**Revelation**

*Lesson 33 – Revelation 17:1-18*

* We now enter a new section of Revelation that covers Revelation 17-19. Chapters 17-18 focuses on the fall of Babylon, while chapter 19 responds to this with rejoicing, the marriage supper of the Lamb, and Jesus coming as a rider on a white horse at the final day of judgment to destroy the Beast and False Prophet. So even this new cycle which zooms in on the ending of the previous cycle still ends with the 2nd Coming of Jesus.
* In this section we see 2 kinds of satanic opposition. The Beast attacks with power and persecution in an attempt to get the saints to worship the Beast. Babylon attacks with seduction, trying to destroy the purity of the saints.

*Verses 1-6*

1. One of the 7 bowl angels comes and tells John that he will be shown God’s judgment on Babylon up close. Babylon is described as a prostitute seated on waters. Greg Beale says that the image of a harlot shows Babylon’s allure and seductive nature in attempting to draw people away from Christ. Fortunately, verse 15 tells us that these waters represent “peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages.” That’s another way of saying the universe of unbelievers. This prostitute can’t be one local city like Jerusalem or Rome because her corrupting influence is worldwide.
2. The dwellers on earth, that is unbelievers, have become drunk with Babylon’s wine of sexual immorality. The OT frequently portrays idolatry as adultery/fornication or sexual immorality. Spiritual unfaithfulness is likened to marital unfaithfulness. Thus the woman primarily represents the seduction of false religions.
3. **Hosea 4:12** – “My people inquire of a piece of wood, and their walking staff gives them oracles. For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray, and they have left their God to play the whore.” **Leviticus 17:7 –** “So they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to goat demons, after whom they whore.” See also Numbers 14:33, Deuteronomy 31:16; Judges 2:17; 1 Chronicles 5:25, Psalm 73:27, etc.
4. So John is carried into the wilderness to see this vision. The wilderness is the place where God takes His people to protect them (Rev. 12:6). So John is taken to a place where he can see the harlot and her effects/aftermath, while himself being protected from her seductions and judgments.
5. This woman representing false religions is sitting on a red beast full of blasphemous names with 7 heads and 10 horns. This is verbatim of what the sea-beast looks like in Revelation 13. There the beast was ungodly governments, so false religion is riding on ungodly governments showing that they are working in conjunction with one another and supporting one another in Satan’s program to attack the people of God. Tyrannical states and apostate religions work hand in hand.
6. The next verses give us a description of this woman. You can compare her description to Proverbs 7:1-17
   1. She is wearing purple and scarlet with gold, jewels, and pearls. This symbolizes worldly beauty and seductive appeal on one hand, but also economic prosperity as what she is wearing is very expensive. Contrast this with the Bride of the Lamb adorned with precious stones and pure linen in Revelation 21:2, 9-23.
   2. She has a cup in her hand (contrasted with the cup in God’s hand) and her cup is full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. **Jeremiah 51:7** – “Babylon was a golden cup in the LORD’s hand, making all the earth drunken; the nations drank of her wine; therefore the nations went mad.” This prostitute has many lovers engaging in all sorts of idolatry. Dennis Johnson notes the interesting contrast this entire picture presents: beauty and gross wickedness.
   3. She has a name written on her forehead (mocking the name of God and the Lamb on the foreheads of believers) indicating that she is the source or fountain that gives birth to all specific instances of false religion and ungodly government sinning against God.
   4. And she is drunk the blood of those who died for the testimony of Jesus Christ. She has participated with the beast in the killing of people who refused to be allured or scared into submission to the worldly system.
7. And John’s reaction to this vision is a mixture of fear and awe and repulsion. It literally says “I wondered with great wonder.”

*Verses 7-18*

1. The angel then rebukes John (or reassures John) for his reaction of fear and amazement and tells John that the vision will be explained to him.
2. First, we see the beast counterfeits the sovereignty and eternal nature of God in the description in verse 8 of “was, is not, and is about to rise.” God is the one “who is, who was, and who is to come” (Rev. 1:4). It’s also a mockery of Christ’s death and resurrection. Remember, this beast in Rev 13 is said to have received a mortal wound but come back to life. So this beast “is not” and was defeated at the Cross, but is about to “rise” which is the same word used for the resurrection. But notice that this beast is about to be resurrected in order to be destroyed. He’s rising from the abyss in order to go to destruction, whereas Christ rose from the grave and ascended to the throne of God.
3. And the reaction of unbelievers (“those who dwell on earth”// “names not written in the book of life”) in verse 8 is the same as John’s reaction to this entire vision. They marvel at the beast. They are in awe because it seemed dead but has now come back to life. They are in awe and fear at this imitation of Christ’s resurrection. It’s a word of worship so they will worship the beast because of his counterfeit miracles in imitation and blasphemous mockery of God. The Beast captures the allegiance and worship of all of those who are not elect.
4. Since John’s beast is a composite of Daniel’s beasts (Daniel 7) and those beasts represent evil kingdoms and rulers, we can conclude that all the evil characteristics of those worldly kingdoms are combined into this beast so that **this beast represents all earthly kingdoms/nations along with their rulers that persecute the people of God**.
5. The 7 heads = 7 mountains AND 7 kings. The 10 horns = 10 kings. Some have identified the 7 mountains with Rome since Rome was built on 7 hills and try to make the 7 kings fit beginning with Julius Caesar, but there are historical problems with this. In the OT, mountains can be used symbolically for kingdoms (Isa 2:2; Jer 51:25; Dan 2:35, 44). So the 7 kings and 7 mountains again represent the complete number of earthly kingdoms that persecute the people of God. So what God is revealing to John in this vision is that 5 manifestations of the Beast have come to an end (“have fallen”), one is currently in power (“one is”), and the 7th head as another expression of the Beast’s power will come but because it’s coming will be near the end and the return of Christ, the 7th will “remain only a little while.” The other 6 will reign or have reigned for lengthy periods of time, but the final manifestation will not be able to sustain a lengthy reign. God is telling John that we are in the midst of the reign of the 6th head which means we are nearing the end of time and Christ’s return because there’s only one more head to reign and it’s reign will be short.
6. The beast itself is described as an 8th “king” but belonging to the 7 “kings.” What in the world does this mean? It means the beast itself is an 8th king, not that there’s an 8th head, but rather that the beast will manifest itself last in the same power and authority as the 7 kings/kingdoms. In other words, there will be 7 manifestations of the beast’s power and authority, but the beast itself will exercise power and authority after the 7. In other words, we’ve moved from 7 representatives of the beast, to the beast itself. I believe this means that while there have been many antichrists (1 John 2:18), the beast itself is the final manifestation of Antichrist at the end of time. Greg Beale says this last manifestation of the beast is an even fuller embodiment of Satanic power and is unlike the rest in that his reign concludes history. So things are going to get even worse the closer and closer we get to Christ’s return and the end of time.
7. They are 10 kings who are allied with the beast in fighting against the Lamb and God (verse 14). Greg Beale writes, “The horns are earthly agents through whom the spiritual forces of evil work.” But these horns “have not yet received royal power.” These horns seem to be on the 7th head which has not manifested itself yet. Again, there’s going to be an intense concentration of universal power in the very last days when the Beast and his allies seem to have won victory. This is evidenced by the fact that they receive authority for 1 hour. Their apparent victory near the end of time is going to be short-lived. Because Christ is Lord of Lords (the highest Lord) and the King of Kings (the highest King) so even the Beast and his kingly allies will not be able to overcome the Lamb who will have His own allies, those who are “called,” “chosen,” and “faithful.”
8. God uses the evil powers against themselves so that the beast and his allies turn upon the prostitute woman. The background for this is Ezekiel 23:25-29, 47. There God was judging unfaithful Israel (described as a harlot) and said that she would be **consumed by fire**, **stripped of clothes**, **deal with you in hatred**, and **burn their houses with fire**. The judgment God brought upon unfaithful Israel in the OT is the judgment that God now brings upon all the unfaithful at Christ’s return (the Babylonian harlot). God causes the military and political kingdoms to turn against false religions and bring them down. It’s like a civil war within the kingdom of darkness, all instigated by God Himself. “The pleasures of sin disappoint in the end.” –William Hendriksen

**Message for Us**

1. The cities of the 1st century Roman Empire were centers of idolatry, greed, materialism, and sexual immorality. Our modern cities are also centers of idolatry, greed, materialism, and sexual immorality. Thus they are modern forms of Babylon. Vern Poythress writes, “The media and their advertisements can bring into our homes and thoughts the seductions of money, sex, power, and pleasure. Advertisements tell us that satisfaction and meaningful living can be found if only we buy the latest product. They say, ‘If only you have enough money and toys and sensual pleasures, you will be fulfilled.’”
2. The beast and prostitute also operate on a small scale within our hearts. We capitulate to the world or compromise with the world out of fear or shame. We don’t want to suffer or be mocked. Thus our remaining sin acts beastly toward us to keep us in fear. Additionally, we can be seduced by and lust after sex, wealth, power, health, beauty, etc. Thus our remaining sin also acts like the prostitute to seduce us and makes us feel guilt and paralyze us from pursuing God’s holiness.
3. If you think things are bad now, they are only going to get worse as the return of Christ nears. The evil forces of the world are going to seem to be more and more powerful and persecution of Christians is going to intensify further to the point that the Church seems almost extinguished.
4. “Revelation 17:16-17 is a lesson for every day. It reveals the course of worldly individuals: first, they become infatuated with the pleasures and treasures of the world, and harden themselves against God; then they are hardened; finally, when it is too late, they experience a revulsion of feeling. They are punished by the results of their own foolishness.” –William Hendriksen
5. We will participate with Jesus in the defeat of the Beast. When Jesus comes back, He’s not alone. Those who died are with Him, as well as those who are alive and will meet Him in the air. So no matter what the beast may do to us, he can’t overcome us because our election, calling, and perseverance is secure in Christ Himself, the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. “No matter how bad conditions may get, no matter how ugly and idolatrous and immoral our society may become, never lose sight of who you are in Christ!” –Sam Storms