Fulfilled Prophecies

Why Revelation Calls Jerusalem "Babylon"



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† The identity of Babylon in Revelation isn't established by geography alone. It's established by covenant history, prophetic language, spiritual adultery, persecution of God's messengers, and the judgment Jesus announced against Jerusalem.

† Many interpreters immediately identify Babylon with ancient Rome, a future world government, or a revived religious system. But Revelation gives identifying characteristics that must be examined alongside the Old Testament prophets and the words of Jesus.

† The central question is which city had entered into a covenant relationship with God, became unfaithful to that covenant, persecuted His prophets, rejected His Son, and stood under the judgment Jesus said would fall upon His own generation.

† When we follow the evidence from the Law and the Prophets through the teachings of Jesus and into Revelation, we discover that Babylon represents Jerusalem in her final condition of covenant unfaithfulness, awaiting the judgment fulfilled in AD 70.

Jerusalem Was Already Called An Unfaithful Wife

Ezekiel 16:32

You adulteress wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband!

† Ezekiel wasn't describing ancient Babylon or Rome. He was addressing Jerusalem, the city God had chosen and established in a covenant relationship with Himself.

† Earlier in the chapter, God described Jerusalem's covenant relationship as a marriage (Ezekiel 16:8). Her idolatry and alliances with foreign nations were therefore portrayed as adultery.

† This matters because Revelation's harlot imagery didn't originate with John. It came from an established prophetic vocabulary used to condemn Jerusalem's covenant unfaithfulness.

Isaiah 1:21

How the faithful city has become a prostitute, She who was full of justice! Righteousness once dwelt in her, But now murderers.

† Isaiah explicitly called Jerusalem a harlot. The faithful city had become corrupt, exchanging righteousness for injustice and bloodshed.

† Notice the combination of spiritual unfaithfulness and murder. These same characteristics appear in

Revelation's description of Babylon.

† Revelation's description of Babylon as a harlot therefore follows a prophetic pattern already applied to Jerusalem centuries before John's vision.

Jerusalem Was Compared To Sodom

Isaiah 1:10

Hear the word of the Lord, You rulers of Sodom; Listen to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah!

† Isaiah addressed Jerusalem's rulers as Sodom and her people as Gomorrah. He wasn't claiming Jerusalem had physically become either ancient city.

† He was using the names of historically wicked cities to describe Jerusalem's spiritual condition and impending judgment.

† Jerusalem could be called Sodom because of her corruption, Egypt because of her oppression, and Babylon because of her rebellion and covenant judgment. These symbolic names describe different aspects of the same condemned city.

The Great City Was Where Jesus Was Crucified

Revelation 11:8

And their dead bodies will lie on the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.

† This is one of Revelation's strongest geographical and theological identifying statements.

† John described the great city as spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, and then connected it with the crucifixion of the Lord.

† Jesus was crucified at Jerusalem, outside the city gate (Hebrews 13:12). Rome exercised political authority over Judea, but Rome itself wasn't the city where Jesus was crucified.

† Although interpreters debate whether every occurrence of the great city must refer to the same location, Revelation's repeated descriptions of covenant corruption, persecution, and judgment strongly support reading them together.

Babylon Was The Harlot Of Covenant Unfaithfulness

Revelation 17:5

and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery: "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

† Babylon's name is presented as a mystery, requiring the reader to understand the symbolism rather than merely search for a city bearing that literal name.
† The woman is a harlot, which recalls the prophetic accusations against Jerusalem in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea.
† Jerusalem had now repeated the pattern of the nations that previously oppressed God's people. The city that should have welcomed the Messiah rejected Him and persecuted His messengers.
† This interpretation doesn't depend on the word Babylon being a literal alternative name for Jerusalem. It depends on the prophetic pattern that John was applying to the city under covenant judgment.

Babylon Was Drunk With The Blood Of The Saints

Revelation 17:6

And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly.

† John identified Babylon by her persecution of the saints and the witnesses of Jesus.
† Rome certainly persecuted Christians, and this is an important reason many interpreters identify Babylon with Rome. But Revelation's description must be compared with the judgment Jesus pronounced against Jerusalem.

† Jesus repeatedly accused Jerusalem of killing God's prophets. He also warned that the city would continue persecuting the messengers He sent.

Matthew 23:35-36

so that upon you will fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

† Jesus placed the responsibility for accumulated righteous blood upon the covenant leadership He was addressing.

† His accusation reached backward through Israel's history, from Abel to Zechariah, demonstrating the cumulative nature of the judgment.

† Most importantly, Jesus identified the generation upon which this judgment would fall. He didn't postpone it thousands of years into the future.

Jerusalem Was The City That Killed The Prophets

Matthew 23:37-38

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who have been sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!

† Jesus named Jerusalem directly. He identified her as the city that killed the prophets and rejected those sent to her.

† He also announced the desolation of her house, a judgment that involved the temple and the covenant order centered upon it.

† Revelation's Babylon is likewise condemned for shedding the blood of God's servants and is subsequently brought to desolation.

All The Blood Of The Prophets Was Found In Babylon

Revelation 18:24

And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slaughtered on the earth.

† This accusation is remarkably similar to Jesus' statement that all the righteous blood would come upon His generation.

† Revelation doesn't merely say Babylon persecuted Christians. It specifically associates her with the blood of the prophets, the same accusation Jesus directed against Jerusalem.

† The connection between these passages is one of the strongest reasons to identify Babylon with Jerusalem. Both describe a city held accountable for the blood of God's messengers at the culmination of a covenant judgment.

Babylon's Judgment Was Announced As Near

Revelation 1:1

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John,

† Revelation opens by identifying its prophetic events as things that must soon take place.

† The timing statement establishes the expectation of the original recipients. They were being warned about events approaching in their own historical circumstances.

† The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 fits the first-century time frame and the covenant judgment language already established by Jesus.

Revelation 22:10

And he said to me, Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.

† John was specifically instructed not to seal the prophecy because the time was near.

† This stands in meaningful contrast to Daniel, who was instructed to seal his vision because its fulfillment concerned a later time (Daniel 12:4).

† The identification of Babylon must respect both the covenant evidence and the timing statements. Jerusalem's first-century judgment satisfies both considerations.

The Harlot Was Replaced By The Bride

Revelation 19:7-8

Let's rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, because the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has prepared herself." It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

And it was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

† Revelation deliberately contrasts two women, the unfaithful harlot and the faithful bride.

† The harlot represents the covenant order that rejected Christ and persecuted His people. The bride represents the redeemed people of God united to Christ under the New Covenant.

† The bride wasn't a replacement for God's promises to Israel. She represented the fulfillment of those promises through Jesus Christ.

Galatians 4:25-26

Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is enslaved with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.

But the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother.

† Paul distinguished between the earthly Jerusalem associated with Mount Sinai and the Jerusalem above, which is free.

† Paul identified two covenant realities, one associated with slavery under the Old Covenant and the other associated with freedom through Christ.

† Revelation's contrast between the harlot and the bride follows this same theological pattern.

The New Jerusalem Is The Fulfilled Covenant Reality

Revelation 21:2-3

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is among the people, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,

† The contrast is complete. The unfaithful city is judged, and the New Jerusalem is revealed as the bride.

† The New Jerusalem isn't simply another physical city replacing the old one. It represents the fulfilled covenant relationship between God and His redeemed people.

† The central promise is God's dwelling with His people. This is the goal toward which the biblical covenant story had been moving.

† The harlot's judgment and the bride's glory belong together. The former Jerusalem stood condemned for rejecting the Messiah, while the New Jerusalem reveals the fulfilled promises of God in Christ.

Historical References

† Flavius Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian and eyewitness to the Jewish-Roman War, described the internal corruption, factional violence, famine, destruction of the temple, and devastation of Jerusalem in The Jewish War, Books 5-7.

† Tacitus, the Roman historian, described the conflict involving Jerusalem and the temple in Histories, Book 5. His account provides additional non-Christian historical testimony concerning the Jewish-Roman

conflict.

† Eusebius, writing in Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, chapters 5-7, connected Jerusalem's destruction with the consequences of the Jewish nation's rejection of Christ and described the departure of Jerusalem's Christian community before the catastrophe.

† These historical sources establish the reality and severity of Jerusalem's first-century destruction. The identification of Babylon itself must ultimately rest upon the biblical evidence rather than upon the historians alone.

How It Applies To Us Today

† Understanding Babylon as Jerusalem reminds us that God's covenant promises were fulfilled through Jesus Christ, not abandoned or postponed.

† We aren't waiting for another Babylon to arise before Christ can complete the redemption He accomplished. The judgment associated with the passing of the Old Covenant order belongs to the first-century fulfillment.

† Today, our confidence isn't found in a physical temple, a geographical city, or a future prophetic timetable. It's found in Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, who has opened the way to the Father.

† The New Jerusalem isn't merely a distant hope. Believers have already come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, through Christ (Hebrews 12:22-24).

† We should therefore live as citizens of His kingdom, demonstrating faith, love, holiness, mercy, and gratitude for the redemption we've received.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Why does Revelation call Jerusalem Babylon instead of simply naming Jerusalem?

A: Revelation uses symbolic prophetic language throughout the book. Isaiah had already called Jerusalem a harlot and compared her rulers to Sodom (Isaiah 1:10, 21). John likewise described the great city as spiritually called Sodom and Egypt (Revelation 11:8).

Q: Doesn't Revelation 17:18 say Babylon reigns over the kings of the earth, which points to Rome?

A: This is a significant argument for the Roman interpretation. However, the Greek word translated earth can also mean land, depending on context. The covenant imagery and blood of the prophets provide reasons to understand the description in relation to Jerusalem (Revelation 11:8; 18:24).

Q: Why does Revelation describe seven mountains?

A: The seven mountains are a strong argument for Rome, the famous city of seven hills. The vision also interprets the heads as kings (Revelation 17:9-10). The imagery alone doesn't settle the other identifying features.

Q: Why is Babylon called a harlot?

A: The prophets repeatedly portrayed Jerusalem's unfaithfulness as spiritual adultery (Ezekiel 16:32; Isaiah 1:21).

Q: Why is the blood of the prophets important?

A: Jesus accused Jerusalem of killing the prophets and declared that righteous blood would come upon His generation (Matthew 23:35-38; Revelation 18:24).

Q: Was Rome involved in Jerusalem's destruction?

A: Yes. Roman armies under Titus destroyed Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70. Rome was the military instrument, while Jesus announced covenant judgment against Jerusalem (Luke 21:20-22).

Q: Does this mean all Jewish people were rejected?

A: No. Jesus, His apostles, and the earliest believers were Jewish. Salvation remains available through Christ without ethnic distinction (Romans 10:12-13; Galatians 3:28-29).

Q: Did Babylon's destruction happen in AD 70?

A: From the fulfilled perspective, yes. Revelation's declarations of nearness and Jesus' prediction of judgment upon His generation point to the first century (Matthew 23:36; Revelation 1:1; 22:10).

Q: What replaced the old Jerusalem?

A: The New Jerusalem represents God's redeemed people in their fulfilled New Covenant relationship with Christ (Galatians 4:25-26; Revelation 21:2-3).

Q: What is the greatest lesson?

A: God's promises are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Our inheritance is found in His completed work and our present relationship with God through Him (Hebrews 12:22-24; Ephesians 2:18-22).

† **This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †**

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Source Index

† Ezekiel 16:32; Isaiah 1:21; Isaiah 1:10; Revelation 11:8; Revelation 17:5; Revelation 17:6; Matthew 23:35-36; Matthew 23:37-38; Revelation 18:24; Revelation 1:1; Revelation 22:10; Revelation 19:7-8; Galatians 4:25-26; Revelation 21:2-3;

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