

## 17. Mystery, Babylon the Great Revelation 17:1-18

Whenever I visit my mother-in-law, she is often working on a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle. I sat down to do it with her some time ago but quickly gave up when I found out there was no picture on the box to guide me in putting the puzzle together. It is much more challenging to put a jigsaw together when there are no reference points to know where parts are to go on the board. You first must work on all the outside pieces and then find specific colors that are similar. Biblical prophecy is like that. There are certain events we are told about that one puts into place on the biblical board, and then one must fill in the details as God brings the time frame into view. At this point, we cannot see all that God is doing, but we trust that God will show us more of the details as we get closer to the time of His coming.

### The War Between Light and Darkness

All humanity is amid a war that is going on all around us. It is not a war of guns and bullets and bombs, although that is a manifestation of the war. The battle that is raging is a battle for the minds of men and women, for all who dwell on earth. We are in the middle of a cosmic struggle, whether we are aware of it or not. Two forces wage war against one another: the Creator of the universe and Satan, a fallen angel. For centuries, Satan has kept man bound up in fear of evil spiritual forces. Humanity has tried to pacify these unseen demonic spirits by worshiping them as idols and sacrificing the innocent (Deuteronomy 32:16-17). Paul the Apostle wrote, “**The sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons**” (1 Corinthians 10:20). These dark satanic forces will be exposed, and humanity's spiritual warfare made clear and plain before Jesus comes at the end of the age.

In the [Parable of the Weeds](#) in Matthew 13:24-30, Jesus explained in parabolic language that the dark, sinister forces will be exposed and brought into the light of day. The parable is about an enemy that sowed poisonous weeds among the Landowner's wheat. The weeds looked like wheat to those who worked in the fields until the time before the harvest. It was as the weeds started to develop their seeds that they were exposed as frauds and were proven to be poisonous weeds or tares (Matthew 13:24-30). As we get closer to the end time, the time of harvest, God wants all men to see clearly to choose whom they will serve: God or Satan, the arch-deceiver. The closer we come to the end of days, the more pronounced the darkness will be and the greater the contrast between good and evil. God has given us this book of Revelation and wants us to understand these things ahead of time. Thank God, He knows the end from the beginning, as He dwells in all, past, present, and future. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end!

In our previous study, 16. The Righteous Judgment, an exposition of Revelation chapters fifteen and sixteen, we read about the pouring out of God's wrath upon the Beast's kingdom:

**The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath (Revelation 16:19).**

Chapters seventeen and eighteen of the book of Revelation are the chapters we are looking at in this study and also in our subsequent study. In these chapters, we have a close-up look at the religious and political forces that oppose the people of God: the Beast and his kingdom. The religious forces' goal is to manipulate men's minds to deceive the world into believing that Satan is the true God and to worship him. The false messiah will be presented to the world as the savior of all humanity's problems. Writing two thousand years ago, John wrote in symbolic language, but in our day, we can see the world stage being set. Many people are seeing the pieces of our metaphoric jigsaw puzzle starting to be put in place in ways that would not have made sense before. We will only know for sure some of these events and identities once they unfold.

We see Chapter 17 divided into two parts:

17:1-5 – John sees the Harlot and the Beast

17: 6-18 – The Angel Explains the Mystery

### **The Woman on the Beast**

<sup>1</sup>Then one of the seven angels with the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. <sup>2</sup>The kings of the earth were immoral with her, and those who dwell on the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her immorality.” <sup>3</sup>And the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, where I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. <sup>4</sup>The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls. She held in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. <sup>5</sup>And on her forehead, a mysterious name was written:

BABYLON THE GREAT,  
THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES  
AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH (Revelation 17:1-5).

John writes that one of the seven angels came to give him an understanding of the symbolic picture language he saw. John writes later about the pure bride dressed in white: “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Revelation 21:9), but until then, he sees a woman described as a harlot, and yet not just a harlot, but the mother of harlotry (v. 5), a seasoned teacher who teaches her daughters her ways. This behavior is taught and passed along to other nations under different names. The Bible calls her an abomination. The word abomination is a word we do not use often, but in this context, the woman represents something evil and loathsome, which the Lord detests. He detests what she is doing. This harlot sits on many waters (v. 1), indicative of her allurements being proffered (proposed or put forward) all over the world.

In symbolic language, what does this woman represent? To grasp the symbolism here, think about what the picture of harlotry suggests in spiritual terms. What does she do?

In the Old Testament, we have many examples of Jerusalem and Israel turning from their relationship to God as a husband to serve Satan in the worship of idols. Isaiah the prophet wrote, “See how the faithful city has become a prostitute! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her-- but now murderers!” (Isaiah 1:21). Jeremiah the prophet spoke of Jerusalem, saying: “I have seen your detestable acts on the hills and in the fields” (Jeremiah 13:27). So that we don’t think that spiritual harlotry was committed just by the nation of Israel, God also spoke of other cities in the same way, for instance, the city of Nineveh located near the modern-day city of Mosul in northern Iraq: “the wanton lust of a prostitute, alluring, the mistress of sorceries, who enslaved nations by her prostitution and peoples by her witchcraft” (Nahum 3:4).

So, to what city is our attention being drawn in Revelation 17? Is it a city, a country, or is it a manifestation of evil, or a world system that permeates the world at the time of the end? The harlot is dressed in scarlet and purple. Both of these colors were very rare and difficult to find in New Testament times, and only the rich and elites of the world could afford them (Luke 16:19). Satan offers temporary luxuries and comforts of this world and its twisted system to allure those who desire to walk with integrity, honesty, and godliness. The deceiver tempts us as he tempted Jesus in the wilderness when he offered our Lord all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. Success and prosperity can also bring blessings to the people of God, but we are to take care that the comforts of this life do not lull us into a false sense of satisfaction, dulling our spiritual senses and altering our priorities in life. Wealth and success are likened to a ladder against the wall that men climb, only to find later in life that the ladder is against the wrong wall and that their hearts have grown cold through their pursuit of success and riches.

John writes of the kings of the earth being immoral with the Babylonian harlot (v. 2). We should not just think of royal kings but also those in positions of power corrupted by the allure of influence and sensuality that go with a position in this world. In chapter eighteen, John calls them merchants of the earth: “The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries” (Revelation 18:3). The Greek word translated as "merchant" is the word *emporos*. It refers to a person who is a commercial marketer. It typifies the wealthy industrialists of our age who have made money on the backs of others. Many among the circles of power are bought in at an early age in the nation's elite schools in our world today. They are seduced into serving the invisible spirits behind the scenes through hedonism, occultism, and influential power and are drunk with thoughts of greatness and being one of the world's elites. Incremental stages of revealed secrets and occultic vows bring about levels of power and corruption until initiates are compromised and manipulated by dark forces. John typifies it as being “intoxicated with the wine of her immorality” (v. 2).

John is then taken by an angel of God into the wilderness so that he may see clearly (v. 3). The desert or wilderness typifies a place or condition where everything that kept our minds focused on the things of this world (think in terms of television and media) is stripped away, and the only interaction we have is with God. In that desert place, John sees a woman, a harlot, riding on a scarlet beast. I interpret (and I could be wrong) the scarlet Beast to be the One World Government's political system at the time of the end, i.e., the same political system of ten power blocs of nations we read about in study [13. The Rise of the Antichrist](#). The woman riding the Beast is symbolic of the same religious system led by the False Prophet in Revelation 13, the one who initiates the

worship of the image of the Antichrist in the temple of God, the Abomination of Desolation, and the Mark of the Beast.

The woman has a golden cup of sensual delights in her hand that can intoxicate men to walk with her and follow her ways into evil. The English NIV translation that I am using says: **“And on her forehead a mysterious name was written: BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”** In the King James Version and New King James, the word *Mystery* is translated with a comma after it: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, perhaps suggesting that we should not look at the city of Babylon itself but for what the city of Babylon was known from early times, i.e., that of the *mysterics* or mystery religions.<sup>1</sup> The Greek word (*mystērion*) translated into English as "mystery" is translated in another place as *secrets*: **“To you it has been given to know the secrets (*mystērion*) of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given”** (Matthew 13:11, Emphasis added). What am I saying? The Holy Spirit may be giving us a big hint by calling the harlot riding the beast “Mystery Babylon.” The thought is that the secret mystery religions are guiding and riding on the political Beast.

The city of Babylon was the birthplace of the occultic mystery religions, which focused man on striving for sensual pleasure and worldly wealth and power. When Israel was deported to Babylon in 586 B.C., some Jews were introduced to these mystery teachings. They returned to Israel's land under Ezra, bringing oral traditions that corrupted the true faith and led to a false interpretation of the truth, such as the Kabbalah. We get the word cabal from the Kabbalah.<sup>2</sup> The Kabbalah and other Babylonian writings promoted a false, mystical, hidden understanding of the Bible. The word Kabbalah means "reception" or "acceptance," and it changed the Bible's message into a hidden mystery instead of the clear teaching of the Scriptures. This false religion is what Jesus fought against when He came into the world.<sup>3</sup> Christ didn't fight against Jews who held to the Scriptures; His struggle was with the alternative religion that many Jews had at that time and the time we live today. The deceiver, the enemy of our souls, will tell a multitude of different lies, but all with the same intent: to lead people away from God. A counterfeit must closely resemble the real thing; otherwise, it loses its power to deceive. The spirit of the Antichrist was already in the world in Biblical times; Satan's strategy does not alter; it merely changes shape.

Jesus said to the Pharisees, the religious elite of the day, **“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires”** (John 8:44). In another place, Jesus spoke about a gathering of ethnic Jews that were deceived into thinking they were of God, when in fact they belonged to Satan: **“I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan”** (Revelation 2:9). Again and again, through the four Gospels, it was the enemy's spirit residing in the Pharisees of the day, the religious elite, that fought against the Gospel of Christ. Just as this spirit in Jesus' day was fiercely opposed to Christ, in the last days, it will fiercely oppose His followers. Jesus warned us of this. He told us:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.equip.org/article/mystery-religion-what-were-the-mystery-religions/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabal>

<sup>3</sup> <http://esau.today/the-babylonian-talmud/>

Remember what I told you: ‘a servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also (John 15:20).

When we read of Mystery, Babylon the Great, this writer believes that the occult mystery religions were exported to Israel, Egypt, Greece, Rome, and other cities. Babylon was the mother, and other cities were her children. Today, we recognize them as false religions, which include secret societies. They all promise enlightened teaching. Their belief systems are shrouded in mystery. Deceptive teaching, cults, and false religions find their origin in the city of Babylon. Jesus said that widespread deception is one of the signs of the end times:

As He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” And Jesus answered them, “**See that no one leads you astray**. For many will come in my name, saying "I am the Christ," and **they will lead many astray** (Matthew 24:3-5).

### The Mystery Explained

<sup>6</sup>I could see that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and witnesses for Jesus. And I was utterly amazed at the sight of her. <sup>7</sup>"Why are you so amazed?" said the angel. "I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the Beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and ten horns. <sup>8</sup>The Beast that you saw—it was, and now is no more, but is about to come up out of the Abyss and go to its destruction. And those who dwell on the earth whose names were not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world will marvel when they see the Beast that was, and is not, and yet will be (Revelation 17:6-8).

In verse 6, when John saw the woman, he was utterly amazed. What do you think shocked or surprised him?

It is a possibility that what John was shocked about was that Jews were a part of this seductive mystery teaching that had infiltrated the world. His eyes were opened to see its true form. The spirit of occult false religion is at war with the Spirit of Christ and His Church. Jesus said that there were only two kingdoms in operation on the world scene, i.e., “**Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters**” (Matthew 12:30). Some may think there are many ways to God, but this is a deception of the enemy. The false religion deceives the world into believing that one can buy one's way into heaven by good works, or by a system of beliefs that work like rungs on a ladder to try and approach and appease God. Jesus alone has made the way to heaven by His death in our place. The Gospel is unique in this way. All other religions speak of what one must do; Jesus proclaims, "It is done! It is finished!" The spirit of this world is at odds with this message because Satan (who is called the God of this age) hates the message of the Gospel, which is the power of God to all who believe. It is interesting to see how the world systems accommodate other beliefs, but those who follow Christ are persecuted for their faith.

Commentator James Hamilton writes:

There are many different interpretations from Biblical scholars regarding the Beast, its heads, and its horns. One clear thing is how these symbols function. They represent the kingdom of the world that will be defeated but which will persecute the Church. They are the enemies of God who are troubling God's people. They are symbolic of governments that put Christians to death or imprison them, social networks and dynamics among groups of people that build a plausibility structure in which the truth of the Bible is regarded as backward and shallow and for the weak, and so on- and these are powers at work in the world to make Christianity seem negative or weak or foolish or not respectable.<sup>4</sup>

When John the Apostle saw this woman riding on the Beast, he was utterly amazed. The angel is aware of John's surprise at what he is seeing and responds with an explanation. I believe this Beast represents the One World government that will come to power. This is something that we can see on the horizon, as there has been discussion about the formation of these power blocs, which we have spoken of before. They will likely be formed because of trade agreements. Let's move on to the following verses:

<sup>9</sup>This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. <sup>10</sup>There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for only a little while. <sup>11</sup>The Beast that was, and now is not, is an eighth king, who belongs to the other seven and is going into destruction. <sup>12</sup>The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but will receive one hour of authority as kings, along with the Beast. <sup>13</sup>These kings have one purpose: to yield their power and authority to the Beast (Revelation 17:9-13).

The angel explains to those with spiritual insight (wisdom) that the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits (v. 9). This passage could indicate that the last days' occultic religion will be centered in Rome, for it is built on seven hills. Still, in this writer's mind, if we interpret this to be Rome, we will be limited in our perception. In this Scripture, we see something older than Rome, something that takes us back to the Babylonian mystery religions that used coercive power through religion and the occult. Also, the idea of a city built on seven hills became a way to equate the grandeur of a city with the grandeur of Rome. For example, Constantinople was regarded as a city on seven hills, as were other cities in the ancient world. The jury is still out on whether this means that the capital city of the Antichrist will have seven literal hills.

We read of seven kings (v. 10). Scholars that I highly respect explain these kings as those who have had power and control over the land of Israel, the nations of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece. The sixth king is believed to have been the Roman Empire at the time of the Book of Revelation, with the one to come being the One World Empire led by the Antichrist.

### **The Victory of the Lamb**

<sup>14</sup>They will make war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will triumph over them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and He will be accompanied by His called and chosen and faithful ones.” <sup>15</sup>Then the angel said to me, “The waters you saw, where the prostitute

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<sup>4</sup>James M. Hamilton Jr, *Revelation, The Spirit Speaks to the Churches*. Copyright Crossway Publications, 2012, Page 327

was seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues. <sup>16</sup>And the ten horns and the Beast that you saw will hate the prostitute. They will leave her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. <sup>17</sup>For God has put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose by uniting to give their kingdom to the Beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. <sup>18</sup>And the woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth” (Revelation 17:14-18)

The angel, our “heavenly tour guide,” gives us a clear picture of who this woman is. He says, “I will tell you the mystery of the woman and the beast that carries her.” Just as the Beast and the false prophet have worked together, we see that Revelation 17 describes two powerful realms depicted as two entities working together, the woman and the Beast.

What do you think it could mean that the Beast carries the woman? What could this signify?

I think it would be helpful now to take a glimpse at the symbols in this vision and what they represent:

**The great harlot: 17:1-8** – False humanistic religion, called the “mother of harlots,” because it is the foundation of all false religions. It is proud and self-sufficient, denying God’s grace. “She” is responsible for the persecution and death of many saints. It will be a worldwide religious system.

**Many waters: 17:1, 15** – Multitudes of people from every nation and people group around the world are globally influenced and under the power of the worldwide religious system.

**Was, is not, and is about to come up out of the Abyss: 17: vs. 3-7-9-19** - The Antichrist will imitate Christ’s death and resurrection to astound the whole world. Again, we see the attempt to counterfeit the Divine.

**The Eighth King: 17:11** – The Antichrist, who is one of the preceding kings, is also an “eighth.” This may refer to the two phases of his rule- before his miraculous death and resurrection (the seventh king) and after this impressive feat when Satan turns his political career into a global empire (as the eighth king).

**Ten horns: 17:7, 12.** - Ten nations, regions, or power blocs who will unite to empower the Antichrist, turning over all worldly authority to him.

In verse 16 of chapter 17, the angel tells us that the Beast and the ten horns will turn upon the woman, burning her and leaving her desolate. There is a profound irony in this. Evil turns upon itself. It is a terrible and mysterious law of political history. Evil always carries with it a self-destructive power.

If the war referred to in verse 14 is about the war on the saints (Revelation 13:7), then we know that, for a time, the Antichrist will have the power to put some of God’s people to death. However, even in death, the saints will overcome by refusing to take the Mark of the Beast and worship his image. The Antichrist will have power only for a short time. Verse twelve says that it will only be for an hour—not a chronological hour, but a brief period that is not stipulated, but it is likely

referring to the second half of the seven-year period, i.e., the period known as the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21). During the three and a half years of the Antichrist's reign, the world will suffer under the ultimate merger between a totalitarian state and an antichrist church. The chapter closes, leaving us wondering what is meant by the "great city" that rules over the kings of the earth. We'll look at that in our subsequent study.

As we conclude this study, we need to reflect on how the spirit of this age can affect our lives today. Will we follow the world system, or will we choose to follow the Lamb?

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