

Revelation 17

Many commentators believe chapters 17 and 18 describe the same thing, namely: the destruction of Babylon. However, Chapter 17 emphasizes the destruction of religious Babylon, whereas Chapter 18 focuses largely on commercial/economic Babylon.

John recorded a mysterious vision (vv. 1-6). **What did the angel who poured out one of the seven bowl judgments say he would show John (v. 1)?** The judgment of the great prostitute, who is called "Babylon the Great" (v. 5) -- a great religious (and commercial) system. Her predominant sin is "immorality," which is a figure for spiritual unfaithfulness. Her judgment is assured at the outset. There is never any doubt regarding the fate -- and ultimate failure -- of Babylon.

Where does the great prostitute sit? On many waters. That is, she presides over unbelieving mankind/many nations (v. 15). She has a universal, international character. The woman is a picture of false religion that will dominate the world in the tribulation period.

What was her relationship with the kings of the earth (v. 2)? With her, the world leaders committed spiritual adultery by uniting with the system she symbolized. She has seduced political leaders with her compromise and intrigue. She had a controlling influence on both the kings and the masses. Religious Babylon intoxicates kings and peoples. Karl Marx was *partly* right when he said, "Religion is the opiate of the masses." He was partly right because *empty* religion *is* the opium of the masses.

When the angel carried John away in the Spirit into a desert, what did he see (v. 3)? A woman sitting on a scarlet beast. The prostitute was riding the same beast (seven heads and ten horns) that was previously seen in Revelation 13:1, i.e. the Antichrist and his dictatorship. She was in a position of dominance over Antichrist, while he supported her (politically).

How would you describe her appearance (v. 4)? She wore expensive, attractive garments and accessories that made her appealing on the outside, but she was a counterfeit beauty.¹ To the people of the earth she will look quite religious, and have the "faith" everybody wants. With the casual disregard for the truth that cripples the church today, the church is ripe for her seduction.

What is in her hand, and what was its purpose (v. 4)? She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries to offer to the nations to drink (v. 2).

What name does she wear (v. 5)? Her name was "mystery," namely something not previously revealed but now made clear. A name in Scripture represents something about the person who bears it, often the person's reputation. She represents Babylon as the "*Mother of Prostitutes*," not just one prostitute by herself, but the fountainhead of many other evil religious systems, and everything anti-Christian. God attributed all kinds of "abominations" to her.²

What did she do to God's people (v. 6)? The woman had drunk (and was "drunk" with) the blood of believers, the blood of those who were faithful followers of Jesus. She rejoiced in their deaths.

In vv. 7-18, an angel interpreted the vision for John. How did the angel explain the mystery of the beast (v. 8)?

- He who **once was** -- refers to his origin, political appearance and rise. The beast first appears out of the abyss, the home of Satan (11:7). He later resurfaces out of the sea (13:1). He was alive.
- He who **now is not** -- refers to the time he was not present; He was mortally wounded and apparently died (13:3). He died.
- He who **will come** up out of the Abyss -- refers to his miraculous recovery/resurrection (13:3-8). He came back to life.
- He who **will go** to his destruction -- refers to his destruction at the hands of Christ at the Second Coming (19:20).
- Before he meets his end, he **will deceive** the inhabitants of the earth.....those whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world. They will be convinced to join forces with the Beast and in doing so they will condemn themselves to the same fate -- eternal torment.

What do the seven heads of the beast refer to (v. 9)? The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits.

What do the seven hills refer to (v. 9)? They are often thought of as Rome which in many minds may implicate the Roman Catholic Church's role in this vision. However, v. 15 suggests that the apostate church embraces many nations and denominations, not just the Catholic Church. It may well represent the ecumenical church.

What else do the seven heads represent (v. 10)? They represent seven past, present, and future kings and kingdoms. What are we told about the seven kingdoms?

- **Five have fallen** refers to the five world empires before John's day: Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Medo-Persia, and Greece
- **One is** refers to the prominent world empire of John's day: Rome
- **The other has not yet come** refers to the one world empire to come....the beast's kingdom....a revival of the Roman Empire.

All of these kingdoms either have persecuted, or will persecute, God's people.³

Who is the eighth king (v. 11)? The beast who once belonged to the seven, is now an eighth king with a worldwide government. He is the Antichrist. **What is the destiny of this king?** He is going to his destruction.

Who do the ten horns represent (v. 12)? Ten kings who will be allies of the beast but have not yet received a kingdom. This alludes to a ten-nation confederation which has not yet arisen. Many have seen the European Union as the potential fulfillment of this but now there are more than ten nations in this revived European power and more may be on the way.

What is the purpose of the 10 nations (v. 12-14)? They will give their power and authority to the beast and join together with the intent of defeating the Lamb and ruling the world. For one hour they will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They join with the Antichrist in the battle of Armageddon immediately preceding the return of Jesus Christ to the earth (v. 14).

What will be the outcome (v. 14)? At the very end of the Tribulation, they will make war against the Lamb as He returns to earth, but the Lamb will overcome them.....and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.

What is represented by the waters on which the prostitute sits (v. 15)? She presides over peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. This tells us that the prostitute's controlling influence is worldwide, through her connection to the beast. This will be a truly one-world religion.⁴

What will happen to the relationship between the beast, the ten kings and the prostitute (v. 16)? The great prostitute will be judged. The beast and his allies will turn on the great prostitute and thoroughly destroy her. Ultimately, the Antichrist will not tolerate any worship except of himself. They will plunder her wealth, expose her corruption, and utterly consume her ("eat her flesh"), as dogs ate Jezebel's flesh (1 Kings 21:23-24). Satan's kingdom will divide and turn against itself, the sure sign that it cannot endure.⁵

Once his power has been consolidated, the Antichrist no longer needs the help of religious Babylon. He will then work to dismantle and destroy her and her one-world religion.

What is the ultimate cause of this action (v. 17)? God's sovereign purpose. He orchestrated the judgment against religious Babylon. God will give the world just what it wants: godless religion and godless rulers.

Who is this woman (v. 18)? The woman you saw is "the great city that rules over the kings of the earth." **What great city would this be?** In John's day, there was no doubt which city reigned over the kings of the earth. Rome was the political, economic, and religious center of the world of that time. Some argue for identifying the phrase "that great city" with Jerusalem. But *Babylon* – in the sense of the world system – has always been "*the great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.*" The question for Christians is, "**Does it reign over me?**"

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes Revelation, 2017 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), p. 185

² Ibid. p. 186

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. p. 191

⁵ Ibid.