

The Book of Revelation

Chapter 17

Introductory Notes

- We enter a last semi-parenthetical section in Chapters 17 and 18 that deals with the fate of “Babylon”.
- Opinions differ, but it appears that “Babylon” represents the unholy alliance of Ecclesiastical Babylon, Imperial Babylon, and Commercial Babylon, all under the control of the unholy trinity (Satan, Antichrist, False Prophet) during the Tribulation.
- There is some debate as to when these events take place. They surely do not take place between the Seventh Vial and Armageddon. I think they are towards the end of the Tribulation, perhaps during the Vial judgments.

Outline

- Vision of Mystery Babylon - vs. 1-6
- The Angel’s Interpretation - vs. 7-18

Notes

- vs. 1 - one of the seven angels – from the previous chapter.
- vs. 1 - great whore – a picture of spiritual wickedness, but not paganism. It speaks of a corrupted form of true religion.
- vs. 1 - many waters - represents people and nations, see vs. 15.
- vs. 2 - fornication - that is, spiritual adultery. They have taken part in her wickedness. See Book of Hosea for examples of this imagery.
- vs. 2 - made drunk - riotous living and stupefied thinking – Matthew 24:37-39
- vs. 3 - woman - representing Ecclesiastical Babylon. J. Vernon McGee calls it the “anti-church”. Many see the Catholic church here, but the scope is greater.
- vs. 3 - scarlet coloured beast - representing Imperial Babylon. This is the same as first beast from 13:1, the antichrist and his government.
- vs. 4 - note the splendor and richness of this individual. Wealth, royalty, sin.
- vs. 5 - mystery - doesn’t mean that it is unknown, merely unrevealed. The works of Ecclesiastical Babylon could be back to Babel in Genesis 10-11.
- vs. 6 - Note that Ecclesiastical Babylon is responsible for the death of saints (Old Testament) and martyrs (New Testament).
- vs. 6 - admiration - no positive emotions at work here, merely wonder or astonishment.
- vs. 8 - the beast – Imperial Babylon (the revived Roman empire) and its head, the Antichrist.

- vs. 9 - seven mountains - many see a reference to the famed seven hills of Rome and conclude this is Roman Catholicism. There are a few problems with this interpretation. First, this verse is speaking of the beast (Imperial Babylon, government), and not the woman (Ecclesiastical Babylon, religion). Second, there is an implied connection between the seven mountains in vs. 9 and the seven kings in vs. 10. Third, mountains are a common symbol of kingdoms (Psalm 30:7, Jeremiah 51:25, Daniel 2:35). It appears these mountains are a series of seven empires that affected the Jews: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and then finally the Revived Roman Empire at the beginning of the Tribulation. That they are a series and not simultaneous is hinted at by the emphasis of the ten kings being simultaneous in vs. 12.
- vs. 10 – the five kings are the five fallen empires (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece). The current king was the Roman Empire of John’s day. The one to come is the Revived Roman Empire that the Antichrist will turn into his dictatorship.
- vs. 11 – “Was and is not” refers to the Roman Empire (6th). The short-lived Revived Roman Empire (7th) of the Tribulation becomes the Antichrist’s empire, Imperial Babylon (8th).
- vs. 12 - ten horns – These are seven rulers/states that make up the Revived Roman Empire. See also Daniel 7:7
- vs. 13 – The transformation of the Revived Roman Empire into the Antichrist’s
- vs. 14 – The promised victory at the end of the Tribulation.
- vs. 15 – See vs. 1. Walvoord: “The situation described here is one of great political power on the part of the beast but a sharing of rule with the woman who controls the multitudes of the world.”
- vs. 16 - A reference to the overthrow of the Ecclesiastical Babylon by the Imperial Babylon. This could be part of the Antichrist’s claim to deity at midpoint of Tribulation.
- vs. 17 - this likely does refer to the last half of Tribulation as Antichrist’s power rises
- vs. 17 – God is in ultimate control, not Satan. He is moving even through His enemies here.
- vs. 18 - great city – I think this does refer to Rome. For John, this reference would be obvious. This can also be seen in the Revived Roman Empire and the likely role Roman Catholicism could play as a unified world religion.