

# The Apocalypse | Finding Composure in the Unveiled Christ

## “Fallen, Fallen Is Babylon the Great”

Revelation 18

6.27.21

*After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. <sup>2</sup> And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. <sup>3</sup> "For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality." <sup>4</sup> I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; <sup>5</sup> for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. <sup>6</sup> "Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her. <sup>7</sup> "To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, 'I SIT as A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW, and will never see mourning.' <sup>8</sup> "For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong. <sup>9</sup> "And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, <sup>10</sup> standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.' <sup>11</sup> "And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more-- <sup>12</sup> cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, <sup>13</sup> and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives. <sup>14</sup> "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. <sup>15</sup> "The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, <sup>16</sup> saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls; <sup>17</sup> for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!' And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance, <sup>18</sup> and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What city is like the great city?' <sup>19</sup> "And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!' <sup>20</sup> "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her." <sup>21</sup> Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer. <sup>22</sup> "And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer; <sup>23</sup> and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery. <sup>24</sup> "And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth."*

We're coming to the end of the final book of the Bible. We've planned for three more sermons on *The Revelation* and then *you'll know all there is to know*.

Actually, we've been "leaving a lot on the table" (as they say) *because* there's so much imagery and so many symbols, so we're sticking to the *Big Ideas*.

Today, *we're covering over four chapters* by looking at the last of those chapters (18) where we learn the fate of a character that first appears in CH 17 as a symbolic representation of something or someone.

The character is a woman, wealthy or even royal, seated on a seven-headed, ten-horned, *scarlet beast that came up from the earth*. She wears purple and scarlet and gold and jewels and pearls and a glass of wine in her hand... but on closer observation it's a gold cup full of sewage (abominations, murder, blood).

St. John may've been enamored *when he first sees her and sort of marvels at her* until the angel with him says, "Why marvel? I'll tell you the mystery of her identity and of the beast who carries her."

This is a passage about the good news of judgment, that God's people ought to rejoice in God's exercise of justice. They should be relieved that God STOPS a rotten vortex of evil that has claimed human lives.

And because we just can't get there – in other words – unless you've seen a lot of horrific evil *you probably can't find judgment something to celebrate ...* but, this passage could help you in some surprising ways.

**So let's look at:**

- 1) Who's That Lady? (nod to the Isley Brothers)**
- 2) Why Is She Fallen?**
- 3) How Should We Respond?**

This woman's named, "Babylon the great." When she's first introduced in the previous chapter it says, "upon her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." (17.5)

And there's this repeated refrain, "*For all nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality...*" That word, immorality, is a reference to the spiritual adultery the Bible calls idolatry.

She's seated on the Land-Beast we met last week but also standing by the waters, a symbol of the Gentile nations (7.15). She is also seated on seven mountains (7.9), which most scholars see as a clear identifier since Rome is situated on seven hills.

Her judgment parallels the judgment of Jezebel (850BC) who was a Gentile married to the Jewish king Ahab and was responsible *for leading Israel even deeper into idolatry* and responsible for the murder of Israel's prophets. There are so many comparisons between Jezebel and the Harlot of Revelation.

The mystery-name on her forehead reminds us of a Jewish Priest (as we saw last week).

So... who's that lady? Is she Babylon (the nemesis of the Jews)? Is she Rome (the current power occupying the Holy Land and Jerusalem)? Or is she a symbol of what those two pagan nations stand for – in other words, is she a symbol for the world-system which is based on ... well, shopping. Did you notice that? all the goods and products listed in v. 11:

*And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more; cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives. (11-13)*

Well, again, some say that the seven hills give it away – “gotta be Rome!” But then we read that the seven heads (of the beast) are seven hills and the seven hills are actually seven kings.

It could be ... could be Rome... and Rome could be a symbol, along with Babylon and Tyre and Nineveh and all the other world-empires going all the way back to Genesis CH 11 and the *Tower of Babel* – all these attempts to build lives independent of God on human achievement and to make a name for ourselves. As the poet T.S. Eliot put it, *“because (all people) are absorbed in the endless struggle to think well of themselves.”*

And let me say – it could be. I have to admit that this is the majority opinion and I do believe in “Christian Consensus” when it comes to Bible interpretation.

Who's that lady?

There is, however, another view, which I DO find to be compelling and in the name of full disclosure I should tell you that some scholars think that... this woman, the harlot, is the same woman symbolized in the marriage of the Prophet Hosea. Remember? Hosea was told to love a harlot and to marry her and do everything to care for and protect her. This was an image of God's marriage to Israel.

Israel was like a spiritual prostitute and would NOT stay faithful to her Husband (YHWH). Read Ezekiel 16 (Hosea in miniature) or Isaiah 5. Yikes!

And... it wasn't so much that Rome was a harlot for Israel but the other way around. And this list of goods – which some scholars have noted – it looks a lot like the building materials and the required supplies *for the functioning of the Temple in Jerusalem*. Rome used Jerusalem for raw materials and it was NOT Rome that fell in an hour (even after the big fire in 64AD Rome was rebuilt and is there to this day.)

It was *the Temple in Jerusalem that fell in an hour* (v 10) – in 70AD – the Great City, Jerusalem fell when the Romans said – “No Mas! We’re tired of your uprisings!”

After, Jerusalem fell... that harlot who’d been unfaithful to her own Husband and went after one lover after another over and over again, after the Temple was destroyed... in some sense, Judaism had come to an end. It would from then on, *not have the necessary system of sacrifice required for the practice of worship as God had prescribed*. It’s that way to this day.

For *First Century Jews*, the destruction of the Temple *was the end of the world, as we know it*. It was, spiritually speaking, an earthquake that the world had never seen. If you remember seeing the *World Trade Center* fall – as shocking as that was – for the Israelites to see the Temple fall was infinitely more devastating.

It was something that could absolutely NEVER, EVER happen... The presence of that beautiful, magnificent edifice was a guarantee that Israel would remain safe forever (Jer 7.4). She was lifted up in pride. She said, “I sit as a queen and I am NOT a widow and I will never see mourning.”

Israel fell because she somehow thought that God owed her. She believed that God had to be true to Himself and would never allow that big building to fall. If the building, the Temple, falls then we won’t be able to offer sacrifices *and we know for SURE*: God will never end the sacrifices!

But God did indeed put an end to the sacrifices by *Himself offering ONE FINAL SACRIFICE for the sins of all His people*. Outside the profaned City on a trash-heap that was holier than the defiled Temple which Jesus Christ called a robber’s den – “And Jesus began to teach and say to them, ‘Is it not written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS ' ? But you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN.”

But outside the Temple and outside the City, God paid the price and offered the Final Sacrifice for sin in order to build a new Temple of Living Stones and open the way for a New City. Listen to the Book of Hebrews: *Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own*

*blood, suffered outside the gate. So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come. (13.12-14)*

Jerusalem had become the Mother of Harlots, the purveyor of KARMA – all her lovers had conditioned her to be the single greatest supplier of quid-pro-quo religion.

Speaking of his countrymen, St Paul wrote: “I know what enthusiasm they have for God, but it is misdirected zeal. For they don't understand God's way of making people right with himself. Refusing to accept God's way, they cling to their own way of getting right with God by trying to keep the law. For Christ has already accomplished the purpose for which the law was given. As a result, all who believe in him are made right with God.” (Romans 10.2-4 NLT)

No wonder the great take-away of this passage is – v. 4 *“Come out from her, My people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven and God has remembered her iniquities.”*

And this makes sense of that difficult verse that says “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins...” (Heb 10.26) In other words: “You can't go back to the Temple for atonement – if you leave Christ there's nowhere else for you to go!”

To be even more to the point – we are grafted in to the True Vine (Isaiah 5; John 15.1-5; Romans 11.17) and “the rich root of the olive tree” and as St. Paul says in that passage from Romans CH 11: *“do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.’ Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear...”* (Romans 11.18-20)

See, the big take-away is this: we owe everything to the Jews. We ought to earnestly desire their salvation AND we ought to walk with JOY but also very serious reverence and absolute fixation on a relationship with God that's based on His grace, received by faith.

In that prayer of repentance we sometimes pray, we see this quest NOT for a righteousness of our own that might make us conceited or feeling superior to ANY ONE but this humble, astounded, deep, daily dependency on the doing and dying of Jesus, the whole basis for our acceptance before the holy God. Listen to this old prayer:

I am always going into the far country,  
and always returning home as a prodigal,  
always saying, “Father, forgive me,”  
and you are always bringing forth the best robe.

Every morning let me wear it,  
every evening return in it,  
go out to the day's work in it,  
be married in it,  
be wound in death in it,  
stand before the great white throne in it,  
enter heaven in it shining as the sun.

Grant me never to lose sight of the exceeding sinfulness of sin,  
the exceeding righteousness of salvation,  
the exceeding glory of Christ,  
the exceeding beauty of holiness,  
the exceeding wonder of grace.

If you're believing in Jesus: keep on believing! Don't take it for granted as if "Oh, I already DID that!" NO! *Be wrapped every day in the record of rightness you receive as a gift.* Come out from this universal quest to make yourself right and keep yourself right, prove to others how right you are and to look down on those who are NOT AS RIGHT AS YOU ARE!

And if you're not sure... Come out from them! Come out from that spiritual approach perfected by the First Century Israelites – the idea that you can make yourself enough.

Come talk to me *about how mercy can save you* and how Christ alone is mighty to save.