

The Book Of Revelation

*3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy,
and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.
(Revelation 1:3. NRSV)*

*5 And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.'
Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.'
(Revelation 21:5. NRSV)*

Message 12

Revelation 17 - 18
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Introduction:

Good evening! Tonight we begin looking at the 6th vision in the Book of Revelation beginning in chapter 17:1. It is the vision of The Whore Upon The Beast or as it is sometimes also called "Mystery Babylon". Let's attempt to orient ourselves before we begin walking through the text. The most pressing question would likely be, 'How does this vision line up with those that have gone before?' The answer is not a simple one. Commentators agree that this vision is not quite the same as those that have gone before. To use our analogy of the transparency slides, this one doesn't seem to fit between the same left right markers as the others. The internal witness of the vision speaks to this mentioning as it does this sort of reincarnating pattern that seems to stretch much further back in history than any of the others. However look at the first part of verse one:

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me,

The angels of the seven bowls were those who revealed things associated with finality and totality. The trumpets were partial and limited, the BOWLS were final and complete. It is one of these angels of finality and completion, one of these angels most associated with the bitter end that presents this vision. What this suggests is that this vision can at least be lined up in terms of its END POINT if not its beginning. Meaning that it is difficult to say how to line up its beginnings but we know that it ENDS in the time of the bowls. Perhaps it is best to illustrate it this way (show graph). The internal witness of the vision, as we shall soon see, seems to present

patterns and cycles that stretch back throughout all of history but the focus of the vision is the future which clearly ends in parallel with the future of the bowls. Does that make sense? Let's carry on with the text then and we will, by God's grace, divide it as we go.

saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters,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."

The Greek word translated as "harlot" there is *pornei* and is an important word because it means "harlot or whore" and it does not mean "adulterer"; there is a different Greek word for that. The point is, this is not the apostate church, the bride who fell away, this is the seductress, this is the whore who seduces and corrupts. Here we begin to meet another of the many dualities in the Book of Revelation. The Book of Revelation is the tale of two cities – the city of God and the Babylon, the city of man. It is the tale of two animals, the Lamb and the Beast, it is the tale of two marks, the mark of the lamb and the mark of the beast and it is the tale of two women, the Bride and the Whore. The good woman we met first in Rev 12 and we meet her again in Revelation 19-21; the whore we meet now. She is the one who seduces men and women away from the Lord and who makes them drunk with her deceptions. Now, obviously the imagery all overlaps here as we will see that the whore is also the city, the harlot is Babylon, and she rides the beast and has the mark on her head, so all of these images and dualities begin to collide in this vision.

We'll say more about her as the text unfolds:

³So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness.

The wilderness in the Book of Revelation represents the hidden place away from the seductions of the harlot. Do you remember that in Revelation 12 there was a time of hiding in the desert? So now there is a time of revelation in the desert. The idea is that you cannot really understand the whore, you can't see her for what she is, unless you spend time in the desert. This is a reminder to unplug, to fast and to pull back from the seductions of culture and these reminders will keep coming.

And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast *which was* full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

So the whore is closely associated, indeed, almost inseparable from the beast of seven heads and ten horns. We met that beast in Revelation 13:1, let me remind you:

And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having ⁴seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. (Revelation 13:1. NKJV)

We agreed that this beast represented government and empire raised up in opposition to God and God's people. The whore rides on the back of godless empire. She is part of it, yet distinct from it as rider is to 'horse and rider'. Commentators generally agree then that the harlot is specifically seducing culture and civilisation. In the same way, for example that the Roman Empire persecuted Christians, so the Roman culture seduced them and tried to lure them in, distract them and kill them. Think of the church of Laodicea, she was not suffering persecution from the government, yet she was in grave danger because she was being seduced by Roman wealth, peace, prosperity and luxury. They are two different agents of the devil in his attempt to destroy God's people.

⁴The 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.

⁵And on her forehead a name *was* written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

Purple is the colour of wealth and worldly power. In the ancient world purple took on this symbolism because of how expensive and rare the dye was; think of Lydia in the Book of Acts. It thus became the colour of success and worldly power. Scarlet is the colour of the dragon. This is filthy lucre as the King James Bible would say. She seduces mankind with filthy lucre and all manner of filth. Think pornography, think drugs, think distraction, think death. She has a mark on her forehead, as everyone does in this story and hers is a mark of evil. It reads first: "Mystery" meaning that it is not obvious who she really is. She is a painted whore, she looks safe from a distance, but up close she is death warmed over. She is Babylon the Great. The whore IS THE CITY. Later the Bride IS THE CITY OF GOD so these various dualities keep colliding throughout the book. Babylon is the seducing host culture in which the remnant of God live, if you have read your Old Testament. She is the mother of harlots which is to say that she begets seducing evil after seducing evil. She is the mother of the adult film industry raking in its billions, she is the mother of the narcotics industry raking in its billions and the mother of Hollywood and soap operas and all manner of seducing cultural enterprise.

⁶I 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.

That she is drunk with the blood of the saints means that she has delighted to lure and destroy the people of God. It was not a duty, it was a passionate obsession.

⁷But 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.

The interpreting angel now begins to tell the history and story of the whore and the beast, culture and kingdom. He begins with the kingdom, the beast, because it is more important, the woman merely rides upon his back and she will not outlast the beast as we shall see.

⁸The beast that you saw was, and is not, 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.

Now you’ll need to recall that back when we were looking at Revelation 13 we spoke about how in these kingdom visions, in both Daniel and here, the beasts stand at times for Empires and at times for characteristic kings. So the lion in Daniel is Babylon and simultaneously Nebuchadnezzar for example. So here. It is at times difficult to know whether the vision is speaking of empires or actual human leaders here and there is a sense in which we should hold on to that ambiguity. The anti-christ is the personal embodiment of the spirit of the beast, the leader and the empire are part in parcel. The idea of this “was, is not and will ascend” language is that this evil empire business keeps coming back around, even after appearing to have been stamped out. Nero died, there was peace and then here comes Domitian, a leader filled with the same evil, persecuting spirit. Assyria fell, there is a bit of peace in the vacuum, now here comes Babylon! Evil empire will keep coming back around. There are revolving spirits that seem to control and set the course of history. Remember the four horsemen who circle the earth and set the board for God’s purpose in Zechariah? Remember the four horsemen? The first one is the rise and fall of Empire. We’ll talk more about this in just a minute when we next come to it.

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

Now just so we don’t get lost in the twilight zone of spiralling, recurring history, Revelation focuses in on a fixed, historical marker. The seven heads are seven mountain on which the

woman sits. Well, everyone in the ancient world would recognise that as Rome, who sits on seven hills. Revelation is saying here that at this time in history, the whore is Roman culture, it is the coliseum, the Roman street, the Roman mob. The whore of Roman culture sits on Roman hills. So one particular incarnation of this truth was ancient Rome, its culture sitting upon its earthly kingdom, but this is just one snapshot in time, the SPIRIT OF WHOREDOM is ever present in history and comes back again and again and again.

¹⁰There 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. ¹¹The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition.

No one is precisely sure what is meant here and so both Morris and Hendriksen lay out the options. One option is that we are talking about Roman Caesars. This would then run as follows:

1. Augustus
2. Tiberius
3. Caligula
4. Claudius
5. Nero
6. Vespasian
7. Titus
8. Domitian

After Nero there was a power struggle with a few quasi-Emperors who are generally not counted in that scenario. Thus Domitian is the reincarnation if you will of Nero. He is of the seven, he is Nero. He is animated by the same evil spirit. By the way, of course we are not talking about reincarnation in the Hindu sense, Domitian is not LITERALLY Nero, he is animated by the same spirit as was Nero. Both teams use this language of course, what does Jesus say about John the Baptist? That he is in some way propelled by the spirit that propelled Elijah. So that could be the right way to read this. Another way is to understand this in terms of world empires. This scheme then would run as follows:

1. Old Babylon (think Hammurabi and his Law Code)
2. Assyria

3. Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar)
4. Medo-Persia (Darius/Xerxes)
5. Greece (Alexander)
6. Rome (the Caesars; Nero)
7. ? (U.S.A.?)
8. ?

In this scheme the last final empire would arise from among the previous 7. If it were to arise today than it would have to come from an Iraq, Iran, a Greece, Italy or possibly, America.

¹²“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.

¹³These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast.

¹⁴These 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.”

The idea is that this final Empire or Emperor will delegate authority to 10 regional powers. This is clearly in the future to John as he is told that as yet they have received no kingdom. So in the future to John, ten kings/kingdoms will rule the world for a brief period of time. This of course is brief in God’s time not ours. We remember that a day is like a thousand years to God so an hour by analogy might be 42 years or one generation. So we might say the last generation on the earth will see a one world government divided into 10 powers of regions but the key issue is that these 10 powers think with one mind. The Greek literally says they have “one cognition”. One brain. This is not a United Nations table, this is one ruler with 10 regional governors or one Emperor with ten kings all of whom GIVE THEIR POWER AND AUTHORITY to the beast. With one mind they serve the emperor and Empire. These will make war with the Lamb. If we combine this with what we’ve already seen, they will shut the children of the lamb out of the economy and even kill them when they have completed their testimony and the Body of the church will lie slain in their streets.

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

We talked about this when we talked about the beast in chapter 13. This anti-christian, anti-God government is a multi-ethnic, multi-national body.

¹⁶And the ten horns which you ^fsaw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire.

¹⁷For 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.

¹⁸And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.” (Revelation 17:1-18. NKJV)

These last verses of chapter 17 are very curious. They state that this world empire, this last great persecuting kingdom in ten regions will turn and officially oppress and destroy the whore. The government will destroy civilization. God will put it in their minds to do this, God begins to turn his enemies upon each other. We see this by the way in the Old Testament. One of the ways that God is often found giving his people victory over huge swarms of enemies is that he turns these enemies against each other and they slaughter each other. Many times this happens. Here we see it also, anti-christian government now turns and slays anti-christian culture and civilisation. They think they have decided to do this but the Bible literally says that God put it into their unified cognition. They have one brain, now God injects a virus of his purpose and they do his will. In chapter 18 we see the extended telling of this destruction of seducing culture and anti-christian civilisation. Because of the sheer amount of material we are covering tonight we will now have to begin moving quite quickly with a little less detail than we are accustomed to, but we will highlight all the most significant details.

¹After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory.

²And he cried ^fmightily with a loud voice, saying, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!”

The language for this section is drawn almost entirely from two places in Scripture. There is first the doom song of Tyre found in Ezekiel 26-28 and then also the doom song of Babylon in Isaiah 13. Tyre was a world commercial centre and the doom song of Tyre is a wonderful work of prophetic poetry. It is told in the figure of the sinking by storm of the good ship Tyre. She is described as a magnificent ship, the product of the finest engineering and the carrier of the finest goods and yet she is ultimately sunk by a strong east wind. A storm shatters her sense of invulnerability and lays her low. She becomes barren, poor and the a place only for the drying of fishing nets. No longer the pride of merchants, she is now the place of fishermen. The doom song of Babylon is also fascinating. Here the prophet is warning the people of God against becoming allied with the Babylonians, thinking that the strength of Babylon would save them from other enemies. The prophet says if you hitch your fortunes to Babylon, you will share her

doom. The prophet Jeremiah actually ties his oracle to a rock and throws it into the river to make his point, a symbol that we will meet here shortly. These colours have been lifted right off Old Testament canvases and they bring all that symbolism with them.

³For 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.”

⁴And I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.

⁵For her sins ^fhave reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.

⁶Render to her just as she rendered ^fto you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her.

So this whorish culture and civilisation has lured men to their doom, distracted them into hell and now the prophetic voice from heaven says to God’s people: “Come out from her!” Go into the desert, fast, get into solitude, unplug lest you share in her sins and the plagues which fall upon her. Her sins have piled up to heaven and it is time to pay the piper. Just notice that it often seems that evil goes unpunished in this world but in fact, it does not. It piles up and then in one decisive hour it is visited back upon our heads if we have not been covered in the blood of the lamb. Now her sins are described:

⁷In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, ‘I sit *as* queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.’

Her sins are listed generally under the categories of pride and selfishness. She glorified herself. Who are we supposed to glorify with our lives? God. The whore encourages people to glorify themselves, to treat themselves like gods and to do so at the expense of others. She lived luxuriously but we shall see, she did so at the expense of others. The Jewish Rabbis used to say of Rome that they ate and consumed 6/7 of the wealth God had provided for the earth. They would say that God provided 7 measures of wealth and the Romans ate 6 measures and the final measure was divided among the rest of the world. It is characteristic of every empire and dominant civilisation that it over consumes because it glorifies itself and its people think themselves worthy of pampering. When Julius Caesar conquered Gaul, modern day France it is said that he killed 20% of its population through war and displacement. He then impoverished them by sending all the produce of the land down the Roman roads and into the Roman markets. Rome’s appetite for luxury was insatiable. She consumed people and lands because she thought herself a god. I sit as a queen and will not see sorrow. The Greek there is fascinating. She

literally says: “I should not know suffering”. The verb is in the subjunctive meaning she says: “I SHOULD not know suffering”. Bad things won’t happen to me, bad things SHOULDN’T happen to me. My friends when you hear so called Christians today in North America saying that Christians should never get sick, Christians should always be happy, healthy and wealthy, when you hear Christians arguing with the plain meaning of Scripture about suffering and saying: “This SHOULD NOT HAPPEN to me” you are hearing people speak with the mouth of the whore and in the spirit of the harlot. A person doesn’t say that by the Holy Spirit who wrote the Bible who said: “Count it all joy my brethren when you face trials of many kinds” and “to this you were called” and “we also GLORY in tribulations”. A person could only say that if they were filled with the spirit of whoredom. The whore thinks she is owed only good things, even if they come at the expense of others. Americans represent 5% of the world’s population but consume 25% of its resources. What spirit animates that culture of consumption?

⁸Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong *is* the Lord God who ^fjudges her.

Most commentators agree that this sounds like four plagues, death can be equally translated as pestilence so we are likely to see pestilence, mourning, famine and fire and this is not random, it is the Lord who judges her.

⁹“The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning,

¹⁰standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’

These are different than the 10 kings or regional powers who bring about her downfall, these are the merchant princes of the world. This is Rupert Murdoch, Bill Gates, Donald Trump, these are the Kings of Capitalism and they mourn the collapse of civilisation and the world economy. In one generation, in one hour, the house of cards has fallen ruin.

¹¹“And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore:

¹²merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble;

¹³and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and **bodies and souls of men.**

The Kings of Capitalism and Lords of Finance became fabulously wealthy by trading all the goods of the world. They even dealt in the bodies and souls of men. They treated people like commodities and souls like chips on the table.

¹⁴The fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have ^fgone from you, and you shall find them no more at all.

The word translated “rich” there is the Greek *lipara* which literally means “fat”. It is the word from which we get our English “lipids”. These people loved to live fat, they gave themselves the best and now its gone and its never coming back.

¹⁵The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing,

¹⁶and saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls!

¹⁷For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.’ Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance

¹⁸and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, ‘What *is* like this great city?’

¹⁹“They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and 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.’

The merchant princes wail and mourn the death of their golden goose. Hendriksen says: “When Babylon perishes, the economic chaos is complete; the world of the unbeliever, on which he has pinned his hopes and built his trust, collapses.” (p. 176)

²⁰“Rejoice over her, O heaven, and *you* ^fholy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!”

The perspective of the heaven however, is different. Afterall, the saints have long since been shut out of the world economy, many have been slain to silence her detractors. The perspective of heaven is that this is the vindication of God upon her for the harm she has done to his people. Now Christians often shy away from images of vengeance but the Bible doesn’t say that vengeance is wrong; what does it say? It says: “Do not take your own revenge beloved.... but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” (Romans 12:19) This is the vengeance of God and it is fierce.

²¹Then 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.

This scene is taken directly from Jeremiah 51:63 where it says:

⁶³Now it shall be, when you have finished reading this book, *that* you shall tie a stone to it and throw it out into the Euphrates. ⁶⁴Then you shall say, ‘Thus Babylon shall sink and not rise from the catastrophe that I will bring upon her. And they shall be weary.’” Thus far *are* the words of Jeremiah. (Jeremiah 51:63-64. NKJV)

The word translated in the English there in 18:21 as “with violence” is the Greek *hormeimati* and means “by attack” or “with violence” equally, so it is difficult to say which is better. It will be sudden, intentional and awful and it will come by the hands of the 10 kings.

²²The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore.

²³The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived.

²⁴And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth.” (Revelation 18:1-24. NKJV)

A few interesting things to say here by way of closing. Do you see the phrase “no craftsman of any craft”? The Greek word for “Craftsman” is *tekhmites* from which we get our English technician. The Greek word for “craft” is *tekhneis* from which get our technology. Thus this could be equally translated “no technician of technology”. An then no light of illumination. This may be describing the complete collapse of the high tech grid as part of the, or rather as a consequence of the collapse of civilization and the world economy. One other interesting note is in regards to verse 23. The Greek word for sorcery is *pharmakeia*; anyone want to guess what English word comes from that? Pharmacy. It means medicine, drugs, sorcery and witchcraft equally. When civilization collapses it will also bring an end to drugs, the good kind and the bad kind by means of which all the nations of the earth were deceived. Fascinating. Why don’t we end there and take questions.