

Lesson 11 – 10 January 2010

The Judgment of Babylon

Lesson Scope: [Revelation 17 and 18](#)

Lesson Focus

This lesson picks up the theme of Lesson 8—Judgment, Chapters 17 and 18 do not advance the movement of the book, but they portray in detail the judgment of God upon Babylon as referred to in the seventh Vial judgment.

Babylon is both a city and a system. Chapter 17 portrays the religious and political aspects of the system as a woman riding a beast. Chapter 18 portrays the commercial aspect of the system as a city. The woman-city relationship is seen to be significant when compared with 21:9-10, where John views the bride of Christ as a city, “the holy Jerusalem” In both cases the woman personifies a corporate body of people who have committed themselves to a cause and a system.

Satan seeks to dominate the world's religious and commercial system. Men who align themselves with this evil empire will also suffer its fate. Not much is said in this lesson about the building of the tower of Babel on the plain of Shinar (Genesis 11:1-9). The city and tower were built in opposition to God's directive to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth." "And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower ...; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." But the Lord confounded their language and scattered them.

In Genesis 10:25, mention is made of the earth being divided in the days of Peleg. This is believed to have been the forming of the continents. Now there was not only a language barrier but also a physical barrier. In the course of time, both of these barriers have minimized, and Satan is working to re-establish a worldwide system of government and commerce.

The heart of the lesson is bound up in the principles of divine retribution and the call for God's people to separate from the world system

Lesson Aim: To show us the nature and the doom of the end-time religious and commercial system.

Theme Verse

[Revelation 18:20](#). Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hash avenged you on her.

Lesson Text

The Religious System

[Rev. 17:1-7](#)

And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: ²With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. ³So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. ⁴And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: ⁵And upon her forehead *was* a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. ⁶And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration. ⁷And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.

[Rev. 7:15-16](#)

Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. ¹⁶They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

The Commercial System

[Rev. 18:1-10](#)

And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. ²And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. ³For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth

have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. ⁴And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. ⁵For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. ⁶Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double. ⁷How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. ⁸Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong *is* the Lord God who judgeth her. ⁹And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, ¹⁰Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.

Questions for Study

The Religious System

1. What is the significance of the great whore sitting upon many waters?
2. What is the significance of the great whore sitting upon the scarlet-colored beast?
3. How is the great whore judged?
4. What are some present-day expressions of the apostate religious system?

The Commercial System

5. What is the way of escape for God's people?
6. List some principles of divine retribution from this passage.
7. How can we avoid the snare of materialism?

Analyzing the Passage

The great whore represents apostate religion. Whore and harlot are translations of the same Greek word. God referred to Israel's unfaithfulness as spiritual harlotry and adultery. Here the professed church is portrayed as a whore because of her illegitimate relationship with the kings of the earth. Her garments and jewelry speak of harlotry and luxury. Her golden CUP is full of iniquity. She is guilty of gross sin and abominable practices. In 17:3 we see that the woman is sitting upon the scarlet-colored beast. Her

position on the beast reveals her union with and control over the political system. But notice in 17:16 that the political system turns against the woman and makes her desolate and naked. The woman is that great city Babylon, whose destruction is described in the next chapter.

The announcement of Babylon's fall is accompanied by a vivid description of her great wickedness. The judgment is according to her works. The Measure is double. From a worldly viewpoint, everything seems to be going well. There is prosperity and luxury. She is proud and selfish. But there is no ability to withstand the power of God's judgment.

The call of 18:4 demonstrates the mercy and goodness of God as seen in Lesson 9, and represents the only way of escape.

Principles and Applications

The Religious System

1. *Babylon exerts worldwide influence mid dominance (17:1, 5, 15).*

Satan uses the end-time system to achieve his goal to rule the entire world. It is significant that we are hearing more references to globalism and worldwide economical repercussions. But we look for the Saviour who is Lord of lords and King of kings (17:14).

2. *Babylon attracts her followers through intoxicating sensuality (17:2, 4).*

She is the mother of harlots. Man's carnal nature is in the devil's favor. Pride is behind the gaudy attire and jewelry. Lust is the instigator of fornication and filthiness. But the Christian is called to sobriety and self-denial. By God's grace the flesh is crucified and pleasure is found in doing God's will.

3. *Babylon is characterized by an unholy alliance between religious and political authority (17:3).*

The woman is riding the beast, and the beast is content to carry her. Both are benefiting the other, and Satan is deceiving many religious people. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world." The separation of church and state is basic to Biblical church life and to avoiding this deception.

4. *Babylon is guilty of persecuting the righteous (17:6).*

The most severe persecution of the righteous has been carried out in the name of religion. The Anabaptists were killed by both Catholics and Protestants, who thought they were doing God service (John 16:2). This is especially true when church and state are united.

The Commercial System

5. God pours out judgment on sinful nations when their cup of iniquity is full (18:3, 5-6).

This was true of the Canaanite nations when Israel entered Canaan. It is certainly true in the case of Babylon. Sin provokes God's wrath, but in long-suffering He waits until the time is ripe. Then God pours upon the wicked the store of wrath that has accumulated (Romans 2:5).

6. The choice to identify with God and to separate from Babylon is the only way to escape judgment (18:4).

God calls His people to separate themselves from Satan's end-time system. God is gracious and merciful, He has provided the way of escape. The call to separation is just as applicable in our day (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). God's people and Satan's people are at odds with each other. They cannot walk together.

7. Babylon is characterized by a materialistic and self-glorifying life style (18:3, 7).

Wealth used for ease and luxury brings God's judgment regardless of who does it (Amos 6:1-6). We see people living this way all about us giving honor to each other and living only for the present. We must beware or we will be caught in the same trap. We seek to live to the honor and glory of God and to use our material gain for His kingdom.

8. Divine judgment is retributive, sudden, and complete (18:6-10).

Justice under the law was "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Leviticus 24:20). But here, because of better knowledge and greater guilt it is doubled. Sinners might suppose that since God has not yet poured out judgment He never will. But God will not be mocked. Judgment will fall suddenly and those who put off salvation will find it is too late. "Behold, now is the accepted time" 2 Corinthians 6:2).

Important Teachings

1. Babylon exerts worldwide influence and dominance (17:1, 5, 15).
2. Babylon attracts her followers through intoxicating sensuality (17:2, 4).
3. Babylon is characterized by an unholy alliance between religious and political authority (17:3).
4. Babylon is guilty of persecuting the righteous (17:6).
5. God pours out judgment on sinful nations when their cup of iniquity is full (18:3, 5-6).
6. The choice to identify with God and to separate from Babylon is the

only way to escape judgment (18:4).

7. Babylon is characterized by a materialistic and self-glorifying lifestyle (18:3, 7).

8. Divine judgment is retributive, sudden, and complete (18:6-10).

Answers to Questions

1. *What is the significance of the great whore sitting upon many waters?*

The waters seem to represent the people and nations of the world. The fact that she sits on them speaks of dominance and control. Her identification as a woman suggests the role of religion—false religion in this case. False religion is used of the devil to deceive the world as noted in the previous lesson.

2. *What is the significance of the great whore sitting upon the scarlet-colored beast?*

The beast represents national rulers and politics. The woman represents religion. It is significant that the woman is riding the beast. The rider is generally controlling the beast being ridden. The beast and rider represent a union of religion and politics.

3. *How is the great whore judged?*

The answer to this question is found by comparing verses 12, 16, and 17. The whore is destroyed by the beast she is riding. More specifically she is destroyed by the ten horns of the beast. The ten horns are ten kings that give their allegiance to the beast. The great whore is a city (17:18). The city is destroyed and burned by the ten kings. Verse 17 reveals that the judgment upon the whore was according to the will and Word of God.

4. *What are some present-day expressions of the apostate religious system?*

We observe the union of religion with politics. The apostates serve in both camps. In a broader sense, the apostates are failing to separate themselves from the world. There are unequal yokes in the commercial realm. We used to hear more about the ecumenical movement; it is still at work as even Mennonites link arms with Catholics and so forth. The Scriptures are not being fully obeyed. This includes some of the ordinances, and Christ's teaching on loving one's enemies. As conservative Mennonites, we are under pressure to accept casual dress and to alter or even discard long-standing Mennonite distinctives. To yield is to begin a course that will surely end in spiritual ruin and judgment.

5. What is the way of escape for God's people?

"Come out of her, my people." Redemption by the blood of Jesus provides the way of escape. The principle of separation is plainly set forth in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. The people of God may suffer persecution and death at the hands of evil men. But they are spared from the wrath and judgment of God.

6. List some principles of divine retribution from this passage.

Divine retribution is according to works (18:6). Divine retribution is meted out when the cup of iniquity is full or when the time is ripe (18:6). Divine retribution is the opposite of that which is experienced in life (18:7-8). This principle is illustrated in the account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:25). See also 2 Thessalonians 1:6, 7.

7. How can we avoid the snare of materialism?

We avoid the snare of materialism by being truly spiritual. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth.... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." Also, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:19-20, 33). We do this by giving our time and money to help others and to further the cause of the church. We must with purpose of heart choose to live by the principles of simplicity and modesty.

Summarizing the Lesson

Babel means confusion. This is the name given to the city and tower that men built in rebellion against God. But God confounded their language! Nebuchadnezzar said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built?" But the voice from heaven said, "The kingdom is departed from thee"

Likewise, in the end the cry is heard, "Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city' for in one hour is judgment come" (Revelation 18:10). Then the people in heaven respond, "Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgments" (Revelation 19:1-2).

Research Guide

1. Read the Babel account in Genesis 11 and also the articles on Babel and Babylon in a Bible dictionary.
2. Read Zechariah 5. The ephah is a measure of grain and symbolizes commerce and trade. Note the parallels to the lesson.