

Revelation: A Study of End-Time Events

Lesson Nine: Chapter 17

Overview:

Chapters 17 and 18 are inserted between the final judgments of Chapter 16 and Christ's return with his saints and angels in Chapter 19. They describe "Babylon the Great," and cover the entire 7-year Tribulation period. This lesson covers Chapter 17 only.

We will go back to the book of Genesis to find the origin of Babylon, so that we may understand the symbolic use of the term in Revelation. We will study other Old Testament passages concerning the worship of the One True God; the similarities will show Babylon as a blasphemous mockery of true religion.

The fall of Babylon was announced in Revelation 14: 8. We will see in this study of Chapter 17 that "Babylon" is symbolic of much more than the idolatrous religious system of the world, but includes the world political and economic systems, as well. In fact, though the destruction of "Religious Babylon" ("the Mother of Prostitutes") has been decreed by God, He will use the political world leaders to carry out its destruction. This will be at the mid-point of the Tribulation period, just prior to the Antichrist assuming full control (Rev. 17:13, 17; Daniel 7:8, 21-25). At that point, both the Revived Roman Empire and the world religious system will have served their purposes: to bring all the peoples and nations of the world under the control of the Antichrist and his False Prophet.

We learned in Revelation 13, and from our study of the passages in Daniel Chapters 7 and 9, that the Antichrist will reveal his diabolical nature mid-way through the 7-year period of the Tribulation. We also learned from Revelation Chapter 13 that the False Prophet will force all to worship the Antichrist and take his mark in order to buy or sell, and survive. Those who refuse the mark will be beheaded.

Introduction:

- A) In order to understand the symbolic meaning of a word in Scripture, we must go back to the first mention of it and study its literal meaning.

- 1) The first mention of Babylon appears in Genesis 10:8-10, immediately following the account of the Flood in Noah's time. Read Gen.10:8-10.
 - a) "*Babylon*" (Hebrew: "*Babel or Babylon*) means "confusion (by mixing)." This is significant to our study!
 - b) John Walvoord explains:
"Ancient accounts indicate that the wife of Nimrod, who founded the ancient city of Babylon, became the head of the so-called Babylonian mysteries, which consisted of secret religious rites developed as part of the worship of idols in Babylon. She was known by the name of Semiramis and was a high priestess of the idol worship." This religious system of idolatry spread throughout the world, and is the origin of pagan religion. ¹
- 2) Read Genesis 11:1-9 The beginning of Gentile nations.
 - a) "Descendants of Noah were told to replenish the earth but were unwilling to separate; they were determined to please themselves, not God. They fell from worship of the true God, the knowledge of which had been passed down from Noah, establishing pagan religion and human self-rule."²
 - b) "Babylon" not only represents the confusion caused by mixing false religion with the worship of the one true God, but it was the beginning of, and is therefore symbolic of, Gentile World Power.
- B) The first reference to Babylon the Great in the book of Revelation is in Rev.14:8, "Fallen, Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

¹ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 247-248.

² Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, A. R., A.M., *Commentary on Revelation*. "Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible". 1871. Public Domain.

- 1) The Greek word for “adulteries” (or “immorality” used in some translations) is *porneia*, meaning “illicit sexual intercourse; metaph. the worship of idols.” Here, also, a metaphor of committing spiritual adultery with a pagan religious system.
- 2) Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
 - a) V.3 “until the rebellion occurs” (NIV), OR, “except there come the falling away first” (KJV). Both come from the Greek word “*apostasia*,” which means “a defection, revolt, apostasy.”
 - b) “Apostasy (falling away) is the act of professed Christians who deliberately reject revealed truth as to (1) the Deity of Jesus Christ, and (2) redemption through His atoning and redeeming sacrifice... ‘Apostates’ depart from the faith, but not from the outward profession of Christianity.”³
 - c) Remember that “Babylon” literally means “confusion by mixing.” The apostasy of the end-time church will deny the deity of Christ and forsake the doctrine of his atonement (payment for our sins by His blood). We already see this being allowed in modern day seminaries, putting these apostate ministers into the pulpits of our churches, causing confusion about the meaning of true Christianity. This also gives unbelievers a false sense of security. “I’m a good person; I’m going to heaven.”
- 3) Read Rev. 3:14-18 The Church of Laodicea is a picture of Apostasy.
 - a) “Lukewarm” is a state between two states: neither hot (fervently trusting Christ as Savior, believing that He is God in human form, and that His shed blood is the only means of our salvation), nor cold (unsaved; do not claim to trust Christ).

The “lukewarm” are neither. Though they profess to be Christians, they have never trusted Christ as their Savior; they are not saved. They are merely church members, following an outward form of Christianity, without experiencing a spiritual rebirth.

³ C. I. Scofield (Ed.), *The New Scofield Reference Bible: Authorized King James Version* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 1304. Public Domain.

- b) Under no circumstances would true believers be “spit out” (vomited out) of Christ’s mouth: Believers are “in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3-14).
 - c) Christ counsels the “lukewarm” to “buy from [Him] gold refined in the fire: [which is symbolic of our] faith tested by fiery trials.”⁴ We know one cannot “buy” faith or salvation; this is a reference to Rev. 3:17, which tells us that they were so wealthy they thought they could buy whatever they needed.
 - d) “White clothes to wear” is a reference to the believer’s robe of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10), washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rev.7:12).
- 4) Read 1 Thess. 4:16-17
- a) Those who profess to be Christians but reject the deity of Christ and the redeeming power of His shed blood will not be “caught up” at the Rapture. They are not members of the Bride of Christ.
 - b) Left standing after the Rapture will be the organizational structure of the false Church, its buildings, its services, and its members. This worldwide “apostate church” will become part of the false religious system of the Tribulation period, which had its origin in **Ancient Babylon**, and has continued throughout human history.

Chapter 17: Mystery Babylon

17:1

- 1) A prostitute (*porne*) is “one who yields herself to defilement for the sake of gain; metaphorically, an idolatress.” We will see in v.4 that this is a wealthy religious system.
- 2) Rev.17:15 explains “many waters”: “Then the angel said to me, ‘The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages.’”

⁴ Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, *Revelation*.

17:2 “Intoxicated” (*methuo*) is a “metaphor of one who has shed blood or murdered profusely.” This implies that the idolatry includes the shedding of blood and those who indulge in it become mentally intoxicated by it (blood lust).

17:3

- 1) The “beast” has already been explained in Rev.13:1-2 as representative of the Gentile world empires described in Daniel 7:3-8, specifically the Roman Empire (ten horns) to be personified by its end-times leader, the Antichrist. He will receive his authority from Satan himself (Rev. 13:4-5).
- 2) This is one beast with seven heads, explained in vv.9-10: “They are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings.” “Mountains’ have a symbolical meaning, namely, prominent seats of power.”⁵ Therefore, we can say that the heads represent both the kings and their kingdoms.
- 3) The ten horns are explained in v.12, “*The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast.*”
 - a) This tells us that they are a confederacy of kings/leaders living at the time of the Antichrist, briefly receiving joint authority with him.
 - b) These ten horns are descriptive of the Fourth World Empire (Roman Empire) of Dan. 7:23-25, out of which these ten horns (kings) will arise. The Roman Empire, which no longer exists in its original form, will have to be restored.

Note: You may want to read Daniel 2 to review the meaning of the statue. The legs of iron are symbolic of the Roman Empire. They are not “cut off” (conquered by a later empire) but rather *extend* to the feet and ten toes.

17:4-5

- 1) “Abomination” (*bdelugma*) refers to “a foul thing, a detestable thing; of idols and things pertaining to idolatry.” Read Exodus 20:1-4

⁵ Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, *Revelation*.

- 2) Mystery Babylon is dressed lavishly, signifying great wealth.
- 3) “Mystery” (*musterion*) is a “hidden thing, secret, generally religious secrets.” This woman is a religious symbol.
- 4) “Mother” (*meter*) is a “metaphor, the source of something.”
- 5) The ancient city of Babylon was the source of idolatrous religion (“Mother of Prostitutes”). “Religious Babylon,” the religious system of the Revived Roman Empire, is one woman riding the beast, symbolic of one world religion, a fusion of religions which “yield themselves to defilement for the sake of gain” (*porne*).

17:6-7

- 1) The phrase “drunk with blood” is the same as “intoxicated” in v.2 (*methuo*), “metaphor of one who has shed blood or murdered profusely.” This is blood lust: this religious system will persecute and kill in the name of religion. The Fifth Seal Judgment (Rev.6:9-10) tells us that many believers will be slain during the first half of the Tribulation, “because of the word of God and the testimony they maintained.”
- 2) Mystery of the woman and the beast she rides: Let’s wait to read the angel’s explanation.

17:8

- 1) Explanation of this beast is found in vv. 9-11.
- 2) Abyss (*Abussos*) is the “abode of demons.” Satan is their king (Rev. 9:11), since demons are fallen angels who followed him in his rebellion against God. This speaks of its satanic origin.
- 3) Book of Life: register of all who have been given life. Read Psalm 139:16

17:9-11

- 1) “This calls for a mind with wisdom.” Read James 1:5
- 2) The heads on the beast were not included in Daniel’s description of the original Roman Empire, but only a reference to the ten horns. He described four World Empires: Babylon (not the ancient city from Genesis 10, 11. The vision refers to the Babylonian empire of Daniel’s day), Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Read Daniel 7 (entire chapter).

Prior to Daniel's time there were, however, two historically recognized great empires, Egypt and Assyria, both mentioned in the Old Testament for taking God's people into captivity. Read Exodus 1:1-14 and 2 Kings 17:21-23.

- 3) These seven heads are successive kings/kingdoms, not the confederacy of kings/kingdoms listed as "ten horns."
 - a) Five have fallen: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece.
 - b) One is: Rome (in John's day).
 - c) The other has not yet come, but when it does come, he/it must remain for a little while: Revived Roman Empire, personified by its leader, the Antichrist. Read Rev. 13:3.
 - d) The original Roman Empire did not extend over the entire earth, but over the European and Mediterranean areas. The revived Roman Empire, the seventh kingdom, will "devour the whole earth" (Daniel 7:23, Rev. 13:7-8). The Antichrist (the "little horn" of Daniel 7) will join with the ten horns "for a little while," then the 10 kings will "give their power and authority to the beast" (Antichrist - Rev.17:13).

- 4) We saw that this beast (Gentile World Power) originated in **Ancient Babylon** (Genesis 11), which once was, now is not (in John's day), and becomes the 8th kingdom. The king and his kingdom are synonymous. Both are going to their destruction (Rev. 18:10; 19:20).

The Antichrist is, therefore, the 8th king of the 8th kingdom, called Babylon here in Revelation Chapters 17 and 18 because of its roots in **Ancient Babylon** (Genesis 11), all having a satanic origin ("coming up out of the Abyss").

- 5) The "prostitute," Religious Babylon (false religious system), sits on and is carried on the back of ALL the Gentile World powers (political Babylon), from the beginning (Genesis 11) through the end of world history.

17:12-14

- 1) A future kingdom, not in John's day. This speaks of the Revived Roman Empire that "must remain for a little while."

- 2) The “beast” is here personified in the Antichrist. The ten kings’ positions are short-lived. They have only one purpose: to give their authority over to the Antichrist. Then the Antichrist will reign as final world dictator for the last 3-1/2 years of the Tribulation (called the Great Tribulation).
- 3) Drawn to the battle of Armageddon (Rev.16:16), the kings of the earth will make war against the Lamb, when Christ returns with “the armies of heaven” (Rev.19:14).

17:15-17

- 1) “Sits” (*kathemai*) is “to have a fixed abode; to dwell.” This idolatrous worship system has had “a fixed abode” among the peoples and nations of the earth.
- 2) Here, we see that the religious world system, personified by this prostitute, rides on the back of the political world system.
 - a) In Rev. 17:7, the NIV states: “the beast she rides.” The NASB translates it as “the beast that carries her.”⁶ “Carries” (*bastazo*) means “to bear what is burdensome.”
 - b) The one who sits on the beast leads and controls it. Up to this point, the government will be controlled by this religious system, as we see in Islamic states such as Iran. It will be “burdensome.” For this reason, the empire will seek to destroy her since she has served her purpose in uniting the nations. They now want to be free of her control.
- 3) To “bring her to ruin” (*eremoo*) is “to despoil one; strip her of her treasures.”
- 4) To “eat her flesh” (*esthio*) is “to devour, to consume.” We are not told exactly how. This happens prior to Chapter 18, where the final destruction of the entire world system is complete.
- 5) v.17: God is COMPLETELY in control of the outcome. Read Proverbs 21:1.

⁶ New American Standard Bible ©1995. LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation. Scripture quotations from this text are marked “NASB.” Used by permission.

Final Passage:**17:18**

- 1) “The woman” is the Mother (*meter = source*) of Prostitutes (v.5).
- 2) The term “Babylon” is a symbolic term, a reference to the ancient city of Babylon, which was the source of idolatrous worship and Gentile world power. A literal city has not “ridden on the back” of all the empires since **Ancient Babylon** (Genesis 10).

However, it is not difficult to understand that the final world empire requires a seat of government: a city that will be destroyed along with the system. Here, Babylon may be taken literally: the city of Babylon, located in modern day Iraq, will be rebuilt.

- 3) “Babylon” is, therefore, a satanic system (Rev. 12:3):
 - a) Religious Babylon: the source of idolatrous worship (“Mother of Prostitutes” - Rev. 17:5)
 - b) Political Babylon: Gentile World Power, with the final world empire controlled by the Antichrist (Rev. 13:5-9).
 - c) Economic Babylon: the World economic system, finally controlled by the False Prophet. The mark of the beast and worship of his image are required in order to buy or sell (Rev. 13:15-17).

*Now what?
How will this lesson change the way you live?*

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