

Vision of the End – Conquering of Evil Forces

Babylon the Great (Revelation 17) The historical city of Babylon was located on the banks of the Euphrates River. It was the center of a great empire that around 600 B.C. ruled most of the ancient Near East from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea. Babylon was used by God to discipline His people for their unfaithfulness to Him. In 605 B.C. and again in 597 B.C., Babylon invaded Judah and carried some of its residents back to the area around Babylon. Finally, in 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, the great Babylonian king, destroyed the city of Jerusalem, including the temple of God and carried even more exiles into captivity. These people were deported to a pagan land where they were always tempted to participate in pagan worship and sometimes were threatened with force if they did not do so (see Daniel 3). The terror and the shame of the Babylonian Exile made it a powerful image in the minds of God's people for centuries to follow. It is easy to see why Babylon is a powerful symbol of the enemies of God's people.

The Fall of Babylon (Revelation 18) In the years before the exile, God sent prophets to warn His people of their impending doom and to call them to repentance. Even as God's prophets were prophesying that Judah would be taken captive by Babylon, they were also prophesying the destruction of Babylon (Isaiah 21:9; Jeremiah 50–51). Babylon was crushed by Cyrus the Persian in 539 B.C. Cyrus then encouraged the people of Judah to return to their land and rebuild their temple. Just as the faithful people of God in the Old Testament looked forward to and rejoiced in the coming destruction of Babylon, so God's faithful people in the New Testament era can look forward to and rejoice in the ultimate destruction of all of God's enemies. There have been numerous attempts to specifically identify the "Babylon" of which John wrote. Certainly in John's day, the powerful, arrogant, pagan Roman Empire, which set itself in the place of God and, at times, persecuted God's people, was an embodiment of Babylon. But in every age God's people face such enemies.