

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Who is Babylon the Great?

Revelation 17:6-7, 14-18

INTRODUCTION:

Just as we thought we might be coming out of the woods from the difficulties of Revelation, we stepped into chapters 17 and 18. As these two chapters introduce us to the 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!

That is the intended message of chapters 17 & 18. The ultimate judgment of the harlot is the forest. We must be very careful that we do not get lost by looking only at the trees!

Last week we looked at the vision in verses 1-6. The remainder of the chapter gives an interpretation of the vision. The ironic part 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. It is not intended to be a mystery or a difficult riddle to unravel! 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.

I have broken this chapter into three sermons. Last week we looked at the vision. Today we are going to identify the Harlot, Babylon the Great. Next week, Lord willing, we will identify the Scarlet Beast that the Harlot rode in on and his role with the Harlot.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Revelation 17:6-7, 14-18 (NASB)

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 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.

...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."

¹⁵ 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.”

BODY:

I. THE SYMBOLISM OF BABYLON THE GREAT.

Some read this passage and believe that Babylon will be a revived Roman empire. Rome was destroyed by the Medes and Persians in . Babylon will never to be a world power ever again. Such as the Medes and Persons, Greeks, and Romans and even Russia, China, and the United States today. Most would agree that the prophecy from Jeremiah about the destruction of Babylon have been fulfilled. So reading Revelation 17 and interpreting it to say that Babylon is going to be a world power again has a problem.

The problem with this interpretation is that Revelation was not written to be read literally. When we read Revelation literally, we are totally ignoring genre.

The genre here is apocalyptic. We interpret apocalyptic writings as symbolic. We are seeing visions here, so the interpretations are not to be literal.

There is a lot of recapitulation in Revelation. You see the same thing repeated multiple times in Revelation. So when John talks about "**only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads**" you know who that refers to, right? Remember in chapter 7 we saw the sealing of the 144,000 on their foreheads that represented all of the people of God? We looked at why it was symbolized that way and, to verify it, we jumped ahead to chapter 22 where we then see those with the name of God on their foreheads now in heaven. It is not a literal 144,000 people, but as Rev. 7:9 tells us it is "**a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes**".

John is not trying to identify an actual woman in this passage. It is a vision. This woman symbolizes an evil spiritual power of idolatry and seduction through immorality and wealth that exists on this earth. It personified by the worldly government or systems on this earth.

II. WHO IS BABYLON THE GREAT?

Who is this "person" Babylon the Great"?

She is the ungodly world system that has existed throughout the ages and will continue to exist until the end of history.

Why do I think that?

1. Here in chapter 17 we have a woman who is a prostitute. As you look at the rest of the book, she is contrasted clearly with a pure woman.
2. In chapter 12 there is a woman who represents the people of God who is pure and gives birth to a male child who is to rule the nations.
3. In chapter 21 we are going to see the bride of the lamb (Bride of Christ).

These are not literal women, they represent the true church or those who are God's people with the Seal of God on their foreheads and have their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Not only does this show that the woman Babylon the Great must be symbolic, but the women in chapters 12 and 21 that represent God's people do not represent just **one** person but spans the ages. So the woman Babylon is an evil world system spanning the ages which is in total contrast to the bride of Christ, the people of God.

Babylon the Great not only commits immorality, but as a harlot. she initiates it. She is like the woman in Proverbs 7 who goes here and there looking for a young naïve person to go with her. She kisses and caresses him and says "Come! Be with me!". She is a seducer. As a prostitute she attempts to seduce faithful husbands and wives away from their spouses and faithful people away from God.

ILLUSTRATION:

It reminds me of a song the was sung by Reba McIntyre name "**Is there life out there?**"

She married...when she was 20...she thought she was ready...now she's not so sure... she thought...she'd done some living...now she's just wondering...what she's living for...now she's **thinking** that there's something more...Is there life out there?...So much she hasn't done...Is there life beyond...her family and her home?...She's done what she should...Should she do what she dares?...She doesn't want to leave, she's just wondering, is there life out there?

She's always...lived for tomorrow...she's never learned how...to live for today...OH She's dying...to try something foolish...do something crazy...or just get away...Oh, something for herself for a change...Is there life out there?...So much she hasn't done...Is there life beyond...her family and her home?...She's done what she should...Should she do what she dares?...She doesn't want to leave, she's just wondering, is there life out there?

Is there a life of pleasure out there? The Harlot tries to allure the bride of the Lamb away from Christ. She attempts to turn our hearts away from the Lord. She dangles the attraction of immorality in front of us and suggests that all of our desires can be satisfied. This same allurement is described in 17:2 as intoxication.

Revelation 17:2 (NASB)

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."

They "**were made drunk with the wine of her immorality**". This is a metaphor for her alluring, attractive, irresistible nature. People think their idolatrous involvement with Babylon the Great will fulfill their desires and ensure their material security. Without such involvement, their security might be removed.

Babylon's promise of a prosperous earthly welfare is an intoxication which the majority of the world's inhabitants are not able to resist. Once a person tastes of her wine the intoxicating influence does some interesting things. Like an alcoholic beverage, it temporarily numbs you to reality such as pain and painful emotions. So when one takes of her wine of immorality, it removes their desire to resist further involvement with her even though it may mean harm. It blinds them of Babylon's own ultimate destiny of

judgment and eternal punishment. It blinds them of Who God is. Their ONLY true source of security. Because **they** think their source of security is found in the worldly system where they are living. And as they continue to be allured by her, it numbs them of a coming fear of judgment. They are lulled asleep by the security of Babylon the Great.

She is not called "the great" for nothing.

ILLUSTRATION:

Mohammad Ali did not call himself "**The Greatest**" for nothing. He would go in and duke it out. And that was it.

The harlot dukes everyone out with her great cup of wine and their "**lights are put out**".

Why do people get high or drunk? Sometimes it is to try to forget a family problem. It may be a business problem. It may be some sin that they have committed that is emotionally eating them alive.

Babylon the Great skillfully uses her seduction to intoxicate people so they will follow her and stay with her. For now, she is in control. She is in control of this world. But John wants us to know that there **IS** an ultimate judgment for the harlot and all who are seduced by her.

Revelation 18:2a, 8 (NASB)

² And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!

...⁸ For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.

For **now**, she is in control of the world.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 (NASB)

³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

For now, she is in control. She blinds the eyes of the unbelieving so they will not understand that the Gospel is their true security.

We read here that she sits on many waters.

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 the peoples of the earth. Her powerful and seductive influence reaches across the whole world. Just like the "earth dwellers", she does not worry of her destruction. She is seduced also.

Revelation 18:7 (NASB)

7 To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, 'I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning.'

These worldly systems are called Babylon the Great. 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 who oppose the people of God. She seduces us with wealth and immorality to draw us away from God and into idolatry.

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.

What was John's initial response to seeing the harlot?

- He was frightened. He **saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints**. He did not take that lightly. Neither should we. He, no doubt, could remember many friends whose blood was dripping from her mouth.
- He was confused. He was told that the vision was to show the judgment of the Great Harlot. Yet there did not seem to be any punishment here.
- He was attracted. Maybe he was struck by her power. Maybe it was because of her glitter and attractiveness.

This is the same way that the world will respond to her. The world is not able to abstain from the fleshly lusts. They greatly desire to have their fleshly lusts satisfied. They become drunk on her wine of immorality. Verses 8 tell us as much.

Revelation 17:8b (NASB)

...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.

John was initially awestruck. But now that John has taken in the full scope of Babylon's final destiny of eternal punishment, he should no longer experience any fear, confusion, or attraction. **And that is how should we respond as well!**

III. HOW ARE GOD'S PEOPLE TO RESPOND.

Revelation 18:4-5 (NASB)

⁴I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; ⁵for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.

During my preparation of this sermon, I was struck by how this verse is worded. The admonition was **NOT for the unbelievers** to come out of her. The voice from heaven said, "**Come out of her, my people**". In other words, if you are my people you will come out of her. If you do not come out of her, you are NOT my people. We are to be foreigners in our own worldly system and become citizens of the Kingdom of God.

1 Peter 2:9-11 (NASB)

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

Now that you have become a child of God, you must maintain an ongoing effort to refrain from sin and serve God. A good example of how our life should be as a child of God is found in...

2 Peter 1:4-11 (NASB)

⁴ For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (So first we must escape from the harlot) ⁵ Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, (Our faith should first be moral) and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge, (As we work on our morality we should study the scriptures) ⁶ and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness, ⁷ and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love. ⁸ For if these *qualities* are yours and **are increasing**, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ For he who lacks these *qualities* is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten *his* purification from his former sins. ¹⁰ Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; ¹¹ for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

As children of God, we are no longer of this world. God must be our first love. If through our faith we can increase in these qualities, we can be sure of our salvation.

We must continuously come to scripture and remind ourselves of what He expects from us. The problems of life can cause us to lose our perspective. God has given us the scriptures in order to have that right perspective.

CONCLUSION:

It is only by God's grace that we can avoid the way of the world. It is only by His grace that we can separate from it. We are to separate, not physically, but by identifying the world's sins and policies that pull us away from Christ. We are to avoid immorality unlike the unbelievers in the world. The world is intoxicated by the wine of the harlot and does not realize or care that judgment is coming.

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. By the grace of God, our perseverance will lead to eternal life with God. REMAIN STEADFAST!

This is the Day!