

**Rev. 17a, The Vision of Babylon**  
**December 11, 1994**  
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**Overview**

1. The seventh vial introduces the final series of the book, ch. 17-22. Movement is Whore -> Lord of Lords -> Bride
  - a) 17:1-18:24 The judgment of Babylon, Great Whore
  - b) 19:1-20:15 The Lord of Lords judges Babylon, the Whore
  - c) 21:1-8 God comforts Jerusalem, the Bride
  - d) 21:9-22:5 The Blessing of Jerusalem, the Bride
2. Outline of ch. 17-19
  - a) 17, unveiling of the source of the church's tribulations, and announcement of her judgment.
  - b) 18, the mourners wail over her.
  - c) 19, the agency of her destruction.
3. Outline of ch. 17
  - a) 1-3, John is summoned to see. Introduces all of 17-19.
  - b) 3-6, the vision of the harlot.
  - c) 7-18, interpretation of the vision.

**A. 1-3a, Summons**

1. Note the extremely strong parallel with 21:9, where one of this same group of angels introduces another woman, the bride of Christ, who also turns out to be represented as a city.
2. But John does not yet know that the woman he sees is a city. Note how the theme unfolds:
  - a) "The great whore." No one has yet been called by this name in Rev., but the theme of whoredom (fornication, *porneia*, cf. whore, *pornhs*) was dominant in 2:14, 20, 21. Focuses our attention on her sin, which has at least three forms.
    - 1) The *physical* sin is bad enough, 1 Cor. 6:18, the one sin said to be against one's own body.
    - 2) Used throughout the Bible as a metaphor for *idolatry*, giving to created things what should belong to God alone.
    - 3) Paul has already taught that even in a sophisticated, nonreligious age, "*covetousness ... is idolatry*," Col. 3:5, and we shall shortly see that this extension occupies this passage as well.
  - b) "that sitteth upon many waters." A common biblical expression (30x, 4x in Rev and others in OT).
    - 1) Sometimes translated "great waters"; originally referred to the sea.

- 2) Since shipping brought nations into contact, became a metaphor for commerce or tribute.
- a> Isa. 23:3, Applies directly to Tyre, the island nation, like Singapore of today, with no natural resources but rich through her trade.
  - b> Jer. 51:13, Also said of Babylon. She was not literally on the seacoast, but as the capital of an empire she enjoyed the "treasure" of nations. (*The commentators' references to irrigation canals are beside the point; cf. 51:55. The point is that inland Babylon had by her conquest attained treasures comparable to those of Tyre 150 years earlier.*)
- 3) Thus the angel now connects the "harlot" with two great OT city-states, and in fact in the sequel allusions from both Tyre and Babylon will be woven together.
- c) v.2, fornication with kings of the earth. This expression is an unambiguous reference of Tyre, Isa. 23:15-17. The emphasis is not on literal fornication or on direct idolatry, but on love of material things that takes the place of God; "covetousness, which is idolatry."
  - d) made nations drunk; an unambiguous reference to Babylon, Jer. 51:7.
3. 3a, the vision unfolds "in the wilderness," where previously the woman had fled (12:6, 14; the only other two references in this book) and where the dragon had pursued her. The reference to the wilderness here is not accidental, nor a natural accompaniment of being carried away in the spirit (which happens a number of other times in the Bible, but never to the wilderness). It is intended to bring our attention back to Israel in exile and the dragon's wrath against her. Here we learn in more detail of the form that Satan's futile attack against the children of God has taken.

#### B. 3b-6, Vision

Two characters: the woman and the beast. She is named first but described later.

1. 3, The beast
  - a) 12:3, 7 heads and 10 horns: the Dragon.
  - b) 13:1; the beast from the sea has same heads and horns, and in addition the name of blasphemy (which has now duplicated to "names" and spread to his entire body).
  - c) Dan. 7:7, the ten-horned beast.
  - d) --> Antichrist.
2. 4-7, The Woman who rides the beast!
 

He is described as a totalitarian ruler in ch. 13, yet here he permits himself to have a rider, who for a season appears to be in control.

- a) 4, Her wealth.
- 1) Purple (made from crushed molluscs) and scarlet (made from the body of a tiny worm) were expensive, reserved only for royalty. She is clothed in expensive garments.
  - 2) Ornaments: contrast the godly woman in 1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:3, who does not rely on such baubles. She is "decked," lit. "gilded." Plastered with precious stones.
  - 3) Golden cup: cf. her role as described in v.2, of polluting others.

"Abomination" translates two OT words, one reflecting unclean things (such as pork), the other emphasizing unclean actions. "Uncleanness" points to the intrinsic defilement that results from either of these. God cannot bear the sight of such people (Jer. 15:1), and even the inanimate earth vomits them out, Lev. 18:24-28. Her opulent adornment is attractive, but the result of associating with her is to become disgusting and reviling.

*Words for defilement:*

- a> *bdelugma* can represent Heb \$QC or TW(BH).
- 1> \$QC 08262, 08263: foods. Emphasizes the presence of THINGS in the world around us from which God commands us to be separated. 9/15 are in Lev. 11, and most of the others draw on this. Primarily Ceremonial (Lev. 11-15).
  - 2> TW(BH 08441: more extensive; primarily ACTIONS that are displeasing to God. Commonly governed by (&H "do." Once (Dt. 14:3) it refers to foods, where it perhaps emphasizes the disobedience involved in eating what God has forbidden. Primarily Moral (Lev. 17ff)
- b> *akaqartos* is Heb. +M) 02931. The intrinsic STATE that comes on us through disease or reproduction. Also used of beasts that are not to be offered to the Lord (Lev. 27:11) or eaten (Lev. 11; Deut. 14:7,8,10,19), perhaps because they communicate such state. Connected both with ceremonial (Lev. 11) and moral (Lev. 20) defilement.
- c> Deut. 14 brings together foods, TW(BH, and +M).
- d> Lev. 20 (incest) brings together +M) (21), TW(BH (13)

- b) 5, Her name.

- 1) Its location: her forehead. Cf. the twofold brands of the followers of the beast (13:16ff) and the lamb (14:1). She represents those who have received the mark of the beast, and so can "buy and sell" (13:17).
- 2) Its nature: *musthrion*, a secret symbol, like the 7 stars and the 7 lampstands in 1:20. Not part of the title.
- 3) The Name itself: "Babylon the Great."

a> In Rev. the title is focused in ch. 17-18 (4x). It

occurs only two other times, both anticipating the narrative now before us (14:8; 16:19).

b> It is used extensively in the OT (243x; Jerusalem is 625; Samaria only 103; Asshur 8x, and Niniveh 16; probably the second most commonly named city in the OT). Review those references to establish its character.

1> It is the name of Empire, united against God's authority. "The locusts have a king over them ..."

a: Gen. 10:10, beginning of Nimrod's rebellious kingdom. His very name means "let us rebel" or "we shall rebel." This is the first reference to a kingdom, a confederation of states under a single strong leader.

b: Gen. 11:9, site of man's organized rebellion against God. Again, takes the form of trying to band together in a large organization.

2> It is the name of idolatry invading God's territory. 2 Kings. 17:24,30, source of idolatrous innovations after the Assyrian conquest of Samaria

3> It is the name of persecution against God's people: Subsequent usages are all in relation to Babylonian invasion and the destruction of Jerusalem (including the ambassadors to Hezekiah, who set the stage for later conquest).

4) Its interpretation: "mother of" in the Bible always has the sense of parentage, never simply "great" as in Hussein's usage. Babylon the Great is the source, the parent, the origin of harlotry in all its forms, and of all the impurity that results from it. Traces back to Nimrod's empire; complex human governments that oblivate the need for God.

c) 6a, Her Actions. She is intoxicated with the blood of God's people. She destroys them, not merely because they are an obstacle to her way, but because she has become addicted to the sense of power over God that she receives when she abuses them.

3. 6b, John's response: wonder. The great conspiracy has been unveiled; here is the source of all the suffering of God's people. Not an unconnected set of misfortunes, but the deliberate work of this one city-harlot.