The Book of Revelation

Zanesville, OH | Wednesday/Sunday Bible Study

**Chapter 17**

* **17:1-7– The Vision of Babylon the Great**
  + As chapter 16 came to an end, we were told that Babylon the great was destroyed and split in three parts. Chapters 17-19 go into more detail concerning this destruction and the reason they were destroyed.
  + **Verse 1**– One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls speaks with John and intends to show him the judgment of the “great harlot.” As will be seen over the course of this chapter and the next, the imagery of a prostitute or harlot is intended to recall a host of OT passages that deal with rejection of God and idolatrous practices (cf. Isa. 23:15-18; Jer. 2:20-31; 3:6-11; Ezek. 16:15-63; 23:1-49; Hos. 1:3; 2:5-13: Nah. 3:4).
  + The harlot is said to sit on “many waters” which is a clear reference to Jer. 51:13 which deals with the judgment to come on Babylon. John uses such wording to apply to the destruction of Babylon the Great here in Revelation. Sitting also denotes power and sovereignty.
  + **Verse 2**– The kings of the earth and the earth-dwellers are said to have engaged in relations with the prostitute and they have committed great acts of immorality. Whether this is idol worship with reference to pagan practices, emperor worship or other acts of abomination, the point is that these things are all ungodly.
  + The harlot seduces the earth-dwellers and she makes them drunk with the wine of her immorality (cf. 14:8). These acts of immorality are enticing to many and many engage in it because of its worldly pleasures (cf. Matt. 7:13).
  + **Verse 3**– John was carried away “in the spirit” (cf. Ezek. 2:2; 3:12, 14, 24; 11:1; 43:5; Rev. 1:10; 4:2) to see this judgment. He is taken to the “desert” which is an allusion to Isa. 21:1-10. The desert of 12:6, 14 is not the same one here.
  + The desert based on Isa. 21:1-10 is a place where fierce creatures and evil beasts dwell. It is associated with sin, judgment and desolation. This is further solidified as John sees the woman (harlot) sitting on a scarlet beast.
  + This beast is the same beast of 13:1 because of the description of having seven heads and ten horns. This description also ties the origin and loyalty of the beast and the woman to the dragon (12:3). The scarlet beast is full of blasphemous names as well (cf. 13:1, 5-6).
  + The scarlet color is associated with luxury, splendor and royalty (cf. Matt. 27:28). Revelation presents two women (character/position/destiny). One is the woman clothed with sun with the moon under her feet while having a crown of twelve stars on her head (12:1). She represents the faithful people of God and she is protected by God in the wilderness (12:6, 13-17).
  + She is also equated with the holy city, the new Jerusalem (11:2; 21:2, 10). She is said to be the bride of the Lamb (19:7; 21:2, 9). Everything about this woman is glorious, righteous and magnificent.
  + The other woman is the one we have seen here in this chapter. She is the antithesis of the woman clothed with the sun. This woman is clothed in earthly splendor (17:3-4) in contrast to the heavenly splendor of the faithful woman. She is also in the desert but a different kind of desert.
  + The woman here is described as a prostitute (harlot) because of what she does and how she does it. She is impure, unfaithful and detestable in the sight of God. She is equated with the great city that is destroyed: Babylon the Great (11:8; 16:9; 17:18; 18:10). She, unlike the previous woman, will be destroyed and not protected.
  + **Verse 4**– John sees the woman (harlot) arrayed in what many would believe to be luxurious and expensive material. The entire description of the woman is very physical and material leaving the reader with no doubt whatsoever about the kind of character she has (cf. 1 Pet. 3:3-4).
  + Her attire and possessions point to the economic success of Babylon the Great. She is a symbol of trade and economic success that dominate the lives of the earth-dwellers (cf. 1 Tim. 6:9-10).
  + In 1 Timothy 6, Paul argues that an obsession over money and material is directly propionate to being immoral (1 Tim. 6:11, 17). All these things his will be expounded upon more in chapter 18.
  + Purple and scarlet were two materials that were very expensive to extract and only the elite rubbed shoulders with such materials (cf. Judg. 8:26; Dan. 5:7). In John’s day the description of all these materials fit Rome very well.
  + In addition to her attire, she has a golden cup in her hand with which she intoxicates the world (cf. Jer. 51:7; Rev. 14:8). Her physical attractiveness seduces men to commit immorality with her by drinking from this cup. Everything about this woman is pleasing to the physical eye but what’s behind it is abominable and destructive (cf. Gen. 3:6; Matt. 7:15; 15:18-20; 23:25-28).
  + In contrast to this woman, the faithful woman in Revelation is clothed with fine linen which is bright and clean (19:8). She is pure and righteous and cleansed by the blood of the Lamb unlike the harlot who is impure, unrighteous and in desperate need of cleansing.
  + **Verse 5**– On the forehead of the woman is a “mystery.” This word is similar to that of 11:8 and the idea is that the name is symbolic and metaphorical. It conveys a concept. Names on the forehead in Revelation represent a person’s true character and it serves as an indication of where their loyalty lies (7:3; 13:16-18; 14:1, 9; 20:4; 22:4).
  + This is also true in this verse. The name given the woman is a description of her character and purpose. The name identifies her with Babylon the Great and she is the mother of all harlots (center for idolatry and all things corrupt and unclean). Together these things make her the abominations of all abominations.
  + **Verse 6**– John sees the woman drunk with the blood of the saints (cf. 2:13; 6:9-10; 12:11; 13:7, 15; 16:6). The saints are being killed because they do not submit to the harlot and her practices. They remain steadfast to Jesus even if it means economic failure and losing their lives (cf. 2:9-10). John is taken aback at all he sees.
  + **Verse 7**– John’s response is typical of vision of that nature. Daniel experienced something similar (Dan. 4:19; 7:15, 28; 8:27). The angel responds to John and assures him that he will make know the mystery of the woman and the beast. The angel will go into more detail about what John has been seeing.