

## Revelation Chapter 17-18

### An Interpretation

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#### Introduction:

In the last chapter we came to the end of time, so what does this chapter describe? It must be a amplification or expansion of something that already happened.

The word “Babylon” is reintroduced. We met Babylon in 14:8 and 16:19. Now we are going to look at the details of God's judgment on it.

(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."

Verses 1-2: Note that the angel speaks of the events here as in the past. Committed acts. Were made drunk. We are looking at some details of the great battle that Satan lost and the Lord won.

**Great:** in earthly power and glory, as well as wickedness.

#### Hinds:

As the three chapters of this section describe the fall and desolation of Babylon in detail, the only conclusion that seems appropriate is that they explain what was said to have occurred when the seventh angel poured out the seventh plague. (16:17-21.)

The woman here is the great harlot and is in contrast with the pure Bride of Christ. One is called Babylon and the other is Jerusalem. The focus here is on Babylon.

## Hinds:

In verse 15 the "many waters" are explained to be "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues." Since the apostate church is also called "Babylon the great," the image may have been drawn from the fact that the ancient city was situated upon the Euphrates and encompassed with many canals. (Jer. 51:13.) These waters sustained the city; the city controlled the waters. In like manner the nations supported the apostate church, and the papacy ruled the nations.

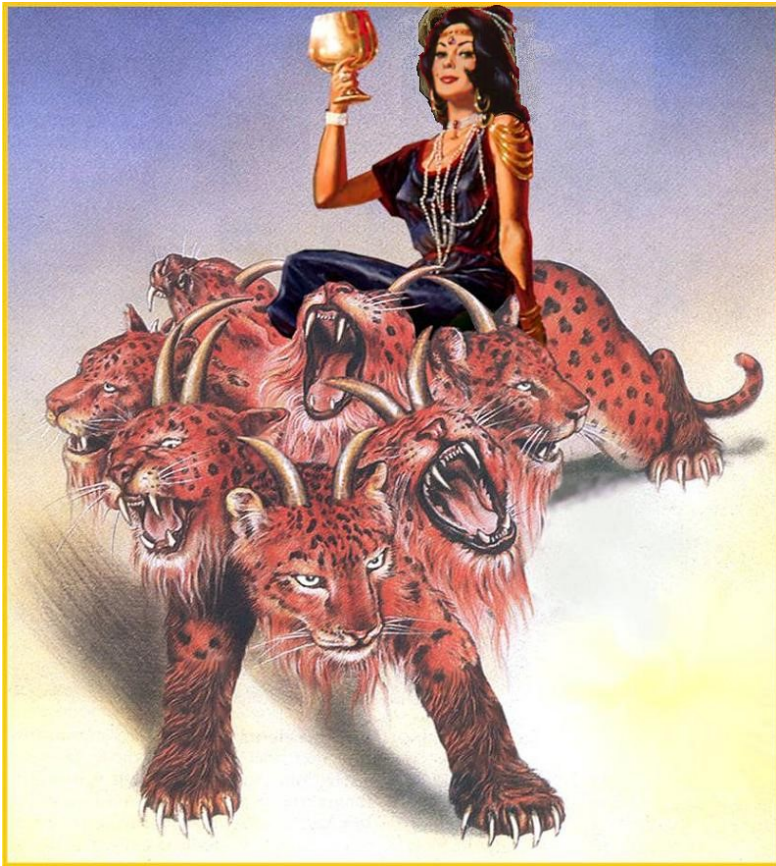
An unfaithful wife typically represents an apostate church — those once God's people, but who have corrupted themselves with idolatry and human doctrines. . . . The reason for the final rejection of the corrupt church is its idolatry and perversion of the truth. It is appropriately described, like the same sin among ancient Israel, as harlotry. This horrid sin is the disgusting symbol by which unfaithfulness to God is presented.

**Kings** here, doubtless, are to be taken literally, meaning that the rulers, representing the nations, were influenced and made the mediums through whom the perpetuation of these false doctrines could be made effective. To "commit fornication" means to practice the false teachings, and such people were affected by these practices as a drunk man is by wine. Intoxication by false doctrines is more deadly than that by wine. It not only dulls the senses, but closes one's eyes to the truth.

We might add that intoxication wears off while false doctrines such as Calvinism (developed outside of Catholicism) can last a lifetime.

**Discussion:** Why do we find it difficult to combat untrue religious teaching?

**(2) 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.**



Verse 3: John saw the woman sitting on a scarlet beast. She was allied with the beast, at that time the Roman Government. The rider is in charge of the beast and it did what it was told. The false religion controlled the government. However the government seemed religious enough, but John called their claims blasphemy.

**(3) 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,**

Verse 4: **The woman** was enormously wealthy. If **the woman** is the *Roman Church*, its value in 1965 was placed at \$10

billion to \$15 billion by *Time* magazine.

While the **immorality** is very real, the symbol probably points to idolatry, a common figure of speech in the Old Testament.

**(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."**



Verse 5: Messages on the forehead have happened before in Revelation. See 7:3; 14:1 and 14:11. We get pictures of these two groups of people - the followers of man's thinking who have the name of the beast on their forehead, and the followers of Christ who have the Father's name on their forehead. In Roman times, if a slave escaped and was recaptured, he would be branded on his forehead. Even in our own age, some cultures use a mark on the forehead. Take for example the red dot (bindi) worn on the forehead of Hindu women.

**(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.**

Verse 6: The woman stays drunk with the blood of the saints. Persecution of God's people is non-stop.

**(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.**

Verse 7: The woman captured John's attention at first, so the angel unfolds her future. In fact, it includes the future of the beast as well. God knows their future.

**(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.**

Verse 8: Jesus was seen, then was not seen (as viewed from earth) and arose again, so the **beast** who hates him is seen, then is not seen, then arises, destined for eternal **destruction** instead of everlasting rule.

### **Hinds:**

The word "abyss" refers to the abode of Satan (see 9:1, 2), and here the thought is that, when the beast returned in a new form, its power and presence should be attributed to Satan—that is, he would be the cause of its existence and the source of its power. The encouraging fact is here stated that this beast power would be destroyed, but when is not mentioned.

**James Smith** summarizes by saying:

The harlot must be respected; because of her evil, she must be hated, because of her attractiveness she must be feared; and because of her record she must be shunned.

**(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.**

Verse 9: *The New Living Translation* reads,

**This calls for a mind with understanding.**

The meaning was not transparent, but could be understood by those willing to expend the effort. The parables of Jesus were like this, too. Matthew 13:11-12.

**Discussion**: How might the reader have a mind of understanding?

**Hinds**:

The appearance of a drunken harlot sitting on the beast was to show the close relationship of the religious and political powers, and indicates that the apostate church was controlling the state, and operating through the means it supplied.

**(11) "The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction.**

Verse 11: The scarlet **beast** was, but is no longer. This is a replay and expansion of the story as revealed previously. The beast was headed for destruction instead of ruling.

**(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.**

Verse 12: **Ten kingdoms** will arise briefly, but their rule does not last.

**(13) "These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast. (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."**

Verse 13: The main purpose of these 10 kingdoms is to give power to the beast. But this will fail.

Verse 14: In battle, the Lamb wins because there is none greater in the universe. Those in His army have been **called** by the **Lord**; they have responded and remained true to Him.

**(15) And he said to me, "The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.**

Verse 15: A definition emerges: **waters . . . are people, multitudes, nations and tongues.** Not literal seas.

**(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.**

**(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.**

Verses 15-16: The kingdoms will turn against the great religion force and destroy her.

**(17) "The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth."**

Verse 18: The **woman** was really **the great city** of Babylon and we read next of it's total collapse.

## Chapter 18

(1) After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory.

Verse 1: This is the next event in the winning sequence.

### James Smith:

The harlot of chapter 17 was attractive and seductive. She lured people into the worship of Satan. To counter her influence, God dispatches this angel who shines with greater glory and speaks with a more compelling voice.

(2) And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.

Verse 2: The angel comes to reassure believers of the announcement made in 14:8 that **Babylon**, with all its glitz and glamour, is slated for destruction.

**Babylon** is an alternate name for the woman, the great prostitute. She has fallen. All she has left to rule are the worst imaginable people. This stands in contrast to the coming holy city in Revelation 21.

(3) "For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality."

Verse 3: The kings and merchants have had affairs going on with the woman. As a result, they have become wealthy. In the short term, this seemed productive.

Discussion: Is stock value our measure of success?

(4) I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; (5) for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.

Verse 4: This is the seventh and final time for the idea of **"Come Out of her my people."** Isaiah 48:20, 52:11, Jeremiah 50:8-9, 51:6-8, Zechariah 2:6-7 and 2 Corinthians 6:17-18. They were not told to fit in and try to influence the people of Babylon. God was through with it because of the next verse.



Verse 5: Blocks of sin were stacked to the heavens. They may not have been punished in this life, but a time was coming for God to remember this unforgiven sin.

(6) "Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her.

Verse 6: *New Living Translation* reads: **Do to her as she**

**has done to others. Double her penalty for all her evil deeds. She brewed a cup of terror for others, so brew twice as much for her.**

God's payback is to be double for ignoring Him and making life miserable for God's people.

(7) "To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, 'I SIT as A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW, and will never see mourning.'

Verse 7: The self-evaluation of Babylon was that she was a **queen** and always would be a **queen**.

(8) "For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is

**strong.**

Verse 8: The fall of Babylon was sudden because God's judgment is **strong**. He may be slow to act, but his judgment is powerful and certain. That's because God is **strong**.

(9) "And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, (10) standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'

Verses 9-10: The kings of the earth cried **Woe, Woe** — this is a word used by one who laments. Here the word is doubled, showing this is a terrible **woe**.

**James Smith**: The kings of the earth consorted with the

harlot. They committed the fornication of idolatry with her. The kings lament Babylon's fall for they lived wantonly with her, i.e., shared her luxury. They profited from participation in her evil system. The ascending smoke reminds one of the fate of another great commercial city, Sodom. The picture is one of the utter ruin of the society of worldly luxury that once been considered so great.

(11) "And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more—(12) cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, (13) and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives.

Verses 11-13: Twenty nine items of trade are listed, all of them illustrating the luxury in which Babylon lived. Even **humans** are on the cargo list. The **merchants mourn** because the markets for their wares are gone. There has been a financial crash.

(14) "The fruit you long for has gone from you, and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you and men will no longer find them. (15) "The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, (16) saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls; (17) for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!' And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance, (18) and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What city is like the great city?'

The *New Living Translation* is very informative:

(14) "The fancy things you loved so much are gone," they cry. "All your luxuries and splendor are gone forever, never to be yours again." (15) The merchants who became wealthy by selling her these things will stand at a distance, terrified by her great torment. They will weep and cry out, (16) "How terrible, how terrible for that great city! She was clothed in finest purple and scarlet linens, decked out with gold and precious stones and pearls! (17) In a single moment all the wealth of the city is gone!" And all the captains of the merchant ships and their passengers and sailors and crews will stand at a distance. (18) They will cry out as they watch the smoke ascend, and they will say, "Where is there another city as great as this?" (19) "And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!'

Verses 14-19: Boom has turned to bust. The merchants were not concerned primarily about Babylon; they were concerned about their lost profits.

(20) "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her." (21) Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer.

Verse 20-21: This huge financial crash was a cause of rejoicing to the **saints, apostles and prophets**. It was **God's** judgment on the wicked and the **heavens** knew about it. The **saints** are the church as a whole, the **apostles** are its authoritative spokesmen and the **prophets** were widely dispersed among the churches to reveal the will of God to the church while the written word was coming into being. The **judgment** was actually pronounced for the believers.

- Babylon disappears from view.

(22) "And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer; (23) and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery.

Verses 22-23: Babylon's culture is destroyed as her musicians are gone. Her commerce is destroyed as no craftsman can be found. Her home life is destroyed.

(24) "And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth."

Verse 24: The fall of Babylon will be a vindication of God's people and a cause for celebrating in heaven.