

Suburban Bethlehem Lutheran Church & School
Revelation Bible Study
Chapter 17

Introduction (1:1 - 3:22)

(Including Seven Letters to the Seven Churches - preparation / call for repentance)

The Inaugural Vision of Heaven, Introducing the Message (4:1 - 5:14)

The Prophecy (6:1 - 16:21)

(The three sevenfold visions with an interlude of the cosmic war)

The Conclusion: The End and the New Heaven and New Earth (17:1 - 22:5)

1. The Judgment and Overthrow of the Forces of the Dragon (17:1 - 18:24)

a. The Judgment of the Harlot (17:1-18)

b. The Fall of Babylon and the Rejoicing of the Saints (18:1-24)

2. The Victorious Celebration (19:1-21)

3. The Judgment and Overthrow of the Dragon (20:1-10)

4. The Bodily Resurrection and the Last Judgment (20:11-15)

5. The New Heaven and New Earth Portrayed as the Heavenly City Jerusalem (21:1 - 22:5)

Epilogue (22:6-21)

Introduction

- We have now come to a major shift in the book of Revelation. Previously we have seen the three sevenfold visions of the events to take place between the Ascension of our Lord and His return. We have witnessed a growing degree of pain and persecution that will be present for the Lord's faithful. We have also seen, as one part of each of the sevenfold visions, a picture of the End.
 - o Remember that up until now we have actually seen four visions of the End:
 - Revelation 6:12-17
 - Revelation 11:15-19
 - Revelation 14:14-20
 - Revelation 16:17-21
- Now, in these 5+ chapters at the end of this wondrous Revelation, we see one last extended vision of what the End will be how Christ will triumph over His enemies, how those who are faithful to Him will be protected, and how the New Heaven and New Earth will be beyond expectation. This will draw to conclusion the entire prophetic vision and message of Revelation and of all Scripture. The words of Hebrews 1:1 are very appropriate here: "In many and various ways God spoke to His people of old by the prophets but now in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son." There will be no more revelation after Revelation for there is no need for any. We have all that we need until the return of Christ! Amen, Come Lord Jesus!

The Great Prostitute sitting on many waters (17:1-2)

- One of the angels shows this to John. Most likely this is one of the seven angels that were the messengers to the seven churches (chapters 2-3) and were also the ones who carried out God's judgments through the seven bowls.
- The Prostitute takes us back to the Dragon and his two beasts in chapters 12-13. The first beast - the beast from the sea - was the beast that the Dragon would use through

political and human institutions to wreak havoc and persecution upon the Lord's Christ and His Church. The beast from the earth is the beast the Dragon uses through spiritual / religious institutions, ideas, etc. that wreak havoc upon Christ and His Church. This beast (unlike the beast from the sea) changes / morphs through Revelation until it finally represents false Christianity and the apostate church - the most deadly form of the religious beast.

- The Old Testament is full of references connecting idolatry and adultery. For a prime example of this, read Hosea 4:10-15. Unfaithfulness to the Lord (the "husband" of Israel) was viewed as prostitution. (Of course, this imagery was assisted by the fact that many false gods in OT times would "commune" with their worshipers through the temple/shrine prostitutes - both male and female.)
- This prostitute counters the woman in Revelation 12 - first depicting the Virgin Mary and then all those who are faithful to Christ (the true Church).
- The prostitute sits "upon many waters" - probably a reference to Jeremiah 51, where Babylon is viewed as the city "upon many waters" (most likely a reference to the Euphrates River and the series of canals in ancient Babylon).
- Perhaps in our sophisticated world we haven't lost the connection between idolatry and adultery. The imagery still holds sway upon us (see Ephesians 5, for example, of the picture of Christ - the Bridegroom and the Church - His Bride). And as a prostitute can *appear* attractive and the results are horrible, so the attractions of false / pseudo-Christianity appear wonderful, the results are devastating to true faith and life in Jesus Christ. Think of any examples?
- "The inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries." No nation, no people's group, no language is exempt.

Various aspects of the prostitute (17:3-6)

- In the desert
 - o Remember where did the woman flee while under persecution from the Dragon in Revelation 12? The desert!
 - o Could it be that the prostitute is here pictured in the desert to symbolize how the false Church will attempt to portray itself as the true followers of Christ?
- Seven heads / ten horns - all bring us back to the beast from the earth (Revelation 13:1)
- Scarlet - most likely because, in the culture of John's day, this may have been representative of the Roman government. Government serving as the tools of the false Christian message....hmm, where have we seen this before?
- Covered with blasphemous names
- Dressed for seduction
- Tooled with weapons for seduction "golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries."
- Named "Babylon the Great" / "The Mother of Prostitutes" - reminiscent of Babylon being the enemy of Israel in the OT
- Drunken stupor on "the blood of the saints, those who bore testimony [what a martyr/witness says] to Jesus"
- John's reaction? "astonished" Why? Ultimately Scripture doesn't answer that question.

The Angel's Explanation (17:7-14)

- These are types of all the enemies of God's saints and His witnesses.
- The beast and what it represents come and go in one form or another throughout the entire period from Christ's ascension up to the End at Christ's return.
 - o Those who are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life will be astonished to see the beast come and go in various forms.
- Special wisdom
 - o Seven hills easily reminded John and the first century Christian of Rome - no special wisdom needed there.
 - o Special wisdom comes into play to see the connection between ancient Babylon and Rome. For us this special wisdom is to help us understand what all this means for us in our earthly pilgrimage.
- Seven kings, five fallen, more coming, the beast himself an eighth king
 - o Commentators have tried for centuries to nail down a list of the kings / authorities and governments. This is a futile exercise.
 - o This is a terrifying symbol that represents all earthly powers and dominions and rulers that exercise tyrannical authority under the pretense of divine sanction of some kind or another.
- Ten horns / ten kings without a kingdom
 - o All forms of earthly government and authority to make war against the Lamb
 - o Even though it saddens us and irritates us when the Christian Church and her message are attacked....but it shouldn't surprise us! The Dragon has only one true religion and message to attack - all the others are pointless and useless.

The Lamb overcomes (17:14)

- This should never be overlooked or forgotten! (See also 1 Corinthians 15:24)
- Notice these beautiful words: "Called" - "Chosen" - "Faithful" Which word gives you the most comfort in troubling times? Why?

The Ultimate Demise of the Prostitute (17:15-18)

- The cohorts of the prostitute turn on her and bring her ruin and destruction. Note that this is accomplished as "God has put it into their hearts" to do this.
 - o This isn't the first time God has used an evil / sinful empire to accomplish His will and then, when His purpose is completed, He brings someone else in to wipe that empire off the political map. Consider ancient Babylon being conquered by Persia.
 - o Where / how do we see this happening today?
 - o What comfort is given us?

Reminder:

- 1) Email your questions to Pastor Bill: billm@deeplyrootedtogrow.org
- 2) You can access these study guides on the church website. Navigate under "Ministries" to "Bible Studies" to the download page for the Revelation study.
- 3) We will put Revelation on hiatus when we reach September 12 as we begin "Discovering God's Vision for Your Life" on Spiritual Gifts. We will resume Revelation later this year.

