

The Judgment of the Great Harlot (Church)

Revelation 17:1-18

The first thing to remember about this chapter, and the next, for that matter, is that they are not chronologically in order with the seven bowl judgments. The events described in this chapter take place over the entire span of the 7-year Tribulation (and even point back in time all the way to Genesis 10 and cover events down through the ages). It is important we understand this.

Also, we have been teaching the book of Revelation as literal unless the context indicates otherwise. Here, the context indicates otherwise – so the events and characters and places in this chapter are to be viewed as type or allegorical in nature.

This is one of the more difficult chapters in the book and because of that there is a wide disparity of opinion on what it means. The best way to interpret this chapter is based upon what we have already learned in this study about what's coming and place these events in their proper place based upon what has been learned.

One point that needs to be emphasized in this chapter is something that affects us today, and that will continue to affect us the closer we get to the Rapture, and that is the apostasy of the church as we know it today. 2 Thessalonians 2:3 says that "Let no man deceive you by any means, for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first" – that falling away is the leaving of obedience to the Lord by those that claim to be His. There will be a great number of false believers in the church when Jesus returns and during the Tribulation it is

those that will be influential for religion in following the false prophet. That is the context of this chapter.



I. THE CHARACTERS

A. The angel with the announcement – vs. 1

1. He is one of the seven mentioned in chapter 16 that had the seven vials – quite possible the seventh (16:19 mentions Babylon)
2. The purpose of the angel was to be the guide for John as he saw the vision

B. John the Apostle

1. He received the vision
2. He marveled at the woman – vs. 6b-7

C. The woman – vs. 1-6

1. Called “The great whore” – vs. 1
2. Her purpose is described in vs. 2
3. She is seen sitting upon a beast – vs. 3
4. Her garment is described – vs. 4
5. Her name is given in vs. 5
 - a) The word “mystery” is not to be viewed as part of her name but is to describe her name – this is one of the ways we know this is not literal – it is a mystery, a type
 - b) “Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth” is her name
6. What she did – vs. 6

D. The beast – vs. 3b, 8, 11

1. Although we can't be certain, this is most likely the beast mentioned in 13:1 –

although here it is described as being scarlet colored and there it was like a leopard – a possible explanation of that difference is the way this is worded it could very easily mean that the beast had on a scarlet colored robe

2. "Full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns"
3. Vs. 8 describes the beast as "was, and is not, and yet is" (or, shall be again) – perhaps pointing to the Roman Empire that was destroyed but that will be resurrected (Dan. 7)

NOTE: The following are notes from Daniel 7 and the "fourth beast" – the Roman Empire.

- a) The fourth beast – Dan. 7:7-8, 19-20, 23-25 – The Roman Empire (both past and future)



- (1) Vs. 7, 19 – *this beast is described as "dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly" – descriptions making it the fiercest of all the beasts described here*

- (a) "It had great iron teeth" – vs. 7, 19

- (i) This made it obvious this was no ordinary beast, but something dreadful
 - (ii) The iron teeth obviously coincide with the legs of iron and the iron mixed with clay in the ten toes of the image Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream in Daniel 2
- (b) "It devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it" – vs. 7, 19 – that is, he destroyed and incorporated all the nations previously mentioned in the other beasts into what became known as the might Roman Empire, the largest, most fierce empire the world's ever known
- (c) "It was diverse from all the beasts that were before it" – vs. 7, 19 – it was not a normal animal, or beast, in that it had no obvious characteristics of any known animal, as did the previous three beasts
- (d) "Nails of brass" – vs. 19
- (i) "Nails" are speaking of its claws, like that of a bear or a bird of prey
 - (ii) Brass, in the Old Testament, speaks of strength, and points to the terrific and horrific image of this beast, and the strength by which it destroys all it comes in contact with
- (e) "And it had ten horns" – again, points back to the image in Daniel 2, and the ten toes
- "The 10 horns corresponding to the ten toes of chapter 2 are ten kings

or nations in which the Roman Empire will yet be divided and by the union of which Rome will be resurrected at the close of the times of the Gentiles.

"The 10 horns are all Roman horns for they are "out of this kingdom" – vs. 24, that is, they will not include, Germany, Russia, Japan, the U.S., or any nation outside the former boundaries of Rome." (Dr. Allen W. Campbell) – Rev. 17:12

(2) *Vs. 8, 20 – describes the first "little horn" mentioned in Daniel, and is a prophecy of the "man of sin," or "the beast" of Revelation (known by most today as the Antichrist)*

- (a) Considering the ten horns from which the "little horn" comes out of, and considering that the ten horns are speaking of the revived Roman Empire, then it would stand to reason that the "little horn" (the Antichrist) will come out of the revived Roman Empire
- (b) This little horn is smaller than the ten horns it is seen coming up in the midst of, yet obviously more powerful – this could point to the man of sin, the beast, coming from a lesser-known, or smaller country that will be part of the revived Roman Empire
- (c) The little horn is seen destroying three of the other horns – it doesn't say who they were and there is not even a good guess that can be made as to who they are. According to the interpretation in vs. 20, this destruction caused those three

nations to bow to this "little horn," and in vs. 24 it says he will "subdue three kings."

- (d) The most unique description of this little horn is that it had "eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things," and "looks more stout than his fellow"



- (i) "Eyes of man" - vs. 8, 20 - indicates that he may look like a man (the man of sin, the Antichrist) but he is far from any ordinary man
- (ii) "Mouth speaking great things" - vs. 8, 20, 25 - that is, blasphemous things against the God of heaven, as well as many great things that the people of the world would naturally want to follow
- (iii) "Looks more stout than his fellow" - vs. 20 - a braggart, a boaster, a proud man, and one that seemed to rise above all others

(3) Vs. 23-25 give the interpretation of the

fourth beast and the ten horns

(a) Vs. 23 describes the fourth kingdom
– the Roman Empire, both past and future

(i) "Shall be diverse from all kingdoms" – it was different in every way

(ii) "And shall devour the whole earth"

(a) In the ancient Roman Empire it was considered to be a world-wide empire – the phrase "all roads lead to Rome" being one of many indications of this

(b) The ancient Roman Empire, however, did not rule all the world as completely as the revived Roman Empire will do during the Tribulation period, when it will literally be a world-wide empire, with a one-world government

(iii) "And shall tread it down, and break it in pieces" – points to both parts of the empire being very destructive in their domination

(b) Vs. 24 gives the interpretation of the horns

(i) "The ten horns out of this kingdom"

(a) That is, out of the fourth kingdom – the Roman Empire

(b) They are seen coming "out of this kingdom" – that is, they all rise out of what was the ancient Roman Empire.

The only place this fits in a literal interpretation of Scripture is during the Tribulation period, ending with the Battle of Armageddon.

- (ii) "And another shall rise after them" – the "little horn" – rising out of the ancient Roman Empire
 - (iii) "He shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings" – again, three fall, and are replaced by this one
- (c) Vs. 25 gives the interpretation of the "little horn" and his rise to world domination
- (i) "He shall speak great words against the most high" – blasphemous things
"In assuming infallibility, professing to forgive sins, and to open and shut heaven, thundering out bulls and anathemas, excommunicating princes, absolving subjects from their allegiance, and exacting obedience to his decrees in open violation of reason and Scripture." (Treasury of Scripture Knowledge) – 2 Thess. 2:3-4; Rev. 13:5-6, 11)
 - (ii) "And shall wear out the saints of the most high" – the saints are referring to both Israel, who will be especially persecuted during the last half of the Tribulation, as well as those saved during the Tribulation period that will be persecuted for not taking the

mark of the beast (Rev. 6:9-10; 11:7-10; 13:7-10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24)

(iii) "And think to change times and laws" – "to alter the forms and constitutions of kingdoms, and the customs and usages of them; yea, to set up and pull down kings at pleasure; see Dan. 2:21, or to change the use of times and seasons, by setting apart days as holy for canonized saints; and appointing such days in a week, and such a season in the year, for abstinence from meats; and even to change the laws of God and man, by dispensing with both, and making new ones of his own" (John Gill)

(iv) "And they shall be given into his hand until the time and times and the dividing of time"

(a) *"They" – the saints of God*

(b) *"Shall be given into his hands" – he shall successfully wage war against the saints and martyr many of them*

(c) *"Time and times and the dividing of time" – a "time" is the longest measurable period of time in the Aramaic (one year); "times" is two times a time (two years); and "the dividing of time" is half of a time (half a year) – combined, 3 1/2 years – the same as the 1260 days or 42 months (there were 30 days in the month in their*

*calendar - 42X30=1260) -
Dan. 12:7, 11-12; Rev.
11:2-3; 12:6, 14; 13:5, 7*

4. "Shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition" – what is in view here is that this beast (the Antichrist?) will come from hell, the kingdom of Satan (he will receive his power from there) and will at a later time go into "perdition" – will be destroyed (19:20)
5. Vs. 11 says that the beast is the eighth king, which came out of the seventh king, or the Gentile world power during the Tribulation Period – the revived Roman Empire – again, perhaps pointing to the Antichrist

E. Kings of the earth – vs. 2

1. This is all the kingdoms on earth during the tribulation represented
2. They follow the apostate church to idolatrous worship which is seen throughout Scripture as spiritual adultery

F. Seven Kings – vs. 9-10

1. The "seven heads" of the beast
2. They represent seven mountains – this is during the Tribulation – this isn't a reference to anything in the past – could be Rome, the "city of seven hills"
3. The seven kings are described in vs. 10

- a) "Five are fallen" – that is they are no longer in existence when the events John saw depicted here are unveiled – could be five consecutive world powers
- b) "One is" – that is, there was one in existence when these events began – at the end of this age
- c) "The other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space" – this is the final Gentile world power that comes into power during the Tribulation – primarily dealing with the violent second half

G. Ten kings – vs. 12-14, 16-17

1. These rule at the same time, not in succession as did the 7 kings
2. They do not have kingdoms to rule when they are established as kings – they receive that from the Beast for "one hour"
 - a) That is, their reign is brief, probably put into power to bring into play the armies at the Battle of Armageddon – 16:13-16
 - b) The "hour" is to be seen as simply a short time
3. They make war with the Lamb – this is the Battle of Armageddon and in vs. 14 where we first find that the saints of God are with Him at this great battle – "and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful"
4. Halfway through the Tribulation the beast, the Antichrist, brings an end to the "woman" – to the apostate Christian church and begins the tyranny of worship

of himself – ch. 13 – apparently destroying every vestige of religion in the world, however false it may be

H. The Lamb – vs. 14

II. THE PLACES

A. "Babylon" – not the literal city but "ecclesiastical Babylon" – representing the apostate church that will exist then

Following is an extensive quote from John Walvoord's book "The Revelation of Jesus Christ – A Commentary" on the subject of Babylon.

The subject of Babylon in the Scripture is one of the prominent themes of the Bible beginning in Genesis 10, where the city of Babel is first mentioned, with continued references throughout the Scriptures climaxing here in the book of Revelation. From these various passages, it becomes clear that Babylon in Scripture is the name for a great system of religious error. Babylon is actually a counterfeit or pseudo religion which plagued Israel in the Old Testament as well as the church in the New Testament, and which, subsequent to apostolic days, has had a tremendous influence in moving the church from biblical simplicity to apostate confusion. In keeping with the satanic principle of offering a poor substitute for God's perfect plan, Babylon is the source of counterfeit religion sometimes in the form of pseudo Christianity, sometimes in the form of pagan religion. Its most confusing form, however, is found in Romanism.

In Genesis 10 and 11 it is recorded that Nimrod was the founder of Babel, later called Babylon. In chapter 11 is recorded the rebellion of men against God in attempting to make a city and a tower that would reach to heaven. The history of the ancient world reveals that it was a common practice to build huge mounds (ziggurats) of sun-dried bricks of which the most ancient illustration has been discovered at Erech, a place mentioned in Genesis 10:10 and dated more than 3,000 years before Christ. The tower of Babel was apparently a forerunner of later towers dedicated to various heathen deities. There was no stone with which to build, and therefore bricks were used with mortar binding them together. The tower of Genesis 11 was a monument to human pride and an express act of rebellion against the true God.

In judging this act God confounded the language of the people and gave the city the name of "Babel," meaning "confusion" (cf. Gen. 11:9). The city, later named Babylon, had a long history. It became prominent under Hammurabi (1728-1686 B.C.) who was the guiding light to the empire during the Old Babylonian period. Babylon's greatest glory was achieved under Nebuchadnezzar who lived during the Neo-Babylonian period about 600 years before Christ. Daniel the prophet wrote his book at that time. The story of the city and empire has been deciphered from thousands of cuneiform tablets unearthed by archaeologists.

Of primary importance in the study of Babylon is its relation to religion as unfolded in Revelation 17. In addition to materials given

in the Bible itself, ancient accounts indicate that the wife of Nimrod, who founded the city of Babylon, became the head of the so-called Babylonian mysteries which consisted of secret religious rites which were developed as a 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. According to extrabiblical records which have been preserved, Semiramis gave birth to a son who she claimed was conceived miraculously. This son, given the name of Tammuz, was considered a savior of his people and was, in effect, a false messiah, purported to be the fulfillment of the promise given to Eve. The legend of the mother and child was incorporated into the religious rites and is repeated in various pagan religions. Idols picturing the mother as the queen of heaven with the babe in her arms are found throughout the ancient world, and countless religious rites were introduced supposedly promising cleansing from sin. Though the rites which were observed in the Babylonian false religion differed greatly in various localities, there usually was a priestly order which furthered the worship of the mother and child, practiced the sprinkling of holy water, and established an order of virgins dedicated to religious prostitution. Tammuz, the son, was said to have been killed by a wild beast and afterward brought back to life, obviously a satanic anticipation of the resurrection of Christ.

In the Scriptures themselves, though many of these facts are not mentioned, there are a number of allusions to the conflict of the true faith with this pseudo religion. Ezekiel

protests against the ceremony of weeping for Tammuz in Ezekiel 8:14. Jeremiah mentions the heathen practices of making cakes for the queen of heaven (Jer. 7:18) and offering incense to the queen of heaven (Jer. 44:17-19, 25). The worship of Baal, characteristic of pagan religion in Canaan, was another form of this same mystery religion originating in Babylon. Baal is considered identical to Tammuz. The doctrines of the mystery religions of Babylon seem to have permeated the ancient world, giving rise to countless mystery religions, each with its cult and individual beliefs offering a counterfeit religion and a counterfeit god in opposition to the true God revealed in the Scriptures. Babylon as an evil woman is portrayed in the prophecy of Zechariah 5:1-11 where the woman of verse 7 is described as personifying wickedness in verse 8.

The Babylonian cult eventually made its way to other cities including Pergamos, the site of one of the seven churches of Asia. The chief priests of the Babylonian cult wore crowns in the form of the head of a fish, in recognition of Dagon the fish god, with the title "Keeper of the Bridge," that is, the "bridge" between man and Satan, imprinted on the crowns. The Roman equivalent of the title, *Pontifex Maximus*, was used by the Caesars and later Roman emperors, and was also adopted as the title for the bishop of Rome. In the early centuries of the church in Rome, incredible confusion arose; and attempts were made to combine some of the features of the mystery religion of Babylon with the Christian faith, a confusion which has continued down to the present day. In this chapter in Revelation, the

last stage of counterfeit religion is revealed as it will be in existence in the period before the return of the Lord to earth.

It is a sad commentary on contemporary Christendom that it shows an overwhelming desire to return to Rome in spite of Rome's evident apostasy from true biblical Christianity. In fact, modern liberalism has far outdone Rome in its departure from the theology of the early church, thus has little to lose by a return to Romanism. Apostasy, which is seen in its latent form today, will flower in its ultimate form in this future superchurch which will apparently engulf all Christendom in the period after the rapture of the church.

B. "Many waters" – vs. 1, 15

1. The woman is seen sitting on these – which points to her exercising authority over them
2. They are described in vs. 15 as the "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues" – that is, the waters represent the world population – all of them

C. "That great city" – vs. 18

1. This is probably not Babylon – it would have been referred to as Babylon if it was
2. Many consider this to be Rome

III. THE MEANING

- A. The meaning, as already stated, has been debated by many, and many have differing opinions on what it all means. However, if we put this in the context of the things stated above, the meaning becomes a bit clearer.***
- B. There will be a false church, an apostate church that will be world-wide and able to deceive most people.***
- C. They will then be destroyed, and the world will be forced to worship the beast.***
- D. The final end of all will be decided at the Battle of Armageddon.***
- E. All the rest of what has been said is of little importance – it's the major issues that we must focus on***

Conclusion: So, what does this mean to us? As a church, it should help us know whose side we're on. If we are as close to the Rapture as many think then the true believer and the true church will become fewer and fewer, and weaker and weaker in importance. It is up to us to stay true, but we need to be careful we don't get discouraged if we continue to be fewer and fewer.