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The Mystery of Babylon

Series: Between a Rock and a Hard Place

August 1, 2021

Revelation 17

I. **Context**

A. Prologue

1. **Revelation 1:7–8** (NASB95) — 7 BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. 8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

B. **Theme**

1. **Jesus Christ is coming**
 - a. Tribes of earth will mourn over Him
 - b. Eschatological triumph of Christ over the anti-Christian forces of evil in the world and in the heavenly realms
2. **Purpose – encourage the churches under great pressure**
 - a. Series: Between Rock and a Hard Place

C. How is this purpose accomplished?

1. **Four visions**
 - a. **“In the Spirit”**
2. **Revelation 1:9–10**
 - a. First vision
 - (1) The glorified Christ
 - (2) The messages to the seven churches
3. **Revelation 4:1–2**
 - a. Second vision
 - (1) The heavenly vision
 - (2) The tribulation
4. **Revelation 17:1–3**
 - a. Third vision
 - (1) The mystery of Babylon
 - (2) Judgment of Babylon
 - (3) Final triumph and consummation
5. **Revelation 21:9–10**
 - a. Fourth vision
 - (1) The New Jerusalem

D. Third and fourth visions condense the events at the end of history

1. Unfolding of the divine victory
2. Negative aspect
 - a. Revealing the nature of Babylon – Chapter 17

- b. Judgment of Babylon – Chapter 18
- 3. Positive aspect
 - a. Coming of Christ
 - b. Victorious millennial reign
 - c. Establishing New Heavens and New Earth

II. **The Angelic Announcement**

- A. **Revelation 17:1–2** (NASB95) —
 - 1. 1 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.”
- B. “Come” – used as an indication of a new revelation about to take place
 - 1. Cf: **Revelation 4:1** (NASB95) — 1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.”
 - 2. Cf: **Revelation 21:9** (NASB95) — 9 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”
- C. Content – punishment of great harlot
 - 1. John is about to see the negative side of God’s victory – punishment of the anti-God civilization
- D. “Who sits on many waters”
 - 1. First clue to the identity of who this prostitute is
 - 2. Not Rome
 - a. One Tiber River, not on many waters
 - b. Certainly Rome figures in John’s era as manifestation of Babylon
 - c. But primary meaning is broader and eschatological
 - 3. Historical Babylon was built on many waters – canals
 - a. **Jeremiah 51:13** (NASB95) — 13 O you who dwell by many waters, Abundant in treasures, Your end has come, The measure of your end.
 - b. Babylon has become the personification of evil to Israel
 - (1) Place of captivity
 - (2) Babel – original development of human civilization in opposition to God
 - (3) City of man in distinction to city of God (Augustine)
 - c. Cf: **Revelation 17:15** (NASB95) — 15 And he said to me, “The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.”
 - 4. Babylon is used here metaphorically of human civilization built in opposition to God
- E. **Brief history of civilization – Genesis 4-11**
 - 1. Adam and Eve

2. Cain and Abel
 - a. Curse of Cain to be wanderer
 - b. Cain complained – too much to bear
 3. Cain built city, named after son Enoch
 4. Civilization developed through generation of Lamech
 - a. Agriculture
 - b. Arts
 - c. Industry
 5. Development of evil occurred simultaneously
 - a. Lamech was most wicked of all
 6. While this was going on, God was preserving line of godliness through Shem
 7. This development of evil provoked the flood
 8. After the flood – Genesis 11 – humanity again builds a city
 - a. Babel! (Babylon)
 9. **Genesis 11:1–9** (NASB95) —
 - a. 1 Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words.
 - b. 2 It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.
 - c. 3 They said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.” And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar.
 - d. 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.”
 - e. 5 The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.
 - f. 6 The LORD said, “Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them.
 - g. 7 “Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.”
 - h. 8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city.
 - i. 9 Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.
 10. Desire to build themselves a city (humanistic origin)
 - a. Again, a desire to avoid the curse of Cain
 - b. God scattered them
- F. Babylon’s history is that of human beings attempting to avoid the right judgment of God and establish themselves
1. Co-extensive with evil in the world

2. Again figures in Israel's understanding of Babylon as captor
 3. Babylon is the manifestation of human civilization in opposition to God
- G. Committed immorality (fornication, adultery) with kings of the earth
1. Immorality, adultery is frequent metaphor for sin
 - a. Israel as a faithless wife, turning to other gods
 - b. Pagan nations also
 - (1) **Isaiah 23:17** (NASB95) — 17 It will come about at the end of seventy years that the LORD will visit Tyre. Then she will go back to her harlot's wages and will play the harlot with all the kingdoms on the face of the earth.
 - (2) **Nahum 3:4** (NASB95) — 4 All because of the many harlotries of the harlot, The charming one, the mistress of sorceries, Who sells nations by her harlotries And families by her sorceries.
 - c. Anti-God civilization participates with nations and governments to prostitute the earth against God
 2. Those who dwell on earth are made drunk with wine of her immorality
 - a. People are taken in by this, drunk
 - b. Ultimately, people are enslaved

H. **Implications**

1. Easy to be enticed by the pomp and circumstance of human civilization
 - a. Wealth
 - b. Prestige
 - c. Power
 - d. Promoted by governments
2. Cf today's statism
 - a. Every group wants to claim victimhood
 - b. Receive benefits from the government
 - c. Always do that with a net loss of freedom
 - (1) freedom implies responsibility

III. **Woman on the Beast**

A. **Revelation 17:3-6** (NASB95) —

1. 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.
2. 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."
3. 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.

B. Carried away in the Spirit

1. Ecstatic condition

2. Marks the beginning of the vision
- C. Woman sitting on scarlet beast – 7 heads, 10 horns
 1. Same beast as 13.1
 - a. Similar in color to dragon, Satan (12.3)
 - b. Signifies the intimate relationship with its ultimate master, Satan
 2. Horns and heads explained later
 3. Important at this point is the relationship between the two
- D. Intimate relationship between the two
 1. Beast is the beast of the sea
 - a. Ungodly governmental institution
 - (1) As distinguished from religious institution
 2. Dependence of woman who sits on beast
 - a. Human civilization propped up by the state
 3. Dominance of woman who sits on the beast
 - a. “Ride ‘em cowboy!”
 - b. Ungodly state does the bidding of the civilization
 - c. Cf elections – if the election moves in ungodly direction, it will be because our culture has already gone in that direction
 4. Main point – interdependent relationship
 - a. Both the civilization and the government feed off each other
- E. Woman’s dress – purple and scarlet, gold and precious stones, and pearls
 1. Appearance of luxury, wealth
 2. Only rich could wear such dined clothing
 3. Civilization glorying in its lavish wealth
- F. She held a gold cup
 1. **Jeremiah 51:7** (NASB95) — 7 Babylon has been a golden cup in the hand of the LORD, intoxicating all the earth. The nations have drunk of her wine; Therefore the nations are going mad.
 2. Cup – beautiful on the outside, full inside of abomination and filth
 - a. Sinfulness seen as abominable, repulsive and corrupt
 - b. That’s the way idolatry is characterized in the OT
 3. Wealth and luxury lead to idolatry, away from proper worship of God
- G. Name (title) written on forehead
 1. Identification seen on foreheads in Revelation
 - a. Saints sealed on foreheads
 - b. Followers of beast sealed on foreheads and hands with name and number of beast
 - c. New earth will find saints with name of God written on foreheads
 2. May involve Roman custom of harlots wearing headbands with name of owner on them
 3. Mystery
 - a. Some hidden revelation – appearances are not what they seem
 4. Babylon the Great identified as a woman
 5. Mother of harlots and abominations
 - a. Prostitute to end all prostitutes

- b. Not satisfied with her own prostitution, but reproduces prostitution in her children, that which civilization developments
 - c. Really more like a madam or pimp
 - d. Ultimate result is filth and abomination
 - H. Drunk with blood of saints, who bore testimony to Jesus
 - 1. Anti-God civilization embodied in city of Babylon seen to ultimately lead to persecution and martyrdom of saints
 - I. **Implications**
 - 1. Realize the subtle, complex, interdependent relationship between the godless culture and the state
 - a. Don't complain too much about the state – remember the ungodly culture that supports, entices and controls it
- IV. **Lifespan of the Beast**
 - A. **Revelation 17:6–8** (NASB95) —
 - 1. 6 And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus.
 - 2. When I saw her, I wondered greatly.
 - 3. 7 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.
 - 4. 8 “The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction.
 - 5. 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.
 - B. John wondered greatly (greatly astonished – NIV)
 - 1. Extraordinary nature of the this vision
 - a. Image of woman on beast is amazing to begin with
 - b. Vision included filth!
 - 2. Expectation of vision of judgment
 - a. Instead, a vision of splendor
 - C. Angels' words of encouragement – he will explain mystery
 - 1. One mystery – includes both woman and beast
 - a. Close interconnection between the two
 - 2. Still an odd answer
 - a. Expected explanation of the woman (harlot)
 - b. Can't deal with one without the other (woman and the beast)
 - D. Beast was, now is not, about to come up
 - 1. Already seen that back in 13.3
 - a. **Revelation 13:3** (NASB95) — 3 I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast...
 - b. One head had fatal wound healed
 - c. People amazed at its reappearance
 - d. This passage in Chapter 17 makes it clear that the one head slain

- means that the beast itself was slain
 - (1) Head is identified with beast as a whole
 - (2) Example of metonymy – one part is used to represent the whole of which it is a part, or with which it is associated
 - 2. Beast had an existence, will have a time in which it is not present or in existence, then will make a final appearance
 - E. Out of the abyss, to destruction
 - 1. Final appearance will be short lived
 - 2. Final manifestation will be clearly satanic in origin (abyss)
 - a. Satanic involvement will exceed prior intensity
 - F. Those who dwell on the earth will wonder (be astonished)
 - 1. Twofold designation
 - a. Those who dwell on earth
 - b. Those whose names are not in the book of life from the foundation of the world
 - 2. Amazed at reappearance
 - G. **Implications**
 - 1. Encouragement in knowing the end of the beast
 - 2. Don't be discouraged when the beast returns with vengeance
- V. **The Seven Heads**
 - A. **Revelation 17:9–11** (NASB95) —
 - 1. 9 “Here is the mind which has wisdom.
 - 2. 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.
 - 3. 11 “The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction.
 - B. Mind with wisdom
 - 1. Not just evident to anyone
 - 2. Need mind spiritually in tune
 - C. Seven hills, seven kings
 - 1. Many see Rom
 - a. Rome is city built on 7 hills
 - 2. Problem is that they are 7 kings as well
 - a. Impossible to identify any combination of 7 Roman emperors
 - 3. Hill or mountain – symbol of power or rule
 - a. **Daniel 2:35** (NASB95) — 35 “Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.
 - (1) Iron, clay, bronze, silver and gold are symbolic of nations; the stone which smites them grows to become a mountain
 - b. **Jeremiah 51:25** (NASB95) — 25 “Behold, I am against you, O

destroying mountain, Who destroys the whole earth,” declares the LORD, “And I will stretch out My hand against you, And roll you down from the crags, And I will make you a burnt out mountain.

- (1) Babylon called a destroying mountain, destined for destruction
- c. **Isaiah 2:2** (NASB95) — 2 Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it.
- d. **Isaiah 41:15** (NASB95) — 15 “Behold, I have made you a new, sharp threshing sledge with double edges; You will thresh the mountains and pulverize them, And will make the hills like chaff.”
 - (1) God’s victory over ungodly nations
4. Easier to see hills and kings as synonymous with kingdoms and their rulers
5. Point is that the woman sits upon a succession of earthly kingdoms
 - a. Historical Babylon
 - b. First Century Rome
 - c. Others
 - d. Eschatological Babylon
 - (1) Intimacy with all kingdoms, complex interrelationships with all
 - e. Not solely identified with any one
- D. Five fallen, one is, other not yet come
 1. Not to be understood as rulers
 2. Better understood as empires
 3. Five previous empires
 4. Currently Rome
 - a. Not Antichrist
 5. One more yet to come
- E. Beast is 8th King, belongs to 7
 1. Difficult
 2. Beast is Antichrist
 - a. Represented in 7 heads
 - (1) Godless empires
 - b. Represented more fully in 2 particular heads
 3. One of those heads is fatally wounded
 - a. Beast dies (i.e., disappears from history)
 - b. Daniel appears to identify this empire
 - c. Daniel 8:9 (NASB95) — 9 Out of one of them came forth a rather small horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful Land.
 - d. Daniel 8:21 (NASB95) — 21 “The shaggy goat represents the kingdom of Greece, and the large horn that is between his eyes is the first king.
 - (1) Antiochus Epiphanes, first ruler of Greece

4. Beast will appear as 8th king (head) belonging to the 7 heads
 - a. 7th head has two stages of existence
 - b. Second stage has full Antichrist manifestation
 - c. Second stage will go quickly to destruction

F. **Implications**

1. Recognize the fundamentally antigodly nature of world empires
2. All more or less evil
3. There will be another particularly evil empire

VI. **Ten Horns**

A. **Revelation 17:12–14** (NASB95) —

1. 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.
2. 13 “These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast.
3. 14 “These will wage 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.”

B. 10 kings not received a kingdom

1. Casts this part into the future
2. Will receive authority briefly
3. To identify with 10 kings as reestablished Roman empire is speculative
 - a. Could be symbolic; 10 = completeness of evil in government

C. Receive authority as kings along with beast for one hour

1. Point is that kings are not powerful in themselves, but only as associated with beast and in support of the beast
2. Regardless, close, intimate relationship between kings, kingdom and Antichrist

D. Give power and authority to beast

1. Purpose is to support the beast

E. Final conflict with Army of the Lamb is foretold, but not described until 19.17-21

F. Lord of lords and King of kings

1. Ultimate victor
2. Not alone – brings called, chosen, faithful followers

G. **Implications**

1. Encouragement – ultimate victory against world powers is assured

VII. **The End of the Harlot**

A. **Revelation 17:15–18** (NASB95) —

1. 15 And he said to me, “The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.
2. 16 “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.
3. 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.

4. 18 “The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.”
- B. Remember
 1. John was told he would see judgment of the prostitute
 2. Most of what he has seen has involved the beast
 3. Here comes a return to the woman
 - C. Harlot sits on the waters of Babylon
 1. Involves peoples, multitudes, nations, tongues
 2. Complex, international, multicultural civilization supports the harlot
 - D. Beast and 10 horns hate the harlot!
 1. Curious description of the man’s judgment of harlot
 2. Evil civilization seems to self-destruct
 - a. Beast and kings turn against the harlot
 3. They destroy the very civilization with which they are so intertwined!
 - E. Naked, desolate, eat her flesh, burn with fire
 1. Cf previous adornment of woman!
 - F. God put it in their hearts!
 1. God is sovereign, even uses evil forces to accomplish His will
 2. His agreement to give beast power to rule had purpose:
 - a. Destruction of evil civilization which had Babylon as its capitol!
 - G. Woman is the great city
 1. Capitol city of evil, ungodly civilization
 2. Ultimate influence over kingdoms
 3. Comes to destruction
 - H. **Implications**
 1. Evil brings its own result – self-destruction
 2. God’s sovereignty, even over evil, to accomplish His purpose
 - a. Why let out beast one last time?
 - b. To judge the evil civilization