

The Book of Revelation Lesson 20 – Chapter 17

1. Chapter 17 – Babylon

1.1. The dragon, which was Satan, was introduced in **chapter 12**.

1.1.1. Satan is pictured to us as a beast. We find the forces of Satan are also shown in terms of being beasts; literally, "wild beasts," an indication of the fierceness and lack of care Satan has for the well-being of man.

1.1.2. Satan must use resources; he has to use men in furthering his purpose.

1.1.3. The warning given by the Lord to the disciples was to "beware of men" (**Matt. 10:17**).

1.1.4. He must work through men.

1.2. The beasts

1.2.1. The beast out of the sea represents the persecuting power of Satan operating in and through nations of this world and their governments.

1.2.2. The beast out of the earth represents all false religions and false philosophies that have plagued, and will continue to plague, the church.

1.2.3. Satan is the deceiver of the whole earth (**Rev. 12:9**), and we are told that the whole world "lieth in wickedness" (**1 John 5:19**)

1.2.4. Satan has a worldwide influence.

1.2.5. The whole of the earth is affected by Satan and his work.

1.3. Now a third helper is introduced which is the harlot, Babylon.

1.3.1. She represents the seduction of the world and Christians by the power of lusts, materialism and worldliness.

1.3.2. This chapter tells of the nature and history of the great harlot, Babylon. One of the seven angels comes to John and tells him that he will show him the judgment of the great harlot that sitteth upon many waters.

1.3.3. John is carried away in the Spirit into the wilderness, and there John sees this woman seated upon the beast and he describes her. She is not to be confused with the woman in chapter twelve who represents God's people of the Old and New Covenant. This woman is the harlot Babylon.

1.3.4. Upon her forehead is written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. She was drunk with the blood of the saints. When John saw this, he did not understand. Then the angel seeing John's bewilderment explains to him the meaning of the harlot. She represents the forces that entice and lead the children of God astray with her lusts and worldly pleasures. Finally, the beast shall turn against the harlot and the people who serve her.

1.3.5. But the Christ will come and will conquer, for he is King of kings, and Lord of lords.

2. **Rev. 17:1 - And there came one of the seven angels that had the seven bowls, and spake with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the judgment of the great harlot that sitteth upon many waters;**
 - 2.1. Chap 16 there were warnings to sinful Babylon that with sin brings punishment.
 - 2.2. "Babylon" is the city of lust, seduction and worldliness. But it must not be limited to Babylon only; these evils refer to any force that acts in this way against Christ and his church throughout the Christian Age.
 - 2.2.1. **1 Cor. 6:9-10 - Or know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.**
 - 2.3. One of the angels that had one of the seven bowls of wrath now speaks to John. The angel told John he would show him the condemnation of the great harlot that sat upon many waters. Already the judgment (condemnation) of the harlot Babylon has been spoken of in chapter 14:8. Babylon is called the great harlot.
 - 2.3.1. In the Old Testament, three cities are called harlots. They are Nineveh (Nahum 3:1, 4), Tyre (Isaiah 23:15-17) and Babylon (Isaiah 47:5-15). Here the harlot is in opposition to the bride of Christ.
 - 2.3.2. This is a wicked, sinful city, opposed to God. The bride of Christ is the Faithful City dedicated to God, the new Jerusalem. They are different and in opposition to one another. The sea represents people as verse fifteen indicates.
 - 2.4. The dragon, which was Satan, was introduced in chapter 12. His helpers, the beast out of the sea, represents world powers and governments opposed to Christ and Christians. The beast out of the earth represents false religion and philosophy. Now a third helper is introduced which is the harlot, Babylon.
 - 2.4.1. She represents the seduction of the world and Christians by the power of lusts, materialism and worldliness. The imagery is of Babylon; however, much of the description is Old Testament terminology. There can be little doubt that he is referring to Rome and its influence. It should be noted that Rome is pictured in three ways in Revelation.
 - 2.4.1.1. Rome is the persecuting government.
 - 2.4.1.2. Rome has the false religion of emperor worship.
 - 2.4.1.3. Rome is the city of lust, seduction and worldliness.
 - 2.4.1.4. But it must not be limited to Rome only; these evils refer to any force that acts in this way against Christ and his church throughout the Christian Age.
3. **Rev. 17:2 - with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and they that dwell in the earth were made drunken with the wine of her fornication.**
 - 3.1. Fornication – Porneuo

- 3.1.1. to prostitute one's body to the lust of another
- 3.1.2. to give one's self to unlawful sexual intercourse
- 3.1.3. to commit fornication
- 3.1.4. metaph. to be given to idolatry, to worship idols
- 3.1.5. to permit one's self to be drawn away by another into idolatry
- 3.2. The harlot Babylon is charged with two things.
 - 3.2.1. First, **the kings of the earth committed** fornication with her. This refers to the kings of the earth who have traded and made alliances with Rome or the other nations throughout the ages.
 - 3.2.2. They had the same attitude toward God and were guided by their selfish and greedy hearts in doing this. They that dwell upon the earth refer to the people of the earth who are wicked and are not following God.
 - 3.2.3. They have been seduced by the harlot and have been drawn away from God by her.
- 3.3. Compare that to the purity of the relationship one has when united with the bride of Christ
- 4. **Rev. 17:3 - And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness: and I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet-colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.**
 - 4.1. John was carried away in the Spirit. Four times in Revelation John is said to be in the Spirit (**1:10; 4:2; 21:10**). This indicates how he received this vision. He was taken into a wilderness.
 - 4.1.1. In the Old Testament, the wilderness is often a place for visionary experiences.
 - 4.1.2. It is not the place of divine protection as seen in chapter **12:5, 14**.
 - 4.1.3. The meaning of the seven heads and ten horns are given in verses **9 - 14, 16- 17**.
 - 4.1.3.1. The seven heads indicate great intelligence.
 - 4.1.3.2. Horns represent strength in the Bible, so ten horns represent great strength.
 - 4.1.3.3. The beast claims to be divine.
 - 4.2. The harlot works in conjunction with the beast(s).
 - 4.2.1. The seduction or allurements of the world are found both outside in the world and inside apostate churches.
 - 4.2.2. The harlot utters blasphemies against God (**Dan 7:25; Rev. 13:5-6**).
- 5. **Rev.17:4-5**
 - 5.1. **Rev. 17:4 - And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stone and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations, even the unclean things of her fornication,**
 - 5.1.1. The woman was a harlot, but was arrayed like a queen.
 - 5.1.1.1. Purple and scarlet denote royalty and luxury. The colors mean more than appears, because these colors came from dyes, which were very expensive to extract. Only the very rich could afford these.

- 5.1.1.2. She had on many precious stones, pearls and gold. In her hand was a golden cup from which one would expect the best things to come, but instead it is full of abominations, the unclean things of her fornication.
- 5.1.1.3. **Abomination** is an Old Testament word usually associated with idolatry. Idolatry was usually accompanied by fornication. The golden cup was to entice the men of the world to engage in her evil ways. It was deceitful just as sin is.
- 5.2. **Rev. 17:5 - and upon her forehead a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.**
- 5.2.1. In the book of Revelation, several times there are names upon the head, sometimes good and sometimes bad. Here the harlot is identified by her name.
- 5.2.1.1. It was the custom in Roman brothels of the first century for the prostitutes to wear a band upon their forehead with their name on it. The mystery is revealed. The woman is Babylon the great, that city which is arrayed against God. Luxury, corruption and power characterize her. Babylon represents Rome in the first century. In each succeeding century, she represents whatever government or society that acts this way. She is not only a harlot; she is the mother of harlots. She seeks to spread her abominations throughout the whole world. All types of abominations were ascribed to Rome, things which are unprintable. These were used to entice and seduce men away from God.
- 5.2.2. As Babylon was the captor of God's people in the Old Testament, the harlot (seduction of the world) entices those who try to be faithful to God.
- 5.2.3. **WORLDLINESS** may be the greatest power the Devil has over the children of God.
- 5.2.4. Worldliness is a word that most people don't even use.
- 5.2.5. Perhaps that is because it describes a manner of being so commonplace among the world's majority that they perceive it as "business as usual" rather than some sort of departure from God's standard of right.
- 5.2.6. Sometimes people say, "I don't see anything wrong with it" (whatever "it" is), without reference to the Bible.
- 5.2.7. We are not surprised to see worldliness, although it may distress us to be surrounded by its more extreme forms (**1 Corinthians 5:9-13**).
- 5.2.8. We often recite the old saying that we should be "in the world, but not of the world."
- 5.2.9. However, when--and to the extent--that worldliness overtakes the church, or those individual members of it, Christ's cause suffers damage and souls are lost.

- 5.2.10. Further, as the church (individually or collectively) becomes worldly it loses its relationship with God and its right to exist separate from the world.
- 5.2.11. It has become indistinguishable.
- 5.2.12. It is one with the world.
- 5.2.13. It is worldly!
- 5.2.14. Think of the anguish the apostle Paul endured in trying to rid the churches of Galatia and Corinth of the sins that beset them.
- 5.2.14.1. **Galatians 4:19 - My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you....**
- 5.2.14.2. **Galatians 4:11 - I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.**
- 5.2.14.3. **1 Thessalonians 4:1-7 - Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.**
6. **Rev. 17:6 - And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I wondered with a great wonder.**
- 6.1. The harlot had slain a great many Christians. She enjoyed it. She delighted in it.
- 6.2. Drunken is present tense meaning she is continuing to deceive Christians.
- 6.3. Saints and martyrs are both referring to Christians.
- 6.4. Wonder in this verse means perplexed. John was perplexed. He had expected to see the harlot punished, but so far he has seen just her radiance. It seems as if she was triumphing.
7. **Rev. 17:7 - And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou wonder? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and the ten horns.**
- 7.1. The angel notices that John is perplexed.
- 7.2. He tells John that he will explain the mystery of the woman and the beast. Notice that there is just one explanation for both of them. They go together and are indivisible.
8. **Rev. 17:8 - The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss, and to go into perdition. And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, [they] whose name hath not been written in the**

book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast, how that he was, and is not, and shall come.

8.1. As the angel explains the mystery of the harlot and the beast, he begins with the beast.

8.1.1. This is the beast out of the sea that had one head which had a deadly wound, but survived. He was, and is not, and is about to come. This indicates that he keeps recurring. He looks like he goes away, but he comes again. This indicates that the government powers that afflict the church will come and go. But Satan and his helpers are doomed and will go to perdition at the end of time when Jesus comes. They will be defeated.

8.1.2. Meanwhile those who dwell upon the earth, whose names are not in the book of life, wonder and are impressed by the beast. This refers to the wicked.

8.1.3. **From the foundation of the world** refers to the eternal purpose of God and does not teach predestination of individual souls.

9. **Rev. 17:9-15**

9.1. **Rev. 17:9 - Here is the mind that hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth:**

9.1.1. John says that this can be understood by those with wisdom.

9.1.1.1. Remember that James said that Christians could pray for wisdom (**James 1:5**); however, remember that one must have knowledge of the word of God.

9.1.2. The angel explains that the seven heads are seven mountains.

9.1.2.1. To the reader in the first century, this would certainly remind them of Rome, the capital city, built on seven hills by the Tiber River.

9.1.2.2. In John's day Rome was the center of anti-Christian seduction, allurements and enticements as well as anti-Christian persecution.

9.1.2.3. For us, it should be understood that this refers to such cities and governments throughout the Christian Age that oppose Christianity and seek to seduce Christians away from God.

9.2. **Rev. 17:10 - and they are seven kings; the five are fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a little while.**

9.2.1. The angel goes on and identifies the seven mountains as kings. The overall meaning is that there are kings who are past, one is now ruling, and another or others are yet to come. Verse eleven teaches the beast is the eighth, and he goes into perdition, which is the lake of fire and brimstone, eternal punishment. The point seems to be that the beast influences each of these in his fight against the church, but in the end, they are all defeated.

9.2.2. Most commentaries seek to identify these seven kings.

9.3. **Rev. 17:11 - And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven; and he goeth into perdition.**

- 9.3.1. The emphasis in this verse is to show that the beast is in all these kings in spirit, they are doing his bidding and working with him against Christ and the church.
- 9.3.2. The main emphasis is that he goeth into perdition, which means he is defeated and cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. However invincible these forces may seem, Christ defeats them.
- 9.4. **Rev. 17:12 - And the ten horns that thou sawest are ten kings, who have received no kingdom as yet; but they receive authority as kings, with the beast, for one hour.**
- 9.4.1. The ten horns are ten kings who have no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority with the beast for one hour. Ten is a symbolical number meaning power. This is probably the way it is used here. They represent all the powers of the nations that are used by the beast in his war against Christ. Remember this war is a spiritual war, not a literal war, though it is expressed literally at times in their opposition to the church.
- 9.4.2. **One hour** means a brief period of time.
- 9.4.3. They are lesser kings, but they are arrayed with the beast. In the first century, they may be vassal kings of Rome.
- 9.4.3.1. A vassal is a person who has entered into a mutual obligation to a lord or monarch in the context of the medieval system in medieval Europe.
- 9.4.3.2. The obligations often included military support and mutual protection, in exchange for certain privileges.
- 9.5. **Rev. 17:13 - These have one mind, and they give their power and authority unto the beast.**
- 9.5.1. These kings have one mind, and that is to fight against Christ and his church. They give their power and authority over to the beast. They willingly give their service to the beast; they are not forced.
- 9.6. **Rev. 17:14 - These shall war against the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings; and they [also shall overcome] that are with him, called and chosen and faithful.**
- 9.6.1. The victory does not come to the Lamb alone, but to the faithful!
- 9.6.2. These shall war against the Lamb. The war is going on all the time. The battle of Armageddon is the last decisive battle of the war that continues throughout the Christian Age. The victory of Christ is certain.
- 9.6.3. They will overcome and the **called, chosen and faithful** are faithful Christians. They will be victors with Christ, not because he needs their help; he can win without them, but they cannot triumph without Christ.
- 9.6.4. He is called the Lord of lords, and King of kings, which are the Old Testament names given to God the Father. Jesus is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father.

9.7. **Rev. 17:15 - And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the harlot sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.**

9.7.1. The angel explained that the waters represented the people of the empire made up of many different races.

10. Rev. 17:16-18

10.1. **Rev. 17:16 - And the ten horns which thou sawest, and the beast, these shall hate the harlot, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and shall burn her utterly with fire.**

10.1.1. He describes the destruction of the harlot similar to that which Ezekiel describes in **Ezekiel 28:20-24**.

10.1.1.1. The beast and the ten horns turn on the harlot, hate her, and make her naked, desolate, eat her flesh and burn her utterly with fire. Many times people think of honor and love among the wicked, but this is not so. The very nature of wickedness which is promoted by hate, envy and evil not only harms the righteous, but also is self-destructive.

10.1.1.2. It is interesting to note that **Leviticus 21:9** teaches that if the daughter of any priest plays the harlot, she is to be burned with fire.

10.1.1.3. Jesus said, "If a house be divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand" (**Mark 3:25**).

10.2. **Rev. 17:17 - For God did put in their hearts to do his mind, and to come to one mind, and to give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God should be accomplished.**

10.2.1. These things did not happen accidentally, God controlled the situation. God frequently used evil men to accomplish his purposes, and had them fight against themselves. We are not told how he does this, only that the will of God shall be done on earth. God will be victorious.

10.3. **Rev. 17:18 - And the woman whom thou sawest is the great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.**

10.3.1. Here John identifies the woman with the great city.

10.3.2. The great city in the first century was Rome.

10.3.3. However, it would also represent all of the great cities and nations which have sought to entice Christians away from Christ with worldly allurements.

11. Babylon was a harlot selling herself for pleasure at any price

11.1. Including the price of its own destruction;

11.2. Not only her, but those who remained loyal in the end.

11.3. And God gave them over to it.

11.3.1. **Rom. 1:24; 26**

12. Chap 17 shows God in control.