

Mystery Babylon the Great Revelation 17

Revelation 17 Introduction

- The Bible makes a clear distinction between true and false religion.
- Jesus calls Himself “the truth” and calls the devil “the father of lies.”
- False prophets and false teachers are continually warned against in the Scriptures.
- This chapter looks forward to the climax of all false beliefs in the form of “Mystery Babylon.”

- The word mystery is used in the Bible with the meaning of its Greek root “*mysterion*.”
- It is something hidden or secret which is naturally unknown to human reason, but is now known thanks to the revelation of God.
- Without the benefit of biblical revelation, it is not a conclusion we would arrive at ourselves.

- Babylon or “Babel” was founded by a man named Nimrod whose very name means “rebellion.” (*Brown-Driver Briggs*)
- *The Jewish Encyclopedia* informs us that in ancient rabbinical literature, “*Nimrod is the prototype of a rebellious people, his name being interpreted as ‘he who made all the people rebellious against God.’*”

- Babylon/Babel is located in Mesopotamia, or modern Iraq.
- It is mentioned nearly 300 times in the Bible.
- Astrologers point to it as the birthplace of astrology – the practice involving horoscopes and the zodiac.
- Astrology and astronomy were initially closely related, which is why the magi from the east made it to Jerusalem looking for Jesus.

- The people of this region practiced a polytheistic religion which included well over 2000 deities.
- An important aspect of this religion was the use and care of images of the gods.
- Some historians believe Mesopotamian religion to be the oldest in the world.
- The Bible would more likely see it as the birthplace of idolatry.

- The Bible also connects it with a possible religion of the future in Zechariah 5:5-11.
- This prophecy was written after the Jewish return from exile – and has never been clearly fulfilled.
- Here a woman, “Wickedness,” is taken in a basket to a house built especially for her in “Shinar”, where the basket will be set upon its base.
- Shinar is another name for Mesopotamia – the region surrounding Babylon.

- This supports the view of many prophecy students who look for a coming reconstruction and revival of Babylon before the return of Jesus Christ.

- One of the most prominent Mesopotamian deities was the goddess *Inanna*, also known as *Anath*, *Astarte*, *Ishtar* or *Asherah* – a goddess of fertility, love and war.
- The prophet Jeremiah referred to her several times as the “Queen of Heaven.”
- He sharply criticized the people of Jerusalem and Judah for honoring her while forsaking their own true God.

- We all see that there is a worldwide longing to achieve a greater measure of unity among various faiths.
- In the last days, what's to prevent a movement to renew the goddess worship of Babylon in the name of religious harmony?
- Not much really, outside of the personal knowledge of Jesus Christ that we arrive at through God's Word.
- After the Rapture of the Church, the ultimate form of religious unity will finally be achieved.
- This chapter reveals the final form of this unified religion from God's perspective.
- He views it as "the great harlot who sits on many waters."
- While connected by name with Babylon, it seems also to be connected with Rome.
- Chuck Smith reminded us,
 - *"It is important to remember that the corrupt religious system coming out of Rome will be the church that exists after the Rapture. When you take all the Christians out of any church, what is left will be awful. And that is what we have here."*
- To get the full impact of John's bizarre vision, let's read straight through the chapter.
- Then we can go back to the beginning and dig into it verse by verse.
- We'll close with a quick look at:
 - The Future of False Religion
 - The Temptation of False Religion
 - The Danger of False Religion
 - The Cure for False Religion

Revelation 17:1

- The vision emphasizes the judgment of the great harlot.
- Make no mistake; her fate is sealed.
- This false world religious system is sure to come, but is just as certain to be destroyed.
- Peek ahead to Revelation 21:9.
- There is a deliberate textual connection and contrast between this great harlot and the bride, the wife of the Lamb.

Revelation 17:2

- Fornication In the Bible, especially in the Old Testament prophets, spiritual fornication speaks of idolatry – whether or not the idolatry included sexual sin.
- The kings of the earth will all get caught up in her idolatry.
- The inhabitants of the earth will be intoxicated by her idolatry.
- It seems the whole world is impacted by it.

Revelation 17:3

- The scarlet color connects this beast with the dragon of Revelation 12 (Satan).
- The seven heads and ten horns connect it with the Beast (Antichrist) of Revelation 13.
- She sits on the beast, and so would seem to somehow control it, but she is also "carried" by it.
 - See v.7
- The relationship is mutually beneficial.

Revelation 17:4

- Her appearance is one of great wealth – which we might expect for a high-priced prostitute.
- She is a religion which has given up any spiritual purity she may have once had in order to gain the world's riches.
- Notice the golden cup in her hand.
- Let's look back at Jeremiah 51:7-9.

Revelation 17:5

- Her name is Mystery Babylon the Great.
- She is the Mother of Harlots – the source to which all idolatry and every false system of worship can trace its lineage.
- In the end times she will again rise to prominence and her influence will be felt throughout the earth.

Revelation 17:6

- Killing the saints intoxicates her – and this completely amazes John.
- He knew about pagans persecuting Christians; he experienced it firsthand.
- What he could not grasp was a link between fanatical paganism and a future apostate church – a harlot contrasted with the bride.
- In these last days this is not very difficult for us to envision.

Revelation 17:7

- The Beast, again, is connected with Antichrist.
- This is clear from the seven heads and ten horns – as in 13:1.
- The Beast supports the false religious system – at least for a time.
- The Woman rides the Beast and the Beast carries the Woman as long as the relationship is mutually beneficial.

Revelation 17:8

- Here are more connections with Antichrist, the Beast of Revelation 13.
- Let's go back and check out 13:3 and 13:8.

Revelation 17:9

- Seven mountains Today numerous cities from Seattle to Cincinnati and Moscow to Mecca to Melbourne are all said to sit on seven hills.
- In John's day "seven mountains" (or "hills", there is no real difference in Greek) would most easily point to Rome.
- This is even more likely when we read v.18.

Revelation 17:10

- The best way to understand this is to view the seven biblical Gentile kingdoms in succession.
- (Kings and their kingdoms are closely linked in prophetic literature.)
- Five have fallen (in John's time) = Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece
- One is = Rome
- The other is not yet come = the Kingdom of Antichrist, which must continue a short time.

Revelation 17:11

- Is himself also the eighth and is of the seven
- This verse makes the most sense if we understand the two phases of Antichrist's kingdom:
 1. The First is his initial version of the revived Roman Empire – from which he arises.
 2. The Second is the World Empire, in which he is worshiped after his "resurrection". During this time Jesus will return and destroy him.

Revelation 17:12-14

- The ten kings are connected to a similar prophecy of Antichrist's end-times empire in Daniel 7:24.
- They shall willingly submit to this "beastly" Man of Sin. (Paul calls him that.)
- They will attempt to fight against Jesus at His return, but won't have a chance.
 - See 16:14-16.

Revelation 17:15

- The waters were first mentioned in v.1.
- Now they are explained.
- They indicate the worldwide influence of this idolatrous last-days Super Faith.

Revelation 17:16-17

- The ten kings hate the harlot and destroy her in the end.
- As the seven-year period begins, Antichrist may seem relatively submissive to the harlot – as an animal submits to its rider.
- The ten kings, in turn, will submit to him.
- By the mid-point of the seven-year span, the rulers of the earth will reject the harlot and all will worship the Beast.

- God is behind the destruction of the harlot – graphically described in v.16.
- This is her final judgment and the main point of the vision given to John.
 - See v.1
- The idolatry that began in Babylon spread throughout the whole world.
- This is when and how it will meet its end.

- Robert L. Thomas explains that this,
 - *"... speaks the utter destruction of a system of false religion that will have reached its peak in the days just before its destruction."*

- The seizing of religious authority by a political power has often been seen in the past.
- Perhaps the most symbolic was when Napoleon invited Pope Pius VII to crown him not king but "emperor."
- As the pope said, "Receive the imperial crown," Napoleon unexpectedly took the crown and proceeded to crown both himself and Empress Josephine.
- A painting at the Louvre captures the event.

Revelation 17:18

- In John's day this would have been one more evident link to Rome.
- The religion of Babylon gradually moved westward – through diverse forms of Greek or Near Eastern paganism.
- Eventually, even the Queen of Heaven mentioned by Jeremiah found herself very much at home in Rome.

- Robert L. Thomas concludes,
 - *"In the future day anticipated in the pages of this prophecy, this city will become the focal point for a religious system staunchly opposed to the truth of Christianity. The system will thrive for a time in gaining influence over the commercial and political entities of its time, until the beast and the ten kings determine that it no longer has a usefulness for their purposes. They will then dismantle it."*

Revelation 17 Conclusions

1. The Future of False Religion

- Outward Unification – so people get along.
- Diversity of Belief – supposing that all beliefs are equally true. (Remember Babylon had thousands of gods.)
- Babylon to Rome back to Babylon?
- An important female goddess figure?
- The marginalization of Jesus.

2. The Temptation of False Religion

- We really do want people to get along. There is a temptation is to sacrifice the truth to achieve an outward unity.
- Everybody wants a faith that brings comfort – even if it ultimately just makes us comfortable.
- If it challenges us, we want it to do so in ways that make us feel better about ourselves.

3. The Danger of False Religion

- It makes us comfortable in our sin.
- Or, it tells us we can work our way into God's favor – thereby leading to self-righteousness.
- It marginalizes Jesus, who is truly God and truly a man, and died to save us from our sins.
- It is false. It is, at it's foundation, a lie, and therefore God must judge it.
- Yet He will accomplish that through the Beast and his subservient loyal kings.

4. The Cure for False Religion

- Be willing to acknowledge our natural resistance to and rebellion against God.
- Be willing to give Him His rightful place of authority over our lives.
- Be willing to receive the truth, no matter how uncomfortable it makes us.
- Be willing to learn the Bible as a whole, which ultimately points to Jesus. See John 8:31-32.