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A0618 – April 30, 2006 – Rev 17:1-5 – The Babylonian System Of Religion

Revelation 17:1 And one out of the seven angels having the seven bowls came and spoke with me saying, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute, sitting by many waters,

An angel is the means of revelation (cf Rev 1:1). He is one of **the seven angels** who had **the seven bowls**. He may be the seventh angel who poured out his bowl on Babylon but the text does not specify. He nevertheless is connected with the bowls and his goal is to fill in the missing details concerning Babylon. Her certain doom was mentioned as early as Rev 14:8 and 16:17 spoke of Babylon as “drinking of the cup of the anger of the wrath of God” but we have not been told what leads up to her final defeat. Why is Babylon judged? So, chapters 17-18 are given to fill us in on these details. Chapter 17 describes the history of the Babylonian system of religion and chapter 18 describes the Babylonian system of commerce, both of which have corrupted the world and led it to ruin.

This angel **spoke with John saying, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute”**. As it turns out, the **great prostitute** is also the “woman” of verses 3, 4-7, & 18 and she is identified as “the great city” in verse 18. “the great city” in this context is Babylon. So, the angel is saying **“Come, I will show you the judgment of the great city Babylon”**.ⁱ Excepting chapter 20 the rest of Revelation is a contrast between two cities; Babylon and the New Jerusalem. Babylon is the final center of the kingdom of Satan and the New Jerusalem is final center of the future kingdom of God. But here we have the city of Babylon being called **a great harlot or prostitute**. The Greek word for **harlot** is *pornes* which is broader than the NT word for adultery (*moichea*) and includes all kinds of immorality. In this context the **harlotry** is primarily spiritual prostitution or idolatry as proven from Rev 19:2. Thus, this city leads the way in corrupting the world with false religion which counterfeits the real. As I will explain in verse 5 this city’s roots go back to the tower of Babel in Gen 10-11 and it will continue to exist into the future Tribulation.

Lastly, verse 1 reveals that she is **sitting on many waters** but it should rather be translated **sitting by many waters** because in verse 3 she is “sitting on the beast “and she can’t be sitting on both water and the beast. What then are the **waters**? The **many waters** are not those of the Euphrates on which Babylon sits even though we may be tempted to connect this with Jer 51:13. A better interpretation is given right in our chapter in verse 15 which says, **The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues**. So, the meaning is that the false religious system of Babylon has corrupted the peoples of the whole world and John is getting a sneak preview of her **judgment**.

Revelation 17:2 with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication and the earth dwellers became drunk (aorist passive) from the wine of her fornication."

Verse 2 reveals that all levels of society, from **the kings of the earth** to the rest of earth’s inhabitants have **committed fornication** with the **great prostitute**.ⁱⁱ Kings, Presidents, Prime Ministers, Czars, and other world leaders have and continue to making alliances with religious leaders in order to advance their power and influence. In the last days, **the kings of the earth** will join the Babylonian system of religion **committing fornication** with her mystery religion which contains demonic doctrines. The general population will follow these **kings** also **committing fornication** with the Babylonian system of religion even to the point of becoming intoxicated by it and lusting after false gods.

Revelation 17:3 And he carried me away into a deserted place in spirit. And I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet beast, covered with blasphemous names, having heads seven and horns ten (Rev 13:1-2).

Here John is **carried away in spirit** to see the judgment Babylon.ⁱⁱⁱ Here **he** is **carried away into a desolate place, a solitary wasteland**. This could be somewhere near Babylon in the desert but impossible to tell for sure. To see the vision John is **in spirit**. This is John’s human spirit, his body being left on the island of Patmos for much of the Book of Revelation (cf Rev 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). To be **in spirit** John will enjoy an ecstatic state of heightened sensation and alertness so that he is able to grasp all that he sees. At this **desolate place, in spirit**, John sees **a woman sitting upon a scarlet beast**. The **scarlet beast** is the same beast from chapter 13 who we nicknamed the Antichrist and we know this because both of them are covered with **blasphemous names** and have **seven heads and ten horns**. But, as you know, the **woman** is not the **woman** from chapter 12 who was Israel. Instead, verse 18 tells us that **the woman** is the great city

Babylon (cf 17:18), which rules over the kings of the earth and she is a “harlot” (17:1, 16) because she is the headquarters of the false religion which corrupts the earth’s inhabitants. So, the picture is of a **woman riding upon a scarlet beast**. Since the rider is in control she is controlling the Antichrist by the seductive speech of her false religion. False religion always controls its followers. I think this is the situation during the 1st half of the Tribulation because during the 2nd half of the Tribulation the Antichrist is going to be the central object of worship. So, most likely the Antichrist will use the harlot to reach world power at the middle of the Tribulation. Here, in verse 3 the Antichrist is described as **scarlet** in color, the color of splendor, luxury, excess, blood and sin (Isa 1:18). “A little later a rider on a white horse will come with His armies all dressed in white (19:11, 14)” (Thomas, 286).

He is **covered with names of blasphemy**, no doubt direct claims to be God and the demand to worship him. He has **seven heads and ten horns**. I identify the **seven heads** as seven consecutive world kingdoms throughout history (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and still to come Revived Rome). The **ten horns** are ten kings who rule as contemporaries in the future Revived Rome along with the Antichrist (17:12). We’ll explore this more next week.

This horse-rider relationship between the harlot and the beast is one of symbiosis; they both need one another, at least for the 1st half of the Tribulation. So, while the harlot rides and controls the beast (17:3) it is the beast who carries the harlot (17:7). Later the beast will get tired of the harlot will buck her off. So, their little love affair will turn into bitter hatred and strife.

Revelation 17:4 And the woman was (imperfect) wearing (perfect middle participle) purple and scarlet garments and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a gold cup in her hand filled with something detestable even her defiling fornication

The woman’s clothing is described in verse 4. Why would her clothing be described? To point out her excessive spiritual idolatry. This description is almost identical to the description of the city of Babylon in Rev 18:12

Revelation 18:16 'Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls;

The final form of the world's religions is pictured as adorned with unimaginable wealth which makes her appear even more alluring, deceptive, and trapping. She even has a **gold cup** filled with the filth of spiritual idolatry which God detests. The harlot will thrive on spreading her filthy lies and corruptions as she makes the earth's inhabitants drunk from her beautiful but poison filled cup. Material wealth is often the allure of false religion and many are taken captive by these enticements.

Jeremiah 51:7 Babylon has been a golden cup in the hand of the LORD, Intoxicating all the earth. The nations have drunk of her wine; Therefore the nations are going mad.

False religion that spreads from Babylon makes the nations drunk even to the point that they go mad and defiantly shake their fists against God (Ps 2).

Revelation 17:5 and upon her forehead a name written (perfect passive participle), a mystery, "Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes and desecrations of the earth."

On the harlot's **forehead a name is written**. This name is a **mystery**, **mystery** is not a part of the name, **the name** is the **mystery**. A **mystery** is something that was previously unrevealed and so at last God is going to reveal the name of the woman. Her name is **"Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes and abominations of the earth"**. I take the word **Babylon** literally and not as a covert reference to Rome.^{iv} This verse is full and so let's spend the rest of our time here. Note that **Babylon is the mother of prostitutes**. In other words, a **mother** has offspring and so here Babylon is looked at as the original source of all spiritual idolatry, all false religion which is an abomination before God. So, what we have here is the fact that the angel is taking us back to see the origin of all false religion. When John heard this, of course, he was amazed, marveling a great marvel as verse 6 says. But the one thing John did know was that Babylon originated with Babel and the tower of Babel back in Gen 10-11. And the angel is saying, this is where all false religion began. So, I want to spend the rest of the time looking at the origin of the Babylonian System of Religion and the forms it has taken throughout history in various cultures and languages and this is all to give us the reason why the great harlot will be judged (17:1) during the Tribulation. A lot of this comes from Alexander Hislop's book *The Two Babylons* and some from Harry Ironside's lectures on Revelation mixed in with Dr Pentecost's lectures but it's all the same basic story. Let me summarize,

The story begins in Genesis with Adam. God created Adam to be the first king over God's kingdom on earth. Adam was to subdue and multiply and scatter over the whole earth but Adam mismanaged God's kingdom and handed it over to Satan, Luke 4:5-6. And so, Satan began to build his kingdom on earth and this turned in to a big mess and God judged the world at the Flood. After the Flood God told Noah to make an altar and sacrifice because that is the way of access to God and He told them the same thing He had told Adam, "be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth", Gen 9:1. So God wanted mankind to approach him by sacrifice and to scatter but Satan had other plans. He wanted mankind to band together, centralize government and organize a new way to God and so we read in Gen 11:2 these people who rejected divine revelation journeyed east, away from the place God had revealed these instructions, to a plain in the land of Shinar, which is modern day Iraq, and they built a city. This is the first reference to a city and the city represented organized rebellion against the revelation of God and they built a tower that would reach into heaven at the center of the city that served as the central temple and symbolized a new way of access to God, that's why they named it Ba-bel, "the gate of God". And when the Lord saw it, He pronounced a judgment on it, using the same Hebrew radicals; God called it Babel, which means "confusion". So there was a divine judgment on that false religious system that was instituted in Babel, which is the predecessor of Babylon. And so, when John sees "Babylon the Mother of Harlots," in Rev 17 he is immediately drawn back to the false religion that was instituted by Nimrod at the time of Genesis 10 and 11.

Now this false religion is described in Babylonian tradition, mythology, and claims that Nimrod's wife was named Semiramis, and she conceived and bore a son who was named Tammuz. Semiramis became the high priestess in this temple-tower that reached to heaven in this Babylonian religion. The symbol of this religion was a mother cradling a babe in her arms, so the Babylonian system of religion came to be known as the mother-child cult.

According to Babylonian mythology, religion, Tammuz was killed by a wild boar while he was out hunting and his mother, Semiramis gathered her priestesses around him and they devoted themselves to prayer, fasting, and after 40 days of fasting and breathing into Tammuz, Semiramis restored him to life. And so the evergreen was made a symbol of Tammuz because the evergreen represented continuation or perpetuation of life. And this is what led to evergreen trees being attached to the birth of Christ which has nothing to do with Jesus but everything to do with pagan religion. The date of his supposed resurrection was set apart annually as a memorial, not so much to Tammuz as to Semiramis, through whom Tammuz was restored, and the egg was made a sacred symbol that represented life out of death. And this is why eggs are associated with the day of

Christ's resurrection today and I'll explain more later about how this came to be known as Easter but its really pagan religion. And Semiramis took to herself the title, the queen of heaven, and access to God was through Semiramis.

This mother-child cult became the religion of the world that rejected the revelation that God had given through Noah, the way of access to God through sacrifice. This religion spread through the Middle East as the population spread, and became the dominant religion. It was the religion of Babylon, and with the fall of Babylon in 536BC the high priests began to flee; they fled westward and ultimately settled in what we know as Asia Minor or modern Turkey. But in the ancient world this Babylonian religion was spread by the Phoenicians, through the sea-faring people. Now the names were changed as this religion spread to different cultures, but it was the same essential religion. Semiramis and Tammuz in Babylon became Ashtaroath and Baal in Phoenicia, Isis and Horus in Egypt, Aphrodite and Eros in Greece, Venus and Cupid in Rome, and later Mary and Jesus under Constantine, but all the same essential mother-child cult.

Now this is the religion that was introduced by Jezebel into Israel, and it became the religion that corrupted Israel and brought about the exile of the northern kingdom into Assyria (722BC) and the southern kingdom into Babylon (586BC). So God was saying to the southern kingdom, you love Babylonianism so much I'll take you back where it all started and you can get your fill of it.

Now I want to look in Ezekiel's prophecy, in chapter 8. God is explaining to Ezekiel why the southern kingdom was exiled to Babylon. God took Ezekiel back to Jerusalem to the temple, and in verse 7, "He brought me to the entrance of the court, and when I looked, behold, a hole in the wall". This was a secret entrance into the temple. It shouldn't have been there but it had been put in there. And when he came to the temple itself, according to verse 5, there was an image of jealousy or an image that stirred God to jealousy at the entry. What had happened is that the altar had been replaced by an image so that the image was the way of access to God and not the altar. So, now we can go to God a new way, through this image. We'll see in a moment in this chapter what that image was. But Ezekiel was told to go in that little side door, and he found in verse 10, painted on the wall of the Holy of Holies every form of creeping things and abominable beasts and idols. What Judah had done was incorporate the gods of Egypt into their religion, and the priests with their incense pots were sacrificing to these abominable things.

And the Lord said, Ezekiel, you think that's bad, let me show you something that's worse, verse 13, "You will see still greater abominations than they commit; He brought

me to the door of the gate of the Lord's house which was toward the north" and there is that image of jealousy, and around that image there are women weeping for Tammuz. They wept for 40 days because Tammuz was dead for forty days and then resurrected on the 41st day. So, the 40 day worship period led up to the feast of Ashtaroth as it had come to be known from the Phoenician names, and that was later called Ishtar or in the English we call it Easter. This period of 40 days before Easter is now called "lent" in Roman Catholicism and it's a pagan thing dedicated to Tammuz, for the 40 days he was dead, after which he was supposedly resurrected on the 41st day. So, the 40 days were to end with the feast of Ishtar which paid homage to the queen of heaven, Semiramis, who resurrected her son Tammuz. This, again, is the mother-child cult. Now you can see why I'm not too much into Easter eggs because all this is pagan religion and when the Israelites mixed pagan religion with what God had revealed they were sent into exile for their idolatry. And most of us don't know any of this background or where this stuff came from but here it is and it's a part of our culture, it has deep roots and it's all over the world permeating us and our culture and it has nothing to do with God and everything to do with pagan idolatry. And God is saying in Ezekiel that this is the image that provokes Me to jealousy so if anyone wondered why God took His people out of their own land and sent them into Babylon they would know it was because they got involved in the mother-child cult of their day.

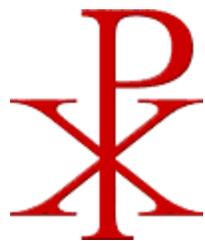
Now turn over to Jeremiah 44. Jeremiah has been exhorting the people to repentance, to abandon their idolatry, to walk in obedience to the law, so that the prophesied judgment through Nebuchadnezzar might be averted. But in verse 16 you get the response of the nation to Jeremiah's pleas. This is what they say: "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."

So what's Israel saying? The God of heaven did us no good, the only blessings we got came from the queen of heaven. Who's that? It's the mother of the mother-child cult. This is the Babylonian system of religion. In that day it was the Phoenician Ashtaroth whose son was Baal, these names had crept into Israel to replace Semiramis and Tammuz. Verse 19, "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?”, those cakes were cakes that were offered to the queen of heaven on the feast of Ishtar, they were baked in with the Phoenician letter “t” pressed into those cakes. The Phoenician letter “t” was in the form of a cross in memory of Tammuz. This is the true origin of the symbol of the cross, not the cross of Christ, the first letter of Tammuz’s name. Any of you from the east who ever ate hot cross buns at Easter? Well, Israel was doing that too, it’s an ancient tradition, offering cakes to the queen of heaven so that she would bestow blessings on them.^v

Okay, so as a judgment, Judah was taken to Babylon. Now in the book of the Revelation, the letters to the seven churches, chapter 2, verse 13, this is the letter to Pergamos, “I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is”. So, Pergamos had become the center of this mother-child cult worship after the fall of Babylon. What happened was the Medes and Persians who conquered Babylon were Zoroastrians, fire worshipers, so they didn’t tolerate the Babylonian religion. So, the priests of Babylon began a migration westward and they stopped in Pergamos and made it the center of mother-child cult worship. And it continued there until Rome overthrew the Greek Empire, when the center of that religion moved from Pergamos to Rome. While the names were changed it was the same essential calendar and the same mother-child worship.

Now you come down to the days of Constantine, 312AD, the civil war was being fought between Constantine and Maxentius for the crown as emperor, and it appeared that Maxentius was gaining the ascendancy. And he looked for support and help, and by that time the Christian church had become very strong in the empire. Constantine declared that he had had a vision in which he saw a large white flag with a blue field and a red cross on that field, and written across the flag the words, *in hoc signo vinces*, “in this sign you shall conquer”.



And he said this was a sign to him that Christianity was the true religion and that if he were emperor he would declare Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. And so he had this symbol put on his soldiers shields and with the support of the Christians he defeated Maxentius that day at the Battle of the Milvian Ridge outside

Rome and in that same year Constantine declared that Christianity was the official religion of the Roman Empire. To support his affirmation, when he defeated Maxentius he had all of Maxentius' soldiers baptized on the battlefield, declaring them now Christians. But Constantine himself continued to be called Pontifex Maximus, the title of the Babylonian high priest. The title was afterwards conferred upon the bishops of Rome, and is borne by the pope today, who is thus declared to be the direct successor of the high priest of the Babylonian mysteries. The chief priests also wore mitres shaped like the head of a fish, in honor of Dagon, the fish-god, the Lord of life—another form of the Tammuz mystery developed by the Philistines. The Roman Emperors took the title Pontifex Maximus and had it imprinted on their mitre. They also wear the fisherman's ring in honor of the fish-god Dagon.

And so, this is how the Babylonian System of Religion has trickled down through history beginning in Genesis 10-11 with Semiramis and Tammuz becoming Ashtaroth and Baal in Phoenecia, Isis and Horus in Egypt, Aphrodite and Eros in Greece, Venus and Cupid in Rome, and finally Mary and Jesus after Constantine and known today as Roman Catholicism. But they are all the same mother-child cult. Now, I cannot tell you what form this religion will take in the future Tribulation. I don't know if it will continue to be embodied in Roman Catholicism in the future but that is where it is today and this thing is an abomination, it's Babylonianism and it's going to be judged no matter what the form or the names. It's sensuous, mysterious, wealthy, alluring. It offers you religion packaged in a golden cup but the contents are poison and it stirs the wrath of God (Jer 7:18-20) and this is why God will judge it and annihilate it completely.

ⁱ This is interesting because in Rev 21 one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls told John to "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb, which is the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven".

ⁱⁱ This chapter is primarily concerned with the religious system of Babylon which first manifested itself in a visible form at Babel while chapter 18 deals primarily with the commercial or economic influence of the city. Both realms will cooperate with the beast in his political domination. So, three areas of corrupting influence and all will basically be centered in the city of Babylon situated on the Euphrates River (Jer 51:13; Rev 16:12) in modern day Iraq.

ⁱⁱⁱ John is also carried away in spirit to see the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:10). There are many parallels between these two sections that deal with these two cities.

^{iv} Earliest references that identify Babylon as Rome take a symbolic interpretation of the *Sybbiline Oracles* and *2nd Baruch* (both 2nd century documents). The earliest church father to make such an identification was Tertullian (late 2nd century AD)

^v http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hot_cross_buns

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