

THE FALL OF NEW BABYLON

Revelation 18:1-24

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The most surprising thing about our study of Revelation is the discovery that Revelation is not about the end times. The first three verses tell us that it is about things that must soon take place because the time is near. Revelation was written in the first century, so that means that Revelation is not about the end times, but about things in or near the first century.
2. If Revelation is not about the end times, then what is it about? It is about the end of the Jewish age. It is about God's judgment on and destruction of the Jewish nation in the first century for rejecting Christ.
3. Many believe that Revelation was fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. In AD 66 the Jews revolted against the Romans, starting a war which led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.
4. For this to be possible, Revelation would need to have been written before AD 70. If Revelation was written before AD70, then it is highly probable that it is talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. If it was written after AD 70, then probably not.
5. So when was Revelation written?

II. THE DATING OF REVELATION

1. About 100 years ago, the majority of scholars believed that it was written between AD 65 or 66. This is called the early date view. Today, however, the majority of scholars hold to a late date view, AD 95 or 96, during the reign of Domitian.
2. Why do many scholars hold to the late date view?
 - i. To determine the date of a document's authorship, scholars look at two kinds of evidence: Internal, and external. Internal evidence has to do with what the author wrote that may point to the date of the book. External evidence looks to other writings from that time.
 - ii. Let's begin with the external evidence.

1. The primary reason has to do with a quote by the church father, **Irenaeus**, who died in 180 AD. He knew some of John's disciples, such as Polycarp. In his book *Against Heresies*, he wrote the following: "We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign."
 - a. If you look closely at this statement, it appears that Irenaeus is saying that John saw his vision (Revelation) toward the end of Domitian's reign, in the 90s AD. But Kenneth Gentry points out three problems with this interpretation. (Gentry did his doctoral dissertation on the date of Revelation, and the world's foremost expert on the subject. His dissertation was turned into a book called *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*.)
 - b. The problem of translation:
 - i. "For that was seen no very long time since"
 - ii. In Greek, the word "that" can be translated "it" or "he." The phrase can just as likely be translated "For he was seen no very long time since," meaning it was John who was seen toward the end of Domitian's reign, not his vision. The quote is not definitive.
 - c. The problem of transition:
 - i. "FOR that was seen no very long since."
 - ii. "For" is a transitional word. It points to something before it. Irenaeus was talking about the identity of the Antichrist. Who is it? If it was necessary for us to know, it would have been announced by John who wrote the book of Revelation. The statement is about John,

not the book of Revelation. Therefore, the word “for” seems more likely to point to John being seen recently, and not the book of Revelation being written recently.

d. The problem of credibility:

- i. It was very important to Irenaeus to trace his doctrines back to the apostles. When he would make a point, he would give it authority by saying, “I learned this from David, who learned it from Henry, who learned it from the apostle Peter.” But he sometimes got it wrong. In his book *Against Heresies*, Book 2, chapter 22, paragraph 5, he claimed to have heard from people who knew the apostles that Jesus had a fifteen year ministry and died about the age of fifty. However, we know definitively that Jesus died between the ages of 30-33, and His ministry only lasted about three years. Obviously Irenaeus got it wrong sometimes. His credibility is suspect. We shouldn’t take his claims with a grain of salt. Even if he was claiming that Revelation was written in the 90s, that doesn’t mean it’s true. Sometimes he got it wrong.

2. However, we have other lines of evidence that show that Revelation was written before AD 70. The emperor Nero died in AD 68, and Clement of Alexandria in AD 200 wrote that all of the NT books were written before Nero’s death. That would support the early date view.

iii. Internal evidence:

1. The most compelling line of internal evidence are the seven kings mentioned in Revelation 17:9-10. There it talks about a seven-headed beast. The seven heads stand for two things: Seven mountains, which represents Rome, which was known as the City of Seven Hills. And it also stands for

seven kings: five have fallen, the sixth is, and the seventh will only reign for a short time. That is a perfect description of the first seven kings of Rome, beginning with Julius Caesar. At the time of this writing, the first five had fallen. That would be Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius. At the time of this writing, the sixth was still alive. That was Nero, who died in 64 AD. And the seventh only reigned for a short time. That was Galba, who only reigned seven months. If Nero was the emperor when Revelation was written, then that puts the date well before AD 70, most likely AD 65-66.

2. For these reasons a growing number of scholars hold to an early date view.

2. I believe Revelation was written 65-65 AD, and is about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

III. RECAP

1. Most of Revelation thus far has been about the destruction of Jerusalem, or the Jewish nation.
2. Revelation has given Jerusalem several names: Sodom, Egypt, the great city, the notorious prostitute, and Babylon.
3. Closely associated with Jerusalem is the Jewish religious leadership, which Revelation has called the land beast, and the false prophet.
4. In Revelation 16 seven bowls of wrath were poured out on Jerusalem, bringing it to its final destruction.
5. In Revelation 17 we are given a further description of the Jerusalem that incurred God's wrath. There it is called the notorious prostitute, just like in the Old Testament (Is 1:21). In the OT Israel was known as God's wife, and when she was unfaithful she was called an adulteress, or harlot, or prostitute.
6. In Revelation 18, the theme is still the destruction of Jerusalem.
7. How do we know that all three chapters are talking about Jerusalem?
 - i. All three are about the destruction of Babylon the Great, (Rev 16:19; Rev 17:5; Rev 18:2).
 - ii. All three chapters refer to it as "the great city," the name given to Jerusalem in 11:8 (Rev 16:19; Rev 17:18; Rev 18:19).

- iii. All three chapters say that the city is being punished because she persecuted the saints and the prophets (Rev 16:1; Rev 17:6; Rev 18:20, 24). Even though Rome persecuted Christians under Nero, only Jerusalem killed the prophets. This description fits Jerusalem better than any other city (Mt 23:37).
8. In chapter 18 we will see...
- i. The announcement of Babylon's fall.
 - ii. The command for God's people to come out of her.
 - iii. The mourning of the world over Babylon's fall.
 - iv. The finality of Babylon's fall.

IV. TEXT AND COMMENTARY

1. The announcement of Babylon's fall.

- i. **Revelation 18:1-2** 1 After this I saw another angel with great authority coming down from heaven, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. 2 He called out in a mighty voice: It has fallen, Babylon the Great has fallen! She has become a home for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, and a haunt for every unclean and despicable beast.
 - a. Jerusalem is called Babylon because in the OT she was the idolatrous enemy of God's people. In the days of Christ and the early church, Jerusalem had become Babylon. She was idolatrous in that she rejected the Christ. And she was the enemy of God's people by persecuting Christ and His followers.
 - b. The prophets in the OT prophesied about Babylon's eventual fall after it had conquered Jerusalem. Here in Revelation 18 John uses a lot of the same language to describe the fall of New Babylon (Jerusalem).
 - c. After the fall of a city, it becomes a deserted wasteland, which is why John describes it as a haunt (dwelling place) for every unclean bird and unclean beast.
 - i. Isaiah also prophesied that the same thing would happen to Babylon after its destruction (Is 13:21-22).

- d. But John also calls it a home for demons. This goes back to the words of Jesus in Matthew 12:43-45.
 - e. **Matthew 12:43-45** 43 “When an unclean spirit comes out of a person, it roams through waterless places looking for rest but doesn’t find any. 44 Then it says, ‘I’ll go back to my house that I came from.’ Returning, it finds the house vacant, swept, and put in order. 45 Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and settle down there. As a result, that person’s last condition is worse than the first. That’s how it will also be with this evil generation.”
 - i. Notice that Jesus was talking about that evil generation.
 - ii. Jesus spent three years casting demons out of Israel, but the nation still rejected Him. Therefore, His prophecy was that when He leaves, the demons will not only return, but will bring many more with them, leaving the city worse off than before.
 - iii. This is a description of the evil and demonic activity that ravaged the city in the months leading up to the fall of Jerusalem.
 - iv. **Josephus** “That period had somehow become so prolific in iniquity of every description among the Jews that no work of evil was left unperpetrated,... so universal was the contagion both in public and private, and such the emulation to surpass each other in acts of impiety towards God and of injustice towards their neighbors.”
 - v. **Josephus** “No generation ever existed more prolific in crime.”
2. **Revelation 18:3** 3 For all the nations have drunk the wine of her sexual immorality, which brings wrath. The kings of the

earth have committed sexual immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown wealthy from her sensuality and excess.

- a. There were Jews scattered all throughout the Roman empire, and rather than being a light to point the world to Christ, the Jews declared the Jesus was a false Messiah, and convinced the nations to join in their persecution of Christians.

2. The command for God's people to come out of her.

- i. **Revelation 18:4-6** 4 Then I heard another voice from heaven: Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins or receive any of her plagues. 5 For her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. 6 Pay her back the way she also paid, and double it according to her works. In the cup in which she mixed, mix a double portion for her.
- ii. This is a word of instruction to the initial recipients of Revelation.
 1. Spiritually separate yourself from the sins of the Jews. Many of the first Christians throughout the Roman empire were Jewish. The command here is to avoid the sins of the Jews. What was the sin of the Jews in the first century? Rejecting Christ.
 2. Literally separate yourself from Jerusalem, because its destruction is at hand. Don't go visit the temple. Don't travel to Jerusalem for the festivals. Literally stay away from that place to avoid her plagues.
- iii. We would do well to heed this word today.
 1. **2 Corinthians 6:17** "Therefore, come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord; do not touch any unclean thing, and I will welcome you."
 2. We must be very careful to separate ourselves from the sins of our culture. Unbelievers are all around us, and they are engaging in all kinds of sins. We must be careful to remain holy to avoid the wrath of God that they are facing.
 3. You might say, "But I'm a Christian. I'm going to heaven, not hell. I don't need to worry about God's wrath."

4. **1 Corinthians 6:9-10** “9 Don’t you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God’s kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or males who have sex with males,, 10 no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God’s kingdom.”
 5. If it is your attitude that you can live sin because you already have your ticket to heaven, then you need to check your ticket again. You may be headed for a different destination that you thought.
- iv. **Revelation 18:7** As much as she glorified herself and indulged her sensual and excessive ways, give her that much torment and grief. For she says in her heart, “I sit as a queen; I am not a widow, and I will never see grief.”
1. This is an allusion to Isaiah’s prophecy about Babylon (Is 47:7). Just as the old Babylon was destroyed even though she thought she never would, the New Babylon will also be destroyed in spite of her confidence.
- v. **Revelation 18:8** “For this reason her plagues will come in just one day— death and grief and famine. She will be burned up with fire, because the Lord God who judges her is mighty.”
1. This is a repetition of many of the judgments that were pronounced upon Jerusalem in the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments.
 2. The judgment will occur in one day. This can possibly be taken literally in that one day Jerusalem was secure, still fighting, still alive, and the next day the Romans had broken in, torn it down, and burned it to the ground. Or it could be hyperbolic to mean very quickly. When the Romans finally surrounded Jerusalem, it only took them six months to break in and destroy the city.

3. The mourning of the world over Babylon’s fall.

- i. In the next section (Rev 18:9-19), we see that Jerusalem’s destruction did not just negatively affect the Jews, but the entire Roman empire. Jerusalem was one of the major cities of the

- world. It played a major role in the world economy, but once it was destroyed all that would end.
- ii. We don't have time read through the entire passage, so I'll just make a few comments.
 - iii. The passage shows three classes of people who are mourning at Babylon's fall:
 1. The kings of the earth. Revelation 18:9-10
 2. The merchants of the earth. Revelation 18:11-17a
 3. All who do business by the sea. Revelation 18:17b-19
 - iv. As the merchants are mourning their loss of profits, a large list of goods and merchandise are described. Commentators have pointed out the striking similarity between those items mentioned in this passage, and the items that were taking from Jerusalem by the Romans when they destroyed the city.
 - v. **James Stuart Russell** "It is very remarkable that the inventory of the spoils taken from the treasury of the temple contains almost every one of the articles enumerated in this lamentation over the fallen city – gold, silver, precious stones, purple, scarlet, cinnamon, odors, ointments, and frankincense."
 - vi. This is another hint that Babylon the Great is Jerusalem.
 - vii. All three classes end by saying the same thing, "Woe, woe, the great city." If you remember from our study of the seven trumpets, John saw a vision of an eagle flying and crying out in a loud voice before the last three trumpets are sounded, "Woe! Woe! Woe! To those who live on the earth.... (Rev 8:13). The word "woe" was commonly used by the prophets in both testaments. It was a pronouncement of judgment. It was said to someone who was about to experience the terrible wrath of God.
 - viii. The second ends with verse 20.
 - ix. **Revelation 18:20** "Rejoice over her, heaven, and you saints, apostles, and prophets, because God has pronounced on her the judgment she passed on you!"
 - x. Although many people will mourn the destruction of Jerusalem, Christians are encouraged to rejoice because their enemy has

been punished. Their great persecutor was been brought to justice.

4. The finality of Babylon's fall.

- i. **Revelation 18:21-24** “21 Then a mighty angel picked up a stone like a large millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, In this way, Babylon the great city will be thrown down violently and never be found again. 22 The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters will never be heard in you again; no craftsman of any trade will ever be found in you again; the sound of a mill will never be heard in you again; 23 the light of a lamp will never shine in you again; and the voice of a groom and bride will never be heard in you again. All this will happen because your merchants were the nobility of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery. 24 In her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all those slaughtered on the earth.
- ii. Angel symbolizes the fall of Jerusalem by picking up a large stone and throwing it into the sea.
- iii. This is the same analogy that was given for the destruction of Old Babylon. Jeremiah wrote on a scroll a pronouncement of judgment against Babylon, and he sent his servant Seraiah to go to Babylon and read it. And he told him, when you finish reading it, tie the scroll to a stone and throw it into the river. In the same way, Babylon will sink and never rise (Jer 51:61-64).
- iv. The same thing is happening here with the new Babylon (Jerusalem). An angel throws a stone in the water and says, “In the same way, Babylon will never be found again.”
- v. Now the question is, “How can this be talking about Jerusalem and Israel, because Jerusalem still exists today, and so do the Jews?”
- vi. This prophecy was talking not about Jerusalem geographically, but covenantally. It is talking about Jerusalem as a people; Israel as the covenant people will cease to exist; Jerusalem as the Holy City will be found no longer.
- vii. **David Chilton** “They will not be a distinct, holy nation of special priests. They will join the peoples of the world in the saved

multitude, with no distinction (Isa. 19: 19-25). By His finished work Christ "made both groups [Hebrew and Gentile believers] into one" (Eph. 2: 14). They have been united "in one Body," the Church (Eph. 2: 16). There is one salvation and one Church, in which all believers, regardless of ethnic heritage, become children of God and heirs of the promises to Abraham (Gal. 3: 26-29; cf. Eph. 2: 11-22). Old Jerusalem, the apostate harlot, has been replaced by New Jerusalem, the pure Bride of Christ. There is no salvation outside of the Church."