

Revelation
A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #49
8/08/2007

The Explanatory Interlude of Chapter Seventeen: Religious Babylon

That Chapter Seventeen is one of the more difficult passages to understand is illustrated by the many different interpretations presented by various scholars of church history down over the years. Those who have done significant reading of these sources are well acquainted with these varying viewpoints. We will not attempt to rehearse or repeat these various viewpoints, while recognizing that they are usually presented by highly respected men of God, but, will rather attempt to approach this difficult passage in the manner that will help to clarify its extremely important message.

Please notice that, as you read the chapter, it divides itself into two parts. First, verses one through six record the vision that John experienced. Second, verses seven through eighteen give us the interpretation which John received from the angel. As we read the first six verses we will discover ten different aspects or statements. These are enumerated and listed in the sidebar. This first lesson will focus on the first two of these aspects.

1 And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of (1) the great whore that (2) sitteth upon many waters:

One of the angels, whom God had used in Chapter sixteen to pour out His bowls of wrath, came to John and instructed him to **“Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters.”** John is caught up in a vision and records for us what he saw and heard. The vision will look backwards in time and then to the future disposition of the evil that is pictured for him. The vision will employ some symbolic images to represent powerful and awesome truths.

The first aspect, “The great whore,” is a symbolic picture of spiritual prostitution, false religion. It specifically refers to those who, though religious, with some even claiming to be Christians, were left on the earth at the time of the Rapture. This includes, though it is not limited to, those who are members of various churches and many different denominations. It is not limited to these “pseudo-Christians” because many people of the false religions of the world which do not even claim to be Christian are included in this symbolic representation. It also includes those who have rebelled against God from even the earliest days of mankind, particularly dating back to the time of **The Tower of Babel and Nimrod.** **In verse five this “great whore” will be identified as “...BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”**

The second aspect emphasizes this previous point, i.e., the **“many waters”** represent the various people groups which make up the population of the world. It is usually used in reference to those who are other than Israel. Because the many people groups of the world, dating back to the earliest days of mankind, are included, at this point we look backward to understand this awesome phenomena of false religion and its beginning.

Revelation 17:1-18

1 And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of (1) the great whore that (2) sitteth upon many waters:

2 With whom (3) the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and (4) the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.

3 So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and (5) I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

4 And (6) the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, (7) having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:

5 And (8) upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, (9) BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

6 And (10) I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.

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God's Word traces the birth of man's sinful rebellion against God back to Genesis, Chapter Three, describing Satan's successful temptation of Eve, and then Adam. The next incident of rebellion is recorded in Genesis Four which tells us about Cain's rebellion. The sinful digression of man then became so pervasive and degraded that God decided to give the earth a bath, which is called **Noah's Flood**, and which is described in Genesis Seven and Eight.

Genesis Eleven tells us about Satan's first effort to organize man's rebellion into some form of false religion at the **Tower of Babel**. The notable Dr. Harry A. Ironside, in his *Lectures on Revelation*, pp. 287-295, provides us with detailed, and oft quoted, information about what began at **Babel** under the leadership of **Nimrod** as described in Genesis eleven. The following information is largely derived from Dr. Ironside's presentation:

“...The founder of Babel, or Babylon, was Nimrod, or Nimroud-bar-Cush, a grandson of Ham. Ancient lore tells us that the wife of Nimrod-bar-Cush was the infamous **Semiramis** who became the foundress of the Babylonian mystery religions and the first high-priestess of idolatry. Attempting to pervert God's promise to send **“the seed of the woman”** to defeat Satan, the devil promulgated the lie that **Semiramis** had a son named **Tammuz** whom she declared to be miraculously conceived and who was hailed as the deliverer of mankind. Supposedly killed by a wild boar, **Tammuz** was miraculously revived. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Jer. 7:18; 44:17-19, 25; Ezekiel 8:14-15) prophesied about the infiltration of this pagan cult into Israel and portrayed its presence, along with **Baal** worship, as one of the primary reasons God sent Judah into captivity. **Baal** worship, which Elijah confronted on Mt. Carmel, was related to the worship of **Tammuz** and imported into Israel by **Jezebel**, a Phoenician whom King Ahab took as a wife (1 Kings 18).

From Babylon this mystery religion spread to all the surrounding peoples. Everywhere the symbols were the same, and everywhere the cult of the mother and child became the popular religious system. Their worship was celebrated always with the most disgusting and immoral practices. The images were seen everywhere though the names differed because of the various languages. It became the mystery religion of the Phoenicians, the seafaring people sailing around the world and spreading the cult. The Phoenicians called them **Astoreth and Tammuz**. The Egyptians called them **Isis and Horus**. The Greeks called them **Aphrodite and Eros**, and they became **Venus and Cupid** in Italy. In other cultures different and varying names were used, but always the same false religion was spread.

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Lesson #49
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Linked with these were countless lesser mysteries, many of which have even been incorporated into modern Christianity in various forms. The fish god **Dagon**, called the Lord of life, of the Philistines (1 Samuel Five) was celebrated by priests wearing hats shaped like fish and by making symbols of fish. Their chief priest took the title **Pontifex Maximum** (bridge builder) and this was imprinted on his mitre. This spread from Phoenicia to Rome and when Julius Ceasar became emperor he took the title Pontifex Maximum. Ceasar even had a ring, shaped like a fish, made as his official symbol. This title was held by all succeeding emperors down to Constantine the Great who was both head of the empire and the Roman church.

Among the other lesser mysteries linked to the Babylonian cult and which are documented in Alexander Hyslop's book, **The Two Babylons**, the following are offered as examples: the doctrine of purgatorial salvation after death; salvation by countless sacraments and the various rituals related to the so-called Easter egg. For instance, for **Tammuz**, the egg was sacred, depicting his "resurrection" and was his chosen symbol to symbolize his victory over death."

It is easy how insidiously and pervasively the pollutions of this cult-based religion have infected and distorted even Christianity. Many Christians today practice one or more of these mystery religion traditions. Beyond the synopsis provided by Dr. Ironside, Dr. Henry Morris, in his book, **The Revelation Record**, pp. 326-327, points out other effects of the Babylon mystery religions on mankind as quoted below:

"... With the confusion of tongues and resultant dispersion (Genesis 11:9), this religious system was carried by the scattering tribes into every region of the world. Each had its own cultural distinctives, and the names of the pantheon of gods and goddesses were different in each nation, because the languages were now different. But the basic system was still the same everywhere.

This is the reason why every nation and tribe of the past or present (except those whose cosmogony is based on Genesis 1 and 2, such as Christianity and Judaism) has a religious system which is fundamentally:

1. **Pantheistic** (believing that the physical universe, rather than the transcendent Creator of that universe, is the ultimate reality);
2. **Polytheistic** (believing that this deified cosmos manifests itself locally as various forces and systems of nature, which are personified as "gods" and "goddesses");

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Lesson #49
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3. **Evolutionary** (believing that these personified forces of nature somehow generate higher and higher orders of beings, including man and — in many cases — even spirits);
4. **Animistic/spiritistic** (believing that the spirits so generated, including the spirits of dead men and women, continue to survive and perhaps evolve into still higher beings);
5. **Astrological** (believing that the highest beings so developed either inhabit or are identical with the starry host of heaven, so that the stars control events on earth); and
6. **Idolatrous** (believing that these “gods and goddesses,” or personified forces and systems of nature, should be worshipped through images constructed to represent them and which they then possess and energize).”

Even though it has been popular over the years to identify the **“great whore”** of verse one as ecclesiastical Romanism in its various forms because of some aspects which shall be seen further in the Chapter, it should be clear that such an identification is too restrictive a description of the **“great whore.”** While it is evident that many of the pagan practices of Babylon migrated to Rome and became integrated into the Roman church, **“the great whore,”** representing false religion includes many other expressions of its perversions of the true faith which can be found in a number of other religious groups. It is fashionable to identify some particular church groups and denominations with the **“great whore,”** but such should be strongly resisted.

This is a good place to remind ourselves that the body of Christ which is to be raptured and taken to be with the Lord is constituted by those individuals, regardless of church membership or affiliation, who have given themselves in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Master. It can be said with absolute confidence that neither affiliation or non-affiliation with a particular church is a requirement for membership in the true church, the body of Christ. Such is entirely and solely based upon whether an individual has yielded up his life to Christ Jesus and been cleansed by His blood.

It has become painfully obvious that many people today, affiliated with “main-line, evangelical churches,” such as Baptists, give no evidence of faith in either the crucified and resurrected and living Lord or an absolute reliance upon His holy Word. Without trusting faith in the Lord Jesus Christ it is impossible for a sinner to be saved for **“there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved”** (Acts 4:12). God also tells us that if a person **“takes away from the words of this prophecy, God will take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city ...”** (Rev. 22:19). This is too serious a matter for its importance to be weakened by erroneous descriptions about the identity of the **“great whore.”**