

Identity of whore Babylon

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By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2018-03-04

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Text

1 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me saying, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great whore who sits on the many waters, 2 with whom the kings of the earth fornicating; and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.”

3 So he took me away in spirit to a wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. 4 And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. 5 And on her forehead a name was written: “Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of the prostitutes and the abominations of the earth.” 6 And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, even with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And upon seeing her I was tremendously impressed.

7 So the angel said to me: “Why are you impressed? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast, having the seven heads and the ten horns, that carries her. 8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the Abyss and to go into perdition. And those who dwell upon the earth will be amazed, 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 will be present. 9 Here is the mind that has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. 10 And there are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not come yet. And whenever he comes he must continue a short time. 11 And the beast that was and is not; he is actually the eighth, yet he is of the seven, and he is going into perdition. 12 And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the Beast for one hour. 13 These are of one mind and give their power and authority to the Beast. 14 They will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called and chosen and faithful.”

15 Then he says to me: “The waters that you saw, where the whore sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. 16 And the ten horns that you saw, also the beast, these will hate the whore and will lay her waste and strip her and eat her flesh and burn her with fire. 17 Because God put it into their hearts to perform His purpose, even to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the Beast, until the words of God should be fulfilled. 18 Now the woman whom you saw is the great city that holds rulership over the kings of the earth.

Introduction

You have in your hands a rather huge outline that hopefully makes it crystal clear who the whore of Revelation 17 is. And there is a good reason why I am spending a whole sermon nailing down her identity: how you interpret this chapter shapes your approach to the rest of the book. And almost all

commentaries agree. Alan Johnson, in his commentary says, “In a sense, the interpretation of this chapter controls the interpretation of the whole book of Revelation.”¹ But that’s the problem: there are numerous opinions on who this whore is. Wilbur Smith said, “the interpretation of Babylon in the Apocalypse has given rise to more differing opinions than any other major passage in this book.”²

And over the years I have run across a lot of very odd interpretations. I think the craziest one I’ve seen was the one that said it was Dallas, Texas. The writer pointed out that Dallas just happens to sit on seven suburbs (which he says are the seven hills that the whore sits on), Dallas engages in whoredom in their strip bars, has enormous wealth, has the ships of the world trading with her, is a banking center, and influences the world. The author thought it was a perfect fit. And others have said, “No, New York City fits that better.” I don’t know why so many Dispensationalists think that America has to be part of the fulfillment of Revelation.

Of course, many say it is not a city at all. I’ve seen those who say it is the United States of America, the World Council of Churches, the United Nations, the League of Nations, a future one-world religion, American liberal Protestantism, etc., etc.

I. Competing views of her identity

But in your outlines I have just stuck to the main views that you will find in respectable commentaries. And I do respect these commentators. It’s a difficult chapter. So I want you to do some sleuthing with me this morning. We will list the theories and then look at clues that rule out all theories except for one. If we can move forward next week with a total confidence in who this whore is, we will have a much better understanding of this chapter and of the book.

A. Jerusalem below (as contrasted with Jerusalem above)

The first theory out there is obviously the one that I hold to. I’m a little prejudiced, so I put myself first. I believe the fornicating woman is Jerusalem.³ This book contrasts two women who represent two cities. And

1 Alan F. Johnson, Revelation, EBC 12; ed. Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), paragraph 61378.

2 Wilbur Smith, “Revelation” in Wycliffe Bible Commentary, ed., Everett F. Harrison (Nashville: The Southwestern Company, 1962), p. 1516. As quoted by Duncan W. McKenzie, PhD, The Antichrist and the Second Coming, volume 2: The Book of Revelation (xulonpress.com, 2012).

3 This view is also held by older writers such as F. Abauzit, J. G. von Herder, C.F.J. Zullig, P.S. Desprez; W. Milligan; Milton S. Terry, and J. Stuart Russell, but also by newer writers like J.M. Ford, J.

the cities themselves stand as the centers of those two religious communities. So the first woman is very clearly identified in this book as the bride of Christ, and she is connected with Jerusalem above. When the angel in Revelation 21 tells John, “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife” (v. 9), what does the angel show John? The angel shows him the New Jerusalem clothed as a bride. So the first woman is the believing church.

The second woman is the whore who has committed adultery against God, and God is bringing His divorce/covenant-lawsuit against her. But the center of this religious community is not the Jerusalem in heaven; it is the Jerusalem below, which stands for Judaism. So there are two women representing two Jerusalems, and the whore is the Jerusalem below. That’s my view and the view of many scholars.

B. The papacy or Roman Catholic Church

The second view is that she is the papacy or the Roman Catholic Church.⁴ This is similar to the first view in that it sees the whore as an organization that was once a good wife, but has apostatized from God. And by the way, this was the main view at the time of the Reformation. And while it doesn’t fit all the evidence (especially the timing clues), I will admit that there is an uncanny resemblance of the whore to the papal system. Alexander Hislop’s book, *The Two Babylons* does indeed stretch things at places, but it is astonishing to see how much Babylonian religion Romanism has imbibed into its system. It has strayed a long ways from its biblical roots.

In any case, I think Chilton is correct when he says, “the Church throughout Christian history has generally understood that she is in some sense a False Bride.”⁵ I would agree. So the first three theories have the best claim to this chapter. Judaism was a false bride; so is Roman Catholicism. And then the third theory makes it an apostate church in our future.

And by the way, while these alternative theories don’t get the history correct, they often make great applications to the present. And the reason is obvious - Satan tends to boringly repeat himself in his strategies down through history. So it shouldn’t surprise us to see some of the same demonic finger prints on the Vatican City that we will find in first century Jerusalem.

It shouldn’t surprise us to see almost identical kinds of statism and occultism that has crept into the modern mainline Protestant denominations (which is

Massynberde Ford, A.J. Beagley; J.E. Leonard, David Chilton, Ken Gentry, Foy Wallace, Arthur Ogden, T. J. Morin E. Holwerda, I. Provan, L.R. Michaels, M. Barker, and B.J. Malina.

4 Most Reformers, Alford (though Alford ranges into the next meaning as well).

5 David Chilton, [*Days of Vengeance*](#) (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 421.

the next theory). This chapter is going to give us clues as to how to recognize the finger of Satan in organizations of every age. Even though it was fulfilled in the first century, it continues to be very relevant in its spiritual applications. So even going through false theories is not a bad exercise because it shows us similar things that the same demons have likely done.

C. Apostate Christianity, or a counterfeit church at the end of time, or an apostate ecumenical movement with or without Roman Catholicism

I've already mentioned that the third view is similar. It says that the whore represents apostate Christianity, or a counterfeit church at the end of time, or an apostate ecumenical movement with or without Roman Catholicism.⁶

D. The city of Rome

The next most common view is that she is the city of Rome that persecuted the church.⁷ This was the view of Augustine and Jerome, so it has a very ancient pedigree. But then it is hard to distinguish the whore who rides the beast from the beast itself. How could the whore be Rome if the beast is Rome? Well, Moses Stuart explains it this way: he says that Rome as a city can be seen in distinction from Rome as an empire - especially during a time of civil war. The city of Rome is supported by the empire and gets lots of money from the empire (and therefore sits on the beast) and the empire fights back and destroys the capital city in a civil war. This view has a lot of merit. But there are several clues that it messes up on.

E. Rome religiously considered

Some have opted instead for saying that the whore is Rome religiously considered whereas the beast is Rome politically considered. Bahnsen and Morecraft hold to this view and it is a very credible view. It doesn't meet all the internal clues, but there is a lot to be said for it. But right off the bat I

6 Herman Hoeksema, John Walvoord, Harry Ironside, J. Dwight Pentecost and many others.

7 Beckwith, Isbon T. *The Apocalypse of John*. New York: MacMillan, 1919; reprinted, Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001; Caird, G. B. *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*. Black's New Testament Commentaries, edited by Henry Chadwick. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966; Charles, R. H. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John*. The International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920; Mounce, Robert H. *The Book of Revelation*. Revised ed. The New International Commentary on the New Testament, edited by F. F. Bruce and Gordon D. Fee. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977; Bruce, F. F. *The Revelation to John*. A New Testament Commentary, edited by G. C. D. Howley. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969; Aune, David E. *Revelation*. Word Biblical Commentary, Vols. 52a and 52b, edited by Ralph p. Martin. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997 and 1998; plus Jay Adams, David Clark, Moses Stuart, Arthur S. Peake and many others.

will say that in terms of ancient philosophy, they never separated religion from politics so tightly as we do. I think first century people would be mystified by that distinction. In any case, as we go through the clues you will see that it meets some of them very well and completely misses other clues.

F. The world system

The next most common view is that it is the world system⁸ that is governed by demons and that seduces believers. Obviously there are some parallels or good men would not have adopted it. But we are looking for 100% of the clues to be fitted in.

G. The literal city of Babylon on the Euphrates in the future (it is presently a heap of ruins)

The next view is held to by some futurists (especially Premillennialists). They hold that the literal city of Babylon⁹ will get resurrected at some point in the future. It is currently in a heap of ruins, but when Saddam Hussein said that he was going to rebuild it, Dispensationalists got very excited. It never happened, but there were a lot of people hoping.

H. All false religions flowing out of the tower of Babel

The next view is that she represents all false religions that flow out of the tower of Babel.¹⁰ OK, well obviously there will be some parallels.

I. A new world religion at the end of times with a false prophet

And then a lot of Dispensational books say that it will be a new world religion at the end of time with a false prophet.¹¹

J. A picture of all world cities (like London, Paris, New York, etc.) which become the centers for religion, philosophy, science, art, commerce and industry

And then the final one that you will sometimes run across is the view that she is a picture of all centralized cities in the world - not just Dallas and New York, but all centralized large cities. And again, there are applications that you can make to the big cities of the world, but as we look at each clue, you

8 William Hendriksen. This seems to be the basic position of Michael Wilcock as well.

9 William R. Newell and many dispensationalists.

10 Oliver B. Greene and others.

11 David Hocking and many other dispensationalists.

will see that it is probably the least likely of all of these interpretations.

II. A sampling of clues which progressively rule out all interpretations except the first one:

A. *The scarlet woman represents a city (17:18; see also 18:10,16,18,19,21)*

So let's look at at least some of the clues. I will say that the last theory at least partially fits the first clue. Look at verse 18 for the first clue. It says, "Now the woman whom you saw is the great city that holds rulership over the kings of the land (τῆς γῆς)." So the first clue is it has to be a city. The τῆς γῆς indicates that it has to be a city in the land of Israel, but we will leave that aside for the moment and focus on the fact that it calls the whore a city. Chapter 18:10 calls her "that great city Babylon, that mighty city!" And you see similar phrases in verses 16,18,19, and 21. Well, if it is a literal city, that rules out five of the views in one fell stroke. It's a city, not just a concept or a religion or a church. And it is one city, not every city, so it rules out the last view as well.

One objection that people give is to say, "Why can't the city be a symbol too?" And the answer is that Scripture doesn't give a symbol of a symbol; it gives a symbol of a literal place, person, or event. That would break the Biblical rules of symbology that we looked at in our introductory sermons. Everyone agrees that the woman is a symbol, and these verses say that she is a symbol of a literal city.

B. *The phrase "the great city" which is used to describe the whore (14:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:21), is used only one other time in Revelation (11:8), a place that refers to Jerusalem (compare 11:8 with Luke 9:31; 13:33-34; 18:31; 24:18-20). It is used elsewhere to refer to Jerusalem (Jer. 22:8; Lam. 1:1).*

But the second clue is that the phrase "the great city" which is used to describe the whore Babylon four times (14:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:21), is used only one other time in the book of Revelation, and there, John explains what he meant by the phrase. He clearly identifies "the great city" of Revelation as being Jerusalem. Let me read that for you. Chapter 11:8 says, "And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified." It's not literally Egypt or literally Sodom, but it had spiritually become so. Well, in the same way, verse 5 of chapter 17 says that the great city in this chapter is not

literally Babylon. Instead, it is “mystery Babylon.” The word “mystery” means that you wouldn’t know that it is Babylon unless God revealed it to you. It is symbolically or spiritually Babylon. In fact, the word “mystery” completely rules out the city of Babylon.

When I preached on chapter 11:8, I pointed out the rule of first reference. The first time John brings up a subject that will be appearing later in the book, he clearly identifies what he means by the phrase or word. And he clearly identified “the great city” of this book with Jerusalem. That really should settle it. John ought to be able to interpret his own symbols.

Think of it this way: if chapter 11:8 is referring to a different great city (as some people say), why didn’t he say “a great city” instead of “the great city”? Why confuse us if indeed “the great city” has an established meaning that points elsewhere than Jerusalem? And why further confuse us with the numerous parallels between the two cities of chapters 11 and 17? And I will look at those parallels in a moment. Why call it the great city of the land (τῆς γῆς) instead of the great city of the empire (οἰκουμένη)? On so many levels this clue completely rules out all interpretations except for the first theory. So we could quit our sleuthing there. But theories on Revelation don’t die that easily. I wish it were so, but they don’t. So in my outline I give you more clues. But before I get to those clues, let me deal with three more objections to this second clue that I see in the literature all the time. People will object that Jerusalem wasn’t nearly as big as Rome in either size or population. Why would it be called the great city?

And I would say first, “Get over it,” because God clearly called Jerusalem the great city in chapter 11:8. And that is simply picking up on Old Testament language. Jerusalem was called that because the Old Testament called it “the great city.” From God’s perspective it was. Religiously it was. In terms of influence it was. In terms of the temple and religion it was. In terms of God’s abode, it was. In wealth it was far more wealthy than Rome ever was.

But it wasn’t just the Bible that called Jerusalem the great city of all the earth; Roman and Jewish historians did too. Appian, a Roman lawyer and writer who lived around A.D. 160 called it “the great city of Jerusalem” [The Syrian Wars 50]. That’s a famous Roman writer. Pliny the Elder was a Roman naturalist, and he said of Jerusalem that it was “by far the most famous city of the ancient Orient” [Natural History 5:14:70]. The emperor Titus not only called Jerusalem “a famous city” [Histories 5:2], but noted that its temple “was famous beyond all other works of men” [Fragments of

the Histories 1] That was the emperor of Rome himself.

Of course, Jews were used to speaking of Jerusalem as the great city of the world because the Old Testament did. In fact the Old Testament called Jerusalem the center of the world. The Hebrew is literally the belly button of the world. God had designed Jerusalem to be the crossroads of the world that everyone would have to travel through as a kind of evangelism of the world. Peters in his book on missions calls it centripetal missions in contrast to modern centrifugal missions.¹²

But secular Jewish writers also spoke of its greatness. One Jewish writer said that Rome “destroyed a great city... no such sign has yet been performed among men that others should think to sack a great city.”¹³ The historian Josephus lived in Rome for many years, and was a personal friend of the emperor Titus, but compared to Jerusalem, it was Jerusalem that was far greater as far as he was concerned. When Jerusalem was destroyed, he said, “This was the end which Jerusalem came to by the madness of those that were for innovations; a city otherwise of great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind... And where is not that great city, the metropolis of the Jewish nation, which was fortified by so many walls round about, which had so many fortresses and large towers to defend it, which could hardly contain the instruments prepared for the war, and which had so many ten thousands of men to fight for it? Where is this city that was believed to have God himself inhabiting therein? It is now demolished to the very foundations.”

Another objection that people give is that chapter 18 portrays the harlot city Babylon as being great because of its enormous wealth. They believe that if wealth made it great, then surely Rome would be greater. But ancient history tells us that there was so much wealth that passed through Jerusalem that even the emperor Titus complained: “till at length you became richer than we ourselves”¹⁴ For the city of Jerusalem to be richer than the empire of Rome is astoundingly rich. And modern authors who have tried to estimate the wealth of Jerusalem and its billionaires have said that Jerusalem was by far the wealthiest city in the world. The Jewish historian, Josephus, explains why: “And let no one wonder that there was so much wealth in our temple, since all the Jews throughout the habitable earth, and those that worshiped God, nay even those of Asia and Europe, sent their contributions to it, and this from very ancient times.” (Josephus, Antiquities, 14:7:2) Charles Merivale’s History of the Romans said, “The palace of the kings of Judea I have already described as not less superior in magnificence to the abodes of

12 George W. Peters, A Biblical Theology of Missions (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972).

13 Sibylline Oracles 5:150-154.

14 Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, 6:6:2

Augustus and Tiberius. The whole city, upon which many despots have lavished their wealth, as far surpassed Rome, at least before Nero's restorations, in grandeur, as it fell short of it in size and population."¹⁵ Ogden says, "The dedication of the millions of devout Jews throughout the world, seeing that their tithes found their way to Jerusalem, made this city the richest and most lavish city for its size in the world."¹⁶ The archaeological finds of the treasure scrolls in Israel (scrolls showing the location of all the buried treasure of the temple with symbolism that is yet to be cracked) shows such vast amounts of money, jewels and other precious items that many people think it is a fable. No horde has ever been found with that much value in history. And certainly Rome considered Jerusalem to be the greatest conquest that they had ever made. So, other than population and physical size, Jerusalem was considered by the Bible, by the Roman emperor, by Roman historians, and Jewish historians to be the great city.

C. The great whore has a totally different identity from the beast since she sits on the beast (17:3), is distinguished from the beast (17:7), receives authority from the beast (17:3,7; cf. later study on 13:11-18), and is destroyed by the provinces of the beast (17:16-17)

Look at verse 3 for another clue. "So he took me away in spirit to a wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns." If she is sitting on the beast, she can hardly be the same as the beast, yet many commentators merge the two. Verse 7 says something similar. "So the angel said to me: "Why are you impressed? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast, having the seven heads and the ten horns, that carries her." The woman and the beast are quite different entities. In verses 3 and 7 she receives authority from the beast. And verse 16 is quite clear that the beast will kill the woman -"And the ten horns that you saw, also the beast, these will hate the whore and will lay her waste and strip her and eat her flesh and burn her with fire." Any theory that merges beast and woman is clearly wrong.

D. She must exist at the same time as the beast (same verses as previous point)

But these verses we have just read give us yet another clue - that the woman must exist at the same time as the beast and the beast must outlast her. If the beast kills her, then the beast has to last longer than the city. We have already

15 Merivale, Charles, History of the Romans (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1865), vol. VI, p. 454.

16 Ogden, the Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets, p. 46

seen that the beast is the empire of Rome ruled over by a literal demonic beast. Well, the empire of Rome did not outlast the city of Rome, so that theory doesn't fit. But Jerusalem does.

E. It has to be a period of time when Rome is divided into ten provinces (17:12 with 7,12-14,16-17), when five emperors have already died, one exists while John is writing, and the seventh is about to come (17:10)

And as to the specific period of time that is in view, there are a number of time clues. Verse 12 makes clear that the ten horns are ten contemporaneous kings. And the other verses that I have listed (verses 7, 12-14, 16-17) also show that they rule parts of the Roman empire. So they represent ten demonic kings over ten provinces. There was only one period of time when that was true. The ten kings ruled over Italy, Achaia, Asia, Syria, Egypt, Africa, Spain, Gaul, Britain, and Germany.

But verse 10 is even more specific when it talks about the seven heads of the beast. It interprets it as seven rulers of the empire: "And there are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not come yet. And whenever he comes he must continue a short time." Since the seven heads rule over the entire empire, this refers to the line of emperors from Julius Caesar to Vespasian, the seventh. When he says that five have fallen, he is referring to the first five emperors who had already died (from Julius Caesar to Claudius). The sixth one was Nero, and it uses the present tense to indicate that he currently exists while the angel is talking to John in early AD 66. So the sixth horn is clearly dealing with first century Rome. If the woman was riding the beast in the time of John and if she is destroyed by the seventh head of the beast, then that narrows things down to first century as well. Vespasian is the seventh head. That clue rules out almost all of the theories except for the first one.

F. God commands His people to flee from this city (18:4), a command which is not given for any other city than Jerusalem (Matt. 24:15-20; Mark 13:14-18; Luke 21:20-24).

The next clue is given in chapter 18:4, which says, "And I heard another voice from heaven saying: "Come out of her, my people, so as not to participate in her sins and so as not to receive of her plagues."

Prior to this city being judged, God's true people obviously still lived in her. The urgency of the need for them to flee from the city before judgment fell can be seen in the expression in verse 8: "Therefore her plagues will come in

one day.” And we find from Eusebius’ history that if the Christians had not left Jerusalem as soon as they saw the armies surrounding the city, they would not have been able to escape. The command to flee with haste is the same language given in Matthew 24:15-20:

Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. This command to flee out of Jerusalem was heeded at the beginning of the war according to the historian Eusebius.

But more to the point of weeding out theories, the only cities in the New Testament that God’s people are told to flee from because of the coming judgment are the cities of Israel, and especially Jerusalem.

G. The whore city is being punished for exactly the same reasons that Jerusalem was: Babylon (6:9-11; 18:20,24; 18:24; 16:5-6) Jerusalem (Matt. 23:31-36; Luke 11:49-50; Luke 23:28-31; 1 Thes. 2:14-16; John 19:6,15; Acts 2:22-23,36; 3:13-15; 5:30; 7:52)

The next clue is that the whore city is being punished for exactly the same reasons that Jerusalem was being punished for. Revelation 18:24 says, “And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, even of all who had been butchered on the land.” So which city did Jesus say that he was going to punish for the blood of all the prophets and saints? Jerusalem. And He did so several times. After telling the Pharisees that they had murdered the prophets and that He would send them more prophets whom they would persecute and kill, He said to Jerusalem, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

The other verses I have listed make it quite clear that all the blood of all the prophets is being blamed on Jerusalem and the same blood of all the prophets is being blamed on Israel. The two are the same. Otherwise you have double jeopardy, something that violates Biblical law.

H. The whore is decked out in the Jewish priestly colors of scarlet, purple and gold (Rev. 17:4-5 with Exodus 25:2,4; 26:1,31,36; 27:16; 28:1-2,4-12,15,17-23,33), wears a tiara like the high priest (17:5 as a contrast to Ex. 28:36-38) and has a cup in her hand as did the high priest on the day of atonement.

The next clue is given in verses 4-5. As I read those two verses, notice the colors and clothing.

4 And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. 5 And on her forehead a name was written: "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of the prostitutes and the abominations of the earth."

What a slam against the priesthood, ruled by the Sadducees. This whore is decked out with what the Jews considered the colors of the high priesthood - colors of scarlet, purple, and gold, wearing a tiara just like the high priest did, and having a cup in her hand just like the high priest did in his rituals. And these were also the colors of the massive Babylonian curtain that was in the temple. If you check out each of those references you will see the the color coordination is not accidental. Here are the priests wearing holy attire and pretending to be serving the Lord, but they are blasphemous in this claim. This is basically a parody showing that instead of having holiness to the Lord on their head, the priest has blasphemy.

III. Quick points of identity between Jerusalem and whore

But let me quickly go through several points of identity between Jerusalem and this whore, Babylon. Because I have given all the verse references in your outlines, I won't cover all of them in detail.

A. Both Jerusalem (11:8) and whore (14:8; 16:19; 17:5; etc) are given pagan names.

First, everyone agrees that both Jerusalem and the whore are given pagan names. In chapter 11:8 Jerusalem is called both Egypt and Sodom. So it ought not to be thought strange that another pagan name would be given to it - especially when the Sadducees and Pharisees had introduced so much Babylonian occultism into their worship. Their traditions are called the Babylonian Talmud for a reason.

B. Both Jerusalem (11:8) and the whore (17:9) are said to have these as symbolic names

And all three of those pagan names are said to be symbolic names, not literal names. So we are not looking for a literal Egypt, Sodom, or Babylon. We are looking for a city who has features of all three pagan groups.

C. Both Jerusalem (11:2,5,13,14,18) and the whore (17:16; 18:8) are doomed to destruction, including burning with fire.

Third, both Jerusalem and the whore are doomed to destruction. And interestingly, in both passages the destruction includes burning with fire. Why would it be significant that the whore is burned with fire? In Old Testament penology when a man or woman committed adultery or whoredom, he and she were ordinarily stoned to death. The only case that called for burning (probably after execution) was when a priest's daughter was guilty of whoredom. And she received this greater shame of burning because she was associated with God's temple. It was a heightened blasphemy against God. Leviticus 21:9 says, "The daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by playing the whore, she profanes her father. She shall be burned with fire." And these chapters speak of burning a whore with fire. Well, since God is a God of justice, He would only inflict the penalties that His law prescribes. And in this metaphor, daughter Jerusalem is being treated as a priest's daughter associated with the temple. Chapter 18:8 says, "she will be burned up with fire; because the Lord God who has judged her is strong." Chapter 17 says she will be stripped and burned. Well, this was precisely the language used in the Old Testament to speak of the destruction of Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar. Back at that time Jerusalem was likened to a priest's daughter who had committed whoredom and who was stripped, stoned, and then burned with fire.¹⁷ I think this is a huge clue that points to Jerusalem.

D. Both Jerusalem (11:3) and the whore (18:20) have prophets witness against her.

Next, both Jerusalem and the whore have prophets witness against her.

¹⁷ In several passages Jerusalem is condemned to be burned with fire because of her adultery. This was because of the corruption of the priesthood. See Jer. 4:11-13,30-31; Ezek. 16:37-41; 23:22,25-30

E. Both Jerusalem (11:7-10,18; Matt 23:30-39; Luke 11:50; 13:34) and Babylon are guilty of the blood of all the prophets (Rev. 16:6; 18:20,24) and Jesus declared that “it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem” (Luke 13:33)

When you check out the references in your outline you will see that both Jerusalem and Babylon are guilty of the blood of all the prophets. We've already read some of those Scriptures. If Christ says that Jerusalem is guilty of the blood of all the prophets, which He does in Matthew 23, Luke 11 and Luke 13, then that would seem to settle it. In Luke 13:33 Jesus said, “it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem.” That's a pretty categorical statement. By the way, that's another statement that speaks to no prophets after AD 70, when Jerusalem was destroyed. Jesus said, “it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem.” Well, in chapters 17-19 we have a ton of prophets who died inside the great city of Babylon. If Babylon is not Jerusalem, then you have prophets perishing outside of Jerusalem - all of them. But if Babylon is simply a third pagan name for Jerusalem, then it fits perfectly. Now, I will hasten to say that the apostles were able to die outside Jerusalem, but not the prophets. At a very minimum, it would have to be the leadership of Jerusalem that put the prophets to death.

F. Both Jerusalem (11:7-8; 13:11-18) and the whore (17:3,7) receive their authority from the beast

Next comparison: Both Jerusalem and the whore receive their authority from the beast. It is actually only hinted at in chapter 11, but it is made explicit in chapter 13 where the provisional government of Israel exercised all the authority of the beast. And this is seen in that the High priests were appointed by Rome down through their history and they represented Rome. Of course, the Sadducees used this government entanglement to enrich themselves and to control Roman politics with their massive amounts of money. So sitting on the beast not only shows the beast outwardly supporting the woman, but the woman also guiding the beast. Both things were true of Jerusalem and the Babylonian whore. Why? Because they are one and the same city.

G. Both Jerusalem (11:9) and whore (17:5) have tribes, nations, peoples, tongues connected

Both Jerusalem and the whore have tribes, nations, peoples, and tongues connected with them. And we dealt with that phrase extensively in chapter

11.

H. Both Jerusalem (11:13) and the whore (16:18-19) have the identical phrase, “there was a great earthquake”

Both Jerusalem and the whore have the identical phrase “there was a great earthquake” associated with their judgment.

I. Both Jerusalem (11:19) and the whore (16:18-19) experience lightnings, noises, thunderings

Both Jerusalem and the whore experience lightnings, noises, and thunderings.

J. Both Jerusalem (11:9) and the whore (16:19-21) are judged by “great hail”

Both Jerusalem and the whore are judged by “great hail.” Some of these things could be coincidental, but when these correspondences start piling up in such a numerous fashion, it starts to add up to identity.

K. Both Jerusalem (11:6) and the whore (16:21; 18:4) are judged by “plagues”

Both Jerusalem and the whore are judged by plagues.

L. Both Jerusalem (11:6) and the whore (16:3) have waters turning to blood.

Both Jerusalem and the whore have their waters turning into blood.

M. Both Jerusalem (11:10,18) and the whore (18:9,11) have the “land” (γῆς) judged along with it

Both Jerusalem and the whore have “the land” judged along with the city. Well, we have been seeing that the phrase, “the land,” is a reference to the land of Israel. So that too argues that the whore is Jerusalem.

N. Both Jerusalem (11:6,8; 12:12) and the whore (17:3) are connected with wilderness

Both Jerusalem and the whore are connected with the wilderness. Rome was not a wilderness. Nor was the literal Babylon. But Jerusalem was in a wilderness.

O. Both the land of Israel (12:12-14) and the whore 18:20 have the heavens commanded to rejoice of their judgments

Both the land of Israel and the whore have a voice commanding heaven to rejoice over the judgments.

P. Both Jerusalem (11:14) and the whore (18:10,16,19,21) have “Woe!” pronounced upon them.

Both Jerusalem and the whore have a “Woe!” pronounced upon them. Again, so many parallels cannot be simply accidental. They are hints that help us to interpret the identity of this whore.

Q. Both Jerusalem (11:18) and the whore (18:20) have God avenging the dead over them

Both Jerusalem and the whore have God avenging the dead over them.

R. When both Jerusalem (11:15) and the whore (17:14; 19:16) fall, Christ is declared in some way to claim the kingship over the world

And when both Jerusalem and the whore are destroyed, Christ is declared in some way to claim kinship over the world. I’ll leave you to study those verse references for yourself. But obviously both cities are destroyed at exactly the same time - and it is because they are the same city.

Now I will admit that most of these parallels are not sufficient testimony by themselves, but when piled together, and added to the very strong ones, I believe they form a pretty water-tight case that Jerusalem is the whore and is given another pagan name, precisely because she has the character of those pagan nations - especially of Babylon. And I hope to put a number of other proofs up on the web, but this should be sufficient for this morning. Let me finish up this morning by quickly going through each phrase in verse 1.

IV. Exposition of verse 1

A. “one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls”

The first clause says, “one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me saying...” I believe that the angel who spoke to John here was the seventh angel who started the judgments on Israel in AD 66 that we had looked at before. But now he is going to be explaining to John why Israel deserved such severe judgments. You will remember that from chapter 15 on we are moving backwards in time - at least up till chapter

18.

B. “Come, I will show you...” is a statement made for two women:

The next phrase says, ““Come, I will show you...” This is a phrase that is used of two women in this book. In this verse he says, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great whore...” In chapter 21:9 he says, Come, I will show you the woman, the Lamb’s bride.”

But as we go through this chapter you will begin to realize that the first woman had been once married to God. She was once the community of saints in the Old Testament. She was once called the faithful city. But she had committed adultery and was being put to death for her fornications. This implies first of all that adultery continues to be worthy of capital punishment. Many people doubt that nowadays, but this image would make no sense unless adultery continued to be a capital crime.

But this chapter also implies an understanding of God’s incredible patience and forgiveness of the adulteries of Israel in the past. It was only because she repeatedly and unrepentantly committed adultery that God put her to death in AD 70. So it illustrates that forgiveness can be a much better option. The fact that God waits this long shows God’s patience and mercy. You realize that God did not put Israel to death for her first offense. Like Hosea, God forgave His wife.

the Old Testament bride who became a whore (v. 1b; that Israel is seen as a whore can be seen in Is. 1:21; 57:3; Jer. 2:20; Ezek. 16:15; etc)

Anyway, you can see in your outlines that the Old Testament bride was called a whore a number of times just like Jerusalem in the first century was being called a whore. Let me just read one of those verses. Isaiah 1:21 says, “How the faithful city has become a harlot! It was full of justice; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers.” Israel once was faithful, but it had become a harlot city. And the first time that happened under Babylon, it led to her burning. So you can see that it is perfectly consistently with the Old Testament to call Jerusalem a harlot city or a whore city. And I’ve listed other similar passages.

the true church who is likened to a faithful bride (21:9; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:21-33; Rev. 19:7)

But even the one that I just read describes what the church should be -

faithful to God, righteous, full of justice, protecting life. Does that characterize us? And when we get to chapter 21 we will look at the incredible pattern that God sets for the bride of Christ today. Paul told the church of Corinth, “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”

These two women are explicitly likened to cities. The city of Jerusalem below (Is. 1:22) and the city of Jerusalem above (21:2,9-27)

And it is quite clear in these verses I have read that both women are explicitly likened to cities. Turn to chapter 21. This describes the bride as the great city of Jerusalem above. Starting at verse 9:

9 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues [Very interesting! He is using exactly the same language that he used when he introduced the whore. That’s not by accident. John wants us to see the contrast that this angel is giving between two women and two cities. “Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues”] came and spoke with me saying, “Come, I will show you the woman, the Lamb’s bride”. 10 So he transported me in spirit to a great and high mountain and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...

So the heavenly Jerusalem and the earthly Jerusalem are both called “the Great City.” He says, “I will show you the bride.” and the only thing that he shows John is the New Jerusalem. But the New Jerusalem is the bride, as is stated so clearly in chapter 21:2. Verse 2 says, “And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband.” Notice that - the city itself is prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. So it is a corporate bride. So back to chapter 17, you can see that the language is setting up a contrast between apostate Judaism and Christianity with these two women representing two cities.

C. Judgment (κρίμα) = equals lawsuit, evidence for lawsuit

Chapter 17, verse 1. He goes on to say, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great whore...” The Greek word for judgment is κρίμα and refers to a lawsuit or the evidence prepared for a lawsuit. What this angel is going to do is to take John back in time to explain why Israel was starting to be judged in AD 66. Why do the seven angels need to start pouring out their plagues? He will explain by showing John the incredible evil of Judaism. This is the evidence being brought against her. These evils didn’t happen overnight. The compromises had been happening for over a hundred years - going all the way back to the first compromises Israel made with Julius

Caesar.

D. “who sits on many waters” is interpreted in verse 15

The next phrase says, “who sits on the many waters.” Jerusalem was landlocked, so how could it sit on many waters - or more precisely the many waters? Well, verse 15 tells us. It has nothing to do with literal water. Look at verse 15: “Then he says to me: ‘The waters that you saw, where the whore sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.’” Well, here’s the thing - the Beast himself was composed of all those peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages. So sitting on the waters is equivalent to sitting on the Beast; on the empire. This is why so many people think that the woman has to be Rome in some way. But we already saw that can’t be the case. Rome and the woman are different entities. So how on earth could Israel sit on Rome, and especially sit on the capital of Rome (which is what the seven hills represents)?

I’ll deal with this more in a later sermon, but let me briefly analyze what it means to sit on the beast. It means two things. First, the beast supported Jerusalem. There is support for Jerusalem from all over the Mediterranean region. How? Well, she had special favored status throughout the reign of the first five emperors and through most of Nero’s reign. No other nation had the status she did. Israel also had special concessions on taxes that made all the other nations hate Israel. Israel also was allowed to implement its own laws rather than Roman laws. Even the high priests were appointed by Rome and their authority was backed up by Rome. So she sat on him getting a free ride and many benefits from the beast.

But a rider often controls the direction that an animal goes. And Israel did that as well. The Sadducees controlled Roman politics through massive amounts of money that they had. And this involved not just bribes, but also loans. Indeed, their international banking not only controlled politics to a large degree in Rome but in almost every nation of the empire. Chapter 18 will have a lot to say about the banking of the time. When the Sadducees are destroyed, international banking went up in flames, and it negatively impacted a lot of people. A lot of people lost money. The Pharisees and Herodians controlled politics through relationships and used people close to the emperors. Nero’s court was filled with Jewish lobbyists, his wife being one of the key Jewish players in the palace. So it wasn’t just the Sadducees that controlled politics; so did the Pharisees and the Herodians.

Ogden’s commentary explains other ways in which Jerusalem sat on the beast or sat on these nations and these waters. He says,

The High Priest... had authority not only in Jerusalem and Palestine but over the Jews everywhere. It was from the High Priest that Saul received authority to go to the synagogues in Damascus, a foreign city, to bind Christians and bring them to Jerusalem for trial (Acts 9:1-2; cf. 22:4-5; 26:10-11). This authority residing in the High Priest was recognized, permitted, and upheld by the Roman government. Decrees permitting the continued exercise of these Jewish rights were published by the Roman authorities throughout the empire demanding their recognition and respect under the penalty of law. With the authority and power of the High Priest and Jerusalem firmly established, Jerusalem ruled the Jews throughout the world. This they did through an elaborate network of courts... the Jews dragged Paul before Gallio, the deputy of Achaia, but Gallio refused to hear the case, saying, 'If it be a question of words and names, and of your law, ye look to it; for I will be no judge of such matters' (Acts 18:15). He thus recognized the right of Jews to judge matters pertaining to their law even in cities outside of Judea. So the authority of Jerusalem as a city was universal. It extended to every city on earth which lodged a Jew!"¹⁸

And because this chapter will fill us in on these matters in much more detail, that's all I'll say on that phrase right now. But you might want to draw a connecting line between this verse and verse 15. Too many people ignore the explicit interpretation. To sit on the waters is identical to sitting on the beast. Jerusalem controlled the Mediterranean Ocean and the Roman Empire primarily through its banking policies, but also in other manipulative ways that we will look at.

E. The redemptive bowls indicates that even this judgment results in salvation for some

And let me make a brief comment on the connection to the angels with bowls. The connection of this covenant lawsuit with the temple bowls is another indicator that God's judgment of Israel is not total. It is going to be a redemptive judgment. Just as there was a remnant that he redeemed in the time of the Babylonian exile, there was a remnant that would be saved in John's day and beyond. Despite justice, there are always hints of mercy.

V. Conclusion: additional applications

Let me conclude with two additional thoughts.

A. This whore is equivalent in unfaithfulness to main-line denominations

While the passage applies to the Jews of long ago, there are many applications that can be made for today. Obviously Judaism still stands under God's judgment, so Dispensationalists should not give blind support to the state of Israel. That's an obvious application. Apart from faith in Jesus,

¹⁸ Ogden, *The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets*, p. 47

that judgment cannot be removed.

But the parallels of this chapter to the unfaithfulness of main-line denominations in America will become increasingly obvious. There is one meaning, but many applications. God calls true believers to leave the PCUSA, the Methodist Church, the Reformed Church in America, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the American Baptist Church, and other denominations that have apostatized. Staying in it to reform it is a lost cause and it goes contrary to God's command given in Revelation 18:4, which says, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues." When you are a member of a conservative local congregation in an apostate denomination, you are still covenanted with that denomination. Your finances continue to support that denomination's evil policies. And God holds you accountable for that covenantal relationship. These denominations tolerate the murder of babies through abortion, they tolerate sexual sin including homosexual pastors, they have routinely denied the true Gospel, have denied the deity of Jesus and have in other ways denied cardinal doctrines of the faith. They are not true churches; they are synagogues of Satan. And yet, Revelation 18:4 says that God's people still strangely stay in those denominations. It's hard for them to move. It is crazy. He says, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues."

But I have the same issue with Rome and Eastern Orthodoxy. Doug Wilson treats them as part of the true church. I do not. He says they are erring brothers. I say, "No. The Westminster Confession correctly calls Rome a synagogue of Satan and treats it as the whore of Babylon. Wrong reference, but good application. There is a sense in which the Reformers were right when they said that Protestants who go back to Romanism are going back to the harlot. Though their eschatology was wrong, their application was great.

B. Judgment is necessary for purification and the advance of redemption.

The last thought is that judgment is necessary for the purification of the church and the advancement of Christ's redemption. We should not fear God's judgments. They cleanse a land and make it more ready to receive the true Gospel. Any nation or church that begins to take on some of the demonic characteristics of Babylon that will be outlined in this chapter should be brought before God's court, and we should ask either for Reformation or judgment. Such high-handed rebellion against Christ's throne cannot be ignored. May we be a church that is stirred up to make a

difference and to cast off any traces of this Babylonian whore that we may find in our midst. Amen.