

The Cradle is the Grave

Armageddon and the Fall of Babylon – Part IV

Revelation 18:1-24

Introduction

You have probably heard the phrase, “cradle of civilization”. Your middle school teacher might have described it in your geography or social studies class as the Tigris-Euphrates River Valley where civilization began. The first chapter of mankind’s history lay between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

Whether your social studies teacher taught it or not, the Bible makes it even more clear. Geographical points of reference for the Garden of Eden provided in Genesis chapter 2 indicate the garden’s location was in this river valley.

The Tigris and Euphrates rivers flowed past this beautiful sanctuary where Adam and Eve tended the garden and walked with God. Because of their sin, recorded in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden.

The human race began – and so did murder and every other form of depraved wickedness. Eventually, humanity reached such perverted and blasphemous conditions that God judged the world by sending a universal flood. This literally wiped the human race, along with the animal kingdom, off the face of the earth.

However, God first provided mankind with an invitation of mercy and grace. They were invited to come to the ark of Noah and be saved from God’s wrath to come.

Noah preached and warned for one hundred twenty years. This was plenty of time for the news to travel the globe and people to respond.

However, according to Genesis chapter 6, outside of Noah’s family, not one person responded. The cradle became a grave.

After the flood, Noah and his family disembarked high above this same Euphrates River Valley on the mountains of Ararat, according to Genesis 8. It is these snow covered mountains that feed the Euphrates River.

Noah and all who would come through him, as we are told in Genesis 9, were commanded to go out and populate the earth. They were to enjoy worship and obedience to God again.

Noah’s great grandson rebelled, however, and instead called all the people to gather together to defy God by building the first city after the flood – a city of rebellion against God. Nimrod became its first Caesar.

These rebellious people also built the tower of Babel, dedicated to the stars, moon, and sun – the Zodiac, which they originated. The Babylonians would become world renowned in their designation of signs in the sky. Under these, people were supposedly held captive to find their destiny only by following their sign in the sky and the movements of the stars.

The Zodiac has been discovered in the remains of ancient ziggurats, which are copycat towers tracing their roots to Babylon. The ceilings and walls of these towers are painted with stars and planets, dedicated in their worship of the heavens.

These people had rejected the Creator and begun worshipping creation.

Genesis 11 reveals the way God judged the human race once again by confusing their sole language. By separating their language into thousands of different dialects, the people, of course, were no longer understandable to each other. As a result, they scattered around the world.

However, Babylon was never completely abandoned. It grew in size and significance each century until a king named Nebuchadnezzar built it into its grandest state ever.

Five hundred years before the birth of Christ, according to Herodotus the historian, whom we will assume was telling the truth, the capital city of Babylon was an exact square of fifteen miles on each side. Interestingly, it is exactly twenty-five times smaller than the New Jerusalem – a city also laid out in a square fashion, though much larger than Babylon.

This is, in my view, one more attempt by Satan to mimic Christ by imitating Christ’s coming capital city. This conflict is really at the heart of human history – Babylon versus Jerusalem; the rule of man versus the rule of God. The heart of mankind, subtly

directed by the fallen angel, desires, to this day, to bring mankind back under the power of Babylon.

There is little doubt that Satan believed Nebuchadnezzar was his antichrist, with a golden image and an edict that would wipe out the Jews. But God thwarted the plans of this world ruler.

Babylon, however, was indeed magnificent. Herodotus described this city – all 60 miles of it – as surrounded by a brick wall measuring 87 feet thick and 100 feet high with 250 towers reaching into the sky to intimidate every enemy army.

The Euphrates River ran through this city. The banks of the river in the city were beautifully walled with steps leading down to the water's edge.

The hanging gardens were created by Nebuchadnezzar to remedy one of his wives' homesickness. Terraced patios with exotic plants were tended by laborers that worked twenty-four hours a day. These gardens became one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

It may well have been another subtle attempt by Satan to mimic the Garden of Eden. Perhaps it was his way of making a statement that once again, in the cradle of civilization, a garden had returned in the city of man.

Babylon was laid out with 25 main avenues that traveled through the city in straight lines, each of which was 150 feet wide. At the end of each avenue were gates covered with brass plates. Herodotus said that as these gates were opened and closed in the rising or setting sun, they were like leaves on fire.

One of these gates was the Ishtar Gate – named in honor of Ishtar, their chief goddess. The Babylonians claimed this goddess was the queen of heaven and the virgin mother who bore a son they worshiped.

This very gate has been excavated and is on display in the Berlin Museum. In pictures of it, stunning blue stone dragons painted in gold can be seen.

Nebuchadnezzar's own inscription was excavated. He had written that these gates and this city were built so that man would stand in awe.ⁱ

Through these gates a young teenager entered the capital city of Babylon. His name was Daniel. If there was any doubt that Babylon was greater than Jerusalem, any thought otherwise was erased from the minds of all the captured Jews who entered along with Daniel at this moment. However, Daniel and his three friends would not be intimidated by this empire city dedicated to the worship of false gods, the Zodiac, and mother earth.

Daniel would later prophesy of Babylon's fall to the Medes and the Persians, as we are told in Daniel chapter 2. This is exactly what happened, according to Daniel chapter 5.

After Darius defeated Babylon it limped along, losing much of its grand reputation. However, when the next world conqueror, Alexander the Great, arrived in Babylon, he decided to make it his capital city. He dismantled Nebuchadnezzar's centuries-old palace and planned to rebuild it to its original glory, but died before he was able to finish.

Later, Napoleon made plans to rebuild Babylon as he raced to conquer the western world. I have read that in the French Department of War in Paris, there are records of surveys and maps of Babylon made at his command. Napoleon had intended to rebuild the ancient city, calling it New Babylon, making it his capital and the governmental and commercial center of the western world. He too, failed.

Babylon again slipped off the radar of world attention. Now, though, there is another reason to desire control over Babylon – in a word, oil.

Iraq sits on one of the largest known crude oil reserves in the world. Oil experts believe that Iraq's potential could rival Saudi Arabia and make them the world's leading producer.

One author wrote, "Stabilizing Iraq and rebuilding the city of Babylon into a major economic center for the Middle East has western oil companies salivating."ⁱⁱ

However, problems arose – namely in the form of a tyrant who had visions of rebuilding Babylon and owning the world.

This man even declared himself to be the new Nebuchadnezzar. His name was Saddam Hussein. He would spend millions of dollars rebuilding the palace of Nebuchadnezzar on the same plot of ground where the original palace had once stood.ⁱⁱⁱ

Saddam rebuilt the Gate of Ishtar, complete with blue stone and golden animals painted on the surface. The millions of bricks used to rebuild the ancient city each had his personal insignia stamped onto them, just as on Nebuchadnezzar's 2,500 years earlier. He offered 1.5 million dollars to the designer who could capture the essence and beauty of Nebuchadnezzar's hanging gardens.

Saddam even went so far as to mint coins that emphasized the connection between himself and ancient Babylon. He claimed to have been given a vision to restore the once great empire and become the next Nebuchadnezzar.

Mark Hitchcock, in his book entitled, *The Second Coming of Babylon*, provided the religious motivation behind Saddam that never made it into the ABC, NBC, or even Fox News reports.

Saddam not only wanted to destroy the Jews, but Iran as well. Why? He hated Iranians as much as Jews, simply because Iranians were the descendants of the Persians who had originally conquered Babylon and his forefathers. He was taking on a personal quest to renew the honor of his forefathers by conquering Persia – now Iran – and the Jews.

In fact, before his fall from power, Saddam had republished a pamphlet, authored by his uncle, the governor of Baghdad, entitled, “Three Whom God Should Not Have Created: Persians, Jews and Flies.”^{iv}

Saddam wanted to rid the world of Iranians and Jews. I found no evidence that he tried to rid the world of flies, although that would have been commendable.

However, he had several obstacles in his way. One of them was his need for money. Saddam’s quest to rebuild Babylon required more and more millions.

We now know, in fact, that it was his need for money that prompted him to invade Kuwait. Saddam wanted to monopolize at least 10% of the world’s oil reserves and fund the rebuilding of Babylon.

There was even more to this, however, as one author revealed. Saddam attempted to regain control over Kuwait because it was part of the original kingdom of Babylon and he considered it his property.^v

He failed in his attempt to capture Kuwait and control oil reserves. Saddam had failed his subjects too.

In the raw video smuggled out of Iraq, in which Saddam was surrounded by chaos and cursing, his own people put a noose around his neck and hung him until he died.

Saddam was one more applicant for world ruler. He was only one more hopeful King of Babylon.

Satan is, even now, waiting and watching for another Nimrod – another who will rebuild Babylon.

Why would Satan, the enemy of God and God’s people, even believe it possible to rebuild Babylon? Because he has most certainly read the record of scripture!

Satan has read of Babylon’s return to worldwide significance and power in the pages of the prophets

and in the book of Revelation. He has no doubt studied the Apostle John’s account of the antichrist’s rule and reign from the ancient, resurrected ruins of the city of Nimrod and Nebuchadnezzar.

Since the time of Genesis 11, when Nimrod was overthrown and the people scattered, Satan has longed for and worked toward manipulating the hearts of unbelieving world powers to ultimately return mankind to Babylon.

The empire that will one day rise from the rubble will indeed rule over a one-world religion, and a one-world government will once again build a tower, so to speak, against Creator God. This coming unified global order, global religion, global economic base, and global political unity will bring about the finale of rebellion and defiance against God.

What I find utterly fascinating is that this will center in and around the place where it all first started – in Babylon.

This fits the biblical record of history and prophecy perfectly. So, unlike many supposed ministers, scholars, and authors, Satan evidently believes the Bible.

Defiance to God began with planet Earth’s first city – Babylon – in the cradle of civilization. Earth’s final defiance against God will once again emanate from Babylon, and in the Battle of Armageddon millions will die in defiance to God. The cradle of civilization will become a graveyard.

You may have heard the phrase, “from the cradle to the grave”. Well, according to biblical prophecy, the cradle is the grave.

The cradle of civilization will become the graveyard of civilization as man loses his final duel against God, and God brings final judgment to Babylon. The Apostle John provides the details in Revelation chapter 18.

The Fall of Babylon is Predicted

Turn chapter 18 of the book of Revelation. Look at John’s words in verses 1-3.

After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory.

And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.

“For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.”

This is basically a repetition of the verdict we have already studied in chapter 17. However, the angel in these verses describes Babylon as a desolate city that is now a haunted region for demons and vultures perched everywhere, like some scene out of an Edgar Allen Poe short story.

Babylon was once the city of dreams – it is now the city of nightmares.

Is this really literal Babylon? Could these words be code for New York or Paris or Berlin or Rome?

If we answer this question by starting with the Old Testament, we discover that every time the word “Babylon” appears, it refers to literal Babylon – the city in what is now modern Iraq.^{vi}

When the name of a city is used in Revelation, words are added to the text to make it clear if the author wants us to consider it something other than a literal city. For instance, in chapter 11 John refers to Jerusalem as Sodom and Egypt, but prefaces it by writing,

. . . the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt . . .

It is important to note that chapter 17 talks about “mystery Babylon” as the mother of all that is religiously corrupt. However, in chapter 18 the word “mystery” is dropped and the word “city” is used.^{vii}

John refers to numerous cities throughout Revelation and unless he adds something to let us know that he is using the name figuratively, we are to understand it literally. Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, Patmos, Armageddon and Babylon are all literal places, regions, or cities in the Middle East. Furthermore, the city of Babylon on the Euphrates fits the criteria for this city described in Revelation 17 and 18.

Henry Morris writes that apart from any prophetic intimation, Babylon is a prime prospect for rebuilding. Not only is it in the beautiful and fertile Tigris-Euphrates plain, computer studies have shown that Babylon is very near the geographical center of all the earth’s land masses. It is within navigable distance to the Persian Gulf and is at the crossroads of the three great continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa. There is no more ideal location anywhere for a world trade center, a world communications center,

a world banking center, a world educational center, and a world capital. The greatest historian of modern times, Arnold Toynbee, wrote that Babylon would be the best place in the world to build a future cultural metropolis. Is it any stretch of the imagination that the future capital of the United Nations kingdom – the ten-nation federation established at the beginning of the Tribulation – should be established in Babylon?^{viii}

Now, as we have learned, the word “Babylon” represented both a city and the religious system that arose out of the same city. Babylon is a literal geographical location on the Euphrates River where its infamous ziggurat – the tower of Babel – became the polluted fountainhead of false religion that glorified creation and the universe while defying the Creator.

The announcement that we read in verse 2 that Babylon is now fallen in judgment is made by the angel as the final bowl of judgment is poured out.

John then hears another voice from heaven in verses 4-5.

. . . “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues;

“For her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.”

In other words, her judgment is justified because she has refused justification by God through Christ.

Notice a word that appears several times in this chapter. Her judgment will be delivered, according to verse 7,

To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously . . .

The only place in the entire New Testament that this word “sensuously” or “sensuous” appears is in this chapter of Revelation.

The word comes from “strenos” (στρηνος), which literally refers to uninhibited sexual promiscuity coupled with excessive luxury.^{ix}

Babylon will create her own new class of perverted, unhinged, sexual deviants along with so much money to burn that they can support luxurious lifestyles beyond anyone’s imagination.

In other words, as bad as Rome became; as immoral as Corinth was, they were never quite immoral enough to be accused of this word – this perverted depth of sensuality.

The entire city will be a literal playground for the rich and famous. There will be no boundaries to their behavior. Their pride and arrogance will have no boundaries as well.

Notice something that might be easy to miss in verse 7b.

... for she says in her heart, "I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning."

This is a quote from Isaiah 47 when Babylon is challenged for believing she is a queen that is ruling forever. The phrase "I am not a widow" refers to the fact that all the world's kings are her consorts. The phrase "[I] will never see mourning" is using the verb for mourn that is the kind of mourning and moaning that comes from suffering torment. In other words, Babylon says, in effect, that she will never experience the tormenting judgment of God.^x

Who would believe that mighty Babylon would ever suffer anything?! Who would imagine that the greatest empire to ever grace the surface of the earth was in danger of utter collapse? I mean, if mighty Babylon says, "I will never be defeated again," who would ever deny it?

Yet judgment falls and the world watches Babylon burn to the ground.

The Fall of Babylon is Lamented

Three different categories of people are revealed as they weep in horror over the loss of economy, power, wealth, position, and occupation.

- The first category is the **monarchs** of the earth. They lament the fall of Babylon in verses 9 and 10. They have lost their power.
- The second category is the **merchants** of the earth. They also, as verse 11 tells us,
... weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more
They have lost their wealth.
- The third category is the **mariners**. Look at verses 17-18.

for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste! And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance,

and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, "What city is like the great city?"

In other words, Babylon had been the commercial center of the world. She was the clearing house with her giant warehouses, markets and shopping centers, which now go up in smoke.

Babylon had traded in every product imaginable, including slave trade (verse 13), where they bartered for slaves – even human lives.^{xi}

Life was cheap – life only mattered as it advanced the kingdom of Babylon. That is the way Babylon has always operated. Life is cheap.

Now, in a moment of time, Babylon has burst into flames.

One author writes, "The ships entering the Persian Gulf stand hastily back out to sea; giant convoys of ships, displaying the flags of a hundred nations, ride at anchor far from the writhing center of fiery doom; telescopes are fixed to every eye as the astonished and frightened watch in horror the last agony of Babylon. Vessels choke the harbors of the world now that Babylon is gone forever. The world's trade is now in ruins."^{xii}

Monarchs, merchants, and mariners, representing every class and occupation on the planet, are standing in their executive suites halfway around the world, watching on satellite television their world go up in smoke. And they begin to weep and to wail.^{xiii}

It is not often that we see grown men weeping and wailing in public.

Note the repetition of judgment's swift arrival. The phrase "one hour" appears in:

Verse 10 – in one hour your judgment has come.

Verse 17 – in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!

Verse 19 – in one hour she has been laid waste!

All the millions, all the connections, all the power, all the pomp, all the extravagance – all that seemed to matter – lost!

When money is god, and God is gone, what is left but godless grief?^{xiv}

What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

This is Pearl Harbor, the stock market crash, the Great Depression, the bubonic plague, and the Holocaust all rolled up into one hour.

The fall of Babylon is predicted in verses 1-8.

The fall of Babylon is lamented in verses 9-20.

The Fall of Babylon is Completed

Look at verse 21.

Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer."

The next few verses reveal the complete and utter loss.

- **Music ceases** according to verse 22a.

And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; . . .

All music is silenced. There are no more parties and there is no more revelry and singing.

- **Work ceases and careers end** as John writes in verse 22b.

. . . and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; . . .

- **Domestic life ceases** as we are told in verse 22c.

. . . and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer;

Every ancient home ground its own grain with a handheld millstone. No one is preparing food because no one is home.^{xv}

Notice also in verse 23a that,

. . . the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; . . .

Babylon is dark and uninhabited, except for demons bewailing their defeat and carrion birds swooping in to feed.

- **Marriages cease** as well, John writes in verse 23b, as if to reinforce there is no hope of ever rebuilding Babylon.

. . . and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; . . .

Music, work, marriage, domestic life, commerce, careers, everything imaginable, like a candle, is snuffed out by the judgment of God.^{xvi}

The cradle of human civilization is the grave of civilization as Babylon orchestrates a global army to march upon God Himself in the Battle of Armageddon.

With the return of Christ and one word of His power, the armies of the world are defeated and Babylon is reduced to rubble.

The defiance of Babylon against God in Genesis ends in Revelation with one final gasp of defiance.

Are we headed there today? Surely there is no interest in rebuilding Babylon now?!

Today the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is pumping millions of dollars into Babylon and several other historical sites in Iraq. With the help of private donors, the United Nations is hoping to turn Babylon into a thriving center of tourism and commerce. Our own government has recently pledged nearly one million dollars of tax money to help rebuild the city of Babylon.

I was invited to join a conference call this past Thursday with Joel Rosenberg, the author of a number of best-selling books that sift the news accounts in the Middle East through the lens of prophetic scripture. I joined about twenty-five other pastors and Christian ministry leaders on the phone as Joel talked about a number of current issues, such as the North Korean threat and their language of terror that mirrored Iran. He talked about the money flowing into Iraq and Iraq's unique position in the coming days economically as it taps its vast oil reserves and develops systems to translate that product into billions of new dollars.

Someone had given me Rosenberg's recent best seller, *Epicenter*, published by Tyndale. I had not read it before this phone call, as all my books at the office have been boxed due to some painting and expansion occurring in our administration offices.

After Joel talked for some time, he asked if we had any questions. I asked if he believed in a future war between Jerusalem and a literal Babylon. He answered, "Absolutely!" and went on to say, "In fact, I wrote an entire chapter on that in my book, *Epicenter*."

I guess I had just asked Albert Einstein over the phone if he had ever thought about relativity. I was obviously the only person on the phone with him who had not read his book.

Joel was kind about it and continued on to say, "Everything's moving toward that end. I believe the ultimate showdown will be between Jerusalem and Babylon."

I had not read his book, but I have read this one – the Bible – and I could not agree more.

I got a copy of Joel's book after my phone conversation and over the weekend I found it fascinating to read of one incident that occurred after Saddam Hussein's fall from power. If you can imagine, this incident occurred in Saddam's newly constructed palace – on the same site as Nebuchadnezzar's palace – which was covered throughout in multi-million dollar layers of marble and gold.

After Saddam's fall from power, within a matter of weeks, in his very throne room where he declared his claim as ruler of New Babylon, an evangelical church service took place with singing and preaching to the glory of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.^{xvii}

This is a small glimpse into the ultimate future. There is a final battle between the kingdom of man and the kingdom of God; a final duel between the antichrist, the King of Babylon, and Jesus Christ, the King who returns to Jerusalem. The King of Jerusalem wins. The battle is over and Babylon, the kingdom of man, is fallen.

The next chapter reveals the followers of Christ singing. The singers include you and me – singing in the Kingdom of Christ. And the lyrics begin with,

Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God. (Revelation 19:1b)

ⁱ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ishrar_Gate.

ⁱⁱ John Walvoord, Armageddon, Oil and Terror (Tyndale, 2007 ed.), p. 146.

ⁱⁱⁱ Steward Custer, From Patmos to Paradise (BJU Press, 2004), p. 193.

^{iv} Ibid., p. 128.

^v Mark Hitchcock, The Second Coming of Babylon (Multnomah, 2003), p. 127.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Daymond R. Duck and Larry Richards, The Book of Revelation (Thomas Nelson, 2006), p. 263.

^{viii} Henry M. Morris, The Revelation Record (Tyndale, 1986), p. 348.

^{ix} Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 851.

^x John MacArthur, Because the Time is Near (Moody Publications, 2007), p. 276.

^{xi} Kendell H. Easley, Holman New Testament Commentary: Revelation (Holman Reference, 1998), p. 340.

^{xii} John Phillips, Exploring Revelation (Loizeaux Brothers, 1991), p. 226.

^{xiii} Duck and Richards, p. 273.

^{xiv} Ibid., p. 276.

^{xv} Easley, p. 336.

^{xvi} Mark W. Wilson, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Revelation (Zondervan, 2002), p. 110.

^{xvii} Joel C. Rosenberg, Epicenter (Tyndale House, 2008), p. 177.