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REVELATION 17:1-18:24

Today we come to two of the most difficult to understand chapters in all the Bible. Before we look at these chapters, let me just say a couple of things that I hope will help us to see where we are...

Many times in Scripture, a subject is merely mentioned, and later that subject is expounded upon...it is amplified.

For example...

In **chapter 13**, we were introduced to the Antichrist (the beast) and in **chapter 17** of today's lesson we see him in greater detail.

In **chapter 16**, we saw the Seventh Bowl of God's wrath poured out and one of the things it did was fall upon Babylon, and today, in **chapter 18**, we will see that in much more graphic terms.

Next week, in **chapter 19**, we will see the Sixth Bowl of God's wrath – the Battle of Armageddon – and it is amplified for us.

So, what we see in **chapters 17, 18 and 19** is a provision of greater details on subjects that have been touched on before. Even though we saw last week the final fulfillment of God's wrath...we see this week and next week further details about these closing events.

Now, having said all that, let me simply say this and then we'll get into today's Scripture.

As I studied this passage of Scripture, it was obvious to me that we could spend weeks on this subject and still not cover all the history...all the many facets of what these chapters may or may not mean. So, let me just warn you on the front end that we'll hit only the high spots. And even hitting only the high spots, we have a lot of ground to cover.

So, please stay with me! Please don't let your minds wander! Please remember that God gave us these chapters for a reason, and let's endeavor together to find out exactly what He wants us to see!

Today's lesson is really "a tale of two cities"... "a tale of two Babylons"...one **mystical** and one **material**...one **religious** and one **economic**...one Rome and one Babylon.

Revelation 17:1-7...

Here we have symbolic language again. What have we said we're to do in our study of **Revelation** when we see symbolic language? Are we to take it **symbolically** or **literally**? **We are to see what the figures or symbols mean and then we're to take that meaning literally!**

So with that in mind, let's see if we can discern the symbols in these verses.

"the great harlot" – this stands for the false church...
the only church that's left after the Rapture.

Who will be taken out at the Rapture? The blood-bought body of Jesus Christ...the true church...the Bride of Christ. (I wish we had time to trace this apostate church's history...it began way back in Genesis at the Tower of Babel.)

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“the many waters” – (God made this interpretation easy for us...) **Verse 15... “peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues...”**

So, we see here that this harlot is a “religious system” that is false. This system includes all segments of false religions...apostate Protestantism, Catholicism, cults, Judaism, and all the great pagan religions of the world.

Remember now, at this point all the born again believers, whether they are **Baptist, Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, or whatever**, have all been raptured! **The restraining power of the indwelling Holy Spirit will be gone!**

Someone once said that some churches will meet the Sunday after the Rapture and will not miss a member. But let's clearly understand that they are not true believers. They are not part of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. He never calls it His church...He calls it a **harlot!**

But, after the true church is gone, the religious system represented by this harlot will have all these others lumped together! (Don't you know this will be a happy gathering?) Can you imagine all these folks lumped together, sharing their different false doctrines?)

By the way, what are some distinguishing characteristics of a false church?

- 1) False churches deny the **inerrancy of the Word of God.**
Beloved, why would any intelligent person go to a church and listen to a preacher or a teacher who doesn't believe God's Word is infallible and inerrant? Wouldn't that be a complete waste of time?
- 2) False churches deny the **depravity of man.**
They say, “Hey, man's not that bad. Man was not conceived in sin. The fall of Adam does not affect all mankind. Man doesn't really need a Savior.”
- 3) False churches deny the **completeness of God's Word.**
They say “Well, the Bible is alright as far as it goes, but we need something more. We need the book of Mormon, or the Talmud, or the Watchtower, or some other new and different “revelation.”

God tells us in His precious Word that Scripture has once and for all been delivered to us!
- 4) False churches deny the **deity of the Lord Jesus Christ.**
Contrary to what many false churches teach, the Lord Jesus is NOT on the same par as Mohammed, Joseph Smith, Buddha or even Abraham or Moses. **Jesus is God!!!**
- 5) False churches deny the **atoning power of the blood of Jesus.**
Without the shedding of blood, Jesus' blood, there is absolutely no remission of sins...

“What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!”

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All over Memphis this morning false churches are meeting. They look good! They have beautiful buildings. They sing pretty hymns. But they deny the inerrancy of God's Word...they deny their need for a Savior....they deny the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ and they deny the only way to salvation is through the blood of Jesus!!

Let me also say this...

There is in our world today, and has been for some time, a movement called "the ecumenical movement." This movement is an alliance of all religions. This movement promotes a "coming together" of all beliefs and doctrines and tenets of all faiths.

And doesn't this sound good? I mean, these folks say, "We are all brothers and sisters...we are all God's children!" But, please listen to me...this is not of God! And let me tell you why it's not of God!

When we come together, for the sake of a "movement", with all other religions of the world, some things happen that are not good!

- 1) We begin to focus on the "movement" rather than on the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 2) We begin to dilute our message and water down Bible doctrine so that it will be better received by the other folks in the movement.
- 3) We begin to see Christianity as a "religion" instead of a relationship.
Basic to Christianity is the fact that it is unique because it is based upon a living, vital kinship and relationship with our living risen Savior who is also the Creator of the universe...and no other "religion" on earth can make that claim!
- 4) We begin to question the inerrancy of God's precious Word!
"All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." (*"inspired".." God-breathed"*)

No "religion" on earth has a Book that is "God-breathed." I don't believe we can emphasize this enough...Only Christianity has the inerrant, infallible, inspired, "God-breathed" Word of God as its guide.

God commands His church to come out from the world and to be separate.

James 4:4: "...do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?...whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

So, this harlot of chapter 17 is the false church full blown. It's the false church in all her fulness. It will be a ***world-wide, universal, ecumenical, not-sectarian church...the devil's dream church.***

Satan has always desired to be like God. He has sought to counterfeit all that God has done. **God called out a church for Christ and Satan will call out a church for the Antichrist.**

Let's note several things about this false church:

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1) As we've said...this false church is made up of all false churches from all over the world.

Can you imagine a "church" that incorporates all the cults...all the pagans...all the idol worshipers in this world? The Shinto worshippers, the Hindus, the Buddhists, the Mormons, the BaHais, the Muslims and who knows what else...

Beloved, I know some of you have traveled to foreign lands and perhaps you, like I, have visited churches in those lands.

I've been to a Shinto shrine, and a Buddhist temple, and a BaHai temple and a Muslim mosque and God was in **NONE** of those places and He won't be in this false church of **chapter 17** either.

Well, not only will this false church be made up of all the false churches from all over the world, but

2) This false church will have the support of the kings of the earth...

The kings of the earth will use this false religious system to unite and control the masses.

3) This false church will be the state, or should we say the WORLD church or religion, and that is seen by the fact that she is seen riding the beast...verse 3...

The prime minister of England, the emperor of Japan, the kings and queens all over the world...the President of the United States will all insist on their people becoming members of this church.

Forget about separation of church and state! By the way, separation of church and state was put into our Constitution not to protect the state from the church but to protect the church from the state!

Just think about it...prayer to Almighty God is banned in most public places in our country today...no prayers are allowed at most high school graduations...no prayers are allowed at most ball games...**DON'T SHOW YOUR LOVE FOR JESUS...it simply isn't allowed...it isn't "politically correct"!!!**

What a silly, silly world we live in. In that day, when Satan has his world church, all the leaders of the world, there will be a big banner handing over it saying "Attend Church this Sunday"...

4) This false church will have great, indescribable wealth!

The kingdoms of all the world will support her and fill her coffers!

5) This false church will be totally against all that is pure and good and holy.

6) This false church will have a mysterious name...Mystery Babylon.

7) This false church will be responsible for the bloodshed of many, many believers during the Tribulation Period.

Well, we've seen the woman, now let's look at the beast upon which she is riding.

Verses 8-13...

As we said awhile ago, we've seen this beast before, haven't we? And here we see him rearing his ugly heads again...all seven of them!

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1) This beast was, and is not and is about to come up out of the abyss.

First of all, we need to get straight in our minds that, YES, this beast is symbolic of the **person** of the Antichrist, but this beast is also symbolic of the **system** which the Antichrist heads up.

One day, the Roman Empire will be revived. The Roman Empire **was** and **it fell** and **has ceased for a time to exist**, and then **it will come back** in the form of the 10 nation European confederacy that we talked about a couple of weeks ago.

This also refers to the Antichrist as a person. Remember when we first met the Antichrist that he suffered a “fatal” wound and then was “resurrected”...meaning he was – he lived, he is not – he “died”, he will come – he was resurrected.

Now, who are these seven kings? Stay with me now...

Up until the time that John wrote this, the Roman Empire had had five kings...1) **Julius Caesar**

- 2) **Tiberius**
- 3) **Caligula**
- 4) **Claudius**
- 5) **Nero**

and at the time of John’s writing the **Book of Revelation**, the emperor of the Roman Empire was a man named **Domitian**. Now the question comes up, “who are the seventh and eighth kings?”

Five have fallen. One is (Domitian). That’s six. “One has not yet come and when he comes he must remain a little while...” The Antichrist is going to be king a short time and then he will appear to be dead. That’s seven. **“...which was and is not, and is one of the seven and goes to destruction...”** He appears to be dead, and then appears to come back to life and when this happens, he’s once again made king.

So, this king is **both the seventh and the eighth king**, but his end is destruction!

2) The beast gives his authority to the ten kings...the ten-nation confederacy.

As we said several weeks ago, some Bible scholars believe this will be the European Common Market. Maybe it will be...

3) The beast will cause this ten-nation alliance to wage war against the Lamb...

And note that John can’t resist telling us that the Lamb will overcome them...**verse 14**.

4) The beast and the kings will turn on the woman...**verse 16**.

What does this mean?

It means that the political arm of the Antichrist will turn against the religious arm of the Antichrist and will destroy it!

The great false church will be destroyed! The great world church will be gone...with all her false preachers and all its beautiful buildings and all her wealth. They use her until they’re through with her and then they destroy her. The Antichrist and the false prophet will not want her around after

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she has served her purpose. **Antichrist wants to be worshiped, and he doesn't want any competition from the church...even the false church!**

This is going to take place at the middle of the Tribulation...

But, look at **verse 17...**

**God permits one evil power to destroy another evil power.
God is so mighty He can get the devil's right arm to cut
off the devil's left arm. That's great! I love it...
What a mighty God we serve!**

don't you?!

Listen, our God is sovereign! He always has been. He is now. And He always will be!

We look around and think all is out of control and right now it certainly appears to be...especially in our own country, but, Beloved...remember this. Way back in the book of **Daniel**, a man spoke these words...

**"God does what He will among the hosts of the heavens
and the inhabitants of the earth and no one can ward
off His hand or say to Him 'what hast Thou done?' "**

Do you remember who spoke those words? Old Nebuchadnezzar spoke those words right after he got saved! Go home and read *Daniel 4* this afternoon. Now, if Nebuchadnezzar can acknowledge that God is sovereign after he just got saved and didn't even know any Scripture, surely you and I can do the same!!

The Bible tells us that "God holds the hearts of kings in His hand and like streams of water He turns them whithersoever He wishes..."

Well, in the time we have left, lets see if we can cover **chapter 18**.

It is obvious that the Babylon of **chapter 17** is not the Babylon of **chapter 18...and let me tell you why...**

The Babylon of **chapter 17** is destroyed by the kings of the earth.
The Babylon of **chapter 18** is destroyed by the God of heaven.

The Babylon of **chapter 17** is no doubt located in Rome.
The Babylon of **chapter 18** is no doubt the Babylon that is located in modern day Iraq...on the Euphrates River.

We haven't heard a lot about Iraq lately...but we will again, I'm sure. One of these days we'll probably hear that Saddam Hussein is rebuilding the city of Babylon. It is reported that he has obtained ancient writings detailing the city that Nebuchadnezzar built and he's planning on duplicating it...right where it was in the beginning!

Verses 1-3... "a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit..."

Even today when we see film clips on TV of that area where Babylon was and will be again...we are struck with the spiritual darkness of that place, aren't we?

Verse 4...

Isn't it amazing that God will have to warn folks to come out of Babylon?

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Are these believers who have come to know Jesus during the Tribulation Period and they've gotten "trapped" there? Or are these Jews who have not yet believed and God is extending one last call of mercy?

I don't know...but whoever they...God warns them **to come out!**

Verses 5-10...

When I read this passage of Scripture this week, I was reminded of the fires that burned for weeks and weeks after the Gulf War. Remember seeing that on TV?

Let me tell you this...when God destroys, He destroys fully! He destroys completely! There will be no experts who can be called in to put out these fires as they were to put out the oil fires after the Gulf War!

Verses 11-20...

The wealth of the world will be centered in Babylon.

Now, we don't find this hard to believe, do we?

It is reported that **right now** the wealth of the OPEC nations is such that they could come in and take over our stocks...every stock on the New York Stock Exchange.

Men are puzzled even today over how to make the world's economic system stable. Our world is on shaky ground even now! About the time the world gets really bad old Antichrist will say, "**I** have the answer...**I** have the answer!" And he sets up Babylon to be mankind's economic and political savior.

AND GOD DESTROYS IT IN ONE HOUR!! And all those who are dependent on her wealth will weep and wail!

Do you want to know how wealthy you are? Your wealth and my wealth consists of that which money cannot buy and which death and destruction cannot take away...

Look who rejoice...

Verse 20...

Look back at verse 5 for just a moment. There are two things that reach from earth to heaven...**our prayers and our sins**...Which are we sending up?

God knows if there is any hope of repentance and He will wait.

"He is not willing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

God knows the very thoughts and intents of our hearts...He also knows when the heart is so defiant that there is no hope and He strikes at His appointed time!

He knows when there is no use waiting any longer for a **person** or a **nation** to repent!

"Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her."

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Because God delays judgment, men tend to think He doesn't see what's going on. But God does! In fact, He **records** their sin against them, not because He doesn't remember...He **always** remembers, but He keeps books for the sake of those who **don't** remember...and we'll see in a couple of weeks that these books will be opened and all will be revealed and laid bare...

Verses 21-24...

Be very sure, be very sure that God will have the last word!

The complete destruction of Babylon had been prophesied...over and over and over in the Old Testament. In fact, if you want to research this fact this afternoon, if you haven't already had your fill of judgment, go home and read **Jeremiah 50 and 51!**

Well, what a mighty God we serve! I know we've rushed through this lesson and you probably have more questions unanswered than answered...but let me just say a couple more things and we'll be through.

I believe we can truthfully say with great assurance and certainty that we are living in a time that is unparalleled in our history.

Our fathers and mothers didn't witness anything much happening in the Middle East, did they? Let alone in the area of Iraq...

I believe we're seeing all signs pointing to the end times. All things are being made ready for Jesus to come for His church...and one day He will come and call us up. Whether we'll hear a literal trumpet or we'll hear His voice **LIKE** a trumpet as John did, saying, "Come up hither," I don't know...

I do know this, Beloved...you and I must be ready. Are we ready? If there is any doubt about your salvation, please get it settled today!! If there is any sin in your life...anything at all that must be cleaned up...do it today!!

Well, after all these judgments, I'm ready to see Jesus, aren't you? Next week, we will!!