

The Book of Revelation

Week #17 – The Harlot and the Beast (Cont'd)

I. THE BEAST – REVIEW OF WEEK 16 (17:7-11)

A. The Beast

The description of the beast who “*was, and is not, and is,*” is a parody of the Lord’s name, “*who is, and who was, and who is to come*” [Rev 1:4, 8, and 4:8].

It identifies the Antichrist who is headed for perdition. St. Paul calls him the “son of perdition” [2 Thess 2:3].

The Beast that existed once, is not now living, but will return is probably an allusion to the Nero *redivivus* legend, as well as to the ultimate Antichrist.

- The beast supports the harlot, who is dependent on his power to corrupt the world and to lead its rulers away from God.
- Rome supported Jerusalem in the beginning, but later destroyed her in 70 AD.
- Ultimately, the return of the beast seems to refer to the coming of the Antichrist and his empire at the end of time.
- In some sense this empire will resemble the Roman Empire under the rule of Nero [or Domitian].
- The ideas of Nero’s return and that of the Antichrist seem to have become inseparately connected. The one is a type of the other.

B. Seven Heads; Seven Hills

The Beast has seven heads. In verse 9 the seven heads are seven hills.

- This suggests Rome which is built on seven hills.
- Jerusalem, too, was said to rest on seven hills according to one rabbinic tradition.

C. Seven Kings

In verses 10 and 11 the seven heads stand for seven kings. The seven kings represent the first seven emperors of the Roman Empire.

If we begin with Julius Caesar, Nero is the sixth king – the one who is reigning at the time John writes Revelation. This is who John is referring to by the phrase “*the one who is.*”

Nero was succeeded by Galba was the seventh king.

D. An Eighth King - Antichrist

But who is “an eighth” king? The eighth will be the Beast, Nero *redivivus* – Nero returned [or Domitian, who some say was the reincarnation of the demonic Nero].

- The eighth is also the ultimate or supreme Antichrist who will appear near the end of time.

John identified the demonic Nero with the eschatological adversary [the Antichrist]; the one who would seize power in the last days.

- He will go to perdition – eternal death.
- In the first century AD, Nero and Domitian are types of the Beast/Antichrist.

II. THE TEN HORNS OF THE BEAST

Read: Revelation 17:12-14

[12] And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast.

[13] These are of one mind and give over their power and authority to the beast;

[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 ten horns are ten kings who derive their authority from the beast. They are probably rulers appointed by one of the Caesars mentioned in 17:10, but their identity is a mystery.

Herod and his successors would probably be included in these kings.

In the end times they could be rulers appointed by “an eighth king”, the Antichrist, and subject to him.

In verse 14 we read that these kings [governments, states kingdoms] join with the Antichrist to make war on the Lamb but the Lamb destroys them; and the called, the chosen and the loyal share in the victory of the Lamb.

This is a reversal of what was described in Chapter 13, verse 7, where the beast was allowed to conquer the saints. Now the Lamb and the saints destroy Antichrist and his rulers.

III. THE BEAST DEVOURS THE HARLOT

[15] And he said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the harlot is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues. [16] And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the harlot; they will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, [17] for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and giving over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. [18] And the woman that you saw is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth."

A. The Waters

The waters are identified as peoples and nations. These are probably the nations subject to Antichrist and influenced spiritually by the harlot.

B. The Ten Horns and the Harlot

The image of the beast and the ten horns turning against the harlot and burning her down is a graphic description of the destruction of Jerusalem, for in AD 70 Rome literally burned the city to the ground.

Making the harlot naked means subjecting her to public disgrace.

C. God Uses the Wicked to Destroy His enemies

The harlot's previous lovers, that is, the very kingdoms with which Judah had made idolatrous alliances instead of trusting in Yahweh, now turn against her and devour her.

The instrument God uses to destroy the Lamb's enemies – are the enemies themselves. In WW2 God used Soviet Russia to destroy Nazi Germany.

The enemies of God are ultimately their own worst enemies. They will eventually self-destruct.

IV. THE FALL OF BABYLON

A. Overview

Following Old Testament patterns, the whole of Chapter 18 is like a dirge, a funeral song, a series of laments over the death of the harlot city Babylon.

The dirge proclaims the fall of Jerusalem – the new Babylon - and celebrates God's judgments for her crimes. Each scene represents a different response to the collapse of the city.

Chapter 18 contains many parallels to Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the fall of ancient Babylon [see *Coming Soon* pages 218-219].

Ancient Babylon destroyed the earthly temple; Jerusalem destroyed the true temple, Christ [cf John 2]. Jerusalem will now fall as original Babylon fell.

Some Christian groups have taken the harlot here to stand, not for the Jewish and Roman persecutors of the first century Christians, but for "ecclesiastical Babylon."

This is sometimes interpreted as "all apostate Christendom, in which the Papacy will undoubtedly be prominent" [Scofield Bible].

However, there are no Scriptural grounds for such an interpretation. In Revelation the whole Church is being persecuted.

Read: Revelation 18:1-5

[1] After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority; and the earth was made bright with his splendor.

[2] And he called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!

*It has become a dwelling place of demons,
a haunt of every foul spirit,
a haunt of every foul and hateful bird;*

*[3] for all nations have drunk the wine of her impure passion,
and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her,
and the merchants of the earth have grown rich with the wealth of
her wantonness."*

[4] Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,

*"Come out of her, my people,
lest you take part in her sins,
lest you share in her plagues;*

*[5] for her sins are heaped high as heaven,
and God has remembered her iniquities.*

B. Babylon Has Fallen

Though the angel uses the past tense ["Babylon **has** fallen"], this is a prophetic announcement of a future event – neither Rome nor Jerusalem has yet fallen when John writes.

This is made clear from the warning of the saints in verse 4 to leave the city, as well as the future orientation of the rest of the angel's words.

The reason for the fall of Babylon [Rome/Jerusalem] is not merely her persecution of Christians, but her immorality [verses 2-3]. She has become the "**haunt of every foul spirit.**"

Like the drug and pornography lords of today, the merchants of the city have let their lust for money draw them into her licentious luxury, abandoning all social responsibility.

C. Leave the City

After the announcement of the imminent destruction of the city, the Christians are urged by a voice from heaven to leave the city [**"Come out of her"**] before it is destroyed, lest, sharing in her sins, they also share in her doom.

The expression “Come out of her,” or “Depart from her” was used frequently in the judgment threats of Isaiah [Is 48:20; 52:11], and Jeremiah [Jer 50:8: 51:6, 9, 45].

Like Jerusalem, God’s people were also called out of ancient Babylon, Egypt, and Sodom and Gomorrah, and warned to flee before their destruction.

V. THE JUDGMENT OF THE HARLOT

Read: Revelation 6-8

*[6] Render to her as she herself has rendered,
and repay her double for her deeds;
mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed.
[7] As she glorified herself and played the wanton,
so give her a like measure of torment and mourning.
Since in her heart she says, 'A queen I sit,
I am no widow, mourning I shall never see,'
[8] so shall her plagues come in a single day,
pestilence and mourning and famine,
and she shall be burned with fire;
for mighty is the Lord God who judges her."*

A. Vengeance Belongs to God Alone

This passage speaks of punishment. But the instruction to exact vengeance on the city [Rome/Jerusalem] is not an instruction to men: it is an instruction to the angel, the divine instrument of justice.

- Vengeance belongs to God, and to God alone.

But the judgment of the city is a “punishment that fits the crime.”

- Just as the harlot-city sought to kill the saints, now she herself will be destroyed.
- Just as Babylon prided herself as unbreakable, so she will be broken.
- And just as she indulged herself in illicit pleasures, so she will now face painful judgment.

All pride will one day be humiliated. The harlot-city’s supreme sin has been pride.

B. The Lament of the Kings, Merchants, and Sailors

Read: Revelation 18:9-19

[9] And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and were wanton with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning; [10] they will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, "Alas! alas! thou great city, thou mighty city, Babylon! In one hour has thy judgment come."

[11] And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo any more, [12] cargo of gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, [13] cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls. [14] "The fruit for which thy soul longed has gone from thee, and all thy dainties and thy splendor are lost to thee, never to be found again!" [15] The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud, [16] "Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, bedecked with gold, with jewels, and with pearls! [17] In one hour all this wealth has been laid waste."

And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off [18] and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, "What city was like the great city?" [19] And they threw dust on their heads, as they wept and mourned, crying out, "Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! In one hour she has been laid waste."

Three groups mourn the destruction of the city, and the description of the three groups parallel each other. The three groups are:

1. The kings [18:9];
2. The merchants [18:11]; and
3. The sailors [18:17].
 - They each “mourn” over the fall of the city [18:9, 15, 19].
 - Each group “stands far off” [18:10, 15, 17].

- All three begin their lament, saying “Alas, alas” [18:10, 16, 19].
- The three groups also mention that the city is destroyed in “one hour.” [18:10, 17, 19].

Although each group mourns at the sight of the harlot's judgment, they mourn not so much for the city itself, but for the loss of the hedonistic pleasures, luxury, and financial gain it provided them.

They cry for themselves!

They don't pity her and try to help her. Rather, they stand afar off for fear that they will be judged as well, and watch as she burns.

VI. REJOICING AMID LAMENTING

Read: Revelation 18:20-24

*20] Rejoice over her, O heaven,
O saints and apostles and prophets,
for God has given judgment for you against her!"*
*[21] Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it
into the sea, saying,*
*"So shall Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence,
and shall be found no more;
[22] and the sound of harpers and minstrels, of flute players and
trumpeters,
shall be heard in thee no more;
and a craftsman of any craft
shall be found in thee no more;
and the sound of the millstone
shall be heard in thee no more;
[23] and the light of a lamp
shall shine in thee no more;
and the voice of bridegroom and bride
shall be heard in thee no more;
for thy merchants were the great men of the earth,
and all nations were deceived by thy sorcery.
[24] And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints,
and of all who have been slain on earth."*

A. Prophets and Saints Avenged

The prophets and saints rejoice at the destruction of the city that killed them. God has avenged their blood as he promised in Revelation 6.

Jesus' promise that Jerusalem would finally be held accountable for the blood of all the prophets killed there is finally fulfilled [Luke 11:49-51]

49] 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,'

[50] that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation,

[51] from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it shall be required of this generation.

B. The Final Desolation

The image of the city being cast as a giant millstone into the sea vividly recalls Christ's warning:

[1] And he said to his disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come; but woe to him by whom they come!"

[2] It would be better for him if a millstone were hung round his neck and he were cast into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.

John takes this imagery from Jesus Himself and applies it to Jerusalem. So then, because the city seduced the nations as a harlot, and led them into sin by its scandalous conduct, it is cast into the sea like a millstone.

The millstone falling silent, the lighted lamp going dark, and the bridegroom and the bride no longer heard singing, speaks to the utter desolation of the city.

Never will rejoicing be heard in her again. The final judgment is awful and awesome.

John does not himself weep over Jerusalem as Jesus did for its lack of repentance. However there is a touch of awe and sorrow as John reviews these tragic scenes.

In 18:24 the reasons for her destruction are given; not only the blood of prophets and the holy ones, but all the innocent who have been slain on the earth.

The shedding of innocent blood, no matter to whom it belonged, cries out to God for vengeance [Gen 4:10].

10] And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.

VII. APPLICATION

In the large cities of North America and Europe, the innocent blood of millions of preborn children has been crying out to God for vengeance for a generation, just as Abel's blood cried out to God.

The mills of God grind slowly but surely.

The window of mercy is fast closing, and the door of judgment is opening.

Woe to the great cities of North America and Europe. Just as we have shed the blood of innocent children, so too, will our blood be shed.

Lord, have mercy! Christ, have mercy! Lord, have mercy!