

The Rise and Fall of Babylon (Part 1) – Rev 17-18

Rev 17. We're studying the book of Revelation to know what to expect in the days to come, and hold fast. Particularly in the days of The Great Tribulation. That brief period at the end of this age, when God judges the world just before his return.

And having covered the *last* of God's judgments, in chapter 16, we're given more detail in chapters 17-18. Specifically, on the rise and fall of Babylon the Great.

We first saw Babylon mentioned in chapter 14 (8), *prophesying* its fall; and then in chapter 16 (19), *speaking* of its fall. Just 2 verses. But in chapters 17 and 18, the floodgates open.

So we're going spend several weeks here, because there's so much to see, so much to apply, and so many parallels with the state of things now.

I'm only going to cover v1-6 in this sermon, but I will refer to verses in both chapters. You follow along. Rev 17:1-6.

[1] *Then [after his vision of the bowl judgments] one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, [2] with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk."*

[3] *And he carried me away in the Spirit [another way of saying he had a vision from God] into a wilderness [a place of spiritual barrenness], and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.*

[4] *The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. [5] And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." [6] And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. (ESV)*

Let's start with this:

The great prostitute is Babylon the Great. (v1,5,18)

They're one and the same. After the angel says in v1 – *Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute*; John says in v5 – *on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great."* The great prostitute is the great Babylon. A mystery, not in the sense that we can't understand it, but that there's more than meets the eye.

And just to make sure we don't miss it, at the *end* of the chapter, in v18, the angel says – *And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth*. The great city referring to Babylon the Great like we saw in 16:19. Where it says – *The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great* [synonymous with the great city], *to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath*.

Connect all those dots – v1, v5, v18, and ch16 – and the great prostitute is one and the same as Babylon the Great.

• Don't be confused.

God uses two metaphors to describe one thing. He uses Babylon, because of its hedonism and sexual immorality; and a prostitute, because she's always trying to seduce people to join her. Seduce people to *participate* in the ways of Babylon.

Babylon remember, was the sin-city of the ancient world. 600 years before Christ. Known so much for its sexual immorality, that over the centuries it became shorthand for it. Plus, it was the most powerful nation on earth at the time. A nation that rose, took people captive, and then fell. Just like Babylon the *Great* will do. It's a fitting metaphor.

But in The Great Tribulation, it's going to be worse. It's going to be like a great *prostitute* as well. The *mother of prostitutes* it says in v5. The *source* of all seduction and *abomination*. Singing her siren song and flaunting her wares in a last-ditch effort to drag the world down and hold it captive to her spell.

Two metaphors instead of one. But don't be confused. They're one and the same. The great prostitute is Babylon the Great, and Babylon the Great is the great prostitute.

And . . .

Both represent a worldwide culture of debauchery, luxury, and persecution. (v2,6)

They represent a culture. Described in detail in chapter 18. A culture that buys and sells, marries and buries, and plays and trades. All over the world.

And it's a culture of debauchery because it's referred to as a great prostitute. Someone who indulges in sinful, sexual pleasure. Look at v1-2 again. "*Come* [the angel said], *I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters*. Or, in bed with the whole world. That's the idea of *seated*, and that's the idea of *many waters*.

Like John says in v15 – *And the angel said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated [indulged, established], are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages* (15). The Great Tribulation is going to be characterized by a *worldwide* culture of debauchery.

Including worldwide *leaders*. Back to v1 – *I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, [2] with whom the kings of the earth* [the world's leaders] *have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk."* They too will indulge.

So from leaders to followers, a worldwide culture of sex and debauchery will run *rampant* in The Great Tribulation. People will drink the wine of lust, and sexual promiscuity, and sexual deviance, with abandon. No limits and no inhibition. Hence the vision of a *great* prostitute to describe it. The *mother of prostitutes* (5). It's a personification of the reality.

➤ But debauchery is only one aspect of it. It's going to be accompanied by *luxury* as well. Look Rev 18:3. An angel makes an announcement that Babylon is fallen, and says – *For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.*"

Not only will the culture encourage *sexual* indulgence, but material indulgence. So that people will accumulate more and more for themselves. Living as high on the hog as they possibly can. No regard for others and no regard for God. Greed will be good and more will be better. “Live it up. Who cares about anyone else?”

➤ And third, it’s going to be a culture of persecution. Like John says in v6 – *I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus*. Literally, the witnesses to Jesus. Those who hold fast to him and keep the faith. Many of them are going to be killed. Perhaps many of *us* if we’re still around. Persecution at its worst.

And then there’s Rev 18:24. The end of the next chapter, and the end of the world’s *lament* over the fall of Babylon. Where an angel says – “*And in her [in Babylon the Great] was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth.*”

We’ve seen persecution before, on the part of the Antichrist and False Prophet; but here, it’s the culture *itself* exacting a toll. From our neighbors and co-workers to our friends and acquaintances. Whoever’s bothered by how we live and what we believe. Whoever’s upset that *their* suffering is worse than ours. Whoever hates us for our *joy* in the midst of it. Our hope in Jesus. Our confidence in the future.

Just like now, we’re going to be the aroma of life to those who are being saved, and the aroma of death to those who are perishing. Except then, near the end of The Great Tribulation, the restraints will be loosed and the inhibitions gone. They’re going to take it out on us. Or try to. Leading to persecution and murder.

That’s the atmosphere we should expect in The Great Tribulation. A culture of debauchery, luxury, and persecution.

• **A culture that’s already started.**

The rise of Babylon has already begun. Look around. The prostitute is present. It’s not just in the Tribulation, it’s now. Just listen to these 6 stats.

1. There are 42 million porn sites on the internet, with 370 million pages of porn. And that was 3 years ago.
2. The porn industry’s annual revenue is more than the NFL, NBA, and MLB combined.
3. 47% of families in the US reported that pornography is a problem in their home.
4. 56% of American divorces involve one party having an “obsessive interest” in porn.
5. 55% of married men and 25% of married women say they watch porn at least once a month.
6. 68% of church-going men and over 50% of pastors view porn on a regular basis. God help us. (<https://conquerseries.com/15-mind-blowing-statistics-about-pornography-and-the-church>)

The culture of *debauchery* has already started. And that doesn’t even include promiscuity, adultery, homosexuality, polyamory, and transgenderism. It’s here. And I think it’s the biggest reason the end *times* are near. I don’t know *how* near. It could be years, it could be decades. But of all the indicators to warn of it’s coming, I think this one is blaring the loudest and clearest.

And the sooner we see it for what it is, with all its danger and evil, the better we’ll avoid it and hate it. Which is important, because it’s not going to get better.

➤ The same is true of *luxury*. Opulence. Extravagance. The cultural desire and expectation, of getting more and doing less, is rampant. As is spending more and *giving* less. People have more and more to spend, and they’re spending it on themselves. Extravagantly and exclusively.

Not that it’s wrong to spend money and enjoy some of the things God has given you. But if you do it because you’re *discontent* in life; or you indulge in luxury at the expense of blessing others; or it’s beyond the realm of living in the middle of our culture, it *is* wrong.

Not only does God bless us to bless others, but his design and desire is that we would live neither rich nor poor. Neither rich and forget God, or poor and curse him. Prov 30:7-9.

The point being, luxury is a cultural trend that’s already here, and getting worse by the day.

➤ And so is *persecution*. For which, one statistic says it all. There have been more Christians killed for their faith in the last hundred years, than the previous *1900* combined. Confirming beyond a shadow of doubt, that the worldwide culture of debauchery, luxury, and persecution has already started.

So whatever you do . . .

• **Don’t be naïve.**

Don’t be gullible. Don’t be foolish. See it for what it is, and avoid it like the plague. See it for what it is, and check your heart. See it for what it is, and stand firm.

Because in The Great Tribulation . . .

The Antichrist will use the prostitute to influence the world. (v2-4)

In other words, he’ll use the culture to influence the culture. Because a culture of sex, greed, and fear has immense influence on people. Individually *and* corporately.

And it seems that in The Great Tribulation, the Antichrist will use it to accomplish his purposes of control and worship. V3 – *And he carried me away in the Spirit [John says] into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.*

That’s the Antichrist. Just like we found in chapter 13. Full of irreverent and ungodly names. Blasphemous labels. Maybe even attributing to himself what only belongs to Jesus. Titles like Lord, or Savior, or Deliverer.

Whatever the case, the great prostitute is not only in bed with the world and its leaders, she’s in bed with the Antichrist. *I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast* (3). The Antichrist.

And no wonder. She has everything he wants, and she’s eager to give it. With plenty leftover to satisfy and influence the world. Plus, v4 indicates that she’s attractive, full of abominations, and overflowing with impurity. Everything that an utterly depraved person like the Antichrist yearns for.

[4] *The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet [colors of opulence and splendor in John’s day], and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls [she’s attractive, desirable, and*

flashy], *holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality*. A golden cup. To make what's disgusting look nice. A cup full of disgraceful corruption and all manner of unbiblical sexuality. Things that can lead you down a rabbit hole from which you never come out.

So not only does he use her, but she uses him. To drag *him* down, as he drags others down. A match made in hell.

➤ And how *better* to influence the world? Cloud their thinking with a great big brothel, participate yourself to condone it, and then demand their worship. Expand the *opportunities* for lust and sex, cultivate the *desire* for money and more, and then threaten to withhold it all unless they give you their allegiance.

It's the oldest play in the book. Entice somebody with the drug of sex and they'll do just about *anything*. From divulging state secrets to worshipping the beast.

That's how much *influence* the great prostitute has. Like it says in v18. The woman *has dominion over the kings of the earth*. Power. Control. Like a mistress holds sway over her lover, because he's drunk with her passion. And shrewd as the Antichrist is, he will *use* that influence to influence the world.

- **Don't be surprised.**

Holding fast in The Great Tribulation is not just going to be a matter of enduring the suffering or withstanding the persecution. It's also going to involve resisting a life of luxury, and fleeing temptation. Don't be surprised.

And don't be surprised at the *power* of a such a culture to adversely influence the masses. Look at the last few years. The world is losing its mind. From a rampant attitude of entitlement to hyper-victimhood and fear. Blatant promiscuity, to cutting off body parts. Changing history, to changing books. Leaving church, to leaving God. Babylon is on the rise, and so is her power to influence.

So whatever you do, don't be surprised. See it for what it is, and steer clear. Smell the battle, and fight the good fight. Always sober and always vigilant, to hold fast.

Prayer – God, help us. Forgive our sins and purify our lives. Give us eyes to see and hearts to understand. And most of all, keep us from stumbling. Hem us in. Guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Guide and direct our steps in the way everlasting. To live for you.

You Are Loved