

Revelation
A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #50
8/15/2007

The Explanatory Interlude of Chapter Seventeen: Religious Babylon
Part 2

Having spent the major part of the first lesson on Chapter Seventeen in giving some biblical and historical background to the development of false religion as **“the great whore,”** we now continue to examine the aspects listed in the first division of this Chapter, verses one through six. As pointed out in the previous lesson, **“the great whore”** is identified in verse five as a **“MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”** Then, in the last verse of this chapter, the angel tells John that **“And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.”** From these two statements it seems clear that God uses both symbolism and literalism to describe the same objects in this chapter because **“the great whore”** is identified as both a **“MYSTERY”** and a **“great city.”** It also appears clear that God is describing an unholy relationship existing between false religion and rulers of this world. As we continue studying the aspects of John’s vision, and the angel’s explanation, we should remember how God is presenting this.

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.

The third aspect sets before us the unholy relationship existing between false religion and government rulers or kings and describes the relationship as “fornication.” Throughout the Bible God has used the image of sexual unfaithfulness to portray the spiritual waywardness of man. This was a common expression used by the prophets in describing the sinfulness of both Israel and Judah and the conditions of spiritual corruption that led to the demise of both the northern and southern kingdoms.

Such expressions as **“...they went a whoring after other gods...”** (Judges 2:17); and **“... all Israel went thither a whoring...”** (Judges 8:27); and **“And they transgressed against the God of their fathers, and went a whoring after the gods of the people of the land...”** (1 Chr. 5:25); and they **“...went a whoring with their own inventions”** (Psa. 106:39); and then through such prophets as Ezekiel God spoke the following: **“And they that escape of you shall remember me among the nations whither they shall be carried captives, because I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and with their eyes, which go a whoring after their idols: and they shall lothe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations”** (Ezekiel 6:9).

Because God’s spoken word could not adequately picture the spiritual prostitution of His people, God finally chose a prophet, Hosea, to present a living drama of His faithful love for his people despite their unfaithfulness. As one reads the prophetic book of Hosea it is likely to evoke a sense of shame and pain for through the unfaithfulness of Hosea’s wife it dramatically pictures the unfaithfulness of God’s people. This can be seen in such references from Hosea as:

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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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“My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them: for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused them to err, and they have gone a whoring from under their God” (4:12). “They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God: for the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them, and they have not known the LORD” (5:4). “Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people: for thou hast gone a whoring from thy God, thou hast loved a reward upon every cornfloor” (9:1).

God’s use of a woman and His reference to harlotry in portraying false religion is quite appropriate because it is more than the matter of unfaithfulness. It is also true that most false religions appeal to the sensual lusts of man and incorporate various types of sexual sin as a part of their drawing power. Thus it was from the very first days of false religion introduced at *“Babel”* by Nimrod with the perverted worship that focused on the sexual attraction of Semiranis. Most of the expressions of this perversion found in the various cultures around the world have used *“priestesses”* who were actually prostitutes to seduce men into worshipping *“the god of this world”* who knows well how to appeal to the lower and depraved nature of mankind. As explained in detail in the previous lesson, *“the great whore”* of Revelation Seventeen represents all variations of false religion, those who will be left behind on the earth when the Lord raptures His own away and takes the true church out of this world.

The spectrum of those represented by *“the great whore”* runs the whole gamut of all the participants of false religion who have not given their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ. Included are those who practice various “pagan forms of religion” such as the obviously non-Christian religions as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc. Represented in the identity of *“the great whore”* would also be those on the fringes of Christianity, incorporating a varying degree of “biblical characteristics,” enough to be identified by some as being “Christian,” but more accurately identified as cults. Examples of these would be such groups as Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, Christian Scientists, Unitarians, etc. Only a cursory examination of the belief systems of such groups, and a comparison of their teachings with Scripture, would reveal their falseness.

Perhaps most Bible students would recognize that the ones referenced in the above paragraph are included in the identity of “the great whore.” However, many who would agree on that conclusion would not as likely be willing to include the multitudes of people who are associated with “main-line” church groups. While we are all aware that those associated with pagan religions and even most of those associated with the “fringe groups” or cults do not spend much time reading God’s Word and certainly don’t believe it or take it seriously, there is something else even more frightening.

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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:

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The various “main-line” churches, where the Bible is recognized as God’s Word in varying degrees, where the ministers are at least acquainted with God’s Word, very likely contain many who are included in those identified with **“the great whore.”** Even as the Old Testament is full of God’s admonitions and warnings that flowed from His broken heart to His chosen people, Israel, God’s heart must be greatly burdened by these who often carry His truth in their hands but have not allowed it into their hearts.

In reference to false religion, **“the great whore,”** the Lord tells John **“With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication,”** referring to the unholy alliance that often exists between rulers and religion. Both feed off of and pervert each other. God gave Nebuchadnezzar a dream of a strange image depicting the role of various governments in Chapter Two of Daniel. Then God gave Daniel his own vision dealing with the same subject, but in a different form, in Chapter Seven of Daniel. These two messages related to the rise, the fall and the influence of secular powers and rulers in man’s history. Though Daniel was in a position of great influence, he refused to compromise his values and corrupt his faith in God. In many places in the Old Testament God related His messages to His people to their experiences with rulers and governments, particularly involving Babylon, Syria and Egypt.

However, the primary emphasis of this statement is related to what God tells us in Revelation Thirteen about **“the dragon”** (Satan), **“the beast”** (anti-Christ), and **“the false prophet”** (false religion). There God describes- how a perverted ruler, **“the beast”** who is empowered by Satan, uses false religion as his tool until he (the Satan-empowered beast) destroys it so that he can take its place and become the object of man’s worship.

The fourth aspect tells us that “the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her intoxication,” as it describes the temporary effects of this unholy relationship. As mentioned above, when such a relationship exists, both parties seem to gain some benefits such as status and power and that would not otherwise be available to them. The church or religion gains some power, wealth and prestige and increases its nominal followers. The ruler or government gains adoration and subjection of those from this so-called “faith or religious group.”

Not only do both parties in such a relationship gain from each other, but both parties also pervert each other. It should be the primary characteristic of a so-called “faith or religious group” to teach and promote a value system of some sort. However, in such a relationship the so-called “faith or religious group” must always compromise and corrupt its values to accommodate the nature and desires of the ruler or government. As a result of being corrupted itself, it promotes corruption. The ruler or government becomes perverted in that it assumes that it has more power and status than it actually possesses. What it mistakes as adoration is in reality the pursuit of self-interests on the

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part of the participants. Both parties become intoxicated with the temporary benefits of their alliance.

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The fifth aspect appears before John when the Spirit carries him “away into the wilderness.” In the midst of symbolism we are told about a literal place. There is much speculation concerning this **“wilderness.”** In Revelation Chapter Twelve, verse six, we read about a **“wilderness where she (Israel) hath a place prepared of God”** for a period of **“a thousand two hundred and threescore days.”** Again, in Revelation Chapter Twelve, verse fourteen, we are told that when **“the woman”** (Israel) is being persecuted by the devil that **“...the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.”** God left it a mystery as to the location of the two places of **“the wilderness”** in Chapter Twelve, probably to protect Israel. If we could determine the location of these two **“wildernesses,”** Satan would also be able to do the same and Israel’s protection would then be compromised. It’s highly unlikely that the place here in Chapter Seventeen is the same as that in Chapter Twelve. It is appropriate that we note that God tells us about Babylon becoming a place of devastation and a wilderness as a result of His judgment in Isaiah 47-48 and Jeremiah 50 and 51. The last verse of Chapter Seventeen tells us that **“the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.”** Some believe that the **“wilderness”** is related to Babylon while others think that it is related to Rome. There are different viewpoints on this matter and it may be best for us to say that this is something we do not need to understand.

John tells us that **“... I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast.”** The **“woman”** is **“the great whore”** and the **“scarlet coloured beast”** is the same beast John had seen **“rise up out of the sea, having seven heads, and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy”** (Rev. 13:1). This **“beast”** has already been identified as anti-Christ, empowered by Satan, now carries and energizes false religion or the false church. The open blasphemy of anti-Christ has already been noted when we referred to certain passages of Scripture previously such as Daniel 7:25; 11:36 and 2 Thessalonians 2:4.

The descriptions given in verse four and verse six elaborate on the results of the unholy relationship. The title in verse five has already been explained in lesson one. Notice that, having received the vision, John is in shock, which is a better understanding of the word translated **“admiration,”** and is in need of some explanation which the angel then gives to him.

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