

WEEK 21: CHAPTER 17

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER 17

- The end of chapter 16 brought us to the end of the Tribulation.
- In strict chronological order, the next event that takes place after chapter 16 is chapter 19.
- Chapters 17-18 do not move the story ahead chronologically but are given to us so that we can know what and who is being judged.
- Chapter 17 details the destruction of Babylon as the world's false religion. It is sometimes referred to as spiritual or ecclesiastical Babylon.
- Chapter 18 details the destruction of the world's financial system. It is sometimes referred to as commercial or political Babylon.
- In other words, God wants us to know that He is going to completely and entirely destroy everything that man has built before Christ returns to rule in the Millennial Kingdom.
- In this chapter, we are given a sort of high-level overview of the Tribulation.
- **Verses 17:7-8** is about the first half of the Tribulation when the false church flourishes. The antichrist has brought peace to the masses, and he is making plans to take over behind the scenes.
- **Verses 15-16** is the mid-point of the Tribulation. There is a shocking twist and betrayal which takes place. The antichrist is no longer looking to the false church for his power but now wants it all for himself.
- **Verses 16-17** predicts the ultimate end as God Himself puts desires in men's hearts so that the kings (10 horns) will turn on the Harlot. The antichrist then outlaws all religions and demands worship for himself.
- "...chapters 17 and 18 are an amplification of one of the main features of the Tribulation, the place, function, and final judgment of Babylon. Chapter 17, which deals with the destruction of religious Babylon, would have to occur somewhere around the middle of the Tribulation when the beast is finished using her as a means to his rise to power. Chapter 18 describes the destruction of political (economic or commercial) Babylon as it is embodied in the city of Babylon, the headquarters of the beast. The destruction undoubtedly occurs at the seventh bowl when the great city of 16:19, along with other cities, fall in the great earthquake."¹

What is the significance of Babylon?

- Before going into these two chapters, we need to have an understanding of Babylon from a biblical point of view and how this city and ideology has been with mankind throughout the centuries.

¹ <https://bible.org/seriespage/babylon-seen-scripture-introduction-rev-17-18>

- Babylon is mentioned 260 times in Scripture, and is second in importance only to Jerusalem. Biblically it is viewed as the Devil’s city while Jerusalem is viewed as God’s city. They are always seen in opposition to each other. Babylon is the result of apostasy against God’s plan of salvation, the first international, political and religious ecumenical movement in the history of man, and one which has never ceased to exist in one form or another. Jerusalem is the result of God’s call of a man and a nation to perpetuate His plan of salvation and nationalism for the world.”²
- “Babylon comes from the Hebrew *Bab-el* which some say is a Hebrew form of the Assyrian *Bab-ili*, which meant ‘Gate of God,’ and is used of the ancient city on the banks of the Euphrates River. However, in Hebrew *Bab-el* means ‘confusion.’”³
- Babylon is first mentioned in Genesis 10 when the table of nations is presented.
- Mosese traces generations from his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Those from Shem would become Israelites, the other two sons being responsible for other nations.
- Those who descended from Ham were responsible for much trouble.
 - Moses writes in **Genesis 10:8–10** “Now Cush became the father of Nimrod; he became a mighty one on the earth. [9] He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD." [10] The beginning of his kingdom was Babel and Erech and Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.”
 - The city of Babel is the first reference to the city of Babylon and its founding. The founder is Nimrod...whose name means “let us revolt” or “let us rebel.”
 - “Nimrod was a rebel from beginning to end. As the first king of Babylon, he had within him the nature and character that would exist in the Gentile nations throughout history and especially in the final form in the Tribulation—tyranny and apostasy.”⁴
- Moses records for us the outright rebellion of these people under the leadership of Nimrod.
 - In the land of Shinar, **Genesis 11:4** “They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”
 - “Ancient history reveals that it was common practice to build huge mounds or towers called ziggurats made of sun dried brick. One such ziggurat was discovered at Erech, a place in Nimrod’s kingdom going back to about 3,000 B.C. These were sacred temple towers dedicated to heathen

² <https://bible.org/seriespage/babylon-seen-scripture-introduction-rev-17-18>

³ <https://bible.org/seriespage/babylon-seen-scripture-introduction-rev-17-18>

⁴ Ibid.

deities often in connection with astrology, the zodiac, and the mother-child cult. “Ziggurat” means ‘pinnacle, mountain top.’”⁵

- Not only was Babylon a city, but it is also the birthplace of all organized idolatry. From Genesis 11, the Tower of Babel represented rebellion and the beginning of humanity’s attempt to reach God on their own.
- Here’s the connection to our study:
 - Babylon is the mother of all false religion because they all can be traced back to her. This religion all evolved into Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Eastern paganisms.
 - Therefore, as the antichrist sits and attempts to bring all people back together (the scattering at Babel was God’s judgment upon them), he wants to reverse God’s punishment and erect one global power.
- “...the city of ancient Babylon is in Iraq, about 50 miles south of Baghdad on the Euphrates river. What you may not know is that prior to Desert Storm and the conflict in Iraq, Saddam Hussein had for several years been working to uncover the ancient ruins of Babylon with a view to rebuilding the city and establishing himself as practically the incarnation of Nebuchadnezzar, the great Babylonian king who took Judah captive from 606 to 586 B.C. This captivity by Nebuchadnezzar began **the times of the Gentiles** ([Luke 21:24](#)), the period of gentile domination over Jerusalem and Israel which has and will continue to keep all descendants of David from sitting on the throne of Israel until the return of the Lord Himself.”⁶
 - When King Nebuchadnezzar II originally built Babylon, he stamped his name into the clay bricks to ensure his eternal legacy. Saddam Hussein did the exact same thing. He ordered millions of new bricks to be laid directly on top of the 2,500-year-old ancient ruins.
 - Billboards and artwork throughout Iraq during his regime frequently depicted Saddam's face side-by-side with Nebuchadnezzar's profile, explicitly framing Saddam as his modern ideological reincarnation and the "successor" to the ancient empire.
 - To solidify his absolute dominion over the site, Saddam built an ostentatious, multi-million-dollar presidential palace on an artificially constructed hill overlooking the original ruins of Nebuchadnezzar's Southern Palace. Even today, visitors to the Iraqi historical site can look up and see Saddam’s abandoned palace casting a literal shadow over ancient history.
- All of this is connected as mankind is always trying to build monuments to themselves and how they gained the glory which was due God.
- In this case, the secular ruler spent millions and millions of dollars only to find out that you can’t defy biblical prophecy and that God will, in the end, always rule.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ <https://bible.org/seriespage/babylon-seen-scripture-introduction-rev-17-18>

CHAPTER 17:1-6 ~ THIS IS BABYLON

Revelation 17:1-6 “Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, [2] with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality.” [3] And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. [4] The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality, [5] and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” [6] And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly.”

- “It is also helpful in chapter 17 to distinguish the vision in verses 1 through 6 from the interpretation in verses 7 through 18.” (Walvoord)
- When we talk of Babylon, as was already stated, it is speaking of a city and a system. Like Americans say *Wall Street*, it’s a place but it’s also a financial system.
- **Verse 1** gives us a clue that this vision of John’s about Babylon is directly connected to the 7 bowl judgments...*one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls...*
- Now, when John speaks of the *Harlot*, this is not speaking of a real woman or person.
- This term is a metaphor for false religion, idolatry, and for those who leave the worship of God.
- The “many” waters that she is sitting on “are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues” found in **verse 15**.
- This is showing the global impact of Babylon the Great and the massive worldwide influence she is going to have during the Tribulation time.
- “Babylon will likely build on the remnants of the professing Christian church that existed before the Rapture. Professing Christians who will not be raptured will remain to form the base of this ‘church.’ Tribulation saints, of course, will oppose this false church.”⁷
- The apostate church at that time is not only a participant of religious harlotry, but she is also going to be promoting it. False religion is always the biggest threat to true and pure religion.
- Their participation is found in **verse 2**...the world powers are infatuated with godlessness and so are those who inhabit the earth. These people “are the hardest to win to Christ” because they believe their false religion is and outward show of worship is true before the living God.

⁷ Ryrie, *Revelation*, 139

- **Verses 3-4** give us a description of a woman on a scarlet beast, having 7 heads and 10 horns.
- The woman is the harlot of verse 1 and the beast is the antichrist.
- Worthy of note, she is riding the beast...she is not the beast.
- This means that the false religions and systems that take place during the Tribulation period are powered by the political power of the beast.
- “The initial unifying and controlling factor of Antichrist’s kingdom will be religion. With the heavens and the earth being ravaged by God’s judgments, and the world’s political, economic, and military might crumbling, people will turn in desperation to the supernatural. The beast and the woman will coexist for a while. But eventually “the beast...will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire” (v. 16). It will be at that point that the false prophet will make the whole world worship Antichrist (13:11-14), and everything will be one in the beast’s universal and comprehensive rule...Far from being separated, church and state will be united as never before in human history.”⁸
- “The significance of the seven heads and the ten horns is revealed subsequently in this chapter, the seven heads apparently referring to forms of government which are successive, and the ten horns to kings who reign simultaneously in the end time. The fact that the woman, representing the apostate church, is in such close association with the beast, which is guilty of utter blasphemy, indicates the depth to which apostasy will ultimately descend. The only form of a world church recognized in the Bible is this apostate world church destined to come into power after the true church has been raptured.” (Walvoord)
- It is interesting that in **verse 4** the woman is “clothed in purple and scarlet and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls.”
- This reminds us of the pomp and show of the “high church” today and how they promote themselves as truly holy and righteous.
- Most biblical commentators (going back to the 1500’s) see this description as the Roman Catholic Church, its ancient heritage, rituals, and claims to have divine authority.
- “Calvin viewed the immense physical wealth, elaborate vestments, and golden ornamentation of the Vatican as the literal fulfillment of this imagery. He argued that the physical grandeur of Catholic worship was designed to distract the human mind from true, spiritual worship, trapping believers in outward sensory experiences.”
- Even today, the RCC priests are known for wearing purples and scarlet and adorning themselves with much gold and precious stones as a symbol of godliness.

⁸ MacArthur, *Revelation 12-22*, 163.

- The mystery in **verse 5** just means a previously unrevealed truth...in other words, we don't know the true identity of spiritual Babylon. It will be fully revealed in the Tribulation.
- Notice what was written on the forehead, *the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth*.
- "In other words, it all started with Babylon! The source of organized rebellion, creature worship, universe adoration, astral devotion, demon-inspired idolatry, and so on is Babylon. She is the mother of spiritual prostitution — worship that should belong to God alone is given to another. We are told that her name is on her forehead. It is interesting to note that the common prostitute in the first century — and it was a flourishing legal profession at the time — wore her name on a scarf on her head or on a colorful headband. This was the way she advertised; this was her attempt to be remembered and called for again by name. So the spiritual harlot seeks to be remembered and desired. However, it will not work after all."⁹
- Her agenda is found in verse 6...to completely destroy Christians and the church. She appeared to John to have killed so many that she was drunk with their blood.
- This is not new in the history of the church. The false church has always attacked the true church in order to assert their authority.
- The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572 is a small example of what the Tribulation is going to be like for believers.
 - This event is the deadliest single event in church history. The Roman Catholic Church and its followers were responsible for 10,000 – 30,000 Protestant deaths in Paris and other surrounding cities over several weeks.

CHAPTER 17:7-15 ~ FURTHER DESCRIPTIONS OF BABYLON

Revelation 17:7-15 "And the angel said to me, "Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. [8] The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come. [9] "Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, [10] and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. [11] "The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction. [12] "The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. [13] "These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast. [14] "These will wage

⁹ [Stephen Davey](#)

war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful." [15] And he said to me, "The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues."

- Seeing that John was *wondering* about the vision, the angel tells him that he will explain it.
- It appears that from the angel's description, John was wondering about the connection between the woman and the beast.
- This is the same beast that was described in chapter 13.
- There are 7 characteristics of the beast described:¹⁰
- 1. Past, Present, and Future States (**Verse 8**): The beast represents a political system personified through imperial power. Its history spans from old Rome ("was"), to its fall ("is not"), to its future revival in the Tribulation ("about to come").
- 2. Mountainous World Kingdoms (**Verse 9**): The seven heads of the beast represent seven successive world kingdoms that have supported the harlot's religious system. Believers are warned to have a mind of wisdom to recognize and stand against this deceptive future system.
- 3. Seven Kings (**Verse 10**): The kingdoms are further described as seven kings, where five have already fallen in history. One king is currently ruling during John's time, and the final one is yet to come to rule for a short space.
- 4. The Eighth King (**Verse 11**): The beast himself is identified as an eighth king who acts as the system's final ruler. Though he is the eighth, he is structurally connected to and springs out of the previous seven world powers before going to his ultimate destruction.
- 5. Ten Horns as Future Kings (**Verse 12**): The ten horns represent ten specific kings who have not yet received a kingdom or official authority. During the Tribulation, they will suddenly rise and receive global political power for a very brief time ("one hour") alongside the beast.
- 6. Unified Purpose and Authority (**Verse 13**): These ten future kings will operate with absolute unity of mind and a single purpose. They will voluntarily surrender all of their personal power, authority, and kingdoms directly to the beast.
- 7. War and Defeat by the Lamb (**Verse 14**): The ultimate focus of this united political power is to wage open war against the Lamb. However, the Lamb will completely overcome them because He is the supreme Lord of lords and King of kings. (we will cover this more in chapter 19)
- Then verse 15, again the waters represent the great sea of people from all over the world. There is not going to be a place on earth that is not influenced or ruled by the antichrist.

¹⁰ <https://bible.org/seriespage/judgment-religious-babylon-rev-171-18>

CHAPTER 17:16-18 ~ THE DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON

Revelation 17:16-18 “And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. [17] “For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled. [18] “The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.”

- Most likely at the midpoint of the Tribulation, the antichrist’s support of the idolatrous religious system is not going to last.
- He is no longer going to need this false religion to gain or keep control over the earth.
- He is going to cast off the false religious system so that all people will only worship him.
- “The world church movement, which characterizes the first half of the seven years leading up to the Second Coming, is thus brought to an abrupt end. It will be replaced by the final form of world religion which will be the worship of the world ruler, Satan’s substitute for Christ.” (Walvoord)
- Notice carefully **verse 17**...it was God who causes this to happen. From the world’s point of view, it looks like a religious or political powerplay, but again, behind the scenes, it is God’s working.
- “The divine judgment inflicted upon apostate Christendom follows a pattern which can be observed in other judgments upon wicked nations and ungodly rulers. Ancient Babylon was used to bring affliction upon the people of Israel, as were also the governments of Assyria and Egypt. But in due time the same nations who inflicted divine judgment were themselves the objects of God’s wrath. The principle involved is plainly stated in verse 17. Their action, though inspired by a blasphemous attempt to institute a world religion utterly contrary to divine revelation, nevertheless fulfills God’s will that the kingdoms of the world should come under the domain of the beast in fulfillment of prophecy until the end of the age, indicated in the phrase “until the words of God shall be fulfilled.” Thus the plan of the ages unfolds majestically, and Scripture indicates that God sovereignly permits the increment of wickedness until the cup of iniquity overflows.” (Walvoord)
- Lastly, in **verse 18**, it again points to a literal rebuilt city of Babylon and perhaps this city is the capital city of the antichrist’s world empire.