

BABYLON'S RELIGIOUS SYSTEM

(Rev 17:1-6) 03-29-20

Grace Bible Church, Gillette, Wyoming

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[Grace Bible Gillette Study Notes](#)

I. HARLOT'S SPIRITUAL ADULTERY (Rev 17:1-2)

A. Harlot's Fall (1)

1. Details of Babylon's Fall - One of the angels who poured out a bowl judgment began revealing to John the judgment on Babylon. Though Rev 16:19 speaks of the conclusion of the fall of Babylon, the angel fills in the details of the events leading to Babylon's fall (Rev 17 & 18).
2. Great Harlot
 - a. False Religious System - Babylon is called the "great harlot," in that, it will be a false religious system.
 - b. Figurative Harlotry - Since it is a system that is in view, it is not a literal harlot, but rather one in the figurative sense. If that is the case what is figurative harlotry?
 - c. Harlotry Defined - This type of harlotry is best defined as "spiritual adultery" whereby God's people become unfaithful to Him and worship other gods.
 - d. Prophet Hosea - The ultimate illustration was given through the Prophet Hosea. The Lord instructed Hosea to take a "wife of harlotry" (Hos 1:1-2; 2:5) as an example of Israel's "flagrant harlotry" (Hos 4:13-14 cf. Deu 12:2; Jer 2:20; Eze 6:13).
 - e. Judah's spiritual adultery was the reason for Jeremiah's message and Judah's punishment (Jer 3:1-2, 8-13; Eze 6:9).
 - f. Worship of Yahweh - Spiritual adultery may also include worship for the Lord while worshipping false gods (Jer 7:9-10, 18).
 - a. Queen of Heaven - The "queen of heaven" (Jer 44:17-19, 25-26) was most likely Ishtar, an Assyrian and Babylonian goddess also called Ashtoreth and Astarte, the wife of Baal or Molech. The cakes were offerings to Ishtar, perhaps even in the image of the goddess. Perhaps, they ate "Ishtar cookies" on the way to the Temple.
3. Sits on Many Waters - The city Babylon was and will be situated by many waters, like the Euphrates River. But figuratively "many waters" represents the "peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues" who join Babylon's worldwide religious system (Rev 17:15).

B. Harlot's Influence (2)

1. Spiritual Immorality - Though literal adultery and rampant sexual immorality will take place in the Tribulation, it will be Babylon's spiritual *acts* of immorality (spiritual adultery) that is emphasized in Rev 17:1-6.
2. Kings of the Earth - The kings are those who are the rulers of the world. They will be seduced and be partly governed by Babylon's religion.
3. Masses on Earth - Not only will Satan and demons influence those who dwell on the earth, but Babylon's religion will appeal to man's naturalistic beliefs and agendas.
4. One-World Religion - Babylon's religious system then becomes the one-world religion (Rev 18:3). It is most likely not a takeover by a single religion but one that incorporates all religions, except the true one.

II. HARLOT AND ANTICHRIST (Rev 17:3)

A. The Woman

1. Carried Away in the Spirit - The divine revelation ("in the Spirit") given to John turns from ("carried away") the announcement of the angel to the vision of the woman and the beast.
2. Wilderness - The "wilderness" (*erêmos* - *desert, wilderness*) could be another identification of Babylon on the Euphrates.
3. Woman

- a. Jezebel - Several women are mentioned in Revelation. First, there is the woman and false teacher Jezebel in the church at Thyatira (Rev 2:20).
- b. Israel - The “woman” clothed with the sun and crowned with twelve stars is Israel along with its twelve tribes (Rev 12:1,4, 6, 13, 14, 16, 17).
- c. Bride of Christ - The raptured church is viewed as “His [Christ’s] bride” with whom the “marriage of the Lamb” commences (Rev 19:7; 22:17). Note: The new Jerusalem is also called a “bride” (Rev 21:9).
- d. Babylon - The woman in Rev 17 & 18 is Babylon, the city, the religious system, and the commercial system. Particularly in these verses, the woman (Babylon) is the great harlot, has become a one-world religion, and is supported by the beast.

B. The Scarlet Beast

- 1. Antichrist - All along the “beast” has been consistently interpreted as the Antichrist. He is the one who came up out of the masses of the world (Rev 13:1 cf. Rev 12:3), becomes a world ruler (Rev 13:2), has a pseudo-resurrection (Rev 13:3), and eventually is worshipped by the world (Rev 13:4).
- 2. On a Beast - Here the woman, Babylon the religious system, is sitting on the beast. In other words, the Antichrist is supporting the false religious system. He will abandon this false religion at some point (Rev 17:16) and will become the focus of all worship (2Th 2:4). But until then, just like Satan, he works through any false religion to sway the masses away.
- 3. Scarlet - There is a connection between the scarlet beast and the harlot who are both dressed scarlet. The beast and religious system are in sync with each other.
- 4. Blasphemous Words - The beast was full of blasphemous words, one of his major characteristics (Dan 7:8, 25; 11:36; 2Th 2:3-4; Rev 13:1, 5, 6).
- 5. Seven Heads - The seven heads are identified in Rev 17:9-10 as kings and their consecutive empires in history. The one that “has not yet come” will be the Antichrist’s empire (cf. Rev 17:9-10).
- 6. Ten Horns - Revelation 17:12 identifies the ten horns as ten kings who will submit to the Antichrist (cf. Rev 13:1). They are all under the influence of Satan (cf. Rev 12:3).

III. HARLOT’S DESCRIPTION (Rev 17:4-6)

A. Woman’s Portrayal (4)

- 1. Purple and Scarlet - Purple and scarlet symbolize wealth, nobility, and status (Eze 23:6; Dan 5:7). Babylon the harlot, used her wealth to dress up and attract the masses to her religion (Pro 7:10; Jer 4:30).
- 2. Gold and Pearls - Gold, precious stones, and pearls also symbolize wealth and could suggest the wealth that Babylon acquired from her religious exploits.
- 3. Cup of Abominations
 - a. Depth of Sin - Abominations speak not only of Babylon’s false religion but also the depth of sin (“unclean things of her immorality,” i.e. possibly temple prostitution) that its religion will permit and will even encourage.
 - b. Intoxicating Influence - The golden cup alludes to wealth, to Babylon’s intoxicating influence (Jer 51:7), and perhaps occultic rituals of the mystery religions. A golden cup full of mystery beverages was given in order to cause the dimming of understanding for new initiates and cause them to accept new doctrines (Barnhouse, Revelation).

B. Woman’s Name (5)

- 1. Babylon the Great
 - a. Forehead - At times, harlots hid their identity (Gen 38:15) but advertised by writing a name on a band on their foreheads (Jer 3:3). Babylon advertised and promoted its deceptive religion.
 - b. Religious Characteristic - Her name will be “Babylon the Great.” Though the woman (Babylon) is a city, her religious characteristic is like the Babylon of old, that is, an organized rebellion against God (Gen 11:1-9).
 - c. One World Religion - Her religious system has become “great” in the sense of being a one world religion (cf. Rev 18:3).

- d. Mystery - A “mystery” (*mustêrion*) is something revealed in the NT after being concealed in the OT. Satan’s future organized rebellion in a one-world religion was now revealed in part through John’s vision.
- 2. “Mother of Harlots”
 - a. Source - The expression “mother” means that Babylon is the origin and source of all false religions (“harlots”).
 - b. Ultimate - It also suggests that the Babylon in the Tribulation will be the ultimate false religion of all false religions.
 - c. Abominations - The word “abominations” (*bdelugma*) often refers to idolatry in the Scriptures (Exo 8:26; Deu 7:25-26). The Antichrist will commit the ultimate abomination (cf. Dan 9:27; Mat 24:15; 2Th 2:4).
- C. Woman’s Deeds (6)
 - 1. Blood of Saints - Babylon, the false religious system, will bring about the martyrdom of the true religion and true believers (“saints”).
 - 2. Drunk - She not only intoxicated the world with her false religion, but that she will be intoxicated with ridding the world of the “witnesses of Jesus.”
 - 3. Wondered - John had questions about the vision he had just seen. Those questions would be answered in the following passages (cf. Rev 17:7).

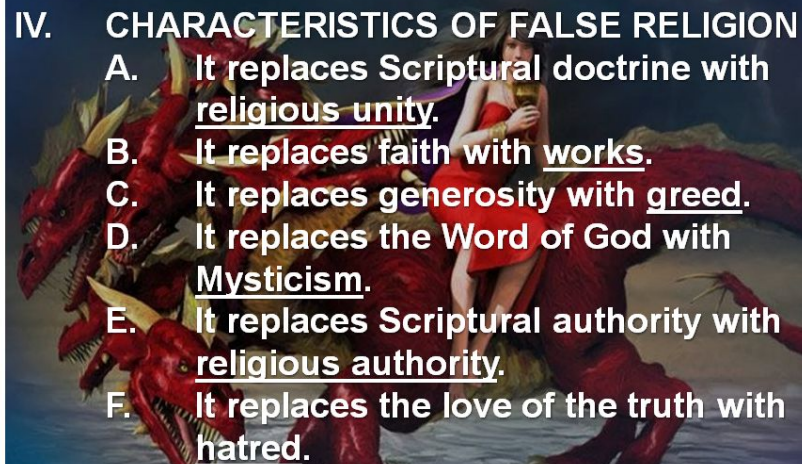
IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF FALSE RELIGION

- A. It replaces Scriptural doctrine with religious unity.
- B. It replaces faith with works.
- C. It replaces generosity with greed.
- D. It replaces the Word of God with Mysticism.
- E. It replaces Scriptural authority with religious authority.
- F. It replaces the love of the truth with hatred.

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