

Text: Rev. 17:7-18

Title: "An explanation for the mystery of Babylon"

Time: 5/6/2018 am and 5/20/2018 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: I saw in the news this past week that our state legislature has passed a bill that identifies "transgender" as a classification of people protected from discrimination. The report I saw hailed the decision as "the first proactive victory on LGBTQ rights in any state since 2016."

As Bible believers, we are against treating people unfairly. The Bible teaches us to love our neighbors as ourselves and to not judge according to appearance, but to judge righteous judgment (John 7:24). We certainly agree with our leaders' desire to pass legislation that accomplishes righteous judgment.

But as Bible believers we also grieve that we live in a world today in which heterosexual creatures of God can claim to be homosexual, where male creatures of God can claim to be female, and where female creatures of God can claim to be male, and where the law of the land believes those claims rather than the truth of the Scripture on these matters.

As I read the glowing report of this bipartisan accomplishment of our lawmakers, I could not help but wonder what a resurrected George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, or Ben Franklin would have thought of that headline. I think their reaction would be similar to the reaction of the apostle John at the sight of the whore of Babylon (v. 6) - utter surprise, incredulous disbelief, and sheer amazement.

What is fascinating about the passage we have come to this morning, however, is the fact that an angel from heaven encourages John not to be amazed at what he sees (v. 7). In the same way, when we see the decadence of the spirit of anti-christ in our day, we need not be surprised or fearful of what we see. Instead, we can see in these things the fulfillment of what God has already explained and clarified for us from heaven.

Chapters 17 and 18 are about Babylon, the coming global kingdom of the tyrant antichrist who shall rise to power during a future period known as the Great Tribulation. We saw last time God's verdict or judgment on that kingdom in 17:1-6. Chapter 18 will focus on the doom of Babylon and reactions to its fall.

In our passage this morning, the angel provides John with an explanation of the mystery of Babylon, and I want us to see 3 things the angel explains about this horrifically ugly sight.

I. The angel explains the origin and destiny of Babylon (vv. 7-12).

Illustration: I can remember as a kid enjoying connect-the-dots puzzles. You would be given a piece of paper, and all the information that it had on it was a bunch of scattered dots, each with an assigned number. The picture would become more clear as you went from the first number to the next, and then to the next, connecting the dots. Soon a picture I could understand would emerge.

Interpretation: The angel's explanation of the mystery of Babylon works that way in this passage. He gives John a set

of dots that have to be understood and connected. Notice them with me:

1. Babylon is a beast with 7 heads and 10 horns (v. 7). That reminds us of the red dragon of chapter 12, who is Satan (v. 3). So this future kingdom of antichrist is going to be at its core a satanic construction. It is as though it will be Satan incarnated among men.
2. Babylon is a revived kingdom (v. 8). It “was, and is not, and yet is.” That particular dot points us to a few of the prophecies of the Book of Daniel. There the final kingdom of antichrist is described as a revived Roman Empire (Dan. 2:39-43). So this future kingdom of antichrist is going to be a revived Roman Empire.
3. Babylon is seven mountains (v. 9). Here again we are encouraged by the angel to think of a location known for its seven hills, which is the city of Rome. This kingdom of antichrist will be headquartered in Rome.
4. Babylon includes the woman sitting on the seven mountains (v. 9). We can also note here that this woman is global in her reach (v. 15) and a city that will reign over the kings of the earth for a time during the Great Tribulation period (v. 18). It is hard to imagine all this without concluding that the future influence of the Vatican City of Roman Catholicism is described here. Just like the pure woman of chapter 12 is Israel who shall be saved during the Great Tribulation period, so also the harlot of chapters 17 and 18 is apostate Christianity dominated from Rome and in league for a time with the antichrist as an integral part of Babylon.

5. Babylon is in a succession of eight kings (vv. 10-11). At the time of John's vision, five had fallen, one was, and one was yet to come for a short time. John lived during the Flavian dynasty under Domitian, who was the sixth emperor of that period of Rome's history. Domitian was a cruel persecutor of the church and an adequate type of the antichrist, who is the one to come. I believe the seventh is the antichrist, and he becomes the eighth of this passage when he is mortally wounded but then brought back to life ("was and is not," v. 11; see Rev. 13:3-4). It is then that the kings of the earth turn against the harlot to worship him (v. 16).
  
6. Babylon enjoys the unquestioning loyalty of ten kings during this time (v.12). Daniel explains how that when antichrist rises to the zenith of his power as the worldwide tyrant who demands to be worshipped, he is going to do so by uprooting three of these kings (Dan. 7:7-8).

So to summarize, this is what I am concluding after we have connected these dots:

The future kingdom of antichrist, Babylon, will be the incarnation of Satan on earth in the form of a state power in league with a global state religion that is dominated by the Vatican City. It will be a revived Roman Empire headquartered in Rome, identifying with the succession of Roman emperors, and owning the unquestioning loyalty of other powerful kings who are at first controlled by the Vatican, but then turn against it in favor of the worship of the revived antichrist.

Application: Good men have disagreed on some of these details for obvious reasons. The angel's explanation is difficult to decipher. But what the angel does make perfectly clear to every interpreter of this passage is the truth that the

future kingdom of antichrist and the current spirit of antichrist that produces it both originate in the abyss of hell and are destined for destruction (vv. 8, 11).

The inhabitants of the earth are mesmerized by Babylon in such a way that they cannot see the truth about her origin and destiny (v. 8). Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). If we belong to His kingdom, we do not belong to this world, and we should be able to see that the world around us dominated by the spirit of antichrist takes its cue from the abyss and that it is headed for destruction. There are two very practical applications for our hearts and lives in this regard this morning related to this understanding about the origin and destiny of the world in rebellion against Christ:

1. We need to believe in the separation of church and state. Historically, that is an especially Baptist way of looking at the role of the church in public life. Government has its proper place as God-ordained authority, but the kind of religion that lusts after government's political power and influence is the kind of religion that will be a part of the coming kingdom of antichrist. It is the kind of religion that gave our history the wars of religion. God has ordained for the church to be separate from the state. A church should dedicate itself to gospel ministry, not to obtaining greater political influence. We must never become beholden to politicians but always be willing to speak truth to power wherever it is in error, whether it be Republicans or Democrats or both committing the error.
2. We need to believe in the separation of the believer and the world. It is the inhabitants of the earth that are enamored with the pleasures, possessions, and praise of the world. For members of the kingdom not of this

world, life is very different. We set our affections on things above and not on the things of the earth, where Christ sits at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1-3). In what direction is your affection set this morning?

II. The angel explains the purpose and plan of Babylon (vv. 13-18).

III: The biblical story of Babylon has from the beginning been a story about a specific purpose and plan. Nimrod built the first Babel, meaning "Gateway of god," with this purpose in mind: "And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Gen. 11:4). God had told man to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, but man wanted to make a name for himself and not be scattered, in direct conscious rebellion against God's directive for them.

Application: Rebellion against God's authority is the purpose and plan of Babylon. In this ultimate act of rebellion, this future kingdom of antichrist shall make war against the Lamb (v. 14). That will have no more success than did Nimrod's tower generations ago, and yet mankind still fails to see the self-destructive consequence of their own rebellion.

This same spirit infects our lives as well. We share the purpose and plan of Babylon when we treat God-ordained authority in our lives with rebellious contempt and disobedience. The child who refuses to obey the parent; the wife who refuses to reverence her husband; the employee who is an incorrigible complainer for the employer; the criminal who breaks the law; the Christian who rejects the authority of a local church — what do all of these have in common?

They share the purpose and plan of Babylon. They rebel against God and they war against the Lamb. The Lamb! They war against the One who was sacrificed for each act of rebellion they will ever commit.

Application2: We must not leave this point without reflecting on the wonderful truth of verse 17. Babylon's purpose and plan of rebellion against the Lamb ultimately fulfills the purpose and plan of the Lamb. God's words will be fulfilled, and there is nothing His enemies can do to stop that truth. We can claim those promises knowing that the more they are opposed by the enemy, the more truly fulfilled they will become (Ex. "I will build my church").

III. The angel explains who overcomes Babylon (vv. 8, 14).

A. The Lamb overcomes Babylon because He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords (v. 14).

Application: I finished reading the Gospel of Mark last week, and I was reminded again of Jesus's mighty power over demons. On one occasion he sent a thousand of them into a herd of pigs and watched them fall headlong into the sea. Since Satan gives us all such a hard time, why does not Jesus just end his opposition now?

An answer came to me from the Scripture: "Without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Heb. 11:6); "The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17). In the day John describes for us here, we will know by sight that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. We have a special opportunity as the church militant now, which we will not have then, to demonstrate that we know who He is by faith. We do that through faithfulness in the face of an enemy who is still allowed to war against the Lamb and us.

B. Those with the Lamb overcome Babylon because their names are written in His book from the foundation of the world (vv. 8, 14).

Conclusion: Are you with the Lamb this morning? Have you turned from your sin and the Babylon of this world to follow Him as your saving sacrifice and risen King? This is the only way to overcome Babylon and to avoid the destruction each one of us deserves as much as she will.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*