

# Revelation 17

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[ 0 : 00 ] This passage is Revelation chapter 17, verses 1 through 18. Would you please stand with me in honor of the reading of God's word? Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.

And he carried me away in the spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.

The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality.

And on her forehead was written a name of mystery, Babylon the Great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations. And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

When I saw her, I marveled greatly, but the angel said to me, Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her.

[ 1 : 27 ] The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will marvel to see the beast, because it was, and is not, and is to come.

This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated. They are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen.

One is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come, he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was, and is not, it is an eighth, but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction.

And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast.

These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. They will make war on the lamb, and the lamb will conquer them, for he is lord of lords and king of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.

[ 2 : 43 ] And the angel said to me, The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute.

They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind, and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.

And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth. This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, God. You may be seated. Thank you.

Good afternoon to you. Thank you. In the year that Paul Sims was born, 1964, a revival swept through our humble holiness church.

And from that revival, from that move of God, there are three of us who are in full-time ministry as pastors, others in Kansas City and other places who have walked with the Lord for many years.

[ 4 : 05 ] We're glad that the Lord still moves in wondrous ways, his wonders to perform. May that be in Chicagoland in general, the South Side and Hyde Park specifically.

Let's pray. Lord, we love you, and we thank you for this opportunity that's before us. May you be glorified through the proclamation of your word is our prayer. In Christ's name, amen.

I begin this afternoon's message with a question that I would like for us to ponder. What is it that John and Jeremiah have in common?

And let me just qualify what I'm saying. Please bear in mind that my reference is to the biblical writer, John, but my reference is not to the biblical writer, Jeremiah.

Huh? It's to a Jeremiah of our day. Jeremiah Wright, if you will. For years, Jeremiah Wright was the pastor at Trinity United Church of Christ, not many miles from here.

[ 5 : 23 ] About a year ago, he rose to national prominence because of video clips that were shown of his preaching.

Preaching that dared to critique, some would even say criticize, some of the policies of our nation. What did John and Jeremiah Wright have in common? Their preaching exposed and critiqued the existing powers of their day.

Jeremiah's, Jeremiah Wright's preaching got him in hot water. And so did John's. As a matter of fact, if you were to look in chapter 1, verse 9, this is what you would read.

I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and in the kingdom and patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos.

[ 6 : 26 ] John, why were you there? On account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Critiquing the powers of the day. One of John's critiques of the ruling powers of his day was that it was in the same vein as beastly God-defying powers of history.

These God-defying powers that demanded loyalty and allegiance that was reserved for one.

God and God alone. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.

In all your mind. And with all your soul. Huh? The book of Revelation exposes Satan as the spiritual force behind the beast-like persecuting powers.

[ 7 : 38 ] Not just of John's day, but behind the beast-like persecuting powers of history. Huh? The beast was and is a member of Satan's core team.

A core member of his anti-Christian team that opposes the Lord's people on earth. Other members of that team include anti-Christian religion.

The false prophet. The, the, and, and, and, and that promotes anti-Christ philosophies and the prostitute that comes into focus of our day. So, as we think of core members of Satan's team.

The beast. False prophet. And the prostitute that we see today. Let me ask you a question.

Whose team are you on? Huh? While the beast of history represent organized antagonism against God's people.

[ 8 : 49 ] And the false prophet represented organized efforts that support these beastly regimes. The game of the prostitute is a little different.

Huh? Huh? It is different. But the game of the prostitute is equally deadly. Huh? The beast uses the force of hand.

Measures like fiery furnaces. And lion's dens. And all various forms of persecution against the people of God. That has been the tactic of the beast down through the years.

But what about the prostitute? What does she use in the game? She, the prostitute uses subtle anti-Christian seduction and deceit.

And guess what? The beast and the prostitute represent different sides of the same coin that's in the hand of Satan.

[ 9 : 54 ] And the goal of Satan with both sides of the coin is the same. Attack the woman's seed. The community of faith. Hinder the advance of God's kingdom.

Trip up God's people. Divert the attention and the worship and the allegiance of God's people and the world. That's the agenda.

Of Satan's core team. It always has been. And even so in our day. Those forces are at work in the world.

And will be. Until the world as we know it moves on. Huh? I want you to notice with me as we look at chapter 17.

That there's some continuity between chapter 16 and 17. We notice that. Look at chapter 16 and verse 19.

[ 10 : 53 ] Where we see that the judgment of Babylon the great is mentioned there. And this is what it says. Read with me. The great city was split in three parts.

And the cities of the nations fell. And God remembered Babylon the great. To make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath.  
She who offered the cup with a various mixture of things to the peoples of the world. God is offering her a cup. And yet it's a cup of his fury.  
And a cup of his wrath. Chapter 14 and verse 8 speaks. This is another passage that speaks of Babylon. Another angel.  
A second followed saying. Fallen. Fallen is Babylon the great. She who made all nations drink of the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.  
[ 11 : 54 ] Huh? The Babylon spoken of in chapters 14 and 16 is the focus of chapters 17 and 18 that will be on next week.

But looking at chapter 17 and we're not going to be involved in getting bogged down in the details. But there are some certain things that I want to proclaim on this afternoon as we look at this marvelous yet rather difficult chapter.  
Huh? Look at chapter 17 and verse 1. We've seen these angels before. One of the seven angels who poured out the seven bowls of wrath in chapter 16.  
That angel appears. Look there. Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, Come and I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who was seated on many waters.  
[ 12 : 54 ] The mission of this angel was to show John the judgment of the great prostitute. The noticeable pattern of judgment from chapter 16 to 17.

It goes from general, on the one hand, this judgment that is coming against the world to specific. And John, as it were, clicks on a specific entity that is being judged in chapter 17, which is Babylon the great or otherwise the prostitute.  
The chapters that follow, as we'll look at and see in 19 and 20 and on into those chapters, those that follow, it shows the judgment of God against Satan and his team.  
These great enemies of God and of Christ and his people. We see their judgment in the chapters that follow. But this is the first of the great enemies to fall.  
Babylon bites the dust. Chapters 17 and 18. The beast and the false prophet meet their fate in chapter 19. And the dragon, Satan, is judged in chapter 20.

[ 14 : 07 ] Just think, as John's audience hears this letter being read in their hearing, they are seeing the judgment of God against the enemies of the people of God throughout the ages.  
Their fate is coming. Their day is coming. They may be active and busy. But their day is coming. Huh? What about Babylon? Huh? The angel's words to John introduce the vision. But similar words introduce another vision.  
And again, helping us to see the contrast between these two visions helps us to zero in and get a greater understanding of what John is doing, of how the Lord led him here in these chapters. Similar words introduce another vision that we see. Turn over to chapter 21 in Revelation.  
Revelation. And we get to see another city.

[ 15 : 13 ] And the city that we see there stands in contrast to the city that we see in Revelation chapter 17. We get a closer look here.  
And again, looking at this city helps us in our analysis of Babylon. You see that in chapter 21, verse 9. Then came one of the seven angels.  
And notice the same players doing similar things. Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me saying, Come, and I will show you the bride, the wife of the lamb.

Can you hear the contrast? Bride versus what? Prostitute. Huh? And he carried me away in the spirit just like he did in chapter 17 to a great high mountain.  
High mountain versus a wilderness in chapter 17. And showed me, notice what he's saying, the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven.  
[ 16 : 25 ] Contrast there. And we'll see when we get to chapter 21, the beauty and the glory and the purity of that city versus the city that we're taking a look at today in chapter 17.

Another city depicted as a woman, a beautiful, pure bride was not a prostitute, but she is the wife of the lamb versus the prostitute of the beast.  
Purity, but that's not what we see in chapter 17. U-G-L-Y is what we see there.  
I did spell it right, didn't I? Ugly. Ugly is what we see. Huh? What we see there is quite unflattering.

Huh? The wording in verse 1, chapter 17, great prostitute. Doesn't take much imagination to paint a picture of such a person or even such a city.

[17:43] Huh? She's seated on many waters. The waters here symbolize people and nations. The verse includes two groups, huh?

That are influenced by the prostitute's charms. Those that she had immorally engaged with. The kings of the earth, you see them there?

Rulers is what's in view. And then the dwellers of the earth. Those who have been intoxicated with her charms. And with whom, verse 2, the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality. And with the wine of whose sexual immorality, the dwellers on earth have become drunk. She's influenced them. They're under her charms.

It is if she had gotten a bottle of Jim Beam or some other kind of liquor. And they were under the influence of her charms.

[18:45] Men, you know how that might be when you fell in love with your wife and she had you charmed and just about could lead you on because of her charm.

You were intoxicated. Hope you're still intoxicated with the one that you are married to. Okay, watch those elbows. Don't hit them this afternoon. But this prostitute had the kings, the rulers, and the dwellers on the earth.

They were under her charm. What might it have been that was it that attracted these kings of the earth and the dwellers of the earth to her?

She had something that they wanted and had lured them accordingly. So we see here as we look on down, Babylon is exposed for who she is and what she is.

This Babylon, we first of all, she's exposed as a prostitute that is marked for judgment. An immoral woman, a woman of the world that seduces and charms and entices others to engage in immoral conduct with her.

[19:54] And again, this is not talking about a physical sex act. Nonetheless, she is a temptress in the broad scope of her influence. Her customer base is broad.

We see that she's also, notice this lady, she is in partnership with the beast and Satan. They're on the same team. Satan is their leader.

She's sitting on the beast, which indicates a certain amount of sovereign control or collusion there being exerted. The color of the beast is akin to the color of the red dragon and the beast's seven heads and ten horns.

Again, we see Satan like, so they're all on the same team. They're in it together. Beast carries the prostitute. The prostitute sits on the beast. They're in it together.

She wows the earth dwellers. Organized rebellion against the beast and his forces against the lamb are overthrown. We see that on down in the chapter. But here she is.

[20:57] Her clothing, scarlet and purple, gold and pearls. Her dress, the jewelry and the clothing fit those who are in the business of seduction.

In her hand is a cup that others are drinking for. Her identity is reinforced by what's on her forehead, written on her forehead. Babylon, the great mother of prostitutes.

The earth's abominations. Again, so she's sort of like the mother. There are other kinds of the same kind that are in the earth realm. The fact that this woman is on Satan team makes her agenda the same as he is, the same as the beast.

The destruction. The wooing of the saints. She's exposed in verses 15 through 17 as a rejected prostitute.

The fate of this seductress is interesting, but it's not really surprising, is it? The picture is one where her lovers don't earn her. God is behind her overthrow and he uses those she used to do his bidding.

[22:08] A composite picture. This one known as Babylon the great. An immoral woman. She's a prostitute.

So what is symbolized? Just give me, I'll give you a few comments from various commentators that really help us to identify exactly what's going on here and who this prostitute or what this prostitute symbolizes.

The prostitute symbolizes the seductive appeal of a worldly economic system driven by the quest of affluence and pleasure.

It indicates the world as the center of industry, commerce, art and culture, which by means of all these things seeks to entice and to seduce the believer.

That is to turn him away from God. It symbolizes the concentration of luxury and vice and glamour of this world. All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the sinful pride of life, the vainglory of life.

[ 23 : 19 ] Those are her wares. Represents the world as the center of anti-Christian seduction at any moment in history, including our day.

And the harlot always opposes the bride, the bad girl, as it were, posing. The good girl.

Counterfeit church that seduces the world to allegiance to the counterfeit trinity. The dragon, the beast, and the false prophet.

That's what's in view here as it relates to Babylon and her depiction as a prostitute.

The things of the world. The desire for things and power and position and recognition. And guess what, friends?

[ 24 : 17 ] They beckon us. They call us. They lure us. And they are ready to destroy us. And you and I, even in our day, must recognize these things for what they are.

Here, John, in this vision, it's a vision that both exposes these things for what they are, and through them and in them, the readers of that day and the hearers of this day, we are warned about these very things that oppose, that call us, and even oppose us.

The vision, while exposing the world for what it is, also warns the people of God through the ages. It amounts to a warning to the church not to compromise with the system.

Not to compromise. I mean, we see the similar message in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. The message to the churches in that day. They were not to compromise. They were not to bow down to this world system.

And they were challenged and warned about Jezebel and other kinds of things that would cause them to compromise. It's a similar warning that we hear about Babylon of old.

[ 25 : 41 ] And just allow me to turn with me to Jeremiah chapter 51 and verses 11 through 14, page 680 in your pew Bibles. Like Babylon of old, Babylon of John's day was marked for the judgment of God.

And we hear this judgment that Jeremiah the prophet, and this is Jeremiah the prophet here in the Bible, issued against Babylon of that day.

Look at verses 11 through 14. Sharpened arrows. Take up the shields. The Lord has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes because his purpose concerning Babylon, notice, is to destroy it.

For that is the vengeance of the Lord, the vengeance for his temple. Set up a standard against the walls of Babylon. Make the watch strong. Set watchmen.

Prepare the ambushes. For the Lord has both planned and done what he spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon. Oh, you who dwell by the many waters.

[ 26 : 51 ] And again, you hear the same language in Revelation chapter 17. Rich in treasure, your end has come. The thread of your life is cut.

It's over. The Lord of hosts has sworn by himself. Surely I will fill you with men as many locusts, and they shall raise the shout of victory over you.

Next week, you will hear in chapter 18 just the various connections of Babylon. How many people and different people are affected by what happens in her and how her fall impacts them.

Just as the judgment of God fell upon Babylon of old, the Babylon of John's day would be the target of judgment as will the Babylon in our day, the Babylon of the end times.

And again, this is not talking about a geopolitical kind of entity. Rather to compromise would make them the target of the judgment of the system.

[ 28 : 00 ] So the people and people of our day are not to compromise because those who compromise, they also become targets of judgment. John writes in one of his epistles, chapter 2, verse 17 of his first epistle, The world is passing away along with its desires.

But whoever does the will of God abides forever. And none of us has immunity from the subtle charms of this world.

Climbing in bed with the world is spiritual adultery. And this kind of attack from Satan is designed to defile us and to render us unfit for the Lord's service and purposes for us in this world.

As a prostitute seduces, so Babylon seduces people away from the worship of the true God. And there are many things, brothers and sisters, that pull us away from the kind of worship that our great

and awesome God deserves.

And those who follow that kind of path do so to their own demise. To embrace Babylon and what she stands for is to embrace a system that is marked for God's judgment.

[ 29 : 29 ] That is what John wanted his hearers to hear and to realize, to see that and to understand that. To allow their lives to be governed accordingly.

But on the other hand, to be a follower of Christ is to be on the winning side. And verse 14 of the chapter emphasizes that.

Look at that. Commentator William Hendrickson considers this great verse to be the theme of the entire book. And it's hard to argue with it. Listen to what that verse says.

They will make war on the Lamb and the Lamb will conquer them. These enemies that we see there, this coalition force that we've talked about.

It's the coalition force that we see in chapter 16. It's the coalition force that we see in Psalm 2. The kings of the earth rising against Christ. They will make war on the Lamb.

[ 30 : 28 ] This Lamb of God that was slain for your sins and mine. But notice what the Lamb will do. The Lamb will conquer them. The forces that are aligned with the beast and the false prophet and the prostitute.

For he is Lord of Lords and King of Kings. He is sovereign over all so-called lords and so-called kings and rulers of the earth. And notice those who are with him.

That's you and me. Are called and chosen and faithful. Our allegiance must be to the one who called us and chose us, not another.

Where is your allegiance? Who do you line up behind? No matter how attractive the alternatives may seem, our allegiance is to belong to him. And we must be faithful in our commitment to the very one who shed his blood for us.

Is that where your commitment lies? Huh? May God give us the kind of strength, the vision to see who our enemies are.

[ 31 : 43 ] Courage and the strength to resist them for his glory and for his honor. Join me in prayer even as we prepare to come to the Lord's table on this afternoon.

Lord, we love you. And we celebrate you. And we give thanks to you.

For you and you alone are God. You are the Lamb of God that was slain for the world.

You are the very bread of life that has come down from heaven. And you gave your life for us.

Lord, praise you for those who by faith have embraced you and received your blood as an atonement, as a wrath-averting sacrifice for them.

[ 32 : 47 ] And as we come on this afternoon to your table, pray, Lord, that we would come to be nourished and come to be strengthened.

And as we think on all that you have done for us, as the Lamb of God that was slain from the foundation of the world, may we embrace all that you are.

And may we stand against all of the forces that are aligned against you in this world. Beastly forces. Lord, and those who promote the agenda of the beast.

Those who advance in the seductive kind of agenda in this world. May we stand strong for you, is our prayer.

In Christ's name. Amen. Trust that your hearts are prepared for this. Amen.