

Babylon

Revelation 16:17-17:18

This series in Revelation has been difficult. Thank you to all who have given feedback, you who have expressed thanks for us teaching verse by verse, for us trying to explain difficult subjects through simple terms, thank you to those who have voiced gratitude and relief for difficult things said from the pulpit, others have said things like- “thank you for saying that, no one else seems to be calling those things out,” others have expressed joy that this series has given the most opportunities for their family to discuss and wrestle with the scriptures and ideas presented. These are all amazing things to hear- whether you agree or disagree with the Revelation dots being connected- my hope is that what is presented here on a Sunday morning, would cause you to wrestle with and dig in deeper into scripture in order to sort out your own personal understanding. I also want to thank the few of you who have reached out and said things like, “Well, I don’t know about that exactly Pastor Wes, what about this view or that view”- and we’ve had really great engaging, thought provoking conversations as a result of trying to understand each others’ perspectives.

Over the past several months, through our study in Revelation, One Church attendance on a Sunday morning has grown, but I also know of some who have been offended by the teaching presented and have left our fellowship. Those scenarios have greatly grieved my heart, and Pastor Dave’s and my intent has never been to be divisive or controversial, but rather to let scripture interpret scripture, and if we’ve somehow been unfaithful in that, then we definitely want to know and try to figure it out together as the body of Christ. There are 2 subjects in particular that keep coming up in the Biblical text that I think can be considered divisive and controversial- the first is the subject of the rapture.

Pastor Dave and I both recognize that it seems the current most popular belief is that Christians will be raptured up to Heaven *before* any of the tribulation bad things start happening in Revelation. We've both expressed that that viewpoint seems harder scripturally for us to personally defend, but rather there are many verses that directly seem to be saying that believers won't be raptured up to be with Jesus until *after* the tribulation. But that's totally ok, if you still hold to a pre-tribulation rapture view, or even a mid-tribulation rapture view, all we want to express here from the pulpit is that there are enough verses that should cause us to at least prepare ourselves mentally that Christians might have to endure some really difficult world events that the book of Revelation describes. We'll hope for the best, prepare for the worst. We just don't want anyone to be caught off guard if things play out a little differently than what many are expecting. So please hear our heart in that, and know that we love you deeply and are doing our best to honor the Lord through scripture and prepare you as His people as best as possible through scripture.

The other subject that could be considered divisive and controversial is the subject of worldly kingdoms and nations. I've made some feel uncomfortable in stressing over and over the scriptures that warn against supporting earthly kingdoms who will be uniting and conquering. And maybe I accidentally confused some concerning where I stand politically in support of or against modern kingdom nations of the world. So I want to try to be real clear so there's no confusion- I am so excited and anticipating the *Kingdom of Heaven*, that I came up with a logo, that I put on a flag, to represent that Kingdom. (Explanation of symbol) I want *this* Kingdom to be at the forefront of my mind 24/7/365, so much so that I've even had this logo printed on a sign displayed at the base of my driveway. I want to be reminded of this kingdom so much so that I embroidered the kingdom logo on some of my clothing. And I love wearing this clothing, because I love people asking me about it and I get to tell them about King Jesus who is coming, bringing a

whole new Kingdom that will replace all the failing kingdoms of this world. And what's so crazy, is that the Bible says this coming Kingdom will consist of people from *all the nations of the world*. There will be Jews, Gentiles, blacks, whites, Americans, Europeans, Africans, Asians, Indians, Latinos, Israelis, Iranians, Iraqis- there is equal access to this Kingdom of God- without any special privilege or partiality to any group- there is equal access to the Kingdom of God available to all the world through Jesus Christ.

So please, I beg you, forgive me if I have given you any impression that I am for or against any people group or nation- that's not my heart at all. Please forgive me for any impression that I've arrogantly got it all figured out- that's not my heart at all either. My heart is for the Kingdom of God, and I'm very passionate in defending it- I want to see all peoples and nations join in to that coming Kingdom. And if that is your heart too, then One Church is a really good place for you to be. And I apologize if I haven't communicated it as gracefully as I should have or as I have wanted to, but my heart's desire is that we as God's people, would be very careful in getting wrapped up in the support or attack of any earthly nation state, when God's word tells us to reach the nations with the Gospel of Jesus so that they can all be a part of God's Kingdom Nation that is coming. If what I've just said sounds really strange to you, please call or email me and let's talk and figure it out together.

Alright, let's look together at Revelation, at the end of chapter 16. I'll read verses 17-21 and then we'll quickly walk back through them, as they will serve as a launch pad for us to wrestle with a really mysterious and cryptic riddle contained in chapter 17. So get ready to put on your Sherlock Holmes hat and jacket after we quickly walk through these verses. Here's verse 17 of chapter 16... **(verses 17-21)**

Here we have described the 7th Bowl of Wrath- the last tribulation event mentioned in the book of Revelation. In **verse 17**, I think it's worth

noting that with this last thing, the words coming from the throne room in heaven are “It is done.” That makes me think back to John 19:30 when Jesus was on the cross and He cried out “It is finished!” Now, while both are similar phrases, it’s not the same Greek verb used in these two cases. In John, when Jesus says “it is finished”- the Greek word is “teleo,” -think of the word in terms of a pirate’s telescope- it extends out one stage at a time until it is done and has reached it’s full capacity and effectiveness. The word means to accomplish, fulfill, complete. That’s definitely what Jesus did for us with His death on the cross. God’s plan of ending the curse in the Garden of Eden, of ending the effects of sin and death in our lives, was revealed one stage at a time until it was fully extended- fully accomplished and fully completed by Jesus’ sacrifice for us.

In contrast, the root Greek word in Revelation 16:17 for “It is done,” is “ginomai,” which means to become, to come into being, to happen, to be made, to be done. The “gin” of “ginomai” is where we get our words generator, or regenerate, Genesis, even begin- and the idea is that something is being produced, something is changing, something is becoming different. One thing ends *because* another is beginning. And that’s the whole idea not just here, but throughout the book of Revelation. The “ending” events we see with each cycle of 7, only serve to usher in the Kingdom of God beginning. These events shouldn't really be seen as the end, but really the beginning of something new, different, and amazing.

Verse 18 describes lightning, thunder, and an earthquake- and on your study guide you’ll see that I’ve noted by underlining, that with each 7th thing there is thunder, lightning, and an earthquake. Yes, these same words are used to describe the 7th seal, the 7th trumpet and the 7th bowl of Wrath. My personal assumption, as I’ve mentioned before, is that these cycles are layered on top of each other, and they are all describing the same thunder, lightning, and earthquake that takes

place right before Jesus returns in chapter 19, but I don't think there's a way to know that for sure or not- so I hold onto that idea loosely.

Verse 19 references the "great city," which is mentioned again at the end of chapter 17, and then several times again in chapter 18. These verses, as we will see later, state that the great city is also referred to as "Babylon," and that in this great city is found the "blood of prophets and of saints." The only other mention of the "great city" that we see in Revelation is from back in chapter 11, that defines it as "the city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified."

Verse 20 sounds very much like what we read back in chapter 6 with the 6th seal- land being removed from its place. **Verse 21**- huge hailstones- a talent is a measurement of about 100 lbs, so we're talking 100 pound hailstones hitting the earth and people of the earth, and instead of repentance and respect for the Almighty God, this describes people who will be further angered at God and will blaspheme Him, calling Him bad when really He is good.

As far as order of events go, basically we could at this point skip straight over to chapter 19 that describes the marriage of the Lamb and His bride, when Jesus returns and rescues His people and obtains the final victory over those who reject Him. But in between chapters 16 and 19 are 2 chapters dedicated solely to the entity referred to as "Babylon." And the way Babylon is described, it seems that a lot of the wickedness of the world has been associated in some way *with*, or is projected *onto* "Babylon." Chapters 17 and 18 are dedicated solely to a mix of describing the wickedness of this "great city," describing clues to identify it, and describing the mourning, the grief, over seeing this great city destroyed and judged by God. This is pretty significant, that two whole chapters are dedicated to this entity. When the Bible dedicates that much attention in one place to one particular subject, we should

probably assume it's worth wrestling with and understanding. I don't know if we can come to any solid conclusions *today* as to the definition of Babylon, but we'll look it at wrestle with it a bit. I'm going to quickly try to walk us through chapter 17, and we can deal with chapter 18 another day.

Before we read, just so you know some of the potential candidates as to who "Babylon" is referring to, the options include:

Rome- this view would be more so from someone who thinks the events described in Revelation have already happened. Rome would have been one of the entities during John's day who were persecuting Christians, and Rome was built on 7 hills or mountains, which is one of the clues we'll see in a moment that the Bible gives. Some nuance this view with the idea that a new "Rome-like" government/nation will be established, which I think could be a more worthy viewpoint to consider.

Another view would be that Babylon is describing a future or ongoing global political, economic and/or religious system; perhaps an alliance of nations or world powers, linked to the beast nation state that we've talked about before. For me, I think this viewpoint could potentially be part of the equation as well.

A similar, or linked view equates "Babylon" to current modern day nations/world super powers. Again, maybe that's part of the equation and is a view worth wrestling with too.

Others have suggested the ancient city of Babylon. Babylon originally got it's name from the tower of Babel, which was constructed in human pride and in efforts to gather together, make a name for themselves, and glorify human achievements rather than God. Babylon the nation is the country to which the Israelites were exiled to about 600 years before Christ's birth. The Bible tells us that the false god and wrong ideology

and practices of ancient Babylon corrupted many of the Israelites during that time of exile, and many prophets were sent to call Israel back to the true God. Today the ancient city of Babylon is located in modern-day Iraq and is basically an archaeological ruin site, so literal ancient Babylon is probably not the place the Bible is referring to here; rather “Babylon” is a figurative, spiritual, symbolic reference to another place- that like ancient Babylon, is attempting to make a name for itself, glorify human achievements rather than God, and corrupt God’s people.

Still there are others who have made a case that the Bible could be referring to Mecca. Mecca is indeed a hotspot for the false religion of Islam, and Mecca is located in a desert wilderness *surrounded* by 7 large mountains, Mecca is a place of wealth, Mecca (in a way) controls several political leaders of Muslim nation states- these facts fit several of the clues we’ll be looking at, so this could also very well be a potential candidate worth heavily considering.

Lastly, some believe that the USA could be who is referred to here as Babylon. Maybe the USA could in a sense be considered as a form of a new “Rome-like” nation state that I mentioned- a lot of our American governance, names of governing places, ideology, etc. are based on ancient Rome governing concepts. I did some research on cities that were built on 7 hills or mountains, and there are a few in the USA, perhaps the one carrying the most significance would be Richmond Virginia. There are 7 hills in the topography of Richmond, which is a very significant city in the founding and establishment of the United States of America; but, there are also several other cities around the world that were built on 7 hills. I’ve mentioned Rome already, but there’s also Istanbul, Lisbon, Athens, Prague, Moscow, Jerusalem, Amman, Melbourne and a few others. So, this is a bit of a mysterious reference, and I’m not going to try to solve the riddle this morning, but again, this is a subject that deserves some thought. I’m going to try to talk about the clues mentioned, but I’m not going to give any conclusions afterwards.

Let's just examine the evidence and then I'll send you out to wrestle with it as homework. Here's the first 7 verses, **chapter 17:1-7...**

So, in **verse 1** this Babylon entity is described as a great prostitute- and that's probably meant to be understood figuratively, as in how the Old Testament describes people committing prostitution by worshiping false gods and not staying true to Yahweh the Creator God. Using that Biblical theme, this entity of Babylon is most likely describing a *spiritual* prostitute, who was supposed to be true to her husband but has not been, and is now facing judgement consequences of her infidelity. Here's another clue, she is sitting on many waters. Not to give away prematurely any of the mystery, but we'll see here soon in verse 15 that the many waters are not literally location waters describing an island or sea port city, but rather verse 15 tells us the waters represent *peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages*. So in other words, this city being described is a city in which many people from many different places, ethnicities, and languages either live or visit there for tourism- which doesn't really narrow down too much our list of cities- Rome, Prague, Jerusalem, Mecca, Moscow, Richmond etc, could probably all be described as cities of diversity at least through tourism.

Verse 2, this entity has been immoral with the "kings of the earth," and those who live on the earth have become drunk with the wine of her immorality. Again, this is probably still figurative language, it probably doesn't make the most sense to assume "Babylon" is literally a woman prostitute who goes around giving away free alcohol and sleeps with world leaders. It's much more likely this is being stated assuming the reader is familiar with Old Testament Biblical themes, understanding the several passages that talk about nations trusting in the kings of other nations instead of trusting in Yahweh. Instead of staying true to Yahweh, nations have prostituted themselves and made alliances with other nations- this is a very clear Old Testament theme presented in books like Hosea (4:15, 6:10), Jeremiah (3), and Ezekiel (16). At the

very least, this verse tells us this diverse city is also very connected to other world leaders and nations.

Verse 3, Babylon is described as a woman in the wilderness, sitting on a scarlet beast who has 7 heads and 10 horns. Both of these descriptions have been mentioned and somewhat defined already in Revelation chapter 12. There we read about a woman in the wilderness, and a red dragon with 7 heads and 10 horns pursuing her, who is defined as Satan the dragon, and then in chapter 13 the beast nation state is also described as having 7 heads and 10 horns.

Verse 4 describes Babylon as being rich, but it seems the idea is that she has become rich through her wickedness and immorality. **Verse 5** labels “Babylon” with a terrible label, but admits this is indeed a mystery. **Verse 6**- we already read that “Babylon” has made others drunk, but here it says she herself is drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. Again this is figurative language, the idea most likely being that this entity has been responsible for killing Old Testament saints, as well as New Testament witnesses of Jesus. Another clue is given in verse 6- of all the things John has seen in this Revelation vision, this is the first time he “*wondered greatly.*” Of all the weird things described, the creatures, the calamities, the sky rolling up like a scroll, the glassy sea mixed with fire- of all the shocking things, this is the one thing that caused John to be like: “Huh? What? This doesn’t make sense.” So the angel, in **verse 7**, is like “pshhh- no sense in wondering, let me tell you in who Babylon the woman is and who the beast is that she’s riding.” Here’s verse 8 through the end of the chapter... (**v 8-18**)

Verse 8- so the beast nation state (referencing back to the beast with 7 heads and 10 horns, of chapter 13), this beast nation state was in existence before John, it was not currently in existence during John’s lifetime, but it will later come- but will eventually be destroyed. The

angel says non-believers will wonder at this, and the logical conclusion is that believers in Jesus (will at this time) have more understanding. We might wrestle with understanding right now, it's mysterious and confusing, but it seems that the generation who will experience these tribulation events, as they see things unfold, light bulbs will turn on, things will click, and they'll be like "Oh... I see now." This is a good reminder for us all, including myself, to be humble and hold loosely to how we attempt to link Biblical prophecy to modern day events, or how we interpret the events described in Revelation. We should study and attempt to understand, but realize that things will become more clear when they are actually happening in real time.

Verses 9,10- here's some more clues that requires wisdom, thinking, and wrestling with. As I mentioned earlier, the 7 heads of the beast nation state correlate with 7 mountains that are located where the woman city sits. So the location of this entity is upon 7 mountains, and as verse 10 tells us, the 7 heads represent not just mountains, but also represent 7 *kings*- 5 have already ruled, 1 currently is ruling the kingdom where the city is located, and then one more would be coming in the future. Again, I don't think we can solve this riddle today, but this description of ruling kings seems to limit our potential cities to cities that were seats of governing power during the Biblical days of John and before. For example, Richmond Virginia would probably not best fit this particular clue, unless maybe we are attempting to connect the USA to ancient Rome, thinking the USA as being a sort of Rome reboot. This is also a clue that also might not fit Mecca as well as some of the other clues do. Most historians and archaeologists suggest that Mecca wasn't established until around the 600s, which is long after John and long after any of the kingdoms that existed during Biblical times. In other words, Mecca didn't have 5 kings who already ruled and 1 who was currently ruling at the time of John's writing, unless maybe we consider Mecca to be an ancient Babylon reboot in the same type of sense that we could potentially consider the USA to be a ancient Rome reboot.

Verse 11 tells us that the beast nation state is actually one of these 7 rulers, but in a sense could also be considered an 8th. I'm not exactly sure what to make of this. It seems to be saying that the beast nationstate is connected to a kingdom that existed before the time of John's writing (one of the 7), but would be re-established in a way that would make it to be considered a separate 8th kingdom. This seems to be a description aiming to say "it's the same, but different." Maybe this gives us some more reason to potentially consider a rebooted nation type viewpoint, whether that be Mecca, Richmond, or potentially another Biblical city.

Verses 12, 13 tells us that from John's time, there would be 10 more kings in the future (represented by the beast's horns), and it seems like they will rule in this area of the world alongside the main beast, just for a very short time, giving their political power, authority, and rule to this alliance kingdom created by Satan the dragon.

Verse 14- as scary as this future Satanic, 10 nation super power seems- with them assembling to fight against Jesus the Lamb- this verse tells us that Jesus the Lamb is the Lord over all lords, He is the King over all kings and that He will win. And those who are with Him are the chosen ones, who are faithful to Him.

Verse 15, I already mentioned this earlier, this Babylon is not located necessarily next to the ocean, but the "waters" described in verse 1 are referring to the multitudes of nations and languages of the people where Babylon rules.

Verse 16, even though the 10 nations give their power and authority to the beast, even though they allow Babylon the prostitute to ride them, they will hate her. In short time they turn on her, she will be overcome

from within- the alliances will eventually crumble and basically Babylon will implode on itself.

Verse 17, God has orchestrated that this is the way it will be. He will cause the nations to partner up, and to give their political power and authority to the beast upon which Babylon rides, until the end- and here again is the base Greek word *teleo*. The word “fulfilled” is based on *teleo*, the same word Jesus used on the cross in saying it is finished. The telescope has extended out in stages, and here is the final extension, the ending point of finality- the beast, and the nations and peoples aligning themselves with Satan will be no more.

Verse 18, the angel states to John cryptically the city being referred to as Babylon- the angel attempts to cryptically define the location of *where* her seat of power will be located. She’s the great city, the great city who reigns- who has great authority and political power, persuasion, and support- from the other kings, political leaders, nations, and militaries of the earth.

Let me give you one more clue to wrestle with, I’m going to steal it from **chapter 18, verse 4**, speaking of her- of Babylon the great city- its says...

So whatever city this is, God’s people are told to come out of her. To no longer consider themselves a part of that city and the things that city does. Here’s maybe another place where Mecca doesn’t quite fit the description, unless there are a bunch of “God’s people” that we don’t know about who live in Mecca, or *who will* be living in Mecca in the future during the Tribulation.

I leave you with this mystery. And my encouragement today is not just concerning this passage- but for every passage that we look at in scripture- may we have a wisdom and a hunger to understand, to read,

to cross reference; and a humility to ask God to lead us by His Spirit. And we might not understand fully until God sees fit to give us wisdom, but may we enjoy the journey together as we pursue Jesus and as we pursue a better understanding of His word. I encourage you not to give up, and not to just settle for “I don’t know only God knows,” and therefore you quit pursuing knowledge and understanding. But rather, as we admit that only God knows, we aim to keep learning, to keep pursuing Him, to keep studying, listening to others’ perspectives, and attempt to acquire wisdom and understanding. **Proverbs 4:7-8** states “The beginning of wisdom *is*: Acquire wisdom; And with all your possessions, acquire understanding. Prize her, and she will exalt you; She will honor you if you embrace her. 9 She will place on your head a garland of grace; She will present you with a crown of beauty.” Let’s pray...