



Revelation 17 and 18 contain much symbolism, and the Rome of the first century is compared to the coming dominance of Rome; the revived Roman Empire. This is lengthy, but provides in depth insight into the near future.

Gaebelein's Annotated Bible

Revelation 17:1

"CHAPTERS 17-18

Babylon, the Harlot, and Her judgment

1. The description of the woman (17:1-6)
2. The angel's interpretation (17:7-15)
3. The desolation of the whore (17:16-18)
4. The angelic announcement (18:1-3)
5. The call to separation (18:4-5)
6. Her pride and destruction (18:6-8)
7. Lamentation and jubilation (18:9-20)
8. Her utter and eternal destruction (18:21-24)

Chapter 17:1-6. Babylon was mentioned for the first time in this book in chapter 14:8; her fall was then anticipated. In two chapters we have a description of her and the details of her overthrow and complete destruction. Babylon is seen as a great, world-wide ecclesiastical, political and commercial system, and her dwelling-place, from where she exercises authority, is a great city, which is the seven-hilled city Rome. There are many who believe that the literal Babylon is in view here in these two chapters. It is claimed that literal Babylon on the banks of the Euphrates is to become once more a large city and the seat of government during the end of this age. Literal Babylon never was a part of the Roman empire, and as the Babylon of Re 17; 18 is seen in closest identification with the empire, and for a time at least is at its center and capital, the Babylon in Asia is ruled out at once. Rome was the great center of the Roman empire and Rome will once more

become the seat where the woman pictured in this chapter will exercise her authority.

In the first part of this chapter we have a description of the great harlot Babylon. Who, then, is this woman, branded a harlot, whom one of the seven angels who poured out the vials showed to John? She represents the papal system in its final power and control in the world. We shall see how this assertion is fully confirmed by the words of this chapter.

We saw in the church-message to Thyatira, which stands for the papacy and its great corruption, that Rome is pictured as the woman Jezebel, corresponding to the woman in the parable of the leaven. And of Thyatira it is said "she repents not." This shows that Rome will continue in her corrupt ways to the end, till judgment overtakes her. She is to be cast into great tribulation (2:22). When the true Church is caught up, the papal system, as we call it, the Roman Catholic "church" will see a great revival. For a time she has been stripped of the temporal power she once had, but it will be restored to her. Along with the revival of the Roman empire there will be a revival of papal Rome. But we must look very briefly at some of the descriptions of this woman, the harlot. "She sitteth upon many waters." We find the interpretation in verse 15. "The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth are peoples, and multitudes, and nations and tongues." Rome even now can boast of her children among all nations. She gets her support from the whole world. And when she gets her revival she will have a still greater dominion. The kings of the earth will yield once more to her spiritual fornication. Then John saw the woman upon a scarlet colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. Who is the Beast she rides? It is the first beast of chapter 13, the revived Roman empire. She becomes identified with that empire. Her attire is purple and scarlet and she is decked with gold, precious stones and pearls. The pope and his cardinals wear these colors. Purple and scarlet are the leading colors displayed in great Romish celebrations; gold, precious stones and pearls describe her enormous wealth and dazzling glory, so attractive to the natural man. And in her hand was a golden cup full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication.

How clearly this describes papal Rome. Her service, called worship, her rituals, her splendid edifices, etc., all are fair to behold and pleasing to the eye, like a golden cup. But inside we find her filthiness in doctrine and in practices. She encourages sin by her indulgences. With the celibacy there is also filth connected. And then the vileness and abomination of the confessional. Her shameless character is written upon her forehead. The true Church is to have His name upon the forehead and the great harlot-system bears an inscription.

Verses 7-15. The interpreting angel told John who the beast is, the beast, that was, and is not, and yet is [verse 8]. It is the Roman empire as stated before, it was, in an imperial form in John's day. In the fifth century, A.D., it ceased existing as imperial Rome; it is not. But it is to be again, a revival which is here described as coming out of the pit of the abyss (chapter 13). Verse 9 shows Rome (seven mountains), where the woman sitteth. Therefore, Rome speaks of "the See of the Papacy," and "See" is derived from the Latin Sedes, which means seat or throne.

The seven kings or heads in verse 10, mean different forms of government of the Roman empire. Five are fallen; these were kings, consuls, dictators, decemvirs and military tribunes. These are past forms of government. But in John's day the empire had the imperial form of government. This is the meaning of "one is." The other and final form of the Roman empire "is not yet come." That is in John's day it had not yet come. It is the Satanic revival and control of the empire as we saw it in chapter 13. And the eighth head, which goeth into perdition, is the man who heads the empire, the little horn, which Daniel saw on the ten-horned beast. The ten horns in verses 12-13 are kings. They correspond to the ten toes on Nebuchadnezzar's image and the ten horns on the fourth beast which Daniel saw coming out of the sea. And these ten kings yield their power and strength unto the beast. In verse 14, their awful future is seen. We shall see this more fully in chapter 19:11-21. They are going to make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb, who is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, will overcome them. With Him are the called, the chosen and the faithful, that is the redeemed, who come with Him and are manifested when He appears.

Verses 16-18. The woman rides the beast for a short time only. She will not be long successful in her regained power. The ten horns, the ten kingdoms, and the beast hate her and turn against the whore. ("And the Beast" is not in the Authorized Version; it is added in the Revised Version and belongs rightfully in the text.) First they were all for her and now they unite in making her desolate and naked and burn her with fire. But more than that "and shall eat her flesh," just as Jezebel was eaten by the dogs. It is God in His righteous judgment who decreed her desolation in this way. Chapter 18:1-3. Babylon is now seen under another aspect. In the former chapter we have the religious center of Rome and her wicked idolatries, in the present chapter it includes also the whole system of apostate Christendom in its social and commercial aspect, the so-called "Christian civilization" in its final apostate condition and doom. Papal Rome in her short revival becomes the head of apostate Christendom and controls everything till her appointed doom comes upon her. While we saw in the preceding chapter the desolation of the whore by the ten kings and the beast, here we see how God views her and that He dethrones this system in His judgment. A strong angel comes down to announce her doom and to lay bare her inner and most awful corruption. A strong descending Angel whose glory lightened the earth, shows what the boasting thing, she, who bore the blessed name of Christ, has become. (This angel may represent the Lord Himself. If this is correct we have the third manifestation of our Lord in the garb of an angel: 8:3 in His priestly dignity; 10:1 in His royal dignity and here as the herald and executor of the vengeance of God upon Babylon.) She is seen to be the habitation of demons. Even now behind all the denials of the doctrine of Christ and the false doctrines which mark the onward march of the predicted apostasy, demons are the leaders (1Ti 4:1).

And the nations drank eagerly her cup and the kings committed fornication with her. These kings are not the ten kings of the Empire for they are used in the judgment of the whore, while the kings mentioned here bewail her destruction (verse 9). And with the system there was connected great commerce; merchants through her became rich.

Verses 4-5. God always calls out His true children from that which is evil. His own must be a separate people. Saints in past centuries have heard this call and left behind the Romish abominations and thousands sealed their testimony with their blood. And in these days in which our lot is cast, days of increasing signs, heralding as never before the approaching end and the homecall of His people to meet Him in the air, in these days God demands the separation of His true children. Christendom is becoming daily more and more the religious camp of apostasy. And, therefore, He calls: "Let us go forth unto Him without the camp bearing His reproach" (Heb 13:13). He who remains in that which denies His Name, is partaker of her sins (verse 4; compare with 2 John, verses 10-11). As all drifts back to Rome and the coming political and religious confederacy, this final Babylon looms up; God's people must hear that call. To whom is this call addressed? Undoubtedly to the remnant of God's ancient people, the believing remnant and also to that large number of Gentiles who hear the final message, the gospel of the kingdom.

Verses 6-8. Like ancient Babylon, the whole apostate system, Rome and all her offspring, was filled with pride. She was lifted up in all her earthly glory and now God breaks her completely. "She shall be utterly burned with fire." As her smoke is to arise forever and ever (19:3) it is possible that the proud city, Rome, the center of the system of apostasy and commerce, will be destroyed by volcanic action, and where the seven-hilled city once stood there may be instead an immense crater, testifying through the millennium of God's righteous retribution. In view of the volcanic conditions on the Italian peninsula this is more than possible.

Verses 9-20. And now follows the great and universal lamentation over the destruction of the great world-system. There is weeping and wailing when at last this anti-Christian civilization, all Christendom united with Rome, and for a time controlling the commerce of the world, is wiped out by the hand of God. The kings, the merchants, the ship masters, the company in ships and sailors, all are seen mourning, weeping and wailing. The destruction of the system and of its proud city affects them all. They bewail their great loss. Notice twenty-eight things are mentioned by them.

The first is gold and the last is the souls of men. How this describes Rome! She is the trafficker in souls and the destroyer of souls as well. And in studying the articles of the commerce of apostate Christendom we notice that these are nearly all articles of luxury. The greatest panic has then come and there will be no recovery of the market. The rich men will weep and howl for their misery is come upon them (Jas 5:1). See also Zep 1:11,15.

Heaven is called to rejoice over her, and three classes are mentioned (Revised Version), saints, apostles and prophets. "For God hath judged your judgment of her." This is the better rendering. The judgment which the saints pronounced on her is now executed. The next chapter shows us more fully the rejoicing heavens.

Verses 21-24. In Jer 51:60-64 we read that Seraiah was commissioned by Jeremiah to attach a stone to the book containing the prophet's words and to cast it into the Euphrates. "And thou shalt say, thus shall Babylon sink and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her and they shall be weary." Here an angel took up a millstone and cast it into the sea, showing by this action the complete and final destruction of the wicked system and the equally wicked city. And what revelation there is in the statement, "for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived." In chapter 20 we read that the old serpent deceives the nations. Sorceries, wicked spirits, demon-powers blinded the eyes of the nations to follow Rome's seductive lure. And thus it is with a lifeless, spiritless Protestantism and its bloodless gospel. The sorceries of Rome, the demons underneath it all, attract apostate Christendom so that all will be united in the great, final Babylon.

So that we may not question that both chapters refer to Rome, though the entire apostate Christendom is also in view, her blood-guiltiness is mentioned once more."