

War against the Lamb

Revelation 17

In 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12, the Apostle Paul described the movement toward the kingdom of the Antichrist in the societies of the world. As he taught the congregation at Thessalonica, he gave them this important reminder: **“the mystery of iniquity (lawlessness) is already at work”** (2 Thessalonians 2:7). So today, as we consider the prophecy of Mystery, Babylon, we need to awaken to this fact: this mystery is working all around us. Even in Paul’s day (2000 years ago), the mystery was already at work. In Revelation 17 and 18, we see the culmination of this mystery: Babylon the Great. But make no mistake about the puny power and might of this monstrosity which will attack the Lord Jesus. This mysterious monstrosity will only serve to fulfill God’s will and reveal that Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords.

P.E.R.M.: Pondering the coming kingdom of the Antichrist can seem overwhelming. The Book of the Revelation is about the unveiling of Jesus Christ. But the book also gives us significant instruction about the Antichrist and his rule upon the earth. One way to break down this coming kingdom is to look at it in terms of categories or divisions. For instance, the acrostic “P.E.R.M.” helps us to look at the Political, Economic, Religious and Military aspects of this prophesied kingdom. (These same categories could be applied to describe most of the nations, past and present. Obviously, there is some overlap between these categories.) For instance, Revelation 17-18 describes the fall of Mystery, Babylon, “that great city.” How are we to understand this mystery in the context of Antichrist’s kingdom?

Political: Passages such as Revelation 17:9-13, 17 describe the political beast that carries the woman, adulterous Babylon. This beast is comprised of kings and a world ruler.

Economic: Passages such as Revelation 17:4; 18:3,7, 12-22 describe the extravagant materialism of Mystery, Babylon, and the merchants who enrich themselves through her.

Religious: Passages such as Revelation 17:1-8; 18:3-5, 9, 23 describe the religious nature of Mystery, Babylon. Throughout chapters 17 and 18, her religious idolatry is described as adultery and fornication. (This is a common connection in the Old Testament: idolatry is pictured as immorality.)

Military: Revelation 17:13-14 describes the military aspect of Antichrist’s kingdom as it is connected to Mystery, Babylon. The prophecy is that the kings of the earth will go to war against the Lamb (the Lord Jesus Christ).

The Judgment of Babylon Revealed

“And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials [bowls], and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will show unto you the judgment of the great whore that sits upon many waters: 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. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. 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 [astonishment].” (Revelation 17:1-6) One of the 7 angels (whom the Lord had used to hurl plagues upon the earth) gave John this revelation. The angel described Mystery, Babylon as the mother of prostitution. By this description, the angel meant that Babylon was the mother of idolatry (or spiritual adultery) and sinful abominations on the earth (vv. 3-5). She uses extravagant wealth (pictured by the golden cup) to hide her poisonous abominations. This system enslaves the souls of men (18:13); her leaders will use sorcery drugs or “magic spells” to control men and women (18:23).ⁱ Those who adore her live in leisurely folly rather than in the fear of the Lord. The angel revealed that this world-dominating religion will fall under the judgment of God. This mysterious monstrosity will only serve to fulfill God’s will and reveal that Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords.

What are the “many waters” upon which the woman sits? According to verse 15, the waters “... **where the whore sits, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.**” In other words, this idolatry is a worldwide religion, perhaps combining all of the present religions of the world. The kings of the earth will be enthralled with the worship of her spiritual idolatry – until they cast her aside. This Babylonian religious system, pictured as a woman, rides a beast having 7 heads and 10 horns. This adulterous, religious woman rides upon the rebellious worldwide rule of the beastly Antichrist. As she ambles about, she is drunk with blood of the martyrs whom she killed because they refused to turn away from their faith in Jesus the Christ.

Mystery, Babylon: System and City

The mystery described here is connected to the religion attempted at the Tower of Babel in the land of Shinar (Genesis 11). Later, Babylon was the capital of one of the most powerful kingdoms in history (mentioned 170 times in the book of Jeremiah alone). Some well-known authors ignore the last verse in Revelation 17, but it makes a significant connection between chapters 17 and 18: “... **the woman which you saw is that great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.**” In chapter 17, Mystery, Babylon is described as a religious system; in chapter 18 it is a rebellious city. The religious system is described as a whore, full of abominations (17:5); the rebellious city is the haunt of demons and people who are greedy for treasure and power (Revelation 18). But there is an important contrast in Revelation 17-18. According to Revelation 17:16, the political beast will destroy and replace the Babylonian religious system.ⁱⁱ But in Revelation 18, God will destroy the massive, rebellious city of Babylon. This mysterious monstrosity will only serve to fulfill God’s will and reveal that Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords.

The Beast with 7 Heads and 10 Horns

The woman rides a beast with 7 heads and 10 horns (17:3). The Antichrist is the Satanic embodiment of this beast who supposedly rises from a deadly wound: “**The beast that you saw 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.**” (17:8). Those who are lost for eternity will adore the Antichrist. And remember: the mystery of iniquity is already at work. According to 1 John 4:3, the spirit of Antichrist is already in the world.

But what about the 7 heads and 10 horns? According to verses 9-12, the 7 heads represent 7 mountains depicting 7 kingdoms. Note verses 10-11, **“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. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goes into perdition.”** Five of the kingdoms had passed (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece). The sixth kingdom was the Rome of John’s day and the seventh is apparently a revived form of the Roman Empire.ⁱⁱⁱ This eighth kingdom (which of “of the seven”) will be the final earthly kingdom – led by the Antichrist. He is doomed to go into the perdition of the Lake of Fire. The 10 horns described in verse 12 will be a coalition of 10 kings; this may represent 10 geographic regions of the world, culminating in a one world government. But remember, Mystery, Babylon, will only serve to fulfill God’s will and reveal that Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords.

Since Biblical Prophecy is True, What Should We Do?

We have asked this question many times throughout this series on the Books of Daniel and Revelation. Another way of asking the question is this: *Since Biblical prophecy is so, what should we know?*

- 1. The monstrosity of Mystery, Babylon the Great, will fulfill God’s will, demonstrating His sovereign control over all kingdoms. (Revelation 17:17)**

“For God has 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.”

As a believer, you can take new courage in this: the Most High God rules in the kingdoms of men (Daniel 4:17). Every new political and religious controversy should take you back to the Word of God to establish your faith. God is fulfilling His will for His own great glory.

- 2. Mystery, Babylon and the political beast upon which she rides will make war against the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, and be defeated by Him. (Revelation 17:14)**

“These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for He is Lord of lords, and King of kings ...” (Revelation 17:14a). In the words of John the Baptist, **“Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world!”** (John 1:29). The Lamb of God is God’s own Son, sent to this earth to overcome your personal evil. During His earthly life, He lived a perfect, righteous life – and to glorify God, Jesus did it for you! When He went to the cross of Calvary, He offered His perfect, spotless record in exchange for your sins and my sins. Those who repent of their evil and embrace Him as Lord will find that He transforms them. He died and rose again to show that He has power over sin and death and hell. He is the way, the truth and the life: no man comes to the Father but by Him (John 14:6). Mystery, Babylon, may teach that there are many ways to heaven. But the Bible teaches that Jesus is the only way. And here in the Book of the Revelation, we see that our precious Lamb is the Lord of all lords and the King of all kings! Those who make war with Him will be defeated. He will rule the world with a rod of iron (Psalm 2:9).

- 3. Christ’s followers are the called, the chosen and the faithful ones. (Revelation 17:14b) “... and they that are with Him are called, and chosen, and faithful.”**

This description of believers alludes to two passages of Scripture: the parable of the marriage feast in Matthew 22:1-14 and the words of Romans 8:30. In the parable, the king invited guests to his son's wedding feast, but they refused to come! So the king destroyed the rebels who refused his invitation. Others were invited, and they accepted the invitation. At the time, it was common for wealthy kings to provide wedding garments to all those who attended the wedding. But according to Matthew 22:11-13, one interloper came to the wedding but refused the king's gift of a garment. In other words, he wanted to attend the wedding, but on his own terms. In Matthew 22:13, Jesus explained that the king arrested the rebel and had him cast into outer darkness (a depiction of eternal punishment). And Jesus made His point in verse 14, **"For many are called, but few are chosen."** Many hear the call – they hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ – but they refuse. Or, even worse, they try to go to God on their own terms. In essence, they refuse the robe of Christ's righteousness. In Revelation 17:14, true believers are "the called, the chosen and faithful." Those who truly embrace Jesus Christ embrace Him on His terms, not their own. That they are chosen by God in His sovereign grace is evidenced by that fact that they are faithful to Him; they persevere. They will not turn back though they face the wrath of the Antichrist himself. Commenting on the parable in Matthew 22, one author wrote:

"God invites many people of different kinds into his Kingdom; overt rejection of God's invitation leads to eventual retribution; and failure to prepare adequately even when apparently accepted by God proves no less culpable or liable to eternal punishment.' Unbelievers today need to know the biblical claim that they face eternal judgment, despite Christians' hesitancy in preaching this message. Professing Christians need to know that they are not exempt from the same danger whenever they replace the true gospel with some substitute of their own designs, for there is no other gospel (Gal 1:6–9)."^{iv}

Romans 8:30-32 presents this Gospel grace this way: **"Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"** And even during the Tribulation, the saints of God will demonstrate the perseverance of the prevailing grace of God. They are the called, the chosen, the faithful. So even as they face Mystery, Babylon, they will know this with certainty: This mysterious monstrosity will only serve to fulfill God's will and reveal that Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords.

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ⁱ Revelation 18:23 uses the Greek word [*pharmakeia*] for drugs from which we get our word "pharmacy.")

ⁱⁱ According to Revelation 19:20, men will worship the image of the beast instead

ⁱⁱⁱ See "Earthly Kingdoms and the Everlasting Kingdom" accessed at <https://www.cbcbfindlay.org/earthly-kingdoms-and-the-everlasting-kingdom/> See also, "The Ultimate Kingdom" by Pastor Rodney King (beginning at 38:00) accessed at <https://www.sermonaudio.com/saplayer/playpopup.asp?SID=1019201455153423>

^{iv} Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 329–330, citing Blomberg, *Parables*, 239. Cf. Sand, *Matthäus*, 439–40.