



The Last Word

A Bible Study on Revelation by Stan Key

SESSION 12. UP IN SMOKE REVELATION 17:1–19:5

I. The Meaning of the City.

In the Bible, the “city” means more than a sociological or geographical reality. Its meaning is profoundly theological. The Hebrew term refers to a guarded or fortified place, probably referring originally to a watching spiritual being, a guardian angel. Thus, the city is more than a collection of houses with ramparts. It is a **spiritual power** that has a profound impact on a person’s life. And in the Bible, its influence is always negative¹ except when it comes to the City of God.

A brief examination of the history of cities in the Bible makes readily apparent the evil spiritual influence of cities:

- A. The first city in history was **Enoch**. It was built by the first **murderer** (Gen. 4:16–17). Trying to cope with his guilt, Cain at first wandered aimlessly in the land of Nod. Rather than looking to God, he built a city and named it after his son. He hoped this city of man would provide a place of security, stability, meaning, and meaningful relationships.
- B. The next city we meet in Scripture is **Babel** (Gen. 11:1–9). Historically, it became the ultimate symbol of worldly evil and rebellion against God. Founded by Nimrod (Gen. 10:8–11), Babel and the tower built there became proverbial for:
- Militarism and imperialistic **power**.
 - **Pride**. Come, let us make a name for ourselves... (Gen. 11:4).
 - Man-made **religion**. The tower (ziggurat) was intended to be a stairway to heaven. The citizens believed that man could reach God!
 - Disregard for God’s **commands**. Come, let’s build a city and a tower lest we be scattered over the earth (Gen. 11:4; compare Gen. 1:28).

Babel was later called **Babylon**. No other city became more associated with man’s revolt against God than this!

Babylon is not a city. She is the city.... No one can rival her, not even Rome.... All the cities of the world are brought together in her, she is the synthesis of them all... She is the head of, and the standard for the other cities... Venice, Paris, New York – they are all the same city, only one Babel always reappearing... (Ellul. 2of.).

- C. The next city we meet in Scripture is **Sodom (and Gomorrah)** (Gen. 18:16–19:29). This city was proverbial for its sin! The Genesis account highlights her sexual perversions (homosexuality, sodomy) but Ezekiel mentions other sins:

*This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had **pride**, excess of **food**, and prosperous **ease**, but did not aid the **poor** and needy. They*

¹ The Meaning of the City by Jacques Ellul (Eerdmans. 1970. p. 9).

were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them... (Ezek. 16:49–50).

Sodom became so wicked that God had to destroy it! It was **beyond redemption**.

- D. Once in Canaan, God’s people built **Jerusalem**. Though it always had special significance, it was a strange mixture of good (Ps. 87:1–3; Isa. 48:2) and evil (Isa. 1:21; Micah 3:10). Sometimes Scripture even compares Jerusalem to Sodom (Isa. 1:10; Rev. 11:8). When Jerusalem falls under judgment, God’s people are sent to exile in Babylon.

Conclusion: Every **city of man** will fail. Though God’s people live in these cities and though they seek the well-being of these cities (Jer. 29:7), they cannot be saved. Only the **City of God** will prevail (Rev. 21–22). The book of Revelation is *A Tale of Two Cities*: Babylon the Great Prostitute and the New Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ, holy and pure.

By faith, Abraham went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents.... For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.... But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.... (Heb. 11:9–10, 16).

II. Examine the Text (Revelation 17:1–19:5).

The Appearance of the Woman		The Identity of the Woman		The Judgment of the Woman		The Hallelujah Chorus	
17:1	17:6	17:7	17:18	18:1	18:24	19:1	19:5

A. The Appearance of the Woman (17:1–6).

1. She is the **Great Prostitute** (*porne*). Her name is on her forehead: “Babylon the Great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations” (17:1,5).
2. She is involved in sexual immorality (*porneia*) with millions (17:2,4; 18:3,9).
3. She is seated on many waters (nations and peoples) (17:1,15).
4. She is sitting on a **scarlet beast** (17:3)(Antichrist). Who is controlling whom?
5. She is dressed in gaudy apparel and lives in **luxury** (17:4; 18:3,7,11–13, 16).
6. She enjoys **killing** Christians (17:6; 18:24).
7. She is involved in human **trafficking** (18:13).
8. She is arrogant, self-confident and deceived about her security (18:7–8).
9. She deceives the nations by her **sorcery** (*pharmakia*) (18:23).
10. She is **drunk** with the blood of martyrs (17:6) and she makes the nations drunk as they drink from the cup of abominations and impurities in her hand (17:2,4; 18:3).

SUMMARY: The woman is seductive, immoral, deceptive, powerful, rich, intoxicated and influential. She hates Christians. What a contrast to the pure and holy **Bride of the Lamb** (Rev. 21–22).

- B. The Identity of the Woman (and the beast) (17:7–18).
1. The beast (Antichrist) was, and is not, and is to come (17:8). He suffered a mortal wound but recovered (13:3).
 2. The 7 heads of the beast are 7 mountains on which the woman is seated (17:9). This is undoubtedly **Rome**, the city of 7 hills. But this does not mean that Rome *alone* is what the woman represents.²
 3. The 7 heads are 7 kings: five have passed on, one is, and the other is yet to come³. An 8th king belongs to the 7 and he too goes to destruction (17:10–11).
 4. The 10 horns are 10 kings yet to come who will reign only briefly (one hour). In an outward show of unity they will give all their authority to the beast and together they will make war on the Lamb. But the Lamb **wins!** (17:12–14).
 5. The 10 horns and the beast will **hate** the woman and will destroy her. In doing so they will unknowingly carry out God’s purposes (17:16–17).
 6. Finally we are told the identity of the woman: she is “the **great city** that has dominion over the kings of the earth” (Babylon) (17:18).
- C. The Judgment of the Woman (18:1–24).
1. The fall of Babylon (18:1–3). In John’s mind the future destruction of Babylon is so certain he writes about it as if it has **already happened**.
 2. Only those who separate from Babylon can be saved (18:4–8). Those who remain will inevitably share in her destruction. Therefore, “**come out of her.**”
 3. Lamentation over the fall of Babylon (18:9–20). A three-fold dirge of sorrow is sung by kings (18:9–10), merchants (18:11–17a), and sailors (18:17b–20). But don’t be fooled. Though they all weep over Babylon’s destruction, their grief is not for the city but for **themselves** and all they have personally lost in her fall.
 4. Up in smoke (18:21–24). As the smoke of her burning rises to heaven, Babylon is cast into the sea like a millstone. Music, commerce, industry, the arts, and **weddings** will never be heard in her again. Babylon, the city of man, is gone forever.
- D. The Hallelujah Chorus (aka, Ding-Dong the Witch Is Dead) (19:1–5).

As Babylon sinks under God’s wrath and justice, a song of praise rises in heaven:

*Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God for his judgments are **true** and **just**; for he has judged the Great Prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality and has avenged on her the blood of his servants...*

² “In the first century, Rome was a striking embodiment of what John means by Babylon. In Rome as nowhere else men could see the city of man bent on its own blasphemous way, opposing with all its might the things of God.” (Leon Morris. *The Revelation of St. John*. p. 209).

³ Many have tried to determine which Roman emperors John may have been referring to. But the emphasis here is on the future, not the present. It seems wise to await future events to determine who these kings really are.

III. How in the World Can I Be Holy?

Though rarely mentioned in the contemporary church, the Bible has much to say about the sin of **worldliness**. Our Scripture is perhaps the classic text. Babylon is the ultimate picture of worldliness. Our Scripture gives four commands to those who follow the Lamb:

- A. Babylon is seductive... so be **careful**. Using all the powers of seduction possible (dress, jewelry, perfume, cosmetics, money, words, etc.), Babylon has perfected the art of temptation. But underneath the glitz, glamour and industrial strength mascara, she is in reality only a hooker, a slut, a street walker. Don't be fooled by her charms!
- B. Babylon is cruel and evil... so be **brave**. Beneath the outward "beauty" is a murderous and evil monster. All of her power comes from the Satan. Therefore she hates those who follow the Lamb, those who are citizens of the City of God.
- C. Babylon is doomed... so **come out**. Our Scripture explains that Babylon's doom will be **sudden, total, and irreversible**. Therefore, "come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins and share in her plagues" (18:4). Flee the wrath to come!

*Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?.... What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God.... Therefore **go out** from their midst, and **be separate** from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you... (II Cor. 6:14–18).*

- D. Babylon is going to be replaced... shout **hallelujah!** The singing in heaven is not taking delight at someone's punishment. It is rather the joyful response of the saints when **justice** is finally established, God's Name is vindicated, the **meek** inherit the earth, and the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and **he shall reign** forever and ever. This prepares the way for the City of God to come to earth, a city coming down out of heaven not built by human hands, a city not dressed as a harlot, but as a bride, ready for her wedding day (Rev. 21–22).

Therefore, the end of the matter:

- *If the world **hates** you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (John 15:18–19).*
- *Do not be **conformed** to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind... (Rom. 12:2).*
- ***Set your minds** on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Col. 3:2–3).*
- *Do not **love** the world or 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 desires of the **flesh** and the desires of the **eyes** and **pride** in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. (I John 2:15–17).*
- *You **adulterous** people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an **enemy** of God. (James 4:4).*

TABLE TALK

1. Describe your personal experience with cities. This lesson has urged you to think theologically about cities. What have you learned?
2. Our Scripture describes Babylon as a place of sex, money, drugs, luxurious ease, and hatred of Christians. American culture seems obsessed with the same things. What lessons should we draw?
3. Why is the American church so silent when it comes to the sin of worldliness?
4. The Bible forbids us to love the world and worldly things but doesn't give many specifics of what that looks like. A previous generation associated "worldliness" with things like lipstick, movies, jewelry, etc. Today, what activities and possession indicate that someone loves this world?
5. Our Scripture described worldliness in terms of being drunk. What are the similarities between drunkenness and worldliness?
6. Scripture calls us to be *in* the world but not *of* the world. How has this lesson helped you to better obey this mandate.

Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken

Test: John Newton, 1725–1807

Music: Croatian folk song; arr. By Franz Joseph Haydn

Tune: AUSTRIA, Meter: 87.87 D

1. Glorious things of thee are spoken,
 Zion, city of our God;
 God, whose word cannot be broken,
 formed thee for his own abode.
 On the Rock of Ages founded,
 what can shake thy sure repose?
 With salvation's walls surrounded,
 thou mayst smile at all thy foes.

2. See, the streams of living waters,
 springing from eternal love,
 well supply thy sons and daughters,
 and all fear of want remove.
 Who can faint while such a river
 ever will their thirst assuage?
 Grace which like the Lord, the giver,
 never fails from age to age.

3. Round each habitation hovering,
 see the cloud and fire appear
 for a glory and a covering,
 showing that the Lord is near!
 Thus deriving from our banner
 light by night and shade by day,
 safe we feed upon the manna
 which God gives us when we pray.

4. Blest inhabitants of Zion,
 washed in our Redeemer's blood;
 Jesus, whom our souls rely on,
 makes us monarchs, priests to God.
 Us, by his great love, he raises,
 rulers over self to reign,
 and as priests his solemn praises
 we for thankful offering bring.