

74. The Book of Revelation—17:1-4

An Introduction to Revelation Chapter 17

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Tonight, in our study in the Book of Revelation we will be entering into Chapter 17.

Understand that both Chapters 17 and 18 deal with Babylon.

Author Mark Hitchcock had this to say about Babylon which I'd like to open with this evening—

“Many people would probably be surprised to know that the most prominent subject in Revelation, based on the number of verses devoted to it, is Babylon. Revelation contains 404 verses and 44 of those verses (about 11 percent) deal with Babylon.

Babylon first surfaces in Genesis 10-11, just after the Flood, as the place of man's first post deluge-organized rebellion against God. It was apparently the first city built after the Flood. It was founded and ruled over by the world's first dictator, a man by the name of Nimrod. It was also the location of the famed Tower of Babel. From its inception, Babylon was both a literal city and the wicked false religious system that emanated from it. It's pictured as mankind's city, and it is the second most mentioned city in the Bible appearing about 290 times. Jerusalem holds the title of the most mentioned city in the Bible at about 800 times.”

Revelation 14:8 and 16:19 have already declared Babylon's fall in overview form—in Chapters 17 and 18, that fall is carefully *detailed*.

There are six primary Chapters in the Bible that deal with Babylon (Isaiah 13 & 14; Jeremiah 50 & 51; Revelation 17 & 18)—you should read them carefully, and preferably in one sitting.

These are not the only passages in the Bible that deal with—but these are the main ones.

Chapters 17 and 18 are inserted into the chronological flow of Revelation—as parenthetical Chapters. The pouring out of the seventh bowl (16:17) is actually followed chronologically in time by the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to destroy His enemies that have gathered together in the Valley of Megiddo to fight against Him (19:11).

Remember that, near the end of Revelation 16, God spoke of the destruction of Babylon—

Revelation 16:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.

Chapters 17 and 18 become the last parenthesis in the Book of Revelation (the first being Chapter 7, and then Chapters 10-14) which gives us a more detailed look at the world system led by Satan, Antichrist, and the False Prophet—before recording its destruction.

Chapter 17 gives us a look at the *religious* aspects of “*Babylon the Great*”; and Chapter 18 zeros in on the *commercial* aspect of this final world empire. Because false religion is so much a part of this fallen world, it is no

surprise that it will play a major role in the end times—especially when it comes to establishing the final world governing empire.

One author put it this way—

“That ultimate expression of false religion will be an essential element of Antichrist’s final world empire, in holding together his military, economic, and political structure. Only religion can unite the world in the most compelling way. Politics, economics, even military force are unable to overcome the world’s cultural diversity. Only religion, with its appeal to the supernatural, can transcend the physical, geographical, historical, economic, and cultural barriers to world unity.”

Revelation 17:1-6 (NKJV)

¹ Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters,
² with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication." ³ So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast *which was* full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. ⁴ The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. ⁵ And on her forehead a name *was* written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. ⁶ I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement.

Now as we come to Chapter 17, the very first thing we are introduced to is a woman riding on a scarlet beast. Just who she is has been a matter of speculation and debate for centuries.

Let’s see if we can gather some clues from the text that might help us determine *who* this woman is—or more specifically *what* she represents.

1. First of all, she is called a “harlot” who led the nations into spiritual fornication (spiritual unfaithfulness to the true and living God).

This is an important clue because it describes someone who is unfaithful to God—while presenting themselves as *being* faithful to Him. In other words, a person can’t be unfaithful to someone unless they have made a commitment to them in some way—either they’re engaged or married to them.

Ray Stedman—

“The symbolism of spiritual adultery is not ordinarily used of heathen nations who know not God, but always of people who outwardly carry the name of God while actually worshiping and serving other gods. The concept of spiritual adultery is frequently used in describing the apostasy of Israel (Ezekiel 16 and 23; and all of Hosea)...”

Under the Old Covenant, God called Israel “His wife” and demanded fidelity from her as any husband would of his wife—

Exodus 34:12-16 (NKJV)

¹² Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. ¹³ But you shall destroy their altars, break their *sacred* pillars, and cut down their *wooden* images ¹⁴ (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name *is* Jealous, *is* a jealous God), ¹⁵ lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and *one of them* invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, ¹⁶ and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods.

2. Her influence reaches around the world.

Whatever she is—she’s not local—she’s global.

3. Don’t confuse the woman with the beast she rides.

She is seated on the beast which means she is steering and controlling the beast much like a rider on a horse would dominate and control and steer the direction of that horse.

Here’s the thing we must understand—in the beginning, she rides and controls the beast—but only for a time.

Initially, the ‘**beast**’ (the 10-region world government) tolerates and even appears to ‘partner’ with her (‘her’ being the religious harlot or ‘world church’—i.e., ecclesiastical, or religious Babylon) during the first half of the Tribulation Period. But after the power of this global government is solidified, they turn on her, destroy her and replace her with the Antichrist as their global leader (much like Hitler used the Christian church in Germany to gain power before he outlawed it and replaced with the Reich Church with himself as ‘lord’ or leader).

We read about this in Revelation 17:16-17—

Revelation 17:16-17 (NKJV)

¹⁶ And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. ¹⁷ For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.

So again, the ‘beast’ (Antichrist and his 10 kings) tolerates and uses this religious harlot during the first half of the Tribulation Period to gain power for their new world government.

Once their power is solidified—they no longer need her and so they turn on her (the harlot/world church) and destroy her starting at the mid-point of the Tribulation Period and extending into the second half of the Tribulation Period—in order so the Antichrist can establish his own religion where he is worshipped as God. (Matthew 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:4)

- Ecclesiastical Babylon is destroyed at the *beginning* of the last three and one-half years of the Great Tribulation.
- Commercial Babylon is destroyed at the *end* of the last three and one-half years of the Great Tribulation right before Jesus’ Second Coming.

4. This harlot is dressed in purple, scarlet, gold and jewels.

In other words, she is unashamedly wealthy, expensively adorned and outwardly attractive—to the world.

When the world honors and thinks the Church is beautiful—that’s always a problem for the Church of Jesus Christ.

5. She carries in her hand a golden cup.

Revelation 17:4 (NKJV)

⁴ The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, **having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.**

A golden cup is shiny, precious, and beautiful to behold—something in the O.T. that was used in the worship of God in the Temple.

However, a golden cup was not used when Jesus first instituted communion since those in the upper room that night were simple fishermen—a golden goblet was the cup of a king (check out the movie, ‘Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade’).

In other words, the true Church of Jesus Christ would never be in possession of such an ornate and expensive cup to use in the worship of God—and yet we see this harlot holding such a golden cup—but one that’s filled with abominations.

Many commentators associate this golden cup with the golden chalice used by the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) during the Mass. The Roman Catholic Mass is a blasphemous rite that claims that during the Mass the elements (bread and wine) are miraculously transformed into the substance of Christ’s body and blood so that they are no longer bread and wine (although they still appear to be).

This process is referred to as **transubstantiation** meaning “*change of substance.*”

After the bread and wine are ‘*transformed*’ into the actual body and blood of Christ at each celebration of the Mass—they are then offered to God as a new sacrifice of Christ for sins. This means, in Roman Catholic theology, the priests literally handle Christ’s body and that the mass is a constant reenactment of Christ’s sacrifice (Catholics deny this by saying it is simply a ‘bloodless representation’—a “*symbolic offering*”).

But according to Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church—“*The Eucharist is **the very sacrifice of the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus** which he instituted to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until his return in glory.*”

In Roman Catholic theology, the Eucharist (which means “*thanksgiving*”)—is *efficacious* meaning it has the power to produce a desired effect—and the desired effect is salvation!

The RCC teaches that when Catholics partake of ‘Holy Communion’ it earns them *installments of “grace”* which (along with keeping the other sacraments) accrue and someday will be sufficient for the *purchasing* of salvation for the faithful Catholic who remains in good standing with the Church.

In Roman Catholicism salvation is *sacramental* (earned thru participation in a sacred ritual or rituals or other sacred practices) as opposed to what the Bible actually says about salvation—that it is a free gift that we receive through our faith in Christ alone. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

The Eucharist (having been transformed into Christ’s body)—is then placed on display in a little standing chamber/holder called a *monstrance* to then be worshipped as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself by the Catholic Mass participants.

When Catholics partake of the Eucharist, they believe they are literally consuming the body of Jesus and that by ingesting the Eucharist (eating the body of Christ) they believe that this brings them everlasting life.

To justify this belief, they point to Jesus' words in John's gospel Chapter 6—

John 6:48, 51 (ESV)

⁴⁸ I am the bread of life...⁵¹If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

And so, the RCC takes these words of Jesus *literally* as referring to His physical body—even though Jesus went on to say—

John 6:63 (NKJV)

⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.

Now, we evangelicals believe that the Lord's Supper (Communion) *is* a spiritual experience—but that the bread and wine are not *transubstantiated* (turned into the actual body and blood of Christ) as Roman Catholics believe. The belief that Jesus' body needs to be sacrificed again and again for sins is utter blasphemy since the Bible clearly teaches—

Hebrews 10:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ ...we have been sanctified [saved, justified] through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Hebrews 9:28 (NKJV)

²⁸ so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many...

John 19:30 (NKJV)

³⁰ So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

All of this means that the Roman Catholic mass is an abomination because it is a constant offering of Christ's body and blood as atonement for sin—or in other words, that Jesus offering of Himself on Calvary's Cross once wasn't sufficient to pay for the sins of humanity.

6. She has a mystery title—"Mystery, Babylon the Great."

This clue links whoever she is spiritually (and in a mysterious way) to the Babylon of Nimrod in Genesis 10-11 (we'll talk about that next time).

7. She is not only a harlot (a prostitute)—she is the mother of all (spiritual) harlots.

This means she has given birth to spiritual children that follow her in her spiritual unfaithfulness to God (*idolatry*). In fact, she doesn't just have some children (spiritual offspring)—she is the source or '*fountainhead*' of all false religious systems starting with the Tower of Babel (which later became Babylon).

However, I would trace her influence back even further to the 'mother of all lies' that Satan told Eve in the Garden of Eden.

8. She is a major persecutor of true believers—in fact it says, "she is drunk with their blood."

In other words, she hasn't just "tasted" their blood (a little persecution) she is *intoxicated* by the blood of the saints of God—which means she has slaughtered (martyred) millions of true believers in Jesus Christ over the centuries.

9. She is associated with a city sitting on 7 hills or mountains.

Many believe that's a reference to the city of Rome which is built on 7 hills (each given a name).

10. The great city that she's linked to rules over the kings of the earth.

Now, in John's day that was a no brainer—Rome had conquered the world, Rome ruled over the kings of the earth and Rome was built on 7 hills. The Vatican to this day is a separate nation—yes within Rome but a sovereign nation with its own diplomatic embassies in every major nation around the world.

For your information—there is no organization in the world that has murdered more true Christians than has the RCC (according to Catholic historians like Will Durant). One pope in one afternoon murdered more Christians than all the Roman emperors put together. Most of the history of Europe is the history of the RCC—and in particular the history of the pope's struggles for power.

They had their own standing armies and because they controlled so many other kings in Europe—they controlled their armies as well. The RCC martyred millions who dared oppose the pope's authority over their lives or dared to speak out against their immoralities and heresies.

Rome was given the nickname centuries ago, "City of Bastards" because more illegitimate children were born to the popes, cardinals, bishops, priests and nuns than in any other city in the world.

It was no secret (it was common knowledge) that there were more prostitutes and mistresses in Rome than any other city because of all the 'celibate' Christian clergy that resided there.

And when Martin Luther (who was himself a Catholic monk), when he finally got to visit the 'holy city' of Rome—he was completely disillusioned and flat out disgusted by all the immorality going on among the clergy (including rampant homosexuality).

What further incensed him was how the RCC was selling *indulgences* (buying your forgiveness in advance for whatever sin you wanted to commit)—that when he came back to Germany, he nailed his 95 theses (reforms) on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg and launched the Protestant Reformation.

One author put it this way—

"The Protestant Reformation began in Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther, a teacher and a monk, published a document he called '*Disputation on the Power of Indulgences, or 95 Theses*'. The document was a series of 95 ideas about Christianity that he invited people to debate with him. These ideas were controversial because they directly contradicted the Catholic Church's teachings."

With regard to this woman in Revelation 17 representing the Roman Catholic Church—Dave Hunt's book, *A Woman Rides the Beast* is a must read on this subject.

I personally believe that this harlot called "**Mystery Babylon**" is bigger than just the RCC—she is called the "*Mother of all Harlots*" on the face of the earth.

I believe the final world religion will be a composite of all false religions—but I also believe that the RCC will be instrumental in bringing them all together.

In fact, for many years the RCC has thought of itself as the ‘Mother Church’ who will eventually bring all the religions of the world under its ‘umbrella.’

I believe this will happen right after the true Church of Jesus Christ is Raptured off of the earth—

2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 (NKJV)

¹ Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, ² not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. ³ Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away [apostasia] comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

➔ Explain ‘apostasia’ is not the Rapture but is connected to the Rapture of the Church—

J. Vernon McGee—

“You see, all true believers will have left the world scene at the time of the Rapture. This includes all true believers, and I have discovered that there are many true believers in the RCC and in liberal churches and even in some very weird religious systems.

All genuine believers, regardless of where they have gone to church, will be raptured. This will leave a church on earth that is totally apostate. Rather than being “the bride of Christ,” God calls it a “harlot.”

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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