

# **Revelation Study Guide**

## **Chapter 17**

Throughout the Revelation study we have been referring to Psalm 2 as a framework for what is happening during the end times. It is also representative of what we see happening in Chapter 17. One of the primary pictures that we see in this chapter is that there is a woman (Babylon) who is sitting on the beast (antichrist kingdom). This represents their partnership and the fact that they are working together to war against the Lamb. We see this in Psalm 2 as well “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed...” In this section of Revelation we see Babylon partnering with the antichrist kingdom to oppose the Lord. In fact, you could say that Revelation is a tale of three kingdoms. Those kingdoms are the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of the antichrist, and the kingdom of Babylon. The kingdom of Christ contains the church and we know that in the church there is a visible component and an invisible component. Meaning that not all of the visible members of the church are actually part of the invisible (true) church. The apostate church or the false church lives within the walls of the true church. The same can be said for the Babylon kingdom. There is an invisible component of this prostitute, which is evident by her description. That is part of the reason that she is called a prostitute because a prostitute looks good and pretends to be harmless to those she is seducing. The political component of Babylon is evident by her power and prowess but the spiritual component of Babylon is much harder to recognize. The spiritual component of Babylon often disguises herself and you might see her identified as the blessed church, the religious church, the loving church, the righteous church, or the doctrinal church. In each of these descriptions there are partial truths of the true church but to the extreme these churches and people become apostate and part of spiritual Babylon. Those that are part of the Babylonian kingdom must repent and turn to Christ or they will be destroyed and eventually suffer in hell. These are those in the Scriptures who cry out to God – “Lord, Lord did I not do this and that in your name?” The blessed church is full of the prosperity gospel and portrays the understanding that suffering can’t be from God and that physical blessing is a sign of God’s presence. The religious church is dominated by activity and rituals and encourages tradition instead of faith working itself out in love. The loving church encourages the love of people and their feelings above all else even as opposed to God and His Word. The righteous church emphasizes works as well and the ability to achieve perfection and depends on the power of self-discipline and standards of holiness instead of freedom, repentance, and faith. The doctrinal church elevates truth above all else to the exclusion of love and is characterized by quarrels, disputes, arguments, and hatred. All of the churches that embrace these doctrines as opposed to those who attempt to keep the whole counsel of God are part of Babylon if they knowingly pervert the Gospel. In every church regardless of its tendencies there are those who are part of Babylon (in the visible church), and others part of the invisible (true church). We saw this in the description of the churches in Revelation and it should not surprise us to see this mixture. The kingdom of the antichrist is the easiest to figure out because they are openly opposed to Christ. This would include all those religions who do not claim affiliation with or belief in Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah of the world. The largest of these religions is Islam and although they may not be intentionally part of the antichrist kingdom that is how they are categorized. At most times throughout history, we would see these three kingdoms as independent and separate from one another, but it appears in the

last days that Babylon will partner with the antichrist kingdom and this will result in worldwide persecution of the saints and ultimately God's response.

**V.1-2 The Judgment of the Prostitute** The first thing that we see in the Revelation account after the Bowls of Wrath is the judgment of the great prostitute. As we have been talking about with the chapters of Revelation since the mighty angel in Chapter 10 these events also appear to be transpiring in the final 3 ½ years of the Great Tribulation. Since it is one of the seven angels with the Bowls of Wrath who is showing John Babylon's outcome, I think it is fair to say it is the pouring of the Bowls of Wrath that has caused its final demise. At least it appears that the fall of Babylon is one of the final outcomes in the last days because of its inclusion after the Bowls of Wrath and the final event described before the return of Christ. Although we know that not all of Revelation is chronological, we still get the impression that this is one of the final major world events that is transpiring before the end.

It is clear from the first couple of verses that this woman Babylon represents immorality and deceit. She is described as the "great" prostitute and she is described as being immoral with the kings of the earth and the dwellers on earth. This is not a one time event or something that she refrains from later. This defines who she is and who she has chosen to be. This prostitute is a picture of the unfaithful or apostate church and we get the inclination that it is not by accident that this has happened. She has decided to become this prostitute to ensnare and deceive others and as we will see in later verses she becomes the mother of all prostitutes (v.5). God will judge her accordingly.

Jeremiah makes some very disparaging comments about Israel and how they have prostituted themselves which sound very similar to what we would imagine regarding Babylon. One of the challenges to this passage of Scripture in Revelation 17 is in trying to understand the identity of Babylon. It is possible that at one time Babylon was a faithful bride and became an unfaithful harlot but we are not told that is the case. We know that was the case with Old Testament Israel and these words remind us of God's thoughts toward the apostate.

"Your evil will chastise you, and your apostasy will reprove you. Know and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the Lord your God; the fear of me is not in you, declares the Lord God of hosts. For long ago I broke your yoke and burst your bonds; but you said, 'I will not serve.' Yes, on every high hill and under every green tree you bowed down like a whore. Yet I planted you a choice vine, wholly of pure seed. How then have you turned degenerate and become a wild vine? Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me, declares the Lord God. How can you say, 'I am not unclean, I have not gone after the Baals'? Look at your way in the valley; know what you have done—a restless young camel running here and there, a wild donkey used to the wilderness, in her heat sniffing the wind! None who seek her need weary themselves; in her month they will find her." (Jeremiah 2:19-25)

This is the type of picture that we should get of contemporary Babylon. It is totally corrupt and has played the harlot regardless of how well the Lord took care of her in her youth.

**V.3-6 Mystery Babylon** Although Babylon in Revelation is a mystery there is much we can learn from ancient Babylon to help us in our understanding of this entity. One of the telling facts about Babylon is that it originated in Genesis Chapter 11 with the creation of the Tower of Babel. At that point and time there was one language of all the people in the world and instead

of dispersing across the earth as God had commanded, they decided to try and make a name for themselves and build a city and a tower that would reach the heavens. God saw what they had done and decided that He needed to confuse their language so that they would disperse and populate the earth as He had intended. The word Babel means “confusion” and it is this definition that typifies the city of Babylon then and it should also inform our view of Babylon in Revelation. As we see throughout the Old Testament the city of Babylon represents the enemy of God and confusion and the city of Jerusalem represents the people of God and peace. Although Israel and Jerusalem are far from perfect and have to be disciplined because of their rebellion Babylon is often described and portrayed as the enemy of God’s people. Babylon is a major topic of the Bible and it is the city that is mentioned more than any other besides Jerusalem. Interestingly even though Babylon is portrayed as Israel’s enemy it is this nation that God uses to capture and discipline His people. The Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC and the Babylonians captured the southern kingdom and destroyed Jerusalem around 586 BC. This period of time is known as the Babylonian Captivity and it is well documented in the Bible that God orchestrated this as discipline for His people. This was the period of time where Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were chosen to serve as part of the royal household of the king and where we see the story of Nebuchadnezzar materialize. As we have talked about previously in this study we see the person of Nebuchadnezzar as a foreshadowing of the antichrist especially with the image that he creates to be worshiped. Ancient Babylon was known to be a center of sorcery, immorality, and idol worship – it is this identity that we see resembles the identity of Babylon in Revelation.

Although Babylon in Revelation is a mystery there are certain things that we can and do know from our text. Some of the things that we can deduce from this chapter are:

#### v.3 – Babylon is separate from the beast (antichrist kingdom)

Although Babylon and the beast are certainly related to each other and both have similar characteristics in that they are immoral and that they are involved in persecuting the saints – we are not to understand that they are the same. Babylon rides on the beast and is described as a separate entity. Although we talked about the beast as being defined as an individual in Chapter 13 because of the identification with the dragon, and the false prophet we don’t get the same impression in this chapter and it is easier to understand that the beast represents the entire antichrist kingdom. It would not be inappropriate to describe Babylon partnering with the antichrist himself but since Babylon is described as a city or entity then I think it is best to understand the beast in this Chapter as the antichrist kingdom led by the antichrist.

#### v.3 – Babylon partners with the beast

The other interesting dynamic that we see is that there is a definite partnership between these two entities. Most scholars and commentators believe that initially Babylon is driving the activity since they are on top riding the beast, but like we saw with the horseman of the apocalypse it is not uncommon for the primary agent to be the ‘beast’ instead of the rider. Regardless of who is leading the partnership at the onset it definitely transitions when the antichrist receives the authority of the ten kings and then there is an attack against the prostitute.

#### v.16 – Babylon is betrayed and attacked by the beast after a period of partnership

The demise of the relationship between the beast and the prostitute seems sudden and severe which we will look at in more detail in the following sections. All of these factors that we know from this chapter should be considered in trying to think about the identity of Babylon. If there is any identity that doesn't fit with these primary identifying markers then it should be a warning signal that it probably isn't it. Whoever Babylon is in the end times they must be separate from the antichrist, partner with him and his kingdom and eventually be attacked and destroyed by this same partner. This information should help us in narrowing down the possibilities that are considered for the city, nation, or entity that is represented by Babylon.

**V.7-14 Seven Heads and Ten Horns** These are the same seven heads and ten horns that we saw on the beast that rose out of the sea in Chapter 13. The only differences are that the order was reversed and it was the horns and heads instead of the other way around. The seven heads are a primary reference to the individual king (antichrist) and the horns are a primary reference to the kingdom of the antichrist as facilitated by the ten kings. In Chapter 13 we noted that the beast was a reference to the antichrist but it was appropriate to think about the description referring to the kingdom as well. The same holds true for this chapter. Although we might think primarily about the kingdom the antichrist is also in view.

I'm not going to spend a lot of time trying to talk about the nations or kings that could be represented by these figures here but there are plenty of available perspectives to investigate if that is your desire. What we do know according to this chapter is:

v.9 – The 7 heads are seven mountains

v.10 – The 7 heads are also seven kings

v.10 – Of the 7 kings (heads) five have fallen and one was currently in power when John wrote Revelation

v.11 – The beast (antichrist) is considered one of the seven kings but he is the eighth

v.12 – The 10 horns are ten other kings

v.12 – The 10 kings (horns) will all receive their reign in the last days with the beast

v.13 – The 10 kings (horns) will endorse and elevate the beast so he can be the ruler of the world

I envision this section of the chapter to be happening chronologically as we see the ten kings hand over their power to the beast. At this point the relationship with Babylon is unclear but we see the beast and the ten kings try to war against the Lamb (v.14). Of course, the Lamb conquers them but the beast and his minions are infuriated with this and turn and lash out at Babylon. This is what causes the demise and destruction of Babylon. It is possible to interpret that Babylon is heavily involved in the persecution and martyrdom of the saints but when it is time to war against the Lamb there is hesitation or an implicit refusal to take that step. This would then result in Babylon being attacked and conquered by the antichrist kingdom. This results in each individual that is part of the Babylonian kingdom having to side with the Lamb and receive martyrdom or side with the antichrist to take the mark of the beast.

The best part of this entire chapter is what we see in verse 14: “They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.” The Lamb will win! We know from Revelation 13 that the antichrist and his kingdom are given authority to war against and conquer the saints. We also saw in Revelation 11 that at some point the antichrist will overcome the two witnesses. Christians should take heart though in understanding that regardless of the antichrist’s power or authority he can not defeat the Lamb. Even with the ten kings who hand over their authority, the false prophet, the demonic help of the dragon, and anything else you want to add in - including the kitchen sink it will not help against the Lamb. The Lamb will conquer them because He is the Lord of lords and the King of kings. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!

**V.15-18 The Hatred of the Beast** In this section of Scripture we see the beast and the 10 kings turn their hatred toward Babylon. It says “they will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire...” This is the same Babylon that the antichrist was partnering with and now there has been a stark betrayal and the antichrist has turned to destroy his prostitute. There is a disturbing story in 2 Samuel 13 that talks about the account of David’s daughter Tamar where she is raped by her brother-in-law Amnon and then thrown away in hatred. It is this type of relationship that I envision between Babylon and the antichrist. It begins with some type of tremendous affection and then when the beast has what it wants or is unable to accomplish all that it wants – turns on Babylon and discards her like a piece of trash. This should alert us to the way of the enemy and his antichrist as they will use and discard anyone that they need to in order to accomplish what it is that they desire. This is the opposite of Jesus who will not offend, hurt, or take advantage of anyone to accomplish all that He desires. Instead, He will sacrifice His very life to prove that He does not possess selfish ambition or vain desires. In the last days it will be Babylon who is humiliated not Jesus.

“Sin in silence, and go into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans; for you shall no more be called the mistress of the kingdoms. I was angry with my people; I profaned my heritage; I gave them into your hand; you showed them no mercy; on the aged you made your yoke exceedingly heavy. You said, ‘I shall be mistress forever,’ so that you did not lay these things to heart or remember their end. Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures, who sit securely, who say in your heart, ‘I am, and there is no one besides me; I shall not sit as a widow or know the loss of children’: These two things shall come to you in a moment, in one day; the loss of children and widowhood shall come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and the great power of your enchantments. You felt secure in your wickedness; you said, ‘No one sees me’; your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray, and you said in your heart, ‘I am, and there is no one besides me.’ But evil shall come upon you, which you will not know how to charm away; disaster shall fall upon you, for which you will not be able to atone; and ruin shall come upon you suddenly, of which you know nothing.” (Isaiah 47:5-11)

We will talk in more detail in Chapter 18 about the possible identity of Babylon but for now let these facts direct you in your study and thinking about who Babylon represents.

What we know about Babylon from Revelation Chapter 17:

Rev. 17:1,15 – Babylon represents multitudes, nations, and languages

Rev. 17:4 – Babylon is rich and wealthy

Rev. 17:4 – Babylon is impure and immoral

Rev. 17:5 – Babylon is the mother of prostitutes

Rev. 17:6 – Babylon is guilty of persecuting and killing the saints

Rev. 17:17 – Babylon is a great city with dominion and power

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