

The Book Of Revelation: Lesson 12

Judgment Of Babylon

Memory Text: “And I heard another voice from heaven saying, ‘Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.’” (Revelation 18:4, 5)

Setting The Stage: American actor W.C. Fields was known to dislike dogs, children, and religion. Upon his death, a portion of his estate was to establish a "W. C. Fields College for Orphan White Boys and Girls, where no religion of any sort is to be preached". Just before his death, a friend visited Fields' hospital room and was surprised to find him thumbing through a Bible. Asked what he was doing with a Bible, Fields replied, "I'm looking for loopholes."

It's hard to escape the notion that one day we will all have to face the Judge of the earth to give an account for our lives. The writer of Hebrews states it succinctly: “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). And like W.C. Fields, many are hoping for leniency or a loophole because they know they won't fair well on that momentous and grand day.

We learned in last week's study that one day God is going to draw a line in the sand and say, “It is done.” One day, He is going to say, “He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; [but] he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.” (Revelation 22:11)

And before Jesus comes to rescue and take His people home to be with Him, seven bowls/vials filled with seven last plagues will be poured out upon those who have worshipped the beast and its image, and received the beast's mark. In that day there will be only two groups of people, divided, not by ethnicity culture, or creed, but by the decisions they have made for or against Christ. On one side are those marked and who have sided with Satan; on the other side those marked or sealed and who have sided with the Creator of all that is, Jesus Christ.

Remember, the sixth plague causes the symbolic drying up of the Euphrates, as the deceived people of the world withdraw their popular support from end-time Babylon. This is preceded by extensive demonic activities counterfeiting the work of God (Rev. 16:13, 14). The demonic activity will be successful in uniting the wicked in preparation for the battle of Armageddon—a battle for allegiance between Christ and antichrist, the seal of God or the mark of the beast, which culminates in the deliverance of God's people by the Rider on the white horse, who is Christ Himself (Rev. 19:11-15).

At the outset of the final battle, a great earthquake occurs as part of the seventh plague. The earthquake breaks up the unity of Babylon and splits it into three parts (Rev. 16:18, 19). Babylon comprises the dragon, or spiritualism, the beast, or the papacy, and the false prophet, or apostate Protestantism (Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 13: 13-16).

We need to keep in mind that Revelation 16:19 only announces the political collapse of end-time Babylon. Chapters 17 and 18 tell us how this collapse will actually happen.

Sunday – The Harlot Babylon

Revelation 17:1, 2, 5, 15; 14:8; 18:2, 3

Revelation 17:1, 2, 5. Chapter 17 has two parts: one, the symbolic vision which John saw (vv. 3-6); second, what he was told as an explanation of the vision (vv. 8-18). Part one reveals the crimes of Babylon. Part two reveals the sentence itself and how it is executed.

Babylon's criminal career reaches its climax under the sixth plague (see Rev. 16:12-16), whereas the sentence is executed under the seventh (see Rev. 16:17-19). So, part one is concerned with events under the sixth plague, and part two with those under the seventh.

The woman's name is "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots". We need to pay close attention to this because God's everlasting gospel message going to the entire world tells us that Babylon is fallen (Rev. 14:8). Everyone is going to hear this message and understand it. They won't all accept it, but each will have a decision to make.

You see, earlier in Revelation we learned about another woman (Rev. 12). This woman, we discovered, represents God's church. Often throughout the Bible God refers to His people as His bride or He refers to Himself as the Husband of His people. So here you have God's faithful and true people, but in Revelation 17 you have a religious system that has corrupted itself, has gone after other lovers, and has been unfaithful to its sacred trust. Ultimately, people on planet earth will either be a part of God's true church, the remnant of "her seed", or they will be a part of last-day spiritual Babylon.

On what does this woman sit and what does it represent? She sits on many waters, representing many people (Rev. 17:15). Just as ancient Babylon depended on the Euphrates River for its existence (Jer. 51:13), end-time Babylon will rely on the support of the masses to enforce her plans.

What two groups of people are specified as being involved in an illicit relationship with, and being seduced by, end-time Babylon? (1) The kings of the earth, or the

governing political powers. The adulterous relationship between these “kings” and the harlot symbolizes an illicit union between the two—a union of church and state. (2) The inhabitants of the earth, or the governed masses. They were made drunk with the doctrines and false practices of Babylon (Isa. 28:7). Everyone, except the remnant, will be led astray by Babylon.

What should this tell us about following popular sentiment, no matter how popular it appears?

Monday – The Harlot Riding On The Scarlet Beast

Revelation 17:3-6

Revelation 17:3. John was invited in vision to come see the judgment of the harlot, which sits on many waters. When he is carried away into the wilderness he sees a woman, but instead sees her sitting on a scarlet colored beast. This beast has seven heads and ten horns.

We know what waters represent in Bible prophecy. What does a beast represent? A beast in Bible prophecy represents kingdoms, nations, or political powers of the world (see Dan. 7:17, 23). The woman is riding the beast. This denotes dominance or control. So here we see this false religious church system dominating secular and political powers.

We’ve seen that before in the past under another symbol John sees. The leopard-like beast in Revelation 13 depicts a church-state union during the Middle Ages, which brought about great spiritual darkness in the world. It was a time when dissenters were persecuted, and when God’s law and truth were trampled upon. This power dominated the landscape for 1,260 years, but then received a deadly wound to one of its heads (1798). But the prophecy says that the deadly wound would be healed and all the world would one day wonder after the beast.

Revelation 17:4-6. The woman is pictured as extravagantly arrayed in purple and scarlet and adorned with ornaments of gold, precious stones, and pearls; such adornment was a practice of prostitutes in antiquity to enhance their power of seduction (Jer. 4:30).

Interestingly, her dress counterfeits the attire of the high priest in the OT, attire that included the colors purple, scarlet, and gold (Exod. 28:5, 6). She doesn’t wear blue however, which symbolizes obedience to God’s law. The blasphemous inscription on the woman’s forehead also replaces the priestly inscription, “Holiness to the Lord” on the miter of the high priest (Exod. 28:36–38). She is a counterfeit system.

The cup in her hand reminds us of the vessels of the sanctuary from which Belshazzar, king of Babylon, and his guests drank wine (Dan. 5:2–4). The cup in the

harlot's hand uses the appearance of truth to conceal the wine—the falsehoods of Satan's end-time religious system (Sunday sacredness, immortality of the soul, salvation by works, etc.)—in order to seduce the world away from God.

Babylon is also described as drunk with the blood of the saints and the martyrs of Jesus who died as a result of their witness to Christ. This links end-time Babylon to medieval apostate Christianity, which was led by the papacy and responsible for the deaths of millions of Christians who remained faithful to the gospel.

In a day and age of ecumenism, we would do well to remember not only the past, but also that prophecy indicates the past will one day soon be repeated.

Tuesday/Wednesday - The Identification Of The Scarlet Beast / The Seven Heads Of The Beast

Revelation 17:7-12

Revelation 17:7-12. How are we to understand all of this? Many interpretations have been offered over the years. One interpretation of the seven heads starts with a list of seven Roman emperors as "heads" of the Roman state. This interpretation assumes the beast represents ancient Rome. Another interpretation offers a succession of seven end-time popes as "heads" of the Roman Church.

Jeremiah 51:24, 25 and Daniel 2:35, 44, 45 show that in Bible prophecy a "mountain" is a symbol of a kingdom or nation. With this in mind, one of the simplest of the many interpretations of these verses look at the seven heads as seven persecuting powers viewed from the time when John was writing Revelation. According to this interpretation, the five heads that had "fallen" (before John's day) are Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece. The head that "is" is the Roman Empire, which was ruling in John's day. The head that is "not yet come" is the Roman Church. Egypt and Assyria were enemies of God's people in OT times.

There's another fairly simple interpretation that instead views these verses from the end time instead of John's day. It sees the five "fallen" heads as Babylon, Persia, Greece, pagan Rome, and papal Rome, the "is" head as papal Rome in its wounded state, to be followed soon by the seventh head that "has not yet come", papal Rome in its revived condition. The "hour" when the ten kings reign with the beast is a brief period at the very end of time when with dictatorial intensity they aid the beast in reviving persecution.

Let's ask three questions to help us understand these seeming complicated verses: (1) From what time frame are we to look at these verses? (2) Should we use any persecuting powers that we haven't already seen in our study of Daniel and Revelation? (3) Is the language to be taken as it stands or in an accommodating sense?

(1) Time Frame. In Rev. 21:9, 10 an angel invited John to watch the New Jerusalem come down from heaven. The invitation carried John's mind forward to the end of the 1,000 years. Similarly, at the beginning of Rev. 17 an angel gave John the invitation to come and see the judgment of the great harlot. This invitation took John's mind forward to that time. So shouldn't Rev. 17 be interpreted from the viewpoint of 1798/1844 and later, the time of heaven's judgment and the end time?

(2) Persecuting Powers. We should probably be reluctant to add certain nations (such as Egypt and Assyria) to the ones so prominent in Daniel and Revelation. The prophecies of Daniel are our key to understanding Revelation. Daniel gives us Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and papal Rome, but not Egypt or Assyria.

The scarlet beast is the same as the leopard-like beast in Rev. 13 both of which stand in water and have seven heads and ten horns (also they have the name of blasphemy and persecute God's people). There seems to be four animal symbols in Revelation—the dragon, the leopard-like beast, the lamb-like beast, and the scarlet beast. However, Rev. 16:13 and 20:10 speak of only three—the dragon, the false prophet (lamb-like beast) and the “beast” (not “beasts”).

The dragon and the beast, both having seven heads and ten horns, represent one and the same spirit of persecution. Their seven heads call attention to the same sevenfold sequence of persecuting government. But whereas the dragon calls attention to persecution at the hand of ancient Rome, and the beast calls attention to persecution at the hand of the papacy during the Middle Ages, the lamb-like beast calls attention to end-time Protestantism as it finally lapses into a dragon-like, beastlike spirit of persecution.

As for the two stages of the beast itself, its leopard-like stage calls attention to the persecution of the Middle Ages, and the scarlet stage calls attention first to its weakness at the beginning of the judgment hour and second to its dramatic but brief resurgence as a Middle Ages persecuting power immediately prior to the second coming.

(3) Language. A third guideline for interpreting the heads and horns, and harlot, and the beast is that some of the language in Rev. 17 is used in an accommodating sense. We read in v. 8 that the beast “is not”; yet even while we're listening to the angel tell us this, we're looking at the beast through John's eyes.

So the beast “is not” in comparison with what it used to be and in comparison with what it will be; and the same is true for the kings.

What about the beast that is “also the eighth” while it also “of the seven” (v. 11)? The beast isn't an eighth head. It's a beast, and the seven heads all belong to it. When we add up seven numbers we get a total, which is an eighth number. But this eighth number belongs to the seven; it's the sum and substance of the others.

When the leopard-like beast received a deadly wound to one of its heads, the whole beast was critically injured. And when the wound is healed, the beast as a whole is healed (see Rev. 13:3, 12, 14).

If we apply all three rules we see that of the “seven heads” the “five” that are “fallen” are entities familiar to us: Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and papal Rome. By the time of the vision (1798/1844) papal Rome is still suffering from the deadly wound. So we are now living in the time of the sixth head—wounded papacy—a time of separation of church and state. The seventh head will be the papacy restored, and as it revives the entire beast (the eighth) will realize its climatic self-actualization. The “ten horns”, which once represented intolerant kingdoms of Europe and which are now more-or-less tolerant democracies, will momentarily become harshly intolerant entities.

Thursday – The Judgment Of Babylon

Revelation 17:12-18; 18:1-5

Revelation 17:12-18. There will be a short-lived political confederacy appearing right before the end and supporting the harlot, and they will render total, unwavering allegiance to the beast.

Revelation 17:13, 14 reiterates in a nutshell the battle of Armageddon—introduced in Revelation 16:12–16. Induced by miracle-working demonic powers in conjunction with the dragon, the sea beast, and the false prophet, the worldwide political confederacy will make war with the Lamb. In other words, the battle of Armageddon is not a military battle in the Middle East but the final conflict of the Second Coming in which Satan and his confederacy fight against Christ and His angelic host.

Revelation 18:1-5. Before the full ultimate demise of Babylon, a voice from heaven urges God’s people still in Babylon to “Come out of her, my people” (Rev. 18:4). There are many worshipers of God who are still in Babylon for various reasons. God uses His remnant church to call these people out from this apostate religious system and not to participate in its sins. They must come out of it in order to escape its fate. God does not want anyone to perish (2 Pet. 3:9).

As Revelation 18:4 shows, there are many God-fearing people in Babylon whom God calls “my people.” Reflect on the following statement:

“This message must be given, but while it must be given, we should be careful not to thrust and crowd and condemn those who have not the light that we have. We should not go out of our way to make hard thrusts at the Catholics. Among the Catholics there are many who are most conscientious Christians, and who walk in all the light that shines upon them, and God will work in their behalf. Those who have had great

privileges and opportunities, and who have failed to improve their physical, mental, and moral powers, . . . are in greater danger and in greater condemnation before God than those who are in error upon doctrinal points, yet who seek to live to do good to others.” (Evangelism, p. 575)

What should this thought tell us about how to treat others? People are not the enemy. People need Jesus. Always remember that you cannot evangelize while you antagonize. God is calling us to share the truth, but to do so in a winsome manner.