

A Confused and Mixed-Up City



SABBATH—MAY 20

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Revelation 12:17; Revelation 18:1–4; Revelation 17:4–6; Matthew 16:18; Jeremiah 50:33–38.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘These kings will fight and make war with the Lamb [Jesus]. But the Lamb will win the war because He is Lord of lords and King of kings. His people are the called [the ones who follow Jesus] and chosen and faithful [obedient] ones’ ” (Revelation 17:14, NLV).



In the Bible, an innocent woman is a word picture for Jesus' bride.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION shows us two women. These two women are word pictures for churches. The first woman wears clothes that shine as bright as the sun. The second woman wears a red dress. Together, these two women show us what happens between God's followers and Satan's followers in the war between good and evil.

In Revelation 12, we read about the woman who wears clothes that shine bright as the sun. Her shining clothes are a word picture for Jesus' holy life. This woman is loyal to Jesus. Also, this woman doesn't follow false teachings. In the Bible, an innocent woman is a word picture for Jesus' bride. The bride is God's loyal church. The Bible says, “ ‘O Jerusalem, you are [the same as] my beautiful and delicate [very nice] daughter’ ” (Jeremiah 6:2, NLT). Jeremiah uses the word “daughter” as a word picture for God's people, Israel. (Also read Ephesians 5:25–32 and Hosea 2:20.)

The Bible says that a disobedient church is the same as cheating wives or husbands (James 4:4; Ezekiel 16:32).

This week, we will study the two women in Revelation.

TWO DIFFERENT CHURCHES (Revelation 12:17)

Read Revelation 12:17 and Revelation 17:14. How do these verses talk about God’s church? What does Satan do to God’s church?

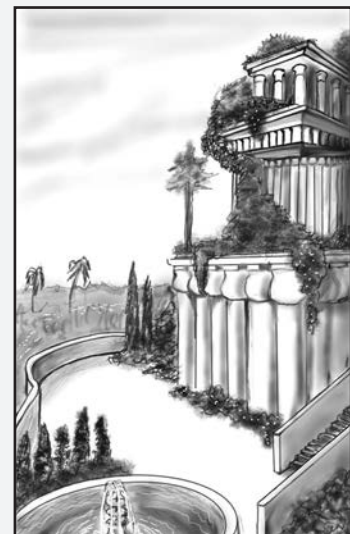
History shows us that God always has a people who are loyal and obedient to Him. Revelation 12:17 talks about how God’s people show their faith in Him. They keep His commandments. The Bible also says that God’s people “ ‘are the called [the ones who follow Jesus] and chosen and faithful [obedient] ones’ ” (Revelation 17:14, NLV).

Read Revelation 14:8 and Revelation 17:1, 2. What announcement in these verses does the second angel make? What did Babylon do to cause the second angel to make this announcement?

John wrote the book of Revelation at the end of the first one hundred years after Jesus was born. By this time, the Old Testament city of Babylon already was destroyed for several hundred years. In the book of Revelation, the old-time city of Babylon is a word picture for end-time Babylon. End-time Babylon is a false religion that will be much the same as the real city of Babylon during Old Testament times. The same rules and teachings that controlled old-time Babylon will guide and control modern, spiritual Babylon.

In Revelation 17:1–6, we see a woman wearing a purple-and-red dress. The woman rides on the back of a red animal. The Bible says this woman is a “prostitute” (Revelation 17:1, ERV). A female prostitute is a woman who sells her body for sex. The prostitute is named Babylon. Babylon is a word picture for a powerful, worldwide religion. Look at what the Bible says about her: “The kings of the earth took part [followed] in her evil ways. The people living on earth were drunk [made confused] with the wine [false teachings] of [made from] her terrible sins” (Revelation 17:2, Nlrv). Drunk? Never a good thing in the Bible. Sex sins or evil ways? These sins show us Babylon’s false teachings, the same as her wine does.

Both government leaders and everyday people have been hurt by the false church named Babylon. What can protect us? (Read Ephesians 6:10–18 for the answer.)



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THE STRONG “WINE” OF HER TERRIBLE SINS (Revelation 18:1–4)

How powerful is Babylon? How much control does she have over kings and people living on earth? Read Revelation 17:1, 2, 15 and Revelation 18:1–4 for the answers.



Wine is a word picture. In the Bible, fresh grape juice shows us Jesus' blood.

As we saw yesterday, Babylon is a word picture for a worldwide religion that is false. This false church is very powerful. Babylon tricks and controls many people with her lies and false teachings. Satan is angry because the Good News about Jesus will be announced everywhere on earth. So, Satan does everything possible to trick people, so they won't accept the Good News about Jesus (read Revelation 14:6; Matthew 24:14; Revelation 17:2).

Revelation 17:2 announces that Babylon has sinned with the kings on the earth. What sin? She, the church, has joined together with the governments of the earth. The true church joins only with Jesus. The church of Babylon is full of sin. So, she gets her strength and might from the leaders on this earth. What does the joining between Babylon and kings show us? Babylon tries to get government leaders to make laws that make Babylon more powerful.

The Bible tells us more about Babylon: “ ‘The kings of the earth took part in her evil ways. The people living on earth were drunk with the wine of her terrible sins’ ” (Revelation 17:2, NlrV). Wine is a word picture. In the Bible, fresh grape juice shows us Jesus' blood. On the cross, Jesus poured out His blood for our sins (Matthew 26:27–29). In Luke 22:20, Jesus says, “ ‘This cup shows the new agreement that God makes with his people. This new agreement begins with my blood which is poured out for you’ ” (ICB). The Good News is the same as fresh, new wine. Babylon's religious leaders changed the Good News and replaced Bible truth with false teachings. That's how the Good News about Jesus became “ ‘the strong wine of her [Babylon's] terrible sins’ ” (Revelation 18:3, NlrV).

Look again at our verses for today. Do you see how God tells His people to come out of Babylon? That means that God has people loyal to Him who are part of this church. The time is coming when God will ask them to leave that false church before it is destroyed (Revelation 18:2).

God has people loyal to Him who are part of Babylon. How does God use us and the Three Angels' Messages to warn His loyal people to leave this false religion?

THE BIG AND POWERFUL BABYLON (Revelation 17:4–6)

Read Revelation 17:4–6. What do these verses teach us about Babylon? As we saw already, Babylon is a word picture for a false religious power or church in the end times.

So far, we learned that Revelation 17 warns us about the false religion or worldwide church named Babylon during the end times. From Old Testament times, Babylon mixes its many teachings with Bible truth. This mix is named her “wine.”

“If we want to understand end-time Babylon, we need to go back to the first time the Bible talks about Babylon, in Genesis. In Genesis 11, we read about a tower named Babel. This tower was built on a plain in the land of Shinar. Today, Shinar is in the south part of Mesopotamia, which is south Iraq. But in Bible times, this area was named Babylonia. The Tower of Babel was a word picture for human pride and a wish to separate from God (Genesis 11:1–4).”—Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “The Closing of the Cosmic Conflict: Role of the Three Angels’ Messages” (from an unpublished paper), page 43, adapted.

After the Flood, the grandchildren of Noah built Babylon against God’s command. The workers built Babel to show off. They wanted everyone to praise and honor them for their mighty tower. So, God caused the builders to get confused when they talked to each other. No one understood anything that anyone said. The Bible says, “So the name of the city was Babel, because there the Lord mixed up the language of the whole earth” (Genesis 11:9, NLV).

The church of Babylon is very evil. That’s why John says, “I saw that the woman was drunk. She was drunk with the blood of God’s holy people. She was drunk with the blood of those [people] who were killed because of their faith in Jesus” (Revelation 17:6, ICB). These awful word pictures show us that Babylon is awful (read Isaiah 49:26).

So, we can see that end-time Babylon is a word picture for a worldwide religion and its false teachings. This religion fights against the Good News about Jesus and the church Jesus built. The book of Revelation shows two churches. The first church shows total trust in Jesus. This church depends on the Bible. The second church trusts in human teachers and depends on their teachings. One church depends on Jesus to save them. The other church replaces Jesus and His saving mercy with its own ideas.



The Tower of Babel was a word picture for human pride and a wish to separate from God (Genesis 11:1–4).

LOYAL TO GOD (Matthew 16:18)



King Nebuchadnezzar made a law that forced everyone to bow down to his gold statue. In the same way, God's loyal people will have the same experience when they refuse to honor the false day of rest in the end times.

The book of Revelation asks us to have faith in God. At times, we may doubt that God's people will win the fight in the worldwide war between good and evil. But we must not fear. God promises us that His church will win in the end.

Compare Matthew 16:18 and Revelation 17:14. What promise did Jesus give His followers about His church?

Jesus is the Leader of His church. Jesus started this church while He was on earth. His church is guided by His Holy Spirit and by the Bible. But Babylon follows man-made teachings and ideas. When church leaders replace Bible truth with human ideas, their followers get confused. That's why Babylon is a good word picture for these false teachers and their teachings. Babylon means "to make things confusing."

In the days of old-time Babylon, church and government were not separate from each other. The people believed that the king of Babylon was a messenger for the gods who told the people what the gods wanted them to do. King Nebuchadnezzar made a law that forced everyone to bow down to his gold statue. In the same way, God's loyal people will have the same experience when they refuse to honor the false day of rest in the end times. (Read Daniel 3.)

During the end times, the leader of a worldwide church will say he is God's special messenger. This false church is spiritual Babylon. People will believe that the commands made by the spiritual leader of this end-time church come from God Himself. History shows us that the Roman popes announced that they replaced God on earth. In a letter written on June 20, 1894, Pope Leo the 13th said, "We believe that the pope stands in the place of God on this earth." *The Ferraris Ecclesiastical Dictionary* says, "The Pope is so important and mighty that he is not just a man. He is God Himself and replaces God on this earth." Paul's name for the pope is the "Man of Evil." Paul says, "The Man of Evil puts himself above anything called [named] God or anything that people worship. And that Man of Evil even [also] goes into God's Temple and sits there. Then he says that he is God" (2 Thessalonians 2:4, ICB).

God has loyal people in Babylon. So, why must we be careful not to judge people who are in this false church?

BABYLON AND THE WORSHIP OF FALSE GODS (Jeremiah 50:33–38)

What other clue helps us to know who spiritual Babylon really is? The answer is the worship of false gods or statues. In old-time Babylon, statues of false gods were a big part of worship.

Read Jeremiah 50:33–38 and Jeremiah 51:17, 47. What do these verses teach you about old-time Babylon’s worship of statues? How does God feel about the worship of false gods? What does God do about this worship?

Jeremiah 50 and 51 talk about what will happen to Babylon in the future. The armies of the Medes and the Persians will destroy Babylon. One of the reasons that Babylon was destroyed was because its people worshiped statues. The Babylonian people believed that their gods lived in these statues in temples. If enemies destroyed the temples or the god’s statue, then the Babylonian people believed the god would stop helping them. History tells us that Prince Marduke-apla-iddina II hid in a swamp in Mesopotamia. The prince took the statues of Babylon’s gods with him. The prince hoped the statues would save him from the armies of Sennacherib, King of Assyria.

The Bible messengers compared the worship of dead statues with the God of heaven. The God of heaven is both alive and life-giving (Jeremiah 51:15, 16, 19).

Read Exodus 20:4–6 and Psalm 115:4–8. What do these verses teach us about worshiping statues and false gods?

Today, spiritual Babylon includes the worship of statues, just as old-time Babylon did. The Bible forbids us to bow down or worship any statue. This worship breaks the second commandment in God’s law. When we bow down to statues, we limit the Holy Spirit. Then the Holy Spirit has a hard time getting us to think about heaven. Worse, statues cause us to fail to honor God. The worship of statues causes us to reduce God’s royal beauty and might to a lifeless statue. About three hundred years after Jesus went to heaven, church leaders started to include statues as part of their worship. The leaders thought that the statues would make Christianity more popular and attractive to non-Christians. Sad to say, people often give these statues the honor and worship that belongs only to God.



The Babylonian people believed that their gods lived in statues in temples.



End-time Babylon will make a law that will command everyone to worship a false “statue,” just as Nebuchadnezzar did in old-time Babylon.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “The Second Angel’s Message in Revelation 14 announces that Babylon is destroyed. This message talks about religions and churches that were holy in the past. But now they have become evil. The Second Angel’s Message comes after the first angel’s warning about the time for God to judge all people. So, the Second Angel’s Message about Babylon can’t be about the Roman Catholic church alone. Why? Because that church has been filled with wrong teachings for many hundreds of years.” —Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 383, adapted.

Daniel 3 is the story about the three Hebrew youths in old-time Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar gave these three young men an order: “ ‘You must bow down and worship the gold statue’ ” (Daniel 3:5, ICB). The story in Daniel 3 shows us what will happen during the end times. End-time Babylon will make a law that will command everyone to worship a false “statue,” just as Nebuchadnezzar did in old-time Babylon. (Read Revelation 13:15; Revelation 14:9, 11; Revelation 16:2; Revelation 19:20; Revelation 20:4.) Do you see that, in the Daniel 3 story, Nebuchadnezzar tried to get the three Hebrew youths to break the second commandment? That’s the same commandment that spiritual Babylon tries to change (Daniel 7:25).

End-time Babylon also tries to change another commandment. Which one is that? The fourth commandment, of course. The Sabbath will be the final test in the end times. Will we worship the One who made the earth and the skies and everything in them and who rested on the seventh day? (Read Exodus 20:11; also read Revelation 14:7.) Or will we worship the wild animal power and his false statue? His statue is a symbol for the false day of worship, which is Sunday.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What does the Tower of Babel teach us about modern spiritual Babylon? How are they both the same?
- ② We must be careful not to allow any spiritual leader to control our experience with God. So how much control should we allow church leaders to have?
- ③ In what ways is the worship of false gods more than just bowing down to statues? Explain.
- ④ How does Daniel 3 show you what will happen in the end times?

BIKE AND BIBLE, PART 1

My name is M. B. I have a friend named Hussein. I wish you could meet him! Hussein is a guard for the building where my wife and I live. We are Bible workers for Jesus in the Middle East. From the first time I met Hussein, I saw that he followed his religion carefully. He lived a holy life. I liked that about Hussein, and I liked him. Hussein visited our home many times. He also invited us to his home. We often talked about everyday things. Sometimes we talked about spiritual topics, too. When my wife and I invited Hussein to pray with us, he accepted. God blessed our friendship. Then my wife and I decided to give Hussein a Bible. We started to pray for the right time to give him this gift.

Not long after, I saw that Hussein was upset. He explained that someone stole his bike. Hussein's bike was his only transportation to work. Hussein was busy trying to find a bike to borrow. On that day, I started praying for God to give Hussein a new bike. Several months passed. Then my wife and I got an unexpected gift. Someone gave us a gift of money worth \$40.00 in U.S. money. I was confused about what to do with the money. I felt that God sent the money straight from heaven. While I prayed a short time later, I felt the Holy Spirit say to me, "Show Jesus to your friend. Buy a bike for Hussein." So, I saved the \$40.00 and started adding more money to it.

The country where we lived in the Middle East was having trouble. People had a hard time earning enough money. I saved as much money as I could. But I didn't have enough to buy the bike. I kept praying and saving anyway. I also went to many used bike shops. I started to imagine the special day when I could give Hussein a bike. I decided to give Hussein the bike for his birthday if I could afford to buy it.

When Hussein's birthday came, my wife baked a cake. I made a special dinner. We invited Hussein for dinner at 5:30 P.M. I hadn't found the bike for Hussein. I prayed for a miracle and went out looking for a bike. At 5:00 P.M., I came home. I felt sad. I had no success. My wife told me to remember that God knew how much we wanted to help Hussein and how much we prayed. "God will take care of the problem," my wife said.

Hussein was so surprised by the birthday dinner. He was so happy! He told us how blessed he was to have us in his life. We enjoyed the meal together and gave him the cake. Then we had a special prayer for Hussein. We thanked God for Hussein in our life. But we had no bike. No gift.

The next day, I saw an announcement for a bike. The bike cost the exact amount of money I saved over many months! I was so happy to find the bike. (This story continues next week.)

INSIDE *Story*

by M.B., as told to KATHIE
LICHTENWALTER



Hussein was so surprised by the birthday dinner.

