Book of Revelation

CHAPTERS 18 & 19

Outline

Chapter 18

Revisiting Babylon the Great

Announcement of Babylon’s Fall

Two Babylons - Religious and Commercial?

Is America Commercial Babylon?

Chapter 19

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

The Supper in Relation to the Rapture

The Second Coming

The Call to the Great Supper of God

The End of the Beast and False Prophet

The Death of All Who Have Taken the Mark

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CHAPTERS 18 & 19

Revisiting Babylon the Great

From chapters 16 and 17, we come away with a choice between an ecclesiastical or a commercial Babylon (either/or) primarily because we see only one Babylon in the picture (Revelation is not cluing us in to more than one). With information from chapter 17 and general knowledge of the descriptions in chapter 18, Babylon is a city, not a religion; which lends more to a commercial center than a religion.

However, what has plagued the One Babylon as a commercial idea is the question as to why the ten kings and antichrist would destroy her? Her allure is certainly enticing masses of people away from Christian values, which would help their cause not hinder it.

But as we encounter more focus in chapter 18, we find that certain details do not equate to the *one Babylon* idea.

**Chapter 17 Chapter 18**

**SIMILARITIES**

the harlot a queen, immorality with her patrons

also a city a great city

purple, scarlet, gold, pearls purple, scarlet, gold, pearls

blood of the saints blood of the saints

**DIFFERENCES**

destroyed by the 10 kings/Beast destroyed by God’s judgments

kings rejoice at her fall kings mourn at her fall

reigns over kings -

Those who destroy Babylon are different actors between the two chapters, which cannot then be a destruction of the same thing.

But more interesting also is the phrase, *“who reigns over the kings of the earth.”* Commercial centers do not reign over kings, even though they may command the addiction of kings. To reign means to control what kings do, their policies, etc.

**Re-Enter Roman Catholicism**

In an ecclesiastical interpretation, churches abroad in the world don’t reign over kings either, with the exception in history of the Catholic Church. We can’t go so far as to make her a world ruler with national kings subordinate to her. The Holy Church wielded influence not practical power in actual affairs. Kings sought the blessing of the Pope and acted to avoid excommunication.

So the Church did meddle in the affairs of state and dictated policies which states were loathe to disregard.

If in end times Catholicism becomes increasingly apostate, it could fulfill the needs of the imagery by remaining Christian in name but practicing abominations in the eyes of God.

What prevented us from concluding Catholicism for the beast or False Prophet was need for a complete conversion from Christianity to Satanism; and this move would be too drastic even for a corrupt church. Satanic influence would certain be playing a role, but that is not the same as being completely out in the open as a declared object of allegiance.

But here, Catholicism can remain Christian. It need not convert to Satanism. Its Christianity would be in name only, while its authority would be twisted into a distortion of truth about practice and behavior. Its rituals would be empty, its sermons horizontal and humanistic, its congregants remaining secular and unchanged, certainly no longer servants of Christ.

For this to occur, two things would have to take place. 1) a change in popes and hierarchy to the bad, and 2) an exodus from the Church of its true believers, leaving behind the unregenerate, nominal Catholics.

Interestingly, traditional Catholics have a belief of a prophecy that there is an immanent coming of a bad pope. Many have shared they would be forced to leave if the Church changed because of it.

**Two Babylons**

In chapter 17, the question of why antichrist and the ten kings attack and destroy Babylon is then answered better if she is an apostate Christian world church. Though not leading people to Christ, she would be a distraction against a new world faith in the beast.

Therefore, we have in chapter 17 an ecclesiastical Babylon as the apostate church of end times, being destroyed by the ten kings to make way for worship of the beast.

Then in chapter 18, we have the destruction of commercial Babylon by God and his last plagues on the earth – a blow against antichrist’s kingdom and center of commerce.

Babylon is Fallen, Is Fallen

We also gain better appreciation of the unnatural wording of the angel – *Is Fallen, Is Fallen.* Is it not now a case of saying that Babylon is falling *twice*?

**CHAPTER 18 - Details**

The Babylon of chapter 18 is declared by the angel to be a place of demonic habitations and unclean things. That all the nations have drunk of her passions (v.3) rules out this Babylon as an apostate version of the Christian church – ala Catholicism, since many nations would not worship under the name of Christianity. The drunkenness is more fitting as a center of immorality, because despite some nations being religiously fundamental, there still are many in them who indulge worldliness and carnality, especially their kings, dictators and presidents.

Furthering the separation from an ecclesiastical idea are merchants getting rich on the wealth of her immorality (v.3). A religious center could not offer such benefits.

*“Come out of her My people”* seems clearly a religious reference as might apply to Catholicism or a corrupt, apostate church in which there is a remnant of the faithful. But the truly faithful would by this point have already come out, were this an apostate church. Those remaining would be the double-minded who remain in a church as corrupted as the descriptions say here. Hence, why call the unfaithful out?

But how then can the call to come out be applicable to a commercial concept of Babylon, being equally abominable? The difference lies in the need for necessities or the tie one has to location. Very faithful people live within blocks of the strip in Las Vegas. A city that is steeped in immorality is not thoroughly so – such that every aspect is tainted.

So it is more possible that believers may be tied by circumstances, not worship, to such a center. Thus, the call to come out is somewhat like that of Lot. Grace before destruction.

**Lament for Babylon – Key to Her Identity?**

As Babylon is being destroyed, her patrons and merchants lament, not only for the loss of the things in her, but for the contrast with her greatness in the world.

Some have proposed that the city will be the ancient city of Babylon, restored. Two observations help this interpretation remain active: 1) OT prophecies about Babylon’s condition after its destruction have not been fulfilled, in fact contradicted historically – meaning those prophecies are meant to apply to her restoration and *second* destruction; 2) planning and some work progressed in Iraq to restore the ancient site. Perhaps someone else will complete those plans.

All of which is possible, except for one geographical complication: Chapter 18 clearly shows her destruction viewed and lamented from ships at sea. But historic Babylon is land bound with no access near the sea.

*And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance,  . . . `Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth , (*Rev 18:17-19)

**Is Commercial Babylon America?**

It has been noted that we do not see anything we might recognize as America in the Revelation. Which leads many to conclude that we have either ceased to exist, or have been reduced to a nation of no practical account in the world that the Bible would notice.

But others see America in the Babylon that is destroyed in chapter 18. This is fostered by the close similarities to the good and bad aspects of American culture and commerce today, and how it might be seen in the extreme in end times.

Let’s look at the similarities:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| BABYLON | AMERICA |
| Described as a great city, a strong city | America’s strength and greatness remain renown |
| Seen as a buyer of goods from merchants of the world, does not produce | As the US sends offshore most of its production, it is fast becoming a buyer and seller of goods, and a services nation |
| *And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more (v11)* |  |
| She deals in luxury and precious merchandise | America excels in luxury despite its social problems |
| *"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.  (v14)* |  |
| Much lamenting at her destruction. Described as a woe | America destroyed would be a great international event and greatly lamented |
| *"And the kings of the earth, . . will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning,*  . . *`Woe, woe, the great city,* |  |
| Ships at sea are close enough to observe her | America has many ports on her coasts |

Some dissimilarities:

Babylon will be held responsible for the blood of the saints. *24 "And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth."* This condition is thought by many to rule out America, since, despite the rise of humanism and atheism, we remain strong for religious freedom and specifically Christian faith.

But others see us falling away in this regard, and more rapidly so in recent times. The moral majority is dwindling and more and more Americans are anti-Christian and gaining an audience. As government and social authorities rule out religious symbols, speech and public signage to appease and offended minority, it seems that the majority who are not anti-Christian support diversity and the protection against being offended, rather than the truth of the gospel.

Will we become a nation that then persecutes Christians because they have become detestable for their intolerance and un-acceptance of diversity?

The key is the phrase, *“and of all who have been slain on the earth.”* If this means the faithful throughout all time, then this can’t be America. But who then was present in all ages to participate in the blood of all the saints? If this phrase is constraining, then we must back away from too literalistic an identification because no single city or nation overlaps the persecution of all saints throughout time.

In such a case, virtually any city or nation could then be meant, if they come under the influence of the same Satanic power and program that has made war on the saints of all ages. In that sense, America could still be intended, if she becomes the tool of Satan to thwart the church and later the tribulation saints – as a final representative form of his program.

While we must remain open to the idea of some new city (or nation) becoming the Babylon of Revelation, none in present day times would be so universally mourned for its commercial downfall than America.

**CHAPTER 19 – The Marriage Supper and The Second Coming of Christ**

In chapter 19, the scene is changed to Heaven once again, and one that immediately precedes the Second Coming of Christ – namely the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

In preparation for its revelation to John, we have a reiteration of the fall of Babylon in the praise shouted by the multitude of voices John hears. And we should make repeated note that in this fall God is the agent of the destruction, whereas in chapter 17 the beast and his ten horns were the agents (another reminder of the distinction between the two.)

We then see the vision of the Marriage Supper now come and the Bride having made herself ready. In this imagery, the Bride is the glorified Church and the Bridegroom the Risen Christ.

In a Rapture concept, this must then take place during the seven years which have occupied our study in the Revelation. If so, we have the question of exactly when the Supper occurs in relation to these events. If it takes place directly following the Rapture, then John is being taken back almost to the beginning of the earthly events he has been shown before, seeing now what is occurring in Heaven with the saints.

If it is toward the end of the seven years, then this Supper overlaps the final events on the earth – namely the battle of Armageddon happening roughly the same time as the Supper, if the Supper comes just before the Appearing.

One interesting point in favor of the Rapture is that the Supper is clearly for the Bride which must be the Church, yet it is happening before the Second Coming. If so, then there must be saints resurrected in order to participate, yet in the non-Rapture interpretation saints are not resurrected until the Second Coming. Even if one offers that the Supper is attended by all Christian saints who have died and are in spirit only, this is hardly the picture for disembodied, unresurrected saints.

But it certainly fits well with those who have been resurrected before the Second Coming and who constitute the saints of the Church Age, frequently called His Bride.

Our chief difficulty with the Marriage Supper in this position is that it disenfranchises the tribulation saints in participating. They will either be still alive, having not yet been martyred, or will be dead but not yet resurrected. What is difficult for them is that they will be living out their Christian witness in many cases more effectively and profoundly than myriads of Christians in the Church Age have done, yet the earlier get to the Supper, while the later do not.

The purpose of the Supper seems to be that of blessed reward for the deeds done in the mortal life.

John then sees the unveiling of the Second Coming. Christ comes on a great white horse, but John does not identify the Rider by name or title. We don’t see the written connection of the name of Christ until chapter 20. But of course John is given enough descriptive terms that we can make no mistake about Who. *(Faithful and True, the Word of God, King of Kings and Lord of Lords).*

As to His appearance, Revelation has not failed to give us bizarre imagery even for Christ. John sees eyes as a flame of fire, and a sharp sword proceeding out of His mouth. It is a scene portraying great authority and power, but especially complete dominion over all that will proceed from here forward.

He is attended by a host of others in white garments and on white horses, with swords to do battle. They are described as “armies in heaven.” So we have two avenues of identification: these are the glorified saints of the Rapture (whom Paul states Christ *will bring with Him.* I Thess 4:13ff.) Or, in the event of no Rapture, these are armies of angels fit to do battle

In the case of a Rapture, we cannot rule out Christ’s use of angels instead of the Church saints, if their glorified role is not fighting but presence and administration with Christ on earth. In other words, the host John sees may include both the Church returning with Christ, but not outfitted for battle, along with the armies of Heaven as angels chosen for that purpose. In both explanations, the Church is brought with Christ as Paul states.

Ironically, there is another Supper being announced in contrast to the Heavenly one.

As the Coming is taking place, John sees an angel flying above the earth, calling the scavenging birds to the great feast of the dead who will be slain by the armies from Heaven. It is called the Supper of God.

Curiously here we find that the beast has assembled his armies to make war against Christ at His coming, yet earlier we heard of the assembly of such armies for Armageddon. What we are not told is how these work together on the side of the beast.

Is the assembly for Armageddon solely for the purpose of waiting for the Appearing? If so, Satan must know the time of it (relatively close) so as to anticipate it, which begs the question of how he would become apprised of such timing? But if so, this eliminates our query as to how saints in this time period would need to be assembled against antichrist to do battle. They would not need to do any such preparation for war if Christ and His armies are to be the warriors.

We also have been taught that Christ comes to put an end to the battle of Armageddon, which implies that the battle has already been raging at the time He returns. If so, we would need to see believers assembling also to defend righteousness against such an onslaught. This battle would then be soon settled by the Appearing.

Of note elsewhere in 2 Thessalonians is the statement that Christ will destroy this lawless one *with the brightness of His appearing*. This suggests it occurs as the descent is taking place, not in the course of engaging him in battle.

But the Revelation here (vv 19-20) does not describe a battle being waged in actuality but an almost immediate event of the beast and false prophet being seized. This is not an exact match to the words of Paul in Thessalonians, but may be the actuality of what was spoken more poetically in Paul’s letter. The brightness of his appearing may mean with Paul simply the whole event of His appearing which would include His arrival and first actions.

Thus the two beasts are thrown alive into the Lake of Fire, to symbolize their very cognizant experience of torment and punishment.

Now follow the words of desperate fate for the rest. Scripture says unabashedly, *“the rest were killed with the sword that comes from the [Lord’s] mouth.”* This is hard to read for those who love Jesus especially for His gentleness, kindness and love. They remember Him as the One described by Isaiah as not breaking *a bruised reed* nor *quenching a smoking wick* (Isa 42.3). Yet here His sword swipes broadly across masses of people, doing them do death without a hearing or a defense.

We must keep clearly in mind that man has been given ample time and copious information as to the path of salvation. The delay of consequences cannot be eternally postponed. The day must come for judgment, and there is only One who knows the truth from the lie. In Christ’s judgment, human defense will be of no use, because He has all the facts. And of course, they are caught here in the very act of rebellion and hatred.

Thus chapter 20 begins with a glorious image of the Supper and Christ’s appearing, but ends with a ghastly scene of human carnage, fit for the birds to fill themselves to satisfaction.

Fortunately, chapter 21 turns our attention to the restoration of the world to a society ruled by Christ for a thousand years.