

Revelation 17

The Great Harlot

The seven bowl judgments took us to the. In the time line of events the last three and a half years of the last seven years of this age are over. And for thirty days the bowl judgments are poured out on the wicked. The Antichrist, who is called the beast and his demonic empire has been destroyed.

Now in Revelation 17- 19 we have another interlude in the time line of revelation. We have a symbolic retelling of the rise of evil and false religion until its destruction under the seven bowl judgments. Many times symbolism is more powerful than straight facts. And I believe this is true here in Revelation 17.

This retelling begins with the apostle John telling us about a harlot. He tells us about a prostitute who dredges up seductive lives from the sewer of her soul, all of which are designed to entrap people, as she helps the Antichrist.

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, ²with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication."
(Revelation 17:1, 2)

The harlot here is a symbol. So too are the many waters. The harlot stands for false religion; idolatry, the worship of anyone or anything other than the true God. And the many waters, we will see, refers to people and nations. The harlot is great, because she has a dominant role in spiritual idolatry throughout history.

The whole world owes allegiance and love to God. But much of the world in the past and in the present and especially in the last days have been, are and will be seduced by the harlot. And not only have kings fornicated with her, but everyday inhabitants of the earth have been seduced as well.

The prostitute has been around for a long time, so you would think she would be unattractive. But quite the reverse is true. She is a beautiful, sexy and seductive. When she walks into a room, all eyes are on her and she likes it that way. In the last days the harlot will be Islam. But this harlot will be judged and those who have fornicated with her will be the ones to destroy her.

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.
(Revelation 17:3)

Here is our first clue as to who the harlot is. She rides on a scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns. In the future this beast is Satan's Antichrist and his Islamic Empire. The harlot sits on the beast indicating that she influences the Antichrist, just as someone sitting on a horse guides the horse. But the Antichrist also supports the harlot and will use her to achieve his goal and then he will destroy her.

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.
(Revelation 17:4)

For most of the world the harlot is extremely attractive. And she will take on anyone: rich, poor, old, young, educated, uneducated, man or woman. She drinks from a cup full of abominations or idolatry and she shares her drink freely. This harlot is not involved in physical, sexual immorality: her trade is idolatry. This is how the word "harlot" is often used in the Old Testament. For example in Jeremiah 13:27 God said, "I have seen your adulteries and your *lustful* neighings, the lewdness of your harlotry, your abominations on the hills in the fields..."

And on her forehead a name was written:

MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT,
THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS
AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS
OF THE EARTH.
(Revelation 17:5)

On the harlot's forehead is written a name. But the word "Mystery" is not a part of the harlot's name. Verse 5 should read "And on her forehead a name was written, a mystery..." And then comes the name: "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

There are a number of mysteries in the Bible; truths that were hidden, but then revealed. There is the mystery of Israel's blindness to the fact that Jesus is

the true Messiah.¹ There is the mystery of the rapture, which is that some believers will be alive when Christ returns for the church. But both the dead and the living will be changed and glorified.² And there is the mystery that the church will be composed of both Jews and Gentiles and that together we are the body of Christ, the people of God.³

The mystery of the harlot is that she is symbolized by the ancient city of Babylon, which was located in what is now modern day Iraq. She is the mother of harlots in that she is the source of all false religion and philosophy. She has a golden cup in her hand and its contents spill over into every form of idolatry. In Jeremiah 51:7 it is written,

Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord's hand,
That made all the earth drunk.
The nations drank her wine;
Therefore the nations are deranged.

This harlot's work began very early in human history. In Genesis 10, we read of a man named Nimrod. He was a mighty man and established a kingdom called Babel. It was later called Babylon. But it was there that the Tower of Babel was built. Both the city and the tower were built to be the political, economic and religious center of the ancient world. And it all stood in opposition to God. In the future both Islam and the Antichrist will oppose the true God and kill God's people.

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.
(Revelation 17:6)

Just as an excess of alcohol makes one drunk, the harlot will kill so many people that she will be drunk with their blood. Imagine drinking blood from a cup until the blood begins to overflow your mouth and splash onto your face. The image should shock us and make us sick! This is why John said he marveled with great amazement.

But the angel said to me, "Why did you marvel? I will
tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast
that carries her, which has the seven heads and the
ten horns. ⁸The beast that you saw was, and is not,

¹ Romans 11:25

² 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

³ Ephesians 3:1-7

and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

⁹ “Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. ¹⁰ There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time. ¹¹ The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition.
(Revelation 17:7-11)

What we are being told here is the rise and fall of empires the harlot has influenced. The relationship between kingdoms and mountains is well established in Scripture. For example in Daniel 2:35 the Messiah's kingdom is referred to as a great mountain that filled all the earth.

When John wrote Revelation the first five empires had come and gone. They were Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece (including Alexander's empire and his successors). The sixth was in power in John's time and that was Rome. The seventh kingdom was yet to come for John: it was the Islamic Empire centered in what is now modern day Turkey. It came five hundred years after John and fell in 1924.

The eighth and final empire is of the seventh. In other words the beast's, the Antichrist's empire will be a revived Islamic Empire, the great enemy of both Jews and Christians. This is what all the Islamic radicals in our world are fighting for—a revived Caliphate and world dominion.

The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast.
(Revelation 17:12)

The ten horns which will make up the ten nations of this future empire are not yet in power, not yet an empire, but they will be. And they will rule for “one hour” meaning for a short time.

These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast.
(Revelation 17:13)

These future kings and nations are in full agreement with the beast and the harlot. To paraphrase this in the words of Romans 12:1, 2: they have presented themselves as a living sacrifice to the harlot and the beast. They understand their duty. They are not at all affected by the truth for they have been transformed by the seduction of the beast and the harlot to do their will.

These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those *who are* with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.
(Revelation 17:14)

Here is a reference to the Battle of Armageddon. The final empire will attempt to fight against Jesus Christ and they will lose and be destroyed. And notice that the people of God who are with Christ are called "chosen and faithful." The next time you think of yourself, remind yourself that Scripture calls you chosen and faithful! Ephesians 1 tells us that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blame before Him in love. And Colossians 1 calls us faithful. And the strength of our faithfulness is in the power of God's Spirit within us.

Then he said to me, "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. 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.
(Revelation 17:15, 16)

The kings of the world who support the beast and his empire will turn on the very harlot they have used for their pleasure. When will they destroy her? I do not really know the answer to that question. But at some point in the future the false religious system of Islam will be destroyed. It will be destroyed by the very people she seduced.

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.
(Revelation 17:17)

This is an astonishing verse. Notice here how God works in the hearts of the wicked to carry out His will, even as they oppose him. God worked His will in the same way with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Acts 22:23 tells us that Jesus was delivered to be crucified by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God. But it was "lawless" hands that actually did the crucifixion. Our God is

sovereign in all of life, nothing is out of His control. And this should give us great comfort when we go through difficult times.

And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.
(Revelation 17:18)

The woman, the harlot, is called "that great city." This is just another way of saying Babylon. It is just like when we say, "Well, those are the values of Madison Ave or Hollywood." We are not speaking of those physical places, but what they represent.

You know, in our world today we are often told, "It doesn't matter what religion you believe, so long as you believe and are sincere." Chapter 17 of revelation tells us that what we believe is of critical importance. We are either in love with the true God or we are united to a harlot.

Let's think about prostitution for a minute. People pay a prostitute to experience some kind of sexual and emotional fulfillment. But it is only temporary. And there is no prostitute as attractive and skilled as he or she may be who can provide the true pleasures of love and fulfillment that a good marriage does.

In much the same way as one is seduced by a prostitute, unbelievers and followers of false religions and philosophies are trying to purchase what God offers to all of us freely through Jesus Christ. But to have the joys that come with a relationship with God we have to be faithful to Him. This is why Romans 12:1, 2 is so important.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service.*
² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Don't be seduced by the harlot. Present yourself to the God who truly loves you! And fill your heart and mind with His holy Word so that you are transformed to become more like Christ. Then you will experience the joy of your relationship with God.

Finally, remember this: all the empires of the harlot have fallen. So will the final empire of the Antichrist. It is doomed to perdition. Only the Kingdom of God will last forever.

