

Lesson 25 Lecture
Revelation 17:1-18:24
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This lesson is a rare time when it covers something I have lectured on before at People of the Word. My preference is to cover new territory – portions of Scripture I have yet to teach. After reviewing the previous lecture given 13 years ago, it has been interesting to see how things that we read about in chapters 17 and 18 seem much closer to reality than they were back then. We left off from lesson 24 with the delivery of the seventh bowl judgment. For those of you who were still awake at the end of last week's lecture, you'll recall the effects of the seventh bowl judgment included:

- Flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a never felt before earthquake that shook the planet.
- Jerusalem (the "great city") is split into three parts and other cities were leveled – most notably Babylon.
- Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found.
- 100 lb. hailstones fell on people.

The title of this lesson is "*The Fall of Ecclesiastical and Political Babylon.*" For chapters 17 and 18, John narrows the focus on the events of the Great Tribulation to Babylon. So, what exactly is "Babylon"? To get the answer, we need to go back to the beginning of the Bible. In the 9th chapter of Genesis, the world had gone through the flood – which was a judgment on the sinful condition of man. God commanded Noah and his sons to be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. Yet, look what the people proposed to do in Genesis 11:4: "*Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.*" This was a double, prideful rebellion against God.

1. Their city, with its proposed tower, was to be a monument to their self-reliance.
2. The permanence of their settlement represented an effort to disobey God's direct command to inhabit the whole earth.

God's response to their attitude? "*But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The LORD said, 'If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.'*" (Genesis 11:5-7).

God's plan worked – the confused languages kept the people from communicating their plan, and they did indeed scatter across the earth. The city where this disobedience began became known as Babel – related to the Hebrew word meaning "*to confuse.*" Later it became Babylon – the constant enemy of God's people. Both chapters 17 and 18 use the term "Babylon," but the Babylon in Chapter 17 is a different Babylon in Chapter 18. It would appear the root of this word is living up to its name. Confused? It's okay – hang in there and maybe we can *un-Babel* or *dis-Babel* these chapters.

At the beginning of Chapter 17, one of the seven angels who have the seven bowl judgments invites John to witness the judgment of the great prostitute. Her title is given to us in verse 5 - "*Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes.*" This Babylon speaks to a false church that will be

created once the *true* church is raptured. In the Bible, in a spiritual sense, adultery is the worship of anything but the God of the Bible. Therefore, worship of other gods is spiritual harlotry. This great prostitute has led so many people into a false hope because they are not worshipping God in spirit and truth.

The verse telling us she sits on many waters means the false church will be far-reaching – many will be deceived. Moreover, the statement, “*With whom the kings of the earth have committed adultery*,” tells us there will be a strong connection with the false church and the political and commercial leaders – at least for a while. The description that these people will be “*intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries*” is an indication of the level of immorality that will infiltrate this “church.” False religious systems seduce people with solicitations of the flesh – with promises of prosperity, power, self-glorification, and even vengeance.

John is then carried in the Spirit and shown “*a woman sitting on the scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns*.” Okay, that’s something you don’t see every day. Let’s try to identify what all this is.

- The identity of the woman is provided for us in verse 18 that tells us, “*the woman is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth*.” By many accounts, the woman is believed to be the city of Rome – verse 9 tells us she is sitting on the seven hills, and Rome is known as the city of seven hills.
- The scarlet beast covered with blasphemous names is the Antichrist. I’ll get to the meaning of the 7 heads and 10 horns in a moment.

So, it appears possible that the false church, religious Babylon, may be centered in Rome. The early church, the Reformers, and the Puritans unanimously viewed “Babylon” in chapters 17 and 18 as a symbol of the Roman Empire. It would appear the Antichrist is ruling over a restored version of the Roman Empire and is, for a time, coexisting with the false church. Because it appears that the capital of this religious system will be in Rome, many people have made the unfair leap that this must be the Roman Catholic Church. The fact of the matter is we don’t know what or who this church is. Verse 5 calls the church “Mystery” because its name and origin is not yet known.

We then read about how the church will be opulent with glittering gold, precious stones, and pearls. J. Vernon McGee describes the golden cup full of abominations in her hand as, “*the religious intoxication of the anti-church and a pseudo-religion, counterfeit Christianity, a fake and false gospel, and a sham and spurious system. This is the cup which makes the world drunk*.” Gee, McGee, tells us what you think! Note the parallel to this statement to Jeremiah 51:7, “*Babylon was a gold cup in the LORD's hand; she made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore, they have now gone mad*.” The intoxication and madness are then focused on the persecution of those choosing to stand for Christ as we read of drunkenness from the blood of the saints.

We mentioned earlier the 7 heads and 10 horns. Verse 9 tells us that the 7 heads are 7 hills on which the woman (the Babylonian church) sits. There are also 7 kings. Five of these kings are fallen. One is – and the other has yet come. There are two prevailing opinions of what or who these “kings” are. As we mentioned in lesson 22, Revelation 17:10 presents the five (empires/kings) who are fallen, one is and one is yet to come. Some believe that the five fallen empires are the Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Medo-Persian, and Grecian empires. The one that “is” is generally thought to be the Roman Empire. Others believe these seven heads represent the five kings who reigned up to John’s Day, the sixth king that was in power during John’s life, and the 7th is yet to come – the Antichrist. Verse 11 says, “*The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs*

to the seven and is going to his destruction.” This appears to be a reference to the Antichrist’s assassination and being brought back to life.

Daniel 7:8 and 24 states, *“While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully. The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings.”* The Antichrist is the “little horn,” and these ten kings or kingdoms will willingly, or unwillingly, give over their authority to the Antichrist and become his puppets.

Therefore, the beast, or Antichrist, will have a striking similarity to one of the 5 previous Roman emperors prior to the writing of the book of Revelation. The one that comes the closest to a Satanic-type individual is Caesar Nero – whose name comes in total, in Hebrew, to the number 666. The early church called Caesar Nero the beast – his extreme persecution of the church could only be explained by the fact that he was possessed by evil spirits.

The 10 horns are 10 kings – the identities we don’t know. The 10 kings will give their power to the beast in a combined effort to destroy Jesus the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them. And why? Because He is the Lord of Lords and King of Kings! We need to remember that – especially when we’re in trouble. Jesus has the supreme power over everything and everyone. We’re reading about the greatest combined effort in history to attempt to go against God, and they will **fail**. *With just his voice*, He quiets the storm, demons tremble and beg for mercy, Roman soldiers fall down, and Lazarus is brought back to life. Satan may rule in the domains of deception and fear, but God’s far greater rule is in truth, peace, and power.

And look who He will have with Him when He destroys the ten kings and the beast, *“and with him will be his called, chosen, and faithful followers.”* (Rev. 17:14) Just as I pointed out back in Chapter 5 that we will be in attendance when Jesus takes the scroll, we will also be with Jesus during the final conflicts on earth. I don’t know if this means we will be joining in on the battle or just witnesses to His victory, but we will be with Jesus, and that’s really the important thing. He wants us there. It should be an awesome experience.

Towards the end of Chapter 17, we see the disintegration of the tenuous alliance between the Antichrist and the false church. God allows the Antichrist and his army to exact God’s judgment on the false church. Dr. Robert Jeffress offers this false church will contain a mix of several current religions and even rogue doctrines of Christianity such as the prosperity doctrine. I mostly agree with his assessment of this one-world church, *“It will offend nobody and attract everybody.”* Everyone today seems to be looking for ways to be offended. To show you how upside down this world has become is these “offenses” are often proclamation of Biblical principles. As society abandons and sheds Christian values, we Christians are offended, but *our* offenses don’t count. True followers of Jesus Christ are today’s counter-culture.

Now in Chapter 18, we are learning of the judgment of a different Babylon – this is the commercial/economic or political Babylon. Commercial Babylon is loved by the kings. Religious Babylon – the false church – is hated by the kings and is ultimately destroyed by them. When is this going to take place? Notice the opening Greek words to the chapter, *“meta tauta.”* Meta tauta means “after these things” which means the previous events have come to an end, and we’re at a new point in time. At the beginning of chapter 4, meta tauta appears to signify that the church age is over, and the saints have been raptured. In chapter 18, it appears that we are at the end of the seven seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments. God will judge commercial Babylon towards the end of the Great Tribulation with the second coming of Jesus Christ.

In ancient Mesopotamia Babylon was a city-state about 55 miles south of Baghdad. Following the death of Alexander the Great, Babylon was ultimately destroyed. All that remains of the original ancient famed city of Babylon today is a mound of broken mud-brick buildings and debris in the plain between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. This is a fulfillment of Isaiah 13:19-22 tells us: *“Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians' pride, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah. She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there, no shepherd will rest his flocks there. But desert creatures will lie there, jackals will fill her houses; there the owls will dwell, and there the wild goats will leap about. Hyenas will howl in her strongholds, jackals in her luxurious palaces. Her time is at hand, and her days will not be prolonged.”*

So, is the destruction that we read about in Chapter 18 on a rebuilt Babylon? Will the physical location of a rebuilt Babylon be on the original site? Could it be Rome? London? New York City? We really don't know for sure. One thing we do know, is that the political and economic Babylon of end times that is self-serving and not God-serving will fall to destruction wherever its capital is located.

In Chapter 14:8, we heard an angel say, *“Fallen, Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.”* In 18:2 we read, *“Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.”* Notice the words *“has become”* – it's written with the sense that these events have already happened. When God says something is going to happen, it's going to happen. He knows the beginning and the end. He told us Jesus would rise again after three days, and He did. It is staggering to see how people continue to question God when He keeps confirming His words with His actions.

We go on to read of God's judgment on big business (“merchants of the earth”) and immoral government (“kings of the earth”). It is hard not to come to the same conclusion with what we are witnessing in our country today. The top 10 most criminally penalized companies in have paid close to \$300 billion in fines. As an ex-banker, I'm so proud that 7 of those 10 firms were banks. On a more personal scale, men and women use business as the biggest excuse for having no time for God, yet these same men and women must finally stand before God. God will judge godless commercialism.

Do you remember in Genesis when God proclaimed judgment on Sodom? Two of God's messengers informed Lot of this and told him to get out of there before they destroy the city. In verse 4 of Chapter 18, we read of a similar warning to the faithful who will make it through the Great Tribulation – God is telling His people to get out of Babylon. Do you see why He's the Good Shepherd? God is always watching out and caring for His children. Look at what Deuteronomy 4:30-31 reminds us: *“When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the LORD your God and obey him. For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers, which he confirmed to them by oath.”*

Verses 4 and 5 have, I believe, the voice of God Himself telling His people **not** to be partakers in the sinful actions that would make them vulnerable to the coming judgment. God wants us to be separate – not indulging the old nature but walking in the Spirit. If we will not deal with sin in our own lives here and now by confessing and forsaking it, He will deal with it. 1st Corinthians

11:31-32 confirms this: *“But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.”*

We go on to read that God has remembered commercial Babylon’s sins – *“for her sins have piled up to heaven.”* God’s system of justice is also revealed: *“Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself.”* (Rev. 18:6-7) Notice this is God’s system of justice – the law of retribution which was first shared in Exodus 21:24 – an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Yet, what are we, as followers of Jesus Christ to do regarding offenses against us? We’re to obey the command of our Lord in Luke in 17:4, *“And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.”* Forgiveness surrenders the right for vengeance. By removing vengeance from our hearts, we can allow the Holy Spirit to pull up our roots of bitterness.

Throughout this chapter we’re seeing judgment on the wealthy, but to be clear, the judgment is on those who have made their wealth their God. There is nothing wrong with accumulating wealth as long as it is kept in its proper place – subservient to the Lord’s preeminence. Proverbs 11:28a warns, *“He who trusts in his riches will fall,”* 1 Timothy 6:17 offers us this truthful perspective about accumulating wealth, *“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.”*

The judgment on Babylon will be swift and awesome. Verse 17 tells us, *“In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin.”* All those efforts to pile up money will evaporate in one hour. Thirteen years ago, when I prepared this lesson, the thought of such a sudden global disintegration of an economy was hard to imagine. Then the Corona virus showed up, and the earth’s economy came to a screeching halt. Virtually overnight, businesses were shuttered, and hundreds of thousands of people lost their jobs. Comments in other verses such as the kings of the earth standing far off and seeing the smoke of her burning remind me of what happened at 9/11 in New York City. Like I said earlier, the things that we’re reading about in this book sure seem a whole lot closer to present day reality. In my opinion, that is a powerful testimony that we are near the end and should be looking up as our redemption draws near.

Again, we learned at the end of Chapter 16 of worldwide shaking earthquake. In chapter 18, Babylon is going up in flames – the merchants are looking at the smoke from the fires from afar. Could this be what happened in San Francisco in the 1906 earthquake? The resulting fires from the earthquake created much worse devastation than the earthquake. Another possibility for these flames is that there’s been one or more nuclear detonations.

Did you notice the last item on the list of “commodities” that aren’t being sold any longer? – human beings being sold as slaves. Every human being is a creation of God, and is, therefore, made for His good pleasure. Each of you is precious in God’s eyes. What kind of judgment do you think is going to fall on those who are engaged in human trafficking? According to the State Department, almost 25 million people have been bought or sold against their will. God’s judgment on Babylon, which is not just a city but a world-wide economic system, will bring a stop to the buying and selling of human beings. Even in the midst of such massive devastation, God’s eyes are on the downcast.

In verse 21, a mighty angel picks up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea. It appears this will cause a complete wipe out of Babylon. Verses 23 and 24 specifically point out the crime to which God is exacting His vengeance, *“Your merchants were the world’s*

important people. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. In her was found the blood of prophets and of God's holy people, of all who have been slaughtered on the earth."

I'm currently reading John's Gospel, and I'm in the earlier portion of the book where Jesus has commenced with His miracles. People are flocking to Him because of His words and His deeds. His popularity escalated to unprecedented heights, and why wouldn't it? He was performing miracles, He was feeding people, and He was teaching the Kingdom of God. Following Him was pretty easy. However, as time drew closer to His crucifixion, the depth and tone of His teaching began to change. He started talking about Him being betrayed, He would be crucified, and people who wanted to follow Him would have to eat His flesh and drink His blood. Because of the difficulties and seriousness of His message, the crowds started to diminish. By the time He got to the cross, there was no one but His mother and the Apostle John.

Next week is the Passion week – commencing with Palm Sunday where the crowds were still believing in Him and calling Him the Messiah. Yet, as His path drew closer to the cross, they all turned on Him. Why? He was dealing with the centerpiece of His earthly mission – He was confronting humanity's sin-driven death sentence. If we choose to truly follow Jesus, we need to deal with our sin – that is uncomfortable in its own right. Yet, as followers of Christ, it is our mission to convey this message of dealing with sin to a world that has the same mentality as those who fell away from Christ in His last days. Following Christ because of His love, goodness, and provision isn't so difficult. However, identifying with His mission to deal with sin puts a target on our backs, and following Him starts to come with a heavy price.

As I was reading the commentaries for these two chapters, one word jumped out at me regarding the universal church, "seduced." God looks at Christ's church as a marriage of the Lamb. Therefore, for the entities and individuals who look to seduce people away from Christ's church, they are viewed as harlots and those who act on the seduction are seen as adulterers. Following Christ is the most serious business – it's the deepest commitment to remain faithful in our love and obedience to Him. Why? Because there are daily increasing seductive forces making following Jesus more challenging and costly. Immoral darkness is spreading across the human landscape, so any one who chooses to stand as a beacon of light is going to be singled out and persecuted.

Can you not see this happening now? It's even happening in the church. God's Word is being watered down for the sake of not offending people because, God forbid, attendance not keep growing. The preaching of sacrificial living and true care for the downtrodden and hurting are being replaced by proclamations of the blasphemous prosperity doctrine and repeated sermon series centered on giving the church more money for more and bigger buildings. We are not equipping people for a serious and committed walk with Christ through the strengthening of their faith through His word.

In the first chapter of John's Gospel, two of John the Baptist's disciples start to follow Jesus after John said when He saw Him, "*Behold the Lamb of God.*" Jesus looked at these two men and asked a simple, but the most important question any human can be asked, "*What do you seek?*" What's *your* answer to this question? By you being in this Bible study, your answer is at least partially a good one – you're seeking to better know God. This is the best thing you can do with the time you have.

Jesus said in John 10:27, "*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.*" Sometimes it's not so easy to know whose voice we're listening to, is it? We've all seen the image of the devil shouting into one ear while an angel is whispering in the other. Brothers and sisters, we are drawing to a close to the church age – we are in its last days. Times are getting darker and more serious – not unlike Jesus' path to the cross. Seductive evil forces – both outside and inside the

church – are relentlessly seeking to pull you away from your faith. *‘There’s more than one way to God.’ ‘God isn’t real.’ ‘God won’t mind if you go have a little sinful fun.’ ‘You’re not in tune with society because of your antiquated and hateful beliefs.’ ‘How can you condemn a loving relationship just because you think it’s immoral?’*

I’ll repeat Jesus’ question to John’s disciples for each of you, *“What do you seek?”* Following Christ to His cross and your cross is going to get harder and harder. It’s going to come with a heavy price. But that price is more than worth it. Only one team wins the Super Bowl, the World Series, or the Stanley Cup. Ask any of the members of those winning teams, and they will unanimously talk about the sacrifices they made. All roads do not lead to God. Only one road leads to God, and that road can be a tough one. But here’s the good news - Easter is coming. You won’t be alone. He is risen! He is alive! He will be with you every step of the way until He leads you home. Babylon has indeed fallen, and Jesus Christ is the victor! Amen? Let’s pray.