

God Judges Babylon



SABBATH—MARCH 16

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Revelation chapters 16–18.

MEMORY VERSE: “‘Come out of that city, my people, so that you will not share in her sins. Then you will not suffer any of the terrible punishment she will get. That city’s sins are piled up as high as heaven. God has not forgotten the wrongs she has done’ ” (Revelation 18:4, 5, ERV).

BABYLON is a word picture for false religion. The Bible shows end-time Babylon as a city. The people’s support for this city “dries up” the same as the Euphrates River shown in the 6th Trouble. When Babylon loses her power, demons start doing miracles (Revelation 16:13, 14) to trick people to fight the war against God’s people. At the start of the war, a big earthquake happens. The earthquake is part of the 7th Trouble. The earthquake breaks Babylon into three parts (Revelation 16:18, 19). These three parts are the worldwide powers that joined together against God’s people: the dragon, the wild sea animal, and the false messenger. But their group breaks. That ends Babylon’s power.

Revelation 17 and 18 tell us how Babylon’s end will happen. First, John shows us Babylon again. But now Babylon is a prostitute. A prostitute sells sex for pay. This prostitute rides on the red wild animal. This red wild animal power works with this evil woman’s “daughters,” a word picture for other false religions and Christian churches that stopped obeying God’s truth. Together, they all try to turn people away from God (Revelation 17:1–11).



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BABYLON, THE WOMAN WHO SELLS HER BODY (Revelation 17:1)

Revelation 17:1 shows us Babylon as a woman, sitting on water. What does the water in Revelation 17:15 show us?

A woman in the Bible often can be a word picture for God's people. The book of Revelation shows us God's true church as a holy woman (Revelation 12:1; Revelation 22:17). But what word picture does John use to show us a church that turns away from God? A prostitute. A female prostitute will have sex with anyone who pays her enough money. That is why Revelation 17:5 shows Babylon as a prostitute. In Old Testament times, the city of Babylon depended on the Euphrates River for life. In the same way, end-time Babylon depends on kings and people to help her do what she wants.

Read Revelation 17:2; Revelation 14:8; and Revelation 18:2, 3. In these verses, what two groups of people work with end-time Babylon?



When people accept Babylon's "wine," they act the same as drunk people.

The first group who works with Babylon are the leaders on this earth. The Bible shows that these leaders "cheat" on God by having sex with the prostitute named Babylon. Old Testament writers often used the idea of cheating, or having unlawful sex, as a word picture to show us that the people of Israel turned away from the Lord and turned to other countries and their gods for protection (Isaiah 1:21; Jeremiah 3:1–10). The cheating between the kings on the earth and the prostitute Babylon in Revelation shows us that an unlawful connection will happen between end-time Babylon and the governments on this earth that support her.

The second group who supports the prostitute Babylon is the people on the earth. Babylon makes the people "drunk" with her wine. Babylon's wine is a word picture for false teachings. When the people accept Babylon's "wine," they act the same as drunk people. The people believe that Babylon's teachings protect them. When people are drunk, they do not think clearly. Also, they are easy to control (read Isaiah 28:7). Everyone on the earth will be tricked. That is, everyone who is not part of God's loyal people.

In the end time, almost everyone on earth will be tricked by Babylon. What does that show us about the dangers of going along with what most people say is right?

**BABYLON RIDES THE RED WILD ANIMAL
(Revelation 17:3)**

Read about the female prostitute in Revelation 17:3. As we learned, a prostitute sells sex for pay. An angel tells John that this prostitute named Babylon sits on water and that God will judge her. When John sees her, she rides the “red wild animal” (NLV). The water and the red wild animal are symbols for the people who support Babylon. How do these symbols help us see who these people really are?

In his vision, John goes into the wild land and sees an evil woman who sits on a red wild animal. This prostitute is a word picture for a religious power that turned against God. The red wild animal is a word picture for a government. The picture of “religion” riding on the back of the “government” shows us that the woman and the animal are two different powers. In the past, Revelation showed us that religion and government were always together. Now we see these two powers are separate from each other. But they will join together at the end time. That is why the woman rides the red wild animal: to show that this end-time religious power will control all the governments on earth.

How does this woman show us the dragon, the wild sea animal, and the wild land animal in Revelation 12 and 13?

The prostitute Babylon wears very expensive clothes. Her clothes are purple and red. She also wears jewelry made from gold, precious stones, and pearls. In Bible times, female prostitutes often wore expensive jewelry and clothes to make men want to have sex with them (Jeremiah 4:30).

Babylon’s clothes also help us remember the clothes worn by Israel’s top holy leader in the Old Testament. This leader is the high priest. His clothes also have the same colors that the prostitute wears: purple, red, and gold (Exodus 28:5, 6). The colors of these clothes tell us that the woman is a word picture for the end-time religious power that Satan uses to turn the people on the earth away from God. She is “drunk” from drinking the blood of God’s people who died for their faith. That connects end-time Babylon to the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. That church killed millions of Christians because they believed the Good News about Jesus.



In his vision, John sees an evil woman who sits on a red wild animal.

WHO IS THE RED WILD ANIMAL? (Revelation 17:8)

In Revelation 17:6, 7, John is shocked when he sees the prostitute. Remember, a female prostitute sells her body for sex to anyone who will pay her enough money. Maybe John is shocked because the prostitute makes him think about the wild sea-animal power in Revelation 13. The wild sea-animal power made war with the woman in the white dress and beat her (Revelation 13:5–7). The woman in white is a word picture for God’s true church. The woman runs into the wild land to escape the attacks. She stays there for 1,260 days or years (Revelation 12:13, 14). That time in history (A.D. 538–1798) is known as the Middle Ages.

Compare the wording of Revelation 17:8 with the wording of Revelation 13:8 and Revelation 13:3. What words are the same? How does Revelation 13:3 help us understand the three parts of the red wild animal’s work at different times in history?



The wild sea-animal power made war with the woman in the white dress and beat her (Revelation 13:5–7).

John shows us the red wild animal that “was alive but is now dead. He will come up” (Revelation 17:8, NLV) from the hole that has no bottom. Then he will be destroyed. Do you see that John’s words about the red wild animal shows us that this power wants to copy God’s name? God’s name Yahweh means “who is, and who was, and who will come” (Revelation 1:4, NIV; read also Revelation 4:8). John’s description about the red wild animal also helps us to understand the three parts of its work in history:

1. The words “was alive” show us what happened during the time period of 1,260 years when the wild sea animal attacked God’s people (Revelation 13:5).

2. The words “is now dead” help us remember the wild sea animal’s deep cut. The wild sea animal, or the Roman Catholic Church, got “cut,” in 1798. The cut shows that the church seems not to have any real power on earth anymore.

3. The words “he will come up” show us that the Roman Catholic Church’s cut will heal. Then the Church will “come back to life” and grow powerful again. It will be full of Satan’s anger. Revelation 17 shows us the Roman Catholic Church of Revelation 13:1–8 at the time when its deep cut is healed. Then the prostitute Babylon will sit on the red wild animal’s back. When she sits on its back, that is a sign that religion and government will join together again, as they did in the Middle Ages, and attack God’s people.

THE RED WILD ANIMAL'S SEVEN HEADS (Revelation 17:9)

Read John's words about the red wild animal's seven heads in Revelation 17:9–11. Also read Revelation 13:18. We need minds filled with wisdom to understand the seven heads. What wisdom is John talking about? How do we get this wisdom (read James 1:5)?

The angel explains to John that the seven heads are seven mountains. Some Bible experts think that these seven heads are symbols for the seven hills that the city of Rome was built on. That is why these experts translate the Greek word for "mountains" as "hills." The seven mountains also are seven kings. The Bible teaches us that "kings" mean "kingdoms" (Daniel 2:37–39; Daniel 7:17). That makes sense when we remember that the book of Revelation does not show us persons but government powers that rule on the earth.

In the Bible, "mountains" often show worldwide powers or kingdoms (Jeremiah 51:25; Ezekiel 35:2, 3). Also, do you see that these mountains do not all appear at the same time? Many Bible experts believe that the seven mountains show us seven worldwide kingdoms that ruled on the earth, one after another: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, Rome, and then the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages. Satan used these kingdoms, at times, to fight against God and hurt His people. By the time that John wrote the book of Revelation, five of these kingdoms lost their power: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece. Rome, the 6th kingdom, was in power during John's time.

The 7th kingdom had not started ruling on the earth when John had his vision. The 7th kingdom is the wild sea-animal power in Revelation 13: the Roman Catholic Church. It controlled most of Europe in the Middle Ages and had power over God's people and hurt them. This church came to power after the end of the Roman Kingdom. History shows us in a powerful way that this special message, or prophecy, from God came true. Jesus gave John this prophecy many hundreds of years before the prophecy happened.

You will remember the 7th head got a deep cut that almost killed it. The 8th head is the same power as the 7th head after its deep cut heals. Today, we live at the time when the deep cut is healing. During that time, the woman named Babylon will ride on the red wild animal's back. The 8th head, or kingdom, will have worldwide power again before the end of time. Then it will be destroyed.



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THE END OF BABYLON (Revelation 17:12–15).

Read Revelation 17:12–15, along with Revelation 16:12–16. What do these verses teach us about the ten kings?

There are many different ideas about who the ten kings are. But we get a hint about who they are from the red wild-animal power who joins with kings. Do you see that the red wild-animal power behaves the same as the wild sea-animal power from Revelation 13? That helps us see that the two animals are the same power. It also helps us understand that the kings who join with the red wild-animal power are the same powers that we saw in Revelation 13. The ten kings show up right before the end of time. The number ten is a word picture that shows us that the governments on the earth will support Babylon fully at the end time.

Revelation 17:13, 14 show us the war of Armageddon again. We first learned about this big war in Revelation 16:12–16. The (1) dragon, (2) the wild sea-animal power, and (3) the wild land-animal power will cause the ten kings on the earth to make war with the Lamb, who is Jesus. That tells us that this big war is not a real fight in the Middle East. No. It is a fight between Satan and his followers against Jesus and His army of angels.

The ten kings stop supporting Babylon (Revelation 17:16–18). What makes that happen (Revelation 16:2–12)? Who causes Babylon's end?

The Last Troubles cause the ten kings to stop supporting Babylon. The ten horns, or kings, fill with hate for Babylon. John says they tear off her clothes. Then they eat her flesh and burn her with fire. These word pictures use Old Testament words to explain God's work as Judge against the city of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 4:30). In the Old Testament, if the daughter of the most holy leader in Israel is found guilty of selling sex to men for pay, she will be burned in a fire as punishment (Leviticus 21:9). Revelation 16:10–12 show us that the worldwide powers who support Babylon learn that Babylon tricked them. These kings believed that Babylon was able to protect them from God's anger. When they learn that she cannot protect them from the Seven Last Troubles, the kings attack her. In the end, God judges Babylon and her supporters. They experience God's full anger against them for their evil behavior.



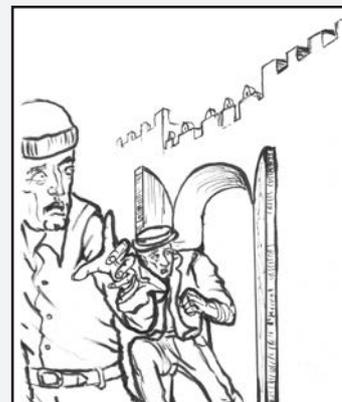
The dragon and his team cause the ten kings on the earth to make war with the Lamb, who is Jesus.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Before God destroys Babylon, a voice from heaven warns God's people who continue to stay in Babylon. The voice tells them to leave Babylon right away (Revelation 18:4). This verse shows us that God has many loyal people who continue to be part of Babylon for different reasons. God uses His end-time church to beg these people to separate from this evil religious power and not to share in her guilt or to join her in her sins. God's people in Babylon must come out of Babylon so that they will escape God's anger against her. God does not want anyone in Babylon to die (2 Peter 3:9). Revelation 19:1–10 show us that there are many people in Babylon who love and obey God. These loyal followers will obey God's warning to separate from Babylon. There is a lot more work for God's end-time church to do. They must warn God's people who stay in Babylon to leave. What does that tell us about our need of God's power in our lives?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① Revelation 18:4 shows us that God has many loyal people in Babylon. Think about these words from Ellen G. White: "We must share God's warning with His people who stay in Babylon. But we must be careful not to push or judge anyone who does not have an understanding of the truth that we have. We should not go out of our way to say things that will make Catholics feel attacked. There are many Catholics who are very loyal Christians. They walk in all the light that God shines on them. God will work to help them. God gives the people in His end-time church many chances to improve their lives, their minds, and their bodies. But they fail to do what God asked. In God's eyes, these people are in more danger of being punished than those Catholics who believe the wrong teachings about the Bible. Yes, they believe the wrong thing, but they live to do good to other people."—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism [the work of preaching the Good News about Jesus everywhere]*, page 575, adapted.

② Revelation 17 shows us an evil woman sitting on a red wild animal. We know that the woman in chapter 12 shows us God's loyal church. But the woman in chapter 17 shows us an evil church that tries to turn the people on the earth away from God. What is the same about the two women? What is different? More important, what do you learn when you look at the two women?



Before God destroys Babylon, a voice from heaven warns God's people in Babylon to leave this evil city right away (Revelation 18:4).