Lesson 29 Rev 17:1-18

Revelation 17:1-18 (NASB)

- ¹ 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 harlot who sits on many waters,
- ² with whom the kings of the earth committed *acts of* immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality."
- ³ And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns.
- ⁴ The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality,
- ⁵ and on her forehead a name *was* written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."
- ⁶ 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.
- And the angel said to me, "Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.
- ⁸ "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.
- ⁹ "Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits,
- ¹⁰ and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while.
- ¹¹ "The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is *one* of the seven, and he goes to destruction.
- ¹² "The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour.
- 13 "These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast.
- ¹⁴ "These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him *are the* called and chosen and faithful."
- And he *said to me, "The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.
- ¹⁶ "And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire.
- ¹⁷ "For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled.
- ¹⁸ "The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth."

K. The fall of Babylon (chaps. 17-18)

Babylon—the source of so many heathen and pagan religions which have opposed the faith of Israel as well as the faith of the church—is here seen in its final judgment. These chapters do not

fall chronologically within the scheme of the seals, trumpets, and bowls of the wrath of God, and expositors have had difficulty in determining precisely the meaning of the revelation in these chapters.

In general, however, in <u>chapter 17</u> Babylon is seen in its religious character climaxing in a world religion which seems to fit the first half of the last seven years preceding Christ's second coming. <u>Chapter 17</u> also records the destruction of Babylon by the 10 kings (<u>v. 16</u>).

<u>Chapter 18</u>, by contrast, seems to refer to Babylon as a political power and as a great city and as the seat of power of the great world empire which will dominate the second half of the last seven years before Christ's return. Babylon, referred to about 300 times in the Bible, is occasionally viewed as a <u>satanic religious program opposing</u> the true worship of God, but primarily it is viewed as a political power with a great city bearing the name Babylon as its capital. The end times bring together these two major lines of truth about Babylon and indicate God's final judgment on it

1. RELIGIOUS BABYLON DESTROYED (CHAP. 17)

<u>17:1-2.</u> One of the seven angels (in <u>chap. 16</u>) who had one of the seven bowls invited John to witness the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. This evil woman symbolizes the <u>religious system</u> of Babylon, and the waters symbolize "peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages" (<u>v. 15</u>). The angel informed John that <u>the kings of the earth</u> had <u>committed adultery</u> with the woman; in other words, they had become a part of the religious system which she symbolized (cf. <u>14:8</u>).

17:3-5. John was then taken in **the Spirit** (or better, "in [his] spirit," i.e., in a vision, not bodily; cf. 1:10; 4:2) to a **desert** where he saw the **woman** herself. She was **sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names.** The beast **had 7 heads and 10 horns.** The beast is an obvious reference to the world government (13:1). The 10 horns are later defined (17:12) as 10 kings who had "not yet received a kingdom." The 7 heads seem to refer to prominent rulers of the yet-future Roman Empire.

The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones, and pearls. Her adornment is similar to that of religious trappings of ritualistic churches today. While purple, scarlet, gold, precious stones, and pearls can all represent beauty and glory in relation to the true faith, here they reveal a false religion that prostitutes the truth.

In her hand the woman held a golden cup... filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries (cf. "the wine of her adulteries" in v. 2). This confirms previous indications that her character and life are symbolic of false religion, confirmed by the words written on her forehead: MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. The NASB and NIV are probably right in separating the word "mystery" from the title which follows because the word "mystery" is not a part of the title itself; it describes the title.

The Bible is full of information about Babylon as the source of false religion, the record beginning with the building of the tower of Babel (Gen. 10-11). The name "Babel" suggests "confusion" (Gen. 11:9). Later the name was applied to the city of Babylon which itself has a long history dating back to as early as 3,000 years before Christ. One of its famous rulers was Hammurabi (1728-1686 B.C.). After a period of decline Babylon again rose to great heights under Nebuchadnezzar about 600 years before Christ. Nebuchadnezzar's reign (605-562 B.C.) and the subsequent history of Babylon is the background of the Book of Daniel.

Babylon was important not only politically but also religiously. Nimrod, who founded Babylon (Gen. 10:8-12), had a wife known as Semiramis who founded the secret religious rites of the Babylonian mysteries, according to accounts outside the Bible. Semiramis had a son with an alleged miraculous conception who was given the name Tammuz and in effect was a false fulfillment of the promise of the seed of the woman given to Eve (Gen. 3:15).

Various religious practices were observed in connection with this false Babylonian religion, including recognition of the mother and child as God and of creating an order of virgins who became religious prostitutes. Tammuz, according to the tradition, was killed by a wild animal and then restored to life, a satanic anticipation and counterfeit of Christ's resurrection. Scripture condemns this false religion repeatedly (Jer. 7:18; 44:17-19, 25; Ezek. 8:14). The worship of Baal is related to the worship of Tammuz.

After the Persians took over Babylon in 539 B.C., they discouraged the continuation of the mystery religions of Babylon. Subsequently the Babylonian cultists moved to Pergamum (or Pergamos) where one of the seven churches of Asia Minor was located (cf. Rev. 2:12-17). Crowns in the shape of a fish head were worn by the chief priests of the Babylonian cult to honor the fish god. The crowns bore the words "Keeper of the Bridge," symbolic of the "bridge" between man and Satan. This handle was adopted by the Roman emperors, who used the Latin title *Pontifex Maximus*, which means "Major Keeper of the Bridge." And the same title was later used by the bishop of Rome. The pope today is often called the *pontiff*, which comes from pontifex. When the teachers of the Babylonian mystery religions later moved from Pergamum to Rome, they were influential in paganizing Christianity and were the source of many so-called religious rites which have crept into ritualistic churches. Babylon then is the symbol of apostasy and blasphemous substitution of idol-worship for the worship of God in Christ. In this passage Babylon comes to its final judgment.

17:6. The woman symbolizing the apostate religious system, was drunk with the blood of the saints. This makes it clear that the apostate religious system of the first half of the last seven years leading up to Christ's second coming will be completely devoid of any true Christians. As a matter of fact the apostate church will attempt to kill all those who follow the true faith. John expressed his great astonishment at this revelation.

<u>17:7-8</u>. The angel explained the meaning of the woman and of the beast she was riding. The beast... will come up out of the Abyss, the home of Satan (<u>11:7</u>) and the place from which demons come (<u>9:1-2</u>, <u>11</u>). This indicates that the power behind the ruler is satanic (cf. <u>13:4</u>) and that Satan and the man he controls are closely identified. Their power is one. The fact that the beast was, now is not, and will come up in the future is another indication of what was

introduced in $\underline{13:3}$. The supernatural survival and revival of both the world ruler and his empire will impress the world as being supernatural and will lead to worship of the beast and Satan. (On the book of life see comments on $\underline{3:5}$; $\underline{13:8}$. Also cf. $\underline{20:12}$, $\underline{15}$; $\underline{21:27}$.)

How so we get this?

17:9-11. The angel informed John, This calls for a mind with wisdom (cf. 13:18). The truth that is being presented here symbolically requires spiritual insight to be understood, and the difficulty of correct interpretation is illustrated by the various ways it has been interpreted in the history of the church.

The angel informed John that the beast's **heads are seven hills on which the woman sits.** Many ancient writers, such as Victorinus, who wrote one of the first commentaries on the Book of Revelation, identified the seven hills as Rome, often described as "the city of seven hills." This identification has led to the conclusion this passage teaches that Rome will be the capital of the coming world empire. Originally Rome included seven small mountains along the Tiber River, and the hills were given the names Palatine, Aventine, Caelian, Equiline, Viminal, Quirimal, and Capitoline. Later, however, the city expanded to include the hill Janiculum and also a hill to the north called Pincian. While Rome is often referred to as having seven hills or mountains, different writers do not necessarily name the same seven mountains.

A close study of the passage <u>does not support</u> the conclusion that this refers to the city of Rome. Seiss, for instance, offers extensive evidence that the reference is to rulers rather than to physical mountains (*The Apocalypse*, pp. 391-94). This is supported by the text which explains, **They are also seven kings** (lit., "the seven heads are seven kings"). If the mountains represent kings, then obviously they are not literal mountains and refer not to a literal Rome but to persons.

This view is also supported by <u>verse 10</u>, **Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while.** John was writing from his point of view in which five prominent kings of the Roman Empire had already come and gone, and one was then on the throne (probably Domitian, who caused the persecution which put John on the island of Patmos). The identity of the seventh king, the one to come after John's time, is unknown.

<u>Verse 11</u> adds that the final world empire will be headed by **an eighth king.... The beast who once was, and now is not.... belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction. The eighth king is obviously identical to the final world ruler, the man who heads up the final world empire destroyed by Christ at His second coming.**

One possible explanation of the difference between the seventh and eighth beast is that the seventh beast itself is the Roman Empire marvelously revived in the end time, and the eighth beast is its final ruler. These verses show that in the end time, particularly during the first half of the last seven years, there will be an alliance between the Middle East ruler (the Antichrist) and the apostate world church of that time. This will come to a head, however, at the midpoint of the seven years, when that political power becomes worldwide.

<u>17:12-14.</u> <u>Verse 12</u> explains that **the 10 horns... are 10 kings.** While many commentators have tried to identify 10 successive kings in the past, the passage itself indicates that they are

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contemporaneous kings who are heads of the countries which will form the original alliance in the Middle East that will support the future world ruler. They will receive authority for one hour... as kings along with the beast. While the 7 heads may be chronologically successive rulers of the Roman Empire who are singled out as prominent, the 10 horns by contrast are contemporaneous with each other, and as the text indicates they will receive political power for a brief time.

The 10 kings will unite their **power** to support **the beast** (v. 13), the Middle East ruler who will emerge in the end time and will make a covenant with Israel seven years before the second coming of Christ. Their antagonism to Christ is indicated throughout the entire seven years. And when Christ returns, these 10 kings will **war against** Him but will be defeated (v. 14). Interestingly Christ **the Lamb** is also the **Lord of lords and King of kings** (cf. 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 19:16).

APL)

17:15. Verse 1 stated that the woman "sits on many waters." These waters are now interpreted as peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages. This indicates that there will be one ecumenical world religious system, embracing all nations and languages. (Represent many)

milze

17:16-18. The chapter closes with the dramatic destruction of the woman. The beast (the world and get it is ruler, the Antichrist) and the 10 horns (10 kings) will hate the prostitute and will bring her to ruin. While the exact time of this event is not given in this passage, it would seem to occur at the midpoint of the seven years when the beast will assume the role of world dictator by proclamation (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15).

When the ruler in the Middle East takes on worldwide political power, he will also assume the place of God and demand that everyone worship him or else be killed (cf. Dan. 11:36-38; 2 Thes. My 2 2:4; Rev. 13:8, 15). The world church movement, which characterizes the first half of the seven years leading up to the Second Coming, is thus brought to an abrupt end. It will be replaced by the final form of world religion which will be the worship of the world ruler, Satan's substitute for Christ.

This is part of God's sovereign purpose to bring evil leaders into judgment, For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish His purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled.

The final description of the woman is given in 17:18: The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth. The reference to the woman as a city is another link with ancient Babylon, this time regarded as a religious center for false religion. The apostate church represented by the woman was a combination of religious and political power. As stated in verse 5, the city and the woman are a "mystery," and are therefore a symbolic presentation. Verse 18, however, introduces the next chapter which seems to refer to Babylon more as a literal city than as a religious entity.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

Open it

1. What are some examples of champions or winners?

Athletes, movie stars, horses

2. What do you think of all the recent talk of a "new world order"?

I read the signs in the bible and wait for the rapture

Explore it

3. What did one of the seven angels show John? (17:1)

The great harlot who sits on many waters

4. How did the angel describe the evil of the "great prostitute"? (17:2)

The kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality

5. What did John see when the angel carried him away? (17:3)

I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horn

6. What could John tell about the woman he saw? (17:6)

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.

7. What amazed John? (17:6)

That she would kill so many

8. What did the angel explain to John? (17:7)

And the angel said to me, "Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

9. Why will people all over the world be astonished at the beast? (17:8)

"The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come

10. How did the angel explain the seven heads of the beast? (17:9-11)

Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, ¹⁰ and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. ¹¹ The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction

11. What action will the ten kings take and what will be the result? (17:13-14)

The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. ¹³ These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast. These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome

them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful."

- 12. What was the significance of the waters that John saw the woman sitting on? (17:15) "The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues
- 13. What is the relationship between the beast, the ten kings, and the prostitute? (17:16-18)

And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. ¹⁷ For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled. ¹⁸ The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth."

Get it

- 14. How significant do you think it is that ancient Babylon is being rebuilt in modern-day Iraq?

 It is getting closer to the time all this is to happen
- 15. What in your opinion is the best way to understand the symbolism in this passage—the prostitute, the seven heads or hills, and the ten kings?

Read numerous commentary's and compare explanations

- 16. How would you describe the difference between knowledge and wisdom?
 - Knowledge is knowing what to do, wisdom is knowing when to do it
- 17. Why is it so important for us to seek wisdom from God?

So we can lead others to understand what is going to happen

18. How do you think you should respond differently to worldly events and situations after having studied this chapter?

Still watch and see what happens

19. How should our behavior or life-style reflect the truth that Jesus is Lord of lords and King of kings?

Do as Jesus has commanded us to do, and do it as he would

Apply it

20. What can you use to remind yourself each day this week of God's rule and superiority over all evil in the world?

Bible, sticky note, devotional, bible study, listen online to preachers

21. What can you do to learn from the wisdom of more mature Christians?

Ask and sit quietly and listen to what they say.

Revelation 1:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like *the sound* of a trumpet,

Revelation 4:2 (NASB)

² Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.

Revelation 13:1 (NASB)

¹ And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns *were* ten diadems, and on his heads *were* blasphemous names.

Revelation 17:12 (NASB)

¹² "The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour.

Genesis 11:9 (NASB)

⁹ Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.

Genesis 10:8 (NASB)

⁸ Now Cush became the father of Nimrod; he became a mighty one on the earth.

Genesis 10:9 (NASB)

⁹ He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD."

Genesis 10:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ The beginning of his kingdom was Babel and Erech and Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.

Genesis 10:11 (NASB)

¹¹ From that land he went forth into Assyria, and built Nineveh and Rehoboth-Ir and Calah,

Genesis 10:12 (NASB)

¹² and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city.

Genesis 3:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."

Jeremiah 7:18 (NASB)

¹⁸ "The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and *they* pour out drink offerings to other gods in order to spite Me.

Jeremiah 44:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ "But rather we will certainly carry out every word that has proceeded from our mouths, by burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, just as we ourselves, our forefathers, our kings and our princes did in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for *then* we had plenty of food and were well off and saw no misfortune.

Jeremiah 44:18 (NASB)

¹⁸ "But since we stopped burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have met our end by the sword and by famine." **Jeremiah 44:19 (NASB)**

¹⁹ "And," said the women, "when we were burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and were

pouring out drink offerings to her, was it without our husbands that we made for her *sacrificial* cakes in her image and poured out drink offerings to her?"

Jeremiah 44:25 (NASB)

- thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, as follows: 'As for you and your wives, you have spoken with your mouths and fulfilled *it* with your hands, saying, "We will certainly perform our vows that we have vowed, to burn sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her." Go ahead and confirm your vows, and certainly perform your vows!' **Ezekiel 8:14 (NASB)**
- ¹⁴ Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the LORD'S house which *was* toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz.

Jeremiah 7:18 (NASB)

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¹⁴ Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the LORD'S house which *was* toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz.

Revelation 11:7 (NASB)

⁷ When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them.

Revelation 9:1 (NASB)

¹ Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him.

Revelation 9:2 (NASB)

² He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit.

Revelation 9:11 (NASB)

¹¹ They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.

Revelation 13:4 (NASB)

⁴ they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?"

Revelation 13:3 (NASB)

³ *I saw* one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed *and followed* after the beast;

Revelation 20:12 (NASB)

¹² And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

Revelation 20:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 21:27 (NASB)

²⁷ and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Revelation 13:18 (NASB)

¹⁸ Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.

1 Timothy 6:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,

Revelation 19:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

Daniel 9:27 (NASB)

²⁷ "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate."