

"HISTORY OF THE GREAT HARLOT"

Rev. 17

There is such great importance attached to Rome, the center of persecution and power, in that period of time. There are three whole chapters given here to portray her doom. We have a series of scenes in the pageant which will show the fate of Rome. And of Babylon. Here Rome is pictured as a great Harlot. She sits upon many waters and practices spiritual fornication. She entices Kings and she reigns. And the dragon, the Devil, the beast of many colors is in the midst of this. It is a fascinating story which the woman is Babylon - that is to say she is Rome - pictured here. And we have not only Satan's character, but we have an anti-Christ movement that is going on at this time. So we will discover in this chapter the great history of this Harlot - and then in the next chapter, we will talk about the fall. And then finally, something about the judgement, upon Babylon. So you will keep in mind what is taking place here.

We will discuss this chapter under two heads. One is - the introduction to the Harlot. V. 1-6. And second, the interpretation of the great Harlot. V. 7-18. That will kind of box things in for us to have a better concept of the Harlot and her description. And as to the vision. And then how the explanation is given later on.

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE GREAT HARLOT

V. 1 - And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying come hither; I will show thee the judgement of the great Harlot that sitteth upon many waters.

Coming fresh from the vision of the seven bowls that were emptied, John immediately has one of the angels involved in that vision. To contact him, and mention that I am going to show you now the judgement of the great Harlot. Jer. 51:9. And this statement is connected with the bowl judgement. And we discover that this great Harlot here is going to symbolize ancient Babylon. That is, human society without God is a good way to put it. Isaiah 23:15-17. Nahum 3:4. She is irresponsible - she hated all that the church stands for. She is a Harlot - who turns people away from true loyalty, to God. And causes them to practice idolatry.

She is said to be adultrous - Isaiah 1:27, Jer. 2:2. The prophet sometimes speaks as Jerusalem as a Harlot. Isaiah 1:21, Jer. 2:20, Micah 1:7. But the great Harlot - the re-incarnation of godless, idolatrous, ancient Babylon was situation on the Euphrates. Which had many streams. It says she was seated upon many waters. Now the Old Testament here uses streams to refer to people. Isaiah 8:7-8. And the many waters upon which she sits is just a symbol of the people who which she reigns. She - there are multitudes, nations, and toms. It is as wide as world power. And this is that - it is as long as evil remains - Babylon will reach out and be in the front. And will be in allegiance to the earth.

Ez. 23:37 - if their idols have committed adultery, now this is a special sin charged to Israel of old. And the matter of fornication is illicit intercourse. It is an invitement against Babylon and against this worldly woman who leads others with her.

So we see the canals, the rivers, spreading out in every direction. And so John in his vision, captures this.

V. 2 - With whom the (kings) of the earth have committed fornication and the inhabitants of the earth have been drunk with the wine of her fornication. This verse declares and prophesies that this corrupt human society seduced the rulers of the earth. And the people have joined in her sins against God. Jer. 3:8-9, Ez. 16:32.

(Fornication) is a form of false affection. So human society without God is joining up with a false alliance. And it is described as sin - the sin of disobedience. And the mixture of Isreal with foreign nations is described as that of self-interest, which was a real motive.

The kings of the earth and the dwellers on earth have joined in the sin of disobedience to the will of God. And the expression - wine of fornication - is an indication that the people followed a great horror and have become intoxicated with her.

V. 3 - The (location) of this vision. John says he was carried away by the Spirit. Into the wilderness. And there he gets a vision and he is introduced to this woman. I saw a woman. On a scarlet colored beast - full of names of blasphemy. With seven heads and ten horns.

And she was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls. And having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication.

This strange sight takes place in a desert place. A lonely place. He says, it is in the wilderness. And the Spirit just sort of lifts him up and takes him away. And in the wilderness - he is able to see into the land of far distances. In the land that was very, very far away. And you remember, that it was on the back side of the desert that Moses met God. And was able to get a vision of the release of the children of Israel. There are people who like to go to the mountains - so they can get a far vision. And see things out in the distance.

And here we have John being carried away. You know that from this - the Spirit took him. And he is able to stand in this place in the desert. And he wearily waits and he saw a woman.

Did you know that the church and the world live together in the same place. Sort of a wilderness - isn't it. And here was a great harlot - the form of evil. Supported by the beast.

Full of blasphemy - that is to the fullest measure. On it's head now, however, it's body full. Seven heads symbolize universal dominion. Ten horns - symbolize human power.

V. 4 - The description of the woman is given here of splendor, luxury - material wealth. She is one with the beasts upon which she rides. She has rich garments. They are the characteristics of the world's attractions.

There is a special note - the golden cup which she holds in her hand. Naturally she

has the expectation that this cup will have a satisfying drink. But it is full of all things that are displeasing to God. And which would rob her of peace. But she arrives in the tinsel glory of the world. And this golden cup - naturally attracts - as she holds it in her hand. And it is probably very tempting to others. As she extends it to them. And invites them to partake. Babylon had been a golden cup. And this is John, getting a vivid description of a harlot.

V. 5 - And upon her forehead was the name - mystery, Babylon, the great, the mother of Harlots and abominations of the Earth. Now the name, is on her forehead. The actual reference here, comes from the custom in Rome - from the prostitutes in the public houses. Where the harlot wore upon her forehead - giving her name. And this name is a sign and a trademark - and an identification mark of the Roman prostitute. This is simply a vivid detail in building up the picture of the great corrupting prostitutes of all the nations. She has rich garments. Now the people of God, the church, have God's name written on their foreheads.

And the worshippers of world power have a blasphemous mark written on their forehead, and on their right hand. And in case, the owners prominent, unmistakable identification is very clear.

Babylon, the great mother of harlots, is written on their forehead. The mark of a worshipper of world power - as belonging to the world. Which is openly against God.

The beast of Babylon's world power - Babylon is symbolic here. Of that which

tempts, seduces, draws people away from God. And the mystery is a subject that is going to be made known.

Now when you read this, what flashes through your mind. You say, what a woman. And then you say, what a beast to be ridden by her. This great harlot intoxicated, delights in drinking the blood of martyrs.

V. 6 - And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her - I wondered - with great admiration. And John looked at this - and it was just something that took away his breath. As he looked. Could he understand it - he says, I was amazed. With great amazement - with a wonder of a great wonder. I was astonished, with a great astonishment.

When John saw this scarlet woman and came to understand what she represented, as he saw the development of the course of religion in this earth - he says, I wonder with a great wonder.

It is very apparent why John reacted with such amazement. Religious idolatry, a great harlot--with the very name written upon her forehead. Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots. And Abominations of the Earth.

Did you know that idol worship had its beginning in the city of Babylon, Babel. Men began to raise a tower toward Heaven. And to attempt by their own works to obtain salvation.

For he lives, we see, that the people here - we know that they are attempting to include the use of images, rituals, contrary to the Word of God. The Bible calls the use of images contrary - and they call it playing the harlot. The Bible calls it fornication - spiritual adultery. The idolatry that this uses - the use of images, the approach the great God in Heaven began in the city of Babylon.

It was established by Nimrod. Now a great British author by the name of Arthur Hislop has traced the development of the mystery of Babylon. The idolatry through the years and the centuries to this present day. Nimrod's wife who founded and Nimrod, who founded Babylon, and the kingdom was named Semiramis.

In Syria, she was called Ishtar. In Phoenician - Ashteroth. In Egypt, Isis. In Greece, Aphrodite. And the Romans called Venus. Now she became the first high priest of the idolaters sister. In answer to the promise made to Eve, the seed of woman will deliver the race. Semiramis. Gave birth to a son - said to be a miracle that she received by a sun beam. And she offered her son to be promised deliverer of the earth. His name was Tammuz. When he was grown a wild bore slew him. After forty days of his mother's weeping - he was raised from the dead. In the story, these two began the cult of worship - of the mother and the child. That spread throughout the whole world. And hence we find, Ishtar and her son Tammuz in Asyria. We find Ashteroth and her son Baal. And of course we find it all the way down through Egypt and Greece, and Rome - where she was called Venus. And the son was called Cupid.

The cult worship of mother and child spread throughout the whole earth. She was worshipped. With the offering of a wafer or a little cake. To her as the queen of Heaven. And there are always 40 days of Lent for the weeping of Tammuz.

Before the feast, and then there was a resurrection celebration. Now the secret of the mystery of Babylon, all of this the prophets spoke against. Jer. 44. The idol worshippers among the children of Israel. Throwing incense to Heaven - offering no cakes or waffers. Chapter 8 - God takes the prophet and shows him the inner life of the people. He said, also unto men, turn ye yet again - that though should see greater abominations than these.

So this cult worship spread.

~~There is no such thing in the Bible that exalts a female deity - and least of all that hints that Mary should be presented as such in the New Testament. The last time she was seen, she was humble. She was in a prayer meeting described in the book of Acts. And she was never mentioned again, nor ever seen again.~~

This mother and child worship is simply of Babylonian origin. And it is amazing that it should come and spread through all the face of the earth. And John saw this and he said, I wondered with great amazement.

V. 6 - It says that I saw this woman drunk with the blood of martyrs. That is, there was a vast extent of the slaughter. The murderous acts to exterminate the saints, and the people of God. She enjoyed her performance. She makes others drunk. This is shocking and this is unbelievable. How long would God allow it to continue. Now the angels wanted to show John this.

Now keep in mind that this vivid description may have come from the back of John's

mind about the temple prostitutes and the strange features of the ancient religion. Again, some of those temples, they had sacred prostitutes, even a thousand of them at Corinth. To have intercourse with them was an act of worship. An act which paid homage of the life force - in life and death.

And John knew about the notorious Roman Emperess who was named Messalina. The wife of Claudis. She was known as a common prostitute - she would go down and serve in those empty cells and took her stand as the name Lycisca. With gilted gold on her breasts, exposed to open view, she graciously received all comers - and asked for each his fee. The passion raged. But she was never satisfied. And this is a terrible picture - even an emperess stooping to this. No wonder John used this of the great harlot - the see the great contrast of how the world was going and how the people of God could easily be led astray.

II. INTERPRETATION OF THE GREAT HARLOT

V. 7 - The angel came and said - why do you marvel. I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast. This angel is going to explain the mystery and meaning of the woman. To know the one is to know the other - that is, seems that the beast and the woman were symbols of the same intentions. Who is, and who was, and who is to come here. We find a description. As it unfolds the truth of these two. The beast was and is about to come out of an abyss and go into perdition.

V. 8 - He saw the ascending out of the bottomless pit - and they that dwell in the earth shall wonder at whose names are not written in the book of life. And the foundation of the world. And they beheld the beast.

Here is a great contrast - the never dying life of God. World power and worldliness is constantly doomed. It is going to pass away. Though it may be reborn in new forms - new fashions, new fads, it always perishes. Here it is - world power. It was, it is not, it is now. It is ascending to the bottomless pit. And this existence, then non-existence, and then existence again. Evil seems to disappear sometimes - but it only seems to do so sometimes Nero disappears. But then somebody else reappears.

Don't forget this - the bottomless pit is the natural abiding place of evil. It is the dwelling place of Satan - and the works of the world come. Chapter 9:11.

As the Christian overcomes evil - Satan goes to the bottomless pit.

Now the unregenerated man will not understand the meaning of this language. But the people of God will understand it. What John is talking about here. That here is a harlot with her skirt stained with blood. With all of the Hellish cruelties behind it. And he says, now the great empire of the world, the civil authority, political power is coming about of the abyss--the most awful features are to be added to its human rise in history.

V. 9 - And there is the mind which hath seven heads and seven mountains which the woman sitteth on. John begins this verse with true wisdom to interpret his symbolism. Only true wisdom can understand and interpret this truth. He uses languages and numbers. A mountain symbolizes strength. Psalm 37. And seven symbolizes universality. The meaning of this verse is that the woman relies upon a universal power - V. 3. The most prominent form of world power in John's day was Rome.

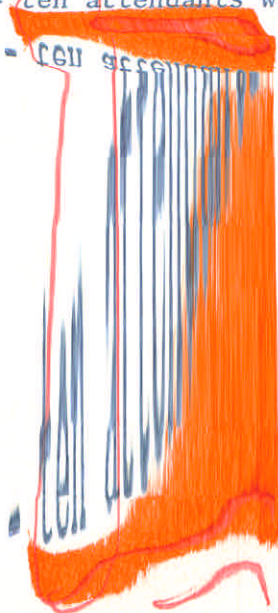
However, Rome was only partial fulfillment of this truth. It really is the bottomment of every age. That evil relies on this world power in every age. V. 10. There are seven kings - five are fallen. Seven symbolizes universality. The seven kings mean the world power is exhibited here - the number five was used here as the fate and the destiny of man. John seems to say, God is under his control here - no matter what the nation is ruling, at any particular time. One indicates the world power always has a manifestation. It is opposition to the people of God. The world existence - the end of time. World power is passing away. And there is little time left - he says. As he speaks this. Five have already fallen. And of course, there were dictators in Rome who had fallen.

V. 11 - The beast is the sum total in what has been described as five kings - then one king, and then one king again. This describes world power as it exists through all the ages. The beast, the basic source of evil, finds a kind of incarnation in each of the seven kings. In a way - he is each of them. So one after another, the kingdoms of the world fall.

V. 12 - Ten horns are all on the seven heads. Dan. 7:24. There is wide-spread complete human power. And that indicates world power expresses itself in various forms. The ten kings symbolize the completeness of all nations. And ten was the number adopted - when a whole was divided into parts.

You remember in I Kings 7 - the furniture of the temple of Solomon. It was to make ten vases, ten lavors, and ten lampstands. In marriage ceremony and funeral processions - ten attendants were required. Matt. 25:1.

processions



No synagogue could be organized unless there were ten adult males present.

John says in this verse, that the fullness of world power has not yet been reached - so he points to the power - hostile to God. The other has not yet come. Conflict will continue. The one hour corresponds to a little time.

V. 13 - This verse states that ten kings act by and for the beast. In whose side they range themselves. They are not independent thinkers but they are willing co-workers and they have one fixed purpose. To join and to oppose the Kingdom of God, and Christ.

So the woman, riding upon the beast - the symbol of the world, government, and political power. With gold and precious stones, luxury - she is rich. John, the only church he knew was despised and poor, hunted, hounded, and hated. For a man to name the name of Christ, he was to be brought before the Roman judge and sentenced to be burned at the stake or have his head cut off. Or to be crucified as an ordinary person.

The church John knew was poor and persecuted.

But this thing he was looking at was organized, rich, controlled government, dressed in scarlet and purple, precious stones, pearl. And was able to uncrown kings.

And this thing that he was looking at was continually drunkened by the blood

of saints. For his day, pagan Rome was persecuting Christians. There were martyrs everywhere. The sword was bloody, there was boiling pots of oil. They fed them to the wild beasts, and the animals consumed them. But in this vision - John looks. And whoever dreamed that such a thing was going to take place. And the angel was revealing to him that the end of this harlot - how will she fair so rich, so goddy, her skirts are full of blood of God's people. And he gives the answer. And the ten horns which though saw from the beasts. Remember the great image of Daniel. The gold, the silver, the brass, the ten toes. The Bible says will come with the government being separated into the different Kingdoms. And that will be willingly done.

Not God who will destroy this harlot - it is man who destroys her. This is an amazing thing as we watch the course of this world.

V. 14 - There was a war between the lamb and all of the powers of evil - that were extended throughout the history of the world. And yet the lamb is still braver. The lamb is not just another king - but he is the king of kings. Deut. 10:17. Psalm 136:3. Daniel 2:47.

He has the supreme power over the earth. Yet the beast will be overcome, by the lamb. Not only will the lamb, Lord of Lords, and King of Kings. War - and overcome. But those who are associated with him. Called and chosen and faithful. Are permitted to share in the battle and in the victory.

John pictures here the lamb as engaged in the struggle. Here is a victory.
2 Cor. 10:3-6.

Now if you want (some hope) - there it is. If you want to get a picture here -

a triumphant picture as to what is going to be the certainty of the Christian - you just hang on to this verse here. V. 14. Those who are chosen, and those who are faithful. Are you faithful. You have been chosen of God - have you been faithful. Are you active for him - are you serving him. Do you daily seek to live for him. Does your life count for him.

Now I'll comment on the closing verses here. V. 15 - we read, and he saith unto me, the waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples and multitudes, and nations and tongues. Well, we have about got that haven't we. There is this mystery - she is sitting on Babylon and the waters - the human race, the people, the multitudes, the nations, the tongues. So here is the intrusion of all of the people. And the statement says - just the say thing in a different way. It helps us to see that here is the human race.

V. 16 - This describes the fate of false religion. It says that the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the harlot, and make her desolate and naked. And burn her with fire. Well, one of these days, false religions - the very nature, is going to develop the elements and lead to its own destruction. It is going to be devoured - burnt up with fire. And that is a symbol of what false religion is going to do. They seduce, make drunk with wine and fornication, etc.

V. 17-18 - God had put in their hearts to fulfill his will. And to agree to give their kingdom unto the beast, until the word of God shall be fulfilled.

And the woman which thou sawest in the great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.

The people and the multitudes are going to perform the will of the beast. God is going to be working above all of these and he is going to utilize them as his agents. And he is going to bring about his design. Did you know that God could use Russia to bring about his design. He could punish some people in destroying false religion. They think they are accomplishing their own purposes. As did the Assyrians. In Iran today, they think they are honoring their God in power. Mohammad. And they are putting to death other people they call heathen. And they may be carrying out God's purposes.

But the world power and false religion in opposition and plan are going down in ruin. The anti-Christ forces are doomed. And the harlot of Babylon - what I have to say to you is identical. With the anti-Christ.

Now in summary, let me say to you, the mystery of the iniquity here in its final form is in Babylon the great. The vast system of error. So likened unto Christianity. And people are not able to distinguish this. When tested by the word of God, you can discover the counterfeit that is in a church. Whether or not it is that which is identified with the lamb.

We learn that the founder of Babel was Nimrod in Gen. 10. And he was an apostate Apostle. Being a mighty hunter. A hunter for the souls of men. Going out in the presence of the Lord. He sought to gether a multitude about himself and defied the commands of God. And they joined him in building a city, a tower, that would reach to Heaven. Now, in our childhood - we thought about that tower reaching up into the skies. And we can escape the flood and other things. And they called the city Babel. The gate of God. But it was soon changed by divine judgement to Babylon. Confusion, unreality.

Now we know that this came from Nimrod who is a grandson of Ham, the unworthy son of Noah. Who exposed his father's shame. And he was a ring leader. And this mystic religion spread to surrounding nations. Everywhere there were symbols of it. And it became popular as people followed them.

Proof - - Laban said Thon has stolen my gods -

Babylon principles are still with us even to this day.

Now if I pick up my Bible and I turn to I John, a little letter written by the same author who wrote the book of Revelation. I John 5:21 - I read a very earnest admonition. He has said nothing about idolatry in this entire little book. But take a look at this last verse - "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." Amen.

For the worship of God is spiritual. God desires that those who worship him will worship him in Spirit and in truth.

Holly Collins . . . awoke last Friday with a hunger for God in her heart. She read Matthew and part of Mark. Having no church background, the pretty twenty-year-old got on a bicycle and started to ride. Five miles later the Holy Spirit guided her into our parking lot. She came into the office and Mr. Utterback had the joy of leading her to Jesus.

It is between you and your soul and no mediation by a priest. It is between you, yourself, and God.

You need to talk to him for yourself. And confess to him your sins. He, alone, can forgive you. He can give you life and heart. You need to walk by his side and be filled with the glory of his presence. And to love our Lord in Spirit and in truth. For God seeks such to worship him. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.