

# Revelation - Babylon and the Harlot

© 2003-2004 Tony Garland - [contact@SpiritAndTruth.org](mailto:contact@SpiritAndTruth.org)

COURSE COMMENTARY

▶ 000:00 / 126:30 🔊 🔍 ⬇️

## What does Babylon mean?

- **What does Babylon mean in Revelation?**
  - 1) Is *Babylon* Rome?
  - 2) Is *Babylon* Jerusalem?
  - 3) Is *Babylon* a major city of our day such as London or New York?
- **Who or what does the Harlot represent?**
  - 1) Roman Catholicism?
  - 2) An end-time ecclesiastical system?
  - 3) Judaism (apostate Israel)?

## Babylon of Old

### Nimrod, king of Babel

The first *king* was Nimrod who was king of *Babel* ([Gen. 10:8-12](#)). His kingship resulted in the judgment of the tower of Babel, the introduction of languages, and the dispersion of mankind ([Gen. 11:1-9](#)).

### Babylon in Iraq



## The Destruction of Babylon

- **Prophecy indicates a cataclysmic overthrow.**

There are two primary views concerning how to interpret prophecies concerning the destruction of Babylon:

  - 1) **Dramatic Hyperbole** - God made use of extensive *hyperbole* (dramatic exaggeration) to indicate His anger against sin. Details of the destruction are not to be taken literally. The

passages were fulfilled in events of the past or speak in general of spiritual principles.

2) **Literal Prediction** - Prophetic passages may utilize some *hyperbole*, but on the whole they are to be taken literally and therefore, have not been fulfilled.

- **Babylon's Historic Fall**

Babylon *fell* to Persia in 539 B.C., but the city was not destroyed. Subsequently, different forces and empires took the city, but in no case was it destroyed. Although it continued to be inhabited until at least A.D. 115, it was eventually deserted through neglect. Then, in the mid-1800s archaeological expeditions began to investigate the site. Later, in 1987, Saddam Hussein began to restore parts of the city.

- **Babylon's Predicted Destruction**

Scripture predicts her cataclysmic overthrow like Sodom and Gomorrah (*Isa. 13:19-20; Jer. 50:39-40*). She is never to be inhabited (*Jer. 50:13, 39-40; 51:43, 61-62*). She is to be utterly destroyed, desolate *forever* (*Jer. 50:26; 51:26, 58, 61-62; Rev. 17:16; 18:8, 21; 19:3*). Her destruction is to be *sudden* (*Rev. 18:8-10, 17-19*).

## The Timing of Babylon's Destruction

- **During the Day of the Lord**

John's vision contains extensive prophecies concerning her destruction so it is obviously future to John's day (95 A.D.). Key passages concerning her destruction include *Isaiah 13* and *14*, *Jeremiah 50* and *51*, and *Revelation 17* and *18*. *Isaiah 13:6-13* is a key *Day of the Lord* passage as are the passages in Revelation. The destruction takes place in the Day of the Lord, when Israel undergoes restoration (*Jer. 50:20*) and the seventh bowl of God's wrath is poured forth (*Rev. 16:19*).

## Babylon is the World?

- **A Symbol of Global Ungodliness**

" *Babylon is an eschatological symbol of satanic deception and power; it is a divine mystery that can never be wholly reducible to empirical earthly institutions. It may be said that Babylon represents the total culture of the world apart from God.* " While there is a measure of truth to this view (Babylon's global cultural influence), it fails to account for aspects which seem to speak of a specific and literal location.

## Babylon is Rome?

- **Similarities with Rome**

Babylon represents the Roman Empire, or the city of Rome in general. Advocates point to attributes of Rome which seem to match Scripture: 1) ruling over the kings of the earth; 2) sitting on seven hills; 3) a center of the world's merchandise; 4) a historic persecutor of the saints. *Babylon* is used of Rome in extra-biblical writings.

- **Evidence against Babylon = Rome**

The use of *Babylon* for Rome does not occur until the second century. Old Testament prophecies concerning *Babylon* would have to have been given using a code word which did not obtain its final meaning (Rome) for hundreds of years. This violates the rules of interpretation where the meaning of language is established by its original context. The seven hills (*Rev. 17:9*) are actually seven **mountains** which are said to be seven **kings**. The mountains are symbols of kingdoms (*Jer. 51:25; Dan. 2:35; Zec. 4:7*) over which the Harlot sits, not a geographical location. Rome did not appear on the world stage early enough to be a *mother* harlot. She is merely an influential *daughter* harlot.

## Babylon is Jerusalem?

- **Babylon represents the capital of Apostate Israel**  
Many preterist interpreters believe the book of Revelation is fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Therefore, they take *Babylon* as a code word for *Jerusalem*. Advocates of this view point to many similarities between what is said of apostate Jerusalem and what is said concerning the Harlot and Babylon.
- **Evidence against Babylon = Jerusalem**  
The Old Testament passages concerning the destruction of Babylon consistently contrast Jerusalem with Babylon. When Babylon is destroyed, Jerusalem is vindicated and restored. The preterist view completely reverses the meaning of many passages ([Isa. 14:1-4](#); [Jer. 50:17-20](#); [51:1-6](#), [24](#), [35](#), [49](#)). Scripture records that Babylon will be destroyed **never to be inhabited again**. If Babylon is Jerusalem and was destroyed in A.D. 70, then why is it inhabited and a bone of contention today? Babylon is to be *destroyed*, whereas Jerusalem is to be *restored* ([Isa. 2:3](#); [62:1](#); [Zec. 14:16](#); [Rev. 20:9](#)). This view is a serious and dangerous distortion of God's Word!

## Babylon is Babylon!

- **Old Testament Context**  
Communication depends upon the transference of *meaning* from an originator to a recipient. For meaningful communication, the flow of information depends not only on the *intentions of the originator*, but also on the *understanding of the recipients*. God is not free to say something which means one thing to those who receive it, but then later redefine or even reverse the meaning.. This is the bedrock foundation of historical-grammatical interpretation.
- **A Literal City**  
Reasons we believe *Babylon* means *Babylon!* **1)** The meaning of *Babylon* in the Old Testament context within which it was given *demands* a literal meaning. **2)** It is found in conjunction with the Euphrates River ([Rev. 9:14](#); [16:12](#)). **3)** Place names have their literal significance in Revelation. When they don't, it is made obvious ([Rev. 11:8](#)). **4)** Old Testament passages concerning Babylon also mention the literal city of Jerusalem. It is inconsistent to take Jerusalem to be literal, but Babylon figuratively. **5)** The Harlot is said to be "the great city" which we will see is Babylon. If Babylon is not literal, then we have a figure (Harlot) standing for a figure (figurative Babylon). **6)** Wickedness is to be transported back to *Shinar* ([Zec. 5:8](#)).
- **Proponents of a Literal Babylon**  
There are many who have held this view. Before Iraq became a nation in 1932: Newton (1853), Pember (1888), Seiss (1909), Bullinger (d. 1913), Larkin (1919), and Govett (1920). Before Saddam Hussein rose to power (and US intervention deposed him): Newell (1935), Jennings (1937), Cooper (1942), and Lang (1948).

## Wickedness to Shinar

- **Zechariah's Prophecy**  
Zechariah is shown a basket containing a woman covered with a lead disk. The woman is identified: "This is Wickedness!" The basket with the woman is transported back to *the land of Shinar*, "when it is ready, the basket will be set there on its base." This appears to be the transfer of wickedness, with a commercial emphasis, back to the region of Babel/Babylon.
- **Zechariah 5 and Revelation 17-18**

<b>Zechariah 5:5-11</b>	<b>Revelation 17 &amp; 18</b>
Woman sitting in a basket.	Woman sitting on the Beast, seven mountains, and many waters.
Emphasis on commerce (a basket measuring grain).	Emphasis on commerce.
Woman's name is wickedness.	Woman's name is Babylon the Great, Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth.
Focus on false worship (a temple is built for the woman).	Focus on false worship.
Woman is taken to the land of Shinar (Babylon).	Woman is called Babylon.

## The Great Harlot

- Her Harlotry**

She is the *mother* of harlots ([Rev. 17:5](#)). She must predate both Egypt and Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon. She rides the seven-headed beast which is also identified with Satan ([Rev. 12:3](#)). His dominion over earthly kingdoms goes all the way back to the garden ([Luke 4:5-6](#)). She cannot be a relative newcomer upon the stage of world history--such as Rome. Rome is merely one of her *daughters*.

- Spiritual Idolatry**

Her harlotry speaks of spiritual idolatry ([Ex. 34:12-17](#); [Deu. 31:16](#); [Isa. 57:3-5](#); [Eze. 16:15-26](#)). She birthed her daughter harlots and her pollution went out to all the earth ([Rev. 17:18](#)).

## Mystery Babylon?

- Is Mystery in Her Title?**

Does "mystery" belong in her title? Or does it describe previously unknown aspects of the vision which John sees concerning her ([Rev. 17:5](#))? It does not appear to be part of her title. She is called merely "Babylon the Great" elsewhere ([Rev. 14:8](#); [16:19](#); [18:2](#)). The angel who explains the mystery includes *both* the woman ([Rev. 17:15-18](#)) and the beast on which she rides ([Rev. 17:8-14](#)).

- One or Two Babylons?**

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>The Harlot (Revelation 17)</b>	<b>The City (Revelation 18, 19)</b>
Named Babylon	<a href="#">Rev. 17:5</a>	<a href="#">Rev. 18:2</a>
Called "The Great Harlot"	<a href="#">Rev. 17:1</a>	<a href="#">Rev. 19:2</a>
Holding a Cup	<a href="#">Rev. 17:4</a>	<a href="#">Rev. 18:6</a>
Fornicating with Kings	<a href="#">Rev. 17:2</a>	<a href="#">Rev. 18:3</a>
Drunk with Wine of Immorality	<a href="#">Rev. 17:2</a>	<a href="#">Rev. 18:3</a>
Persecuting Believers	<a href="#">Rev. 17:6</a>	<a href="#">Rev. 18:24</a> ; <a href="#">19:2</a>

Destroyed by Fire	<a href="#">Rev. 17:16</a>	<a href="#">Rev. 18:8, 18</a>
Destroyed by God	<a href="#">Rev. 17:17</a>	<a href="#">Rev. 18:5, 8</a>
Clothed with Purple, Scarlet, Gold, Precious Stones, Pearls	<a href="#">Rev. 17:4</a>	<a href="#">Rev. 18:16</a>
Wealthy	<a href="#">Rev. 17:4</a>	<a href="#">Rev. 18:3, 7, 12-14</a>
Sitting	<a href="#">Rev. 17:1, 7, 15</a>	<a href="#">Rev. 18:7</a>
Global Influence	<a href="#">Rev. 17:1-2, 15, 18</a>	<a href="#">Rev. 18:3, 9, 11; 19:2</a>
Spiritual Wickedness	<a href="#">Rev. 17:5</a>	<a href="#">Rev. 18:23</a>

For additional information on this topic, see the [commentary](#).