

REVELATION 17-18

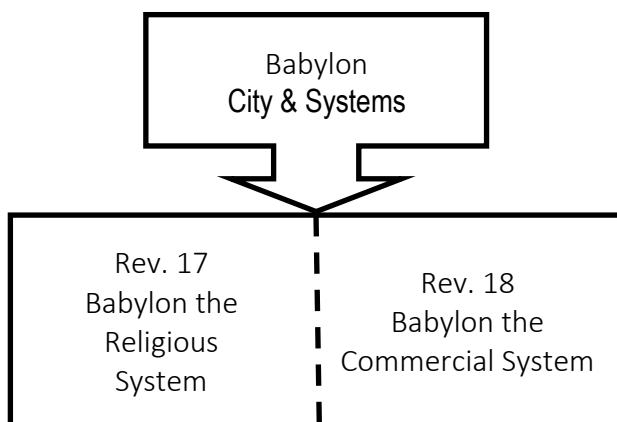
Chapter 17 marks a new turning point in Revelation. Chapters 17 to 19 record the ultimate victory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapters 17-18 do not advance the revelation chronologically, but they add details. Chapter 17 focuses on the religious system that God identified with Babylon in Scripture.

Chapter 18 is on the commercial system. This chapter records the account of the fall of Babylon and its empire and the economic downfall of the world.

Chapter 19 will present the celebration of the wedding of the bride and the Lamb.

The name Babylon the Great appears in both chapters 17 and 18 (17:5; 18:2). Babylon is not just the name of a city in the Middle East, but it is also a name that symbolizes the chief characteristics of that city throughout history, which were both a religious system as well as a commercial system.



- A. **And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: (Revelation 17:1)**

One of the angels of Chapter 16 reveals to John the destruction of Babylon and the final consummation of the wrath that John saw prophetically poured forth. So from Revelation 17 through to 20:3, John is shown additional details concerning aspects of the bowl judgments and their recipients.

The great whore is associated with Babylon (Rev. 17:5, 18; 19:2). The prophets foretold the judgment which would come against Babylon (see also Isa. 13, 14, 47; Jer. 50, 51).

In the case of the prophesied destruction of Babylon, the near-term prophecy was fulfilled in the capture of Babylon by Cyrus (Dan. 5:30-31).

But Babylon has never been destroyed as predicted by the far-future prophecy of Isaiah's and Jeremiah's prophecies. Babylon will be judged because it has corrupted the earth with her fornication and shed the blood of God's servants (Rev. 17:6; 19:2).

She is the "great whore" [*pornes tes megales*] in the sense that she will play a dominant role in spiritual idolatry throughout history. She is great also because she is the Mother of Harlots (17:5), implying she is the source of false religions.

The great whore is also Babylon. The connection between Babylon and immorality is quite obvious (14:8). The great whore is the personification of spiritual fornication and idolatry (cf. Isa. 23:15-17; Jer. 2:20-31; 13:27; Ezek. 16:17-19; Hos. 2:5; Nah. 3:4).

The phrase – "many waters" – has two possible meanings. It could mean that Babylon is a place where there are many waters (Jer. 51:13).

The phrase could also mean "peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues" (Rev. 17:15). This speaks of both her influence and support, which has now extended throughout the world.

Babylon, therefore, dominates humanity. In other words, Babylon is a system that dominates the world and leads it away from God in pursuit of a perverted religion.

B. With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. (Revelation 17:2)

The "kings of the earth" are world leaders who personify kingdoms. They committed fornication with Babylon by uniting with the system she symbolizes. The angel compares this to drinking wine, which is intoxicating as well as exerting a controlling influence on the people.

C. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. (Revelation 17:3)

The angel carried John away in the Spirit to a wilderness. This wilderness may refer to: (1) the desert near literal Babylon; (2) it may be an anticipation of the desolate condition of the harlot.

The description of this animal is similar to the Antichrist in 13:1. The woman sat in a position of control over Antichrist, and he supported her.

The fact that the woman is riding the beast and is not the beast itself signifies that she represents ecclesiastical power as distinct from the beast which is political power.

The scarlet-coloured beast is full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. (Rev. 17:3; see also Rev. 13:1). These same heads and horns were seen upon the great red dragon that empowers the Beast (Rev. 12:3). The seven heads are seven

mountains and seven kings (Rev. 17:9-10). The ten horns are ten kings (Rev. 17:12 cf. Dan. 7:7, 20, 24).

D. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: (Revelation 17:4)

The woman’s clothing was purple, symbolic of royalty, and scarlet, representing luxury (17:3; cf. Matt. 27:28; Mark 15:17, 20; John 19:2, 5). Her ornaments included gold, precious stones, and pearls; these are jewellery that made her look like a queen.

The cup in her hand added to her royal appearance, but it contained idolatrous abominations. So, the woman seduces with her beauty and her wealth.

E. And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. (Revelation 17:5)

Her name was...

- “MYSTERY,” that is to say something not previously revealed but now made clear. This means that the identity of this woman is unknowable by man until it is revealed by God.
- BABYLON THE GREAT, which is a description of her wickedness and evil character.
- MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. The woman has the reputation of being an adulterous fornicator.

RELIGION (as of 2020)	NUMBER
Christians	2.382 billion (31.0%)
Roman Catholics	1.375 billion
Protestants	600-700 million
Orthodox	260 million
Anglican	85 million
Muslims	1.907 billion (24.9%)
Hindus	1.161 billion (15.2%)
Buddhists	506 million (6.6%)
Chinese folk religionists	394 million (5.6%)
Sikhs	26 million (0.3%)
Jews	14.7 million (0.2%)
Atheists	1.193 billion (15.58%)

- F. **And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration. (Revelation 17:6)**

This woman had drunk the blood of believers, the saints generally and witnesses to Jesus Christ specifically. This system had destroyed true believers and rejoiced in their deaths.

- G. **And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns. (Revelation 17:7)**

The angel promised to interpret these revelations that so puzzled John, particularly the mystery concerning the woman and the beast.

- H. **The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. (Revelation 17:8)**

The beast is Antichrist (13:1-3). Paul gives us the four phases of the life of the beast.

- **WAS** – His original political appearance and rise (Dan. 9:26-27).
- **IS NOT** – His death by a mortal wound (Rev. 13:3).
- **WILL ASCEND** – His miraculous recovery (Rev. 13:3).
- **TO PERDITION** – His destruction at the hands of Christ at the Second Coming (Dan. 7:11; 11:45; Rev. 19:19).

The beast's revival will greatly impress those who dwell on the earth (unbelievers). They will marvel at the time they see the beast. His appearance results in their response. This speaks of his deadly wound, which was healed, which causes the earth dwellers to worship him (Rev. 13:3).

I. **And here *is* the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. (Revelation 17:9)**

The angel further explains the “seven heads” are the seven mountains. Over the years, various commentators have suggested different interpretations. The most popular of these include seven Roman emperors, the seven hills of Rome. With the help of an ancient Roman coin depicting the goddess Roma sitting on seven hills and quotations from Roman historiographers (17:9), most Western scholars interpret seven hills as a reference to Rome.

Verse 10 indicates that the seven heads are seven kings. They are the heads and personifications of seven empires.



In verse 9, the angel refers to them as “mountains,” which is consistent because, in the Bible, mountains are sometimes a symbol of government (Ps. 30:7; 68:15-16; Isa. 2:2; 41:15; Jer. 51:25; Dan. 2:35, 44; Hab. 3:6, 10; Zech. 4:7).

J. **And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. (Revelation 17:10)**

The seven kings are rulers over seven kingdoms. There were five that fell – Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece. The sixth is the one that “is,” which in John’s day would have been Rome. There is one that is “not yet come.”

This parallels Daniel’s vision (Dan. 7), and Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan. 2).

The angel adds that “when he cometh, he must continue a short space.” The “he” refers to the seventh head-mountain-king, which represents the seventh kingdom. The reign of the last kingdom is said to be relatively short. In verse 12, we are told that the ten horns, all on the last head, “receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast” (Rev. 17:12).

K. **And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition. (Revelation 17:11)**

The beast is one of the seven in the sense that his first kingdom is on par with the seven major empires. He is the eighth in the sense that he establishes an eighth major empire with a worldwide government after he is revived from a deadly wound (Rev. 13:3).

- L. **And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. (Revelation 17:12)**

The specific identity of the 10 horns (other kings but without kingdoms when John wrote) is not yet clear. One thing is certain; they will be allies of the beast and serve under him in his worldwide government during the Great Tribulation.

- M. **These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. (Rev. 17:13)**

In the time of the end, amidst much turmoil and political upheaval, such unity of thought and purpose would be unexpected if it were not for their ultimate control by God. The single purpose of these end-time kingdoms is to rule the world. The 10 rulers will submit to the Antichrist's leadership to achieve this end.

- N. **These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful. (Revelation 17:14)**

At the very end of the Tribulation, these kings will fight against Jesus Christ as He returns to earth. The Lamb will defeat them and will prove to be Lord of lords and King of kings (19:16), the title Antichrist seeks to claim in his worldwide empire.

Those with Christ who accompany Him from heaven are the called, the elect, and the faithful.

- O. **And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. (Rev. 17:15)**

The angel next helped John understand the identity of the waters (17:1). Water is a common symbol for people in the Old Testament (e.g., Ps. 18:4, 16; 124:4; Isa. 8:7; Jer. 47:2). The harlot exercises a controlling influence over the population of the world, both the faithful (cf. 5:9; 7:9) and the rebellious (cf. 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6). There will be one religious system that will encompass all nations and peoples during the Tribulation.

- P. **And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. (Rev. 17:16)**

The beast and his allies will eventually throw off the harlot and thoroughly destroy her. They will plunder her wealth, expose her corruption, and utterly consume her, just as dogs ate Jezebel's flesh (1 Kings 21:23-24; 2 Kings 9:30-37; cf. Ps. 27:2; Jer. 10:25; Mic. 3:3; Zeph. 3:3). They will completely desecrate her, as the Israelites burned the bodies of people who committed detestable fornication (cf. Lev. 20:14; 21:9; Josh. 7:15, 25).

Q. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. (Rev. 17:17)

The ultimate cause of this action is God's sovereign purpose. God has used the forces of evil for His own purposes and to accomplish His will.

R. And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth. (Rev. 17:18)

The woman represents "the great city." In the context, this undoubtedly refers to Babylon. It is the only city referred to specifically in this chapter. As a system of apostate religion, from which Babylon is both the source and (Gen. 10-11) symbol, the woman reigned over the leaders and kingdoms of the world.

The focus of this chapter is the age-old apostate religious system and its relation to government during the seven-year Tribulation period. During the first half of the Tribulation it will be an ecumenical, worldwide body that will stand above government and will be aggressively hostile to true believers in God. At the end of the Great Tribulation, the Antichrist will terminate it and demand universal worship of himself.