

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

“The Great Harlot”

Revelation 17:1-7

Introduction

1. The destruction of ecclesiastical Babylon is recorded in this chapter. It comes as a relief and delight to all the earth. The next chapter deals with the political demise of Babylon. Judgment is the crux of these chapters.

2. Both religion and politics play major roles in the closeout of the purpose of God prior to the millennium (17:2, 5, 18; 18:1-3). The combination of these two today should cause suspect.

3. Babylon was originally built by Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-10; 11:1-9). Nimrod was the son of Noah through Ham and Cush. Tradition relates that Nimrod married Semiramis the First, who was the priestess of the Babylonian mystery religion and the first high priestess of idolatry. This became the fountainhead of every pagan and heathen system in all the earth.

4. Semiramis bore a son whom she declared was miraculously conceived and born! He was hailed as the promised deliverer. This is the Tammuz mentioned in the Bible (Ezek. 8:14). Here began the concept of the mother and the child, a mystery form of idolatry, since only initiated were allowed to know the mysteries. God says all of this was intentional idolatry (Rom. 1). This was Satan’s effort to delude men from the truth of the virgin birth and our Lord.

5. These ideas have swept across the world with different names and forms, but the same base. The idea of the queen of heaven with the babe in her arms is popular all over the globe. The Phoenicians had Asheroth and Tammuz, but the Egyptians had Isis and Horus; the Greeks had Aphrodite and Eros, and Italy had Venus and Cupid. Other items known only to the initiates included the idea of purgatorial purification after death, salvation by sacraments and priestly absolution, sprinkling of holy water, and weeping for Tammuz for 40 days prior to the festival of Ishtar, who was supposed to have received her son back from the dead! The egg was sacred to Tammuz for it represented his resurrection. The evergreen was a symbol of his birth in the winter solstice (about Dec. 25) when a boar’s head was eaten (Tammuz was supposed to have been killed by a wild boar and later resurrected) and a yule log was burned with many mysterious observances. The first letter of Tammuz’ name was symbolized by the sign of the cross and indicated a life-giving principle.

6. The importance of all these facts is that it was this Babylonianism from which Abraham was called to separate (Gen. 12:1). Jezebel was involved in this (1 Kings 18-21). It ruined the two kingdoms of Israel and forced them into captivity. Baal was the Sun-god, the life-giving one, and is identical with Tammuz! It was this same system which held sway when our Lord came. The mysteries of Babylon had spread. It ultimately got to Italy under the Etruscan Mysteries. The chief priests of Rome wore miters shaped like a fish in honor of Dagon, the fish god, the lord of life, a form of Tammuz which the Philistines had developed (Judges 16:23). The chief priest was named Pontifex Maximus. Julius Caesar held this title as did all Roman emperors down to Constantine, who was both head of the church and the state. Later it became a title of the Roman bishops only and finally for the Pope. Hence, the leader of the Roman church is a successor of the fish-god Dagon and he wears the fisherman’s ring, an idolatrous symbol.

7. It is this system, along with the obvious movement for church-federation under the name ecumenicalism, which is the issue of this chapter! The current overriding issue is the charismatic movement which prides itself with its inclusivist achievements. This organizational union which is developing is a total monstrosity. It is a combination of saved and unsaved. It is Babylon all over again in a modern dress. It includes Romanism, liberal and apostate Protestantism, apostate Judaism, and the pagan religions of the world, along with the sects and cults. It is the “in thing” to be a part of the conglomerate. To be “born again” is now popular. These present trends ought to sharpen the

views of the true children of God to the state of things. We ought to be alive to the issues and ever vigilant that we stand in separation from this massive idolatrous movement. However desirable outward unity may be, it cannot be established at the expense of the truth of God!

8. It is this chapter which provides God’s judgment of this system of idolatry and irreligion. The great harlot (v. 1) is nothing but the ecumenical hodge-podge of the last days. It is the religious system which claims to be the bride of Christ, but in fact it is a whore, a harlot! It demands God’s lethal judgment (v. 1). That it will receive. Study for yourself the record:

1. The OUTREACH of the harlot vv. 1, 15

The harlot is pictured as “sitting” on the waters. This is her position as the verb connotes. The “waters” are identified as peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues (v. 15). Hence, the vast multitudes of the earth have followed the train of the harlot. If ever there was a verse in the Bible which supports the dictum that the majority may be wrong, this is it! The true church of Christ is a remnant. God always works with the few (Matt. 13).

2. The COMPLEMENT of the harlot v. 2

The phrase “kings of the earth” must refer to a technical group (1:5; 6:15; 17:8; 18:3, 9; 19:19; 21:24). The inhabitants of the earth surely refer to those associated with the earth-dwellers. These are people who do not belong to heaven! The key word of the verse is “fornication.” It denotes that the false religion of the world has consorted with the political powers. There is an unholy relation here for the sake of existence and they cooperate to such an extent that they are drunk.

3. The SUPPORT of the harlot v. 3

The harlot “sits” (present tense) on the beast (13:1). Hence, the anti-christ provides the financial, political, and military protection for the harlot. The wilderness here is the moral desert—it is fruitless! The power of false religion will be supreme over the political powers. Apparently, this is the first 3-1/2 years of the Tribulation. It should be noted that the whole body of the beast is covered with blasphemy! It shows the utter idolatry of the whole system!

4. The WEALTH of the harlot v. 4

This is noted by the royal purple, the attractive scarlet, and the jewels of gold and pearls gained from religious traffic. The gold cup which the system has to offer is full of abominations and filthy fornication! It is spiritual discernment which can see the difference between this popular form of religion and the true flock of God!

5. The MYSTERY of the harlot v. 5.

Here is the lure of the people: mystery! False religions are loaded with this. Roman harlots wore badges with their names on their brows. So here. What a name! This woman has mothered a thousand abominations which are everywhere upon the earth. It must be remembered that this is God’s view of the harlot. Man accepts her, but God rejects her. She is a total abomination to the Lord! For those who foster the ecumenicalism of the day, take heed—listen to God’s evaluation of the system!

6. The ACTIVITY of the harlot v. 6

The ecumenical movement is charged with the death of saints and of martyrs of our lovely Lord! John’s contempt is his response of wonder (a cognate accusative construction). When the ecumenical movement and its cohorts support rebels world-wide or immoral homosexuals in the U.S.A., check it out in your notebook—they fulfill all that God has written! The true church has never been promised acceptance (John 16:33). What a contrast with the happy “evangelical” of today who delights in his merry-go-round experience with everyone clapping hands for him!

Conclusion The full interpretation is yet to come (vv. 7-18). In the meanwhile, is there any word for the true child of God from all of this? Yes! Here it is: “come out of her my people” (18:4). This is the call for separation unto the Lord and His truth (2 Cor. 6:11-7:1). The only place for a true believer is “outside the camp, bearing His reproach” (Heb. 13:13). That is where He is! Let’s stand with Him! Amen.