constantly draw on these three historic periods to explain the end-time events.

And what you're witnessing here is the incredible condescending love and wisdom of God. Not only does He warn of coming judgment, but He does it in such a way that He doesn't even just ask us to **accept His word for it**. He points all eyes back to **previous visible demonstrations of it**.

Nowhere is this practice more obvious than in these references to Babylon. Obviously, this end-time hub of godlessness could have had any name at all. **Why Babylon?** Because, for these early Christians, and for all of us who take the time to read our Bibles, Babylon is clearly the handiest picture of what this end-time power will be like.

The angel calls the church to **separate herself** from Babylon so she won't receive of her plagues - **Revelation 18:4** - "**Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues....'**"

And immediately, John's first readers would have heard those words calling them back to another Babylon and a very similar warning from the Lord - **Jeremiah 51:6-7** - "**Flee from the midst of Babylon; let every one save his life! Be not cut off in her punishment, for this is the time of the Lord's vengeance, the repayment he is rendering her. [7] Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord's hand, making all the earth drunken; the nations drank of her wine; therefore the nations went mad.**"

There is something very important happening here. This is the reason you and I, as Gentile Christians, living under the New Covenant, still have Old Testaments in our Bibles. Just as Israel was called to separate herself from literal Babylon before God poured out His judgment on her, so **you and I**, as the body of Christ, need to be aware of this example so we too will not get sucked into end-time Babylon's allurements and receive the same judgment.

Please don't miss the forest for the trees in this passage. There is a message for today's church in these verses. Rather than try to pinpoint the end-time location of Babylon on a map (something I'm convinced John and Jesus would both be horrified to see us doing), we should take a much more immediate and practical truth to heart: **Church, if you live like Babylon, you will perish like Babylon**. You and I can't just have a **name** that we're spiritually alive. We have to actually **live** like Jesus in these last days!

3) **THE JUSTICE OF GOD'S JUDGMENT**

Revelation 18:6-8 - "**Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed.[7] As she glorified herself and lived in luxury, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning, since in her heart she says, 'I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see.'** [8] **For this reason her plagues will come in a single day, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her.**"

Once again, I want you to see this end-time warning as it's framed in the Old Testament judgment of literal Babylon in **Isaiah 47:7-10** - "**You said, 'I shall be mistress forever,' so that you did not lay these things to heart or remember their end. [8] Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures, who sit securely, who say in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one besides me; I shall not sit as a widow or know the loss of children': [9] These two things shall come to you in a moment, in one day; the loss of children and widowhood shall come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and the great power of your enchantments. [10] You felt secure in your wickedness, you said, 'No one sees me'; your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray, and you said in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one besides me.'**"

John uses some of the very words of Isaiah for a very distinct purpose. **He wants his readers to know that this kind of blind, arrogant stubbornness has manifested itself before**. And God wiped an entire nation off the face of the earth.

This is a very important point. **Nobody** thought Old Testament Babylon would ever be taken over by anybody. The idea seemed so ridiculous that many Jews partnered with Babylon, thinking she was invincible and their best bet for prosperity and protection in the whole world at that time. But God's warning proved true. It caught everybody off guard. Nobody can even **find** Old Testament Babylon anymore! God's future judgment will be just like that. God will pour out **double** wrath for all her sins.