

## Rev. 17 & 18

### Introduction

This is the 4<sup>th</sup> of four parenthetical sections:

- 1) Ch. 7 - People, into and out of tribulation
- 2) Ch. 10-11 – Places, whole earth & the holy city
- 3) 12 to 14 – Purposes, God's Preservation, Satan's Deceptions, Tribulation Details
- 4) 17 to 19:10 – Powers, Religious & Commercial

### Chapter Outlines

#### **Revelation 17**

- V1-6 Indictment of the Harlot
  - V1 Invitation & its Purpose
  - V2 Woman's Perversion
  - V3 Woman's Position
  - V4 Woman's Possessions
  - V5 Woman's Name
  - V6 Woman's Sin
- V7 – 14 Interlude to Describe the Beast
  - V7 Mystery Introduced
  - V8 Rise and Fall of the Beast
  - V9 Seven Heads Defined as Mountains
  - V10 Seven Kings Throughout History
  - V11 Beast's Associated Character
  - V12 Ten Horns Defined as Future Kings
  - V13 Ten Kings Confederate with Beast
  - V14 Earthly inability against the Lamb
- V15-18 Inescapable Judgment of the Women
  - V15 Woman's Influence
  - V16 Woman made Desolate
  - V17 God's Sovereign Will
  - V18 Women Defined as Royalty

#### **Revelation 18**

- V1-8 Babylon's Fall Announced
  - V1 Glorious Heavenly Messenger
  - V2 Final Pronouncement of Destruction
  - V3 Recounting of City's Sins
  - V4 Request for Separation
  - V5 Remembrance of her Sins
  - V6 Recompense meted out
  - V7 City's Professed Security
  - V8 God's Strength in Judgment
- V9-19 Earth's Sorrow
  - V9-10 Kings' Lament
  - V11-16 Merchants' Lament
  - V17-19 Sea Traders' Lament
- V20 Heavenly Refrain
- V21-24 Babylon's Desolation
  - V21 Its Sentence (with violence)
  - V22-23 Its Scope (no more at all)
  - V23-24 Its Sins (three fold accounting)

There are keys, that if understood first, do set the basis for the chapters. One is the timing of the chapters, another is the main subject of each, thirdly is the distinction between the chapters, fourthly is the distinction of language that is either literal or symbolic, and finally, OT prophecy.

It is from these standpoints that the chapters have been interpreted but it must be stated that many others have differed with their interpretations.

These chapters are more prevalent in symbolism than many of the other chapters in Revelation and so thus have links and draw concepts from many parts of Scripture.

### Timing & Subject of Chapters 17 & 18

There are two previous mentions of Babylon, found in 14:8 (**Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great - RV**) and 16:19 (**And great Babylon came in remembrance before God**). These correspond to Ch. 17 & Ch. 18 respectively.

Babylon and its Judgments are the subject of these chapters. Babylon with its roots going back to Nimrod and the tower of Babel, stands for everything that is opposed to God in terms of idolatry & world systems.

Chapter 17 : Religious Babylon

Chapter 18 : Commercial Babylon

Thus the Harlot and the Beast will work together for the first half of the tribulation, but Religious Babylon will be cut off at midpoint. Commercial Babylon will continue throughout until judged by the Lord at the end of the tribulation in the vial judgments

### Distinctions between Chapters 17 & 18

While there are similarities, two different entities and judgments are in these chapters.

In similarity between the two Babylons; both hate the saints and shed blood, both are associates with kings in fornication, and both come under judgment and are destroyed.

However, there are a number of striking differences:

The 4<sup>th</sup> parenthetical section (17:1-19:10) divides with the repetition of the phrase 'after these things' (18:1 & 19:1). Thus the events of each chapter are both distinct and in sequence.

Chapter 17 unfolds a mystery, truth uniquely revealed by God. God declares Babylon to be the mother of harlots

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and of abominations - the source of all spiritual impurity. . . Five times in chapter 18, Babylon is noted as a "great city" (vv. 10, 16, 18, 19, 21), the same emphasis as in chapter 16, verse 19.

That which characterized the iniquity of the harlot was the martyrdom of God's saints, and especially of the witnesses of Jesus; but the character of the iniquity of the city overthrown in chapter 18 is that of a godless, luxurious commercialism, making "merchant princes" of those dealing with her along with opposing saints of God from every age.

Instead of being an external directress of the last empire (**harlot sitting upon the waters, sitting on the beast, v18 'hath a kingship over the kings of the earth** (JND)), the Babylon of chapter 18 is the beloved capital of the whole earth's activities, and for this cause men mourn her overthrow.

Further, the judgment in chapter 17 is at the hands of the 10 kings and the beast (v 16), (that which once supported her) while "the kings of the earth" (including at least the 10 kings) bewail the destruction of the city (Revelation 18:9) by a direct intervention of God (18:20, 21).

The Harlot is destroyed by the 10 kings at the time when they give their kingdom to the beast (vv 16, 17). From the connection of chapter 18 with the beginning of chapter 19 (see vv 1-3), the destruction of the city (chapter 18) is just before the return of Christ to the earth.

If chapter 17 and 18 take place during the last days of the Tribulation, there will be no place to do away with all religions and substitute the worship of the Beast's image .

The Beast and his ten kings could not have destroyed the harlot in "one hour"; but such is declared to be the suddenness of the doom of the great city of chapter 18. "One day," and "one hour," God says.

The voice of Christ in 18:4 calls his people out of Babylon, the city. This call is absent from Ch. 17 as a true believer would not be taken up with the idolatry and abominations that characterize the Harlot. However, they may take up residence in the city and be partakers of its commerce and sinful practices.

### Literal or Symbolic

Chapter 17 interprets the Harlot as a symbol: "**The woman . . . is the great city.**" Noted as sitting on many waters (v 1, interpreted as peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues, v 15), the beast (v 3), and seven mountains

(v 9), the woman exerts influence thus described demographically, politically, and historically respectively. The Harlot, therefore, pictures the spiritual institution which characterizes the city. Chapter 18 presents the commercial enterprise of the city.

The spiritually abominable institution of unholy worship will be destroyed to open the way for the worship of the Beast, which marks the beginning of "the great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21; Revelation 7:14). The commercial character of the proud and morally corrupt literal city will continue until the Lord judges the city.

In Chapter 17, the name of the Harlot is introduced as Babylon the Great, and preceded by the word 'Mystery'. Therefore, that which is only understood through divine revelation and spiritual insight. Whereas in Chapter 18, the emphasis is on 'the city' mentioned in V 10, 16, 18, 19, 21.

Is Babylon the great, the city, going to be literally rebuilt, and become the commercial capital, or does it only symbolize the commercial enterprise and system that is prevalent in the Tribulation? While it certainly encompasses the second, it is suggested to be a literal city, as there are OT prophecies related to Babylon's destruction that have yet to be fulfilled.

### OT Prophecies and Connections

The prophesy of the final destruction of Babylon still needs to be fulfilled. See Isa. 13 & Jer. 50-51

**And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall shepherds make their flocks to lie down there"** (Isaiah 13:19, 20).

**"It shall be no more inhabited for ever; neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation. As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbor cities thereof, saith Jehovah, so shall no man dwell there, neither shall any son of man sojourn therein"** (Jeremiah 50:39, 40)

Babylon was not totally destroyed by the Medes & Persians. It has faded into obscurity, but has not yet come under the wrath of God as set forth in these passages

When the final destruction of Babylon, the literal city, was prophesied by Jeremiah, we find God's solemn warning to His people to flee from it: "**Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and save every man his life; be not cut**

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**off in her iniquity: for it is the time of Jehovah's vengeance ... My people, go ye out of the midst of her, and save yourselves every man from the fierce anger of Jehovah" (51:6, 45).**

Notice that when Cyrus took Babylon, neither Daniel, who that night prophesied to Belshazzar the end of his kingdom, nor the other Jews, fled from Babylon. In fact, Daniel was immediately elevated under Darius the Median. But these prophecies of Jeremiah accord perfectly with the voice from heaven of Revelation 18:4, **"Come forth, my people, out of her, that ye have no fellowship with her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."** If the city of Babylon is restored as Antichrist's capital, at the end of this age, godly Jews will be warned fully to flee, as in Jeremiah 51:45, 46, 50.

The Fall of Tyre from the words of Ezekial has a connection to the language in Revelation  
The city of Tyre on the Mediterranean coast became the great maritime center of the earth and upon it was pronounced the terrible judgment of Ezekiel 26-28. It contains similar lists to that of Rev. 18 and was said to **"enrich the kings of the earth"**. At its destruction, there are bitter cries from kings, merchants, & mariners.

### Chapter 17 Detail

V1-2 John is invited to view a harlot. (Contrast to 21:9)  
The kings of the earth have entered into unholy relationships and earth-dwellers have become intoxicated under her influence.

V3-5 The wilderness is an apt location for what John is invited to see. A women sits on wild beast. The seven heads and ten horns relate this beast to the first beast of Ch. 13 (whose heads & horns will be later explained).

The Key to the women, is that she is a 'mystery', this word likely not forming part of the name. A spiritual entity that requires divine revelation to be understood. Her dress speaks of power and royalty, along with great riches. She possesses something that had its origin with God (a golden cup), but that is just the veneer as its contents are complete wickedness.

Harlotry was often used as depicting the turning away of God's people from true worship and into the resulting sin. (for example, the worship of the golden calf and associated immorality). This is the character portrayed by the name.

V6 John wonders with wonder, and with good reason. The present intoxication and madness of the women is based on utter opposition to the people of God.

V7 Spiritual interpretation will now be given to John

V8 The background, rise and fall of the Beast is the focus. The unsaved will follow this man because he will appear to die and yet live. Spiritual insight shows us that both in character and in demonic influence, this man is energized by Satan, and has the same ultimate end.

V9-11 A double symbol displays the Beast's character but also how the Beast connects to history. So the woman sits on the heads which are interpreted as mountains which are in turn interpreted as 7 kings. Many translations show this as **..seven mountains... and there are seven kings...** (italics removed).

The kings are heads of empires that have been identified through Scripture and those that have had influence on the children of Israel. These in order are: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medeo-Persia, Greece, and the current to John's day of Rome.

The seventh, existing for a time, and then the eighth proceeding may well refer to the Beast seemly recovering from the dead. In any case, this eighth king, the beast of Ch.13 has the character of the 7 kings before and is likely the **'little horn'** of Dan. 7.

V12-14 The ten horns join together with the Beast in the control of the world. In purpose and heart, they follow the Beast who is at the control of Satan. In keeping with Revelation, viewing of a item in its initial and end state, we are told of their rise and subsequent utter destruction by the Lamb. It is in this character that all nations are subdued and the Lord truly exhibits the character of Lord of lords and King of kings. It may be that "Lord" is presented first as the background of the Ch 17 is primarily idolatry and false worship. This is contrasted with the title in 19:16 as Christ is coming to rule and smite the nations.

V15 The women is now interpreted as having an influence that spans the entire human world without exception.

V16-17 The beast and 10 kings have supported the Harlot and there has been a mutually beneficial relationship for 3.5 years. In the sovereign will of God, His ways will be established, and so the Harlot and her associated worship of gods and idolatry are destroyed to pave the way for the singular worship of the Beast (and thus Satan).

V18 The last part has been also translated as **'hath a kingship over the kings...'**, another description of the influence this religious system has. The connection made

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between the women and the great city does cause some difficulties in interpretation. It may be that the harlot is headquartered in the great city Babylon or that the women and city (religious and commercial) are tightly intertwined during the first half of the tribulation. The great city Babylon continues until destroyed by the Lord.

### Chapter 18 Detail

V1 This is likely not the same angel as in Ch. 17, but could be another of the angels with the responsibility of the vial judgments. In any case, he is characterized by coming from the presence of God, and thus the world is ablaze at his entrance.

V2-3 There is no question of Babylon withstanding God's judgments. In fact it has become the center of Satanic influence. Babylon's sins are recounted as similar to Ch. 17, but with the addition of making rich men of those who have taken part in the power of her luxury.

V4 In some manner, God's people would have been able to get involved in Babylon's commerce and would therefore be negatively affected. The voice of Christ gives a warning to flee the city in a call that reminds us of Jer. 51. A call that may be directed primarily at the Jewish nations but would include those who have not taken the mark of the beast. Jeremiah 51:50 "**Remember Jehovah from afar, and let Jerusalem come into your mind**" gives the contrast in gathering places (Babylon or Jerusalem)

V5-7 While the tower of Babel desired to reach to heaven, the sins of this later day city will attain to that and will not go unnoticed. The sins of the city are further outlined as: self glory & luxurious living, and an attitude that at its core speaks of pride in position (queen), pride in lasting relationships (no widow), and pride in immunity from sorrow.

V8 God's judgment is swift (one day) and severe (utterly burned). Judgment is noted as originating with the Lord God (Jehovah), reminding us that it is the eternal God, who has taken account of their wickedness from all generations.

V9-10 This is the first of three groups who cry "**Alas, Alas**" at the destruction. The kings cry is centered the loss of power and personal comforts. Through these cries there appears to be at least a marginal understanding that the judgment is from God, but still yet no repentance.

V11-17 The concern of the merchants is personal riches that will no longer be able to grow and that the riches of the city have been laid to waste and will no longer be of

profit. The list of 12-13 represents wealthy commerce, with few of the items being of necessity.

V17-19 This is a wide group, ship owners, sailors, and all associated with shipping (trade). To all groups, Babylon was that 'great city'. It had become the center point of their lives, yet there is no mistaking its end. Note '**the smoke of her burning, her torments, her desolation**'

V20 Perception changes at the stark contrast from the weeping and wailing of earth to the rejoicing of heaven. Throughout the ages God's people have suffered and now the sentence has been passed and judgment meted out. Perhaps the rejoicing is found in the Hallelujahs in Ch. 19.

V21-23 The actual fall of Babylon is likened to the smash of a great millstone. The wrath of God comes with violence, reminding us of the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah. **Gen.19 'and lo the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace'**. Then the first of 6 statements ending in '**no more at all**' brings the force of the desolation of this city. Every aspect of life is affected whether it be entertainment, business, domestic, physical, or relational. Everything has come to an end.

V23-24 The iniquities of Babylon are summarized one last time. There is the domination of earth and the pride of the 'great men'. Secondly, the deceptions that were propagated. This reminds us of Satan the '**great deceiver**' and the '**lie**' that the earth-dwellers will believe and take part in during the tribulation. Finally, the guilt of blood. The inclusion of prophets, saints, and all slain, broaden the scope of Babylon's sins to not just the tribulation period, but all those who have died in testimony for God. The Harlot Babylon puts to death all who will not practice idolatry while in the last half of the tribulation, many will die who refuse to take the '**mark of the beast**'.

### Conclusion

On a practical note, there are lessons for us in the call to separation of Ch. 18, and the need for spiritual insight like what was given to John to distinguish the forms of idolatry and false worship. The world in any form truly has nothing for the believer and we are reminded to take up the pilgrim character of Abraham

Satan has made the veneer very attractive, religiously, commercially, and politically. Yet God will judge. As at the very heart and root of these systems is both the will to and the execution of persecution of the people of God.