

Dr. David L. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 22, Revelation 17-18--Introduction to Babylon 6-Min. Video Overview

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Alright, let's just jump right into it. We're going to tackle one of the most powerful, most perplexing, and honestly, one of the most bizarre visions in the entire Bible. I'm talking about the mysterious woman from the book of Revelation.

You know, this is a 2,000-year-old image that has had people scratching their heads for centuries. So, the vision kicks off by telling us she has this title written right across her forehead, and it is not subtle at all. It immediately drops us into this deep, complex mystery.

You've got to understand, this isn't just a name. It's basically a list of charges. The author, John, he paints this picture that's just impossible to forget.

You've got this woman who is the absolute picture of power, wealth, and seduction. I mean, she is dripping with luxury. But, and this is a big but, she's riding this terrifying monster that's covered in blasphemous names.

That contrast? Totally jarring, and absolutely on purpose. So, the big question is, what does this all mean, right? Is this just some kind of ancient apocalyptic fever dream, or is there a real message hidden in all the spectacle? Well, that's what we're here for. We're going to decode the clues and figure out what this vision meant to the people who first read it, and maybe why it still hits so hard today.

Okay, so if we want to figure out who she is, we first have to understand what she's accused of. So let's start there. Let's break down the symbolic crimes that she's being charged with.

Now, the number one charge against her is that she's a prostitute. But hold on, we've got to be really careful here. This isn't what you probably think.

In the kind of prophetic language the Bible uses, that word means something very specific and way, way bigger. See, if you look back at the Old Testament, cities like Tyre and Nineveh were called prostitutes, and it had nothing to do with literal acts. It was all about their economic game.

They would seduce other nations into this corrupt system, basically getting them hooked on excessive wealth and luxury. And that's the charge against this woman, Babylon. She uses her economic muscle to pull the whole world into a system that's completely at odds with God.

So it really all comes down to three big things. First, that economic seduction we were just talking about. Second, this insane arrogance, where she acts like she's the ultimate power, demanding loyalty that should only go to God.

And third, just brutal, raw violence against anyone who dares to stand up to her system. And man, this next part really drives home that third crime. The vision isn't just symbolic anymore.

It gets graphic. She's not just a persecutor. The text says she's drunk on the blood of the saints.

She's intoxicated by her own violence. You can just imagine how this image would have landed with an audience that was facing actual, real-life persecution for their beliefs. All right, so we know what she's guilty of, right? Economic corruption, arrogant idolatry, and violent persecution.

Now that we've got the rap sheet, the clues are going to start pointing to a very specific real-world suspect. You have to put yourself in their shoes. For the first-century churches that John was writing to, this wasn't some abstract puzzle about the far-off future.

No way. Babylon was a code word for something very real, very powerful that they were dealing with every single day. For John's original audience, I mean, the light bulb would have gone on almost instantly.

When you hear about this entity with all its wealth, all its power, and its history of persecution, it was a perfect match for the global superpower of their day, the Roman Empire. And the evidence for this is just so compelling. The clues just lock into place perfectly.

First off, the vision says the woman sits on seven hills. Well, guess what? That was a super famous nickname for Rome. They even put it on their coins.

Then there's the code word itself. We know from other writings, like the Book of First Peter, that early Christians used Babylon as a code for Rome. It was a way to talk trash about the empire without getting arrested immediately.

And maybe most important of all, the entire Book of Revelation is basically a survival guide for Christians living under the thumb of that very empire. But this is where it gets even more interesting, because it's not just about Rome. Yes, Rome was the immediate target, for sure.

But the author of Revelation is using a symbol that's way older and way bigger than any single empire. Babylon is what you'd call an archetype. It's like the Bible's go-to symbol for any human system, any civilization, that gets so big, so arrogant, so powerful, that it starts acting like God, starts crushing anyone who disagrees, and seduces everyone with money and influence.

And you can trace this idea all the way back. I mean, it starts in Genesis with the Tower of Babel, that classic story of human pride trying to build its way up to heaven. Then it gets very real with the actual Babylonian empire that destroyed Jerusalem.

So by the time John is writing Revelation, he's looking at Rome and seeing the newest, and maybe the most powerful, version of this timeless spirit of Babylon. So what John is doing here is pretty brilliant, if you think about it. He's taking a direct shot at the Roman Empire of his day, absolutely.

But he's also pointing to this timeless pattern of human corruption, a pattern that existed long before Rome, and let's be honest, will probably show up again and again in different forms all through history. And that brings us to the real heart of the whole vision. See, the author doesn't just throw this horrifying image of Babylon out there by itself.

Nope, he sets it up as one half of this incredibly powerful contrast that really frames the whole book. So just a few chapters after we meet the prostitute, Babylon, John gets a vision of another woman, representing another city. And comparing these two, well, that's kind of the whole point.

And this comparison forces you to make a choice. It's so stark. On one side, you've got the prostitute, Babylon, seductive, corrupt, totally earthly, and headed for judgment.

And on the other side, you've got the bride, the new Jerusalem, pure, holy, from heaven, and destined for eternal life. The imagery is intentionally parallel, making you, the reader, choose a side. And this is deeper than just good versus evil.

This is a choice between two completely different ways of life, two competing value systems. One is all about seductive wealth, raw power, and basically making yourself into a god. The other is about faithfulness, purity, and your allegiance to the actual god.

And the vision doesn't beat around the bush. It makes this call to choose totally explicit. A voice from heaven literally shouts, "Come out of her, my people."

It's a command to get untangled from Babylon's corrupt system, to refuse to play along with its sins, so you don't end up sharing its fate. So why should we care about this today? Well, because this vision is so much bigger than just the Roman Empire. It becomes this timeless challenge, asking every single person in every generation, which city do you belong to? Which system has your ultimate loyalty? I think the real genius here is that the vision gives you a new set of eyes.

It equips you to recognize that spirit of Babylon whenever and wherever it pops up. It helps you see past the shiny, glittering exterior of wealth and power and spot the monster hiding underneath. And that really just leaves us with one final thought.

This vision was never just about trying to predict the future. It was about exposing the truth of the present moment. So the question it asked 2,000 years ago is the exact same one it's asking us today.

When you look at the world around you, which city's values do you see shining through the most?