

The 2nd Angel's Message:

Babylon is Fallen. The second angel followed with his message. "And another angel followed, saying 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.'" Revelation 14:8. Although there was a literal Babylon in the past from which we can derive lessons, "Babylon" is a term that in this context must be understood as being symbolic. We are compelled to do so because Babylon no longer existed when John wrote Revelation, nor has there been a literal Babylon built at any time following.

Of what is apocalyptic Babylon a symbol? Literal Babylon, a city built on the very ruins of the ancient tower of Babel, stood for unbelief, self-exaltation, confusion, defiance, rebellion, false teachings and oppression. It stood as the "capital" of Satan's kingdom. As such, it is used to represent those who persist in such characteristics. The Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar was given an opportunity to fulfill God's purpose, even being used as His tool to exercise discipline toward Judah. But eventually she repelled His Spirit and apostatized.

Decades before the book of Revelation was penned, the concept of a symbolic "Babylon" was in place. Peter closed his first epistle by saying, "She who is in Babylon, the elect together with you, greets you." I Peter 5:13. There wasn't a literal Babylon when Peter closed his letter. Because Pagan Rome at that time "filled the role" of Babylon with its arrogance and persecution, Peter felt free to apply the term to her. Apocalyptic Babylon represents the enemies of God, with the Church of the Middle Ages taking a leading role. Note that when we refer to the "Church" we refer to its hierarchy; we are speaking of the system of the papacy. God loves Catholics! He died for them! There are many of His sincere followers within that communion today. The prophecies of the Scriptures address Catholicism, not individual Catholics. That distinction must be made prominent!

What is meant by the "fall" of Babylon, and why is it mentioned twice? What are the two "falls" of which the second angel speaks? The Church established by Jesus began in purity and victory, but later "fell" from her sanctified position. This apostasy, this "falling away" was predicted by the Apostle Paul. II Thessalonians 2:1-8. The first "fall" occurred when the Church established by Jesus fell into apostasy in the Middle Ages.

In the period between Christ's first and second Advents, which is the period under the spotlight in the book of Revelation, the Church of the Middle Ages has predominately occupied the role of Babylon, as it has cherished the very same attitudes and nourished the same practices of ancient Babylon, with its apostasy, departure from Scripture, with its promulgation of false teachings and with its oppression of dissenters. The light of the Gospel was nearly obliterated during these centuries. It was a crime to own or teach the Bible. A cry for reform began to ascend, reaching a crescendo pitch in the work of Reformation led by Martin Luther, John Knox, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli and others.

But Protestantism, which began with such lofty ideals, itself declined and departed from its original principles, failing to maintain the flame of earnest quest for and assimilation of truth. It also has "fallen away" from the truths of Scripture. Thus there are two "falls" or apostasies which are identified by the second angel. "Babylon is fallen, is fallen." The fall of the Apostolic Church represented by the apostasy of the Church of the Middle Ages was the first fall; the fall of Protestantism in more recent centuries is the second fall. And yet there will be an even greater fall, as one day Babylon will make, or coerce, all nations to abide by her dogma on pain of persecution and death.

The Wine of Babylon. What is the “wine” which Babylon gives to all nations? It is the intoxicating false teachings which result in confusion and dependency. Just as there was “confusion” at the tower of Babel, just as the drinking of alcohol results in addiction and produces confusion of mind, so the teachings of Babylon induce dependency upon her and a confusion that befuddles with regard to spiritual truth. Having imbibed her cocktail of heresies, all nations stumble and fall. Satan, working through unsuspecting men, removed, corrupted or obscured nearly every truth contained in Scripture.

What is the “fornication” of which the angel speaks? Fornication in the literal sense describes an illicit relationship between two partners. In the spiritual sense it also describes an illicit relationship between two entities. Revelation 17 gives us a clear picture of this improper relationship involving Babylon, in that an impure woman, on whose forehead is the name Babylon, representing an apostate church, rides upon (oppresses and/or is supported by) a beast, representing a kingdom or state.

A “woman” riding a “beast.” This is a prophetic portrayal of the illicit union of church (a woman) and state (a beast); this is spiritual fornication. Throughout the Middle Ages there existed such an improper relationship between church and state. Great oppression and persecution were the results as the church relied on state power rather than the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish her goals. Her departure from her Lord; her suppression of His Word and its truths; her dissemination of false teachings and her dependence on the power of secular sources has resulted in her fall. A later angel’s message, contained in chapter 18 of Revelation, gives a call for all of God’s true followers to “come out of Babylon.”