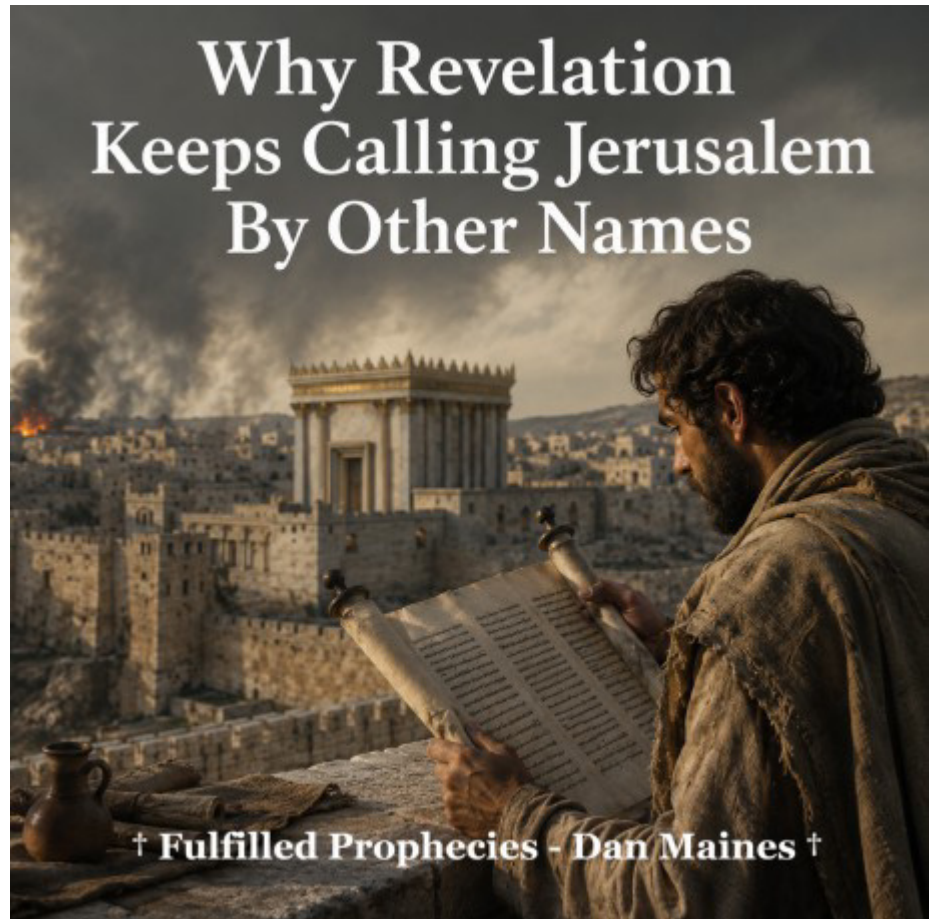


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Babylon - Why Revelation Keeps Calling Jerusalem By Other Names



By Dan Maines

Why Revelation Keeps Calling Jerusalem By Other Names

Introduction

† Revelation doesn't identify the covenant-breaking city by only one name. It calls the city Babylon, Sodom, Egypt, the great city, and presents it as the great harlot.

† These names aren't random geographical labels. They are prophetic covenant names describing what Jerusalem had become through rebellion, spiritual adultery, persecution, and bloodshed.

† The Old Testament prophets had already spoken about

Jerusalem this way. Isaiah compared Jerusalem to Sodom, Jeremiah described Jerusalem as an adulterous wife, and Ezekiel portrayed Jerusalem as a harlot.

† Revelation uses that established prophetic language and brings it to its final judgment setting. The strongest identification appears in Revelation 11:8, the great city is the place where their Lord was crucified.

† Jesus wasn't crucified in literal Babylon, Sodom, or Egypt. He was crucified at Jerusalem. Revelation itself therefore gives us the key for understanding why Jerusalem could be described under these other prophetic names.

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.

† Revelation doesn't leave the identity of this great city entirely to speculation. It gives a geographical marker, their Lord was crucified there.

† The city is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt. The word spiritually tells us these names are symbolic descriptions of the city's spiritual and covenant condition, not statements that Jerusalem had geographically become Sodom or Egypt.

† Jerusalem had become like Sodom in corruption and like Egypt in opposition to God's people. Revelation applies the characteristics of former enemies of God to the city that rejected and crucified Christ. (Luke 13:33-34; Matthew 23:37)

† This verse provides an interpretive anchor for the great-city imagery that appears throughout Revelation. Before looking outside the first-century covenant world for another city, we should allow Revelation to explain its own symbolism.

(Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:10)

Isaiah 1:9-10

If the Lord of armies Had not left us a few survivors, We would be like Sodom, We would be like Gomorrah. Hear the word of the Lord, You rulers of Sodom; Listen to the instruction of our

God, You people of Gomorrah!

† Centuries before Revelation, Isaiah addressed Judah and Jerusalem using the names Sodom and Gomorrah. Isaiah wasn't confused about geography. He was using prophetic comparison to expose covenant corruption. (Isaiah 1:1, 21)

† The rulers weren't literally governing ancient Sodom, and the people weren't literally citizens of Gomorrah. God was describing what His covenant people had become morally and spiritually.

† Revelation 11:8 follows this same prophetic pattern when Jerusalem is spiritually called Sodom. John wasn't inventing a new method of interpretation, he was using language already established by Israel's prophets.

† When Revelation calls the city Sodom, an Old Testament reader would already have a biblical framework for understanding the accusation. (Deuteronomy 32:32; Ezekiel 16:46-50)

Jeremiah 2:20

For long ago I broke your yoke And tore off your restraints; But you said, 'I will not serve!' For on every high hill And under every leafy tree You have lain down as a prostitute.

† Jeremiah described covenant unfaithfulness as harlotry. Jerusalem belonged to God by covenant but pursued other gods and repeatedly violated that covenant relationship. (Jeremiah 3:1-3; 3:6-10)

† This is essential background for Revelation's harlot imagery. A harlot in prophetic covenant language isn't identified only by sexual immorality, the image can represent spiritual adultery against God.

† Revelation therefore didn't suddenly introduce the concept of a harlot city without precedent. The prophets had already established the vocabulary that John later used.

† The accusation becomes especially significant because Revelation's harlot is guilty not only of corruption but also of shedding the blood of God's servants. (Revelation 17:6; 18:24)

Ezekiel 16:2, 15

Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations, But you trusted in your beauty and became unfaithful because of your fame, and you poured out your obscene practices on every passer-by to whom it might be tempting.

† Ezekiel removes any doubt about the identity of the woman in his prophecy. God specifically tells Ezekiel to make Jerusalem know her abominations.

† Jerusalem is then portrayed as a woman who became unfaithful and played the harlot. This covenant imagery existed long before Revelation described another great harlot facing judgment. (Ezekiel 16:8; 16:26-32)

† The point isn't that every prophetic use of the word harlot must always mean Jerusalem. The point is that Scripture had already established Jerusalem herself as a covenant harlot, giving Revelation's readers a familiar prophetic pattern.

† Revelation's imagery should therefore be interpreted within the prophetic vocabulary of Scripture before imposing a completely foreign system upon it.

Matthew 23:34-36

Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will flog in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, 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 responsibility for the accumulated blood of the righteous upon the first-century generation He was addressing.

† Notice the same themes that later appear in Revelation, prophets sent by God, persecution, righteous blood, and judgment upon the guilty city and generation. (Matthew 23:29-33; Luke 11:49-51)

† Jesus didn't place this judgment thousands of years beyond His audience. He said all these things would come upon this

generation.

† This becomes extremely important when Revelation later describes a city drunk with the blood of the saints and prophets. Revelation's imagery matches the covenant lawsuit Jesus had already pronounced against Jerusalem. (Revelation 17:6; 18:20)

Revelation 17:1-2, 5-6

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of sexual immorality, and those who live on the earth became drunk with the wine of her sexual immorality." and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery: "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." 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.

† Revelation calls the woman both the great prostitute/harlot and Babylon the Great. Babylon functions as a prophetic name representing a city characterized by rebellion, corruption, oppression, and judgment.

† The woman is drunk with the blood of the saints and the witnesses of Jesus. This parallels Jesus' indictment of Jerusalem as the city responsible for killing God's prophets and persecuting His messengers. (Matthew 23:34-37)

† Calling the city Babylon doesn't require the city to be literal Babylon any more than calling Jerusalem Sodom and Egypt in Revelation 11:8 requires Jerusalem to be geographically located in either place.

† Revelation layers prophetic names together because each name communicates something about the city's covenant condition and approaching judgment.

Revelation 17:18

The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over

the kings of the earth.

† This creates an important internal connection within Revelation. The harlot is the great city, and Revelation 11:8 identifies the great city as the place where their Lord was crucified.

† John therefore gives us both sides of the identification, the woman is the great city, and the great city is where Jesus was crucified. (Revelation 11:8; 17:1, 5)

Revelation 18:20, 24

Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her. And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slaughtered on the earth.

† The blood accusation is one of the strongest connections between Revelation's Babylon and Jesus' judgment declaration against Jerusalem.

† Jesus said Jerusalem killed the prophets and stoned those sent to her. He then declared that the righteous blood would be required from His generation. (Matthew 23:35-37; Luke 11:50-51)

† Revelation says blood of prophets and saints was found in Babylon. Jesus had already identified Jerusalem as the city with this covenant bloodguilt.

† The shared language isn't incidental. Revelation presents the culmination of the judgment Jesus announced against the city that rejected God's messengers and ultimately rejected God's Son.

Revelation 18:10

standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'

† Here Revelation directly connects the expressions the great city and Babylon. Babylon is therefore functioning as a prophetic designation for the city under judgment.

† Revelation 11:8 has already identified the great city by the

decisive statement, where also their Lord was crucified.

† When these passages are allowed to interpret one another, the terminology forms a coherent picture. The great city can be spiritually called Sodom and Egypt and prophetically called Babylon because these names describe its covenant rebellion.

† Jerusalem had become what the names represented, corrupt like Sodom, oppressive like Egypt, adulterous like the harlot, and destined for judgment like Babylon.

Luke 13:33-35

Nevertheless I must go on My journey today and tomorrow and the next day; for it cannot be that a prophet would perish outside Jerusalem. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who have been sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her young under her wings, and you were unwilling! Behold, your house is left to you desolate; and I say to you, you will not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!'

† Jesus identifies Jerusalem as the city that kills the prophets. Revelation later identifies Babylon by the blood of prophets and saints found within her. (Revelation 18:24)

† Jesus also announces that Jerusalem's house would be left desolate. This wasn't an unrelated warning, it belonged to the same covenant judgment that dominates His final warnings to Jerusalem. (Matthew 23:36-38; 24:1-2)

† Jerusalem's guilt reached its climax in rejecting Christ and persecuting those He sent. Revelation's judgment language continues that same biblical storyline.

† The Bible therefore gives us a connected chain of evidence, the prophets described Jerusalem with symbolic covenant names, Jesus pronounced bloodguilt and desolation upon Jerusalem, and Revelation describes the great city using those same prophetic themes.

Historical References

† Josephus recorded the horrors surrounding Jerusalem and its

destruction in AD 70, including internal violence, famine, factional bloodshed, the Roman siege, the burning of the temple, and the devastation of the city. His account provides historical background for the catastrophic end of first-century Jerusalem. (Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, Books 5-7, especially 5.10; 6.3-6; 6.8-10; 7.1)

† Tacitus also recorded the Roman siege of Jerusalem under Titus and described the enormous conflict surrounding the city and temple. (Tacitus, *Histories*, Book 5, chapters 10-13)

† Eusebius later connected Jesus' warnings concerning Jerusalem with the calamities that came upon the city and recorded the Christian tradition that believers departed Jerusalem before the final destruction. (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3, chapters 5-7)

† These historical writers don't determine the meaning of Scripture, Scripture determines the meaning of Scripture. Their writings provide historical testimony concerning the first-century events surrounding Jerusalem's fall.

How It Applies To Us Today

† Revelation should be read through the prophetic vocabulary Scripture itself provides. We shouldn't assume every symbolic name in Revelation refers to a different literal geographical location.

† When Revelation says spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, it tells us directly that symbolic geographical names are being used to communicate spiritual realities.

† Understanding the Old Testament prophets helps us understand Revelation. John repeatedly draws his imagery from the covenant language, judgments, symbols, and prophetic patterns already found throughout Scripture.

† Revelation 11:8 gives us a powerful interpretive key, the great city was where their Lord was crucified. That directs our attention back to first-century Jerusalem.

† Babylon, Sodom, Egypt, the great city, and the harlot aren't five unrelated mysteries requiring five unrelated cities. They are prophetic images that describe different dimensions of covenant

rebellion and judgment.

† For believers today, the message isn't to wait for another Jerusalem to become another Babylon. The message is to recognize the completed covenant transition and live faithfully in Christ and His New Covenant kingdom. (Hebrews 12:22-24; Colossians 1:13)

Q & A Appendix

Q: How can Jerusalem be called Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon if it wasn't literally any of those places?

A: Revelation itself says the great city was spiritually called Sodom and Egypt and then identifies it as the place where the Lord was crucified. Scripture had already used this kind of prophetic language for Jerusalem. The names describe spiritual and covenant characteristics rather than geographical identity. (Isaiah 1:9-10; Revelation 11:8)

Q: What is the strongest evidence that Revelation's great city points to Jerusalem?

A: Revelation 11:8 gives the clearest identifying statement, where also their Lord was crucified. Jesus also identified Jerusalem as the city that killed the prophets, while Revelation says the blood of prophets and saints was found in the city called Babylon. The descriptions converge on Jerusalem. (Luke 13:33-35; Matthew 23:34-37; Revelation 18:24)

Q: Why would Revelation call Jerusalem Babylon?

A: Babylon had become a biblical symbol of arrogance, oppression, idolatry, and divine judgment. By the first century, Jerusalem had rejected Christ and persecuted His messengers. Calling the condemned city Babylon communicated what Jerusalem had become and what judgment awaited it. (Matthew 23:34-38; Revelation 17:5-6; 18:10)

Q: Does this mean every reference to Babylon in the Bible means Jerusalem?

A: No. Historical Babylon was a real empire and city. The issue

is how Revelation uses the name in its own prophetic context. Revelation openly demonstrates that it can apply symbolic geographical names to another city when it calls the place where Jesus was crucified Sodom and Egypt. (Revelation 11:8)

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

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Source Index

† Revelation 11:8; Isaiah 1:9-10; Jeremiah 2:20; Ezekiel 16:2, 15; Matthew 23:34-36; Revelation 17:1-2, 5-6; Revelation 17:18; Revelation 18:20, 24; Revelation 18:10; Luke 13:33-35

† Historical writers: Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, Books 5-7, 5.10; 6.3-6; 6.8-10; 7.1; Tacitus, Histories, Book 5, chapters 10-13; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, chapters 5-7

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