

The Book of Revelation

Judgment on Babylon

Lesson #12 for March 23, 2019

Scriptures: Revelation 13:1-8,18; 16:2-12; 17; 18:4-5; Exodus 28:36-38; Jeremiah 51:13.

1. Revelation 17 and 18 are two of the most challenging chapters in the Bible to interpret correctly. Large portions of these two chapters are descriptions of what will happen to the Devil, his associates—the sea beast and the land beast—and all the people on earth that join his side. The ultimate result will be a gathering together of the demonic side in preparation for the “battle of Armageddon.”
2. Read Revelation 16:13-14. What kind of battle is the battle of Armageddon? When will it take place? Could part of it be at the second coming? Will the final episode be at the third coming? What kind of beings are the “frogs” that come out of the mouths of the evil trinity? What is the relationship between the miracles that they perform and the preparation for the battle of Armageddon? Why do you think God gave these visions or images to John? Were they primarily for him and his fellow Christians in his day? Or, are they primarily for us? What did the angels in heaven think of these messages when they were given?
3. As a part of the seventh plague, the unity of Babylon will be shattered; it will split into three parts. (Revelation 16:17-21) What could it possibly mean to say that the city will be split into three parts? Confusing as it may be, it seems clear that much of the world will be gathered together under the umbrella of Satan and his evil trinity. But, just before the second coming of Jesus, that unity will be broken up; those who formerly supported Babylon will turn against her. Is it really possible that the cities of all the countries will be destroyed? That the mountains and all islands will vanish? Will that be a result of the earthquake? Or, something else? Will this occur just before Jesus appears? Or, will it occur sometime earlier?
4. If *God's anger* means that He steps back and allows Satan to have more and more control over things, will the great earthquake and the destruction of the cities be the work of Satan? What is Satan trying to do?
5. The **sixth plague** described in Revelation 16:12-16 and the **seventh plague** described in Revelation 16:17-21 are just brief synopses of what is further described in Revelation 17 and 18. How will the collapse of Babylon actually take place?
6. Read Revelation 17:1-11. What is it about this seductive harlot—the prostitute riding on the dragon or the sea beast (See Revelation 12 and 13.)—that attracts almost the whole world to follow it? Who is this red beast that she is riding on? The dragon noted in Revelation 12:3? Or, the sea beast—which is not described as red—mentioned in Revelation 13:1?
7. There are many questions raised in these two chapters for which we do not have full answers. Who are the 10 horns? Or, the 10 kings? How does the Lamb with His called, chosen, faithful followers defeat almost the entire world who oppose them?
8. Who is the woman—or the great city—described as *Babylon*? How does God apparently influence the peoples of the world first to support Babylon and then to destroy her? Or, does He?
9. We have already suggested in earlier lessons that *practicing sexual immorality* in a spiritual sense means having an illicit relationship between the church and the business world or

state. What happens when we get an amalgamation of church, state, and business?

10. Read Revelation 18:8-10. What is the relationship between the *one day/one year* of prophetic time in which she is struck with the plagues and the *one hour* in which she will be punished?
11. One hour in prophetic time is about two weeks. Does that mean that this final end-time cooperation between the forces of evil will only last for about two weeks? How will God and His forces defeat them? What does it mean to “pay her back double”? (Revelation 18:6)
12. Read Jeremiah 51:13 and Revelation 17:1,15. A *woman* in the Bible is a symbol for God’s people. A *pure woman*, then, would be a pure and true church while an *apostate woman* or *prostitute woman* would be a false church. (See Revelation 12:1; 17:5; 22:17.) Ancient Babylon depended on the Euphrates River for its life. Modern Babylon will depend on the support of the masses of people.
13. What specific groups are involved in these illicit relationships? See Revelation 17:2; 14:8; 18:2-3. The two groups which are mentioned specifically are *the kings of the earth* and, then, *all peoples or all nations*.
14. The *kings of the earth* clearly reflect governing political powers and not just individuals or a particular type of government. They are portrayed as having an illicit relationship with this religious power called Babylon. Does that mean using the influence of the church to profit in one’s business? And also using businesses to promote one’s religion? Old Testament parallels regarding prostitutes are found in Isaiah 1:21 and Jeremiah 3:1-10. How is that related to Revelation 13:16-17 which describe when the command goes forth that those who do not have the mark of the beast will not be able to buy or sell?
15. This raises a very important question: How is/was God actually involved in all of these events? Does God actually hold back the rain when people sin?
16. The second group that are involved in an illicit relationship with the harlot, Babylon, includes *all the peoples of the earth* or the governed masses. Why would so many people be fooled by the Devil’s lies and deceit? It is quite possible that as the plagues begin to fall, people turn to that religious power, hoping that it will protect them from the plagues.
17. Read Isaiah 28:7. Does that sound like a good church? What kind of drinking is being described? Could those who claim to be representing God to the world be completely confused in their guidance and direction? Why is it that the masses almost always seem to get things wrong?

Men, it has been well said, think in herds; it will be seen that they go mad in herds, while they only recover their senses slowly, and one by one.—Charles Mackay, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*. (1841).

18. One puzzling question is raised by these few chapters in Revelation. Revelation 17:3 talks about going to a desert and seeing a red beast with names insulting to God written all over it. The beast had 7 heads and 10 horns. So, who was or what was that red beast? Read Revelation 12:3-4. A huge red dragon with 7 heads and 10 horns dragged a third of the stars out of the sky and threw them down to the earth. Clearly, this red beast, or the red dragon, is a reference to Satan himself. But, as we read on in Revelation 17, it seems to imply that the *red beast* is actually talking about the sea beast of Revelation 13:1-2. Is this a case of Satan actually being in charge but hiding behind his earthly surrogate? Note that

the sea beast is not described as being red or scarlet in color. The sea beast behaves like the dragon/Satan.

19. In his vision John saw a woman riding on a scarlet/red beast. *Women*, as we have discussed, represent religious entities; *beasts* represent political or military powers. So, what we have is not a complete identity between religion and political power but two separate entities cooperating. So, what do you think? Is the woman guiding the beast? Or, is the beast carrying the woman without guidance from the woman?
20. Read Revelation 12:3-4,14; 13:13; and 17:3. What is the relationship between the pure woman who fled to the desert (Revelation 12:14) and the prostitute woman riding on the beast in the desert? (Revelation 17:3) Has God's pure church in Revelation 12 become totally corrupted? Or, are these two completely different religious organizations? What can we learn from the actual history of the Christian church from its early beginnings to the present day?
21. Read Exodus 28:5-6,36-38. Clearly, this prostitute riding on the beast described in Revelation 17:3 is dressed in colors and ornaments meant to resemble the clothing and ornaments of the high priest in the Old Testament. She is holding a glass from the temple that reminds us of the feast of Belshazzar described in Daniel 5:2-4.
22. So, why does drinking the blood of the saints/martyrs make the harlot drunk? What does it mean *to drink their blood*? Is this harlot somehow related to Jezebel? (Revelation 2:20-23) Read Revelation 13:5-7. How is that related to Revelation 17:3? We live in a day of ecumenical ideas and movements. It may be difficult for us to recognize that our Christian brothers and sisters in other denominations might end up being responsible for the terrible persecution at the end.

As the storm approaches, a large class who have professed faith in the third angel's message, but have not been sanctified through obedience to the truth, abandon their position and join the ranks of the opposition. By uniting with the world and partaking of its spirit, they have come to view matters in nearly the same light; and when the test is brought, they are prepared to choose the easy, popular side. **Men of talent and pleasing address, who once rejoiced in the truth, employ their powers to deceive and mislead souls. They become the most bitter enemies of their former brethren. When Sabbathkeepers are brought before the courts to answer for their faith, these apostates are the most efficient agents of Satan to misrepresent and accuse them, and by false reports and insinuations to stir up the rulers against them.**—Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy** 608.2. [Bold type is added.]

23. Read Revelation 17:8 and 13:8. Does it help to read Revelation 13:3? The scarlet or red beast is identified as the one who *was* and *is not* and *will ascend* out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. This should immediately remind us of an attempt to counterfeit the description of God Himself in Revelation 1:4; 4:8.

(1) The beast "was." It existed in the past. Its prior activities lasted for the prophetic period of 42 months, also known as 1,260 days/years (see *Rev. 13:5 and Lesson 9, Sunday*).

(2) "Is not." With its deadly wound (see *Rev. 13:3*), the beast went into its

nonexistence phase, at least, as a persecutor, in 1798. It vanished for some time from the world scene; yet it survived.

(3) Finally, with the healing of the deadly wound, the beast will regain its power and exert it in full satanic rage.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, March 19.

24. What kind of events could lead to the rise of religious extremism and persecution similar to that during the Dark Ages? What will be the result?

Let opposition arise, let bigotry and intolerance again bear sway, let persecution be kindled, and the half-hearted and hypocritical will waver and yield the faith; but the true Christian will stand firm as a rock, his faith stronger, his hope brighter, than in days of prosperity.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 602.1.

25. What must we do to be prepared for such a time?

26. The next very puzzling passage is found in Revelation 17:9-11. We need to compare Revelation 13:18. These **seven mountains**—or possibly seven hills—may allude to the seven hills upon which the ancient city of Rome was located. These seven mountains are also described as seven kings. That would suggest that they are successive, not simultaneous.

These mountains do not symbolize individual kings, because Revelation does not deal with individual persons but with systems. In the Bible, mountains often symbolize world powers or empires (*Jer. 51:25; Ezek. 35:2, 3*). In biblical prophecy “kings” represent kingdoms (*see Dan. 2:37-39, Dan. 7:17*).

Thus, the seven mountains symbolize seven great successive empires that dominated the world throughout history, through which Satan opposed God and harmed God’s people.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, March 20. [Bold type is added.]

27. So, who could these seven kings possibly represent? One view that has been accepted by many Adventist interpreters suggests that the *five kings* are those who have dominated and harmed God’s people in the past: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece. The “one is” kingdom would be the Roman Empire which was in power in John’s day. If that is indeed the sixth kingdom, then the seventh kingdom which had not yet come would be the sea beast of Revelation 13. That would have to be the papacy which did everything it possibly could to destroy God’s faithful true people during the Dark Ages. Furthermore, John is told that there is an eighth world power—although it is one of the seven heads or world powers. If we believe the kings are sequential, then the eighth must be the seventh head which had received the deadly wound. Would this eighth kingdom then be the beast after its deadly wound had been healed? When the world wanders after this beast and is amazed at its healing, could that represent the eighth world power? At what point in history do these seven kings occur? Many people have tried to suggest that these are referring to consecutive popes in modern times. This has led to date-setting which has, so far, always proved to be in error.
28. Another view which is popular among Seventh-day Adventist scholars suggests that *the five following kings* might be Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and the medieval papacy. That would lead the sixth king to be the papacy from 1798 to 1929 when the papacy had lost all its political power. The other interpretation given above seems more likely.

29. Read Revelation 17:12-15 and 16:14-16. We have very little specific information about these **10 kings or 10 horns**.

Different interpretations have been offered regarding the identities of the ten kings. However, Revelation does not tell us who they are. All we can derive from the text is that they are a short-lived political confederacy appearing right before the end and supporting the harlot. Their number signifies that the world powers will render total, unwavering allegiance to the beast.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, March 21.

30. Read Revelation 17:13-14 in light of Revelation 16:16. Clearly, **the battle of Armageddon is not some military conflict** located somewhere in the Middle East; instead, **it is the final conflict just before the second coming of Christ when Satan and his false trinity fight against Christ and His angelic host**. That conflict will arise again at the third coming.
31. So, how will the Lamb defeat this worldwide confederation of kings? Read Revelation 17:16-18. In light of the first five plagues, what are the implications? Apparently, the peoples of the world see that the prostitute to which they have turned for protection cannot even protect her own city; so, the kings of the earth and their followers will turn against her and persecute her. Is this a case of people who have been deceived and disillusioned and are suffering terribly turning on the one who has deceived them?
32. Read Revelation 18:4. In light of what we have studied so far in this lesson, we need to remember that it is our job as Seventh-day Adventist Christians to carry the three angels' messages to the world; that includes calling people out of Babylon. God does not want anyone to perish. (2 Peter 3:9) Revelation 19:1-10 suggest that many faithful people who have been deceived will no longer be deceived and will respond to the call.
33. Who are these people? How are we to reach out to them?

This message must be given, but while it must be given, we should be careful not to thrust and crowd and condemn those who have not the light that we have. We should not go out of our way to make hard thrusts at the Catholics. Among the Catholics there are many who are most conscientious Christians, and who walk in all the light that shines upon them, and God will work in their behalf. Those who have had great privileges and opportunities, and who have failed to improve their physical, mental, and moral powers, ... are in greater danger and in greater condemnation before God than those who are in error upon doctrinal points, yet who seek to live to do good to others.—Ellen G. White, *Special Testimonies, Series A,** No. 3, 28.1-2 (1895); *Testimonies,** vol. 9, 243.3; *Evangelism** 575.1; *16MR** 161.2-162.1.

34. We read about a bewildering array of images and alliances in Revelation 16 and 18. There are mountains and kings, harlots and beasts, and a city called Babylon.

The variety of images in these chapters can all be linked to three great, worldwide alliances that develop in the final period of earth's history.

1. There is a **great, worldwide alliance of religious institutions that join together in opposition to God and His faithful people**. This alliance is named by many names: Babylon, the great harlot, the great city, and the woman that rides the beast.

2. There is a **great, worldwide alliance of secular, political, and military**

powers. This alliance also is named by many names in Revelation: the kings of the whole inhabited world (*Rev. 16:14*), the cities of the nations (*Rev. 16:19*), the kings of the earth, the earth dwellers (*Rev. 17:2*), the beast (*Rev. 17:3*), the seven heads, the seven mountains, the seven kings (*Rev. 17:9, 10*), and the 10 horns (*Rev. 17:12, 13*). These secular powers also are represented by the kings (*Rev. 18:9*), merchants (*Rev. 18:11*), and seafarers (*Rev. 18:17*) of chapter 18.

3. There also is a **worldwide, end-time alliance of the saints**, which has the following names: the sealed (*Rev. 7:1-3*); the 144,000 (*Rev. 7:4-8*); the remnant (*Rev. 12:17*); the saints (*Rev. 14:12*); those who keep their garments (*Rev. 16:15*); and the called, chosen, and faithful followers of the Lamb (*Rev. 17:14*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 159.

The last two alliances are precipitated by the final, worldwide proclamation of the gospel by the remnant (*Rev. 14:6, 7; Rev. 18:1-4*). Through the counterfeit gospel “inspired” by the demonic angels (*Rev. 16:13, 14*), Babylon (the satanic triad [*Rev. 16:19*]) gathers the secular/political powers of the world to its side (*Rev. 16:14, 16*). She “rides” the beast (*Rev. 17:2-7*). For a short time, united institutions of religion dominate the world’s governments, turning their fury against the saints (*Rev. 17:6, 13:15-17*). But the drying up of the Euphrates (*Rev. 16:12*) symbolically portrays the time when the secular/political powers that supported the harlot Babylon turn on her and destroy her (*Rev. 17:16*). God saves His end-time remnant from destruction (*Rev. 17:14*). After the fall of Babylon, the secular powers of the world meet their end at the Second Coming (*Rev. 19:17-21*).—*Ibid.** 161. [Bold type is added; italic type and content in brackets are in the source.]

35. In order to understand these visions in Revelation, we must understand a certain principle. Like Daniel in Daniel 2 and Daniel 7, John was given a vision which he apparently did not understand; and then, he was given an explanation. Prophetic visions can relate to events happening anywhere in the universe at any time in history. (See Revelation 12:7-12.) But, when the explanations are given, they are almost always linked to the times and places of the prophet himself. Daniel saw a great image; but, it was related to Nebuchadnezzar and his time. Thus, we can learn that there may be a very significant difference in understanding between visions which prophets see and the later explanations.
36. In this lesson we have talked about events from the distant past all the way up to and including many events still future. It might be difficult to think of life applications in light of all of this. But, one or two things are very clear. We need to be establishing ourselves so firmly grounded in biblical truth that we cannot be shaken. And more than that, we need to be spreading the truth of the three angels’ messages to all those around us. And while we must be cautious in our presentation of these facts, we must recognize that God’s worst enemies in the end will be those who claim to be Christians, even former Adventists. Pride and stubbornness can destroy people. Which side of this conflict will you be on?

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