

Harlot Babylon: Who is She? (Rev. 17-18)

I. THE GREAT FALLING AWAY AT THE END OF THE AGE

- A. One of the greatest challenges for the Church in the End-Times is the falling away from the faith. (Mt. 24:9-13; 2 Thes. 2:3; 1 Tim. 4:1-2; 2 Tim. 3:1-7; 4:3-5; 2 Pet. 2:1-3).

¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons... (1 Tim. 4:1)

- B. The falling away is one of the main signs of the generation that the Lord returns.

³ Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition... (2Thes. 2:3)

II. THE GREAT HARLOT: HER JUDGMENT AND SEDUCTION (REV. 17:1-7)

*¹ One of the seven angels...talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the Great Harlot who sits on many waters (v. 15), 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... I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast (Antichrist) which was full of names of blasphemy...⁴ The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold...having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. ⁵ 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. ⁷ But the angel said to me, "Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast (Antichrist) that carries her... (Rev. 17:1-7)*

- A. John received one of the most significant prophecies related to the End-Times in Rev. 17-18 that directly addresses the issue of the End-Time falling away. An angel revealed to John part of Satan's strategy to seduce the Church, Israel, and the nations to voluntarily cooperate with this.

- B. A Harlot will be raised up across the earth that has two powerful expressions that operate simultaneously. First, a religious network and second, an economic one. They will have a complicated inter-connection with each other.

- C. The Harlot religion and the Harlot economic system will have the power to seduce and deceive the most powerful leaders on the earth (the kings and great merchants; Rev. 17:2; 18:3, 23).

³ For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury. (Rev. 18:1-3)

²³ For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived. (Rev. 18:23)

III. THE IMPORTANCE AND DIFFICULTY OF REV. 17-18

- A. The Harlot will have a complicated inter-connection with a worldwide religious network and a worldwide economic one. ***Thus, the precise identification of the Harlot and how she operates is difficult to grasp.*** We must challenge all of our preconceived ideas and continually evaluate all of our major premises related to the Harlot so as to make sure they line up with our growing understanding of what Scriptures says about this End-Time mystery. There is an unusually large amount of Scripture devoted to this vast and important subject (Gen. 10-11; Isa. 13-14; 21; 47; Jer. 50-51; Ezek. 16; 23; 26-28; Rev. 17-18).
- B. Rev. 17-18, is the longest prophecy in Revelation (42 verses). The second longest prophecy is about the New Jerusalem (33 verses; Rev. 21:1-22:5). The longest prophecy in the OT is Jer. 50-51 (110 verses) and, it also focuses on Babylon in the End-Times. One of the longest prophecies in the OT is Isa. 13-14 (54 verses) which also focuses on the role of Babylon in the End-Times.
- C. Rev. 17 is the most difficult chapter in Revelation (if not in the whole Bible) to understand. It is the most symbolic chapter in Revelation. The angel gives us the meaning of the symbols right in the chapter itself. The main message of Rev. 17 is very easy to understand. We must know the three main themes of Rev. 17-18 which are the emergence of the Antichrist, his ten-nation confederation, and the Harlot Babylon.
- D. Why is this most important prophecy veiled in such cryptic language? Because the Lord wants us to diligently pour over every line of it and discuss it often so as to understand its every nuance.
- E. Rev. 17 is essential to understand because its theme concerns the coming worldwide Harlot that will powerfully seduce and deceive Israel, the Church, and all the religions on earth. Those who are deceived by it will end up in the Lake of Fire. Rev. 17-18 deserves much careful study.
- F. We must function as forerunners that prepare the unprepared. Therefore, it will be necessary to wrestle and diligently work through with what the Scripture says about the Harlot with much prayer with fasting as Daniel did (Dan. 9-10). The enemy will resist all who pursue these themes.
- ²¹ ***While I was in prayer...Gabriel...22 said, "Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand. 23 At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you...therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision... (Dan. 9:21-23)***
- ¹² ***Then he (angel) said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. 13 But the prince (demonic principality) of the kingdom of Persia withstood me 21 days; and behold, Michael...came to help me...14 I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days..." (Dan. 10:12-14)***
- ¹⁴ ***But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Heb. 5:14)***

IV. BASIC PREMISES: CHALLENGE THESE OFTEN

- A. The Harlot by definition must be one who was formerly in a covenant with God.
- B. Israel's corporate harlotry in Scripture is spiritual harlotry that involved idolatry and making covenants with idolatrous nations instead of trusting the Lord. Money was always central to spiritual harlotry, Either by the fear of lacking economic provision or the lust for great wealth.
- C. The Harlot will have great prominence in religion and economics over the kings of the earth, the merchants, and the great men of the earth (Rev. 18:3, 23).
- D. The Harlot will be destroyed by the Antichrist and his 10-nation confederation (Rev. 17:16).
- E. My present "theory" is that the Harlot will involve two different cities that will work very close together for mutual benefit and will be judged at two separate times. In other words, the Harlot will be the "composite Harlot" that combines two vast global institutions based in two different cities working together to deceive the whole earth. Rev. 17 focuses on religious (spiritual) Babylon. Rev. 18 focuses on economic Babylon as a literal city as its economic center.
- F. It seems most likely to me at this time, that the Harlot worldwide religious network will be established in Jerusalem and will work with its counterpart, the Harlot worldwide economic network that will be established in the rebuilt city of Babylon on the Euphrates River.
²¹ How the faithful city (Jerusalem) has become a harlot...²⁵ I will turn My hand against you, and thoroughly purge away your dross...²⁶ Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city." (Isa. 1:21, 25-26)
- G. It seems most likely to me at this time, that the Harlot religious network in Jerusalem will be burned by the Antichrist at the time of the Abomination of Desolation or at the beginning of the final 3½ years to make way for the Antichrist worldwide religious network. The Harlot economic network in Babylon will transfer its loyalty and wealth to support the Antichrist until he also destroys her near the end of the Tribulation related to Jesus' Second Coming.

V. THE 2-DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN THE END-TIMES

- A. The Harlot religion and the Antichrist religion are two very different stages in Satan's plans. Satan's strategy involves two significantly different religious movements to keep the nations from the faith and to cause others to deny it.
 - 1. First, Satan will raise up a tolerant worldwide religious network that will be supported by a worldwide economic base in the city of Babylon.
 - 2. Second, Satan will raise up another worldwide religious movement that will be totally intolerant. It will also be supported by the same economic base in Babylon.

- B. In stage one, the Harlot religion will be a voluntary, tolerant, moderate, liberal, humanistic, worldwide religious network that will be supported by a worldwide economic base. It will blend all the main religions in the world. The majority of the peoples of the earth will not perceive this religion as being demonic. It will be spiritually dangerous, causing many to deny the faith.
- C. The leadership of this religious network will be different from those who lead the finances in Babylon. However, they will have the same spirit of evil that inspires them.
- D. This religious network is described as sitting on many waters or as greatly influencing many nations (Rev. 17:1, 15). It will eventually become an official institution that will forcefully remove all who resist her. It will have the political and social backing to kill those who resist it.

¹ *I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters... (Rev. 17:1)*

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

¹⁸ *The woman...is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth. (Rev. 17:18)*

- E. This religious network will be destroyed by the 10-nation confederation and the Antichrist.
- 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. (Rev. 17:16)*
- F. In stage two, Satan will raise up another worldwide religion. It will be the Antichrist's worship movement that will be totally intolerant and involuntary. It will also be supported economically by the same city of Babylon. This religion will have additional financial strength because of the mark of the Beast economic monopoly.

⁴ *So they...worshiped the beast (Antichrist), saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"* ⁵ *...He was given authority to continue for 42 months...* ⁷ *It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. Authority was given him over every...nation.* ⁸ *All who dwell on the earth will worship him...* (Rev. 13:4-8)

¹⁵ *He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast (Antichrist), that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.* ¹⁶ *He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads,* ¹⁷ *and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast...* (Rev. 13:15-17)

- G. Satan's second stage of his religious plan will be instituted after the Abomination of Desolation which includes a speaking idol in the Jerusalem Temple with the mark of the Beast that enforces all to obey (by legalizing the death penalty for all who refuse). Satan will use the Harlot religion to weaken the conscience, conviction, and resolve of the people who believe in God so that they will more readily accept the Antichrist religion that comes next.

¹⁵ *When you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" ...¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. (Mt. 24:15-16)*

VI. WHY IS BABYLON CONSIDERED A RELIGION?

- A. Nowhere in Rev. 17 is Babylon actually called a religion. However, most agree that it is one.
- B. First, because 100% of the 90 references in the Old Testament that refer to national harlotry are about religion seeking provision through idolatry. Thus, John is using the concept of spiritual harlotry in the way that is in unity with the Old Testament.
- C. Second, many believers who will take a stand against Babylon will be martyred. They will be killed for taking a stand on Jesus being the only true God and for Babylon being demonic. Thus, Babylon is more than an economic institution. Business networks do not kill those who take a stand on doctrinal issues. They do not legislate martyrdom for those who hold fast to Biblical doctrines. Murder will be widespread in the Harlot Babylon.
⁶ I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints...of the martyrs of Jesus. (Rev. 17: 6)
- D. Third, she is the mother of harlots. In other words, she produces other religious institutions like her. The original mother is found in Gen. 10-11 at the tower of Babel which was the original Babylon which was profoundly religious. Babylon's history is far more dominant in religion than its economic policies.
- E. Fourth, is the evidence of what is currently happening around the earth. Many religions are joining together. This is a historical reality that we can easily observe. However, the use of nuclear weapons can change the political, economic, and religious landscape very quickly.

VII. SPIRITUAL HARLOTRY IS FOCUSED ON RELIGION

⁹ Because I was crushed by their adulterous heart which has departed from Me, and by their eyes which play the harlot after their idols... (Ezek. 6:9)

- A. Israel's spiritual harlotry had two primary expressions. First, by worshipping idols as the way to secure rain and agricultural prosperity. Second, by making alliances with idolatrous nations to gain protection from hostile nations, instead of trusting God. When Israel turned to idols or foreign alliances, God called it "playing the harlot with other gods." Israel's harlotry was motivated by seeking provision or protection in way contrary to their relationship with God.

¹² Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going...¹³ But you shall destroy their altars...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...¹⁶ and...his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods. ¹⁷ You shall make no molded gods for yourselves. (Ex. 34:12-17)

- B. When Israel turned to idols or foreign alliances, God called it “playing the harlot with other gods.” There are 90 OT passages in the Old Testament that refer to Israel’s national harlotry. In each passage, harlotry is about religion based on idolatry.
- 16 The LORD said to Moses: "You will rest with your fathers; and this people will...play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land...and they will forsake Me..." (Deut. 31:16)***
- C. Spiritual harlotry is synonymous with idolatry which is demon worship involving encounters with demons. Idolatry is usually combined with immorality (orgies), drugs, demonic rituals, and the sacrifice of animals or humans.
- 20 The things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons...I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. (1 Cor. 10:20-21)***
- 12 My people ask counsel from their wooden idols...for the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray, and they have played the harlot against their God. 13 They offer sacrifices on the mountaintops, and burn incense on the hills... (Hosea 4:12-13)***
- 37 They have committed adultery with their idols, and even sacrificed their sons whom they bore to Me, passing them through the fire, to devour them. (Ezek. 23:37)***
- 25 They were unfaithful to the God of their fathers, and played the harlot after the gods of the peoples of the land.... (1 Chr. 5:25)***
- D. The Harlot Babylon will commit spiritual harlotry. She will offer a golden cup that is filled with filthiness and abominations. To be guilty of harlotry, it requires that many of her followers be those who claim to have had a relationship with God (Church and Israel).
- E. Jerusalem was a harlot because she worshipped idols for money instead worshipping God for love. Money was sought to provide her protection, comfort, stature, etc. The Harlot Babylon is motivated by money not love (true worship). The love of money is the root of all evil.
- 21 The faithful city has become a harlot! It was full of justice...but now murderers. (Isa. 1:21)***
- F. When Jesus cleansed the Temple at His first coming, it provided us a prophetic picture of what He will do when He comes to Jerusalem at the Second Coming. He will again need to cleanse the Jerusalem Temple from the spirit of Babylon. Zeal for His Father’s house consumed Him (Jn. 2:17). His zeal was provoked as they combined commerce and abominable practices with worship. His House in Jerusalem was to be a House of Prayer, but they made it a house of merchandise! They will again exchange their worship for commerce! Instead of praying to their Father for their needs, they exploit people's desire for worship and make a profit from it.
- 16 He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" 17 Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up." (Jn. 2:16-17)***
- 24 You cannot serve God and mammon. (Mt. 6:24)***

VIII. JERUSALEM AND BABYLON COMING TOGETHER?

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. ⁷ 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..." (Rev. 17:6-7)

- A. John in his 90's has seen the visions throughout Revelation and was on the Mount of Transfiguration. No man ever saw more than John, yet he is shocked by the harlot! The mystery may be the unification of Babylon and Jerusalem as the ultimate expression of harlotry!
- B. Jerusalem could be the litmus test of a new international city with worldwide political and religious unity to see if people can come together as one. It is the city that the three main monotheistic religions look to. The Antichrist will be the political and economic leader of much of Europe and the Middle East. Babylon will be the new controlling city where much power will be based. He will bring together political power, economic strength, and religious unity.
- C. Jer. 50-51 refers to many Jewish people living in Babylon at the end of the age! I assume they are in Babylon involved in commerce. The Lord warns His people in Babylon to flee (Rev. 18:4; Jer. 50:8, 28; 51:6, 9, 45, 50; Isa. 48:20-21; 52:11-12; Zech. 2:6-7). This will involve family members who have resisted Babylon in their heart.
- D. Possibly some apostate Jewish leaders (in covenant with the Antichrist in Jerusalem) may be asked to relocate to Babylon as they are promoted to great positions in worldwide economics. It is possible that some of the prominent Jewish leaders in the Harlot religion in Jerusalem will be connected to Jewish economic leaders in Babylon; thus creating a strong relationship between the wicked apostate leaders of these two cities. This would be the ultimate harlot in history!

IX. JERUSALEM AND BABYLON ARE BOTH THE GREAT CITY IN REVELATION

- A. The Abomination of Desolation will occur in Jerusalem, making it central to the Antichrist's worldwide religion. In Rev. 11:8, Jerusalem in the Tribulation is called the "great city." This is the first occurrence of the designation "the great city." This is significant as it establishes a powerful precedent for the title before Rev. 17-18. John sets another precedent in referring to Jerusalem by a name of one of their ancient enemies (who came under God's judgment).
⁸ And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. (Rev. 11:8)
- B. The next use of the title the "great city" is in Rev. 14:8 referring to Babylon the Harlot. Several verses later Jerusalem is referred to "the city" without identifying it (most interpreters agree that this city is Jerusalem). In this passage, "great city" and Jerusalem are linked.
⁸ Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city...¹⁹ The great winepress of the wrath of God. ²⁰...was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for 1600 furlongs. (Rev. 14:8, 19-20)

- C. The next use of the title the “great city” is in Rev. 16:19 just before Rev. 17:1. It is in context to the Seventh Bowl judgment. Jerusalem again is called the “great city” that was split into 3 parts. Ezekiel spoke of Jerusalem as being split into three parts when judged by God (Ezek. 5:1–5). The “nations” can be translated “the Gentiles.” The juxtaposition of the “great city” with the ‘cities of the Gentiles’ makes clear it is not a Gentile city.

¹⁹ Now the great city (Jerusalem) was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations (Gentiles) fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. (Rev. 16:19)

- D. In the first three passages that mention the “great city” (Rev. 11:8; 14:8, 20; 16:19) we see Babylon and Jerusalem connected together. Each of these passages come before Rev. 17-18, thus, establishing a consistent motif in the mind of the John’s reader before the Harlot is revealed. There are two great cities at the end of the age that are against God. They operate in a love-hate partnership as they deny God and serve the Antichrist as a harlot for financial gain.

- E. The next reference to the great city is found in Rev. 17:16. John assumes his readers understand who the “great city” is because of previous references to it.

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

- F. In Rev. 18, the great city is referred to 5 times (v. 10, 16, 18, 19, 21). It is the city of Babylon.

¹⁰ Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! ...16 and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen...18 and cried out...saying, 'What is like this great city?' 19 "They threw dust on their heads...saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.' 21 Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore. (Rev. 18:10-21)

- G. The ultimate great city in God’s plan is the New Jerusalem.

¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, (Rev. 21:10)

X. THERE ARE TWO STAGES TO THE FALL OF BABYLON

- A. Two passages in Revelation declare, “Babylon has fallen, has fallen.” They quote Isa. 21:9.

⁹ Then he answered and said, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen!" (Isa. 21:9)

⁸ Another angel followed, saying, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city." (Rev. 14:8)

² And he cried...saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen..." (Rev. 18:2)

- B. Babylon falls twice. First, the locations of worldwide religious network are destroyed by fire near the middle of the final 7 years. Second, is judgment of the city of Babylon (Seventh Bowl).