

THE END OF FALSE RELIGION AND THE GOVERNMENTS OF MEN

Revelation 17-18

Revelation 17 and 18 deal with the destruction of Babylon which symbolizes all the false religions on earth. Chapter 18 deals with the destruction of the political and commercial system which the Antichrist has set up to rule the world. Babylon was a literal city, which was built shortly after the Flood in Mesopotamia, on the river Euphrates. It was founded by Nimrod, a grandson of Ham who was under the curse of Noah. Nimrod, whose name means "rebellion", founded the city in direct opposition to God's instructions for descendents of the Flood to disperse and populate the world. Nimrod was the first world leader and in rebellion against God began tyranny and false religion. The city was located on the Euphrates River and its ruins can be seen today some fifty miles south of modern Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. In the ancient world it existed as early as 3000 BC, and was the capital of Babylonia. Interestingly the name Babylon which was the place where false religion began literally means, "The gate of God." In Genesis 11, the Bible tells us that the inhabitants of the city spoke one language and that they built a great tower to reach unto heaven. This is the first city mentioned in the Bible and was built after the world wide flood of Genesis 6-9.

The Bible says in Genesis 11:6, "*...nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do*" which indicates they were a highly developed and intelligent people. The Babylonians were a highly civilized people and the city of Babylon had many conveniences we think as only existing in modern times. The city's streets were paved in stone, and their buildings were architecturally beautiful and magnificent structures. They had running water, baths, a sewer system and toilets in their homes. They had a written language and writing was done in cuneiform on clay tablets and they were educated people having schools, libraries and sophisticated system of law.

God instructed the people on Earth to, "*...be fruitful, and multiply and replenish the earth.*" These people however congregated themselves into one area and built the city of Babylon in order to keep the people from scattering and replenishing the whole earth as God had commanded. The tower was built to worship the stars and thus began the first false religion on earth, which was astrology, the worship of the stars. The tower of Babel was a ziggurat, or a great terraced tower of sun dried mud brick faced with kiln dried brick on which the priests of Babel plotted the stars and practiced their false religion. The structure probably had seven stories with a shrine or temple on top. These were people lived shortly after the Flood who had direct knowledge of the God, but rather chose to reject God and worship the stars.

God saw the sinfulness and power of the Babylonians priests and He "confused" their language so that one family or tribe could not understand the language of another. This had the effect of forcing the tribes to separate and men began to spread across the earth and this broke the power of their false religion and the government it controlled.

All false religion is actually a worship of Satan. It was at Babylon, that the first organized false religion was founded and men began to openly worship idols, the occult and Satan. (See Deut. 32:17, Lev. 17:7, Psa. 96:5, 106:37, 1Cor.10:20-21) Donald Barnhouse says, "It was an open, definite turning to Satan and the beginning of devil worship. This is why the Bible everywhere pronounces a curse on those who consult the sun, the moon, and the stars of heaven." It is easy to understand why the name "Babylon" in the Bible stands for false religion and the worship of Satan and all that is evil.

THE INVITATION - Revelation 17:1-2

John is invited to go and see great harlot's Judgment. Verse 5 identifies the whore as being "*Babylon, the Great, the mother of harlots and admonitions on earth.*" God calls Babylon a "great whore" and the phrase "sitteth upon many waters" indicates the scope of her harlotry is great. God refers to the sin of Babylon as fornication. Fornication is used symbolically to describe spiritual adultery which means forsaking God and worshipping false gods. False religion is Satanic and offers riches, power and prestige. It has great appeal and has seduced the most of people in the world by letting them indulge in the satisfaction of the flesh. In contrast the true child of God sees the harlot (false religion) for what she is and is repulsed by her corruption and worldliness. However, the religions of the world and those who have rejected the Lord Jesus Christ and the Bible, relish in pride for their false churches.

There are four women mentioned in Revelation. The first is Jezebel who is a picture of those who would seduce people into rejecting God and going into apostasy (Rev. 2:20). The second is Israel who are God's chosen people (Rev. 12:1). The third woman is presented as a whore or harlot which identifies the world's apostate religious system (Rev.17), and the last is the Body of Christ, referring to all believers who have trusted in Christ since the founding of the institution of the local church in Acts 2 and ends with the Rapture of all saved both dead and alive since that time. (See Acts 2, 1 Thess. 4:13-18) Those saved in this time period or dispensations are referred to as the bride of Christ which denotes their special relationship with the Savior. (See Rev.19:7, 21:9)

Warren Wiersbe says, "The natural man cannot understand the truths given in this chapter, and John would not have known without the invitation of the angel. Worldly minded church members refuse to face the facts of the chapter."¹ The world seeks a church in which all can attend and be comfortable. They want love and sweetness preached or as 1 Thessalonians 5:3 says, they want peace and safety preached while the enemy rallies at the gates of the city. Jeremiah in the Old Testament, being led of God, preached destruction and the judgment that God said was coming upon Jerusalem. It was not the message the people wanted to hear so they threw him in jail and listened to their many false prophets. The message of false religious leaders is positive and appealing to the flesh, but the message of the false prophets of Israel was deadly to soul and Jerusalem perished. Thousands died because they did not heed God's warning! Nothing has changed and today many churches and professing Christians are blind drunk, following their false prophets, intoxicated with the world, success, money, material things, and having a good time.

THE EXPLANATION OF WHAT JOHN SAW. Revelation 17:3-18

There are various symbols here and the angel explains them to John. This is another example of God's interpreting His word for us that His meaning be clearly understood. The symbolic language helps describe these various characters for us.

THE WOMAN. Revelation 17:3-7, 18.

John is now taken away in the spirit into the wilderness, which means he is shown a vision and he sees woman sitting upon a scarlet colored beast that was full of blasphemy and had seven heads and ten horns. The description of the woman sitting on a beast of seven heads and ten horns makes it clear that this woman is a major part of the Antichrist's world system. She controls the Antichrist's false religious system that he is forcing on the world. This woman is arrayed in purple and scarlet and decked with gold, precious stones, and pearls. God says her hand is full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication.

On the woman's forehead is the name "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." This woman is seen as drunken by her slaughter of the saints of God and with the martyrs of Jesus.

She is described as a city and the seven heads of Revelation 17:3 are identified as the seven mountains of Revelation 17:9. There is little doubt this is a reference to Rome as this great city which became the center of the false and apostate religion of Roman Catholicism. The Roman Catholic Church's headquarters in the Vatican in Rome the city set on seven hills. When Revelation was written, Rome ruled the world and later in times the Roman Catholic Church came into power ruling Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Egypt and North Africa which comprised most of the known world under the title of the "Holy Roman Empire." The Roman Catholic church has always been apostate and based not on God's word, but on the traditions and teachings of its religious leaders. Even today this false religious system has deceived millions of people into a false worship all the while claiming to represent truth and Almighty God. David Cloud speaking of the Roman Catholic Church says,

"Though she does not fulfill this prophecy in its final entirety, it is an amazing fact that every feature of the religious Harlot is found in the Roman Catholic Church. She has ridden through church history upon the back of kings, is clothed in gorgeous robes and decked in expensive attire. She sits on seven hills, is full of abominations, and has a golden cup. She is certainly drunk with the blood of the martyrs, and the inhabitants of the world are indeed drunk with the wine of her fornication. Countless multitudes of deceived people from practically every nation blindly follow Rome's errors and glory in Rome's false religion."²

Revelation 17:10-11 explains that this woman, at this future point in history, will be a major part of the Antichrist's empire, which is comprised of seven kings of which at this time five are fallen. One of the kings remains and one of the kings has not yet come.

When this one king comes he will continue only for a short time. This is a reference to the beast of Antichrist who is over the seven other kings. He will only reign for a short seven years (*"continue a short space"*) and then will go into perdition. It must be understood that this is the political situation at the time the Antichrist comes to power in the seven year Tribulation. Probably in rapid succession the European nations will be realigned by political upheaval as the Antichrist vies for power and rallies the nations of Europe to support him as the supreme ruler.

The ten horns which John sees are said to be the ten kings, which at the time John saw them, had not received their kingdoms, but will come into existence and power for a short time ("one hour" See Luke 22:53) with the beast who is the Antichrist. (See Dan. 7:23-24). These kings all have the same ambitions and mind and they join their power and strength in supporting the Antichrist. The one element that unites them in this ten nation confederacy is their hatred of God and intent to war against Jesus Christ the Lamb. (Rev.17:14) Their rejection and opposition of God is their down fall and they are overcome by the Lamb. *"... for He is the Lord of lords, and the Kings of kings: and they that are with Him are called and chosen, and faithful."*

Roman Catholicism had its birth in the paganism of the Roman Empire during the 4th Century and perverted God's word and sought the world's riches and power in the name of Christ. Her history is a bloody one of murdering the true saints of God who simply refused to submit to her idolatry and who believed and followed the Word of God. These saints were mercilessly murdered by the tens of thousands for their faith in God by an apostate religion lead by demonically influenced popes. There is no greater and clearer description of Roman Catholicism than found here in Chapter 17. Revelation 17:15 removes all doubt as to her identity today stating this is the apostate and satanically controlled church.

Revelation 17:15 establishes the ecumenical nature of this harlot church which the founding tenant of Roman Catholicism. The Roman Church claims she is the only true church on earth and her pope is the vicar or direct representative of Jesus Christ on earth. She claims to hold the keys to heaven and only Roman Catholics will be allowed in heaven. She has perverted every true doctrine of God and replaced it with traditions of her church counsels. The Antichrist, through his false prophet, as the head of the Revived Roman Empire will gain control over all over the Revived Roman Catholic church and use it to establish his authority and rule.

THE BEAST - THE ANTICHRIST. Revelation 17:8

This is the beast described in Chapter 13. Scarlet is the color of Satan, which means the beast is indwelt and controlled by Satan. He is identified as the one who goes into perdition according to Revelation 19:20. This links him with Judas the traitor who also was cast into perdition. Perdition means judgment, destruction and punishment. It is a term used to signify eternal death and separation from God.³

The beast is described as having seven heads, and ten horns which identify him

with Antichrist who is controlled by Satan. (See Rev. 12:3) The Bible interprets this further for us and says the seven heads are the seven kings which are fallen. (Rev. 17:10) Five of the seven have fell which are Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece. The king "that is" refers to Rome in John's day. The "one to come" is the kingdom of the beast, which is "the revived Roman Empire."

The ten horns are the "ten kings" which parallel the ten toes of Daniel's image in Daniel 2:36-45 identifying these as "The Revived World Empire." (Rev. 17:12) These kings at first give support to the beast and put him in power, but soon after coming to power he turns on them. Those who serve Satan serve a fickle master as he always turns on them.

". . .and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder." Those alive during the Tribulation will "wonder" which means they will "marvel and admire"¹ the beast and think him to be a "wonderful thing."² The charisma of the beast will draw the unsaved people to him and to his ecumenical religion. Those that follow him are the ones who are rejecting God. These are not people who have a passive rejection of God. These people are like Satan who willing, and with full knowledge, rejected God and rebelled against Him. Although they can see God's hand in the events of the Tribulation, the Gospel message, and of the proclamation of Christ's soon return, yet in utter rebellion they turn to this false man pleasing religion.

The phrase *". . . whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world,"* has wrongly been used by the Calvinists to teach God predestinated or decreed these souls to hell, not allowing them to be saved or offering them His grace. Revelation 13:8 gives us insight into what the statement means. *"And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."* (Revelation 13:8) This verse states that the Lamb, Jesus Christ, was slain from the foundation of the world. God knew before the world was created, who would follow Satan and and reject Him. Thus, God's plan included not only those who would believe and accept Him, but also the fate of those who would rebel. God in His love for His creation implemented His plan for the salvation of men. His plan was to come to earth, God incarnate in man, and to suffer and die for the sins of the world. (1 John 2:2) God being omniscient, knowing all things, in His foreknowledge knew who would believe and who would reject Him. This includes Satan's rebellion and those angels that would follow him. God's plan included creating the Lake of Fire. *"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels"* (Matthew 25:41) God's plan was twofold. One, to those who by faith believed Him and accept His salvation would have everlasting life and spend eternity with Him.³ Second, His plan also determined the fate of those who would rebel and reject Him that they would be

1 Strong's, "thaumazo" (2296)

2 Vines, "thaumazo" - marvelous, thing to be admired.

3 See Matthew 25:34, *"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:"*

condemned to the Lake of Fire. (Rev. 20:11-15) This phrase in Revelation 17:8 states the obvious. The fate of those in rebellion reject God was determined in God's initial plan made before the foundation of the world. Clearly, these unsaved souls, in following the beast, had distain for the Lord and His grace. The reason their names are not written in the book of life is because they rejected God mercy and grace. Nowhere in God's word do you find that He withholds His grace from anyone and thus predestinating them to the Lake of Fire. The unsaved willingly choose their destiny be rejecting their Creator. God does condemn the unsaved, but it is because they reject Christ's sacrifice for their sins.

Jesus plainly stated the reason why men reject God and condemn themselves. *"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved."* (John 3:18-20)

Paul further states this truth in first chapter of the Book of Romans. *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things."* (Romans 1:18-23) The fact is that it is not God who rejects His creation, but sinful men, willingly with full knowledge of their Creator, refuse His grace and believe the lie and condemn themselves.

THE FALSE CHURCH OF BABYLON AT WORK.

As stated earlier Genesis 10:1-11 and 11:1-9 records the first false religious systems. The name "Babel" means confusion, which stands for apostate religion. The Babylonian system has existed from its foundation by man who served Satan. It has murdered the saints of God and further spiritually misleads the world for centuries and will continue to do so until Christ destroys it. It hates the truth and will do anything to stop it, falsely believing it can.

In our modern times, Protestants are moving closer to Rome and in the Tribulation will finally rejoin the Roman church and this false religious system will be world-wide. This religion of the Antichrist will not just be the Roman Catholic Church, but all false religious systems including the "Christian" cults. They will join under common preaching of the "false prophet" who will preach peace and safety. The "gospel" of the Antichrist will be based on modern psychology which always has a position note. Its message will be that it's okay to sin; you're all right, just be good and love your fellow man.

False preachers will not preach separation from sin and apostate churches which hold to false doctrine. Examples of this modern trend abound. Even some once sound biblical churches are not sponsoring joint Christmas services and evangelistic meetings with included the Roman Catholic, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and Assembly of God churches. This is happening all over the United States. Some evangelical churches have had members of the Mormon cult come to their services and present Christmas music. Ephesians 5:11, states the Biblical directive to those who truly hold to the truth; **"...have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."** These are examples showing how many compromising churches are today moving towards apostasy which will be in full bloom in the Tribulation.

They will preach Jesus, but not the Jesus of this Bible who is the Lord, God Almighty, who hates sin and will judge it. You cannot separate Jesus Christ from truth. John 1:1 says that Jesus Christ is the Word. It is a false gospel that mixes truth with error and it honor Satan who is the father of all lies and false teaching. God will have no part of worship, doctrine or churches that mix truth with error.

Can we stop for a moment? Can't we see that the God who created us is warning us of the world's philosophies and the world's false teachings coming into the churches! False religion is pictured as a harlot. She sells her virtue for money and position! Is that not what we are seeing today? Many once sound biblical churches are selling the truth for popularity and numbers. Their pragmatic approach is that anything goes if it produces numbers and money. God honoring traditional music and preaching is being replaced by modern contemporary services that offer entertainment and emotional experiences instead of true biblical worship. These modern churches water down God's word and offer a mixture of truth and error and use the world's music and message to gain a crowd. But isn't God warning us of this sinful trend and telling us that virtue is more important and worth more than the world's goods, the world's glitter? Note the contrast between the true churches and the false ones. The true New Testament church is a local assembly of Bible believers and is virtuous; keeping herself pure in doctrine and practice. The harlot church loves the world and sells her virtue for power, money. God says the harlot condemns herself to Hell.

BABYLON FALLS. Revelation 18:1-3

It is frustrating today for sound biblical churches to try to defend the truth. They increasingly find themselves having little effect in turning men to sound doctrine and practice. Yet, there is some consolation in knowing that God says that Babylon will fall. She is popular and seems very successful and appeals to the eye and carnal mind instead of pointing men to God and His truth. Her apostasy leads that follow here to Hell! In verse 4, there is a warning in the form of an appeal. *"Come out from her, my people, that ye not be partakers of her sins."* It must be stated here that sound uncompromising pastors and churches heed the word of God and they remove themselves from those on the road to apostasy. They need to recognize that to be a part of what these false churches are doing is to share the guilt. The Apostle John even said that to bid the preacher or carrier of false doctrine "God speed" was to *"be a partaker of his evil deeds."*

(See 2 John 11) When we refuse to take a stand, we give our approval and we are as guilty as they who oppose the gospel.

Note verse Revelation 18:7 she says, "*I sit a queen*" meaning "I'm really something special," note the pride. She proclaims that she is no widow, denying that she left God. The *statement "Shall see no sorrow"* means she refuses to accept her doom and will not turn from her unbelief.

Revelation 18:8-19 states that her doom is sealed because she will not believe and thus this false church that is full of pride seals herself to judgment. The world which has loved the harlot now mourns her death. They have learned nothing from seeing God destroy her because she is false and a liar, they still love her. This passage makes it easier to understand why so many still support and love the TV evangelists who openly con them, the false churches and cults of our day even when they are exposed as apostate and evil.

The motives of many who loved the harlot are exposed in Revelation 18:15. Those who profited from her, the merchants, stand off in the distance weeping and wailing. They have no comprehension of the gravity of what is unfolding before their very eyes. Their greed and love of the material world has blinded them to the truth that this evil and sinful world is about to be judged and they as part of the system are doomed. They have no concern for their impending doom and only are concerned with their material losses. What a revolting and pitiful display. Notice also, how rich was Babylon, and yet now she has nothing. It should never discourage the child of God to see the seeming success and riches of the false churches and cults. They have material riches and look good on the outside, but inside are dead and naked which is a description of the apostate churches of the Tribulation. (See Rev. 3:17) Note that it says Babylon lost everything in only one hour. An hour earlier they were fine and confident in their wealth and position, but now they are destitute and exposed by God for what they truly are.

THE SAINTS OF GOD REJOICE! Revelation 18:20-24

Heaven, the apostles and prophets all rejoice. The long awaited day has finally arrived. The saints of God for centuries have preached against false religion and they have been persecuted and ridiculed. Now truth is vindicated. God has now finally and completely destroyed the false prophets and teachers with their false churches, which has for centuries deceived the world and murdered the true preachers, and children of God. The atrocities recorded in Hebrews 11:36-38 against the saints of God are avenged. Truth has prevailed!

This is the end of all false religion, as the angel in verses 21-22 takes a mill-stone and casts it into the sea, stating that no more would Babylon be the cause of suffering. The false religions and cults of this earth, who have for centuries so skillfully deceived so many by perverting the very word of God, are now silent and gone for all time from the earth.

Chapter 19:1, starts a new chapter in the history of man, it begins with all the people in heaven, saying, "A l l e l u i a! Salvation and glory and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God." What a happy and joyous day the will be!

End Notes:

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, Expository Outlines of the New Testament, Covington, Kentucky: Calvary Book Room, 1965, p501.

² David Cloud, *Way of Life Encyclopedia and Christianity*, Computer Version 4.0, "Rome and the Harlot of Revelation 17", 2001.

³ *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, "perdition", Erdmann's, 1915, Electronic version.