

Introduction:

Do you ever wonder if Christ's church is going to lose? As our culture becomes increasingly immoral and social pressure becomes increasingly anti-Christ, we may start to fret. Not a month goes by that I don't see an internet story trending about church attendance being down, Christianity diminishing, Islam flourishing, atheism abounding, why the millennials are abandoning the church, or other stories that indicate Christ's church is on the losing side of this battle. It seems like several times a year I hear of another brother, sister, or group that is abandoning the simple truth of Scripture for some form of evangelical compromise, stealing souls as they leave. I've heard of sermons and series and lectures being presented wondering if Christ's church can survive the Islamic threat or the culture wars or fill-in-the-blank danger. Do you wonder if it can?

The Christians of the first century wondered. With persecutions popping up in various locations, over sundry times, the Christians wondered if they would survive. With tribulation, trial, and tragedy occurring among them, the saints wondered if Christ's church would be victorious. Whether they were facing the threat of the earthly Jerusalem or the threat of Rome, they wondered how they were going to make it. So God sent a message, a revelation, an apocalypse. It was filled with signs and symbols. Some of it is confusing to our modern minds because we aren't used to the cultural pictures. Again and again throughout this message, God provides pictures of the saints being attacked and seemingly beaten. The enemy appears to win. But in the end, God wins. Those who are with God come out victorious. He goes through cycles of 7 letters to 7 churches, 7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 bowls of wrath and judgment. And He ends with the greatest vision of all in **Revelation 17-22**. He ends with a tale of two cities: Babylon the Great versus the New Heavenly Jerusalem. He ends with a contest between two women: a great immoral prostitute and the holy Bride of Jesus Christ. He ends with a battle and a wedding. He ends with our eternal victory. Don't be afraid, we win!

Discussion:

I. The Temporary Victory of Babylon the Great

- A. The first city is "Babylon the great" (**Revelation 17:5**). She is an immoral prostitute. Here is the picture. Jesus has offered to the entire world to be His bride. And the world has basically divided into two portions. Those who will make up His faithful, pure, holy bride and those who have decided to pursue immorality with the nations. Babylon represents those who have chosen that second path.
- B. Amillennial Christians, of which I am one and I hope you are too (if you have questions about what that means, feel free to meet with me and we can discuss that issue), argue about whether this city represents Rome or Jerusalem in its original context. I lean towards Rome because of **Revelation 17:9**, knowing that Rome was considered the city set on seven hills. However, I believe God used the vague symbolism because He didn't want us to limit our application to those cities. The reality is this contest between Christ's church and her enemies follows a repeated pattern. Though **Revelation** was not written specifically about our times, any enemy that arises against Christ's church will fit in this apocalyptic explanation. We can apply this message to our present enemies and our coming victory as well. Whether the city of our enemy is Mecca, Baghdad, Kabul, or even Washington, this picture of Babylon will apply.
- C. We must not scoff at Babylon the Great, the immoral woman. In **Revelation 17:1-6**, we see her stature and status. On a beast with seven heads and ten horns, she is presented as a powerful city. Few can stand against such power and strength. She is bedecked with valuable jewels and clothed in royal splendor. Purple, scarlet, gold, jewels, pearls adorn her beauty. She drinks from a golden cup. But she drinks a cup full of abomination and immorality. And she is drunk on the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus. Those martyrs who were persecuted, tormented, and slain by persecution, famine, and death in **Revelation 6:3-8** and who in **Revelation 6:9-11** cried out for vengeance but were told to wait, were slain by Babylon. She receives authority and the kings with her (**Revelation 17:12**). The beast she is on even mirrors Jesus Christ in some ways, being able to say he was, is not, and is about to rise (**Revelation 17:8, 11**). (BTW: many argue to discover which Roman emperor is meant by this imagery. I wonder however if this is not simply supposed to represent an apocalyptic parallel between the beast and the dragon, Satan, when compared with **Revelation 20**. There, the dragon is in the pit, then released, then sent to destruction much like the beast here. In **Revelation** we see that in the unholy trinity, the second person of that trinity, the beast, mirrors the first, Satan, in much the

same way that in the Holy Trinity, the second person, the Son, mirrors the first, the Father. I wonder if we are being led astray by trying to pick out a person in history instead of just seeing this as a picture of parallels to convey a message.) This immoral city is so impressive even John marveled and wondered greatly at her (**Revelation 17:6**). How can Christ's church withstand such an enemy? How can we possibly hope to overcome? You can see when the enemy is set out in picture how frightened the Christians might be that they simply cannot win the victory.

- D. However, did you notice that the authority the beast, the kings, and the immoral city enjoy is only for one hour (**Revelation 17:12**). They will make war on the Lamb, but the Lamb and His army will conquer them (**Revelation 17:14**). Amazingly enough, the very nations and kings who supported the immoral city and committed immorality with her will turn on her (**Revelation 17:16-17**). "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!" (**Revelation 18:2**). Her plagues will come in a single day (**Revelation 18:8**). Her judgment will come in a single hour (**Revelation 18:10**). In a single hour she will be laid waste (**Revelation 18:17, 19**). Her purple and scarlet garments along with her gold, jewels, and pearls will be lost (**Revelation 18:16-17**). Her fruit will be gone (**Revelation 18:14**). The kings who had supported her and the merchants who profited from her will weep and mourn for her as they see the formerly great city wreathed in smoke (**Revelation 18:9, 15**). The great city who feasts on the saints of the Lord will be judged by God and will ultimately become a feast for the birds (**Revelation 19:17-18**).
 - E. In **Revelation 19:11-20:15**, we see the actual battle between the Rider on the white horse and the beast and the dragon. Christ wins. Satan, the beast, the false prophet, and the immoral city/prostitute lose. We win!!!
- II. The Eternal Victory of the Bride of Christ, the New Jerusalem.
- A. In contrast to immoral Babylon the prostitute, John ends **Revelation** with the holy city, New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ (**Revelation 21:1-2**). He ends not with the battle, but with the wedding. Like a warrior promised a bride if he defeats the enemy army, the White Rider conquers the enemy armies and by that victory claims His Bride. And what a Bride. Though she has been attacked, besieged, and bombarded by the immoral city, she stands tall, proud, and unassailable. The harlot city may have reigned for an hour, but our city will reign forever and ever (**Revelation 22:5**).
 - B. We need to make a distinction at this point. Many look at **Revelation 21:1-22:5** and preach about heaven. That is not exactly accurate. The New Jerusalem is not heaven. The New Jerusalem, the bride of Jesus Christ is His church (cf. **Ephesians 5:25-33; II Corinthians 11:2**). Certainly, the victorious church ultimately resides in heaven, but it is important to recognize this is Christ's victorious church and not heaven itself. I'll explain why at the end.
 - C. Consider the greatness of our city and its eternal victory.
 - 1. *Our city has the glory of God*, its radiance is like a rare jewel, like jasper, but clear as crystal (**Revelation 21:11**). What a great victory, not only does our city behold the glory of God. Not only does it house the glory of God. It takes on the image of the glory of God. As **I John 3:2** says we will be able to behold Him because we will become as He is. I want to dwell in this city.
 - 2. *Our city is impregnable*. First, the height of **Revelation 21:16** must refer to how high the city is on the mountain of God. After all, a city doesn't have a height besides its wall, and that is a different measurement. The 12,000 stadia of **Revelation 21:16**, might refer to the circumference of the city or it might refer to the length of each side. In the first case, each side of the city and its height on the mountain is about 350 miles. In the latter, it would be about 1400 miles. Keep in mind that Mt. Everest is only 5½ miles high. Olympus itself could not compete with our city. Can you imagine these ancient envisioning an enemy army trekking up either a 350 mile mountain or 1400 mile mountain? But if they made it to the top of that mountain, then the found themselves up against a city wall that is over 200 feet high. With a city like this, who can beat it? I want to dwell in this city.
 - 3. Like the Garden after the fall was guarded by the cherubim, *our city is guarded* in its gates by 12 angels (**Revelation 21:12**). Nothing detestable or false may enter (**Revelation 21:27**). Even the original sanctuary, the Garden of Eden did not fare as well when the serpent entered. But nothing like that will happen in our victorious city.
 - 4. However, unlike the Garden *our city is open*. The gates never shut (**Revelation 21:25**). The Cherubim would keep us from the tree of life in the Garden, but these angels do not keep us from the tree of life in our city. The names of the 12 tribes are on our gates, hearkening back to the victorious city of **Ezekiel 48:30-35**. In other words, while God fulfilled that promise to Israel by bringing them back from Babylon to the earthly Jerusalem, rebuilding the wall and the temple, they are ultimately only victorious if they become part of this city, Christ's church.

5. As Paul had explained in **Ephesians 2:20**, the foundation of our city is 12 stones, the 12 apostles. But these aren't just any stones. They are priceless stones: jasper, sapphire, agate, emerald, onyx, carnelian, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth, and amethyst. Nine of these are mentioned as the stones in the breastplate of the High Priest in **Exodus 28:16-20**. We are not a city with priests; *we are a city of priests*. We are a nation of priests (**I Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6**). I want to dwell in this city.
6. *Our city is valuable and precious*. Imagine the value of a city when its building materials are jewels, its pavement is gold. Gates made of pearl. The wealth and value of Babylon is laid waste, but our city is valuable beyond compare and cannot be laid waste. I want to dwell in this city.
7. *Our city is perfect in proportion*. It is the city foursquare. Whether the 12,000 stadia of **Revelation 21:16** is the circumference or is one side, our city is perfect in its dimensions. If we take that measurement as the circumference, which I'm leaning to right now, it is 275 times larger than the one pictured in Ezekiel's vision (**Ezekiel 48:30-35**). What can we expect when this city is built on the perfect cornerstone (**Ephesians 2:20**). As **Hebrews 12:23** explains, when you come to the church, you come to "the spirits of the righteous made perfect," of course we dwell in a perfectly proportioned city. Where else could those made perfect by the blood of Jesus dwell? I want to dwell in this city.
8. *Our city is a place of life*. The river of life flows there (**Revelation 22:1**). The tree of life grows there (**Revelation 22:2**). Babylon has become a haunt for unclean spirits, birds, and beasts. It is a city of death and destruction. It has lost its fruit (**Revelation 18:14**). But the fruit of life in our city is never ending. A new fruit for each month. I want to dwell in this city.
9. But for all of that, do you know what makes our city truly great? *Our city is where God dwells among His people*. Everything that was lost in **Genesis 3** is regained in our victorious city (**Revelation 21:3-4**). We are no longer merely a temple (cf. **Ephesians 3:20-22**), but an entire city because God is our temple dwelling in our midst. We have no need for the s-u-n because the S-o-n is our light (**Revelation 21:22-23**). The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in our city. We will see His face, His name will be on our foreheads. The Lord God will be our light in our nightless city, and we will reign forever and ever. We will have an eternal victory (**Revelation 22:5**). I want to dwell in this city.
- D. There is no in between. We will either be within this city or we will be without. **Revelation 22:14-15** makes it clear. Those who wash their robes have a right to the tree of life and enter by the gates. But the rest are outside. Those outside are described as dogs, sorcerers, the sexually immoral, murderers, idolaters, and those who love and practice falsehood. What is truly sad for those outside the city is that **Revelation 21:8** explains these very people will have their portion in the lake of fire.
- E. Understand why we need to see the distinction between seeing this picture as the church versus seeing it as heaven. Though ultimately this picture applies to the church in heaven, the realm of God's dwelling, though ultimately it applies to our eternal victory, we need to see it as a picture of the church and not heaven for one very powerful and important reason. *This city, this bride is Christ's church and if we want to be part of this city in eternity, we have to be part of this city right now*. You can't stand outside the city walls as the battle rages with Babylon the Great and hold out hope of being in the city when the victory is won. Are you part of this great, eternal city now?

Conclusion:

Revelation 22:14 is pretty clear. The modern translations relying on the most ancient manuscripts say, "Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates" (ESV). **Revelation 7:14** explains we wash our robes white in the blood of the Lamb. Where was Jesus's blood shed? In His death, during His crucifixion. In **Romans 6:1-4**, Paul explains how we enter the death of Jesus Christ. We are baptized into His death. If you want to be part of the eternally victorious city, you have to wash your robes in the blood of the Lamb. If you want to enter the blood of the Lamb, you've got to be baptized into Christ's death. Are you part of the victorious city? Would you like to be?