

## **“GOD’S JUDGMENT ON THE HARLOT AND THE BEAST.”**

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**October 4, 2015, 6:00PM**

**Scripture Texts: Revelation 17:6-18**

### **Introduction.**

We have been through the seven churches of Asia Minor, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls. Now we start seven messages of doom and judgment on Babylon from 17:1 to 19:10. Tonight’s text is the first message, the angel’s explanation of the war with the prostitute.

Chapters 17-18 explain in more detail the judgment summarized in chapter 16. The next two chapters are not new images of judgment but a fuller explanation of what this judgment will be like.

In Revelation Babylon is the world and all that is wrong in the world. Babylon is the sinful world, in rebellion against God, in love with worldliness. Babylon is the symbolic word for all that is evil, dark, satanic, anti-Christian, anti-truth, anti-love.

All of this opposition to Christ in the world manifests itself in two ways, either persecution and the killing of the martyrs, or seduction and enticement. The enemies tactics are simple, either pain or pleasure. Satan will destroy the church either by using and abusing power, influence, coercion and authority. Or he will entice and seduce with luxury and pleasure and comfort and ease.

The beast and the prostitute represent the two kinds of Satanic power and influence in the world.

The beast is persecution, wicked regimes and tyrannical governments.

The harlot is seduction, temptation, enticement to wicked pleasures.

And the Biblical response to their two tactics are just as clear and simple. Endurance in the face of persecution and pain, and separation and resistance to worldly pleasures. Endurance and separation.

### **The Angel explains the meaning of the mystery, 17:7-18.**

**Revelation 17:6-7** And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her, I marveled greatly. 7 But the angel said to me, “Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her.

This is at least the third time in Revelation that an angel has explained part of the mystery. As the angel explains the woman and the beast and the beast's heads and horns, we will see they represent one mystery, one picture, the kingdoms of this world that will be defeated.

### ***The Beast, 17:8, 11.***

**Revelation 17:8, 11** The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. ... 11 As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction.

Was, is not, and will come sounds like a counterfeit version of what is said of Christ in Revelation 1:17-18, "I am, I died, I am alive forevermore."

However close Satan may seem in comparison, those whose names are written in Book of Life know the difference and how it will end.

"From the foundation of the world" reminds us of the sovereignty of God and His control over salvation.

**John 6:37** All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

**Ephesians 1:3-4** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who ... chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world.

### ***The Seven Heads, 17:9-10.***

**Revelation 17:9-10** This calls for a mind with wisdom: the *seven heads* are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; 10 they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while.

The simplest explanation is that heads mean authority, power and influence, in a word, political power.

Rome was known as the city of seven hills so there is an allusion here that would be familiar to the people of the time. Rome was their present day embodiment of Babylon.

Who are the seven kings?

Some say the five are the five fallen great empires of history before John, Babylon, Assyria, Babylon again, Persia, and Greece. And that Rome is the one that now is.

Some say they are Roman emperors, but the problem with that is there were more than seven.

More likely this is simply a reference to how kingdoms and empires and tyrannies come and go, nations rise and fall. They are always changing, but one thing never changes. There has been and will always be opposition to God and His people.

We can look back and see a succession of worldly powers against Christianity (the five), we can look around now and see worldly powers in our own time (the one that is) and we can expect worldly systems and powers in the ages to come (the one yet to come).

The last will be the same as the first, of the same spirit and mind. The beast will be like the seventh, but with a capital E, Empire.

Every generation has its opposition. Greece, Rome, the Barbarians, the Ottoman Turks, Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia, Mao's China, Enver Hoxha's Albania, Kim Jong-Il's North Korea, Iraq and Iran, Isis.

No government has always remained God-honoring, not Israel, not Europe, not America. We cannot trust in man or man's systems. Politics is not God and is not Messiah, it will never save us.

### ***The Ten Horns, 17:12-14.***

**Revelation 17:12-14** 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 they hand 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.

What are the ten horns? They are another Biblical symbol for strength and power and another allusions to Daniel 7.

They are yet ten more kings, but they are placed in the future. They are yet to come and will reign during the time of the anti-Christ. They will be completely allied to him, receiving their authority from him. Will these be political leaders? Will they be all the facets of human culture, media, education, business, industry?

This simply illustrates the wide-scale allegiances of human powers and resources with Satan and his ungodly work on earth. Many are they who will cooperate, or be accomplices.

But their time will be very short. The end is coming. It will go very badly for Christians for a little while, and the Lord of lords and King of kings will deliver His people.

### ***The Waters, 17:15.***

**Revelation 17:15** And the angel said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.

The waters represent the multitudes of nations and languages, indicating the worldwide scope of the conflict and judgment. This is not small or localized. This is truly a world war.

*What the beast and horns will do, 17:16-18.*

**Revelation 17:16-18** And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. 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 handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. 18 And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.

This is a surprising turn of events. These ten kings turn on the harlot and hate her. Satan will become a house divided.

**Mark 3:22-26** And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.” 23 And he called them to him and said to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26 And *if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end.*

They will self-destruct, they will become the cause of their downfall. Sin is always self-destructive, it comes back to bite us. Idols and idolatry always crumble and fall. And when our idols fail us sometimes we turn and take it out on the idol.

Behind this is the power and working of a sovereign God.

Notice, God is working His will in the hearts of the wicked. God is absolutely sovereign over His enemies. God is fulfilling His purposes. Nothing can thwart His plan. What we are reading here is the Word of God. This is His book and His will.

Their time will be short and then God will execute His plan and put them to an end. Remember, everything that opposes God and the Lamb will fail and fall.

### **Implications and Applications.**

In Revelation 17, you’ll notice *three things about the prostitute Babylon.*

*First*, she is attractive, alluring, seductive. Beautiful clothes and jewels, gold and precious stones. She is something to behold, desirable, hard to resist.

*Second*, she is influential. She sits over many waters, she has pull countless nations and individuals into her sway. Her worldliness reigns in the hearts of mankind and in all the nations of the world. She has dominion over the kings of the world.

*Third*, she is impressive. Even John marvels. The ways of the world are often much more impressive to us than the ways of Christ and His church.

Friends, We are in a kind of Babylonian captivity. We are living in Babylon, in the world surrounded by worldliness. We are tempted every day to drink from the golden cup of all Babylon has to offer. We are tempted by every kind idolatry, countless “isms” or cults.

Healthy and the cult of looking younger and living longer, and the pills that make it possible. Sports and living and dying on how our team or our favorite athlete is doing.

Entertainment, pursuing feeling better. Consider the ever expanding entertainment and resort and vacation industry. My son manages 40 guides on one of the highest volume ziplines in the US. Three groups of ten every hour for 10 hours every day at \$125 a pop. Thrill seekers everywhere looking for the next high or the next buzz.

Shopping, now we call it retail-therapy, some is good, more is better, too much is just right.

Voyeurism, our inordinate interest in the lives of the rich and the famous, because our lives are boring, or they are more dysfunctional than ours.

Political idols, that everything wrong is the other sides fault, and our problems can be solved by votes and taxes.

Family. Among many Christians family is god, and even spiritual life takes a back seat to family plans and activities.

Science is a god, it tells us the truth we need to know about everything, and it is the only trusted source of truth.

It's the air we breathe, the water we drink. It's so subtle we don't even notice. Worldliness will destroy more faith than Islam or terrorism. The world is always seeking to squeeze us into its mold.

The seductions of Babylon are all around us, not just in our cities, but in our homes and hearts. Idolatry, greed, materialism, pleasure, money, sex and power. Media and advertising constantly calling us to something more satisfying, more pleasing, more pleasure oriented.

We constantly hear the siren call of the world, the flesh and the devil; the lure of temporal desires, temporary pleasures; the deceitful power of the world with all its charms and attractions and enticements.

We chase after wealth and health, beauty and power and recognition, keeping up with the neighbors, enjoying the good life, seek to suffer as little as possible.

The unaware are easily taken in by her dazzling beauty without noticing how repulsive she is. She is never to be underestimated. Even John marvels, as the inhabitants of the earth marveled.

But remember, in John's vision he sees her in a wilderness, a barren and desolate place, a place devoid of life, not life-giving. She is to be feared, and shunned and fled from.

But it will soon all come to an end. We know how it ends, we know that everything in this life is temporal, that is it all kindling for a really big fire. Yet we are drawn to it anyway. Everything here is a counterfeit to the real thing in heaven.

***The answer to impure pleasure is not no pleasure, the answer is pure pleasure.*** To sweep the house clean, but leave it empty is to invite in seven more demons of worse stripe. The answer is not just abstinence but replacement. Turning away from what cannot satisfy and turning to what can truly satisfy.

J.I. Packer, writes, "Contempt for pleasure, so far from arguing superior spirituality, is actually...the sin of pride. Pleasure is divinely designed to raise our sense of God's goodness, deepen our gratitude to him, and strengthen our hope of richer pleasures to come in the next world."

"We must fight fire with fire. The fire of lust's pleasures must be fought with the fire of God's pleasures. If we try to fight the fire of lust with prohibitions and threats alone – even the terrible warnings of Jesus – we will fail. We must fight it with the massive promise of superior happiness. We must swallow up the little flicker of lust's pleasure in the conflagration of holy satisfaction" (John Piper, Future Grace).

So pleasure isn't the problem, in fact pleasure is part of the solution. Lives without pleasure are vulnerable. We are created to thirst. We are created to enjoy life and all the good pleasures God has filled it with. God has given us our five senses so we can enjoy all His good gifts.

We need a clear vision of the difference of living for the Lamb and living for the beast.

Satan tries to keep us from God's pleasures by tempting us with his pleasures. But sin always leads to depression and despair and misery.

Learn to enjoy God's world without loving the world, without loving things more than God. doing sacrifice the best things for good things. Love God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, love His Word and His Church and His worship and His sacraments. Treasure the best things God has to offer over what the world has to offer.