

The Doom of Babylon

A Series on the Function of Revelation's Interludes: Part 4

The last pause in the unfolding course of God's judgment comes after the pouring of the seventh bowl of God's wrath. One of the angels, who dispensed a bowl of God's wrath, spoke to the apostle John and explains the meaning behind Babylon (Rev 17:1-18:24). To fully appreciate the basis for this explanation, it is important to observe when the apostle John first personally hears of Babylon.

After the seventh trumpet, three angels are flying in mid-heaven, and each make a proclamation to "every nation and tribe and tongue and people" (Rev 14:6).

The first angel is proclaiming the gospel (Rev 14:6-7; Matt 24:9-14; Mark 13:9-10).

And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters." (Rev 14:6-7)

This is remarkable. Virtually all Believers have been killed, and yet, out of compassion, God still sends a messenger (that cannot be killed) to proclaim the gospel.

The second angel introduces Babylon as the cause of humanity's immorality:

And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality." (Rev 14:8)

The third angel pronounces the judgment for idolatry; anyone who "worships the beast and his image" or "receives the mark of his name" will be "tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb." (Rev 14:9-11)

he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger;... (Rev 14:10)

After the seventh bowl is poured, supernatural catastrophic events took place including the destruction of major cities and "Babylon the great." As the only ancient city mentioned, Babylon received an emphasis, because "God remembered" (Rev 16:19). The irony here is that imbibing Babylon's wine of passion resulted on one's destruction by Jesus Christ in the great wine press of God's wrath and becoming the source of its blood. (Rev 14:20).

Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. (Rev 16:19)

It seems clear that the location Babylon has a special significance to God. After Noah's Ark and the Flood, human beings attempted to build a tower and make a name for themselves. But it wasn't simply building a tower, it was building a tower "into heaven" and seeking some recognition akin to God.

Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." (Gen 11:1-4)

The area became known as "Babel," the precursor to Babylon, "because there the Lord confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth" (Gen 11:9).

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What Babylon represented was a puzzle to the apostle John (Rev 17:5-6), and this last interlude is the moment that it is explained to him. Presented as a historical city, the angel personifies to describe what the figure of speech represented.

Babylon Personified	Angelic Interpretation
<p>The great harlot who sits on many waters (Rev 17:1)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality (Rev 17:2)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality (Rev 17:2)</p>	<p>The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues (Rev 17:15)</p>

From a theological perspective, a “harlot” was a term God used to refer to His people that were unfaithful to the Mosaic Covenant by worshipping other gods (Ex 34:14-16; Lev 20:4-6; Deut 31:15-17). Here Babylon is portrayed as something more than an individual non-Believer. It is “the great harlot” who leads others, including kings, to be immoral. It is a lifestyle that attracts all cultures and people and is intoxicating and pleasurable.

In the New Testament, the theological use of “harlot” is not found except here in the book of Revelation. With the New Testament focused on introducing the New Covenant, the theological emphasis moves from the unfaithful “harlot” of the Mosaic Covenant to the faithful “bride” of the New Covenant, and this is seen towards the end of this interlude:

and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the **bridegroom and bride** will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery. (Rev 18:23)

In a reference to the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt 25:1-13), the light of a lamp is symbolic of the faithful bride waiting for her bridegroom to fetch her for the wedding; it is the faithful Believer waiting for the return of Jesus Christ. But Babylon’s lamp will not shine nor will she be able to hear the bridegroom coming.

Babylon Personified	Angelic Interpretation
<p>Woman sitting on a scarlet beast (Rev 17:4)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Clothed in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, precious stones and pearls (Rev 17:4)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of unclean things of her immorality (Rev 17:4)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">On her forehead, “Babylon the Great, The Mother of Harlots, and Of the Abominations of the Earth” (Rev 17:5)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Drunk with the blood of the saints, blood of the witnesses of Jesus (Rev 17:5)</p>	<p>The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth (Rev 17:18)</p> <p>She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality. (Rev 18:2-3)</p>

What the angel describes figuratively as “Babylon,” the apostle John described elsewhere in the words of Jesus as “the world.”

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Do not love **the world** nor the things in the world. If anyone loves **the world**, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in **the world**, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from **the world**. **The world** is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

If **the world** hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of **the world**, **the world** would love its own; but because you are not of **the world**, but I chose you out of **the world**, because of this **the world** hates you. (John 15:18-19)

When the apostle hears another voice from heaven (Rev 18:4), it is Jesus who is calling people to leave the sin of Babylon and come to faith. As Jesus continues to speak, the angel's personified descriptions become easier to understand. In short, Babylon represents the world, a secular culture that denies the existence of God and sin. In lieu of God and His imperative to be holy (Lev 20:26), a life in motivated by pride and power derived by human achievement.

To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, "I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning." (Rev 18:7)

And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, (Rev 18:9)

And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more — cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives. (Rev 18:11-13)

In this same vein, the people who speak of woes for Babylon (Rev 18:9-20) are selfishly lamenting of their financial losses. This stands in stark contrast to the eagle's three woes (Rev 8:13) which were expressed in sympathy for those on earth reminiscent of Daniel's lament for Nebuchadnezzar who did not recognize that God "is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes" (Dan 4:19-37). But Babylon, in contrast to Nebuchadnezzar who came to recognize God, is a culture that will never recognize the one true God, and its evil influence is cause for its termination.

Supporting the woman whose forehead was written, "Babylon the Great, The Mother of Harlots, and Of the Abomination of the Earth" (Rev 17:5), was the Scarlet Beast. While the Scarlet Beast shared the same number of heads (7) and horns (10) as the Beast from the Sea, they are two distinctly different beasts.

Scarlet Beast	Angelic Interpretation
I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, (Rev 17:3)	The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. (Rev 17:8)

There are two reasons why the Scarlet Beast is Satan:

- 1) The Antichrist, Beast from the Sea, is seized and thrown into the lake of fire when Jesus Christ returns (Rev 19:20).

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2) When the seventh trumpet sounds, there were loud voices in heaven saying, "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ" (Rev 11:15). Satan "was" the lord of the world, "is not" the lord of the world, and will be bound in the abyss for a thousand years (Rev 20:1-3). After which he will "come up out of the abyss and go to destruction" (Rev 20:7-10).

Scarlet Beast	Angelic Interpretation
having seven heads (Rev 17:3)	The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. (Rev 17:9-10) The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction. (Rev 17:11)
and ten horns. (Rev 17:3)	The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast. (Rev 17:12-13)

The picture of the Scarlet Beast is difficult to fully understand.

Because the "head" contains the brains and mouth of an individual, the seven kings are apparently extensions of Satan and represent evil sovereign leadership.

In the context of Daniel's prophecies, these evil kings reign during the fourth Gentile empire controlling the Promised Land prior to the Divine Kingdom (Dan 7:7-26).

The Greek empire effectively ended with Antiochus IV Epiphanes as its last leader in 164 B.C.; thus, the fourth empire is currently in place. As Daniel was unable to identify this fourth kingdom (Dan 7:7), the empire was not something he had seen before nor established by a founding conqueror (i.e. Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus the Great, or Alexander the Great). And an angel interprets Daniel's fourth beast as "the fourth kingdom on earth," "different from all other kingdoms," and it will "devour the whole earth," and "crush it" (Dan 7:23).

From the apostle John's prophecy, Daniel's fourth empire is described as "Babylon the Great, The Mother of Harlots, and Of the Abomination of the Earth" (Rev 17:5). This perspective is confirmed by the loud voices in heaven rejoicing when the seventh trumpet sounds, "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ" (Rev 11:15).

It would seem that the fourth Gentile kingdom is not a conventional state government.

Five significant kings, whoever or whatever they may be, have come into existence and have since "fallen." The apostle John appears to describe the sixth "king" as presently "ruling," and the seventh "has not yet come" (Rev 17:10).

The seventh king that "has not yet come" is suggestive of the Antichrist (Beast of the Sea, Rev 13:2-5). But what is baffling to understand is what follows:

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The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction. (Rev 17:11)

The apostle John indicates that Satan, "the beast which was and is not," is one of the seven kings and also an eighth king! As difficult as this riddle appears, one *possible* interpretation is Satan "became" a seventh king when the Antichrist's fatal wound was healed through his satanic power (Rev 13:2-3) and the "eighth king" when he returned after the millennium to lead the nations into the final war (Rev 20:7-8). However, this conjecture is not decisively hermeneutically founded and at best speculative.

In Daniel prophesy, "horns" represent kings of the fourth Gentile empire, and the "little horn" that is personified with eyes and a mouth represents the Antichrist. However, in contrast to the apostle John's account, Daniel prophesies of ten kings of whom three are supplanted by a greater king. The net effect is a final count of eight kings which matches the apostle John's account.

After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had **ten horns**. While I was contemplating the horns, behold, another **horn, a little one**, came up among them, and **three of the first horns** were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold, **this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts**. (Dan 7:7-8)

Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the **horn** was speaking; I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire. (Dan 7:11)

Then I desired to know the exact meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze, and which devoured, crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet, and the meaning of the **ten horns** that were on its head and the **other horn** which came up, and before which three of them fell, namely, **that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great boasts and which was larger in appearance than its associates**. I kept looking, and that **horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them** until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom. (Dan 7:19-22)

Thus he said: 'The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it. As for the **ten horns**, out of this kingdom **ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings**. He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. (Dan 7:23-26)

The apostle John's kingdom of the world with its eight kings corresponds to Daniel's fourth Gentile empire with its eight kings and both refer to the same Antichrist!

Lastly the Scarlett Beast had ten horns which represented ten kings who will reign at the very end for a short time as vassals to Satan (Rev 17:12-13). Because the Promised Land is ruled by the fourth empire, these horns represent the leaders for the rest of the world who will, in alliance with Satan and his Antichrist, assemble at Armageddon to defend against Jesus who is coming to claim His kingdom (Rev 19:19).

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And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled. The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth." (Rev 17:16-18)

It was apparent that "Babylon," representing a secular worldview devoid of God, was insufficient in supporting Satan and his Antichrist. So much so that the kings of the world (ten horns) supplanted this worldview with another to compel people to rise up and fight in Armageddon.

Throughout this passage, the motif of drinking wine and getting drunk illustrates the sin and deceit of Babylon.

Babylon celebrates the death of Believers who testify of Jesus and the glory of God. The blood of the saints serves as the wine that inebriates Babylon; the more blood, the better.

And I saw the woman **drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus.** When I saw her, I wondered greatly. (Rev 17:6)

Pay her back even as she has paid, and **give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her.** To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, "I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning." (Rev 18:6-7)

And **in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.** (Rev 18:24)

The message of the saints is silenced, because mankind finds the deceit of the immoral worldview pleasing, beneficial and addicting.

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom **the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality.**" (Rev 17:1-2)

For **all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality,** and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality. (Rev 18:3)

In this context, the apostle John recognizes the judgment against Babylon when he sees the strong angel toss a stone resembling a great millstone (Rev 18:21).

Two heavy circular millstones are used for grinding grain: one lying flat as a base and the other standing up rolling on an axle atop of the flat circular base.

Then a **strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea,** saying, "So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer." (Rev 18:21)

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When speaking of deceit and causing others to go astray, Jesus mentions the use of a millstone in the figurative sense to warn against and emphasize the seriousness of the offense. And this is what Babylon was precisely guilty of.

Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea. (Mark 9:42)

The fourth interlude reveals the subtle and seductive influences of the fourth Gentile empire that dominate the lives of human beings today and lead them astray from God. At its root is the temptation that faced Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:5), which is so hated by God that it is associated with ancient Babel.