

**The Book Of Revelation
Study 83**

Revelation 17:1-18 (NASB)

¹ *Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters,*

² *with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality."*

³ *And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns.*

⁴ *The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality,*

⁵ *and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."*

⁶ *And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly.*

⁷ *And the angel said to me, "Why do you wonder? 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.*

⁸ *"The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.*

⁹ *"Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits,*

¹⁰ *and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while.*

¹¹ *"The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction.*

¹² *"The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour.*

¹³ *"These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast.*

¹⁴ *"These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful."*

¹⁵ *And he *said to me, "The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.*

¹⁶ *"And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire.*

¹⁷ *"For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled.*

¹⁸ *"The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth."*

There are certain elements of truth in Karl Marx's oft quoted statement that religion is "the opium of the people."

People are incurably religious because God created them to be worshipers.

They will inevitably worship someone or something, if not the true God, then false gods of their own making.

People are made with a God shaped vacuum that they are constantly seeking to fill.

Since the fall, man's innate longing to know God has been twisted and perverted. People still seek something to worship but no longer seek the true God.

Romans 3:11 (NASB)

¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;

Because ;

John 6:44 (NASB)

⁴⁴ "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

Sadly man's need for a relationship with God has been corrupted by his love of sin. Paul wrote:

Romans 1:21 (NASB)

²¹ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Into mankind's spiritual vacuum steps Satan, "the father of all lies, (John 8:44), and his demon hosts, disguised as angels of light (2 Cor. 11:14-15) and purveying "doctrines of demons" (1Tim. 4:1).

Playing on people's religious bent, they energize religious deception.

False religion's powerful appeal comes from its promise to satisfy man's longing for the spiritual realm without bringing him under God's authority.

In their rebellion against the true God, and because of their love of sin, fallen men willingly turn to these damning Satanic religions.

But, wonderfully, graciously, mercifully, though man no longer seeks God, God still seeks man. Jesus said,

Luke 19:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

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.

During the Tribulation, all the world's diverse false religions will be reunited into one great world religion.

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.

Chapter seventeen reveals the spiritual nature of Antichrist's kingdom;
Chapter eighteen follows with its material aspects.

God will destroy both aspects of Antichrist's kingdom.

Chapters 17 and 18 are inserted into the chronological flow of Revelation, which continues in Chapter 19.

The pouring out of the seventh bowl (16:17) is actually followed immediately in time by the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to end the great world battle(19:11).

Chapters 17 and 18 digress to look not at God's specific judgments, but at what is being judged.

These two chapters go back to describe the world system led by Satan, Antichrist, and the false prophet, before recording its destruction.

John had already heard harbingers of Babylon's destruction;

Revelation 14:8 (NASB)

⁸ *And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality."*

Revelation 16:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ *Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.*

Now we have the details of that destruction given to us in these remarkable visions.

During the Tribulation, people will desperately seek religion because of what will be happening in the world. As the hammer blows of God's judgment (the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments) devastate the earth and terrorize its inhabitants, people will turn in desperation to Antichrist as their savior.

Aided by the false prophet and hordes of deceiving demons, Antichrist will establish a worldwide religion, "*Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth.*"

How can the future religious Babylon be the mother of all false religion?

To comprehend this Babylon of the future, we have to understand the Babylon of the past, and its role in the false religions of the world.

The story begins with the tower of Babel, recorded in Genesis;

Genesis 11:1-9 (NASB)

¹ *Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words.*

² *It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.*

³ *They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar.*

⁴ *They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."*

⁵ *The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.*

⁶ *The LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them.*

⁷ *"Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech."*

⁸ *So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city.*

⁹ *Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.*

Journeying east after the flood, Noah's descendants arrived at the site of Babylon (the land of Shinar). In history's first great humanistic effort, they decided to build a monument to themselves, to make for themselves a name.

but this act of rebellion against God also had religious implications.

Brick towers like the one they built (known as ziggurats) were later used in false religions. Ziggurats had on their tops the sign of the zodiac, which was used by pagan priests to chart the stars. Through their observations of the stars, the priests supposedly gained spiritual insights and knowledge of the future.

Such blatant defiant rebellion against God is incredible on the part of those to whom the Flood was a recent event.

In fact Nimrod, the apparent leader of the plot, was Noah's great grandson.

Genesis describes him as a mighty hunter before the Lord (10:9) and notes that "the beginning of his kingdom was Babel and Erech and Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.

From that land he went forth into Assyria, and built Nineveh and Rehoboth-Ir and Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah;

This proud arrogant leader foreshadowed the final Antichrist.

God's judgment scattered those proud rebels from Babel (Gen 11:8), and they took their false religion around the world with them.

In spite of the scattering, Babylon remained an idolatrous center of false worship.

At one point in the city's sordid history, it contained no less than 180 shrines dedicated to the goddess Ishtar. Even some of the Israelite were caught up in the idolatrous worship of Ishtar, one of whose titles was "Queen of Heaven."

Jeremiah rebuked the Jewish remnant that had fled to Egypt for the Idolatry that had led to their downfall. Instead of repenting, however, they remained defiant.

Jeremiah 44:15-19 (NASB)

¹⁵ *Then all the men who were aware that their wives were burning sacrifices to other gods, along with all the women who were standing by, as a large assembly, including all the people who were living in Pathros in the land of Egypt, responded to Jeremiah, saying,*

¹⁶ *"As for the message that you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we are not going to listen to you!*

¹⁷ *"But rather we will certainly carry out every word that has proceeded from our mouths, by burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, just as we ourselves, our forefathers, our kings and our princes did in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then we had plenty of food and were well off and saw no misfortune.*

¹⁸ *"But since we stopped burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have met our end by the sword and by famine."*

¹⁹ *"And," said the women, "when we were burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and were pouring out drink offerings to her, was it without our husbands that we made for her sacrificial cakes in her image and poured out drink offerings to her?"*

God through Jeremiah, pronounced judgment on those Jews for their stubborn, defiant adherence to the Ishtar cult:

Jeremiah 44:20-27 (NASB)

²⁰ *Then Jeremiah said to all the people, to the men and women—even to all the people who were giving him such an answer—saying,*

²¹ *"As for the smoking sacrifices that you burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your forefathers, your kings and your princes, and the people of the land, did not the LORD remember them and did not all this come into His mind?*

²² *"So the LORD was no longer able to endure it, because of the evil of your deeds, because of the abominations which you have committed; thus your land has become a ruin, an object of horror and a curse, without an inhabitant, as it is this day.*

²³ *"Because you have burned sacrifices and have sinned against the LORD and not obeyed the voice of the LORD or walked in His law, His statutes or His testimonies, therefore this calamity has befallen you, as it has this day."*

²⁴ *Then Jeremiah said to all the people, including all the women, "Hear the word of the LORD, all Judah who are in the land of Egypt,*

²⁵ *thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, as follows: 'As for you and your wives, you have spoken with your mouths and fulfilled it with your hands, saying, "We will certainly perform our vows that we have vowed, to burn sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her." Go ahead and confirm your vows, and certainly perform your vows!'*

²⁶ *"Nevertheless hear the word of the LORD, all Judah who are living in the land of Egypt, 'Behold, I have sworn by My great name,' says the LORD, 'never shall My name be invoked again by the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, "As the Lord GOD lives."'*

²⁷ *~'Behold, I am watching over them for harm and not for good, and all the men of Judah who are in the land of Egypt will meet their end by the sword and by famine until they are completely gone.*

Ezekiel also refers to the worship of Ishtar and Tammuz;

Ezekiel 8:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the LORD'S house which was toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz.

Throughout history, then, Babylon has been an important center of false religion. In the end times, false religion will come back to where it started.

The devil who deceived the people at Babel, and from there launched false religion over the earth, will deceive the world once again.

The final world religion, depicted as a harlot, is the theme of this vision, which records the exposure of the harlot, the explanation of the harlot, and the extermination of the harlot.

THE EXPOSURE OF THE HARLOT

Revelation 17:1-6 (NASB)

¹ Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters,

² with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality."

³ And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns.

⁴ The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality,

⁵ and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

⁶ And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly

Revelation 17:15 (NASB)

*¹⁵ And he *said to me, "The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.*

That it was **one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls** who came and spoke with John connects the judgment of the harlot with the seven last plagues (16:1-21).

As previously noted, chronology halts in chapters 17 and 18 as the scene shift from God's judgments to Antichrist's world empire, the target of those judgments

The great harlot that will be judged is not an actual prostitute.

The term **harlot** is a metaphor for false religion, spiritual defection, idolatry, and religious apostasy.

Besides Babylon several cities in Scripture are designated harlot cities because of their idolatry and pursuit of false religion.

Nineveh (Nah. 3:1, 4),

Tyre. (Isa. 23:15-17),
Jerusalem (Isa. 1:21)

These are examples of cities that committed spiritual fornication.

John's vision exposes several aspects of the harlot city of Babylon;

Her authority,
Her alliances,
Her apparel,
Her abominations,
Her accusation.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE HARLOT

Revelation 17:1b (NASB)

¹ "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters,

Revelation 17:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ And he *said to me, "The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.

The harlot in John's vision **sits** in a position of authority and sovereignty like a king on his throne **on** or beside **many waters**.

Cities in ancient times were usually located near a source of water, either, the ocean, a river, lake, or spring. The true Babylon was located on the river Euphrates. Jeremiah addresses ancient Babylon as;

Jeremiah 51:13a (NASB)

¹³ O you who dwell by many waters, Abundant in treasures, Your end has come,

Just as the proud capital of the Babylonian empire took her seat beside many waters so also will the Babylonian harlot city of the future.

The phrase **many waters does not**, however refer to the harlot's geographical location.

Instead, as the angel explains to John in ver. 15, "**the waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.**"

The metaphor is an apt one, since a city situated in a commanding position on a great waterway would be highly influential.

The **harlot** will not merely influence, but will dominate all the unredeemed **peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues** of the earth.

The harlot's authority will be universal: the entire world will be committed to the false worship of the Babylonian system, rather than the true God.