

CHAPTER 18

Chapter 18 is a broadened description of events that were briefly discussed in 17:16. (Refer to that verse as you consider this interpretation.) It describes events that are to take place in a period of time still in the future to us. As was emphasized in the comments on 17:16, we are in no way trying to predict the future. There is absolutely no way to put any timetable on the events described here. We can only interpret the symbols as they have been used throughout the book and make application to their usage in this chapter.

The main symbol used in chapter 18 is “Babylon the great,” which is another way of describing the great harlot. In 17:5 the great harlot has the name “Babylon the great” written in her forehead. The Babylonian Kingdom was a great enemy of God’s people in Old Testament times as they took Israel into captivity and eventually destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. The symbolic “great harlot” shows that these people commit spiritual fornication, and the “great city” shows the vast number of people who oppose God in this particular way. Therefore, “Babylon the great” is symbolic of those great multitudes of people who oppose God by committing spiritual fornication. They also oppress and persecute the true church of God.

Chapter 18 is a continuation of the judgment of the great harlot described in chapter 17. Events are foretold that will take place on earth concerning this “great harlot,” or

“Babylon the great.”

Probably, the best known interpretation of chapter 18 among members of the church today assumes that the great harlot and Babylon represent the actual city of Rome. Many of the events that take place in this chapter are applied to the destruction of Rome in AD. 476. It would be fairly easy to believe this interpretation because it does give an alternative to premillennial interpretations, which basically state that a period of great tribulation will occur after the saints have been raptured. These events are supposed to occur just prior to Christ’s returning to earth to establish an earthly kingdom. Although we believe the events referred to in this chapter are in the future, we do not believe they are dealing with these types of premillennial interpretations.

There are also several reasons why we do not accept the interpretation that applies these events to the destruction of Rome. We will present some of these reasons for your consideration and encourage you to read more about these interpretations and make further comparisons in your own studies.

First, it does not apply the meaning of the great harlot and Babylon as they are used in the Bible. The great harlot represents those who commit spiritual fornication. Obviously, there were those in Rome who committed spiritual fornication, but they certainly were not the only people to ever live who committed spiritual fornication. The great harlot refers to all those people, not just the ones who happened to live in Rome between the time of Christ and A.D. 476.

Second, applying the meaning of this chapter specifically to Rome takes away any meaning it might have for Christians who live during other periods of world history. The knowledge that this great harlot will be destroyed is something in which all Christians of all ages can rejoice and take comfort. To realize that Rome would be destroyed would concern only those Christians who lived during that particular period of time.

Third, to interpret this chapter as being the destruction of

Rome forces the interpretation of chapter 17 to also deal specifically with Rome. This, in turn, forces literal interpretations of certain symbols in chapter 17, such as mountains and kings. If we interpret the kings as the actual emperors of Rome, we have to accept the Nero-resurrection myth. There is absolutely no way we can believe an interpretation of the Bible based on some heathen myth.

Fourth, the things that undergo destruction in chapter 18 are destroyed forever. They will never exist again. (See v. 14, 21-23.) Obviously, after Rome was destroyed, it was rebuilt and still remains today. It arose to once again become an important city as a center of government and trade. When the destruction described in chapter 18 takes place, it will be complete and everlasting.

THE FALL OF BABYLON ANNOUNCED

Verse 1. And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power, and the earth was lightened with his glory.

“After these things” refers to the vision that John has just seen which told of God’s judgment of the great harlot (17:1). Beginning with this verse, John is seeing a different vision, but the subject remains the same. John is still viewing the judgment of the harlot, and this same subject continues through 19:3.

John sees a powerful angel coming down from heaven who announces that Babylon the great has fallen. Angels play an important part in many of the visions of Revelation. Therefore, it would be difficult to place any special significance on this particular angel. The main idea presented is that this angel possesses great power. He is capable of announcing the fall of Babylon, or even causing it, if directed to do so by God.

Verse 2. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

The mighty angel announces that Babylon is fallen. It is important that we understand how this vision is organized. It is written as if we are viewing the destruction of Babylon after it has taken place. This places us in a period of time after the destruction of Babylon and looking back at events that occur during that destruction. These events are still in the future for us today, yet they are described in this vision as being in the past. This should present no problem in correctly interpreting this vision because John would have been in this exact situation at the time of writing Revelation, regardless of whether it applied to events near the end of the world or to the destruction of Rome. If chapter 18 did apply to the destruction of Rome, it would be describing events approximately four hundred years in the future to John. If the Bible can reveal events four hundred years in the future to John, it certainly can reveal events that are still in the future to us today. Let us not limit God's ability to know the future, or his willingness to foretell certain events. He has done this throughout the entire Bible. As early as Gen. 3:15, a reference is made to the first coming of Christ, which took place more than five thousand years later.

Babylon is to "become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird." This is a symbolic expression describing the condition of Babylon the great once she has fallen.

As of now, Babylon is a city or multitude of people who do practice certain spiritual activities although they do not follow the pattern outlined by God. At some point in the future, those people will cease to participate in these spiritual activities. The spiritual nature of this city will be lost. It will become the "habitation of devils." Those who inhabit it will no longer seek to worship God. They will practice unrestrained sin. It will be a hold for everything unclean and hateful.

Verse 3. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of

the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.

The great harlot will receive the judgment of God described in this chapter because she has led many to commit spiritual fornication. This same thought is present in 17:2, which states that the kings of the earth, and its inhabitants also, have committed fornication with the great harlot. As people follow the false religious teachings of the great harlot, they become a part of the great city of Babylon, which will eventually receive the destruction described in this chapter.

This should also serve to point out the fact that the “great harlot” and “Babylon” are two ways of describing the same thing. Both symbols cause the kings and inhabitants of the earth to commit spiritual fornication. (See 17:2.)

All we have to do to understand that the merchants of the earth are made rich by this great city is to look at the wealth which the Roman Catholic Church and other false religious organizations have possessed and controlled throughout their existence. There have been times in history when people were not allowed to trade unless they followed the dictates of Roman Catholicism. In order to be in business, or even have a job, it was necessary to prove one’s allegiance to this religious organization. This exact situation is referred to in 13:17 where this great harlot, Babylon, is described as the religious beast with two horns. It states, “And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.” This great harlot controlled much of the world’s wealth, and anyone doing business with her must also have been a part of her. Therefore, the merchants of the earth, who committed spiritual fornication with the great harlot, have been made rich through the abundance of her riches.

Verse 4. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

We have an interesting situation in verse 4. The people of

God are bidden to come out of the city of Babylon (the great harlot). This indicates that some of God's people are in this city of Babylon. How could it be that some of God's people are in this great city of spiritual fornication? The answer lies in the fact that throughout the ages many have sought to worship God in the correct way, but have faced tremendous persecutions or even death if they did not worship according to the dictates of this religious organization. It is likely that many were not able to withstand these persecutions and submitted to the laws of worship established by this organization, though they did not believe in them. The point of verse 4 is that God will not permit his people to remain in a situation such as this. If they are going to remain faithful to God and be obedient to him, they must come out of this situation. They must withstand the persecutions and have no part in this great city of Babylon. If they remain in this city of spiritual fornication, they are partakers of her sins and will receive the plagues that God will direct against this great city.

Verse 4 points out that God's people must not only be obedient to the first principles of the gospel, but they must also worship in the correct manner in order to be acceptable unto him. Mt. 15:9 states, "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." If one worships in any manner other than that designed by God, he is worshipping according to the commandments of men, and that is vain worship. It is not acceptable to God. It is comparable to the sacrifices of the Old Testament. Only those sacrifices that were ordained by God were acceptable; everything else was unacceptable.

The plagues that this great harlot, and everyone who commits spiritual fornication with her, will receive must be those seven last plagues described in chapter 16. The seventh and final plague will be eternal destruction in hell, which all those who oppose God will receive.

Verse 5. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.

God will remember those people who commit spiritual

fornication against him. Every man will be judged according to his works whether they be good or bad (2Cor. 5:10). The great harlot and all who partake of her sins will stand before God in judgment to answer for those deeds. God will remember her sins. He will remember the sins of anyone who has not been obedient to his will. For a person's sins not to be remembered at judgment, he must obey the gospel of Christ and become part of the family of God – his church.

Verse 6. Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled, fill to her double.

This is a message of consolation to the saints. The great harlot may be responsible for the persecution of many saints during the Christian age; however, Christians can take comfort in the fact that the punishment this great harlot will receive will be far greater than any persecutions she has inflicted. Her cup will be doubled. No physical persecution can possibly match the eternal torment that those who are disobedient to God will suffer.

Verse 7. How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow given her for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.

Because the great harlot has glorified herself and lived sumptuously upon this earth, she will be tormented eternally. Since the time that men fell away from the true teachings of the gospel, false religious organizations have controlled, and still control, vast amounts of wealth. Enormous cathedrals stand as great monuments of this wealth throughout the world. Huge amounts of wealth are also controlled by many religious organizations today who claim to be a part of the true church but are actually a part of the great harlot.

The latter part of verse 7 once again helps identify the great harlot (Babylon). She claims to sit as a queen. A queen is one who is married to the king. This great spiritual

harlot claims to be married to the King of kings – Christ. She claims to be the true church, which is married to Jesus Christ (Rom. 7:4), but is actually a spiritual harlot committing adultery with many gods. She claims that she is “no widow.” This again points to the marriage relationship between Christ and the church. Just as the true church of Christ believes that her husband has risen from the grave and sits on his throne in glory today, this great harlot claims the same thing about herself. She claims to be the true church. Therefore, she professes not to be a widow. She also believes that she will “see no sorrow.” She believes that one day she will be in heaven with God. This is a fearful statement because many people today mistakenly believe they are serving God; however, in actuality, they are a part of this great harlot.

The great lesson that must be learned, is that God will not accept man’s designs of worship. We must worship according to the plan God has given us in his Word. This great harlot “saith in her heart,” or truly believes in her heart, that she is the true church of God. Yet, God tells her that she will receive “much torment and sorrow” because she is actually committing spiritual fornication.

Verse 8. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.

Because this great harlot glorifies herself; lives deliciously, and claims to be the true church of God, yet commits spiritual fornication, she will be destroyed. In one day, death, mourning, and famine will come upon this great figurative city of spiritual Babylon. This must mean that her fall will be sudden and complete. This great city is also referred to as the eighth beast in 17:11. In 17:12 the ten kings were to receive power with this beast for “one hour.” According to 17:16, the ten kings will also be the ones responsible for the destruction of this beast. The ten kings refer to the complete number of civil governments that will reign with the beast. Many different governments will rise

and fall during this period of time and reign for “one hour.” The reign of some may be short; others may last for many years. Near the conclusion of the reign of these “ten kings,” they will unite to destroy the great religious city, which commits spiritual fornication. These times of “one day” and “one hour” are not meant to be used in determining the actual amounts of time involved in these events. If that were the case, the length of time it would take those governments to destroy the great harlot would be longer than their reign with her. However, we can be sure that this destruction will come “one day.” When it does, this great harlot (city of Babylon) will be utterly and completely destroyed by those who have shared their powers with her.

There is no way of knowing when this event will take place, but when it does, most likely it will be an extremely difficult situation for those living at that time, and especially for Christians. According to 17:16, the governments of this world will be responsible for the destruction of this great spiritual harlot. When this does take place, Christians may find it difficult to remain faithful to the Lord. According to 12:16, these false religious organizations actually assist the true church to remain in existence by helping to provide an atmosphere of spirituality upon the earth. When this great spiritual harlot is destroyed, this assistance will be removed. Sin will prevail throughout the earth, and the church will be surrounded by an ungodly world. It is not difficult to believe that this situation could occur because, if it were possible, many governments today would prefer eliminating all forms of religion. According to these verses, someday they will succeed in accomplishing this task.

This is similar to another situation that was prophesied in the Old Testament and fulfilled in A.D. 70. It was called the “abomination of desolation” in Dan. 9:27 and spoken of by Christ in Mt. 24:15. This abomination of desolation was the destruction of Jerusalem, or the ending of the Jewish system of religion, which had been observed from the time of Moses. When this destruction was accomplished, it was a time of great tribulation (Mt.24:21). When this great

harlot is destroyed, it is also likely to be a period of great tribulation although there is no way to actually know what will take place during this period of time.

We offer the following discussion on this subject for your consideration as you continue to study Revelation. In comparing other passages in Revelation that seem to have similar meanings, it is likely that the period of time spoken of here is comparable to the “little season” of 20:3, 7. In that period of time, the devil will be loosed out of his prison for a “little season,” and his forces gathered together to make war against the saints. Rev. 20:9 says they will compass about the camp of the saints (the church) and when this is accomplished, the end will come. If these times are comparable, this would mean that the destruction of this great harlot will take place very near the second coming of Christ. It will be a period of time when the only religious activities taking place will be those of the church. Sin will rage wild upon the face of the earth and the camp of the saints will be surrounded. Satan will control the lives of many people, and the world will find itself in a catastrophic situation. (See comments on 20:7, 8.) This situation will be caused by sin. Man cannot live in a situation where sin rages uncontrolled by anyone or anything. This was the situation that existed during the days of Noah before the destruction of the world by the flood. The only people who were faithful to God were Noah and his family. They were completely “compassed about” by sin. Mt. 24:37 says, “But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”

LAMENT FOR BABYLON

Verse 9. And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning,

The kings of the earth who have committed spiritual fornication with this great harlot and have been made rich by this association will lament for her when they see her

destruction. According to 17:16, the ten horns, or ten kings (17:12), which represent all the kingdoms of the world, will be responsible for the destruction of the harlot. Also, verse 3 makes a reference to the kings of the earth as being the ones who commit fornication with this great harlot. As Coffman says, "Here is the great paradox."¹ Those who destroy this great harlot will suddenly realize that they have destroyed the source of their riches. They will lament for her as they see the smoke of her burning. They will be in great sorrow because of their actions. This realization will come quickly, even as the smoke is still rising from her burning.

It is hard to imagine what this world would be like without false religious organizations. However, many governments today would like to destroy all forms of religion. According to this passage, they will eventually be successful, only to find out that they have destroyed the very thing that made them rich and powerful.

Verse 10. Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.

These kings of the earth, or civil governments that were responsible for the destruction of the great harlot, will stand afar off viewing the destruction of the great city of Babylon. They stand afar off because they are afraid to come near, or be associated with this great harlot any longer for fear of being destroyed themselves.

This destruction is said to take place in "one hour." This is in contrast to verse 8, which says the destruction took place in "one day." We should not view this as two different time periods or two different times of destruction. This most likely means that this destruction will take place at the end of the "one-hour" reign with the ten kings. The beast is to reign with the ten kings for one hour, and at the end of that reign, the ten kings will destroy the beast in one day, which indicates her end will come suddenly and quickly.

Verse 11. And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her for no man buyeth their merchandise any more:

As discussed in 17:4, the great harlot has controlled, and still controls, a great deal of the wealth of this world. When this destruction comes, this wealth will be lost. It is hard to imagine what this period of time might be like, and we must refrain from making unfounded guesses; however, we are told that those who have depended on this wealth will weep and mourn because people will no longer buy their merchandise. This great harlot controls much of the earth's wealth, but when she is destroyed, this wealth will be lost and those who depended on it for their own livelihood will suffer. Another reference is made to this same situation in verse 15.

Verses 12, 13. The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men.

These two verses list the merchandise that the merchants of the earth sold to the great harlot. There may be symbolic meanings in this list of merchandise, but more than likely, this is used to emphasize the amount of wealth possessed by the great harlot. She is capable of purchasing all types of precious stones and many other costly items that require great wealth. When the great city of Babylon is destroyed, those who sold these items will no longer be able to do so and will suffer greatly because of it.

We must emphasize the last phrase of verse 13. It includes slaves and souls of men in this list of merchandise purchased and controlled by the harlot or the city of Babylon. An alternate translation of this is "bodies and souls of men." The great harlot not only controls great

material wealth, she also controls the bodies and souls of men. A cross reference which should be studied in connection with these verses is 13:11-17, which describes a beast with two horns coming up out of the earth. This beast is the same as the great harlot or the city of Babylon. The difference is that chapter 13 describes the governmental powers that this great harlot possesses. The two visions are giving different information about the same great religious harlot or beast. In 13:15 the two-horned beast had the power to “cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.” This is control of the souls of men. Rev. 13:17 shows that “no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.” This is control of the actions or bodies of men. Therefore, the great harlot not only controls the great wealth of the world, she also controls the bodies and souls of men. Those people who are a part of the great spiritual harlot are enslaved by it. They have pledged body and soul to it.

Remember, the great harlot still exists today. It has simply changed forms and now exists under many names instead of only one. (See 17:5.)

Verse 14. And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all.

The great harlot, according to 17:4, was “arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls.” At this time these riches will depart from her. These are the things that she has lusted after from her beginning. When her destruction comes, she will no longer control these items of great wealth.

It is emphatically stated that she will find them “no more at all.” This will be the end of this spiritual harlot on earth. She will not rise again at some later date to reclaim her wealth. She will be gone forever. This once again re-emphasizes the fact that this city of Babylon cannot be referring specifically to the literal city of Rome, which rose

again to become a prominent city. However, verse 14 states that this will not happen to spiritual Babylon. The wealth of this great spiritual city will be lost forever.

Verse 15. The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing,

These merchants, who sold these costly items to the great harlot and have been made rich by her, stand afar off as they observe her burning. Her destruction will be so great that not even those who were made rich by her will be willing to come to her aid. They will not attempt to help her in any way for fear of their own destruction.

They will weep and wail as they watch her burning. This will happen because of their own greed and the knowledge that the source of their wealth has been destroyed. We must not try to determine when this great event will take place; exactly how it will happen, or what will be the situation upon this earth that will cause it to take place. The indication here is that it will include a time of great economic chaos throughout the world. When the civil governments of this world have succeeded in destroying the great spiritual false religious organizations, the world will probably find itself in a very difficult state of affairs. Although it may be “intellectually stimulating” to ponder events that might occur during this period of time, let us not go beyond what we are told in God’s Word.

Also, remember that it is not the purpose of this vision to tell when, or even how, such events might occur. It is recorded to assure the saints that this great spiritual harlot will not win the war, but instead, she will finally be destroyed. According to 17:1, the subject of this vision is the judgment of the great harlot. It should be a source of comfort and strength to Christians to know that this great harlot will finally be destroyed. Even though she may possess great material wealth throughout her lifetime, Christians are the ones who are actually wealthy. We possess forgiveness of our sins, which gives us an inheritance more valuable than anything on this earth.

Verse 16. And saying, Alas, alas that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls!

A description of the great harlot, which is almost identical to this description of the great city, is given in 17:4. This again points to the fact that the great harlot and the great city are identical. It is simply two ways of describing the same thing. Each description gives different information about the same subject. (For more information about the description of the great city, see comments on 17:4.)

Verse 17. For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off,

Once again, the time of her destruction is given as “one hour.” It is also used in verses 10 and 19. (For information about this symbol, see comments on v. 8,10.)

The shipmasters, sailors, and those who trade by sea will also stand afar off, not wanting to be a part of this great destruction. This shows the totality of the destruction. Just as the merchants of verse 15 stood afar off weeping and wailing, anyone who trades or deals with this great harlot in any way will mourn her destruction because of the economic losses they will suffer. Also, no one will come to her rescue. Everyone will watch her destruction, but no one will assist her for fear of being destroyed themselves.

Verse 18. And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city!

When the destruction of this great spiritual city of false religion comes, those who have destroyed her (v. 9; 17:16), along with those who were made rich by her (v. 15), will realize that the great city served a purpose on earth. At least those people who are part of this great harlot are morally good people. They may not be worshiping according to God’s plan; however, they do believe in God and are

spiritually minded. According to verse 2, when this great city is destroyed, it will become a habitation for devils. The spirituality of this great city will be lost and the people in it will no longer believe in God. Men will cry, "What city is like unto this great city!" There will be none. People will no longer seek to serve God and sin will overwhelm the world.

Verse 19. And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.

Those who have been made rich by the great harlot will be exceedingly sorrowful. They will cast dust on their heads and cry by weeping and wailing. These are signs of that great sorrow. There will no longer be any need for the great cathedrals or beautiful buildings in which to worship. There will no longer be any need for the golden altars and marble images, or the priceless paintings and fine stained glass windows, which are outward signs used by false religious organizations to show the world that they believe in God. The wealth owned and controlled by this great city will be lost forever.

Verse 20. Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.

In the fifth seal in 6:10, the saints under the altar asked, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" This is at least a partial fulfillment of the answer to that question. God will be responsible for the destruction of this great city. According to chapter 18, there will come a time when this great spiritual city of false religion will cease to function, and we know that Christ will destroy it forever in hell when he comes again. (See 2Thess. 2:8.) When Christ returns again, all those who have been a part of the great spiritual harlot throughout the ages will suffer eternal

destruction.

For the holy apostles, prophets, and all who follow their teachings, this is cause for rejoicing. This assures Christians today that false religion will not win over the truth. God will destroy it, but he will bless those who follow him. This could also be taken as a warning that God will destroy all those who have a part in false religions. Therefore, we must make sure to follow the ways designed by God.

THE FINALITY OF THE FALL

Verse 21. And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.

The destruction of this great city of Babylon, the spiritual harlot, will occur with great violence. When false religion is finally destroyed on this earth, it will not happen quietly or simply gradually decline until it no longer exists. The ten kings of 17:16 will destroy it with great violence. Chapters 17 and 18 overwhelmingly point to the concept that the secular governments of this world will join forces to eliminate all forms of religious practice. The only thing remaining of a spiritual nature will be those Christians whose faith is strong enough to enable them to remain faithful to God. (See 20:9.)

To see that this is possible, all we have to do is look at the situations in the world today concerning governmental relationships with religious organizations. Some are blessed to live in countries where religious practice is welcomed and even encouraged. Others live in nations where religious practice is simply tolerated, while still others are unfortunate enough to live in nations where worship to the true God is prohibited, or at least strictly controlled. According to chapters 17 and 18, a time will come when the governments of all nations will end their associations with religious organizations. With great violence, these religious organizations will be destroyed, never to rise

again. They will be found no more at all (v. 22).

It should also be noted that the “sea” is sometimes used as a symbol to represent the people of the earth. (See comments on 12:16.) It is very possible that this meaning can be applied here also. Just as a great stone cast into the sea would cause a violent upheaval of water, the destruction of Babylon will be a catastrophic event for the people of the earth. This is why the people who actually destroy this city of false religion will quickly mourn her extinction. (See v. 9; 17:12, 16.)

Verse 22. And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee;

This great city of false religion will cease to function. Nothing pleasant or worthwhile will ever be accomplished by it again. Verse 2 says this great religious city will become the habitation of devils and a hold of every foul spirit and a cage of everything hateful and unclean. The spiritual nature and organization of false religion will be destroyed.

In verses 21 through 23, the phrase “shall be found no more at all in thee,” or one similar, is used six times. This emphasizes the finality of this destruction. This great city of false religion will never again exist. Its destruction will be eternal. Man’s organized structures of false religion will be destroyed forever.

The repeated use of this phrase should be enough to underscore the fact that this chapter is not describing the fall of the actual city of Rome. Rome rose again, and without any doubt, all of the items mentioned in verses 22 and 23 have been heard or seen again in that city since its initial destruction. This chapter describes the fall of a symbolic “great city,” which is also described as a great harlot, signifying that those who are in this great city commit spiritual fornication. To commit spiritual fornication means to be untrue to God. This is false

religion. When the “great city” of false religion falls, it will be completely destroyed, never to rise again.

Verse 23. And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.

When the great city of false religion is destroyed, the light of a candle will no longer shine in it. Even though the religious teachings of the great city are false, the Bible is still read and used as a guide for moral values. The people of the great city claim to believe and follow the teachings of the Bible, even though they do not practice everything it teaches. This is especially true concerning the plan of salvation that enables one to enter the “Holy City” of God, the true church. (See 3:12.) From this standpoint, the Bible, or God’s Word, shines as a light in this great city. When the great city of false religion is destroyed, this light will cease to shine. Remember, it will become the habitation of devils as stated in verse 2.

When this destruction comes, the voice of the bridegroom and the bride will no longer be heard in this city. This meaning is similar to that just stated. The bridegroom is used symbolically to represent Christ (Jn. 3:29), and the bride represents the church (21:9). Therefore, the voice of the bridegroom and bride is the Word of God, or the teachings of the Bible. Teachings concerning the bridegroom and the bride can be heard today in false religious organizations. They are made up of those who profess to know God and claim to be a part of his church, yet they commit spiritual fornication by disobeying his commands. When the great city is destroyed, the teachings of the Bible, the voice of the bridegroom and bride, will no longer be heard. It will become a hold of every foul spirit (v. 2).

According to verses 11 and 16, the merchants of the great city are those who supply its needs and luxurious desires. Here they are described as the great men of the earth. Those

men, who are powerful and well known upon this earth, supply this great religious city its goods. Many today become wealthy by supplying the needs of these great false religious organizations. In 2Tim. 4:3-4, we read, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." Some of the most well known men of this entire world are leaders of these false religious organizations. They are merchants unto the great city!

All nations are deceived by the sorceries of the great city. In 13:13-14 this same situation is described as governmental powers of the religious beast that arise out of the earth. This beast was the first manifestation of the great harlot, or the great city of Babylon. As the apostate church began to organize by the canons of men, it gained great political power and became one horn of the great two-horned beast of the Holy Roman Empire (13:11). It used these political powers to require that all men worship according to the ways designed by the apostate church and proclaimed the penalty of death for those who did not submit (13:15). It did great wonders in the sight of all men, causing them to worship this spiritual beast (13:13). It deceived all nations by its sorceries!

This great religious beast, which caused people to commit spiritual fornication, is referred to in chapter 17 as the great harlot. According to 17:2, this great harlot committed fornication with the inhabitants of the earth and made them drunk with the wine of her fornication. She deceives all nations by her sorceries!

Rev. 17:5 says that this great harlot became the mother of harlots. Part of the name written in her forehead was "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots." Rev. 17:18 shows that this woman is that great city, or Babylon the great. Therefore, Babylon the great is a figurative city which includes all those who commit spiritual fornication against God. Verse 3 says that the kings of the earth have committed fornication with this great city and the

merchants of the earth are made rich by the abundance of her delicacies and all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication. All nations are deceived by her sorceries!

The above information shows that the great city has deceived the people of this world since its beginning, and it will continue to do so until the time of its destruction.

Verse 24. And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.

The great city or spiritual harlot has been responsible for the persecution and death of many of God's people throughout the ages. Rev. 13:15 says that the great religious beast, which possessed civil powers, used this power to cause "as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed." The image of that beast was the religious organization that patterned itself after the great civil beast (Roman Empire). Those who refused to worship this image of the beast, the religious organization, were proclaimed heretics, sought out, and punished or killed if they persisted in their refusal to submit. (More information is given in chapter 13.)

How could this great harlot be responsible for all who have been slain upon the earth? The Jews on the day of Pentecost were accused of killing the Messiah, yet they had not actually driven the nails in his hands. The Roman government had actually killed him, but because of the Jews rejection of Christ and their false accusations against him, they were responsible for his death. Many wars that have already been fought and are still being fought are religious wars. They are wars that are brought about by the great city of false religion. Many of the governmental decisions made in the world today dealing with problems between nations are based on the religious beliefs of those nations. Coffman says, "it is the spirit of lawlessness and apostasy from the truth, spectacularly represented in the harlot; it is the whole religious apparatus moving throughout history and responsible for wholesale deaths all over the world."²

Babylon the great, the great harlot, is a tremendous religious force that exists as a powerful beast today. It is responsible for many circumstances that occur daily. Revelation teaches that the great harlot is not only responsible for many persecutions against the church, but actually aids the true church in its existence. (See 12:16.)

All Christians need to have a better understanding of the function of false religion around the world today. With a good understanding of Revelation, we firmly believe it is possible to understand more clearly why there is so much false religion today. It provides an “atmosphere” in this world that is conducive to the existence of the church. If the church were completely surrounded by people who had no religious belief at all, it would be almost impossible for the church to exist. Even though false religion is not acceptable to God, it does serve a purpose.

¹James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979), p. 426.

²*Ibid.*, p. 435.