

# WORSHIP SERVICE - 3.6.2022

## BABYLON THE GREAT PROSTITUTE

### I. INTRODUCTION

**MAIN POINT:** Babylon, the world system, will come to an end. For now, God's people must resist the pull of the world by not compromising her allegiance to Christ.

#### **Revelation 17:1-18**

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.

When I saw her, I marveled greatly. 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. 8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. 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. 9 This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; 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. 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. 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. 13 These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. 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."

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, 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.”

## II. THE GREAT PROSTITUTE

### THE IDENTITY OF THE WOMAN

- V1 shows this is linked to the seventh bowl. It is one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls who says to John, “Let me show you judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters...”
- V3 And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness...4x in Revelation we see this phrase that is reminiscent of the OT prophetic literature that was a sign of prophetic commissioning. (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10)
- John sees a woman sitting on a seven-headed scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and had ten horns.
- Well, we’ve already seen that beast. That the beast that rises out of the sea in ch13.
- The woman, who is a prostitute is said to be sitting on many waters and also sitting on the beast.
- V15 the angel explains to John that the waters that he saw the prostitute seated on “are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.”
- V18 the angel tells John the identity of the woman that he saw sitting the beast, she “is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.”
- The great city is Babylon.
- What John sees is the world system, the corrupt great city, personified as a woman who is a prostitute.
- And the world, the inhabitants of the earth and the nations are under her control. That is personified by the waters upon which she sits.
- This woman is not just a prostitute, she is mother of prostitutes.
- The picture is striking and shocking. Through multiple metaphors, John is depicting the world system which the beast cooperates with and shows allegiance to.
- The beast we have previously described as the corrupt state, the dragon institutionalized in the idolatrous political, social, cultural, economic, and religious system by which Satan relentlessly attacks the Church.
- Babylon in one word is—worldliness!
- It is the world that has set itself up as an enemy of the cross and of the followers of the Lamb.

### THE CHARACTER OF THE WOMAN

- The symbols and images of the woman tell us everything we need to know about the corrupt world system.
- She is portrayed as a harlot, not an adulteress.
- She is seated on the waters and the beast. That is symbolic of sovereignty and authority. She entices, allures, seduces, deceives and entraps the ungodly to partake of her abominations and sexual immorality.
- Sexual sin is not the only sin in view when we are talking about worldliness. But it is the most vivid and graphic depiction of what we are doing when we compromise with the world.
- Harlotry throughout Scripture is a metaphor for spiritual infidelity and idolatry. Read Ezekiel 16 to see the shocking picture the Lord gives about unfaithful Israel comparing her to a harlot.

- The whole world owes its allegiance and faithfulness to God.
- The whole world should relate to God as a wife does to her husband. She should be completely devoted to her husband.
- But the world is a whore.
- The depiction of the world as a prostitute is a reflection of how the world relates to God instead of the way she should.
- Babylon is first mentioned in Genesis 11 in the story of the Tower of Babel.
- Babylon is a continuing presence and power in human history.
- John would certainly have seen the spirit and essence of Babylon in Rome, the great imperial city.

## THE ANTI-CHURCH

- What John is seeing in this vision is the anti-church, the counterfeit church, seducing the world to give allegiance to the counterfeit trinity.
- We've already come across a picture of another woman in chapter 12. She is a symbol for the covenant community of God. She is the church.
- The woman here in ch17 is not the church but the ungodly world and its system.
- The women compared and contrasted.
- Both women are mothers.
- Both are pregnant.
- Both are lovers.
- Both are said to be in the wilderness.
- Both are adorned in beautiful attire and jewels, like a bride.
- Both are marked on the forehead.
- Babylon is the anti-church.
- It's a tale of two women, two mothers, two cities.
- There are two rival kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world
- One is building the New Jerusalem the other is building the city of Babylon.

Here's a **few things** we can say about Babylon, the great prostitute.

- **She is seductive.**
- Worldliness looks appealing. It looks good. If it didn't look good it wouldn't entice us.
- Babylon draws us in because she has things we sinfully desire.
- **1 John 2:15-16** Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.
- Sin wouldn't be so attractive to us if we saw all of the awful consequences first.
- In the 1st century, the appeal to worldliness came in the form of economic success.
- Example: trade guilds and patron deities.
- You can imagine how conflicted Christians would be; follow Christ and possibly suffer or starve, or drink from Babylon's cup and have worldly success and comfort.
- Sin may be good for a season but sin's pleasure is fleeting.
- Behind the glamour and the attractiveness is desolation. She is in the wilderness. That's the real truth about the world.
- You may have heard this quote before, "*Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.*"
- **Her influence is universal** - v2 "she sits on many waters."

- There is no nation, no socio-economic class of people, no ethnicity, no generation, that is out of the reach of Babylon's influence.
- Rich and poor alike, all are enticed by her and have drunk of her fornications.
- All of society, all of culture, every system of government, every human philosophy and political and sociological ideology has been tainted by this woman.
- Worldliness is pervasive and extensive.
- Not even the church is safe from her influence. Because she mimics the church, she can entice Christians into adopting her ways.
- John's letters to the seven churches warns us about this. (Rev. 2 / Thyatira)
- **She is destructive** - v6 says she is "drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus."
- The world hates the church. The world wants nothing but for the church to fall in line with its agenda, plans, and way of thinking and living.
- When the church does not walk in step with the world, she will suffer.
- Towards the end, the suffering will be intense. It will appear as if the church has been conquered. The beast is allowed to make war against the saints and conquer them. (Rev. 11:7; 13:7)
- The destructive power of Babylon will be brought down upon the church and everyone who does not make an alliance with the world.

### III. THE MYSTERY EXPLAINED

- In response to John's amazement at the vision he sees of the woman, the angel says to him, "Why do you marvel? Let me tell you the mystery of the woman and beast that she is riding."
- Mystery doesn't mean solving a riddle. It's a term in Scripture that means something in God's plan that was hidden for a time and is now being disclosed to his servants.
- Here is the mystery revealed, the rise and fall of the woman and the beast is what is being disclosed and has not yet happened. It is the mystery revealed about the fulfillment of God's Word concerning the destruction of Babylon, how she will turn against herself, and how she will be completely demolished at the return of Christ. (Jeremiah 51)
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel all prophesied about this, but did not see it as clearly as John now sees it.
- Vv8-14 focuses on the beast, its heads, and its horns.
- We have established before that the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet are a kind of counterfeit trinity, a false parody of the holy trinity.
- What we have here in v8, "the beast you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction," is a parody of Christ, it is a mimicking Christ.
- Jesus "was," he came to earth; "and was not," he died; and "rises" in the resurrection; and is coming again in glory.
- The main difference is that the beast will go down to the lake of fire for his destruction.
- The beast imitates Christ and the world marvels at the beast and worships him.
- Several statements and themes from earlier in Revelation are brought together in chapter 17.

#### THE SEVEN HEADS

- The angel gives John two interpretations of the beast's seven heads.

- Now v9 says “this calls for a mind with wisdom.” This requires discernment.
- The first interpretation: seven heads are seven mountains; this identifies the beast with the seven hills on which Rome was built.
- The second interpretation: seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain for a little while.
- These two interpretations convey the same idea, the beast represents the evil empires of the world. Just like in Daniel’s vision.
- Seven is the number for completeness. The seven mountains, seven kings, point to the complete number of all evil empires.
- Then he interprets the ten horns as ten kings.
- All of these things are beastly symbols representing the wicked world government that refuses to honor Christ as King. There will be a final iteration but that is not important for us to know its name.
- All of the nations of the world are deceived in making war with the Lamb and the church, we saw that in the sixth bowl plague. (16:14)
- The whole world will join together as one to kill followers of the Lamb. They are of one mind to do that, but that is by God’s design.

## GOOD NEWS

- v14, “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.”
- The details and symbols of this passage may be confusing but there is one thing we can all agree on.
- The end is coming. It will be exceedingly bad for Christians for a little while.
- But when Jesus comes, he will undeniably conquer his enemies and deliver his people.
- And where are we? We are with him; the called and chosen and faithful!
- We’re the army of the Lamb. We are those called by God to respond to the gospel message and trust Christ, we are those who were chosen in him before the foundation of the world, and are made faithful by the sanctifying work of the Spirit.
- In contrast to God’s people being called faithful, the people of the world and the rulers of the world will not remain faithful to the prostitute.
- They will turn on the harlot. Towards the end evil will turn on itself and the world system will self-destruct.
- v16 “They will hate the prostitute and make her desolate and named and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire.”
- The prostitute’s clients will become disillusioned with her and destroy her.
- Why does this happen?
- It is God’s justice in vindicating his saints. It is by His design.
- V17 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.
- God is absolutely sovereign and he puts it into his enemy’s heart to carry out his divine purposes by doing their wicked deeds.
- And God will fulfill every single promise he has made concerning his plan and his people. And fulfill every promise to utterly destroy Babylon. (Jeremiah 51)

## IV. LIVING IN BABYLON

- **Rev 18:1-2** After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. 2 And he called out with a mighty voice, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.
- This is a pronouncement from the Angel of the Lord, this is Christ. “The earth was made bright with his glory.” That is none other than Jesus.
- He said she is fallen. She will be finally judged.
- And when that happens, God will fully vindicate his people.
- Rev. 18:20 Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!”
- Rev. 18:21-23 The pronouncement from the angel is that she will be thrown down in violence and will be found no more. That she is ‘no more’ is repeated six times.
- So even though we live in Babylon, we must live as if Babylon is fallen.
- We live in Babylon, not for Babylon.

How do we do that?

- **Rev. 18:4** Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues.”
- We can’t physically come out of the world. We are not called to isolate ourselves.
- It’s a spiritual coming out that God is calling us to; a spiritual separation from the world.
- Jesus prayed for us in John 17, knowing that the world would hate his disciples because they were not of this world, he prayed to his Father, not to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. (John 17:15)
- How encouraging it is to know that Jesus prayed for us to come out of her and be separate from her, and all of his authority and power are available for the believer to resist the allure, seduction, and pull of the world.
- **Marinate your mind in God’s Word!**
- We are shaped by our culture to a far greater degree than we think.
- There is no neutrality, either something comes from a biblical worldview or from Babylon’s worldview.
- Entertainment is an idol for many Christians and they don’t even realize it.
- Worldliness is a far bigger threat and will ruin more Christians than anything else.
- We need to be shaped by a whole different set of ethics, assumptions, and principles.
- That can only come from God’s Word.
- **Romans 12:2** Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.
- When we compromise we are conforming, we are aligning ourselves with Babylon.
- Lastly, look to the cross and look to the consummation of all things.
- **Galatians 1:4**, Paul speaking of Christ’s work, “who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,”
- Jesus gave himself to this very purpose. He bore the wrath of God on the cross, in our place for ours, so that you and I might be delivered from this present evil age and Babylon’s ultimate destruction.

- On the cross, Jesus cried out, "***It is finished!***" (John 19:30) God's redemptive work was completed.
- At the pouring out of the seventh bowl, a loud voice cries out, "***It is done!***" (Rev. 16:17)
- We are living in the time between these two loud cries, "it is finished" and "it is done."
  
- What city do you belong to? Babylon, the world city or the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem?
- If we don't come out of Babylon, we will share in her plagues and judgment.
- Do not forsake your allegiance to the Lamb by compromising with the beast and his whore!