

**The Fall of Babylon (Part 1)**  
(Sermon 24 – Rev. 17)  
3.30.25

Please turn in your Bibles to Revelation ch. 17.

**(Story of praying near Satanists)** *Point: These people thought they could control Satan and evil and use it for fun, for their purposes. In reality, they don't control Satan. Satan controls them. They are deceived, and only Jesus can rescue them.*

All through history, Satan has seduced and deceived sinful humanity to reject God but to persecute God's people. That will intensify the closer we get to Christ's return. While sinful man thinks he is in control, he is actually nothing more than a willing puppet of the devil. But in the end, the devil, all his partners, all who have persecuted Christians, and all of mankind who reject Christ's authority, will be utterly defeated by the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what this chapter is about, the first glimpses of that ultimate victory.

Let's read just the first 6 verses of ch. 17, and then we'll pray and ask for God's help...

**Revelation 17:1-6**

**[1] Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, [2] with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk."**  
**[3] And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. [4] The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. [5] And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." [6] And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.**

**(Pray)**

**PROP: Even when it looks like the devil is winning, our Sovereign God is always in control.**

Especially as we get closer to the return of Christ, the wickedness of the world will increase. It will appear that the devil is gaining ground in our culture, and at times, in the church. But for those who trust in Christ, you can rest assured that even when it looks like the devil is winning, our Sovereign God is always in control, working out His perfect plan.

And it's God's sovereign plan of final judgment upon the wicked that we see in our text today. Back in ch. 15-16, we saw God's final judgment of mankind depicted as 7 bowls of God's wrath poured out.

Now today in ch. 17, the Bible describes this final judgment as "the fall of Babylon". If that sounds familiar, we've seen this description before:

-Back in 14:8 – ***"Another angel, a second, followed, saying, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.'***"

-And in ch. 16, when the 7<sup>th</sup> bowl is being poured out, the Bible says...  
***"The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath."*** (Rev. 16:19)

Our text today shows us what this means and why it happened. And as is common in the Book of Revelation, we see a central symbolic figure that John is shown of the wickedness of mankind...

## **1. The Prostitute & the Beast**

One of the angels who helped pour out the bowls of God's wrath stops and turns his attention to John. He tells John he is going to show him God's victory over someone called "the great prostitute".

Who is this, and what does she represent? Well, we can guess she's not good, because of the title she's given. Depending on your Bible translation, she is called the prostitute, the harlot, the immoral woman of Babylon – none of those are compliments.

In the Book of Revelation, there are three important female characters used as symbols:

- Back in ch. 12, you have **the woman who gives birth** to the child that the dragon is trying to kill. This woman represents God's covenant people leading up to Christ's birth – OT believers.

- A second female figure is the **pure bride of Christ**, which represents the Church, those who trust in Christ alone and are faithful to Him.

- And now a third female symbol in our text today: the impure, **sexually promiscuous woman**. She is the polar opposite of the other virtuous female figures in Revelation. She hates all that is holy, and she embraces all that is evil. This woman does not serve God. She is not faithful to Christ.

Her allegiance is to her own desires, selling her worship to the highest bidder. That's why sexual sin is part of this symbol – it is representative of all sin, because it's trading something beautiful and holy and God-honoring, for what is perverse and selfish and destructive. It's trying to purchase a fleeting sinful pleasure, instead of finding true joy and intimacy through a relationship with God.

And we see the prostitute seated, which communicates a place of authority. She is seated upon “many waters”, representing the nations of the earth. That means she has been given authority to sway or tempt the nations to follow her.

This figure of the prostitute in John's vision has two meanings:

1. For the 7 churches John is writing to, she represents **Rome**. In ancient literature, Babylon was the nickname of Rome, because of its widespread sin and wickedness. And in John's time, Rome was the ruling power of man that was used to persecute Christians and demand emperor worship.
2. For those living in the end-times, she represents **all unregenerate mankind** gathered together in an evil alliance against God. She illustrates the seduction and deception of sin upon the world.

So, this “great prostitute” is a metaphor, a symbol for all evil governments, leaders and institutions of men that have rejected Christ, and instead followed their lustful, selfish pleasures. They have rebelled against God's rule and authority, and have persecuted His Church throughout the ages.

***[3] And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.***

John's perspective comes from the wilderness, looking at the woman, who is in the city. This reminds us, that to recognize evil, sometimes you need to back away and look at things objectively. The world tells you to follow

your heart. But God's word tells us the heart is wicked and full of deception. We don't follow our hearts, we follow God's word.

So from a distance, John sees this woman sitting on a beast, almost like a horse and rider. But this is no horse – it's the same beast we saw back in Revelation 13, the satanic power that comes against God and His Church by using government coercion and military might. This woman appears to have authority or control over the beast, guiding him as if she were his master. But we will see later that is not the case.

Now, we are told several details about this beast:

-That it is "scarlet" and full of blasphemous names. Scarlet is a color in scripture that represents sin. Isaiah 1:18 says...

*"Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."*

And this description means not only is this the beast's appearance, but it is full of sin, inside and out. Also, this beast has 7 heads and 10 horns. Heads represent power, and horns represent authority. We will see more of this in coming verses.

***[4] The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality.***

So, her appearance is one of royalty and excess. Expensive clothes and gaudy jewelry. On the outside she looks enticing: wealthy & powerful, drawing people to herself, promising pleasure & fulfillment, but delivering only evil and emptiness, revealed by her cup of abomination & immorality.

***[5] And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." [6] And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.***

In ancient Rome, prostitutes would often wear headbands with their names on them, often not their actual name, but the name they wanted to be known by.

Here, the great prostitute completes her costume with her name on her head – ***"Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's***

**abominations.**” This not only identifies her own sin, but how she also actively leads others astray.

The Bible says she is drunk with the blood of Christian martyrs, which means not only is she responsible for persecuting and killing Christians, but she enjoys it. She is indulging in and celebrating the bloodshed of God’s people. Quite a spectacle! And how does John respond?

**[6b] When I saw her, I marveled greatly.**

This doesn’t mean John was impressed. It means he was shocked. He was astonished. Probably because the angel said he was going to show John the judgment of the great prostitute. But right now, it looks like she’s having a great time killing Christians, appears to control the beast, and leading the nations astray.

But things are not always as they seem...

## **2. The Evil Plan Revealed**

The prostitute looks like she’s getting away with all of this. Verse 7...

**[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.**

The angel now begins to explain what these horrible characters in this vision actually mean.

First, the angel confirms the beast is the same one we saw before in ch. 13. But the angel uses a very specific description, one he repeats later. Verse 8...

**[8] The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction.**

What does that mean, the beast “was, and is not, and is about to rise”?

-“he was” = The beast has existed from ancient times

-“he is not” = the beast is not yet active in John’s time

-“he is about to rise” = in the replay of the end-time events, the beast is about to rise up against God, before God’s ultimate victory is revealed.

This description of the beast is a contrast to the description given to God Himself, “who was, who is and who is to come”. The angel is making the point that this beast, though powerful and feared by man, is not all-powerful, and cannot defeat the One True God.

**[8b] 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.**

John’s “marveling” was to be astonished and repulsed. But for the world, their “marveling” is one of awe and worship. They are rejoicing in their own deception, and being led astray to worship the beast.

Now, this is a lot of symbolism, isn’t it? But don’t get lost. More clarity is coming. In fact, the angel says to John in v. 9...

**[9] This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated;**

The immoral woman was first seated on the waters, representing her authority over the nations to deceive them. Then we see her seated on the beast, which gives the *appearance* of her authority to guide and manipulate Satan’s power.

And now, those 7 heads of the beast are also interpreted as 7 mountains, which is another picture of Rome, the symbol of man’s governing authority.

And these 7 heads of the beast have yet another meaning...

**[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.**

What does this mean? Still in keeping with the evil empire of Rome, these heads of the beast seem to represent all evil empires throughout history that have rejected God and persecuted God’s people.

Starting with Egypt, then Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and then Rome (the 6<sup>th</sup> one that “is”, likely meaning the power in John’s time). But just a few centuries later, the Roman Empire would be overthrown. So, that means the 7<sup>th</sup> head or king would represent all the wicked governments of men from the time of Rome to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ.

**[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.**

Calling the beast the “eighth king” is likely meant to communicate that he embodies all the wicked empires that came before him.

Now, things could be getting confusing, so let’s stop and add up the symbols we know so far:

**The prostitute** = Rome in John’s time, but also in the end-times, she represents all of sinful, deceived mankind gathered together in an evil alliance against God.

**The beast** = Satan and his evil power behind all sin

**The 7 heads of the beast** = All evil empires of men that have rebelled against God and His Church throughout history. Six of those kingdoms have already come and gone. The 7<sup>th</sup> will be revealed in the last days.

Now, there’s one more symbol the angel gives the interpretation for: the ten horns of the beast...

**[12] 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.**

So, the angel says the 10 HORNS = 10 KINGS. We know that horns = authority. So, if the 7 heads represent 7 evil kingdoms throughout history, then the 10 horns on those heads could represent institutions those authorities use to wield their ungodly power. Institutions like education and the arts, economics and industry.

These things are not bad in themselves, but will be used as tools by wicked men to blaspheme God and persecute Christians. In fact, they already are being used for that purpose. We can see that right now in our own country.

-**The Arts** – What used to be an institution years ago that would strive to value and appreciate beauty and excellence, now much of what is called “modern art” celebrates what is base, what is crass and absurd. Instead of holding a high standard of excellence and beauty, now anything can be called art.

For instance, ***here is a picture*** of what was recently called a work of art. In 2019, someone claiming to be an artist took a banana, taped it to the wall of an art gallery with duct tape. The display sold for \$6.2 million. The wealthy individual who bought it promptly took the banana off the wall and ate it. I've tasted some good fruit in my time. But not that good.

**-Education** – Unfortunately, our modern universities, even ones that were once founded by Christians and on Christian principles, so many of them are no longer interested in absolute truth. They are more interested in indoctrinating students to be offended with everything, while learning nothing.

**-Government** – As Americans, God has given us one of the best forms of government – one where we can be free from dictators and persecution. At least that was the intent. No matter who the president is, or what party is in control of congress, the institution of government more and more seems to be used to make more people dependent on it, with more corruption, and to be used less and less to honor God.

We could go on and on but the point is clear. Earthly rulers and the institutions they rule have been slowly taken over by the enemy of our souls, to use for his purpose, to continue to persecute Christians, promote wickedness, and to eventually rise up against God Himself. That's what v. 13 says...

**[13] These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast.**

These man-centered authorities and institutions are tools that Satan is using now, and will use more and more, to attack God and the Church. It looks like the devil is getting the upper hand.

BUT - Satan... will... not... win. That brings us to our final few verses, and the last aspect of this vision...

<b>3. The Victory of the Lamb</b>
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<b>(14-18)</b>
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**[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."**



As we've seen many times before in Revelation, just when things look to be at their worst, when God's enemies seem to be winning, we are reminded of Jesus' ultimate victory over all the enemies of God.

That's what v. 14 is – a timely reminder to the 7 churches of Revelation who were enduring Roman persecution, telling them to hold on, to be faithful, that Jesus wins in the end. And it's a reminder for today, for you and me, as we face struggles and trials and temptations in our own lives, reminding that what we see is not as real as what we cannot see.

Our circumstances, our problems, our struggles, yes they are real. But they are not forever, and they do not have the final say. Jesus has the final say. Jesus is forever. He said heaven and earth would pass away but my word will never pass away.

And the Bible says Christ's victory also belongs to "those with him who are called and chosen and faithful." When you trust in Christ, His death becomes your death. His resurrection becomes your resurrection. And because Jesus wins in the end, His victory will be your victory!

Now that we've been reminded of who wins in the end, the angel reveals the ultimate defeat of the great prostitute, and how it comes to pass...

**[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. [16] 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,**

Wait a second – I thought the prostitute and the beast were allies - meaning all the evil empires and institutions of men are partnered with the devil? With the prostitute seated on the beast, it even looked like the kingdoms and institutions of men were in control of the devil and using his power for their purposes.

The truth is, wicked men do not control the devil. The devil controls wicked men. But that does not make them innocent victims, because they are complicit. They are willing puppets, desiring in their hearts to throw off the rule of God, desiring in their hearts to reject God's sovereignty, to reject God's rightful ownership over His Creation, to deny God the glory that only God deserves, and even to turn away God's love by denying what Jesus did on the cross.

So what we see here in these verses is that the very evil that man thought he was controlling for his own ends actually controls him. The prostitute we saw before riding the beast as if she controlled him, she is now torn apart by the beast.

**“They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire”** meaning she will be utterly destroyed by the very evil she thought she controlled.

That’s the devil’s desire for all people from the very beginning. When he failed to defeat God, the devil turned his attacks on mankind. Because you are made in God’s image, every time the devil sees you, he sees your Creator.

That’s why he fights you so hard. Every Christian in here knows the bait-and-switch the devil pulls. In the moment we’re being tempted to sin, the devil says, “Don’t worry – God will forgive you.” Then after we sin, the devil says, “How could you – God will never forgive you.”

So this is a double-cross, a betrayal by the Betrayer. He convinces man that true freedom comes when we cast off the restraints of obedience to God. But the opposite is true. Only those who surrender to Christ find true freedom. Only those whom the Son sets free are free indeed.

And when wicked men turn from God, the devil will ultimately turn on them, Evil has no partners. Ultimately all who join together to rebel against God will turn on each other and be destroyed.

Does this mean the devil won? Not at all. The devil is not sovereign. God is. And that’s how the chapter ends...

**[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.”**

-Man thinks he’s in control, using darkness and evil power to rule and persecute Christians. But he is not in control.

-The devil thinks he’s in control by turning on mankind, turning on the very ones the devil promised pleasure and power through sinful means. But he is not in control.

God Almighty, who is sovereign over all, is using all of these things for His plan to come to pass, fulfilling the one central purpose for all creation and all redemption – and that purpose is to be reconciled to God and glorify Him forever.

Never lose sight of that, church. Whenever we ask “God, why is this happening to me” or “why did you allow this or that”, you and I may not know all the many things God is doing in our trials, in our suffering, in our pain.

But we can know this: God will use it all for His glory. And because God is good and perfect and loving toward His people, anything that glorifies God means it will ultimately be for our good as well.

### **Conclusion**

Now, a lot has been said today of the devil’s use of governments and institutions attacking the church in the last days. But as we close, let us be reminded that Satan’s attacks are not always from without. Sometimes they come from within.

*Satan is most effective in the church when he comes not as an open enemy, but as a false friend; not when he persecutes the church, but when he joins it; not when he attacks the pulpit, but when he stands in it. - John MacArthur*

Until Jesus returns, Satan will continue fighting the Church, from without and from within. His attacks and deceptions will not always be obvious. We must be discerning and diligent. As the Apostle Paul commanded Timothy, “Keep a close watch on your life and on your doctrine.”

The closer we get to the return of Christ, our spiritual battles will become more intense. For us, the most important preparation we can do is to know Christ, trust His word, and live in a manner that honors Him. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you afresh, to strengthen your faith, and to grow you in holiness and obedience to God’s word.

Ask the Lord to help you see your situation and circumstances the way He does. So that even when it looks like the devil is winning, you can know for sure that your Sovereign God is in control.

***(Let’s Pray)***