

# ***A Tale of Two Cities***

## ***Babylon vs. the New Jerusalem***

### **Introduction, Part 1 (Ron)**

[Read brief excerpts from chapters 17-18 and chapters 21-22, illustrating the prominence of the city theme in the final chapters of the book]

### **Introduction, Part 2 (Greg)**

Cities play a prominent role in the narrative that runs through the Bible. In the Old Testament, we can think of Babel, Ur, Sodom and Gomorrah, Jericho, Nineveh, Babylon, and, of course, Jerusalem. In the New Testament, Jerusalem remains, but other cities and towns take prominence: Bethlehem, Nazareth, Antioch, Ephesus, Philippi, Corinth, Athens, and Rome.

Cities enable people to protect themselves and stand in contrast to rural areas. But there is **more to it** than that: “Its basic identity has always been that of humanity *en masse*, and it is therefore not surprising that in the human imagination the city becomes humanity ‘writ large’—a representative that pictures in heightened form what is good and bad in human behavior” (Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman 150).

Cities are often addressed with warnings and subjected to judgment when they fail to repent of sin. Though the Bible does not always take a negative stance toward the city, it often contrasts man’s concept of the city with God’s ideal for it. Thus the city comes to stand for humanity organized to affirm independence from God.

The contrast of two cities—the city of man and the city of God—is a theme that runs **throughout the Bible** and culminates in Revelation. Hebrews 11:13-16 is one text that illustrates the difference rather well:

<sup>13</sup> These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. <sup>14</sup> For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. <sup>15</sup> **If they** had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

At different times in biblical history, various ancient cities loomed large in the collective consciousness. We can think, for example, of **Babel, Sodom, the cities of Egypt, Jerusalem, Babylon, and Rome**. These cities had iconic status in much the same way that places such as Hollywood, Las Vegas, Manhattan,

Washington, and Paris have today. So as we consider what Revelation has to say about Babylon and the New Jerusalem, we need to keep in mind that these cities stand for two different ways of life.

## I. Basic Description, Alternate Metaphor, Physical Characteristics

### A. The New Jerusalem (Ron)

#### Basic Description

Made by God, for God

The holy city (21:2)

#### Alternate Metaphor

An adorned bride (21:2)

#### Physical Characteristics

Light

Walls

Gates

Dimensions

Translucence

Street (not streets)

### B. Babylon (Greg)

#### Basic Description

Revelation repeatedly describes Babylon as the “great city.”

Revelation 18:16

<sup>16</sup> 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!’

Fifteen times the book of Revelation refers to greatness of Babylon, its wealth, and its inhabitants (14:8; 16:19 [2x]; 17:1; 17:5; 17:18; 18:2; 18:10; 18:16; 18:17; 18:18; 18:19; 18:21; 18:23; 19:2).

By using the term *Babylon*, John evokes imagery of an ancient city whose history was intertwined with that of the kingdom of Judah. Babylon was a major world power, ruthless in its treatment of the people that it conquered, but ultimately brought to utter destruction.

## Alternate Metaphor

Just as the New Jerusalem is identified with the bride of the Lamb, Babylon is also described as a woman: “the great prostitute.”

Revelation 17:1

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters,

Revelation 17:18

<sup>18</sup> And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.”

## Physical Characteristics

**Babylon is a large, important, and powerful city.**

Revelation 18:10

<sup>10</sup> standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’

**Babylon is a center of wealth.** The city is not only a hub of economic activity, but an icon of luxurious living.

Revelation 18:7

<sup>7</sup> In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, ‘I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.’

An extended description of Babylon’s commerce is found in Revelation 18:9-19.

**Up until its destruction, Babylon is the scene of every form of social exchange.**

Revelation 18:22-23

<sup>22</sup> The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore. <sup>23</sup> The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived.

## II. Origin, Inhabitants, Relation to Nations and Their Leaders

### A. The New Jerusalem (Ron)

#### Inhabitants

Those who overcome (21:7)

Those whose names are written in the Book of Life

#### Relation to Nations and Their Leaders

Diversity

Surrender of glory

Equality

### B. Babylon (Greg)

#### Origin

**Babylon is the product of human collaboration on a grand scale.** It is not something local, but something global.

Revelation 17:15

<sup>15</sup> Then he said to me, “The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.”

#### Inhabitants

**The inhabitants of Babylon are described as “those who dwell on the earth”—unbelievers whose names are not written in the Lamb’s book of life.**

Revelation 17:8

<sup>8</sup> The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

#### Babylon persecutes the saints, apostles, and prophets, even to the point of death.

Revelation 17:6

<sup>6</sup> I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement.

## Relation to Nations and Their Leaders

**Babylon is said to exercise dominion over the kings of the earth.**

Revelation 17:18

<sup>18</sup> And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth."

One of the chief ways that Babylon wields her influence is through commerce.

## Kings, nations, and merchants corrupt themselves with her.

Revelation 18:3

<sup>3</sup> 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."

## Kings and merchants mourn her demise.

Revelation 18:9-11

<sup>9</sup> "The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, <sup>10</sup> standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.' <sup>11</sup> "And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore:

## III. Significance, Ultimate Destiny

### A. The New Jerusalem (Ron)

#### Significance

**No more death, sorrow, or pain (21:4)**

**The river of life (22:1)**

**The tree of life (22:2-3)**

**No need for night to sleep, lamps, or sun**

## B. Babylon (Greg)

### Significance

**Babylon demonstrates its opposition to God by persecuting the followers of Jesus.**

Revelation 18:24

<sup>24</sup> And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth.”

**Babylon engages in warfare with the Lamb by associating with the beast.**

Revelation 17:13-14

<sup>13</sup> These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. <sup>14</sup> These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.”

**Babylon is known for its abundance of sin, conceit, and luxury.**

Revelation 18:5-7

<sup>5</sup> For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, ‘I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.’

### Ultimate Destiny

**Babylon will suffer the wrath of God.** The very first mention of Babylon in Revelation proclaims that the city is fallen (14:8). Then, as the extended description of Babylon begins, the city is said to be the object of God’s wrath.

Revelation 16:19

<sup>19</sup> Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.

**Babylon will be betrayed by the beast.** This may come as a surprise, but the beast uses Babylon as long as it is convenient, and then turns on her.

Revelation 17:16-17

<sup>16</sup> And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. <sup>17</sup> For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.

**Babylon will be destroyed and suffer desolation.**

Revelation 18:21

<sup>21</sup> Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore.”

**Babylon will suffer retribution for evil deeds.** Her punishment will fit her crimes.

Revelation 18:6

<sup>6</sup> 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.

**Babylon will be destroyed by fire—suddenly and violently.** Even though the beast will have a hand in the city’s destruction, the outcome is ultimately the work of God.

Revelation 18:8

<sup>8</sup> Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her.

The cliché, “the bigger they are, the harder they fall,” appropriately describes Babylon’s fate.

As we have seen in previous lessons, the fall of Babylon figures as one of the major end-time events. It is mentioned by name as the outcome of the seventh bowl; based on its description, the sixth seal likely refers to the same event. Just as the other seals, trumpets, and bowls have global impacts, so does the fall of Babylon.

Perhaps we can get some sense of the magnitude of Babylon’s fall if we think of **New York City**, and then imagine it being reduced to rubble as in the **devastation that an atomic bomb produced** in Hiroshima in 1945.

A quote from the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* provides a fitting summary of how we should think of Babylon:

“Already in the OT [. . .] and certainly in the NT [. . .], Babylon stands not for a specific power but more generally for world power in opposition to God—the empire where God’s people live in exile. This is particularly clear in Revelation, which draws heavily on OT imagery in portraying the end times. **Here stands** Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes. [. . .] She is the arrogant and secure queen of the whole earth, now smitten suddenly and decisively with pestilence, mourning and famine [. . .]; desolate, naked and destroyed [. . .]; deprived of all her previous luxuries [. . .]. She is the ruin inhabited by demons and birds [. . .]. **The force** of the imagery is the more strongly felt in Revelation because of the deliberate contrast drawn toward the end of the book between Babylon and the new Jerusalem, which is presented as the Bride of Christ [. . .].” (Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman 69)

## Conclusion (Ron)

### Work Cited

Ryken, Leland, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998.