

### BOOK OF REVELATION

#### Lesson 40 - Chapters 18 and 19

As we continue through the Book of Revelation what is beginning to become clear is that Babylon the Great represents more than one thing or a single entity. This is critically important not only to intellectually understand what John's Apocalypse is telling us, but because what we're learning is as real as it gets, we need to be able to interpret events and geopolitical changes as they happen. It seems that Babylon the Great is a system, the same way a car is a system. That is, a car consists of several major pieces like an engine, a transmission, suspension, a body, etc. that are somewhat independent, and yet they must be integrated into a single organized system in order for a car to serve its function as transportation for people. Thus Babylon the Great represents both a secular commercial portion and a vast religious institutional portion. These pieces will interlock in some way, even if a single entity or person might not exactly control both pieces. And yet these pieces are so co-operative with each other that they can be thought of as operating as a single system called Babylon.

Babylon the Great also represents an actual place.... a capital city if you would.... as well as a spirit of idolatrous worldliness. Thus Babylon the Great has the ability and intent to corrupt nations, people, the world economy, and religious faith. Is it any wonder that God is judging her so harshly as to give her twice as much punishment for her sins as the proportional punishment system of the Law of Moses might call for.

Last week we read from Ezekiel and Jeremiah to connect these ancient prophecies to what is going to occur in the End Times with Babylon the Great. As Craig Koester rightly puts it in his book "The End of All Things", ***"John's portrayal of Babylon's fall is a tapestry woven from threads taken from many periods of time. Much of the language echoes the threats against Tyre in Ezekiel 26 - 28, together with those against (ancient) Babylon in Jeremiah 50-51"***. It is instructive to know that other prophets were also given similar information; information that must have been greatly puzzling to them. But when we see their obvious connection to the Book of Revelation, and we realize that in modern times money and commerce trumps everything in the Western world, then we can begin to get an inkling of what predictably lies around the corner in human history, since human nature remains constant.

Turn your Bibles to Zechariah chapter 5.

#### READ ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 5 all

In Hebrew thought the ***ephah*** (a unit of dry measurement like a bushel) is emblematic of commerce. And note in this passage how this mysterious woman is placed upon the ***ephah*** (the system of commerce) and then a huge lead lid is put over it to indicate that this circumstance is divinely sealed and no human can change it. Then sometime later the ***ephah*** with the woman and the lead lid is transported by two other women to the Land of Shinar. And there a shrine will be built to the ***ephah*** and the woman sealed inside it. This is a picture of

how Babylon will be created as a monument to the world's economic system, and the Whore of Babylon will sit atop that commerce and economic system, and so there will be a specific place where the capital of this system exists (whether that place exists today I do not know). In this prophecy of Zechariah, this place is represented by the Land of Shinar.

Eight times in the Hebrew Bible Shinar directly refers to Babylon. In fact, if you'll recall the Babel that Nimrod ruled over, Babel was said to be located in the Land of Shinar. So Shinar is emblematic of a place that is the center of idolatry, wickedness and a human system of commerce, government and religion that opposes God. Thus as I spoke about just minutes ago, Babylon the Great of the future is a system composed of several pieces and that is how we must understand it.

Since context is everything when studying God's Word, and since Revelation 18 is not a long chapter, let's re-read it all to get our bearings to begin today's lesson.

### RE-READ REVELATION CHAPTER 18 all

Notice how John's visions indicate the absolute universal sway of Babylon upon humanity. Every nation in one way or another has succumbed to her seduction. Every human institution has been adversely affected by Babylon; from government, to the economy, to education, to religion. Charles Feinberg in his commentary on Revelation says this: **"Godless religion knows how to capture the attention of the unwary world by display, ritual, an easy means of redemption, and vast amounts of wealth"**. Not only am I in agreement with his statement, but I would add that Godless religion also knows how to continuously remold itself so as to not antagonize the world system and so as to appear to agree with whatever direction societal morality has taken by declaring it godly. So Believers, as difficult as it is in our time to try to balance our faith and trust in God with maintaining relationships with family, friends and community, it is only going to get more challenging as time marches on. Christ warned us long ago that taking up our cross and following Him would often mean hardship in our relationships, as opposed to the healing of them. And yet for the disciple who could not bring him or herself to make that difficult choice to follow Him if it means damaging or even losing the relationship of those dearest to us, then Christ has little use for us.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Luke 14:25-27** <sup>25</sup> **Large crowds were traveling along with Yeshua. Turning, he said to them,** <sup>26</sup> **"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father, his mother, his wife, his children, his brothers and his sisters, yes, and his own life besides, he cannot be my talmid.** <sup>27</sup> **Whoever does not carry his own execution-stake and come after me cannot be my talmid.**

Let me be clear: this passage is not a call to abrogate the commandment to honor your father and mother. Nor is it a command to intensely dislike your family members. Rather, in ancient times to love and to hate often carried a different sense to it; a somewhat political sense. It was not about affection, but rather it was about loyalty. To love your King was to be loyal to him; to hate him was to commit treason. This is the sense that Yeshua means it in this verse. It is that in the end, one must be less loyal to his family members and even to keeping his own life than he is to Christ. For a Believer loyalty to Yeshua must trump all. And if we cannot promise that,

then Christ says we cannot be His disciples.

Verses 9 and 10 bring home the fact that the leaders of nations will wail and mourn when God judges Babylon because all that they valued is destroyed along with her. These are the people who have the most to lose in the collapse of the world's economy. But, of course, no one will be able to escape its effects because the demise of the world's economy means the demise of countless companies and thus the loss of millions of jobs. So we must not sit back and think that should we be alive during this time that we might only be mildly affected because what comes with economic depression? Chaos in government and society. A dog eat dog mentality develops. Who to blame is upon everyone's mind. People will be looking for a savior to make things right again; a person with all the answers. Someone who can alleviate their immediate suffering and give them hope for a brighter future. That makes the masses moldable and suggestible and thus easy prey for a smooth talking tyrant.

The worlds' merchants are devastated because no one will be buying their goods. Some 28 separate items are listed; everything from staples to luxury items. This means that even the formerly wealthy will not have the means to buy the things that they used to take for granted. But that these merchants have no market for staples such as flour and grain make it clear that even those on the middle and the lower rungs of society will find themselves in a state of poverty that they had probably never known. Governments won't be able to fulfill their promises of a social safety net because the demand will be too great. Food pantries will run out because those who donate will no longer have the means.

It is interesting that the final two items listed as no longer being in demand are usually translated in one of two ways: either as bodies and souls of men, or as slaves and souls of men. Very likely it is the second way that is intended because it comports well with what we read last week in the related texts of Ezekiel. In Ezekiel 27 we read of the end of selling human slaves along with other goods that are no longer in demand. So in the End Times it is hard to know if this is speaking of human trafficking or something not quite as sinister such as merely supplying employment. Either way I don't see this passage as using the term "souls" in a spiritual sense.

Verse 14 continues with other items considered luxurious, but what drew my eye was the statement that "All the luxury and flashiness have been destroyed, never to return". There will be no return to prosperity for the world. The rich who have lost everything will not recover. The world will be a fundamentally different place from here forward.

Verse 15 offers yet another category of people who will be devastated by Babylon's destruction: these would be the shopkeepers and local retailers who also got rich according to the world system promoted by Babylon. They, too, stand at a distance, weeping and mourning, as fair weather friends who won't go near Babylon now that she is of no use to them; and they are afraid of being associated with Babylon any further because they don't want to suffer it's fate.

Let's back up for a minute and think about what is being implied here. First: how is Babylon being destroyed? It is not a direct supernatural judgment of God (like fire raining from the sky

upon Sodom). Rather it is the result of the 10 kings represented by the 10 horns who turn against Babylon and destroy her. And since Babylon is depicted as being burned by fire and laying in smoldering ruins, then of course this result has come from war. It must be a coordinated surprise attack akin to Pearl Harbor, because it happens almost overnight and Babylon seems to be in complete ignorance of what is about to occur. So these particular kings are not mourning; rather they are jubilant. They achieved their goal. It is the remainder of the worlds' leaders, wealthy, and merchants who are wailing in deep sorrow.

As we discussed in the last lesson: in the world as we know it today, might there be nations that would be thrilled to join in the collapse of the world's economic system and the destruction of the financial capital of the Western world? We must remember that the 911 attack on New York City was precisely for this purpose in the minds of the terrorists who perpetrated it. And we read here in Revelation 18 that the big importer/exporters as well as the retail shopkeepers refuse to get anywhere near Babylon, or stand up for her in any way, even though they greatly lament her fall because her economic fate is tied to theirs. Why is that? No doubt they are restrained by fear. As I look to all the present forces in the world to see how it might work if this happened today, Islam and Islamic nations fit this scenario to a Tee. They not only hate the world economic system because they see it as Western Judeo-Christian based, they hate anyone and everyone that is in any way associated with it. Islam has demonstrated time and again that even a minor association with a nation or organization that in some way represents the Western world system is enough to warrant attack. In modern times we have witnessed EU members and other nations go to great lengths to appease the threatening demands of Islam rather than confront it. I believe that this is the essence of what is happening in these verses and unless the geopolitical landscape changes over the next several years (and it certainly could), I see Islam as the driving force behind the destruction of Babylon.

Next the shipping magnates and their passengers and the sailors who work on the ships also stand at a distance (in fear) and they weep and mourn over the demise of Babylon. They exclaim the nearly identical words of the others when they say that Babylon brought such wealth to the seafarers and to the owners of the ships. But now, in a single day, it has all evaporated.

The point of this series of dirges is that the fall of Babylon affects every facet of commerce on earth; no one will escape it. But then, suddenly, in verse 20 everything changes because the location changes from earth to Heaven. As the people of Earth moan and weep, the residents of Heaven rejoice. From God's perspective what He has promised has finally come about: redemption and validation for those who love Him, and justice and vengeance upon those who oppose Him. The suffering and persecution that Jews and Christians have faced for as much as 3000 years will be avenged because as verse 20 ends with: "For in judging her (Babylon), God has vindicated you". So part of Babylon's evil world system includes the persecution of God's people. Let's pause for a moment and think this premise through. Since Babylon's evil world system incorporates a massive religious institution, and since Babylon's evil world system is based around Western world values (that are constantly deteriorating), then we can only conclude that this religious institution will pawn itself off as Judeo-Christian. So since this is the case how can it be that God's chosen will be persecuted?

We find a strong clue to this conundrum in the Gospel accounts; however since John is the writer of Revelation I think we should use the wording in his Gospel as he addresses this very matter.

**CJB John 16:1-4** *CJB "I have told you these things so that you won't be caught by surprise.*

***<sup>2</sup> They will ban you from the synagogue; in fact, the time will come when anyone who kills you will think he is serving God! <sup>3</sup> They will do these things because they have understood neither the Father nor me. <sup>4</sup> But I have told you this, so that when the time comes for it to happen, you will remember that I told you. I didn't tell you this at first, because I was with you.***

In other words, it is the dominant religious institution of the End Times (no doubt claiming to be Judeo-Christian) that will be the persecutor of God's true chosen. But in fact this institution is built on deceit and will be nothing but part of the Babylon the Great system. It may well be the only authorized, acceptable Christian religious institution..... the result of the never ending (and naively mistaken) constant refrain within the modern church for "unity". If a Believer disagrees with them, that person will be banned and no doubt formally or informally excommunicated. According to Messiah Yeshua this religious institution will even kill some of these non-conforming Believers and claim it is being done in the name of God..... again, without doubt, because they are threatening the unity of the church.

And why will this great institution do this? Because their members will have been taught by the church leadership that to eradicate these radical Believers who don't march to the tune of the institutional church and follow their teachings will be pleasing to the Lord. How could those who profess Jesus so easily believe such nonsense? Because as Yeshua said, they have understood neither the Father nor Christ. They are blind and deceived. I contend this can only happen if the Bible, the Word of God, is more or less abandoned and replaced by manmade doctrines that formulate a new kind of Christian religious philosophy based on the experiential, the human intellect, and a rejection of anything as primitive as a 2000 year old Holy Book. And, by the way, this is happening right now, in our time. Over and over in the New Testament we are reminded that Yeshua IS the Word of God. So if one rejects God's Word, one automatically rejects He who is that Word..... Christ.

This premise takes us full circle back to verses 4 and 5, so that the full impact of what God is exhorting Believers to do can be fully realized IF we have the ears to hear and a heart that is willing to obey.

**CJB Revelation 18:4-5** *<sup>4</sup> Then I heard another voice out of heaven say: "My people, come out of her! so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not be infected by her plagues, <sup>5</sup> for her sins are a sticky mass piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.*

Get out of her. Flee this fraudulent religious institution that intertwines itself with Babylon and revels in the evil world system while insisting they represent the Lord of Heaven and Earth.

Such a thing existed in Christ's day, it exists now, and apparently will become immensely influential in the final days of the End Times. I could probably spend several minutes telling you how to recognize such an institution; but in my heart I know that you already know. It is an issue of accepting the reality of the ever growing corruption of, and Babylonish influence over, some of our most cherished Christian institutions.....some of which we may be supporting..... instead of denying it because it's just too painful to face. And especially for those who are perhaps long time, even life long, members of a church that bears all the wrong characteristics; those who face perhaps the most emotional and toughest decision of their lives, this is the one time that God more or less says "every man for himself". Do you want to go down with the sinking ship? Or do you want to avail yourself of the divinely ordered life raft that God has provided? You can't do both. My urgent advice to you is to exercise enlightened self-interest.

Back to the rejoicing that is going on in Heaven as the smoke of Babylon's ruin rises upward. We must understand that God is not reveling in the suffering and death that is happening in Babylon; rather it is that the long wait for justice has finally come and it goes hand in glove with the rescue of God's people and removing Satan from his throne as prince of the air. Those Believers who have stuck with God, who have clung to our Bibles and our faith in Christ, will be vindicated. The Fake Believers who form the worldwide church of Babylon will be exposed for who they really are. Those who have falsely accused their brethren, driven them from the true church, and even killed them for not toeing the mark, will have done to them what they did to the true Believers. And we find this formula all the way back in the Law of Moses, in Deuteronomy.

**CJB Deuteronomy 19:18-19 <sup>18</sup> *The judges are to investigate carefully. If they find that the witness is lying and has given false testimony against his brother, <sup>19</sup> you are to do to him what he intended to do to his brother. In this way, you will put an end to such wickedness among you.***

Verse 21 then depicts a mighty angel that picks up a giant millstone and hurls it into the sea where, of course, it sinks to the bottom. And this mighty angel says that it is with violence like this that the "great city Babel" will be hurled down, and never to be found again.

The millstone is figurative of Babylon. But I want you to take notice of something. Here Babel (Babylon) is called "the great city". If you recall back in chapter 17 verse 18, we had a substantial discussion about who the "great city" represented. The verse reads:

**CJB Revelation 17:18 <sup>18</sup> *And the woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.***

In our discussion I said that commentators tend to choose from Jerusalem, Rome, or Babylon as the great city that will be judged and destroyed. And that my conclusion was that it could only be Babylon. Notice how chapter 18 verse 21 goes a long way towards clearing this matter up. So 17:18 speaks of the woman (the Harlot) as representing the great city, and 18:21 says that the great city is Babylon. Clearly, the great city must be Babylon. But also notice that Babylon is wiped off the face of the earth once and for all. So from this point forward there is no more "great city".

The remainder of this chapter speaks of the irreversibility of Babylon's demise; recovery is impossible. The happiness that was found in this remarkable city has come to an end along with all the trappings of music, beautiful crafts, the joys of making a home, marriage, or even the simple, warm glow of lighting a lamp to chase away the night. Rather, Babylon's fate is permanent joyless darkness. And lest any pity or compassion by Believers well up within them, it is made explicit that Babylon merits every calamity and misery she receives because she has inflicted her terror and homicidal brutality upon God's prophets and saints. Babylon..... at least everything she represents..... is to blame for every killing of every follower of God that has ever existed on earth.

Let's move on to chapter 19.

### **READ REVELATION CHAPTER 19 all**

Chapter 19 is a sort of doxology..... a hymn of praise that ends a section of a worship service.... that celebrates the final destruction of Babylon on account of all she has done and all she has stood for over the millennia. And what has she stood for? The corruption of God's perfect Creation. Since verse 20 of the previous chapter, the scene has shifted from earth back to Heaven. Thus everything we read about will be taking place NOT in the physical sphere, but rather in the spiritual sphere (and it is critical that we always keep these two spheres of existence separate even though there is a certain connection between them).

Another element of chapter 19 that we shouldn't over look is that it is ushering us into the final moments of human history as we have known it and into a new age that the church calls the Millennial Age. It is ironic that while at least the knowledgeable among Believers and many within Judaism are expecting such a thing and looking forward to it with joy and great anticipation, the remaining part of humanity is also expecting an imminent end to human history but view the prospect as something to be terrified over and for mankind to unite and battle against at all costs. Climate change is the latest worry by many that is seen as perhaps the catalyst for the end of the world, and others think it may be something like a giant asteroid striking the earth that causes an extinction level event similar to what ended the era of dinosaurs. And on both accounts, people are placing their faith in science and technology to save them. Perhaps the most stated reason among advocates for colonizing Mars is to increase the odds for the survival of the human race. That is, if humans reside on two separate planets, then the chances of being wiped out as a species in both places nears zero.

Already Christianity is under fire for essentially being on the wrong side of history since we see the end as necessary, divinely ordained and thus unstoppable, and fully under God's control..... not ours. And while we may hold some trepidations about it because what leads up to it will involve suffering and cataclysm, in general God's people understand that this end is for our benefit and so it is to be welcomed as what comes next is the end of suffering, death and evil.

Therefore it is not hard to imagine that as the final days come into full view, and the Anti-Christ begins his rule, and the judgments of God manifest in earnest, that those who have no intention of allowing the end to human history if there is any means to stop it will be in direct

confrontation with Believers who pray for the end to arrive. And it is also not hard to imagine that the giant religious institution that claims to represent Judeo-Christianity, but in actuality is aligned with Babylon, will stand with those who will battle to try to save the earth and keep the end from happening. That is, they will be fighting against God's plan and God's will. This is, at least partly, what we have been reading about in Revelation.

So fellow Believers, here is where we stand: on the one hand we are to take good care of this magnificent home that the Lord has created and given to us. But on the other, the ultimate fate of this planet and the humanity it harbors has already been determined by God, and to join with the science and academic and secular communities to try to thwart God's will on this matter is sin. It represents the spirit of Babylon. And it will take much wisdom and prayer for us to walk that fine line between proper caretaking of our earthly resources versus believing that our deliverance lies in the hands of superior human intellect and ingenuity.

John's vision continues as he hears what can only be the roar of a huge number of people in Heaven. No attempt to quantify this number is made nor is there an attempt to identify the crowd. That's because there's no need to wonder over it: these are the countless souls of the redeemed in Christ because only the redeemed (along with God's heavenly angels) can exist in Heaven. And, if we can take what we're reading literally, the first words of this Heavenly doxology are (appropriately enough) halleluyah! Halleluyah is a Hebrew word (2 words actually) and in English it means Praise God. The Early Church Father Augustine said that the feeling and saying of this word incorporates all the blessedness of Heaven. Sadly, on planet Earth we know so very much about cursing God, denying God, demeaning God, and slandering His blessed Name. But in Heaven only praise for the Creator and all His glory is known and expressed. So when we sincerely cry out halleluyah we are bringing a little bit of Heaven to earth. We have in the verses of chapter 19 a beautiful example of such Heavenly praise and we'll go over it quite carefully the next time we meet.