

Revelation 17:1-18 | The Great Prostitute

Introduction

Chapters 17 and 18 continue the 7 bowl judgments of chapter 16. In all, chapters 15, 16, 17, and 18 deal with the bowl judgments, indicating the *expansive* and *final* nature of God's wrath poured out through the bowls. Chapter 17 can be divided into two parts: the vision (verses 1-6) and the explanation of the vision (verses 7-18).

Verse-By-Verse Notes

Verses 1-2

- The "great prostitute" is the world's religious system that will unite the political kingdoms ("ten kings") and the unbelieving wicked and nations of the world ("many waters") – see verse 15.
- "Sexual immorality" is a reference to spiritual harlotry which is fundamentally *idolatry*. Idolatry is frequently pictured as spiritual adultery throughout Scripture (e.g. the entire Book of Hosea).
- Jim Hamilton: "The whole world owes allegiance, fidelity, to God. The whole world should relate to God as a wife does to a husband, in pure devotion. But the world has forgotten God, betrayed him, and sold herself to anyone who will pay. The world is a whore. Every human government that does not honor Christ is prostituting itself to agendas and worldviews and national interests that are nothing but pimps and customers."
- False religion will become increasingly prevalent so that it consumes the world, "the dwellers on earth have become drunk." John MacArthur: "The world's people [will be] swept up into the intoxication and sin of a false system of religion."

Verses 3-6

- John sees the prostitute sitting on a beast with seven heads and ten horns. The angel will explain these in verses 7-14. (v. 3)
- The appearance of the woman was beautiful, but her beauty was a cloak for her abominations, much like the true nature of sin is cloaked by the promise of pleasure. All manner of sin is initially enticing, but ultimately destructive. Similarly, all false religion appeals to man's fallen desire to justify himself, but only leads to damnation, not salvation. (v. 4)
- "Babylon the great" is probably a reference to the city of Rome in John's time, but more significant than any historical city is what "Babylon the great" represents: *man's attempt to be his own god*. This can be traced all the way back to the Tower of Babel in Genesis 10, hence the phrase "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." (v. 5)
- False religion hates Christ and His followers, even to the point of martyrdom. (v. 6)

- Robert Mounce: “Babylon the great is that great system of godlessness that leads people away from the worship of God and to their own destruction.”

Verses 7-8

- The angel will now explain the imagery of the vision to John. The beast is the antichrist of chapter 13. The phrase “was, and is not, and is about to rise” is a reference to the death and subsequent resurrection of the antichrist (see 13:3).
- The phrase “rise from the abyss” is possibly a reference to a powerful demonic possession of the antichrist after his alleged resurrection.
- The deceptive power of the antichrist and his false world religion will be so expansive only the elect will be preserved (see v. 14 and Matthew 24:24).

Verses 9-10

- The seven kings are representatives of the 7 great world empires (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and that of the Antichrist).
- The phrase “five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come” refers the empires that did not exist at the time of John (Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Medo-Persian, and Greek). The Roman Empire still existed and the antichrist’s empire is yet to come, but when it does, it will be brief (“only a little while” v. 10).

Verses 11-14

- The phrase “the beast which . . . is an eighth but belongs to the seven” is a reference to the antichrist pre and post “resurrection.” After he turns on the false one-world religion, he will be the eighth king unto himself (see v. 16).
- We do not know the identity of the ten kings, but they will apparently be part of the antichrist’s dominion as “sub-rulers.” Their power will be limited and brief (“for one hour”).
- The antichrist and his subservient kings will war against the Lamb. This is a reference to the Battle of Armageddon (see 16:14).
- The terms “called,” “chosen,” and “faithful” have massive doctrinal implications in and of themselves (*effectual calling, unconditional election, & perseverance of the saints*), but all three are frequently used in reference to God’s people (1 Corinthians 1:24; Jude 1; Colossians 3:12; 1 Peter 2:9; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:2)

Verses 15-18

- The waters on which the prostitute sits represent the nations and people of the earth, indicating her pervasive influence. (v. 15)
- At some point, the antichrist will turn on the world’s false religion. John MacArthur: “After using the false religious system to unify the world kingdoms and gain control of

all, the Antichrist—with the help of his 10 sub-rulers—will turn against the system, plunder and destroy it, and seize all power and worship for himself. They will be carrying out God's will (v. 17)."

- Sin and rebellion against God is ultimately self-devouring.
- The "great city" is most likely a reference to Babylon, that is, a future manifestation of Babylon/Rome as the capital of the antichrist's empire.

BIG IDEA: "WE NEED TO BE CONVINCED THAT IT IS BETTER TO LIVE FOR THE LAMB THAN THE BEAST, WITH THE PURE BRIDE THAN WITH THE NASTY WHORE, FOR ETERNAL THINGS RATHER THAN THE TEMPORARY, TO PLEASE GOD AND NOT ENRAGE HIM, TO ENTER HIS CITY RATHER THAN BEING THROWN INTO THE LAKE OF FIRE." – JIM HAMILTON