

## **Revelation 17: The Judgment of Babylon, Part I**

Scripture: Revelation 17

### **Introduction:**

The wrath of God has been completed in the pouring out of the seven bowls of judgment, and once again, we were taken to the end of history, where Christ returns in judgment. Now, in the remaining chapters, we will hone in on the final judgment that is to come upon the whore of Babylon, the two beasts and the dragon, ushering in the consummation of the Kingdom of God, and the new heavens and the new earth. Again, most time is given over to describing the destruction of the whore of Babylon, because she is most relevant to the people of this world. Life as we know it will end, suddenly, and there will be nothing left to hold onto in this world, when that happens. Only those who are in Christ will stand firm on the Rock of His grace, because they have loved not this world or even their very lives in this world, to the very end.

The next two and a half chapters deal then primarily with the fall of Babylon. Chapter 17 gives us a description of Babylon; her ways, her relationship to the beast and her ultimate demise. Chapter 18 describes the utter fall of Babylon, and how this affects the entire world. And then, the first half of Chapter 19 describes the response of the heavenly hosts, to the destruction of Babylon.

### **I. The Scarlet Woman and the Scarlet Beast**

Now, as we begin to consider this description of Babylon and the beast, it is important for us to understand that the information given to us here in chapter 17 is as relevant for John (and the seven churches of Asia), as it is for us. In other words, we are not here given a description of Babylon and the beast *in their final manifestations*, but rather, we are given an all encompassing description, which takes us from the time of John to the end (when Christ returns). The beast is the beast from the time of John onward, as is the whore of Babylon. Governmental powers and the world system, though spanning all of the ages individually (in one sense), also represent the whole package; the lump sum of them all, from beginning to end, finding their final manifestation just prior to the return of Christ. Remember, there are demonic powers at work behind the scenes here, working behind every persecuting empire and world system, and though the individual empires and world systems rise and fall, as nations rise and fall, the demonic beings behind them are not ultimately destroyed until Christ returns. And so, especially in Chapter 17, which describes the nature of the Scarlet whore of Babylon, and especially in how she relates to the beast, we will find great relevance and emphasis for John's day in these descriptions. In other words, we cannot limit these descriptions to our day, and try to piece

everything together from there. Chapter 17 is relevant for the seven churches of Asia; these enemies are at work then, and they are not ultimately defeated until Christ returns. And so, even as OT Babylon is the primary image used to describe the whore, we can anticipate strong traces of the Roman Empire implied in our text as well. That said, Rome is ultimately only one part of the composite make-up of the Scarlet whore. This would apply to the Beast as well, with respect to the empirical Roman powers.

And so, as John is preparing to behold the destruction of Babylon (the opening up of what has happened in the pouring out of the seventh bowl), the angel begins by exposing the whore's harlotrous deeds and then shows her connection to the beast. In the first six verses, we are given a description of the whore and the beast, and then, in the verses that follow, we are given an interpretation of that description. Let's begin then by working through some of the details from the first six verses:

1) [Read verses 1-2]. Here Babylon, the Mother of Harlots (vs. 5) is described as having committed fornication with the kings of the earth, and making all of the inhabitants of the earth drunk with the wine of her fornication. What are we to make of all this?

Well, Babylon, the system that drives and orders this world, convincing all of the inhabitants of this world that life is defined by the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes and the pride of life; Babylon, the Mother of all entertainment and every material distraction that would turn us away from knowing, loving, worshiping and serving God, has enticed the kings and authorities of the earth with her licentious pleasures, and has intoxicated the entire world with senseless and useless lusts. She has drawn our attention away from God and His Christ and has convinced us of a better life, deceptively appealing to our sensual flesh and the lusts of our sin nature. The idea of "intoxication" is a worthy description, because that is exactly what she does; she intoxicates, mesmerizes and entices the lost with her lying ways, causing all to ignore the reality of God and of our accountability to Him. The drunk have no thoughts of tomorrow; they live "in the now," and "for the moment," trapped in the lie of immediate fulfillment, numb to every reality of God and the coming judgment, doing whatever it takes to get another fill of the whore. Most of us can relate to this, can we not, brethren? We were there, weren't we...until God rescued us from the whore's grasp and brought us to Christ. Governmental powers are swayed and controlled by their love of wealth and power and materialism, and so they uphold and give power to the whore, as she intoxicates the rest of the world with her lying and seductress ways.

2) [Read verse 3]. Notice again, the whore rides on the back of the beast; he bears her up and ultimately gives her her strength, as he backs her with his power. Indeed, this is the same beast as the first beast from the sea (chapter 13). Compare chapter 13:1, 5 with chapter 17:3. Only, here we are told that the beast is "Scarlet in color" like the whore. They bear the color of blood, of lust, of impurity

and of lavish living.

And so, the beast supports and upholds the whore, as long as his power is maintained the whole time. However, the beast is primarily consumed with power, and he will sacrifice the whore; he will kill the economy and the world system (even to his own hurt) as a last ditch effort of seeking to maintain his power and control of the world, if necessary. And indeed, we will find this happening at the end of the text. For, it is the horns of the beast who ultimately destroy, burn and devour the whore. But, as long as he benefits from her, the beast maintains his love affair with the whore, and works with her to control the world and destroy the church.

The beast was manifested in the Roman Empire during the time of John, and the whore was the lavish, lustful, material, sensual world system that pervaded Rome. We will see these things more clearly, when we work through the interpretation of this vision in verses 7ff. 3) [Read verses 4-6]. In competition with the church, whose beauty is inward, the whore is arrayed *outwardly* in all manner of expensive clothing and fine jewelry. She lures people into her intoxicating grip by these means, taking created human souls captive unto a system of life that dares to seek to live independently of the God who created all things. Indeed, she mocks true religion and presents man-made things, financial prosperity and material success as the true meaning of life, and though people know that their days are numbered, they stumble through her intoxicating allurements and are incapable of embracing the truth. She is the Mother of all Harlots because every idolatrous way; every temporal distraction, which gains the hearts of living souls throughout this entire globe, comes from her. Every idol; physical, sensual, mental, visual, selfish ambition, entertainment...etc; these are all her children.

And, since the church (the saints) represents the true light, and exposes her shame, she especially, in cooperation with the beast, leads her lovers to make martyrs out of them. They contradict her ways; they expose her frivolity; they reveal her shame and strive to lead the lost to the truth, which is in Christ, and so, she leads the world to contend with and destroy the people of God. In that sense, she is "drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (vs. 6a). And this whore is indeed happy to use religion, when religion serves her idolatrous cause, and seeks to contend with the true light of the Gospel.

Having gone over these descriptions, let us move on to get a better understanding of their meaning, found in verses 7ff. And here, we will especially see how this Revelation serves to inform John and his readers directly, even as it is meant to inform us. John and his readers would have understood the meaning of verses 7ff, probably better than us. Again, they had Rome as a very relevant and tangible present day example.

**[Ex: Joseph refuses Pot's wife and is imprisoned]**