

REVELATION CHAPTER 17—Exegetical Notes

Introduction

- a) The importance of cities: Washington, London, Berlin, Paris, Rome, Moscow, Tokyo etc.
- the origin of cities
 - Cain built the first city and called it Enoch after one of his sons (Gen. 4:17)
 - the wicked have always congregated in cities
 - misery loves company
 - the origin of Babylon
 - it was built by Nimrod and his ilk for the purpose of defying God (Gen. 10:8-10; 11:1-9)
 - ancient lore says that Semiramis was the wife of Nimrod
 - she was the foundress of the Babylonian mysteries and the first high-priestess of idolatry
 - this became the fountain head of idolatry and the mother of all the pagan systems of the world
 - its fullest development will come in Babylon of the end time
 - Semiramis bore a son whom she declared was miraculously conceived
 - when presented to the people he was hailed as the promised deliverer
 - this was Tammiz (Ezek. 8:14)
 - the rites of this worship were secret
 - only the initiated were permitted to know its mysteries
 - it was Satan's effort to delude mankind with an imitation of the truth
 - within 1,000 years this had spread throughout the world
 - the symbols were all the same although under different names, such as Isis and Horus; Aphrodite and Eros; Venus and Cupid
 - the identity of Babylon
 - Old Babylon may be rebuilt, or Rome may be the endtime Babylon (Rev. 17:1—sitteth upon many waters—thus a great system. cf. vs. 15)
 - it is also a great city, the capital of this great system
 - this empire is the fourth great empire of Daniel 2
 - political greatness has been transferred from Old Babylon to Rome
 - but whereas this transfer has been made, the capital may be relocated in the endtime
 - since the religious aspect is transferred with the political, the same will be true in the endtime
 - the importance of the Middle East today is making this a great possibility
- b) the setting of chapter 17: this is in relation to chapter 18
- the key verse: 17:1
 - it centers upon the attention upon the religious aspect of Babylon, "The judgment of the great whore."
 - for chapter 18 it is in verse 2, "Babylon the great is fallen."
 - the chronology of these two chapters is also clear
 - the judgment of the great whore comes at the hands of Antichrist in the midst of the week (16-17 cf. with verse 12)
 - the fall of Babylon comes at the end of the week and is a direct judgment of God (8)
 - the figure of a woman is used to symbolize religion
 - and here it is false religion
 - the colour marks the powerful attraction, the jewels mark the tremendous riches and the cup marks the fullness of abominations

- chapters 17-18 are an expansion of the 7th vial; while chapter 19 is an expansion of the 6th vial

c) the outline of chapter 17

- the victim of the judgment v. 1-6
- the visitor of the judgment v. 7-15
- the visitation of judgment v. 16-18

2. The victim of judgment: the great whore—v. 1-6

- key verse 1—“The judgment of the great whore”
- while this is the judgment of a religious system, the judgment is localized in a city (v. 1, 18)
- this whore should not be identified as the Catholic system alone
- it is all false religion now under one great system
- this undoubtedly is the catholic system, since no other system is so highly organized, and so easily incorporates other false religions
- verse 1 is the introduction to the vision
- one of the seven angels with the seven vials invites John to go and view the judgment of the great whore

a) the scope of her influence—“that sitteth upon many waters”

- it is obvious after a comparison with verse 15 that the scope of her influence is universal
- religion is universal

b) the nature of her influence—“the wine of her fornication”

- political powers have had to join with her for the sake of their own existence
- they have committed fornication with her
- peoples of the earth have been imbibed so heavily of the wine of her fornication that they are intoxicated and no longer in control of themselves

c) the power of her influence—“sit upon the scarlet coloured beast”

- the place of her power is the spiritual desert provided by the Devil
- all truth and life are divested and gone
- the substitutes of Satan are in their place
- the position of her power is marked by the seat on the beast
- the beast tolerates the woman who rides him
- this beast is full of names of blasphemy
- this beast has seven heads, a career of empire
- this beast has ten horns, or ten endtime kings
- this beast is headed up in one man, the Antichrist

d) the wealth of her influence—“decked with gold and precious”

- purple—the royalty and kingliness of her influence
 - she has sought the highest places and has consorted with kings
- scarlet—the attractiveness of her influence
 - she has sought to draw admirers without respect to holiness, and so the world has followed after her
- jewels—the wealth that has poured into her coffers from all sources, from rich and poor alike, through superstitious feat, etc.
- cup—what she has to offer
 - these are abominations and filthiness
 - she has nothing pure and wholesome

- e) the mystery of her influence—“mystery, Babylon the great”
 - secrecy has always been associated with religion and especially false religion
 - this is one way the millions have been lured into it
 - once inside they have not been able to extricate themselves
 - and in this respect true Christianity stands in contrast with all false religion
 - greatness of this system is marked by the fact that it overwhelms all the peoples of the earth and finally centers in the capital of the universal kingdom, Babylon
 - motherhood is the dominant feature of this system
 - under the guise of good this false system has mothered the whole brood of abominations and wickednesses that have swarmed through the earth
- f) the results of her influence—“drunken with the blood of”
 - the blood of the saints probably refers to Old Testament saints
 - this means that this religious system reaches back to the very beginning
 - the blood of martyrs probably refers to New Testament saints and others so her direful influence reaches on into the future
 - this amazes John and he wonders
 - the reason is that religion persecutes religion and is its greatest enemy
 - the answer is this that Satan manufactured religion to turn men aside from the truth
 - he has used this false religious system through the centuries to persecute the true saints of God

3. The visitor of judgment: the Antichrist—v. 7-15

- the angel escorting John about enquires why he marvels and assures him that he will reveal to him the secret of the woman and the beast that carries her
- a) the identity of the beast—v. 8
 - he is the first beast of chapter 13
 - he has seven heads and ten horns (17:7 with 13:1)
 - he makes war with the saints (11:7 with 13:7)
 - he is wondered at by those whose names are not in the book of life (13:3-4 with 17:8)
 - he is the beast that was and is not and yet is (13:3, 11:7; 17:8)
 - he is a kingdom and a person (17:9-11)
- b) the career of the beast—v. 9-11
 - the seven heads are seven mountains
 - these do not refer to Rome
 - they refer to seven kingdoms in history: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome
 - revived Rome
 - besides being seven kingdoms, these are represented by seven kings (RV. v. 10)
 - and the beast is the 7th who is brought to life again and becomes the 8th
- c) the alliance with the beast—v. 13
 - the ten horns are ten kings
 - at the time of the beast and his rise to power they do not have a kingdom
 - but they receive power as kings for a brief period with the beast
 - these are the ten toes of Daniel’s image (Dan. 2)
 - these ten kings agree to give their power and strength to the beast, and thus alliance is formed
- d) the war of the beast—v. 14
 - these ten kings under the guidance of the beast make war against Christ (19:19)
 - at first this war is against his people (13:7), but this is simply the means of attacking the Lamb
 - at the end of the tribulation week they are in open war against the Lamb who descends the heavens (19:19)

- e) the power of the beast—v. 15
 - the power of the beast is indicated by the many peoples whom he controls, namely the nations of the earth
 - upon this beast rides the woman, apostate religion
- f) the ultimate source of power—v. 17
 - the ultimate source of power against the woman lies in the fact that providentially God has put it in their hearts to hate the whore and has permitted them to bring judgment upon apostate religion
 - it is the will of God that apostate religion shall come to an end and this is the method God uses to bring it about
 - this is permissive and not directive
 - somehow there is within every free moral agent the power to destroy himself

4. **The visitation of Judgment: the harlot destroyed**—v. 16-18

- introduction v. 16a—the ten horns agree to destroy the woman
- a) the deadly hatred toward the whore—v. 16
 - “these shall hate the whore”
 - this means that the Beast and his vassal kings only submit to the domination of false religion that they might gain their ends
 - there is no love between them
 - each is using the other as a tool
 - when the opportunity arrives they will destroy one another
- b) the desertion from the whore—v. 16
 - “and shall make her desolate”
 - this means that all political and commercial support of the harlot will be withdrawn and she stands absolutely alone
 - in this condition, it will then become quite obvious the source of her power
- c) the display made of the whore—v. 16
 - “and shall make her ... naked”
 - all of the outward display which made her so attractive will be taken away
 - and she will stand before the gazing multitudes utterly naked
 - there will be nothing to hide behind
 - there will be nothing to obscure the vision
 - there will be nothing to distort or twist the naked truth
- d) the despoiling of her riches—v. 16
 - “and shall eat her flesh”
 - the word flesh is plural (fleshes) and refers to the vast stores of wealth accumulated through the years
 - with ravenous greed the kings and the Beast confiscate her wealth
- e) the destruction of the woman—v. 16
 - this means the utter abolition of religion and all that is associated with it
 - Lev. 21:9—“the daughter of any priest...playing the whore...shall be burnt with fire”
 - Satan has achieved his purpose
 - he is being worshipped and his false Christ (Rev. 13:4; 2 Thess. 2:3-4)
 - this is the end he has sought through the ages and now there is no longer need for a system of religion