

**4/24/22 “Seduced by the World”
Revelation 17:1-18**

Welcome...

What’s the greatest danger you face? Heart disease? Cancer? Traffic or other accidents? Crime? Natural disaster? Terrorism?

In some countries, people might answer: Economic collapse, political upheaval, or war. These can all bring physical pain and death. But there is a greater danger we all face – much more deadly than any of these.

The New Testament character of Demas exemplifies this danger. In Colossians 4:14 and Philemon 24, Paul sends greetings from Demas, whom he calls a fellow worker. Demas was a companion of Paul’s – some might say a disciple. Paul wrote Colossians and Philemon while under arrest, so Demas had the courage to stay with Paul when things got tough. We don’t know how long Demas had been with Paul prior to his passing along these greetings, but afterwards he remained by his side for several years: at least three, perhaps as long as eight years. Paul refers to him one more time, in his last letter, 2 Timothy. Paul writes 2 Timothy from his final imprisonment – the imprisonment that ends in his execution. And he writes these sad words in 2 Timothy 4:9-10:

“Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he has loved this present world, has deserted me.” 2 Timothy 4:9-10

Demas loved this world. And after years of being with Paul, after years of being discipled by Paul – he deserts him.

Friends, the greatest danger you face is being seduced by world.

In Revelation 17 the world is introduced to us as a harlot, a prostitute named Babylon. We’ve been introduced to Babylon already. In 14:8, one of three angels preceding the final bowl judgment declares: “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her immorality.” Revelation 14:8

Then in chapter 16, when God’s wrath is completed through the pouring out of the seventh bowl, John once again records Babylon’s demise: “The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.” Revelation 16:19

So, in a sense, chapters 17 and 18 describe in detail why the seven bowl judgments of chapter 16 are necessary and, in particular, how Babylon will fall. Babylon is a city, but it is also a system. It represents a final godless, humanistic, and worldwide religious system that is void of God. In the same way we might refer to “Wall Street” to describe the entire American financial system, Revelation uses the word “Babylon” to refer to the Antichrist’s end-time religious/political/economic empire and she is a harlot who seduces many in the world, but she will ultimately be destroyed.

Let’s read about it now in Revelation 17...

Our text begins by explaining the great harlot, Babylon the great, will lead the kings, the rulers of the world, into immorality. The image is one of spiritual adultery and idolatry. Not only does she seduce the leaders of the world, but she also seduces common people - verse 2 says “those who dwell on the earth,” are drunk with the wine of her immorality. The lust for power, material stuff, sex, and pleasure has intoxicated the world! No one under the sun has escaped her enticing allurements. The prostitute has captivated their hearts and taken over their lives.

As 1 John 2:15-17 warns, “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.”

All of God’s plans for history from beginning to end have one goal: worship God! Don’t worship the prestige of the world, don’t worship the prosperity of the world, don’t worship the power of the world, don’t worship the pleasures of world, and don’t even worship the holy messenger who brings you the news that Babylon has fallen forever. Instead, worship God and do His will!

So, the main point of our text is this: In Revelation 17 we see the true nature of the world, its alluring system of corruption, and its future judgment.

Our outline has three points:

First in verses 1-6 we will see The World Described.

Then in verses 7-15 we will see The World Demystified

And third, in verses 16-18 we will see The World Destroyed

God tells us through John that the world is doomed to destruction so that we stand guard are not seduced by the world, and instead we worship and obey God.

My prayer is that as we study this passage, you will evaluate your own heart and ask: Do I worship God with all my heart? Do I find my salvation, my security, my hope, my pleasure, and my satisfaction in the Lord Jesus Christ? What steps will I take to not be seduced by the world and instead to know Christ and make Him known?

Let’s begin with:

I. The World Described

Verses 1-2...

The fact that one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with John connects the judgment of the harlot with the final seven bowl judgments of chapter 16.

The harlot in John’s vision sits in a position of authority and sovereignty like a king on his throne on or beside “many waters.” Cities in ancient times were usually located near a source of water, either the ocean, a river, lake, or spring. That was true of Babylon, which was located on the Euphrates River. Just as the proud capital of the Babylonian Empire took her seat beside many waters, so also will the Babylonian harlot city of the future.

Many of the greatest cities in the world, ancient cities like Tyre and Sidon, modern day cities like New York, Los Angeles, Hong Kong, are port cities because of the ease of commerce and trade.

Verse 15 tells us...

The harlot will not merely influence, but will dominate all the unredeemed peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues of the earth. The harlot’s authority will be universal; the entire world will be committed to the false worship of the Babylonian system, rather than the true God.

Look back at verse 2 “With her the kings...”

Rulers from around the world will become obsessed with the Babylonian harlot. Deceived by the false prophet, Antichrist, and Satan and his demon hosts, they will become enamored with the false world religion. But having joined themselves to the harlot, economically, socially, militarily, politically, and religiously, they will share her disastrous fate.

Verse 3: “Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert.”

Isaiah and many other prophetic books in the Old Testament use the desert as a picture of the judgment of God - sterility and fruitless deeds of darkness which Paul discusses. Nothing eternally good comes from this system of wickedness; it is the absence of God’s blessings and of life.

Revelation 17:3-5...

She is seated on a scarlet beast. Both the beast and the woman are scarlet, a vivid, lurid color, which reminds one of the shedding of the blood of the saints and prophets. The beast, the Antichrist, a tyrant, who has consolidated power into a worldwide geopolitical and military system.

Sitting on the beast, the woman shows either that she is riding the beast where she wants it to go, like she is in charge, or that the beast is supporting her and enabling her to do the things she wants to do. The latter is a better fit, because in verse 16, the Antichrist rises up and eats her flesh and burns her up with fire after using her for his own purposes.

Verse 3 says the beast, the Antichrist, is covered with blasphemous names, indicating that he openly embraces blasphemy. He demands to be worshipped as God, and he defies the true and living God, so he is blasphemous. Like the dragon, Satan, in the vision in Revelation 12, the Antichrist has seven heads and ten horns. These represent the different kingdoms and nations that come together to make the beast’s empire, and it also represents the total harmony between Satan, the Antichrist, and the wicked world system together.

The Antichrist supports the woman, enabling her to live a lifestyle of luxury, power and comfort. Look at verse 4...

Her garments are purple and scarlet, symbols of wealth. In John’s day, purple dye was obtained from the secretions of mollusks - snails and clams - native to the Mediterranean Sea. Four species in particular give off a purple dye; it would take approximately 8000 of these small aquatic sea creatures to make a single gram of purple dye. Thus, purple cloth was extremely expensive and almost exclusively reserved for royalty and nobility- the wealthy and powerful in every nation. In addition, she is glittering with gold, precious stones, and pearls. She is holding a golden cup in her hand, a picture of wealth.

She is drinking from the golden cup, a picture of ease and pleasure as she reclines on the beast. The cup is filled with abominable things and the filth of her adultery. She is drunk with illicit pleasure.

Revelation 14:8 told us, “A second angel followed and said, ‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.’” She is drinking the wine that gives insanity. Since the word adultery is used, we can see her reclining at a raucous feast, getting drunk on wickedness, living out a life of pleasure and ease and immoral, sensual excess, especially sexual.

In verse 5, she has a mysterious title written on her forehead, proclaiming her identity to John and through him to us, to the world. “Mystery. Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the Earth.” The word “mystery” refers to the special spiritual insight you need to understand this vision. Her identity and activity in the world are a spiritual mystery, hidden from us unless God reveals it.

Verse 5 says the woman's name also involves "mystery." In the New Testament, a "mystery" is a hidden truth that was concealed but is now revealed to those with spiritual discernment. For example, In Ephesians 5 marriage is called a mystery for it only when we are in Christ do we see that marriage is to be a picture of Christ and His bride the church. In this case in Revelation 17, the mystery has to do with Babylon. Her true character and identity of the woman, previously kept concealed, are now objects of clear revelation.

Babylon is the essence of human rebellion against God, begun in Genesis 10 by the son of Cush who name was Nimrod. Nimrod was known as the first mighty man and hunter, and he founded the City of Babel. Just an interesting fun fact, when I was deployed with the Navy and flying missions in Europe, we often worked with the British anti-submarine warfare aircraft called the Nimrod (since then the aircraft has been decommissioned).

The name Bab-el means "the gate of God." The famous tower of Babel in Genesis 11 was an idolatrous attempt by man to defy God and elevate themselves and show their own greatness. When the Lord sent judgment on the builders by making mankind's one language into many, the word bab-el came to mean "confusion."

Verse 6....

The woman is drinking a mixed wine of adulteries and immoralities and illicit pleasure, but also the blood of the saints and prophets, the followers of Christ, whom she hates. The faithful saints of God will not join in her immorality, so she heaps abuse on them and take pleasure in seeing them killed, getting drunk with their blood.

The Romans were an example of this: they delighted in watching defenseless Christians be ripped to shreds by wild animals or killed by Gladiators; they could not get enough of it.

John's reaction to this is seen at the end of verse 6...

John stands in utter amazement; he marvels, he is surprised; he underestimates the wickedness of this woman, Babylon the Great. Let me apply this to here today: ask God to show you immediately with eyes of faith this world we live in, what it will look like on Judgment Day, to warn you away from this corrupting influence of the world.

We have seen the world described in verses 1-6. Now will see:

II. The World Demystified

Verse 7...

In response to John's confusion and amazement, the angel asked, "Why do you wonder?" There was no need for John to remain puzzled by the relation of the beast to this beautiful yet bloody woman in the vision.

In verses 8–14 the angel gives John a lengthy description of the beast. He is explaining to John the relationship between the harlot and the beast, which had mystified the apostle. However, the angel needed first to give him further details about the beast.

The beast that John saw is the Antichrist, the satanic ruler of the last and most powerful empire in human history, who will serve as Satan's instrument to attack Israel, persecute believers, who tries to conquer the world for Satan, and oppose Christ. He is described as one "who was, and is not, and is about to come" again. This description contrasts with the divine Christ, "who is and who was and who is to come" from heaven to rule forever (Revelation 1:8).

Verse 7 ...

Seven heads refers to seven world empires that stood in opposition to God and His people—five that were in John’s past (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece), one that existed in John’s present (Rome), and one that will arise in the future (empire of the Antichrist).

Verse 8...

The beast “was” (i.e., “existed in the past”) and “is not” (i.e., does not at the time John is writing exist in the world of the living) and “is about to come up out of the bottomless pit.” Back in 11:7, we are told he will arise from the abyss, the bottomless pit.

All this is true because he had been put to death but was expected to return to life soon. He appears in 13:3 as one with a mortal wound (“as though slain unto death”), whose deathblow had been “healed” (13:3, 12), that is, he had “the wound of the sword but came to life” (13:14).

The response of the non-Christian world (we are told in the middle of verse 8 those not recorded in “the book of life,”) to non-Christians this remarkable recovery is worshipful amazement (they “will marvel,” v. 8d; 13:3) at what appears to be a supernatural recovery.

The career of the beast will seem wildly successful until he turns his satanic-inspired hostility against the returning Christ. And as we will see in Revelation 19, His defeat at that point will be swift and overwhelming.

In verses 9-13 the beast’s heads are “mountains” in that they show the woman’s location, but they are “kings” in that they characterize the Antichrist’s role and that of others associated with him in that role.

Seven heads means seven world empires that stood in opposition to God and His people—five that were in John’s past (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece), one that existed in John’s present (Rome), and one that will arise in the future (empire of the Antichrist).

The seven mountains is a way to equate the grandeur of a city with the grandeur of Rome. So, Constantinople was regarded as a city on seven hills, as were other cities in the ancient world. It is uncertain whether this means the capital city of the Antichrist will have seven literal hills.

Verse 11...

The Antichrist, who is one of the preceding kings, is also an “eighth.” This may refer to the two phases of his rule—before his marvelous “death and resurrection” (the “seventh” king) and after this astounding feat when Satan turns his local political career into a global empire (as the “eighth” king).

Verses 12-13...

Ten political powers that will unite to empower the Antichrist. The reference to one hour is a figure of speech that emphasizes the brevity of their rule; their reign will be short-lived because their master’s empire itself will be short-lived. During their brief reign, they will be unanimously devoted to Antichrist; they will have one purpose, and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will do his will, and his will alone.

Verse 14....

Verse 14 is an interjection that anticipates the 2nd Coming of Jesus described in 19:11-21. It is also a simple summary of Armageddon (16:16) and the final battle. The beast and his kingdom, in a spiritual suicide mission, attack the Warrior Lamb, the Lamb who is also a Lion! It is no contest. The Lamb will conquer them. Why? Because “He is Lord of Lords and King of kings.” The title is well known looking back to Deuteronomy 10:17; Psalm 136:2-3; Daniel 2:47. It is a title reserved only for God.

When Christ returns as King of kings and Lord of lords to overcome the beast and the kings of the earth, He will be accompanied by “the called and chosen and faithful.” This same group is called the “armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean” Revelation 19:14. The New Testament commonly uses the terms “called,” “chosen,” and “faithful” to describe saints, so these are likely the resurrected and raptured believers returning with Christ to the earth at the battle of Armageddon.

We have seen The World Described in verses 1-6, The World Demystified in verses 7-15, and finally

III. The World Destroyed

Look at verses 16-18...

Antichrist’s alliance with the false religious system will not last. Eventually the ten horns (the ten kings) and the beast (Antichrist) will hate the harlot. Having used the false religious system to help the Antichrist gain control of the world, Antichrist will discard it. He will want the world to worship only him. He will turn on the harlot and will make her “desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire.” That graphic language of extreme violence is used to make clear that Antichrist and his henchmen will completely obliterate the false religious system.

Yet the ten kings’ unity of purpose (mentioned already in v. 13) will not originate from solely human intent but is prompted by the sovereign God who controls the events of his world, even the actions of evil, God-opposing powers (v. 17).

In verse 17 the angel makes this clear by repeating the key word from v. 13, the word “purpose” two times, showing that the unified purpose that the ten kings will execute will be God’s intention.

God’s power is behind the destruction and consolidation of the evil empire. As always, Satan is the instrument of God’s purposes. The one-world unification government so long sought by the humanists will have finally arrived, only to be destroyed in one great act of divine judgment. All prophecy of Christ’s return and the setting up of His kingdom will be fulfilled completely.

In closing, what does this passage have to say to us today? The world has an influence even today on the way that you think and live — the way you think about money, time, your profession, your future, marital relations. Satan still attempts to seduce people, including Christians, to believe the world has more to offer more than Christ does. He will attempt to seduce you like He did to Demas, and I the enemy does it in four ways, four temptations that you must be on guard against:

1. Prestige

Those of us in such places must constantly refer back to the apostle Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 1:20, “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” The world’s wisdom, and the acclaim that comes from aligning with the world’s wisdom, should not be our goal.

Instead of desiring to be prestigious in the eyes of the world, we should pray to be strategic. We should emulate our Lord Jesus Christ, who cared nothing for fame and power, and who gave everything He had to strategically advance His kingdom for the glory of the Father.

2. Prosperity

Notice verse 4....

There is allurements in all of her wealth. It is not wrong to be rich, but it is wrong when you are full of greed. Look at 1 Timothy 6:6-11...

Like Demas who left the faith because the lure of wealth, verse 10....

3. Pleasure

In verse 4, the harlot's cup is full of pleasures. Are you tempted to by pleasure? Do you have a price which you are willing to pay? If you are promised the greatest amount of pleasure, what will take for you to compromise? Satan has really deep pockets and he is willing to pay for you to leave your first love.

In Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis, an older demon advises a younger demon about tactics of temptation. On the topic of normal physical pleasure, Screwtape says to his nephew Wormwood, "Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on enemy territory. I know we demons have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, it is God's invention, not ours. God made the pleasures: all our research so far has not enabled us to produce a single one. All we can do is encourage the humans to take the pleasures which God has produced, and to seduce man to indulge in them at times, or in ways, or in degrees, which He has forbidden."

Look at Proverbs 6:23-26 with me....

The harlot takes a small payment from her victim but as an adulteress she steals away his very life and he is reduced to a loaf of bread.

If you want real pleasure, go to Jesus and drink from the fountain of living water. You want true joy, repent of your sin and trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. Psalm 16:11, "You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever."

4. Power

If you love your life more than faithfulness to God, then you will do whatever it takes to have control and power.

In Matthew 4:8-11, Satan took Jesus to a high place where He could see all the kingdoms of the world, offering Him all of the power and splendor of earth. Why would this matter? Jesus had just been proclaimed the Son of God, the one who would inherit the whole universe. So what was the big enticement?

Satan, with cunning subtlety, tempted Jesus to compromise "Why do you have to wait for what is rightfully Yours? Why go through the humiliation of the cross and sacrifice Your life when You can have it all now?" All Satan asked in return was for Jesus to compromise and bend the knee to the devil.

It seems insignificant, but that is Satan's deceptive way. If Jesus had succumbed, He would have done nothing less than sell His soul to the devil, all for the sake of power and glory now without the suffering and sacrifice that would lead to our salvation.

If Jesus had fallen for this temptation, He would have been disqualified from being the King of kings and the Savior of the world. Instead of the mob at the cross crying, "He saved many. Now let Him save Himself!" Satan would have cried, "He saved Himself. Now He can't save any!"

So, like the other temptations in Matthew 4, Jesus quoted the infallible Word of God, beginning with "It is written." And Satan fled from Him, defeated.

In the wilderness, Jesus showed us that all who believe in His name and embrace Him as Savior will have strength to defeat the enemy. When faced with any temptation, we must remember that the way through is to flee from it and submit to Christ, proclaiming to ourselves and our enemies, "It is written." 1 Corinthians 10:13....

Which of these four temptations (prestige, prosperity, pleasure, power) is most seductive to you? Talk to your community group about these so they can pray for you, and you can develop a battle plan.

Let's pray...