

IN RESPONSE - THE MYSTERY OF BABYLON (Revelation 17:1-9)

by Dennis Prutow

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We continue to look at Revelation as a seven-fold view of the inter-advent period, the time between the first coming and the second coming of Christ. Revelation 16:21 brought us once again to the judgment at the end of the present age. As we draw closer to the end of Revelation, the visions place more emphasis on events at the close of this age. Revelation 14:8 mentions the fall of Babylon. Revelation 16:19 reminds us Babylon is judged already. We step back once again. Revelation 17-19 gives a detailed account of this judgment. Revelation 20-22 reveals the final victory of Christ with His bride. Revelation 17:1-2.

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality."

Revelation 21:9 introduces the bride of Christ with the same words.

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

Angels with the *last plagues* bid John to view marvelous things. That these particular angels beckon indicates we are discussing the final chapters of history.

Babylon is the capital of evil. She is the center of unrighteousness. She sits on many waters. The waters are the families and nations outside of Christ. See verse 15. Those drunk with her immoralities are those who follow the ways of the world in every area of life in opposition to Christ. The kings mentioned are leaders in medicine, science, education, religion, and government. Babylon's counterpart is the New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ. Here is the center of the manifestation of righteousness in creation. Verse 3.

And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns.

The dragon, the serpent of old, proudly carries the woman into battle in the wilderness (Revelation 12:6). She dresses as royalty. Babylon is the queen of evil. The world bows before her opulence and seeks with might and main to partake of her luxury. Verse 4.

The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality.

The cup she carries is full of uncleanness. It is a gold cup. Gold, precious to the ungodly, symbolizes how precious immorality is to the fallen world.

Babylon carries a name written on here forehead. This is her seal, her identifying mark. It corresponds to the mark of the beast. It describes her character. Verse 5.

And on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

Babylon is not simply the apostate church. Her name includes *all the abominations of the earth*. It might well be the words *a mystery* are part of the name. In Scripture, a mystery is something unveiled. Here we see lewd, licentious, bawdy Babylon unveiled in judgment.

Remember, we are looking at a vision. We see symbols. They represent reality. The reality is that the world outside of Christ is intoxicated with itself and with sin. As seen in previous visions, the world is in mortal combat with the church. No subterfuge is withheld in the battle against righteousness and godliness. This is the portrayal verse 6 gives.

And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus.

When I saw her, I wondered greatly.

The world stands in awe of the greatness and luxury of Babylon. Why should the church and the saints be amazed at her power and strength? Verse 7 therefore broaches the question to John.

And the angel said to me, "Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast

that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

The mystery of Babylon now comes to light. Men and women should not worship at her throne nor drink of her cup. In today's world one of the manifestations of Babylon is athletics. The Olympic Games in Atlanta were presented as an extension of ancient Greek paganism. The hope was for world peace and unity to emerge. Yet the Bible plainly says with reference to Christ, "For He Himself is our peace" (Ephesians 2:14). We cannot have it both ways.

Although many Christians participated in the Olympic Games, those Games were not *the* answer to the sin based dilemmas of our world. Why do worldly institutions take on this messianic complex? In the end, they are servants of the devil. Verse 8.

The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.

There is a resurrection of sorts portrayed here. I do not think this is an actual resurrection of an actual entity or person. I think this simply pictures the dragon and his rider as a false Christ, a false messiah, to whom the world flees and in whom the world puts its trust.

The dragon and the woman are doomed. The earth, representative of those who oppose Christ, are also doomed. They are reprobate. Their names are not and never were in the book of life. The reprobate marvel at the splendor of Babylon much as America marveled at the Olympic athletes. Their dream took them to Atlanta. This was a theme song. Was this a covert repudiation of Providence and the God of Providence? Was this and is this too much a worship of the creature rather than the Creator who is blessed forever?

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IN RESPONSE - BABYLON, THE GREAT CITY (Revelation 17:9-18)

by Dennis Prutow

I maintain the best way to interpret the visions before us is to recognize the deeply symbolic nature of Revelation. Keeping this in mind, we begin this lesson with Revelation 17:9-10.

Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while.

Within the vision an interpretation is given. This interpretation is also symbolic as it is also part of the vision.

The seven heads of the dragon are seven mountains. Many commentators insist the seven mountains are the seven hills of Rome and that this fixes the identity of Babylon. As previously seen, mountains often represent kingdoms. Here are seven kingdoms. Why seven? This is a number of completeness. The dragon and the woman have complete power within their domain. Only the intervention of the Sovereign God can extricate peoples and families from this evil power. This is the glory of the Gospel. Christ plunders the strong man's house and takes captive a people for himself.

Continuing our interpretation, Babylon is the capital of evil. New Jerusalem is the capital of righteousness. We have the City of Man versus the City of God. Ancient Babylon was on the Euphrates. Surely contemporary Babylon for first century Christians was Rome located on the Tiber. However, realize this.

Babylon is with us in every age....

Thus Babylon must be seen not only on the Thames, the Seine, the Rhine, the Volga, and the Bosphorus and the Nile but also on the Potomac.¹

Washington, D.C. is every bit a modern Babylon as Rome once was. This is a bitter pill for Americans to swallow. Sadly, many Christian fundamentalists wrongly equate Americanism and Christianity. Were the USA a Christian nation bowing to Christ by conviction and constitution, the story would be far different. This is not the case. Christ calls us to be

light in the world of North America and salt in the earth of North America.

Further description follows in verse 11. "The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction." The dragon and his kingdoms are set for destruction. Those caught up in worldliness are fools. They have eyes for nothing else. Psalm 92:6-7 prophesies this. We must grasp and be warned by this truth.

A senseless man has no knowledge, Nor does a stupid man understand this: That when the wicked sprouted up like grass And all who did iniquity flourished, It was only that they might be destroyed forevermore.

This is the ordained destiny of unbelief.

Other worldly kingdoms will follow. They will round out the divine plan, ten horns are ten kingdoms. These kings and kingdoms are servants of the dragon, the beast upon which the harlot rides. In terms of eternity, their tenure on earth, enthralled with worldly pleasure, is short. This seems to be the import of verse 12.

The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour.

I demur. I do not identify these kings as historical characters, Roman Caesars. This is risky at best. Rather, I say, the purpose of worldly kingdoms is to glorify the devil and to wage war with the people of God. Verses 13-14.

These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast. These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful.

The people of God prevail. The gospel goes forth in victory (Revelation 6:1-2, Psalm 45:4-5). Christ leads His army into battle and to triumph (Revelation 19:11-16). There are "the called and chosen and faithful." God "concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for Himself" (Acts 15:14). Those who remain serve the harlot. This is what verse 15 tells us. "And he said to me, 'The waters which you saw where the harlot sits,

are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.'"

Evil feeds on itself. The kingdoms of this world inevitably fight against one another because they all have one goal, the consolidation of power. War is inevitable. Power struggles within businesses and the church are inevitable. Evil is self-defeating. Babylon may be the capital of evil but lesser powers will always vie for her position and prestige. Those who wield ungodly power must have complete control over subordinates as well as their complete loyalty. Managers in businesses insist on loyalty. "Can I trust you?" This is the question. It means, "Will you do anything to enhance my position and power? It is trust based upon intimidation. It results in conflict and defeat. This is the meaning of verse 16.

And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire.

All of this fulfills God's plans and purposes. Remember, we are seeing the scroll, the book, of God's decrees being opened by Christ, the King of the universe (Revelation 5). Our major purpose is to see the greatness and majesty of God and of Christ. Verse 17.

For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled.

We end Revelation 17 with a simple but dramatic statement. "The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth" (verse 18). Once again we see Babylon is the capital of evil in every age. Jerusalem of old turned to whoredom. She capitulated to Rome and repudiated Christ and the gospel. The great city became Babylon. Compare Revelation 11:8. Hence the need for New Jerusalem to come down from heaven. Revelation 17 gives an overview of the destruction of Babylon. Revelation 18 gives greater detail.

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¹ Rousas John Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), p. 180.

IN RESPONSE - FALLEN, FALLEN IS BABYLON (Revelation 18:1-10)

by Dennis Prutow

Now we zero in on the judgment of Babylon. Revelation 18:1.

After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory.

This messenger from heaven is glorious. He is part of the highest echelons of heaven. His presence illumines the earth. Again I say, the earth represents that evil spiritual world system dominated by Satan. This is a picture of real spiritual illumination coming to the world by way of common grace. The purpose of this illumination is that men and women will really see the demise Babylon. Such illumination can and does come today through the preaching of the law and gospel. In fact, the Bible charges us to provide such light (Ephesians 5:7-14).

Verse 2 brings the awesome announcement of the glorious angel.

And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird."

What is the problem of Babylon? Look through her gates and you peer into the depths and darkness of hell erupting into the affairs of humankind.

A description of the problem continues in verse 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.

Men and women, families, nations and governments spurn the Bible, the God of the Bible and the gospel of the Bible. They grasp after the hope of greater wealth and the gospel of better education. They trust secularism and atheistic humanism, the doctrines of demons (1 Timothy 4:1). Verses 4-5.

I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues." For her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.

There is a call familiar to all Christians. Who issues the call? Perhaps an angel speaking on behalf of God. Paul quotes Jeremiah 51:45 to this effect in 2 Corinthians 6:17.

"Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate," says the Lord. "And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you."

The context in Jeremiah is separation from Babylon. The context in 2 Corinthians is separation from unbelief, immorality and darkness. This seems to substantiate the direction of our interpretation. Believers must separate themselves from Babylon in all her tempting manifestations because God sees her sins and His judgment looms large.

Verse 6 continues the direction from heaven for judgment. The direction is probably given to the angels charged with carrying it out under the seven trumpets and seven bowls of wrath.

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.

The sins of Babylon come to culmination. Compare Genesis 15:16. As Babylon doubles her efforts to sin, God doubles judgment. In strict accordance to her sin God judges. Jesus said it, "I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36). Compare also Jeremiah 16:18 and 17:18 and their contexts. Double or twofold judgment is also complete judgment.

Verses 7-8 confirm this.

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."

The punishment fits the crime. The great crime is arrogance. The pride of unbelief exalts itself to the level of God. It is a worship of self, the creature, rather than the Creator.

This arrogance and the concomitant actions demand God's answer. Therefore verse 8 continues the pronouncement of the voice from heaven begun in verse 4.

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.

Judgment will be swift. God is the real "strong man."

There is dramatic response to this sudden judgment of the world system represented by Babylon. Verses 9-10.

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, 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."

The first category of people, leaders in the world system, react with astonishment. These are leaders in anti-Christian science, education, arts, entertainment, government and religion. Because of common grace, they truly fear the torment they see. Cries of agony and despair come from their lips, "Woe, woe."

The word *burning* in the phrase *the smoke of her burning* is significant. The apostle uses it 1 Peter 4:12.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the *fiery ordeal* among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you (*italics added*).

Fiery ordeals involving physical torment, emotional distress or spiritual anguish. They test the reality and sincerity of faith. Compare Matthew 13:20-21. Christians are not exempt from persecution and affliction. Cancer and the need for hip replacements are common among believers. These same fiery ordeals become judgments against unbelief. For believers there is deliverance from them all. For the reprobate these same afflictions are magnified infinitely in perdition. Seeing this horrifies reprobate observers. This fear is part of their torment.

The long expected, sought and prayed for judgment comes. The saints cried to God for it (Revelation 6:10); they prayed for it (Revelation 8:3-5). They are also to rejoice in it (Revelation 18:20).

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IN RESPONSE - REJOICE OVER HER, O HEAVEN (Revelation 18:11-24)

by Dennis Prutow

The first category of those watching in horror the judgment of their beloved city included kings, the leaders. Now we have the second category, merchants. The former lead the forces of anti-Christ. The latter willingly carry the anti-Christian message throughout the world. Revelation 18:11, "And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more."

Verses 12-14 indicate the mechanize bought and sold. There are seven categories listed. The fullness of the world's treasures were in the hands of these merchants. There are

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 of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, 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.

Here is the breakdown. One: cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls; two: fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet; three: every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble; four: cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense; five: wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep; six: cargoes of horses and chariots; seven: slaves and human lives

What of luxury now? Verse 18 laments its loss.

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.

The purveyors of all worldly goods stand aghast. They tremble at the judgment of Babylon. They have enough light to see the doom of all they thought was good and lasting. They fear because they know they have a part and share in the profits of Babylon. They lament Babylon's fall because it is also their demise.

Verse 15-17.

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, "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; for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!"

Those who teach, preach, write, support, and find their livelihood in the things of the world sing a song of woe. This includes all those engaged in the commerce of evil in any way whatsoever.

Revelation 18:17-18 introduce a third group lamenting the fall of Babylon.

And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance, and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, "What city is like the great city?"

We move down the economic scale from kings to merchants to shipmasters and sailors. The common man is now in view. The common worker may be victimized by his or her leaders and managers. Yet these people too have their part in the propagation of evil. They consent to it and assist in its spread.

When judgment comes, they can ask only one question. "What city is like the great city?" They are amazed at the splendor of Babylon and conceive no other city can be greater. The glory of New Jerusalem escapes their vision. They have no eye for the eternal. Verse 19 shows their dismay.

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!"

The rug of life is ripped out from under these mourners. All they know and lived for is gone. Their world is destroyed. This completes the threefold lament over the fall of Babylon. It is a doleful sound, the most mournful which could be heard.

In verse 20, the voice from heaven introduced in verse 4 exhorts heaven to rejoice over the fall of Babylon.

Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.

Can there be joy in heaven over the judgment of evil? There can be no sadness in that blessed place. As we, on an earthly plane, rejoice over the defeat of enemies in war, so there is joy in heaven over the defeat and judgment of Babylon. We witness the justice of God and rejoice. The smoke of Babylon's burning is an eternal testimony to God's justice always visible from New Jerusalem. Compare Isaiah 66:24.

The scene now shifts to a vision of a strong angel. Verse 21.

Then a strong 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 not be found any longer."

Earlier, we saw a strong angel cry out to the residents of heaven, earth and hell (Revelation 5:2). He sought someone to open the book with seven seals. We also saw a strong angel with a little book, the gospel, take command of land and sea (Revelation 10:1). The millstone cast into the sea is a sign of final doom (Matthew 9:42, Luke 17:2).

The strong angel announces devastating results of judgment. All joy and all reasons for joy are gone. Verses 22-24.

And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer; 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. And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.

Babylon's doom is sealed. Hallelujah!

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