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10-11-1981

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Recommended Citation

Vaught, W. O., "The Mystery of Babylon the Great--The Mother of Harlots" (1981). *Vaught Sermon Notes: A Study of the Book of Revelation*. 27.

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THE MYSTERY OF BABYLON THE GREAT--THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION
NUMBER 29
REVELATION 17:3-18

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REVELATION 17:3-18 "So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration. And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition. And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful. And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth."

We have been studying the seven deadly drinking cups--the judgments of God poured out on the earth during the last part of the Tribulation. The seventh drinking-cup judgment was upon Ecumenical Religion. Here in our passage Ecumenical Religion is compared to a prostitute. Power lust and lust for money were both involved in this operation. It will take two full chapters here to describe all the different facets of Ecumenical Religion. In verse 2 of chapter 17 we saw the "Strong delusion" actually referred to Ecumenical Religion.

REVELATION 17:3 "So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns." This verse brings us to the subject of this vision. John will be carried by the Spirit to Rome, not literally, but in a vision. Please remember that the Bible never has anything good to say about Ecumenical Religion. Every time the Bible speaks of religion it condemns it. Always keep in mind the definition of religion--religion is man's effort to do what only God can do. Religion emphasizes human works and ignores the work of God by grace. Jesus spoke of religion when he said, "Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness". The entire 23rd chapter of Matthew is devoted to this subject. Every time the Bible describes religion it is negative. The worst people in the world are not immoral people, but they are religious people. The worst thing you can have in your mind is religion, for religion is foreign to the grace of God. Religion is the great enemy of the born-again believer. Religion, human good, sincerity, and self-righteousness are all cut from the same piece of goods. So here in

our passage religion is described as a great whore. Now don't be embarrassed by this term, for it is a term the Bible had to use in order to give an accurate description to religion. Prostitutes live on money, so lust and money and low living is involved in this picture. The scarlet colored beast is the dictator of the Revived Roman Empire of the Tribulation. Here in this instance, God brings about the same situation which existed when the Jews went out under the fifth cycle of discipline when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. In 30 A.D. the church began and forty years later the Jews were phased out under the fifth cycle of discipline. Their capitol was destroyed and the Jews were scattered to the far ends of the earth. Please remember that in 70 A.D. this discipline was administered to the Jews by Rome. Eventually Rome fell as an empire, but the church moved right straight on. But when the Second Coming of Christ takes place the same conditions will prevail as when Christ came the first time. This means that the Roman Empire will be in existence. So the Jews went out under the discipline administered by Rome and they will come back in the same way. There was a Roman Empire when they went out, and there will be a Roman Empire when they come back in. Rome will ride back into power with a combination of Ecumenical Religion and a ten-nation political alliance. The beast carrying the woman is the dictator of the Revived Roman Empire. Religion always wants to dominate and it will use any power of the state it can in order to dominate people. Christianity, on the other hand, emphasizes the fact that church and state must be separate and free. Jesus said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's". Bible Christianity never tries to be the state and it recognizes the right of freedom for every man. All members of the human race must have their own freedom and this is the basis of any true evangelism in any generation. Scarlet colored beast meant a great deal in John's day, for the Roman soldier wore a red tunic and this scarlet uniform could be identified anywhere in the earth of that time. The Assyrians were the first to wear red as the color of military dress, and later on Rome adopted this color. The scarlet colored beast could be no one in John's day other than the Roman Empire, and here in our passage it is the Revived Roman Empire. "Full of names of blasphemy" simply means something that contradicts Bible doctrine. A name can refer to a person or a principle, and here it refers to a principle that is anti-biblical.

Here again we have the seven heads and the ten horns. The seven heads refer to the seven nations that have inflicted discipline unto the Jews in the past. The list of these empires chronologically in history are as follows: 1. Egypt 2. Assyria 3. Chaldea 4. Persia 5. Greece 6. Rome 7. The Revived Roman Empire. This beast rises out of the seventh and he is spoken of as the eighth. He has a religious hat and a political hat, and wears them both at the same time. He will rule a ten-nation confederation. The ten horns are the ten nations making up the federation, and possibly the United States will be one of these nations. If this is not true we do not know where the U.S.A. comes into the picture because the U.S.A. is not mentioned in scripture.

REVELATION 17:4 "And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication" This is the glamour of this Ecumenical Religious-Political system. Arrayed in purple and scarlet. Arrayed is in the perfect tense and this means purple and scarlet are her permanent type of apparel. This woman is glamorous all the time. These were the two royal colors of the ancient world. "Decked" here means to wear something. This woman was "Decked out", as we say, in very expensive robes. The gold and precious stones refers to her fabulous wealth. The gold cup refers to pleasure. Abominations refer to sensual pleasure. The word "filthiness" refers to that which is contrary to true Bible doctrine.

REVELATION 17:5 "And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

Here is her identification. (Note--Let me state here that there is nothing in the original language that would suggest this passage ought to be in big capital letters. Someone who was translating this passage when the King James translation was made put these words in capital letters and they have remained that way ever since. The Church of England at that time was having a great struggle with the Roman Catholic Church and that fact accounts for these letters being placed here in such large type.) In England the people had thrown off the yoke of the Roman Catholic Church and this was their fight for survival.

The word "Mystery" refers to a doctrine not known in the Old Testament which was revealed in New Testament times.

COLOSSIANS 1:25-26 "Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints"

ROMANS 16:25-26 "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith"

This means here that this part of the Tribulation was never revealed in the Old Testament but was to be revealed here in the New Testament. Babylon is the title given because Babylon is where religion and internationalism began. The word Babylon stands for religion and internationalism. Babylon does not exist today and Isaiah made it very plain that Babylon would be destroyed and never would rise again. But here Babylon refers to Rome. This is the international religious system of the Tribulation. Abominations refer to anti-biblical systems.

Now what is the attitude of religion to Bible doctrine? The answer is given in verse 6.

REVELATION 17:6 "And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration! Religion always persecutes the truth. In the Tribulation they will use their power to eliminate those who are born-again and who believe the truth. In many parts of the world there will be great purges. Now this next phrase is not correctly translated. It should read, "When I saw her I was utterly shocked." Shocked at the tremendous power and at the slaughter she brought on the world. Religion kills people in many ways. The word "Drunken" here means that she was saturated with her power and ruthlessness.

Now from this point on we have interpretation. Verses 7-18 will interpret the vision John had of this beast. John was shocked and amazed at what he saw, and thus far it has not yet been explained to him.

REVELATION 17:7 "And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns." So John is asked, "Why are you so shocked?" The point is this. You can't learn when you are shocked. People who are shocked don't even know what is being said. So John is in shock here and the angel is going to arouse John out of his shocked condition so he can think and take in the meaning of the vision. The angel is going to explain to John this beast and this means you must have a panorama of the Roman Empire in order to understand what is being said here. You have to go back to the beginning of Rome to understand this vision.

REVELATION 17:8 "The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is." It says "The beast was". This is imperfect tense. Remember John wrote this down in 96 A.D. That was down toward the end of the Augustian era of Rome. The Julian Caesars had been replaced now by the Flavian Caesars and they will rule from about 96 A.D. to 192 A.D. This will be Rome's greatest era. So the passage really should read, "The beast kept on being" and actually it lasted for about 500 years. This "keeps on being" will continue until 476 A.D. So when John saw this vision and wrote this down Rome had about 400 years yet to go. History tells us that a German by the name of Odovakar succeeded in killing the last Roman Emperor, a young man named Romulus Augustus in 467 A.D. and the empire was not revived until it was revived as the Holy Roman Empire under Charlemagne. Charlemagne was the grandson of Charles Martel who defeated the Turks and kept the Mohammedans from overrunning Europe. "Shall ascend" means that this empire will rise again. The Revived Roman Empire is brought back to continue the way it was going before.

"Bottomless pit" here refers to satanic forces and "perdition" refers to the judgments that are coming. Many people who live on the earth at that time are going to be amazed that their names were not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world.

"Were not written" is a perfect--passive--indicative. What is the significance of this? The perfect tense here is very important. Let us look for a moment at what is called "The book of life". From other passages in the Bible we know that every member of the human race has his name written in the book of life. But if one does not believe in Christ, his name is rubbed out of the book and at the end of time, those names in the book of life are only those who have been born-again.

There is another book, and this book is called the book of works, and this is the book which contains the names of those who did not put their faith in Christ but depended on their own works for salvation. So the "perfect tense" of this verb means the permanent book of life as it will finally be when we get to eternity. Passive voice here means they received the act of not being written in the book because of their unbelief. The indicative mood means the reality of the fact that in eternity the book of life will not have a single name in it of an unbeliever. So it is like this--

Book of life in eternity--only names of believers.

Book of works at the end of time--names of unbelievers.

Actually, at the judgment, no one will be judged for his sins because at the cross Christ took every sin of every man in the whole human race and died for those sins. But if a man will not accept what Christ did for him on the cross and instead chooses to stand on his own human merit, then that man will be judged on the basis of his human works.

"From the foundation of the world" simply means from the ultimate source of God. The words "Yet is" in this verse refers to the future of the Roman Empire and means though the empire of Rome ceased to exist for many centuries, it will rise again and be revived.

REVELATION 17:9 "And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth." Here is the person who has wisdom. In other words, if when you hear Bible doctrine and Bible teaching you listen and think and absorb it, then you are wise. In other words, here is the person who gets and A on exams. This person has been listening.

The seven heads are the seven mountains on which the woman sitteth. We have explained this above as being the seven kingdoms which administered discipline to the Jews in the centuries that have passed.

REVELATION 17:10 "And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space."

The five that are fallen are Egypt, Assyria, Chaldea, Persia and Greece. The one that is (During the moment this was spoken to John) was the Roman Empire. The one that was yet to come was the Revived Roman Empire. When this seventh kingdom comes it will remain for a short time, and this refers to the seven-year Tribulation time.

Now in verses 11-13 we will have a description of the Revived Roman Empire.

REVELATION 17:11 "And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition." The seven kingdoms are Egypt, Assyria, Chaldea, Persia, Greece, Rome, and the Revived Roman Empire. This beast comes out of number seven so he is here called the eighth.

This dictator defeated three kingdoms and whipped them into line and the seven others came in of their own accord in order to form the ten-nation federation. This is the beast of Revelation 13:1-10 and the one who goeth into perdition in Revelation 19.

REVELATION 17:12 "And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast." This ten-nation federation did not exist at the time when John wrote this. The "one hour" refers to the Tribulation.

REVELATION 17:13 "These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast." This is simply the picture of strong dictatorship. All are blended into one international unit.

REVELATION 17:14 "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called and chosen, and faithful." "The Lamb" refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the Second Coming of Christ. The called are Old Testament saints. The chosen ones refer to the church. The faithful refers to resurrection bodies. When this happens all believers will be there.

REVELATION 17:15 "And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues." "Waters" is a name used for nations of people. Peoples and multitudes refer to races. Nations refer to geographical units. Tongues refer to languages.

REVELATION 17:16 "And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." The ten horns represent the political side of the Revived Roman Empire. The political side of this Revived Empire makes a break with the religious crowd and there is a split. The political turns on the religious and destroys it. The point is this. Church and state cannot unite and remain united very long. One will dominate the other.

REVELATION 17:17 "For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled." This verse simply says that God has a plan in history and even though men try to rise up and alter that plan they cannot. God's will is going to be done in the earth in spite of Satan or Ecumenical Religion, or anything else.

REVELATION 17:18 "And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth." This is the city of Rome. We will see this again in Rev. 19:2. In the next chapter we will see the Revived Roman Empire from the economic side.