

Slide 2

The Foundation of Idolatry – Part 1

Revelation 17:1-6

Slide 4

I. Introduction: Interpretive Considerations

1. Our entrance into chapters 17 & 18 (which should be taken as one unit), is by invitation of one of the seven angels we have read about in the just concluded bowl judgments. *This angel is revealing the apostate church throughout all her history culminating with God's judgment in the Great Tribulation before ushering in Jesus' millennial kingdom.*
2. God definitively rejected idolatry and its close cousin, covetousness (*with its practices of placing man ahead of God and therein rejecting His authority, sovereignty, faithfulness, and will*), in the 1st, 2nd, and 10th commandments found in **Exodus 20:1-6**. *Yet, the destructive roots of both run long and deep as we will discover in studying what the angel reveals to John.*
3. Babylon is mentioned 6 times through the book of **Revelation (14:8; 16:19; 18:2; 18:10; 18:21; and of course here in 17:5)** with the subject of idolatry always in view. *Some of the more important takeaways in the various passages include:*

Slide 6

- A. As we have traveled through the book of Revelation, we have repeatedly noted that Babylon's influence was brought forward into the Roman empire and her successors. *As such, we often speak of spiritual Babylon when considering the actions John describes;*
- B. It seems clear that both political-economic and spiritual Babylon are in view here in chapters 17-18;
- C. Properly identifying the various characters John introduces to the reader are paramount in our interpreting Revelation. *This means we must identify the 2 beasts, the woman, the 7 hills, and the 10 horns.* Chapter 13 aids us with understanding the

Slide 8

two beasts while there are at least 10 identifying markers of the woman found here in verses 1-6 of chapter 17.

4. Many interpreters have looked at the history of the Catholic church, including its persecution of protestants in the Reformation period (along with other good reasons), and fingered it to be the apostate church that we read of here in Chapters 17-18. Yet, there are also many good reasons to conclude that the apostate church is NOT limited to the Catholic church or even the Roman empire. There are good reasons to see Babylon as Babylon and good reasons to consider her roots of governance, philosophy, and religion when identifying the scarlet woman.
5. While I do believe the arguments for the Catholic church being at the forefront of the apostate church are reasonable, I think that is far too limiting as to Satan's designs and powers of deception. Even today we see clear signs of an apostate church in our nation and across the globe. We would be foolish to always be looking "out there" as the enemy has already planted many Trojan Horses within the walls of the church. While the Bible makes clear that Satan cannot prevail against the church, it makes equally clear that there will be a great falling away in the church as we move closer to Christ's return.
6. What's more, an argument can be made that the prophecy regarding a Babylon that will completely cease in Isaiah 13:19-20 has not yet been fulfilled. Isaiah says:

Slide 10-11

¹⁹And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, The beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, Will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. ²⁰It will never be inhabited, Nor will it be settled from generation to generation; Nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, Nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there. - Isaiah 13:19-20

- A. **Jeremiah 50 and Zechariah 5** also support the interpretation that Babylon is yet to be "uninhabited" and that there is both a near and far fulfillment of the annihilation of Babylon.

B. Further, since both Rome and Babylon were in existence in the time that John wrote this book, it is hard to make the case as to why he would he confuse the reader by calling Rome, Babylon.

7. No matter whether a renewed Babylon or a spiritual Babylon in Rome, the Catholic church, the Roman empire and her successors, and/or drawing back yet further in time to the founding of a one world governance, philosophy, and religious system, **the real issue is the deception of false religions or idolatry that God continuously warns about, yet mankind continues to pursue.**

Slide13

II. Some History

1. For most of us, when we think of Babylon, we think of King Nebuchadnezzar and Israel's exile to the land that we read about in Daniel. **And while certainly a world power in that day, the foundation of Babylon draws much further back to right after the flood.** When we follow Noah's line, in Genesis 10 (*for an interesting related read, go to **Micah 5***) we find a great-grandson by the name of Nimrod. **Nimrod was a mighty hunter and built many great city's including Babel and Nineveh (which was in Assyria).**
2. It was Nimrod that ushered in the first world-wide, fully integrated political, economic, philosophical, and religious system – a system that hated God and looks much like the system the Dragon, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet will usher in during the Great Tribulation. **Nebuchadnezzar reestablished the worship of Marduk, the chief god in the Babylonian pantheon of gods, a name that is thought to be derived from the name "Nimrod"**¹. Commentator Henry M. Morris notes it was from these roots, that ALL idolatry in all of its varying forms of philosophies and religions can be traced, including²:

Slide 15

- A. Pantheism (identifies the divine with the natural world);
- B. Polytheistic (a religion that worships multiple gods);

¹ Henry Morris, The Revelation Record, P 326

² Henry Morris, The Revelation Record, P 326

- C. Evolutionary (Evolutionists may argue with this, but it is a system that tries to explain the origin, development, and purpose of life so it qualifies as a religion that places man as the highest order of being and therein as god(s));
 - D. Animistic/Spiritistic (all things have a distinct spiritual essence or soul);
 - E. Astrological (a faith based on the influence of celestial bodies on human development and affairs); and
 - F. Idolatrous (while inclusive of all of the previously list ones, this one also a catch all for all other forms of idolatry as well).
3. All forms of idolatry deny the God of the Bible. Even many that have accepted God as Creator have denied Him as Savior and One that is intimately involved in mankind's ongoing existence.

Slide 17

III. **Closing: The Apostate Church in Our Day** (in light of both history and what John is reporting that is yet to come)

1. As noted previously, I think it likely that chapters 17-18 of Revelation present the apostate church from Nimrod's time through the time of Christ's second coming. Importantly, this is not the bride of Christ, God's church, that we are speaking of here for she was raptured at the beginning of the tribulation period.
2. Despite God's warnings regarding false religions, the clear testimony of history right up to our present day is that Satan has never stopped nor suspended his efforts to have absolute rule over the earth – and he is a master at leading people into war against God both outside and inside the 'church'. Furthermore, the clear testimony of Scripture that, even in light of the horrific judgments in the tribulation period, neither Satan nor unbelieving mankind will repent nor surrender, in worship, to the God of the Bible.
3. All this leads me to share some survey results that are quite eye opening about the Trojan Horses unmasked in the church today:

A. Survey One (2022)³:

- i. 20% of Americans say the Bible is the literal word of God;
- ii. 29% of Americans say the Bible is a collection of “fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by man”.
- iii. 28% of CHRISTIANS say the Bible is the inspired word of God, but not everything in it is to be taken literally. Only 25% of CHRISTIANS say the Bible is to be taken literally. Finally, 16% of CHRISTIANS say the Bible is an ancient book of fables.
- iv. 30% of PROTESTANTS say the Bible is literally true while 15% of Catholics hold this view. Only 50% of born-again Christians believe the Bible is literally true.

Slide 19

B. Survey Two Regarding Evangelicals (2025)⁴

- i. 53% affirm “Everyone sins, but most people are good by nature”.
- ii. 53% think that “The Holy Spirit is a force but is not a personal being”.
- iii. 47% affirm that “God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.”

Slide 21

C. Survey Three Regarding Pastors (2022)⁵

- i. 37% of ALL pastors bring a Biblical worldview into the pulpit. Fully 62% have a syncretic worldview;
- ii. 50% + of Evangelical pastors have a Biblical worldview;
- iii. 48% of Baptist pastors have a Biblical worldview;
- iv. 78% of Southern Baptist pastors have a Biblical worldview;
- v. 37% of Pentecostal or charismatic church pastors have a Biblical worldview;

Slide 23

³ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/394262/fewer-bible-literal-word-god.aspx>

⁴ <https://www.ligonier.org/posts/the-results-are-in-2025-state-of-theology-survey>

⁵ <https://www.christiantoday.com/news/shocking-survey-finds-only-half-of-evangelical-pastors-hold-biblical-worldview>

- 28% of pastors holding to a “holiness theology”, those also in the charismatic movement believing one can eventually reach a “sinless state”; and
 - vi. 6% of Catholic pastors have a Biblical worldview
4. God repeatedly warns us against and offers us the path to victory over idolatry. May each and all of us stand on God’s word. Don’t think you can’t be deceived. Don’t look the other way. Purpose to press into Jesus and not allow a beachhead for false teaching to come into your life.

[Prayer]

Revelation 17:1-6

Discussion Prompts

Don't be shy or embarrassed, this is a safe place to talk, learn, and grow. All of us should walk with an attitude of grace and Godly love in encouraging one another to contribute to our shared growth in the Lord.

For more discussion questions helping your faith to grow, please download the sermon documents typically posted the day after each sermon on the watch tab of our App or website.

1. Survey after survey indicates that the majority of churches are led by people without a Biblical worldview. Why has this become an acceptable standard? What, if anything can be done about this?
2. In a world with a loneliness epidemic (especially amongst our young adults), how can the church reach people valuing horizontal relationships over Biblical truth?
3. Come up with a list of central tenets of a Biblical worldview. Then write 3-5 sentences as to why a Biblical worldview is important. When you are writing these, consider youth, young adults, unbelievers, and baby Christians.

Revelation 17:1-6

The Foundation of Idolatry – Part 1

I. Introduction: Interpretive Considerations

Additional Scripture References: Exodus 20:1-6; Rev 14:8, 16:19, 18:2, 18:10, 18:21, 17:5; Is 13:19-20; Jer 50; Zec 5

II. Some History

- All forms of idolatry deny the God of the Bible. Pantheism, Polytheistic, Evolutionary, Animistic/Spiritistic, and Idolatrous (as a general catch all category)

Additional Scripture References: Gen 10; Micah 5

III. Closing: The Apostate Church in Our Day

- Survey says...

5-Day Devotional Revelation 17:1-6 The Foundation of Idolatry

Day 1: The Danger of Idolatry

Reading: Exod. 20:1-6, Col 3:5-10

Devotional: God's first commandment warns against having other gods before Him. In our modern world, idols often take subtle forms - career, money, relationships, or even our own desires. Paul equates covetousness with idolatry in Colossians. Today, reflect on what might be competing for God's place in your heart. Are there areas where you've elevated created things above the Creator? Ask God to reveal any idols in your life and for the strength to put Him first in all things. Remember, true freedom and fulfillment come only from wholehearted devotion to the one true God.

Day 2: The Deception of False Teaching

Reading: 2 Pet 2:1-3, Mat 7:15-20

Devotional: Peter warns about false teachers who introduce destructive heresies. Jesus taught that we would recognize false prophets by their fruits. In a world of diverse beliefs and teachings, how can we discern truth from error? The key is to know God's Word intimately and to cultivate spiritual discernment through prayer and the Holy Spirit's guidance. Today, consider your sources of spiritual input. Are they aligned with Scripture? Commit to deepening your knowledge of God's Word so you can stand firm against deception. Pray for wisdom to recognize and resist false teachings that may creep into your life or church.

Day 3: The Importance of Biblical Worldview

Reading: Rom 12:1-2, Col 2:8

Devotional: Paul urges us not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. A biblical worldview shapes how we interpret and interact with the world around us. It affects our decisions, values, and actions. Reflect on how your worldview has been shaped. Are there areas where cultural influences have overshadowed biblical truth? Ask God to help you see the world through His eyes and to align your thinking with His Word. Consider practical steps you can take to cultivate a more biblical perspective in your daily life.

Day 4: The Call to Spiritual Purity**Reading: Jam 4:4-10, 1 John 2:15-17**

Devotional: James starkly reminds us that friendship with the world is enmity with God. John warns against loving the world or the things in it. As believers, we're called to be in the world but not of it. This requires constant vigilance and a willingness to swim against the cultural current. Today, examine your heart. Are there worldly attitudes or behaviors you've embraced that are hindering your relationship with God? Humble yourself before the Lord, asking for the grace to draw near to Him. Consider what it means to live as a citizen of heaven while navigating life on earth.

Day 5: The Promise of Christ's Return**Reading: Rev 22:12-21, 1 Thes 5:1-11**

Devotional: The book of Revelation concludes with Jesus' promise to return soon. This hope should shape how we live each day. Paul encourages us to be alert and sober, living as children of light. How does the reality of Christ's return impact your daily choices and priorities? Are you living with eternal perspective? Today, meditate on the joy of Jesus' return and the hope it brings. Let this motivate you to live faithfully, to share the gospel boldly, and to eagerly anticipate the day when faith becomes sight. Pray for the strength to remain steadfast in your faith, even in the face of increasing worldliness and spiritual opposition.

Small Group Study Guide

Revelation 17:1-6

The Foundation of Idolatry

Opening Prayer: Pray for the Lord to lead your discussion and to help you all learn.

Key Takeaways: Query the group for takeaways first...you may stay with one or more of those.

1. Idolatry has deep historical roots, tracing back to Nimrod and ancient Babylon.
2. The apostate church, as described in Revelation 17-18, represents false religious systems throughout history.
3. Modern forms of idolatry include various philosophies and religions that deny the God of the Bible.
4. There's a concerning trend of declining biblical literacy and worldview among Christians today.

Discussion Questions: Did the Holy Spirit prompt any questions with you? Start with those.

1. What stood out to you most from the sermon? Why?
2. The sermon mentions various forms of idolatry (pantheism, polytheism, evolution, etc.). Can you think of modern examples of these in our society?
3. How would you define idolatry in your own words? What are some subtle forms of idolatry that Christians might struggle with today?
4. The sermon presents survey data showing a decline in biblical literacy and worldview. Were you surprised by any of these statistics? Why or why not?
5. How can we as believers guard against false teachings and maintain a strong biblical worldview?
6. The sermon warns against always looking "out there" for the enemy's influence. How might Satan be planting "Trojan horses" within the church today?
7. What role does regular Bible study play in combating idolatry and false teaching?

Practical Applications: Query the group for applications first...you may explore one or more of those.

1. Self-Reflection: Take some time this week to examine your own life for any subtle forms of idolatry. Are there things you prioritize above God?
2. Bible Study: Commit to reading and studying a passage from the Bible each day this week, focusing on God's character and His warnings against idolatry.
3. Worldview Check: Review the survey questions mentioned in the sermon. How would you answer them? If needed, seek out resources to strengthen your biblical understanding.
4. Accountability: Partner with someone in the group to discuss and pray about areas where you might be vulnerable to false teaching or idolatry.
5. Church Engagement: Consider how you can become more involved in your church's teaching ministry or small groups to help promote biblical literacy.

Closing Prayer: Encourage group members to reflect on Exodus 20:3-6 (the first and second commandments) throughout the week as a reminder to keep God first in their lives.

Discussion Questions

Revelation 17:1-6

The Foundation of Idolatry

4. How does the concept of spiritual Babylon relate to modern forms of idolatry in our society today? What are some examples you see in your own life or community?
5. Why do you think God repeatedly warns against idolatry throughout Scripture, and how can we be more aware of subtle forms of idolatry in our lives?
6. How does the history of Babylon, from Nimrod to Nebuchadnezzar, inform our understanding of false religious systems and their impact on society?
7. What are your thoughts on the survey results showing a decline in biblical literacy and belief among Christians? How might this trend affect the church's ability to discern truth from falsehood?
8. How can believers guard against the influence of the 'apostate church' while still showing love and compassion to those who may be deceived?
9. In what ways might the prophecies about Babylon's destruction in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah relate to end-times events described in Revelation?
10. How do you interpret the various forms of idolatry mentioned (pantheism, polytheism, evolutionism, etc.) in light of biblical truth? Which do you think are most prevalent or dangerous today?
11. What role do you think pastors and church leaders play in combating false teaching and maintaining a biblical worldview within their congregations?
12. How can individual Christians develop and maintain a strong biblical worldview in a culture that increasingly rejects absolute truth?
13. In light of the warnings in Revelation, how can we balance being aware of spiritual deception without becoming paranoid or judgmental towards others?

Dinner Conversation Starters

Revelation 17:1-6

The Foundation of Idolatry

1. Idolatry and Modern Life

The sermon discusses how idolatry is repeatedly warned against in the Bible. What are some modern-day forms of idolatry that you think we might encounter in our daily lives? How can we recognize them and stay true to our beliefs?

2. The Role of Babylon in Revelation

The sermon highlights Babylon's influence throughout history. How do you think the historical actions of Babylon relate to the challenges we face today in staying true to our faith?

3. Interpreting the Bible

Different surveys mentioned in the sermon reveal varied beliefs about the Bible's interpretation. What do you believe about the Bible being the literal word of God, and how does that belief influence your daily life and decisions?

4. Identifying False Teachings

The sermon warns against false teachings infiltrating the church. How can families work together to discern and protect against false teachings affecting their faith and family life?

5. The Importance of a Biblical Worldview

The sermon shares statistics about pastors and their worldviews. Why do you think it's important for individuals and church leaders to have a strong, biblical worldview, and how can we support one another in maintaining or developing this perspective?

Family Conversation Guide for Children & Early Teens

Revelation 17:1-6

The Foundation of Idolatry

AGES 5-7: SIMPLIFYING THE MESSAGE APPLICATION POINTS

1. **Understanding Idolatry**: Teach children about the concept of putting anything above God. Use simple examples like valuing toys or screen time more than family or prayer time.

Discussion Question: What happens when we care more about our toys than spending time with mommy and daddy or praying?

2. **Good Choices**: Encourage kids to make choices that align with kindness and sharing, demonstrating love as taught in the Bible.

Discussion Question: How can we show love and kindness to our friends at school or on the playground?

3. **Role Models**: Identify positive role models, such as biblical figures or family members, who prioritize love and kindness.

Discussion Question: Who do you think is a great role model, and why do you admire them?

AGES 8-12: BUILDING UNDERSTANDING APPLICATION POINTS

1. **Identifying False Influences**: Discuss the importance of recognizing influences that might lead us away from good behavior or beliefs, both in school and online.

Discussion Question: What are some things at school or online that might try to distract us from what we believe is right?

2. **Making Wise Decisions**: Teach decision-making that reflects biblical teachings, especially when interacting with friends or social media.

Discussion Question: How do you decide if something you see online is good or not, and who do you talk to about it?

3. **Understanding Scripture**: Explore Bible stories together to help children understand their faith's foundations and the importance of staying true to them.

Discussion Question: Can you share a Bible story we learned and what it teaches us about making good choices?

AGES 11-15: DEEPENING THE CONNECTION APPLICATION POINTS

1. **Digital Discernment**: Discuss the dangers of idolizing online personas or content and teach critical thinking when engaging with digital platforms.

Discussion Question: How can we ensure we're not letting social media or influencers become more important than our values and faith?

2. **Peer Influence and Faith**: Encourage teens to maintain their faith and values when facing peer pressure and discuss ways to stand firm in their beliefs.

Discussion Question: What are some ways you stay true to your faith when friends are pressuring you to do something different?

3. **Developing a Personal Faith**: Support them in exploring their personal beliefs, encouraging regular prayer, and participation in faith-based activities.

Discussion Question: How do you feel your faith helps guide you through difficult situations, and how can we support you in this journey?

Tips for Parents

- Be patient and listen: Give your child time to think and respond.
- Relate to everyday life: Use real-life examples and stories familiar to your child to make abstract concepts more tangible.
- Encourage questions: Let your son or daughter know it's okay to ask questions, even if things don't make sense right away.
- Share personal insights: Tell a personal story about a time you experienced these themes, adapting as needed for age appropriateness.

Family Conversation Guide for Gen Z

Revelation 17:1-6

The Foundation of Idolatry

1. Navigating Digital Idolatry

Biblical Principle: Exodus 20:3 — "You shall have no other gods before Me."

Application: Encourage Gen Z to reflect on where they spend most of their time and energy online. Whether it's social media influencers or online games, anything that takes precedence over their relationship with God can become an idol.

Scenario: When choosing between spending hours scrolling through social media or engaging in personal devotion, challenge yourself to set limits on digital consumption and prioritize time with God.

2. Building Strong, Faith-Based Relationships

Bible Principle: Proverbs 27:17 — "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."

Application: Promote the formation of friendships and relationships that challenge each other to grow spiritually and morally. Be intentional about seeking and nurturing connections that are grounded in shared faith values.

Scenario: During times when friends encourage choices that contradict your beliefs, seek opportunities to discuss your faith openly and use it as a foundation to influence the group positively.

3. Critical Consumption of Information

Bible Principle: 1 Thessalonians 5:21 — "Test everything; hold on to what is good."

Application: Encourage Gen Z to critically evaluate the media and information they consume, distinguishing between truth and deception, particularly in digital spaces where misinformation is rampant.

Scenario: When encountering a viral trend or controversial post, research its origins, discuss it with trusted mentors or peers, and pray for discernment before forming an opinion or participating.

4. Embodying Christ-like Love in Diverse Settings

Bible Principle: John 13:34-35 — "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

Application: Prompt Gen Z to reflect Christ's love in all their interactions, regardless of the setting or the nature of the relationship.

Scenario: In diverse group settings, engage others with kindness and respect, actively listening and being open-minded, while also confidently sharing your faith perspective when appropriate.

These points aim to empower Gen Z to live out their faith genuinely and courageously in various aspects of their daily lives, reflecting Biblical integrity, compassion, and steadfastness.