

Chapter 17 Introduction: THEME: The apostate church in the Great Tribulation

In chapters 17,18 - judgment of the two Babylons. First the apostate church in the Great Tribulation in chapter 17, and then commercial Babylon in chapter 18.

The questions are: "Are there two Babylons, and are they in two different geographical locations? Are they representative of two systems? Are they two literal cities, or are they the same?" The answers to these questions will become more apparent as our redemption draws near. It appears at the present time, in my judgment, that two distinct cities are in view.

Chapter 17 is mystery Babylon, the apostate church. It will attain the goal of the present-day apostates of all the great systems of the world: Romanism, Protestantism, pagan religions, cults, etc. The Bible calls it a harlot. This is an ecumenical one-world church. The location of this system could be in Rome (the city built on seven hills).

It is called mystery Babylon because of its origin. At the Tower of Babel man attempted to rally against God. Under Nimrod, Babylon became the origin of all false religion. Now the dream of Nimrod will be realized in the first half of the Great Tribulation period. This church is guilty of spiritual fornication, selling herself to the world for hire. This is the church that says, "*I am rich and increased with goods, and I have need of nothing.*"

The true church will not go through the Great Tribulation; it will be raptured before the Tribulation begins. Let's be specific: who will be raptured? Not denominations, not just individual churches, but His church, a collective term meaning all true believers, those who are in Christ.

As Dr. George Gill used to say, "some churches will meet the Sunday after the Rapture and will not miss a member." J. Dwight Pentecost in his book, *Things To Come* (p. 368), gives this comment concerning the harlot system:

*"The Beast, who was dominated by the harlot system (Rev. 17:3), rises against her and destroys her and her system completely. Without doubt the harlot system was in competition with the religious worship of the Beast, promoted by the False Prophet, and her destruction is brought about so that the Beast may be the sole object of false worship as he claims to be God."*

Babylon is to be rebuilt, as we have seen in Isaiah and Jeremiah, and here in chapters 17 -- 18 we see it destroyed. Ecclesiastical Babylon will be destroyed by the wild Beast.

Ecclesiastical Babylon is destroyed by the wild Beast.  
Commercial Babylon is destroyed by the return of Christ.  
Ecclesiastical Babylon is hated by the Beast.

Commercial Babylon is loved by the world.

Ecclesiastical Babylon is destroyed at the beginning of the last three and one-half years of the Great Tribulation.

Commercial Babylon is destroyed at the end of the last three and one-half years of the Great Tribulation.

17:1, **And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials**, - Καὶ ἦλθεν εἷς ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλων τῶν ἔχόντων τὰς ἑπτὰ φιάλας, -

**and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither;** - καὶ ἐλάλησε μετ' ἐμοῦ, λέγων μοι, Δεῦρο, -

**I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:** δεῖξω σοι τὸ κρίμα τῆς πόρνῆς τῆς μεγάλης, τῆς καθημένης ἐπὶ τῶν ὑδάτων τῶν πολλῶν· -

"*The great harlot*" is that part of the church that will remain after the true church has been raptured. It will be composed of those who have never trusted Christ as Savior; they have never been in the body of Christ. We are told certain things about her. She "*sitteth upon many waters.*" According to verse 15, which we will see later, the "waters" refer to great masses of people and nations. The harlot will control most of the world.

17:2, **With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication**, - μεθ' ἧς ἐπόρνευσαν οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς, -

**and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.** καὶ ἐμεθύσθησαν ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν γῆν.

"*The kings of the earth committed fornication*" show that there is an unholy alliance between church and state during that period.

The movement in our day of bringing all religions together certainly falls into the pattern of this false church which is to appear. This movement is more dangerous to our own country than is any foreign political system or some new morality. It will become a power-bloc that will bring the world under the influence of the wild Beast out of the sea and the wild Beast out of the earth. They will use the apostate church to control the masses, and the church will yield to this arrangement for political power. When you reject the genuine, you are wide open for the spurious. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians that when someone rejects the love of the truth that they might be saved, they will believe a lie.

"*The judgment of the great harlot.*" God's cup of judgment will be pressed to the lips of the harlot. The Beast himself will destroy her. The Antichrist and the False Prophet will not want her around after she has served their purpose. Antichrist wants to be worshiped, and he doesn't want any competition from the "church."

17:3, **So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness:** - καὶ ἀπήνεγκέ με εἰς ἔρημον ἐν Πνεύματι· -

**and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast,** - καὶ εἶδον γυναῖκα καθημένην ἐπὶ θηρίον κόκκινον, -

**full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.** - γέμον ὀνομάτων βλασφημίας, ἔχον κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα.

"*He carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness.*" Remember that John was on the Isle of Patmos in the Spirit for the vision of the glorified Christ and His message to the churches. At that time John was caught up to heaven. From then on the scene shifts from heaven to earth. However, here we are told again that John was in the Spirit. Did he need a fresh anointing of the Spirit for this vision? Babylon was to become a wilderness, and in this connection read Isaiah 47-48; Jeremiah 50-51. Outside of Rome the wilderness is called the *campagna*.

John saw a woman "*sitting upon a scarlet-colored wild beast.*" The wild Beast has previously been identified as the Antichrist ruling over the restored Roman Empire. The woman is identified for us in verse 18: "*And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.*" The woman is a city, and the city is Rome, the religious capital of the world. She is religious Rome, which at that time will have inherited all the religions of the world.

The city is further identified in verse 9: "*And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.*" Rome was the city set on seven hills and was known as such to both pagan and Christian writers.

Horace wrote, "*The gods, who look with favour on the seven hills. . . .*" Ovid added, "*But Rome looks around on the whole globe from her seven mountains, the seat of empire and abode of the gods.*" Augustine wrote, "*Babylon is a former Rome, and Rome is a later Babylon.*" In these verses the city of Rome is assuredly in view.

"*Full of names of blasphemy*" reveals how far religion will have departed from the living Christ.

17:4, *And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour*, - καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἦν περιβεβλημένη πορφύρα καὶ κοκκίνω, - "Clothed in purple and scarlet." Purple was the predominant color of Roman imperialism. Every senator and consul wore a purple stripe as a badge of his position, and the emperor's robes were purple. Scarlet is the color adopted by Roman Catholicism.

"Gilded with gold" shows the beauty of the outward display, but, like the Pharisees, it is within "full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness."

*and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls*, - καὶ κεχρυσωμένη χρυσῷ καὶ λίθω τιμίω καὶ μαργαρίταις, -

"Precious stones and pearls" A sordid imitation of genuine heartfelt religion. The Lord Jesus said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess" (Matt. 23:25).

*having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:* ἔχουσα χρυσοῦν ποτήριον ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτῆς, γέμον βδελυγμάτων καὶ ἀκαθάρτητος πορνείας αὐτῆς,

17:5, *And upon her forehead was a name written*, - καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον αὐτῆς ὄνομα γεγραμμένον, -

*Mystery, Babylon the Great*, - Μυστήριον, Βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη, -

*the Mother of harlots and abominations of the earth.* - ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς.

"A golden cup full of abominations" is the religious intoxication of the apostate church, a pseudo-religion, counterfeit Christianity, and a fake and false gospel. This is the cup which makes the world drunk. "Babylon hath been a golden cup in the LORD'S hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad" (Jer. 51:7).

"Upon her forehead a name written" is a startling revelation of the character of this woman. She does not wear a crown but rather the mark of her profession. "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" is the disgraceful title for the "church."

"MYSTERY BABYLON." The true church is a mystery in that it was not revealed in the Old Testament (see Eph. 3:1-9). The anti-church, designated here as a harlot, is a mystery in that it was not revealed until John wrote Revelation 17.

Babylon is the fountainhead for all false religion; therefore she is "THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." This is, by far, Scripture's more expressive and vivid picture of awful and abominable sin. Immorality and false religions are related.

Have you noticed that this "MYSTERY BABYLON" is called the "MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS"? - not singular but plural! It is impossible to water down theologies and practices to suit everyone. So, each group will come into this great world ecumenical system but retain some of its distinctiveness. A religious brothel.

17:6, *And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints*, - και εἶδον τὴν γυναῖκα μεθύουσαν ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων, - The harlot not only makes others drunk, but she is intoxicated by her acts of persecution.

"saints" may refer to those who were killed during the Tribulation and *the martyrs of Jesus* refer to the death of the 144,000 who died, or those who refused the mark of the beast. This indicates that "BABYLON" is more than just Romanism.

*and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus:* - και ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ.

*and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.* - και ἐθαύμασα, ἰδὼν αὐτήν, θαῦμα μέγα.

Babylon is a composite religious system which includes Protestantism, Romanism, cults. It is confusion compounded and is the fountainhead of all religious error and idolatry. Babylon in the Old Testament persecuted God's people and was the enemy of God. It was Babylon that put the three Hebrew boys in the fiery furnace because they would not worship an image.

17:7, *And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel?* - και εἶπέ μοι ὁ ἄγγελος, Διατί ἐθαύμασας; -

*I will tell thee the mystery of the woman,* - ἐγὼ σοι ἐρῶ τὸ μυστήριον τῆς γυναικός, -

*and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.* - και τοῦ θηρίου τοῦ βαστάζοντος αὐτήν, τοῦ ἔχοντος τὰς ἑπτὰ κεφαλὰς και τὰ δέκα κέρατα.

17:8, *The beast that thou sawest was, and is not*; - τὸ θηρίον, ὃ εἶδες, ἦν, καὶ οὐκ ἔστι, *and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition*: - καὶ μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου, καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγειν. -

The wild beast "was" speaks of the past history of the Roman Empire. "Is not" refers to the present condition of the fragmented Empire. The Roman Empire is not dead. It has fallen apart into the nations of Europe today. "Is about to come up out of the abyss" speaks of the reactivation of the Roman Empire by Satan.

Many have attempted to put the Roman Empire back together again but have never been successful: Charlemagne, Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini tried it, and the United Nations. The wild Beast, who is the Antichrist, will be the one who puts the Roman Empire back together again.

"Shall . . . go into perdition" speaks of the destruction of the Roman Empire by the coming of Christ. The reappearance of the Roman Empire in its great power will win the admiration of the peoples of the world who are not redeemed. They will respect and worship the Antichrist.

*and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder*, - καὶ θαυμάσονται οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, -

*whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world*, - ὧν οὐ γέγραπται τὰ ὀνόματα ἐπὶ τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου,

*when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is*. - βλέποντες τὸ θηρίον ὃ, τι ἦν, καὶ οὐκ ἔστι, καίπερ ἔστιν. -

17:9, *And here is the mind which hath wisdom*. - ὧδε ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἔχων σοφίαν. -

*The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth*. - αἱ ἑπτὰ κεφαλαὶ ὄρη εἰσὶν ἑπτὰ, ὅπου ἡ γυνὴ κάθηται ἐπ' αὐτῶν.

17:10, *And there are seven kings*: - καὶ βασιλεῖς ἑπτὰ εἰσιν. -

*five are fallen, and one is*, - οἱ πέντε ἔπεσαν, καὶ ὁ εἷς ἔστιν, -

*and the other is not yet come*; - ὁ ἄλλος οὐπω ἦλθε. -

*and when he cometh, he must continue a short space*. - καί, ὅταν ἔλθῃ, ὀλίγον αὐτὸν δεῖ μέναι.

"*And there are seven kings*" is taken by some to mean individual rulers. Govett gives the following list:

1. Julius Caesar -- assassinated
2. Tiberius -- poisoned or smothered
3. Caligula -- assassinated
4. Claudius -- poisoned
5. Nero -- committed suicide
6. "The one is" refers to Domitian who was living in John's day, who was also assassinated.
7. "The other is not yet come" refers to the Antichrist.

Other expositors consider these seven as the different forms of government through which Rome passed. These are listed as kings, consuls, dictators, decemvirs, and military tribunes.

"*The one is*" refers to the sixth or imperial form of government set up by Julius Caesar and under which John was banished by Domitian.

The seventh and last, though it has not yet appeared, will be satanic in form. Regardless of the interpretation: the Antichrist rules over the reactivated Roman Empire.

17:11, *And the beast that was, and is not*, - καὶ τὸ θηρίον ὃ ἦν, καὶ οὐκ ἔστι, -

*even he is the eighth*, - καὶ αὐτὸς ὄγδοός ἐστι, -

*and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition*. - καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐστι, καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει.

17:12, *And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings*, - καὶ τὰ δέκα κέρατα, ἃ εἶδες, δέκα βασιλεῖς εἰσίν, -

*which have received no kingdom as yet*; - οἵτινες βασιλείαν οὐπω ἔλαβον, -

*but receive power as kings one hour with the beast*. - ἀλλ' ἐξουσίαν ὡς βασιλεῖς μίαν ὥραν λαμβάνουσι μετὰ τοῦ θηρίου.

17:13, *These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast*. - οὗτοι μίαν γνώμην ἔχουσι, καὶ τὴν δύναμιν καὶ τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἑαυτῶν τῷ θηρίῳ διαδιδώσουσιν.

17:14, *These shall make war with the Lamb*, - οὗτοι μετὰ τοῦ ἀρνίου πολεμήσουσι, -

*and the Lamb shall overcome them*: - καὶ τὸ ἀρνίον νικήσει αὐτούς, -

*for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings*: - ὅτι Κύριος κυρίων ἐστὶ καὶ Βασιλεὺς βασιλέων, -

*and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful*. - καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ, κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοί.

The Antichrist is designated. He is the "little horn" in the vision that God gave to the prophet Daniel. The "little horn" puts down three other horns -- that is, three kings -- when he comes to power (Dan. 7:8, 24). "*The beast that was*" refers to the past history of the Roman Empire under the emperors.

"*And is not*" refers to the end of Imperial Rome, which came to an end sometime between the third and fifth centuries.

"*Is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven*" identifies the Antichrist with the return to the imperial form of the restored Roman Empire. He is the "little horn" of Daniel, chapter 7. He is not one of the ten horns, but he is separate from them. He is an eighth head in this seven, yet he is one of the seven since he restores the last form of government to Rome.



"The ten horns" are the same as the ten horns of Daniel 7:7. These ten kings will reign with the Antichrist but will be subservient to him. They willingly or unwillingly give over their authority to the Antichrist and become his puppets.

17:15, *And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth,* και λέγει μοι, Τὰ ὕδατα, ἃ εἶδες, οὗ ἡ πόρνη κάθηται,

"The waters" are the nations of the world. Cf. Isaiah 8:7 and Psalm 18. The position of the harlot reveals that she is ruling over them for only a brief time.

*are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.* - λαοὶ καὶ ὄχλοι εἰσὶ, καὶ ἔθνη καὶ γλῶσσαι. -

17:16, *And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast,* - καὶ τὰ δέκα κέρατα, ἃ εἶδες, ἐπὶ τὸ θηρίον, -

"The ten horns" are ten kings (verse 12) who rule over the different divisions of the Roman Empire. They in turn give over to the Beast their kingdoms. This solidifies the Roman Empire and enables the Beast to lift himself up as a world dictator.

For a time the Beast (Antichrist) is willing to share his place of glory with the harlot, since she has also sought to advance his cause. This he hates, and the ten kings are one with him in this. The Antichrist not only breaks his covenant with Israel, but he also breaks his relationship with the apostate church. This hatred against the apostate church is so violent that the reaction is described as the cannibalistic picking of her bones, then burning them with fire! This great hatred destroys the false church. This is what happens to the false church. It has no victory. It never comes into the presence of Christ. By eliminating the apostate church, the way is cleared for the worship of Antichrist, as advocated by the False Prophet.

*these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked,* - οὗτοι μισήσουσι τὴν πόρνην, καὶ ἡρημωμένην ποιήσουσιν αὐτὴν καὶ γυμνήν, -

*and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.* - καὶ τὰς σάρκας αὐτῆς φάγονται, καὶ αὐτὴν κατακαύσουσιν ἐν πυρί.

17:17, *For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree,* - ὁ γὰρ Θεὸς ἔδωκεν εἰς τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν ποιῆσαι τὴν γνώμην αὐτοῦ, -

*and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.* - καὶ ποιῆσαι μίαν γνώμην, καὶ δοῦναι τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτῶν τῷ θηρίῳ, ἄχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ ῥήματα τοῦ Θεοῦ.

17:18, *And the woman which thou sawest is that great city*, - καὶ ἡ γυνή, ἣν εἶδες, ἐστὶν ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη, -

*which reigneth over the kings of the earth*. - ἡ ἔχουσα βασιλείαν ἐπὶ τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς.

This is the frightful but just end of the apostate church. It introduces the darkest period for religion in the history of the world. The reign and religion of Antichrist is the darkest hour earth will know, and yet it is the inevitable end of the distrust which began in the Garden of Eden when man failed to believe God.

My friend, you as a Christian should have thankfulness in your heart, knowing you will be spared from the Great Tribulation, but also you should have a real concern for your loved ones who may be facing this frightful period that lies ahead.