

"The Great Harlot Babylon"

Let's open our Bibles tonight - Revelation 17 - as we continue on Wednesday night going through this book.

Last week, we finished the final seven bowl judgments which were prepared back in chapter 15. And we mentioned to you, then, that up through chapter 14, the Lord's grace and mercy reached out to man, but now this judgment of God that had to come, will come.

And we find ourselves, chronologically, at the end of the *Great Tribulation* period, just before the return of Jesus. In fact, Revelation 16 leads immediately to chapter 19, where the Lord returns. That's chronological. However, after these seven bowl judgments had been poured out in chapter 16, is God's final judgment upon man. In fact, John was told as far back as chapter 10 by the time that these bowl judgments were poured out, the wrath of God would be fulfilled and completed, and all of those things spoken of by the prophets would be brought to pass. And so we find ourselves in chapters 17 and 18 and two chapters that are not chronological in the sense that they move the history forward, but they are rather parenthetical in the sense that the Lord stops us and says, "Let Me show you around a little bit more." And chapters 17 and 18 are really two chapters that the Lord devotes to a detailed description of the final destruction of Babylon. It is used here, figuratively, to speak both of world religions in chapter 17 as well as the world political and commercial ways in chapter 18, because both of them represent man at his best apart from God. And much like the old judgment of Tyre in Isaiah 23 - man serving himself, money as his god, power as his way - man's ways have to fall. And here, in the last judgment, at the time of the *Great Tribulation* and now, at the end of this final world kingdom, God lays waste and lays bare these ways of men before Jesus returns to establish His kingdom upon the earth.

Chapter 17 - easily defined as far as layout: the first six verses tell us John's vision, and then we are given the interpretation by the angel of the Lord as to what John has seen. But the picture is that of false religion pictured by the Lord, here, as a harlot that is seducing and has seduced the nations for centuries; that man

has been seduced by this false religious way of life, absolutely characterized in the last days by the Antichrist and the false prophet and those filled with Satan himself; headed blindly for eternal judgment and brought to a climax here in this final seven-year period where the Lord brings man's last kingdom to an end.

So, in verse 1 we begin, "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and he talked with me and he said to me, 'Come, I'll show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits upon many waters.'" Now, John is invited by one of the seven angels to come and see the judgment that God has undertaken on the great harlot, Babylon. And he uses that descriptive term "harlot" in verse 1, in verse 5, in verse 15, in verse 16 as well. Notice here, in verse 1, that the Lord describes the harlot as sitting upon many waters, and when you get to verse 15, you will read that the harlot is multitudes of people and nations and languages and tongues. It was really a description of her worldwide influence throughout history. The term great harlot speaks of her dramatic role in the spiritual idolatry and in the birthing of many daughter harlots. In fact, verse 5, she is called the "mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth." And really, this is God's view of a religious system that precludes Him, that somehow seeks to make its base upon man's best or man's work or man's ways. We see folks getting away with it for many centuries. God has been very patient, but yet He sees the seduction of religion as being such that it dooms men's souls. And it is no more explicitly laid out than in these final seven years when the Antichrist will demand worship under penalty of death and demand his mark and his name be taken if you are, at all, going to survive it. So, the Lord now gives to John this vision of this harlot, this religious system.

In chapter 18, Babylon will be pictured as the commercial and the political systems of man; specifically commercial, though, more so even than political. But God shows this fall of Babylon to John because this is really the final judgment of God against man's rebellion before the King of kings returns. Who this angel is, we're not sure. John sees a lot of them. It could very well be - if we go back to verse 8 - the angel that, from the last chapter, poured out the judgment upon Babylon; we're not sure, but notice that God's designation of her is one of a harlot. This is how He sees the actions of religious man, and the judgment shows the seriousness of the sin. Chapter 17 focuses specifically, like I said, on the false religious systems that are engendered and what they have done to man and what God will do to her as a result.

By the time we get to chapter 19, in a couple of weeks, where the Lord will return with you and I in tow, we read in verse 1 and verse 2 of chapter 19 that there is rejoicing amongst those in heaven. "True and righteous are the judgments of God. He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and He has avenged on her the blood of His saints shed by her." The prophets, for years, foretold of the fall of Babylon. Jeremiah and Isaiah, in particular, wrote chapter upon chapter of the destruction of Babylon in their day. Tied to those prophecies are always that far-looking or that looking far ahead. You might want to read Isaiah 13-14, 47 and Jeremiah 50 and 51, in particular, as the Lord speaks there. But John is now shown this harlot sitting upon many waters and really spreading herself over every nation and tribe and people and tongue.

And then he says in verse 2, "With whom the kings of the earth committed" - past tense - "fornication. And the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication." So, how far has religion reached in her influence - to the kings, to the inhabitants of the earth; from the boardroom to the state house, from Wall Street to living in the street. Religion crawls into men's lives. And without a relationship with God, through His Son, we have no hope. But it is the great seduction that the enemy has propagated upon man, and her ways have captured the hearts of leaders around the globe for generations. People embrace religion; it is the single greatest motivator for men's lives most of the time. And God help us - that we're sure who we're following and why, and what our call and our mission is as a church. Notice we read with the world that over the centuries this harlot has committed spiritual fornication, carried people away drunk with wine. The word drunk is just that - carried them away in a stupor, dead to their thinking, unable to judge wisely. I remember when I used to witness to my Dad before he was saved, and he would say, "Well, I know what I believe." And I'd say, "Well, what do you believe?" And then he'd tell me and I'd say, "Do you really believe that?" And he'd say, "No. I don't really believe that." Or I'd say, "Why do you believe that?" And this is what he'd say, because that's how Dads can talk, "That's just the way I believe." I'd say, "Well, do you have any reason?" "No. That's just the way I believe. When you get older, you'll understand." Really? I don't understand even to this day, except there's great blindness that comes with religion, isn't there? And when he got saved, he said to me, "You know, I just watched you and the people around you for so long, and I saw that you believed what you believe, and it changed your life."

Well here the blindness and the drunkenness of this - the word sexual immorality, *pornea* or fornication, is used metaphorically to speak of the unfaithfulness of man to God with his false gods and his false ways. The word "harlot" is not a compliment. By the time we get to chapter 21, the Lord will show us the bride of Christ, described in extremely different terms. But here's how the Lord sees man's religion - it is like being drunk and immoral, stumbling around, not knowing where you're going; and history spans from one generation to the next, these empty belief systems that bring men face-to-face with God's eternal judgment. And it is epitomized in this last seven-year period, this movement of the great Antichrist.

We read in verse 3, John says, "He carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman that was sitting on a scarlet beast full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and having ten horns." Now John is given a vision by the Lord; he uses these terms a couple of different times, "carried away in the Spirit." We know he was on the island of Patmos at the time, but he was taken into the wilderness where he finds both a beast and the harlot. And both of them are thriving in the wilderness, a place that at least the Bible always portrays as a place of no life at all, that place of wilderness. And the great harlot of verse 1 is the woman of verse 3 who represents the city or the ways of Babylon, speaking of the religions of man; and yet in verses 1 and 2, we are told of her centuries of influence - religiously, politically, commercially. Here in the last, we see her riding upon this beast.

Now, the scarlet beast we have seen, and we will see tonight as well, is both an individual and is a world empire. Here in the Tribulation, you remember as you've been with us, it will be the revival of the old Roman Empire that really was the last world empire that the world has seen. It is comprised of, in the last days, ten nations (according to Revelation 13), over whom is ruling a beast, a man of sin that is filled with the power of the enemy, with the dragon.

So, we see the harlot here riding upon the beast, which would suggest that she will have considerable influence in the establishing of this final world government. Religion will play a huge part in the coming to power of the Antichrist. In fact, the Antichrist will use the false church or religious man during the first 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ years of his coming to power to really assert himself and to influence himself and establish himself; and only, according to the Scriptures, in the last 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ years, when the Antichrist will come to the Temple, demand worship as God, threaten death to

anyone who doesn't take his mark, he will then separate himself from this false church and even turn on the religious people themselves. In fact, when you get to verses 16 and 17, we will read there that he will take her and desolate her and eat her flesh and burn her with fire. In other words, he will turn against her. So, once riding his coattails; once he, riding hers. Eventually she will fall into his wicked sights. He doesn't want to share his power with anyone. So, notice here, that the harlot is not at all put off by the names of blasphemy written on this name of this man of sin, possessed by hell - these names that characterize his mission and his rule and his nation and his ways.

The seven heads, as we have been going over Revelation a lot with you, represent the seven world governments that the world will see; and the many that have, up to this point, the six that have been seen and the emperors who are leading them or ruling them, the kings. They represent power. The ten horns refer to that ten-nation confederacy, which will form this last world empire, among whom the Antichrist will arise, remove three of the ten and establish his own last world empire. The same seven heads and ten horns were seen on the dragon there in chapter 13, you might remember.

So, she's riding upon this final world empire. Verse 4 tells us that she "was arrayed in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls; she had in her hand a golden cup filled with the abominations and the filthiness of her fornication." So, God now portrays the false religious system throughout the ages as a prostitute looking for customers and always finding those to charm. She's arrayed in purple and scarlet and gold. Her attire matches her character in the sense that (in Daniel 11:38) the beast himself is "dressed to kill" so to speak, drawn in by the lavishness of the wealth that is put on display in the name of the Lord and all; and she invites folks to come and dwell with her, and many follow. She's captivating, she'll lead you astray; but the woman works in the worldly ways to her advantage. So different in picture to the saints dressed in white linen there in Revelation 3 or the godly woman of 1 Timothy 2 whose beauty is in her heart, in her ways, in her works. But here is a woman in the wilderness who has only death to offer to her suitors, and religion is big business, but the big business is coming to an end. And notice that the Lord shows John a cup in the hand of the woman, and in the cup is what she drinks and what she offers to others; but inevitably that which is found there is nothing more than filthiness and abominations, and she is going to be judged by the Lord for what she has to offer. And this is the end of man and his religious ways.

"On her forehead a name was written" - verse 5 - "MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." Now you remember that Israel, the 144,000 - they were sealed with the name of their Father. You know that the worshippers of the beast also received a name. And here is a religious woman with a name written upon her. The word "MYSTERY" is interesting here because I don't think it should be in capital letters because, in the way it is written in the Greek, the mystery is the association of the woman with this final world government. There is nothing mysterious about her, in particular; certainly not her name. It should simply read Babylon the great, the mother of harlots, the abominations of the earth. The mystery is her involvement in the last days. By Biblical definition, a mystery is something unknown to man until God has revealed it, and the antidote of a mystery in the Bible is not discovery or investigation but is revelation. In other words, God peels back that which was mysterious to reveal to us what we can now know. So, this is not a reference to Babylon the city but really the Babylon of man, apart from God, in his religious ways.

And notice here in verse 5 that the name on her forehead says that she has always gone this path. Her religious perversion, which began in Babylon, has countless abominations offered to men instead of the Lord. People go, "How come we have so many religions?" Because there's a devil who wants to draw men away from God. And this very name, I think, would prohibit anyone from applying these verses to one religious system or another. There are a lot of Bible scholars who want to say, "Well, you know who he's talking about." "No, who's he talking about?" They'll tell you some religion they're mad at. This is the mother of all harlots - pretty much responsible for everything that is false, religiously, in the world. So, it is far more widespread than any one denomination or group that you're not happy with.

But out of Babylon arose all of the pagan practices, the witchcraft, the spiritism, the many gods and many lords that the world worshipped. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 8:5, the "so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, and there are many." So, that's the name on her forehead, and that's what John sees riding the beast - this Babylon, this false religious system, man seeking to get to heaven on his own ways or his own terms.

John says in verse 6, "I saw this woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement." Notice that the false religious system in the last days will be

the chief opponent of the saints because here this representative of all that is not of the Lord has her hands dripping with blood, and it is the blood of those who have been killed, it is the blood of those who have suffered at her hands. I think if you go through history, you will find that the greatest opponent to a man or a woman of God in any culture is the religious folks. It isn't usually the unbeliever who doesn't really care for anything - just live and let live. It's the person who has an agenda and doesn't believe that yours is the right one; and so that they will come after you. How many people have been killed by zealous religious folks who think in killing you, they're serving the Lord? That that's really their responsibility. Or for political expediency or somehow for gain. Paul, when he first got started in ministry, everywhere he turned people tried to kill him. Everywhere he went, people tried to stop him by his death. He would flee from one city to the next. The Pharisees thought the same thing of Jesus, "This guy's going to wreck our whole deal here. He's going to take away all of our thunder. He's going to lead away all of our people. He's going to take away all of our profit. We gotta kill this guy! That's the solution!"

So, here's the blood of the martyrs and the blood of the saints that had proceeded from the hand of religious men, and yet, when Babylon falls, we'll read at the end of Chapter 18, the apostles and the prophets and the saints will be avenged. God will bring judgment upon those who have hurt His people.

Now John is watching all this, and we have mentioned to you several times - he's in his nineties by now, and there have been five or six pauses throughout, the Lord letting John see all these things so that John can catch his breath - because He just goes, "John, it's going to be over pretty soon." "Oh, I hope so." He had seen enough. And here these words are pretty strong because the word "great amazement" literally means to be overwhelmed. And John sees this picture - and it's very much the same picture Daniel saw of the four beasts leading up to this final kingdom in Daniel chapter 7 and 8. At both places, Daniel stopped and said, "What I saw greatly troubled me, and my countenance changed, and I kept the matter in my heart and I was sick for certain days, and the vision just astonished me and I just had to stop looking." So whatever John sees here - and when he realizes how many generations of people have been caught up by the lies of religious men, offered hope "If you just light a candle, bow your knee, say this prayer, wear this jacket," I don't know, "Then you'll be all right." And men just boldly following and aimlessly, without any thought, getting in line. To the very last generation, "Just take the mark, you'll be fine." And John is just overwhelmed by

what he sees: the scope of the hideousness, of the harlot, the wealth and the corruption, the idolatry, and now the overthrow, and John just says, "I don't know what to do with this!" It was too much for John.

We read in verse 7 that the angel said to John, "Why did you marvel? I'll tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her." And there's that word "mystery." The mystery is of the woman and the beast; it isn't her name, as you'll find there in verse 5. "I'll tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, who has seven heads and who has these ten horns." Now John was on this island directly as a result of a political and religious persecution for his faith. So John was firsthand at seeing how this would all fall out. Now he sees the future destructiveness as it would continue in the eventual judgment that was to come. And so the angel offers to make the vision very clear to him, and what follows, then, in the rest of the chapter is his description and clarification of what John sees. So, "Let me tell you about the beast that carries her." So the angel makes it clear that Satan was behind Babylon in all of its ways.

Verse 8 - "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is." Now the beast, as we have learned, is many things in the book of Revelation. He's a king with a kingdom; he's a person, but he's also represented as a government - this last Roman Empire growing up out of the ashes will arise from this ten-nation confederacy. But notice that behind this work sits the enemy. He comes out of the bottomless pit. This Antichrist, you remember in chapter 13, supposedly was killed in an attack although chapter 13:3 says "as if" he was dead and chapter 13:14 says he was only "wounded;" but it was that which was used by the false prophet to say he was dead, now he's alive. And so this ruse will bring many folks to believing that he's the one that they should follow. In the end, the devil and the Antichrist and their kingdom of followers are all headed for perdition, for judgment. But before that, notice that many will marvel and be impressed and sign on because here's a fellow that was not and he is; he died, he's back from the dead, it must be the right one. But it was nothing more than a ruse. And John can't believe the wickedness, and the angel says that in that day many won't believe their good fortune for signing on with him. So, "Let me tell you the marvel and the mystery of this beast," the angel says to John. By the way, the beast, the Antichrist and the false prophet are not going to be allowed to last long enough to get to the Great White Throne Judgment

which we will find in chapter 20. In fact, unlike all other unbelievers who will have to stand that day and be judged out of the Book of Works because their names aren't found in the Book of Life, and no one makes it out of the Great White Throne Judgment without judgment, these two fellows will be thrown into the lake of fire early on. In fact, they'll be the first two occupants of it for some 1000 years before being joined by the devil in chapter 20:11 and then by all of the unbelievers who have died and gone before, also in chapter 20 as well.

Notice, here, as the angel is describing to John in verse 8, that those marveling are those whose names are not written in the Book of Life. And those who dwell on the earth will "marvel." The word means to "find themselves overjoyed," almost; it's a positive term in a negative context. "Oh man, we found the right guy now. This is it!" But they are only those whose names are not written in the Book of Life since the foundation of the world. The religious are taken in, those who don't know the Lord are taken in, and those who have taken the mark of the beast are taken in. Interestingly enough, this is a perfect-tense-passive verb which literally says "those whose names were never written there." Now everywhere else in the Scriptures you would come to the conclusion that God has written every name in the Book of Life, that there is always that threat - if you don't turn to Him, then your name will be taken out or blotted out. But these, in particular, were never written there, and it is interestingly set aside by the verb tense because God knew and acted accordingly - doesn't make them any less responsible, mind you, but this was a generation that signed on with the devil that God said won't make it. And they've gone beyond the chapter 14 time of grace, and they now find themselves having sealed their fate - taking his mark.

Verse 9 - "Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains upon which the woman sits. And there are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other is yet to come. And when he comes, he must continue for a short time. And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and he is of the seven, and he is going to perdition." Now, the seven heads are both mountains and kings. No doubt, as we've said each time, these seven heads represent the seven world governments, and the last one will be that revival of the old Roman Empire. And they are mountains in the sense that they are powerful. And so, upon that power, the beast sits. There are those anti-Catholic folks who would love to tell you this is the Catholic church. I was raised Catholic. I wouldn't be offended if that was true. It's just not here Biblically. I'm glad to have come to know the Lord, but I think that the folks who, like I said, single out religions - I

think they're nearsighted and shortsighted. This is a picture of world works by God since the days of the fall of Babylon and the development of false religions.

In each of these world-governing powers, Satan has been at the helm using the harlot of religion to blind men. So, by the time John writes this near the end of the 1st century, there had been world five empires. In fact, Egypt had fallen, Assyria had fallen, the Babylonians had fallen, the Medo Persians had fallen, the Greeks had fallen, and the Romans were in power at John's time. So five had fallen, one was, and then there is one yet to come. Since the fall of the Roman Empire, and depending on whether you're in the West or the East - it fell at different times - there has not been a world-governing empire, but one is yet coming; one which will be the basis for the takeover by Satan and this man of sin and rising out of this ten-nation confederacy. In essence, the beast will be the ruler of the seventh, but then he will replace three of the nations with three of his own choosing so, in that form, he'll be an eighth. There will be a seventh world-governing power; and then because he will reconstitute it and take it over, he'll be the eighth, but he'll really be part of the seventh as he makes this final grab for power before the Lord returns.

Verse 12 says, "The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they will receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. They are of one mind, and they will give their power and their authority to the beast. And these will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is the Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful." That's you!!! Nice to be called, chosen, and faithful - at least to be seen as such.

This verse 14 brings the chronology of Revelation again to this final world government - now to face Jesus who is coming to make war with those who have come to make war with the Lamb. It's a hopeless struggle - man standing against God. But the battle will be over here soon enough.

"Then he said to me," verse 15, 'The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, they are multitudes and nations and tongues. And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, they will make her desolate and naked, and eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.'" And so John defines the waters of verse 1

here as being a religious system over many generations, and then he tells them that this harlot, who will play such a great part in electing and establishing the Antichrist, will eventually be turned on as well; and this false church will be destroyed by the Antichrist because he wants no competitors for the throne. So, not only is she duped in her religious ways, but she is duped into throwing her hope and her ambition in behind the Antichrist because he will turn on her as well. When he comes to demand worship as the only God, even the lost - I suspect - will protest and yet, then the judgment will fall. So politics uses religion to gain power with man, but its ultimate purposes have nothing to do with religion. And I think you can see that even today, can't you? Politics and religion are great bedfellows. If they can get your votes, "Praise the Lord!" But when it comes to voting, the Lord is usually the last one consulted. So, that is nothing new, and it certainly won't be anything new in these last days. In the end, the Antichrist will turn against the religion that made him and take her power and her wealth and authority and leave her naked and desolate. Great god to serve isn't it, that Satan? Really for you. False religion will be destroyed by the chief of false religions, and verse 17 says very clearly the Lord's will is that it would fall.

Well, then we read in verse 18, "And the woman who you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth." This false religious influence and power will originate from Jerusalem, from which the Antichrist will rule the world; but the reference here is probably to Babylon, where there is that founding of false religion. Today, I think that the religious deception is fairly subtle. You sometimes have to listen twice and read three times to see where people are coming from; are they believers or are they just corrupt, what's going on here? In the final days, that won't be so subtle. Like I said, politicians love to use religion to get votes on the right and on the left, but the church - we as the church - our main responsibility is to preach the gospel. We may get people elected that we like, but there's no real salvation in elections. There's salvation in choosing Christ. There's salvation in being saved. You should be a good citizen individually, but collectively I think our call is to preach the kingdom of heaven. And God help us.

Paul said to the Philippians, "Our citizenship is in heaven." The word "citizenship" in Greek is the word for politics. So, that's our home, right? So, if you want to campaign vigorously, preach! Preach the gospel, and share the Lord. Because ultimately notice, from chapter 17, that this harlot who has run many lives and deceived many hearts and filled with corruption many generations, is not leading you to the place of life; and in the end, those folks that will be caught up with this

liar, the Antichrist, and with all of the subtlety of a freight train, will take his mark, will have no hope, but their future will be judgment and facing the judgment of God.

In like manner, chapter 18 turns from the religious loss and the hope of religious men to the loss of the commercial and vision of men, all under the banner of Babylon - the ways of men trying to make things the way that they want. And he will say of them in verse 3, next week, "They're drunk with the desire for luxury. And they're drunk with the ambition for gain. And it's all going to burn. And the vendors are going to stand along the side of the street saying, 'There's nothing to buy. There's nothing to sell. Oh, life stinks.'" That's right. Because there's more to life than what you buy and what you sell. It's who you know and where you're going. But the merchandise and the merchants - verse 11 chapter 18 - "Weeping and mourning over her, no one buys their merchandise anymore." Verse 14 - "The fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you. The things which are rich and splendid have gone from you. You don't find them anymore." And then they just begin to weep, "Where's the great city? Where's the great city where all the ships of the sea brought their riches and wealth? In one hour, she's desolate. Oh, what are we going to do?" Well, there you go. When Jesus comes, all that stuff isn't going to be worth much. But your relationship will. So, we probably should have done chapter 18 in light of Christmas, but we'll get it right afterward.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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