

America *and* Babylon



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Rev. 13:1–12; 14:9–11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4; Jer. 51:6, 7, 53, 57; Rev. 18:1–4.*

Memory Text: “At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book.” (*Daniel 12:1, NKJV*).

Last week we looked at the counterfeit trinity, Satan (the dragon) and two earthly powers that together will bring persecution against God’s people.

One of these powers, the sea beast (*Rev. 13:1–10*), is described as a composite of a leopard, a bear, and a lion (*Rev. 13:2*)—images taken directly from Daniel 7:4–6. We saw in week 6 that in Daniel 7—after the rise of Babylon (lion), Media-Persia (bear), and Greece (leopard)—came the final earthly power, Rome. It started out as pagan Rome and then turned into papal Rome, the little horn power of Daniel 7:7, 8; 19–21; and 23–25 that rose directly out of the fourth beast. We saw, too, that many of the characteristics of papal Rome, as depicted in these verses in Daniel 7, reappear in the sea beast of Revelation 13:1–10. Hence, Bible scholars have seen Rome as one of the key antagonists in the end-time scenario of Revelation 13.

However, Rome is not alone. Another power is depicted. This week we will focus mostly on Revelation 13 and the events and powers portrayed in it, and as always asking the questions: What do these events mean, and how can we be prepared for them?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 9.

Deadly Wound Healed

Read Revelation 13:1–10 and go over the reasons why these texts are referring to the papacy, with regard to its role in the past and in the future. Notice specifically just how prominent a role it is given. What does this mean in terms of last-day events?

Although God has faithful people in all churches, Scripture does point to a specific role that this institution has played in history and will play in last-day events.

Read Revelation 13:3. What is happening here, and what does this teach about Rome’s prominence?

For centuries the Roman church had been the central religion and, in many ways, the political center of the Western world. A telling example of her power is seen in the story of Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV, who, upon angering Pope Gregory VII, came to the pope’s castle to make peace. There, the Roman emperor was made to wait in an outer court for three days in the winter cold before the pope granted him entrance. Gregory VII, elated with his triumph, boasted that it was his duty to pull down the pride of kings.

Nevertheless, by the late eighteenth century through the influence of the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution, Rome’s political and religious hegemony had been shattered. One of the popes, Pius VI, actually had been taken captive by the French army in 1798 and died in exile in 1799.

Revelation 13, however, speaks of a resurgence after the healing of its “deadly wound” (*Rev. 13:3*). And although Rome today doesn’t have the kind of political power it wielded in the day of Gregory VII, it is an influential force, both religiously and politically, thanks to the popularity of recent popes (for instance, Pope Francis’ speaking to both houses of the U.S. Congress in 2015 was a historical first). According to prophecy, this influence only will grow.

How can we be faithful to the message that we have been called to preach, but do so in a way that causes as little offense as possible? Why, though, must we not bow down to “political correctness” as we proclaim present truth?

The United States in Prophecy

People have asked, and understandably so: *How could Rome have the kind of influence today, or in the future, that is depicted in Revelation 13?* Long gone are the days when it could command armies such as it did in times past. The answer is found, too, in Revelation 13.

Read Revelation 13:11, 12. Which marks help us to identify who this power is?

The beast that precedes this one—long viewed as Rome by Protestants—was depicted as having been given power for forty-two months (*Rev. 13:5*). The forty-two months are the same as the “time and times and the dividing of time” of Daniel 7:25, or three and a half years (*Rev. 12:14*), or 1,260 prophetic days (*Rev. 12:6*)—the time during which the papal power oppressed its opponents. This prophetic time period (using the day-year principle) began with the supremacy of the papacy, A.D. 38, and terminated in 1798, the year that the pope was taken captive. At this time the papal power received its deadly wound, and the prediction was fulfilled.

About this point in history, near the close of the “forty-two months” (1798), another power appears (*Rev. 13:11, Rev. 13:1*). It arises this time out of the earth—which is in contrast to many of the previous powers, which arose out of water (*see Dan. 7:2, 3*)—a symbol of masses of people. “‘The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues’” (*Rev. 17:15, NKJV*).

For these reasons, and others, this power must be the United States of America, which arose in a relatively uninhabited part of the world and didn’t need to overthrow any major empires in order to do so.

“What nation of the New World was in 1798 rising into power, giving promise of strength and greatness, and attracting the attention of the world? The application of the symbol admits of no question. One nation, and only one, meets the specifications of this prophecy; it points unmistakably to the United States of America.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 440.

Although this power is described first as having two horns like a lamb, symbolizing gentleness, it will speak “as a dragon” (*Rev. 13:11*), indicating a time of persecution such as took place under the previous power. Revelation 13:11–17, then, answers the question about how Rome could exert the influence that prophecy predicts. It will have the might of the United States behind it—that’s how.

An Issue of Worship

All through sacred history, the Lord constantly had to deal with those who fell into idolatry and other forms of false worship (*see Matt. 4:8–10*). In the final crisis, as depicted in Revelation 13, the issue of worship will again arise. Here, too, God’s people will have to make a choice about whom they will worship and serve (*see Josh. 24:15*).

In week 2, in the lesson titled “Daniel and the End Time,” we studied the story of three Hebrew boys who were ordered to “worship the golden image” (*Dan. 3:5*). We saw, too, how Revelation 13 uses language from that chapter in depicting the persecution that God’s people will face in the end times. That is, we may see what happened in Daniel 3 as a precursor to what will happen in the last days, as depicted in the immediate context of the beast powers in Revelation 13. All were commanded to worship the golden image, or they would be put to death in a fiery furnace. Similarly, in Revelation 13, whoever “would not worship the image of the beast [is] to be killed” (*Rev. 13:15, NKJV*).

Read Revelation 14:9–11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4. What do these verses tell us about how crucial the issue of worship will become?

Babylon always has been the capital of false worship. The Tower of Babel testified to its builders’ desire, like Lucifer, to “ascend above the heights of the clouds” (*Isa. 14:14*), as well as to its builders’ efforts to save themselves in case of another global deluge. Thus, they refused to believe God’s promise never to bring another flood upon the earth (*Gen. 9:8–11*).

The Neo-Babylonian Empire likewise exalted the work of human hands. Nebuchadnezzar extolled “this great Babylon, that I have built” (*Dan. 4:30*). Later, King Belshazzar took the golden cups of Solomon’s temple for a feast, and “they drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone” (*Dan. 5:3, 4, NKJV*). Notice that the true vessels of the temple were filled with intoxicating wine, which deadened the sensibility of all who drank from them. As a result, many in the city perished when Babylon fell. Thus, an outward appearance of truth can deceive us by disguising the deadly “wine of Babylon.” False worship and false ideas are the currency of Satan’s kingdom.

How can we make sure we aren’t involved in any false worship now?

“Babylon the Great”

Read the following texts. What do they teach us about Babylon? *Jer.* 51:6, 7, 53, 57; *Zech.* 2:7; *Rev.* 17:5, 6; 18:2, 3.

As we saw yesterday, Babylon has a long history as the capital of false worship; so it is a fitting symbol of an end-time power that deceives the nations.

Compare the dragon, the sea beast, and the scarlet beast (*Rev.* 12:3, 13:1–3, 17:3). What are the similarities and differences?

All three beasts have seven heads and ten horns, which represent the sum total of heads and horns of the beasts of Daniel 7. Each successive empire was built upon those that went before. Similarly, the scarlet beast combines elements of the dragon and the sea beast (symbolizing pagan and papal Rome, respectively), as well as of the land beast (*Rev.* 13:11–14), grouping “all three powers—all of God’s enemies—into a real coalition.”—Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse Through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2002), p. 162. An additional element in Revelation 17 is the woman who rides on the scarlet beast, symbolizing an illicit union of religious and political powers. This woman contrasts sharply with the pure woman of Revelation 12:

Pure Woman (*Rev.* 12)

In heaven
Clothed with the sun
Crown of twelve stars
Attacked by the dragon
Mother of the remnant

Harlot (*Rev.* 17)

On the waters
Clothed in purple and scarlet
Adorned with gold, gems, pearls
Supported by the dragon
Mother of harlots

As “the mother of harlots,” Babylon has been busy reproducing itself. The apostate mother church has many apostate daughters. But God does not take ownership of the errors promulgated and atrocities committed by apostate Christianity. His true people, although attacked by Satan, survive through the centuries.

Revelation 14:8 has already warned people of Babylon’s fall or apostasy from the truth, which eventually leads to the final deception, the mark of the beast (*Rev.* 14:9–11). This warning will be repeated with much greater power, culminating in one last appeal for God’s people still in Babylon to come out of her and unite with God’s end-time, remnant church (*Rev.* 18:1–4).

Come Out of Her, My People

Over the years, students of Bible prophecy have been following world events with great interest, particularly as they seem to relate to the end time. Think, for instance, about the role of the United States. As far back as 1851, some Adventists were identifying America as the second beast power (*Rev. 13:11–15*), which was a very remarkable identification given the status of the United States then. In the mid-1800s, the big powers were still the Old World ones: Prussia, France, Austria-Hungary, and England. At that time America had a peacetime army of about twenty thousand men, about one-tenth the number of combatants at the Battle of Waterloo (1815) alone. In 1814, just forty years earlier, the British invaded and burned Washington, D.C. In 1876, Sitting Bull's braves wiped out General Custer's Seventh U.S. Cavalry Regiment. Thus, even after some commentators identified the United States as the power that would one day enforce the "mark of the beast" on the world, the nation was still fighting Native Americans on its own soil, and not always winning either!

No question, world events are following as we have believed they would. But still more things need to happen before we reach the end. That's why, for instance, when discussing the "mark of the beast," it's very important to emphasize that right now no one has it, regardless of whether or not they are keeping the fourth commandment.

Besides, more needs to unfold.

Read Revelation 18:1–4. What is happening here, and why is this important for us to remember now? What do these verses teach us about our mission to the world?

These verses paint a bleak political, moral, and spiritual picture of the world. They show the malevolent influence of false religious teaching in the world. At the same time, though, they offer great hope, because another angel from heaven lights the world with his glory. Further, God's faithful people, the ones who haven't learned yet what they need to know, are called out of Babylon. This means, then, that right up to the end, God's people who are already out of Babylon have a work to do for those who are still in it.

What should it mean to us that the Lord calls some of those still in Babylon "My people"? Why is this an important point for us to remember as we relate to others?

Further Thought: Satan’s attack on God’s law is an attack on God Himself, both on His authority and on His government. So in the last days, in the climactic events of the final crisis, Satan will be attacking those who keep “the commandments of God” (*Rev. 12:17, 14:12*), for they alone will be refusing to pay him homage through his proxies here on earth. The battle that he waged against God in heaven long ago will be continued here on earth, and just as he was defeated in heaven, he will be defeated here on earth. “From the very beginning of the great controversy in heaven it has been Satan’s purpose to overthrow the law of God. It was to accomplish this that he entered upon his rebellion against the Creator, and though he was cast out of heaven he has continued the same warfare upon the earth. To deceive men, and thus lead them to transgress God’s law, is the object which he has steadfastly pursued. Whether this be accomplished by casting aside the law altogether, or by rejecting one of its precepts, the result will be ultimately the same. He that offends ‘in one point,’ manifests contempt for the whole law; his influence and example are on the side of transgression; he becomes ‘guilty of all.’ James 2:10.” —Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 582.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, talk about world events. In what ways are they pointing to what we believe needs to happen in the last days? What events still need to unfold? How can we learn to keep vigilant about the signs of the times while avoiding fanaticism, date setting, and making bold predictions about things that the Bible and Ellen White’s writings have not explicitly taught?
- 2 Dwell more on the question of worship. What does it mean to worship something? How do we worship whatever it is we do worship?
- 3 Dwell more on the idea that God still has people in Babylon. What do we understand as the meaning of the term “Babylon” (which is obviously a symbol and not literal)? What does this teach us about our obligation to continue preaching our message to others, regardless of their political and/or religious beliefs?

“Trust Jesus” Hats

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Tony Pouesi, imprisoned for nine months after the death of a man in a bar fight, began a closer walk with God following his surprise release from jail in the U.S. state of Alaska.

With nowhere to go, he moved into a Seventh-day Adventist home for former inmates, the Greater Works Christian Living Center, in Anchorage. He began to have morning devotions. He attended prayer meetings on Wednesday and Friday evenings. He kept the Sabbath.

“It was the first time that I got to experience a real Christian family,” he said.

A desire swelled in his heart to share his newfound love for Jesus, and he decided to establish Alaska Street Ministry. Five days a week, he distributes GLOW tracts, Bible promise books, food, and clothing. He prays with strangers and talks about Jesus.

Tony has found that wearing a custom-made hat or shirt stamped with the words, “Trust Jesus,” is an excellent conversation starter.

“It is a great tool for witnessing,” he said. “A lot of people come up to me and just start talking about God. If they are responsive, I tell them how God changed my life.”

Tony’s biggest burden, however, is his own family. He called his single mother in Shelton, Washington, shortly after being freed from jail.

“There is only one thing in this world that I will ask of you,” he told her. “I want you to do these Discover Bible studies.”

As a result of the *Voice of Prophecy* studies, his mother has quit smoking and lost 30 pounds (14 kilograms). She keeps the Sabbath.

“I knew that she would never be the same after the Bible studies,” Tony said. “This is the power of God.”

Tony is now looking for new ways to share Jesus. One Sabbath as he left church, he encountered a man carrying a large white cross. The man explained that he had been carrying the cross around the world for six years and, after hearing Tony’s story, presented it to him.

It took Tony some time to gather the courage to drag the cross around the city block. But when he did, the reaction was astounding.



“People were honking their horns, and waving, and saying, ‘Praise the Lord!’” Tony said. “It was awesome.”

Tony isn’t convinced that the cross is the best way to witness. But he is confident that his “Trust Jesus” clothing is effective. He is looking to support his street ministry by selling the hats and shirts online.

“God gave me this fire to spread the gospel, and I still have that fire,” he said.

Read more about TONY POUESI, left, last week.