

A Tale of Two Cities: Babylon vs. the New Jerusalem

The final chapters of Revelation describe two cities: Babylon (17:1-19:5) and the New Jerusalem (21:1-22:21). The contrast between the two cities is not only an important theme of Revelation, but of the entire Bible, as expressed in Hebrews 11:13, 16:

These . . . confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. . . . Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

	Babylon	New Jerusalem
Basic Description	The great city (16:19; 17:18; 18:16; 18:18)	The city of God (3:12); the holy city (21:2; 21:10)
Alternate Metaphor	The great prostitute (17:1; 19:2)	The bride/wife of the Lamb (21:2; 21:9)
Physical Characteristics	Large, important, and powerful (17:18; 18:2; 18:10; 18:16; 18:18; 18:19; 18:21); wealthy (18:3; 18:7; 18:9-19; cf. 17:4); the scene of every form of social exchange (18:22-23)	Massive, stable and safe, perfectly proportioned, made of precious metals and jewels (21:10-21)
Origin	The product of human collaboration on a grand scale (17:15)	Comes down from God/heaven (3:12; 21:2; 21:10)
Inhabitants	Those who dwell on the earth (17:2; 17:8); not those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (17:8); not those who are the people of God (18:4); not saints, apostles, prophets, and martyrs (17:6; 18:20; 18:24)	Those who conquer (3:12; 21:7); those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (21:27); those who wash their robes (22:14); servants of God/the Lamb who bear His name (22:3-4); not unbelievers, idolaters, liars, etc. (21:8; 21:27; 22:15); not those who diminish from prophecies (22:19)
Relation to Nations and Their Leaders	Exercises dominion over the kings of the earth (17:18); kings commit sexual immorality with her, earth-dwellers/nations get drunk with her wine (17:2; 18:3; 18:9); kings mourn her demise (18:10); merchants grow rich by trading with her (18:3) and weep when she is destroyed (18:11ff)	Nations walk by the city's light (21:24); kings and nations bring their glory into it (21:24, 26); nations experience healing in it (22:2)
Significance	Persecution of the followers of Jesus (17:6; 18:24); warfare with the Lamb in association with the beast (17:13-14); abundance of sin, conceit, and luxury (18:4-7)	God dwelling among His chosen people and receiving their worship (21:3; 21:22; 22:3-4); filled with the glory of God (21:11; 21:23)
Ultimate Destiny	The wrath of God (16:19-21); betrayal by the beast (17:16-17); desolation (18:2; 18:21-23); retribution for evil deeds (18:6); sudden and violent destruction by fire (17:16; 18:8-10)	Permanent dwelling (3:12); eradication of sorrow, pain, and death (21:4); presence of the water of life (21:6; 22:1-2; 22:17) and the tree of life (22:2; 22:19); everlasting kingdom (22:5)