

Lesson # 55 The Woman & the Beast Revelation 17: 1-6

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Revelation 17: 1-6 (ESV)

¹Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, ² with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk." ³And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. ⁴The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. ⁵And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." ⁶And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her, I marveled greatly.

I. Introduction to Chapter 17

Immediately following the 7th Bowl being poured out, the events of chapter 19 take place. However, before we get to the details of history's last chapter, John takes us via one of the bowl angels to view the overthrow of the Antichrist, the False Prophet and the religious & political systems Satan had set up using these 2 as his front men. ①

In chapters 17 & 18, we get a glimpse of the evil that has overtaken the world in a few short years and the idolatry is likened to sexual immorality & harlotry in chapter 17. In this first section of chapter 17, this religious system is called, "a great prostitute" - v. 1; "a woman" - v. 3; "mystery Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and the earth's abominations" - v. 5; and by the end of the chapter this woman is identified for us and she is not the Roman Catholic Church as so many have postulated over the many years.

II. The Great Prostitute vv. 1-2

Man is prone to worship. This need is hard wired into our psyche by God who created us in His image. We are worshippers by nature, although, since Genesis 3 our natural bent is towards evil and sin, which combines with our tendency to worship someone or something other than the true God. Instead, anything that seems bigger than us or frightens us becomes the object of our worship if we are not guided by God in the right direction. **Romans 1:18-32** is a key passage describing man's sinful worship. Man is totally depraved and his desire to worship takes forms that carry him far away from the real God. Man will not seek the true God until God seeks him first. (**John 6:37-65; 10:26**). Even those who are saved must fight the battle and run the race and persevere because that

‘old man’ in us wants to draw us back to our sinful past ways. The words of a great hymn by Robert Robinson, “Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love; Here’s my heart, Oh take and seal it, Seal it for thy courts above.”^① The words of this hymn describe very well what we all face from time to time, even as believers. The pull of the world is strong, and must be respected and feared.

Although the true church is not found in the Tribulation, having been raptured before the Tribulation began, there will still be religion. This religion will be directed to an object of worship who has usurped the rightful place of God the Creator & Christ. As the world follows the Antichrist, who manages to deceive them at the start of the Tribulation by bringing about peace with Israel and across the world, the False Prophet will ‘manage’ the Antichrist’s campaign in a way that directs the world to worship him under deadly coercion (take the Mark or else), by signs and wonders, by a resurrection of an assassinated Antichrist. As Satan indwells Antichrist at the mid-point of the Tribulation, all the worship directed at Antichrist is really going to Satan. As Antichrist declares himself to be God at the 3 ½ year point – he is drawing glory to Satan, who by this time has indwelt the Antichrist.

Those whom the true God draws to Himself during the Tribulation will not follow this evil system and will not take the Mark, at the risk of their very lives – cf. Rev. 12:17; 13:7-9; 14:12-13, etc.

This deceptive evil religion in the Tribulation will be a very important element in the control Satan has over the populace. He has spawned every false religion that has ever existed throughout history and this final religious system will be his masterpiece & twisted crown of glory. It will bring all things we as true believers hate about false religions – hatred of Christ; vilification of real Christianity; violence; idolatry; etc. Liberality will change to devotion but to the absolutely wrong object. True ecumenism will thrive, but as already shown, I believe it will be brought under the umbrella of Satan’s true masterpiece religion – Islam, which in today’s world, appears to be the religion best able to control people’s lives both religiously and politically, especially as it uses Sharia law and terrorism to do so.

The angel in v. 1 (one of the 7 who poured the bowls) sets the tone of the chapter as he approaches John and carries him in the spirit to show John the judgment against this false religious system. This judgment finally comes at the end after the 7th Bowl, but much of this chapter describes why judgment comes as it displays the evil career of this ‘prostitute’ who holds such power during the final 7 years of history. Chapter 17 is about the spiritual judgment of Antichrist & the false religious system and chapter 18 is about the physical judgment of Antichrist and the evil worldwide commercial system.

We are introduced to this false religious system as ‘the great prostitute who is seated on many waters’. Just to show a contrast, look with me at **Rev. 21:9-10**. On one hand, we have a harlot or prostitute, and on the other, the Bride, the

wife of the Lamb...the false religion versus the true...both described symbolically as women. One is filthy, evil, debauched and immoral; while the other is pure, chaste, holy and loved by God.

To be “seated on many waters” is obviously symbolism but what does it mean? Well, in v. 15, we are given an explanation – “The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.” (NASB) This harlot has authority over the world and ancient cities. I mention cities because this harlot is also called “Mystery Babylon”, and the destruction described in chapter 18 is the ruin of a city. Cities were built on waterways because water brought life, both physical and economic. Waters brought trade and wealth, interaction and defense (and still do). Verse 1 establishes that this harlot has worldwide control of the deceived masses.

The 2nd verse describes the immorality that will be a main feature of this government controlled religion. It is not necessarily describing actual sexual immorality (although the way the world is now heading, that is likely not out of the question), but rather spiritual immorality or idolatry. The KJV and NKJV use the word ‘fornication’ here, and when we compare that word to how Israel’s idolatry was often described in the OT – ‘spiritual adultery’ – (Ezek. 6:9; 16:32; Jer. 13:27) and NT believers who apostatize are described in a similar way – James 4:4, and note Heb. 13:4 where both are called fornicators & sexually immoral, whom God will judge. What is the distinction? Only those who are married can commit ‘adultery’, while sexual sin committed outside of marriage is called sexual immorality or fornication. In Rev. 17:2, they are called fornicators because they are not God’s people, not the bride of the Lamb, but Satan’s people. ③

Both the kings and the common people commit this sexual immorality, which is devotion to this evil religious system which exalts Satan and Antichrist. Under Satan’s murderous control (cf. JN 8:44), anything short of full devotion will be dealt with harshly – by death. The ‘dwellers on earth’ have become drunk (they have lost control) on the ‘wine of their devotion’ – fully entranced and deceived – counting on their devotion to their beloved world leader to save them from the judgments that have fallen on earth for a full 3 ½ years since the 2nd Seal.

III. Mystery Babylon vv. 3-6

John is carried ‘in the spirit’ by this angel into the wilderness – perhaps Babylon in Iraq - where he now sees what the angel had told him he’d be shown in vv. 1-2. He sees “a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names” with 7 heads and 10 horns. This is showing John the strong connection between Antichrist and the false religious system. Although the Antichrist is the political leader of the world, it is the False Prophet and his religious system which pulls the world together to worship Antichrist, and which is the controlling power – note **Rev. 13:11-17** – see who is doing all this? The 2nd Beast – the False Prophet is directing attention to Antichrist.

Consider what we've been seeing in all of God's judgments in Revelation. Military power has been decimated, political alliances have been damaged or destroyed, food and water supplies disrupted, disease, natural disasters abounding, etc. Where do people turn for comfort and security? To God or to the government? The religious system grows stronger in the end because people want spiritual comfort, even if it's false spirituality and false comfort. Near the end, the religious system is really the controlling system.

By v. 16, Antichrist & the False Prophet have become enemies. Satan cannot promote or maintain unity because he is a liar and a murderer, so at some point, the Antichrist (indwelt by Satan), turns on the False Prophet, probably out of crazed jealousy, because the world is drawn to the religion rather than the Antichrist. The unholy trinity does not have single mindedness of purpose as the Holy Trinity has, so it is only a matter of time before they implode.

The beast on which the woman rides is "full of blasphemous names" because he has taken the place of God, declared himself to be God and demands to be worshipped as God. John MacArthur comments, "He will take every name that belongs to God and wear it himself."²

This beast is said to have 7 heads and 10 horns. Again, we don't have to wait long to see what this symbolism means. Verse 9 says that the 7 heads are 7 mountains that the woman is sitting on, and 7 kings, 5 fallen, 1 is, and another is to come. These are past and present kings, and we'll look more closely at them when we get to these verses (9-12), but this is describing the extent and completeness of the Antichrist's and False Prophet's control over the world through certain ruling empires. We can tell from the context that this is not describing the woman as the Roman Catholic Church (Rome famously sits on 7 hills), so the RC church is not "mystery Babylon", as popular as that idea has been among Protestants for centuries, although the RC system is a false biblical system to be sure. ④

Pope John Paul II commented in a Newsweek article on Sept. 21, 1987 that "the only hope for unifying Europe is a common religion to tie them all together."³ Now, of course, he meant the Roman Catholic religion, but in one sense, he was right – all he got wrong was the identity of the religion, because it is now more likely that Islam is the religious system which will unite Europe.

The woman (v. 4) John sees is clothed in purple and scarlet (emblems of royalty & blood or sin). This system has become wealthy and prosperous, also adorned with pearls, gold and jewels. Now that could describe the RC church as many have pointed out, because it is certainly wealthy and enjoys opulence, but by very nature, any religious system that controls everyone in the world is going to get wealthy. This Tribulation system will control all commerce, will undoubtedly exact usurious taxes and tithes to maintain a lifestyle for Antichrist and his leaders that will transcend the lifestyles of dictators like Saddam Hussein, Idi Amin and others who stripped their own nations of wealth, leaving

their people in abject poverty so they could live lives of extreme excess, which they believed was their due.

The woman holds “a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality”. If we contrast this golden cup with the cup of God’s wrath that Christ drank at Calvary or the cup of the New Covenant in His blood, we see in this golden cup the very proof of the debauched wickedness inherent in this false religion. While the promise of pleasure, wealth and health is contained in this golden cup, in reality, it contains sinful pleasure, death & destruction. It is impure, evil and idolatrous, and represents what the False Prophet deceptively holds out to the masses – hope – where there really is no hope. See **Jer. 6:10-15**. This system is bound for Hell and all who partake of this cup will follow her there. This is a symbolic cup, just as the cup of God’s wrath is symbolic, but the wrath of God is very real.

The woman has (v. 5) on her forehead a name written, “Mystery Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth.”. Historians tell us that prostitutes in ancient Rome wore a band around their heads with their name on it – even Jer. 3:3 mentions the forehead of a harlot. This woman proudly wears this identification of her rank and position.

This is a mystery religion because it has a deep Satanic connection which gives it deceptive power. This is not the name of the religion, but a description of it. It is called Babylon because that name takes us back to the first real establishment of Satanic religion, at Babel (which became Babylon) in **Gen. 11:1-8**. This was the first recorded human attempt to assemble a system to oppose God, but God scattered them across the globe from there and confounded their language. ⑤

This was the place where real rebellion occurred after the flood and is the place where God will end it all. Some want to equate Babylon with Rome or the Vatican (and some with New York City), but the actual Babylon, the city in Iraq which Saddam Hussein was rebuilding, the place where Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel lived, makes much more sense given the nature and identification of the false religious system with the best chance of becoming the religious system of Satan that controls the world for a time. This system would feel very at home in Babylon.

This ‘woman’ is intensely anti-God, intensely evil and an abomination before the true God. Jesus warned people not to be deceived or taken in by such end times deception – cf. **Matt. 24:7-24** – Satan, who easily deceived Adam and Eve in the garden, will pull off the greatest deception of all time as he draws the people of the world together to worship him through Mystery Babylon.

The nature of this woman (v. 6), this false religion is described here. She is against Christ and all who oppose her, who will not take the Mark, who will not pledge allegiance to her & Antichrist will be killed. The woman is “drunk with the blood of the saints”. As the killing becomes a thrill for the sadistic Satan and his minions, the death toll will rise among Jews & Gentile believers so that the

WW II holocaust will pale in comparison. Note **Rev. 19:1-2**. God will avenge those who lost their lives because they refused to bow and worship Antichrist or be deceived by this false system of evil masquerading as religious devotion.

True martyrs are those who die for their faith in Jesus Christ, who overcome because they refuse to be deceived and who love not their lives even unto death. These brave people stand against this Satanic system and refuse to participate, making them targets for Antichrist and the False Prophet.

Next lesson – Lesson # 56 Rev. 17:7-18 A Description of the Beast & the False Prophet

^① Robert Robinson, 1735-1790, Hymn entitled, “Come, Thy Fount”; p. 51 in Kenneth Osbeck, 101 Hymn Stories; Kregel 1982

^② John MacArthur, from a sermon entitled, “The Destruction of the Final World Religion Part 2”, code 66:60 – ⑥
Grace to You website, Rev. 17:1-6

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