

Revelation Chapter 17  
Handout

*Chapter 17 is one of the pivotal chapters of the book and its interpretation will control the interpretation of the rest of the book. Historically most commentators have interpreted the whore Babylon as Rome. The seven mountains (vs. 9) are the Seven Hills of Rome. The seven kings (vs. 9) are the emperors from Augustus to Domitian. The ten kings (vs. 12) are client states that desire freedom. Rome had been killing Christians and so the vs. 6 fits as well.*

*The difficulty with this is that it limits God's judgment to only the Roman Empire. It once again makes Revelation a time limited book... only good for historical information. However, regardless of how one tries to tie Rome to this chapter (and chapter 18) there are problems with some of the numbers tying neatly into any one historical sequence. One must strain credulity to make it all work.*

*The other way to view this chapter is to make it tie in with the rest of Revelation in the sense that evil, personified by Babylon (and in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century manifested in the Roman empire) is always around us until the end. Therefore this vision stands along side the Old Testament prophetic visions of an evil city (both Babylon and Jerusalem). These can be found in Jeremiah 50-51, Ezekiel 16, Nahum and Isaiah 14. They illustrate common characteristics among these evil cities: Royal dignity and splendor combined with prosperity, overabundance and luxury; self-trust, boastfulness, power and violence against God's people, oppression, injustice and idolatry.*

*The evil city becomes the archetype for evil besetting the world. It is the world that is opposed to God.*

17 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great whore who is seated on many waters, 2 with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk."

*I will show you the judgment- God is beginning the final judgment and it will come not in some generic way but in concrete retribution against those who oppose God.*

*of the great whore - the idea of the whore is one who cannot remain faithful but goes after whomever is willing to pay. The Prophet Hosea was instructed by God to use the theme of faithfulness/prostitution in this words to the people of Israel. This is also present in Ezekiel 16:15 ff, Nahum 3:4 and Isaiah 23:16-17 when referring to different cities who could not remain faithful to the living God.*

*Who is seated on many waters - this ties back in with Jeremiah's oracle about the original Babylon which say on the banks of the Euphrates with many canals around the city.*

*Kings...inhabitants of the earth* - this shows the extent to which the evil kingdom has spread its influence

3 So he carried me away in the spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication; 5 and on her forehead was written a name, a mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth's abominations." 6 And I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly amazed.

*Wilderness* - this is the place of testing and the place from which evil can come and John's reaction...amazement...is one that leads to going to the dark side  
*Seven heads and ten horns-* just like the beast in Chapter 13...probably the same one.

*Purple and scarlet* - this is royalty...as in trying to convince people that she actually holds power, however since she is not clothed in white she is not pure and Godly, but just the opposite...blood red

*Gold, jewels* - here is the temptation to power because there is great wealth... John was not enticed by wealth and saw it as one temptation to lead people away from God

*Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth's abominations* - again we could look at Babylon as Rome, however since she is the mother of all who stand against God, then she is in many ways more ancient than Rome...hence the name Babylon. She becomes timeless and placeless.

*drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus* - this is a vivid image... here you have someone drunk with power and violence... look at any modern dictator who has enjoyed watching the death of those who oppose him.

*Greatly amazed* - this is giving into temptation (see vs. 8) where those who are not aware fall under her spell.

7 But the angel said to me, "Why are you so amazed? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. 8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the inhabitants of the earth, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will be amazed when they see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.

*Why are you so amazed* - John is being taken in and now is being confronted by his failing

*The beast you saw* - this is a theological statement and not an historical one (succession of Roman emperors).

*was, and is not, and is about to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to destruction* - this refers to the beast as having been in power and control (once upon a time), is no longer in control (he has been defeated by Jesus on the cross), and is continuing to be judged (the language of coming the pit is present tense

*which means continuing action. So it is now in the process of being judged... continually.*

*Not written in the book of life - this reminds John that only those who can be duped because they have not been saved ought to be amazed... not one who has been marked out by Christ.*

9" This calls for a mind that has wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; also, they are seven kings, 10 of whom five have fallen, one is living, and the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain only a little while. 11 As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven and it goes to destruction. 12 And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. 13 These are united in yielding their power and authority to the beast;

*Seven heads are seven mountains - this is usually the basis for the Woman = city = Rome hypothesis. The very fact that it appears to be so obvious (7 hills are in Rome) almost works against buying into the theory. 1) if this is a mystery why then is it so obvious? Everyone knows that Rome has seven hills. 2) the hills belong to the monster (the seven heads are the seven hills) and not to the woman 3) if the city is the Roman empire it could not exert influence over seven emperors because the fact was the opposite... and this is true because the woman is seated on the hills it means she exercises power over them 4) the word translated here as hills is used several other times in Revelation and is always translated as "mountain." Only here is it made to be hills... which might presuppose a biased view as to the meaning of the mountains. Mountains can also mean power which can then be used to talk about the seven kings as having power 5) remember that the number seven means complete and so what we have here is complete evil and complete power*

*Of whom five have fallen - this is one way of saying that God is already at work... or has been at work defeating the powers of evil over time.*

*One is living - there is at this moment a power at work in the world to defeat God's people*

*The other has not yet come - this means that we have not yet seen the end of the evil... there is more out there but it will be confronted by God's power in the Lamb*

*It is an eighth but it belongs to the seven - the beast will try and imitate Christ who was raised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day... if you will the old weeks are gone and he is alive on the first day of the week (7+1). And in Revelation all the sequences of seven, the seventh becomes the new beginning for a new sequence (or the 7<sup>th</sup> becomes the 8<sup>th</sup>). However in this case the 8<sup>th</sup> does not begin something new as did Christ but it belongs to the old life, the seven.*

*Kings for one hour - these other kings who will have power will only share it for a moment, for a little while because they too will fall because they are dependent upon the beast.*

14 they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

*War on the lamb - this is the purpose of the entire recounting of the woman, beast and kings. They will try and defeat the Lamb  
Lamb will conquer them - this is the final outcome however... so that even when the saints are faced with dire circumstances they will not fall away.*

15 And he said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the whore is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. 16 And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the whore; they will make her desolate and naked; they will devour her flesh and burn her up with fire. 17 For God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by agreeing to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled. 18 The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

*The waters - we now come to understand that the woman (pure evil) sits on the waters (the people) and dominates them for her own purposes.*

*Will hate the whore - the forces of evil cannot hang together. They will turn on one another trying to save themselves.*

*For God has put it in their hearts - this turning on one another will be God's doing. God's victory will not come through violent means (war, etc.) but through God's overwhelming power being used to confuse and confound his enemies.*

*The woman - she is the great city... the evil city... the epitome of evil.*