

Fallen is Babylon the Great!

Thomas Robinson, July 3, 2005

Revelation 18:1-24

After this I saw another **angel** coming down from heaven, having **great authority**; and **the earth was made bright with his splendor**. ² He called out with a mighty voice,

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!

*It has become a dwelling place of demons,
a haunt of every foul spirit, a haunt of every foul bird,
a haunt of every foul and hateful beast.*

³ **For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxury.”**

⁴ Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,

“Come out of her, my people,

*so that you do not take part in her sins,
and so that you do not share in her plagues;*

⁵ *for her sins are heaped high as heaven,
and God has remembered her iniquities.*

⁶ *Render to her as she herself has rendered,
and repay her double for her deeds;
mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed.*

⁷ *As she glorified herself and lived luxuriously,
so give her a like measure of torment and grief.*

Since in her heart she says, ‘I rule as a queen;

I am no widow, and I will never see grief,’

⁸ *therefore her plagues will come in a single day—
death and mourning and famine—
and she will be burned with fire;*

for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.”

⁹ And **the kings of the earth**, who committed **fornication** and lived in **luxury** with her, will **weep and wail** over her when they see the smoke of her burning; ¹⁰ they will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say,

“Alas, alas, the great city, Babylon, the mighty city!

For in one hour your judgment has come.”

¹¹ And the **merchants of the earth** weep and mourn for her, since **no one buys their cargo anymore**, ¹² cargo of gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron, and marble, ¹³ cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, choice flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, **slaves – human souls**.

¹⁴ *“The fruit for which your soul longed has gone from you, and all your dainties and your splendor are lost to you, never to be found again!”*

¹⁵ The **merchants of these wares**, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in **fear of her torment**, weeping and mourning aloud,

¹⁶ **“Alas, alas, the great city,**

*clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet,
adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls!*
17 For **in one hour all this wealth has been laid waste!**"

Romans 13:1-8

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is **no authority except from God**, and those authorities that exist have been **instituted by God**.² Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.³ For **rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad**. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then **do what is good**, and you will receive its approval;⁴ for it is **God's servant** for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the **servant of God** to execute wrath on the wrongdoer.⁵ Therefore **one must be subject**, not only because of wrath but also because of **conscience**.⁶ For the same reason you also **pay taxes**, for the authorities are **God's servants**, busy with this very thing.⁷ **Give back to all what is due them** – taxes to whom taxes are due, **revenue** to whom revenue is due, **respect** to whom respect is due, **honor** to whom honor is due.⁸ Owe no one anything, except to **love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law**.

PATRIOTISM, LOVE, AND ALLEGIANCE

July 4th Weekend. Time for reflection on the relation of our faith to nation, power, politics, justice, cultural values, etc. Important ongoing discussion for U.S. Next Week some are traveling to Washington – *"Worship in a spirit of Justice."* How does our faith relate to political power in a pluralistic society of private faith? Two pictures from the early church in the midst of the Roman empire. Not the same as ancient Israel (covenant with God), nor as participatory America with sovereign people and separation of secular state from religion.

PAUL — THE AUTHORITIES AS SERVANTS OF GOD

Romans 13:1-7. Very influential in history, not always good — Interpreted to mean the divine right of kings or that the status quo is approved by God. Written by a man whose back was bloodied by Roman rods; who focused on the cross. Paul knew the evils of the Roman empire. Why write this? How do Christians live by their own fundamental values within the power structures of a hostile world? Realization of God's sovereignty and universality. God is over everything and working everywhere, not just in the church but in society, even thoroughly pagan society. The Roman empire claimed to be led by "Divine Emperors" but they are simply subordinate servants of God with specific task to promote good and punish wrong. Christians should expect that of them: Do good; avoid wrong; give what is due: taxes, respect (as expression of love); but never primary allegiance, divine honor. Implied in Paul's words: The authorities are not us. We have no power to affect them. God has expectations of them as his servants and will judge them.

JOHN IN REVELATION — FALLEN IS BABYLON THE GREAT!

John's vision expresses God's judgment on Rome: *"the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth"* (Rev 17:18) seen as a great harlot empowered by Satan and drunk with *"the blood of the martyrs of Jesus."* She corrupts others by her power and wealth. She thinks herself invulnerable because of her military power and control of governments and economies (kings and merchants), but God judges. John's vision is not just foretelling the fall of Rome, but giving Christians a vision of God's judgment on corrupt, oppressive, exploitative human power that fails as God's servant.

In US today, no sovereign emperor, divine king; but a sovereign people. We all become involved in the “governing authorities” – faithful servant or Babylon the oppressor. Use power for good: justice, fairness, peace, life; against poverty, violence, oppression. Open, fair debate; respect for all people. No theocracy, but active participation.