

Revelation 17– Boom or Bust?

Remember the “Wizard of Oz” scene when Dorothy and her friends first met the great and powerful Oz? They felt small and overwhelmed. Yet later, when Dorothy’s dog Toto pulled back the curtain exposing the great wizard for who he really was everything changed! In Revelation Jesus has been pulling the curtain back, exposing the true character and ultimate destinies of his persecuted people and the persecuting Empire. Here he pulls the curtain back to reveal the true character and destiny of the Empire. “In her heart she boasts, ‘I sit as queen...I will never mourn’ (18¹⁷), but she is exposed as a “great prostitute” (17¹) who “will be thrown down, never to be found again.” (18²¹)

Warm Up Question(s) – Choose one

- If you could be famous for one hour, for what would you like to be known?
- What is the greatest city you’ve ever visited and what made it a “great city”?

Discovering the Word

- 1) **Read Revelation 17.** Who is the central figure in this scene and why? In what sense is she influential? Evil? Attractive? Repulsive? Who is she (v.18; cf. 14⁸, 16¹⁹)?
- 2) What interpretive clues is John given in this scene and what help or insights do they provide?
- 3) Many commentators have noted that the reference to the seven hills (v.9) would naturally evoke the city of Rome (famous for its seven hills). While Rome is *an* example of a great and godless civilization, what indicators are there that “the great city” (v.18) being exposed and judged is the sum of all godless societies & cities (v.5; cf. Gen. 11¹⁻⁹)?
- 4) **Read Revelation 18.** What is the booming city of “Babylon the Great” famous for? Are the “adulteries” committed with her literally or are they figurative for a wide range of sins (e.g. “excessive luxuries”—v.5, 7, 9, 12-13, 14-16)?
- 5) What are God’s people told to do and not do in the context of the Empire’s widespread appeals and influences?
- 6) How does God’s perspective on Babylon (vv.2-6) differ from Babylon’s self-understanding (v.7)?
- 7) How do the voices from the world greet the fall of Babylon (vv.9-20), and why?
- 8) What images and language is used to underline the great city’s complete and permanent destruction (vv.20-23? Why is this appropriate and just (v.24)?
- 9) **Read Revelation 19:1-10.** In contrast to the silence that comes with the fall of Babylon (18²²), what characterizes this new scene in heaven? Who participates in this praise?
- 10) What is the most frequent refrain in the five songs of praise? What do they tell us about God’s character?
- 11) Contrast the prostitute of chapters 17 & 18 with the bride of verses 7-8 (cf. Eph. 5²⁵⁻²⁷). What is conveyed by this contrast?
- 12) What is the most important lesson you have learned from today’s chapters? What actions will you take as a result of this insight?