

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

The Vision of the Harlot Babylon the Great

Revelation 17:1-6

INTRODUCTION:

Just as we thought we might be coming out of the woods from the difficulties of Revelation, we step into chapter 17. As this morning we are introduced to a character that has only been mentioned in passing in previous chapters. This character is this great harlot of Revelation named Babylon the Great.

It is very easy to get sidetracked with the details in this chapter. **It is very important that we understand the purpose of this vision.** We will find that the purpose is given to us in verse 1. "I will show you the judgment of the great harlot." The purpose is to show the destruction and punishment of the prostitute. THAT IS THE POINT!

There will be people who will try to talk about the anti-Christ. We will have people who will try to determine the date of the writing of this book from this passage. We will have people trying to predict the future...THAT IS NOT THE POINT. The angel says "I want to show you the punishment and destruction of the prostitute". This is ultimately what is going to happen. THIS is the forest. Don't get lost by looking only at the trees!

Revelation 17 is all one unit but it is divided into two parts. Verses 1-6 tell of a vision. The remainder of the chapter gives an interpretation of the vision. The ironic part about this chapter is that the interpretation is harder to interpret than the vision itself. Which is something you will need to wrap your mind around.

But I remind you, this book was written as a REVELATION. God is having this written so we can understand the events that are going on around us and remain ready for Christ's second coming. It is not intended to be a mystery! So we must diligently search for understanding through our personal study.

This week we will deal with the vision. Next week, Lord willing, we will get more into the details of the interpretation of this vision concerning this harlot's future fate.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Revelation 17:1-6 (NASB)

17 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, ²with 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." ³And 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. ⁴The 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.

Prayer

Our Father we thank You that You have preserved for us this Revelation from Christ. I thank you that we can read it and hear it and preach it freely. I pray that we will all cherish this opportunity to gain a better understanding of what is being revealed here. We pray that You, through Your Holy Spirit, will be present in our midst that the message may be driven deep into our minds. Allow these words to work through us and bear much fruit for You. Help me to present this message with clarity and accuracy that Your Son may be glorified.

In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

One of the main things we have learned thus far in this book, is that our Christian life is a battle. We have been shown who some of the primary forces against us are in this battle.

- There is the **dragon**, which the scriptures tell us is Satan. We saw back in chapter 12 that he is in mad pursuit of the church. He has chased us into the wilderness and he is seeking to devour the church anyway that he can.
- We also saw the **beast that came out of the sea** in chapter 13. This beast is the Satanically inspired kingdoms and governments of the world that is formulated by the dragon to be his ally by bringing governmental **persecution** to the church.
- Then we were introduced to the **beast that came up out of the earth** which we are told is the false prophet. He, too, would work with the dragon and the first beast as an agent of **deception** through worldly institutions to try to draw individuals into worshipping the beast.

So these are the agents that we are warring against. Thus we have learned that the primary weapons that they are using so far is **persecution** and **deception**.

These are the methods that Satan and the beasts use to try to deceive men and ultimately destroy the church.

When we are introduced to the Great Harlot, or **prostitute** in our modern language, we learn of a **third** weapon that is used against the church. That weapon comes in the form of **seduction** and **temptation** as she works to draw all those on earth away from God and into some form of idolatry. The harlot will be working with Satan and the beasts to attempt to destroy the church.

So our task this morning will be to identify who this woman is and how she operates. We must understand these things in order to avoid being brought under her spell. Being aware of her mission of trying to pull us away from Christ will help prevent us from unknowingly being brought under her seduction.

BODY:

I. THE JUDGMENT OF THE GREAT PROSTITUTE.

Revelation 17 starts with one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls inviting John to come and see a vision. Remember the **purpose** of this vision was to show the severity of the **judgment** against the Great prostitute when Christ returns.

Revelation 16:19b (NASB)

¹⁹ ...Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.

Then he tells us again in verse 1 that we might not forget the purpose.

Revelation 17:1b(NASB)

17 ...“Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters,

Then the Great Prostitute is identified in verse 5 as Babylon the Great.

Up until now, we have not had a close-up of this woman yet. Chapter 17 is not only intended to identify this woman but it is also intended to show us this harlot's fate. We get a brief look at her here in the vision. During the interpretation we will be given more details concerning her judgment and fate.

We read here that she sits on many waters. We will learn in verse 15 the interpretation that the waters represent.

Revelation 17:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ And he *said to me, “The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.

In other words her **seduction** will be over the entire earth. Notice there are **four** groups mentioned (peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues). The number four is like the compass pointing North, East, South, and West and is used symbolically to represent all the peoples of the earth. Her powerful and seductive influence reaches across the whole world.

Verse 2 tells us that the kings of the earth and those who dwell on the earth will feast on the immorality and sexual pleasure that her seduction produces. Any time Revelation refers to the "earth dwellers", it is referring to non-believers. So even though Christians, those with the Seal of God on their foreheads, live among this immorality, they do not desire to participate in the seduction.

II. THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE GREAT PROSTITUTE.

So for now, the question is "Who is Babylon the Great?"

The place to begin this identification search is her name. We find her name in verse 5.

Revelation 17:5 (NASB)

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.”

That is significant because we have learned in Revelation that names or markings on the

hands or forehead are given to identify individuals, reveal their character, and reveal where their allegiance belongs.

For example we saw that those who follow the beast symbolically had the **Mark of the Beast** on their hands or forehead. Conversely, those who follow the Lamb (or Christ) have the **Seal of God** on their forehead. So when we see a name on a forehead it reveals character and identity.

The name on this woman's forehead tells us a lot about her. It starts by referring to her by the name of the ancient city of **Babylon the Great**. The city of Babylon was the very powerful and wealthy capitol of the Babylonian empire. Babylon is known for the devastating role they played in Israel's life. Babylon is was the army that came into Jerusalem in the sixth century BC and destroyed the temple, killed many of its citizens, and took many more into captivity including Daniel.

Babylon also has a very deep history of idolatry. In Daniel chapter 3 we read of king Nebuchadnezzar who built a giant statue of himself made of solid gold and was nine stories tall. He demanded that all the people come and bow down and worship in front of this massive idol of himself. If they refused to do so they would face death in the lion's den. Daniel was actually thrown into the lion's den because he refused to worship the statue, but an angel of the Lord closed the lions mouth and saved Daniel.

So Babylon stood out among Old Testament scripture as being the archenemy of God's people. Thus the name "Babylon" on the harlot's head draws upon the reputation of this corrupt city. Babylon symbolically represents those who oppose God through immorality and idolatry.

The second name was "**the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth**". This is not saying that she is literally the mother of all prostitutes although there is a sexual connotation attached to this name. Throughout scripture, when one prostitutes themselves, it always symbolizes idolatry. If someone is said to "play the harlot", what it is saying is that that person has forsaken the Lord and abandoned Him for another God. They become "lovers" with something else and chased after other Gods.

This is not trying to identify an actual woman. It is a vision. This woman symbolizes an evil spiritual power of seduction and temptation that exists on this earth. It promotes idolatry, immorality, and sexual pleasure throughout the earth.

III. THE APPEARANCE OF THE GREAT PROSTITUTE.

Revelation 17:4 (NASB)

⁴The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls,

This adornment is not given to us only to reflect the attractiveness of the harlot although it is certainly described partially for that reason. **It is like saying that she was standing on the street corner with a miniskirt, low-cut top, and black thigh-high boots. We all are familiar with the identity of those people.** The way she is arrayed are also symbols of wealth and luxury. You have gold, jewels, pearls, and finely dyed fabric. These are used to seduce others into a relationship with her. She uses wealth along with sexual pleasure to pull you away from God and into an idolatrous relationship with worldly things.

That is why John sees her as a richly dressed prostitute. He sees her "having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality." Sexual immorality and material excess are the means by which she lures those who dwell on earth into idolatry. By idolatry I do not just mean that they start engraving little statues and images and bow down before them. Idolatry means that they are exalting their passions or other people other than the Lord to a place of supremacy in their lives.

Paul talked about this in...

Romans 1:24-32 (NASB)

²⁴Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. ²⁵For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

²⁶For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, ²⁷and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

²⁸And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, ²⁹being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; ³²and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

We see this seduction happening around us all of the time. We see it on reality TV and on shows for "mature" audiences. We see it on x-rated and even PG movie screens. We see it in the news and on the streets. We see pornography and nakedness on the internet. It is everywhere because the world finds great pleasure, at least for a short time, in passionate relationships.

We see in verse 3 that she does not work alone in this seduction. Her partner is the beast.

Revelation 17:3 (NASB)

³And 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.

We have already identified this beast with seven heads and ten horns. This is the beast that came up out of the sea which symbolizes the Satanically inspired kingdoms and governments of the world that oppose Christ and His church. While the beast is persecuting the church and even killing some of them, the woman Babylon is trying to seduce the church in other ways. They are both trying to defeat the church.

Revelation 17: 6 (NASB)

⁶And 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.

She is able to pull men away from God with her wealth and sexual seduction, she is excessively drunk with the blood of the saints.

When we put all of this together, we have a pretty clear picture of the identity of the woman Babylon the Great. She represents the economic and the non-Christian religious forces and systems of the world that work in conjunction with the governments to oppose the people of God. She uses wealth and sex to draw men away from God and into idolatry.

CONCLUSION:

The beautifully arrayed seductress is attractive to us in the same way seeking wealth and sexual pleasure is. She is attractive to us! She is the one who makes our pulse beat and our hearts race. Yet the message of chapters 17 and 18 is that those who follow after such things will suffer doom. They tell us of the severe judgment that awaits them.

At this time I would like to look back at the interlude in chapter 14. The interludes in Revelation are written to be a message for the church. When we read of the judgments and the seemingly impossible task of overcoming Satan it would be easy to get discouraged. We might very well ask "Who **IS** able to Stand"?

Chapter 14 tells us of the doom of those who follow their passions as opposed to those who remain steadfast and are found standing when Jesus returns to earth.

Revelation 14:6-12 (NASB)

⁶ And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; ⁷ and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters."

⁸ And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality."

⁹ Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, ¹⁰ he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." ¹² Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

Is your relationship with God one that worships and fears Him and gives Him glory? Are you able to avoid seduction and temptation in your life? Does your wealth get in the way of serving God? When we are faced with these temptations the desire to persevere and keep the commandments of God should exceed the desire to give in to the seduction of sexuality and sin. This is because we understand the judgment that awaits the harlot and those who have the mark of the beast. Earthly pleasure and wealth are only temporary. The satisfaction from it may only be for a few minutes. But, because of the grace of God, our perseverance will lead to eternal life with God. **REMAIN STEADFAST!**

This is the Day!