

## **Week – 8 The Fall of Babylon—17:1–19:10**

### **1. The Great Whore—17:1-18**

It is not unusual to use this language:

Nahum describes Nineveh as a harlot (Nahum 3:4)

Isaiah describes the city of Tyre as a harlot (Isaiah 23:16-17); Jerusalem is also described as a harlot (1:21)

Most scholars agree that Chapter 17 is an expansion of how Babylon will be destroyed as was initially described in Chapter 16.

I will hit very briefly the highlights of Chapter 17.

#### a. The harlot/whore is Rome

- i. Called by name in 17:5 (Babylon), this is John's designation for Rome.
- ii. The designation in verse 9 of the seven heads as the seven mountains on which the beast sits is clearly Rome – known as the city upon seven hills.
- iii. The woman is a city (verse 18) that rules over the kings of the earth.
- iv. The seven kings "riddle" (verse 10) represent the rulers of Rome.
  1. Much discussion about who these are depending on when one places the beginning of Rome.
  2. Many scholars have weighed on this. There is no consensus.
- v. The blasphemous names previously discussed were the titles given to Rome and her rulers – god, savior, lord, almighty.
- vi. John uses this entire chapter to basically point the finger at Rome and blame her for the evils of the world.
  1. She promotes worship of other gods and emperors.
  2. She is wealthy (purple clothes, jewelry) and powerful (the kings and nations fall in line with her) and she is a killer (of Christians).

#### b. The Golden Cup

- i. This is taken directly from Jeremiah 51:7: "Babylon was a golden cup in the LORD's hand, making all the earth drunken."
  - ii. John gives a twist by saying the whore has the cup.
- c. The one who was, is not and is going to destruction... a play on words and a parody of the description of God.
- d. This chapter comes with an explanation – verses 7-18

- e. Eventually, the subjects of Rome (other nations) will rise up against her and destroy her.
  - i. I remember this from Jesus: A house divided against itself cannot stand.
  - ii. Evil is self-destructive.

## **Laments on Earth—18:1-24**

**Verse 1** – another angel. This one is heavenly and illumined with glory.

**Verses 2-3** - Some of the language in Verses 2-3 sound like the type of rhetoric coming from the Islamic extremists about the US.

This language follows the same tone of Chapter 17 – Rome lead people away from God, Rome is an evil institution, all the nations of the earth have colluded with Rome and become partners with Rome.

This section is a “taunt” and is similar to those prophetic taunt songs in Isaiah 23-24, 47; Jeremiah 50-51; and Ezekiel 26-27. They mock the downfall of an enemy.

John is writing as if the downfall has already occurred, he sees with eyes of faith.

**Verse 4** – those faithful to God are called to triumph!

This verse is similar to those in the OT (Isaiah and Jeremiah) that call for the Jews to flee from Babylon because of God’s impending destruction of that city.

**Verses 5-8** – As any person, program, government or institution who does the same, Rome will eventually fall. Riches, power and claims of divinity will not prevent that from happening.

God has taken note of Rome’s sinfulness and will not allow it to last. Since Rome destroyed God’s people, it will be destroyed. “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall” Proverbs 16:18

**Verse 9-19** – The collapse will be complete and others will mourn because the success of Rome is their success as well. The collapse will be economic as well systemic. The riches and wealth that seemed endless will end!

John has adapted these verse from Ezekiel 26-28 (The lament over the city of Tyre’s fall).

Rome had become a place not of the basics but of luxury and excess. John lists very expensive items in these verses to demonstrate the wealth of Rome. He lists slaves right along with cattle.

It has been said that 1/3 of Rome's inhabitants were slaves.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Century Roman writer Aelius Aristides said that one could travel the world to see its products or come to Rome and see them there. "Whatever cannot be seen here belongs completely to the category of Nonexistent things."

**Verse 20** – Heaven can rejoice because this evil has been destroyed. In the midst of the collapse people will turn to God, Christianity will prosper.

This verse is a direct opposite of Rev. 11:10 where the people of the earth rejoice at the death of God's two witnesses.

**Verses 21-24** – Rome, just like every other empire, nation and kingdom will give way and fail. Only God is eternal, God and his followers.

So complete will the destruction of evil be that Jesus (the bride) and the church (her bridegroom) will not be present any longer. They will be with God and not with evil.

But the blood of those who were killed because of their faith, those who remained faithful, will remain a stain on the evil one forever. But the faithful will not need blood where they are going!

John viewed Rome as the cause of all death and evil in the world. They would be held accountable. John saw Rome as the ultimate example of power gone awry. (What would John say about Hitler (17 million deaths, 6 million Jews), or Mao Zedong (50-70 million deaths))

Any government or leader or institution that demands complete loyalty to anything other than God, judgment awaits.

### **For Us to Consider**

- John's condemnation of Rome and her opulent living echoes to today. We are part of the world's wealthiest 20 percent. Today **we** are the Rome of John's time. Is America in need danger of God's wrath and judgment?

- The voice from heaven in verse 4 tells the faithful "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues;"

How do we do that? How do we live **faithfully** in a world, a culture that is vastly different from the world of God?

- John thought that the end of the world was imminent. Nearly 2000 years have passed since his writing and we do not live with such a sense of urgency. Therefore, we must face the concept of salvaging the city instead of simply fleeing it. How do we, as Christians do that?

## 2. Celebration in Heaven—19:1-10