

through their faithful witness to Jesus. This victory is not automatic. Faithfulness matters.

The downfall of Babylon (chapter 18)

Empires get rich through trade. When an Empire falls the trade collapses and wealth disappears.

The word 'merchants' occurs four times in this chapter. The merchants (seafarers) are those who make the money, so they weep and mourn Babylon's destruction.

Their wealth is described in detail., as is the trade. Verses 11 to 13 describe wealth almost beyond description. The earth is plundered.. Take special note of the last few words of these verses.: slaves and human lives. The Empire builds its wealth on the slave trade. You may think of other empires and see why God wants them to be brought down. The Empire is great for those who profit from it, but at the cost of human misery. So Rome/Babylon falls from within. It collapses under its own weight.

Chapter 18 is more straightforward than most of Revelation. This is what Revelation has always been about. I suggest you take time to read this chapter, feel the pain and think about our own times.

Look at verse 24. The seven churches have been warned about persecution. They know that some will face martyrdom.. The Romans will not tolerate people who do not recognise their gods. Note the reference to sorcery in verse 23. The advice for now is in verse 4. Come out! Don't compromise with an Empire that has no future. The Empire will be judged for all the blood it has shed, not just the blood of the Christian martyrs.

Revelation 17-18 the fall of Babylon

July 9th 2023



'Babylon'

The Old Testament story of Babylon goes back to Genesis 11, where its name ('Babel') is linked to the Hebrew word for 'confusion.' It is the place where people built a tower to reach up to heaven. God decides that humans are becoming too powerful, so he confuses them by giving them different languages and people disperse over the earth. (You might want to think about the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, where God starts to reverse this.)

Later, Babylon is the city whose Empire destroys Jerusalem and takes its people into exile.

In Revelation the term 'Babylon' relates to Rome, the (then) newest version of the Evil Empire. There is a hint of this in the mention of 'seven hills' in Revelation 17:9, but see especially Revelation 17:8, where Babylon is described as the great city that rules the kings of the earth. The word for 'rules' here is a form of the word for 'king.' Remember that only Jesus is the true 'king of kings.'

Babylon the prostitute (17:1-6)

Babylon appears as a prostitute, who entices the kings of the

earth with her riches. She intoxicates those who seem to do well out of her. And she herself is intoxicated with the blood of the martyrs who dare to stand against her. The word translated as 'abominations' here is literally 'things that stink.' There was a lot of (literal) sexual immorality in Rome too.

The beast (verses 7-18)

Once more we meet the monster (beast) of chapter 13. The Beast is also a symbol of the Roman Empire.

As before, the monster has seven heads and ten horns. And as in chapter 13, the monster has recovered from what appeared to be a fatal wound.

It is best to take the numbers here as symbols. As usual in Revelation, the number seven suggests completeness and the whole span of the Empire. Yet there will be an 'eighth' emperor who will hate Rome as the Empire seems to rise from destruction. The number ten suggests a large number; the ten horns represent client kings of the Roman Empire who will ally with the 'eighth' emperor to attack Rome itself.

Note verse 8 and compare 'it was and is not and is to come' with the words about God in 4:8.

The ten kings and the eighth emperor are also allies against the church. They make war on the people of Jesus, who is once more portrayed as the Lamb.

But (verse 14) the Lamb will conquer. This is the same word that is used ('overcome') in each of the seven letters in chapters 2 and 3. See also 5:5, 12:11 and 15:2. This alli-

The book of life

Revelation 17:8 is the third mention of the 'Book of Life.'

The one who conquers will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. (3:5)

All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world. (13:8)

The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast. (17:8)

1. The first quote is there to encourage the believers to stay faithful to Jesus. They can be victorious and it will be significant.
2. The crucifixion of Jesus is a unique event, but human blood has been shed throughout history. Jesus is always present in his people and in that sense he is regularly being 'slain.'
3. Names are always being written in the book of life. I take the word 'from' in the second and third quotes to mean 'since.' See Luke 11:50 where the same phrase 'from the creation of the world' is used..

ance will destroy Rome, and the great city and its empire will fall apart.

As we have seen before, biblical prophecy is not about telling us what will be. It tells us what things could be. The victory of the seven churches depends on them staying true to the ways of Jesus Christ. They overcome