

A really cool young man bought one of the fastest cars around – a Ferrari GTO. On one particular occasion, he took it out for a spin, and as he was stopped at a red light, an old man on a Mo-ped pulled up next to him. The old man looked over at the sleek, shiny car and asked, “What kind of car ya’ got there, sonny?”

“A Ferrari GTO which cost a half a million dollars,” answered the young man.

“That’s a lot of money,” said the old man. “Why does it cost so much?”

“Because this car can do over 200 miles an hour” proudly boasting the young man.

The old Mo-ped driver asked, “Do you mind if I take a quick look inside?”

“No problem,” answered the young man.

So, the old man poked his head in the window and looked around a bit, then sitting back on his Mo-ped, the old man said, “That’s a pretty nice car!”

Just then the traffic light turned green, and the driver decided to show the old man just what his car could do. He floored it, and within 30 seconds the speedometer read 160 miles per hour, but suddenly, he noticed a small dot in his rear-view mirror, and it was getting closer. He slowed down to see what it could be, and – Swoosh – something zoomed by him going even faster.

“What on earth could be going faster than my Ferrari?” thought the young man to himself. Then, ahead of him, he saw that dot coming back towards him. Swoosh, it went by again, heading in the opposite direction – and crazy enough, it looked like that old man on his Mo-ped. Couldn’t be, he thought, “how could a Mo-ped outrun my Ferrari?”

Once more, he saw the dot in his rear-view mirror, followed by a bang as the object crashed into the back of his car. The young man jumped out and there he saw the old man lying on the pavement. He came to him and asked, “Is there anything I can do for you?” to which the old man whispered, “Unhook... my suspenders... from your side-view mirror.”

There is actually a moral to this story, and it is this – be careful what you get attached to – it could harm you in the end. That’s a simple truth with multiple applications in this life, and it’s also a truth which has some application for the future.

Last week we made our way through the seven bowl judgments presented in **Revelation 16**, which described the final judgments upon the Earth just before Jesus returns to set up His earthly kingdom.

If you recall from last week, when the seventh bowl – when the last bowl was poured out, we were told by the Apostle John that Babylon was remembered before God in His wrath – *definitely, not a good thing to be remembered for*, and at that time, I mentioned to you that this future Babylon appeared to be both a great city, as well as a worldwide system that represents the empire of the Antichrist.

Now you might ask, **how could it be both?** How could it be a literal city with a physical location but at the same time be a system, and I would suggest – think of Wall Street. **When you think of Wall Street, what comes to mind?** For me, Wall Street represents our nation’s financial system, but just as true, it also identifies a specific location in New York City. So, during the Tribulation period, this Babylon could very well refer to a city bearing its name, as well as, a massive global system.

This morning, we are going to take a closer look at this future Babylon. God knew that the readers of this book would have questions about it, and so, once again by stepping outside of the chronological sequence, God takes us backwards a bit and provides us with a broad, wide-angle view of this future Babylon that emerges during the Tribulation period and is judged at the end.

So, we are looking at this future Babylon, and more specifically in **Revelation 17**, we will be focused on its religious feature – its religious sub-system, and we are going to answer the question: **Will there be religion during the Tribulation period?**

So, if you have your Bible turn to **Revelation 17**, beginning with **verse 1**.

¹Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, ²with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality.”

In this passage, one of the seven angels tells John to come and to take a closer look at one of the judgments – the judgment of this character identified as the **great harlot**. Now, this character might be called other things depending on your translation, but hopefully you get the picture – a picture that means something.

In the Bible, and this is the key to identifying this **great harlot** – God’s faithful were often pictured spiritually as a devoted wife or a bride who honored her husband, whereas the unfaithful towards God – typically, those involved in idolatry and the worship of false gods, they were often pictured spiritually as prostitutes or those engaged in adultery, and so, with that key understanding, we can rightly conclude that this great harlot symbolizes religion gone bad. She symbolizes the *false church*, the apostate church, the religious system of Babylon that rebels against God and rejects His truth during the Tribulation period.

Now, as we continue with this vision, John tells us this great harlot **sits on many waters**, which we are told later is symbolic of peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues. This tells us she has global influence as she entices the inhabitants of the world, even the rulers of the world, to take part in her **immorality**. That’s what is occurring during the Tribulation period, as this enticing religious influence will spread far and wide throughout the world.

Maybe you are thinking, that sounds really far-fetched and overly dramatic on my part, but imagine this for a moment. The Rapture of the church occurs before the Tribulation period, and all true believers are gone. All that is left are the lost, the unrepentant, the deluded, and those who only played church but were not true believers. There will be a huge void created by the raptured church, and understandably those left behind will have to deal with the devastating and horrible and confusing aftermath, and they will be easy pickings for a cunning and seductive and immoral religious system identified as the great harlot.

Okay, let’s continue beginning with **verse 3**.

³ And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. ⁴ The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality, ⁵ and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”

So, the picture gets interesting. This great harlot has a name and its “**Babylon the Great**,” and she isn’t just any harlot – she is the “**Mother of Harlots**,” and that warrants a quick review of history.

As you may know, Babylon is rooted in a place called “Babel” – a word in Hebrew which means “*the gate to God,*” – and it’s a place we first read about in **Genesis 11**.

If you remember after the flood, God commanded Noah’s family to be fruitful and to multiply and to spread throughout the whole world. Well, they were fruitful, and they did multiply, but instead of spreading out, they challenged God’s authority and banded together as one great people – and to symbolize their greatness, in their arrogance, they decided to build a tower in Babel as a monument to the power and self-righteousness of man. They wanted to build a tower that would be their gate to God – in essence claiming in so many words, “*We can make it to heaven on our own! We have what it takes to get to where God is.*”

Well, if you remember the story, everyone was speaking one language and God said, “*Well, I’m going to stop that*” and *Ka-pow!* Suddenly, they were all speaking different languages, they could no longer work together on the tower, and just as God desired, they spread out and separated into the nations of the earth, but when they separated, they carried their man-centered religion with them. So, Babel – Babylon is the “**Mother of Harlots**”. She is the mother of false religion, and as Paul Harvey might say – “*Here’s the rest of the story about this Babel.*”

The Bible tells us that the ring leader in the building of this tower in Babel was a guy named Nimrod. Nimrod had a wife named Semiramis, and together they had a son named Tammuz. Unfortunately, Nimrod died before the birth of Tammuz, but Semiramis lived on and she became a very important leader – a high priestess.

Legend has it that Tammuz was later killed by a wild boar, so Semiramis took the body of Tammuz, laid it out, and for 40 days she fasted and wept over the body of her son, and after 40 days, Tammuz came back to life. This was a legend that actually started a pagan religion, and if you think I am making this up, there is a reference about this found in **Ezekiel 8** beginning with **verse 14**.

¹⁴Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the Lord’s house which was toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz.

*¹⁵He said to me, “**Do you see this, son of man?** Yet you will see still greater abominations than these.”*

In this passage, God gave the prophet Ezekiel a vision about all the wicked religious abominations that were occurring, and one of these religious

abominations described a pagan ceremony occurring outside the temple of God that involved women **weeping for Tammuz**.

So, Semiramis and Tammuz became figures in this pagan religion – a pagan religion, where both mother and son were worshiped, and if you do a little study on your own, you will find there were numerous other religions that were spawned from this idea, and that’s another reason why Babylon is called the “**Mother of Harlots**”.

Okay, back to John’s vision in **Revelation 17, verse 3**. In his vision, and this is very interesting, John sees this woman – this great harlot named Babylon, and she is sitting **on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns**. **So, what’s the significance of that?** Well, some say it means that the beast was supporting her – it’s carrying her, and that seems true. Others say it means that she was in charge, because the rider is typically in charge of whatever he or she rides. That seems true as well, and maybe both are true. The beast supports the great harlot – the beast supports this false religion, and at first, it may appear that the beast is actually controlled by her.

Now, we have seen this beast before with the **seven heads** and the **ten horns** back in **Chapter 13** – and we already know that this beast is the Antichrist, and in regards to the seven heads and the ten horns, we will look at that in a moment, but for now, this picture of the great harlot sitting on the back of the scarlet beast represents the unholy alliance between this false religion during the Tribulation period and the wicked government of the Antichrist.

We are told this great harlot was dressed in dazzling attire, adorned in the finest of jewelry, and holding a shiny gold cup. In other words, she looks great on the outside – gorgeous in fact, she has incredible wealth, but on the inside, she’s filled with filthy, nasty stuff.

False religion can make itself look very appealing, enticing, and inviting, but appearances can be deceiving, and I will show you what I mean with **verse 6**.

And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly.

This false religious system will have its converts who will be responsible for the zealous persecution and slaughter of countless numbers of people who come to Christ during the Tribulation period, and if you think that is unreasonable and unbelievable, just go back in history and you will discover that some of the most

vicious and violent persecution against Christians was done in the name of religion.

Well, John was astonished to see this vision, and as a result, the angel provided an explanation to him beginning with **verse 7**.

⁷ And the angel said to me, “Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. ⁸ “The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come. ⁹ Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, ¹⁰ and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. ¹¹ The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction. ¹² The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. ¹³ These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴ These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful.”

We looked at this passage some time ago as we worked our way through **Chapter 13** to study the family tree of the Antichrist, but since we are here again – it’s worth a short recap. So, let me try to summarize this for you, hopefully without confusing you, beginning with the **seven heads**.

If you notice in **verse 10**, we are told the seven heads are symbolic of **seven kings**, described like **mountains** – and when taken together, I believe they are better understood to represent seven world empires, and these empires are actually given to us in sequential order. The order goes like this – **five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come**.

At the time of John’s writing, there were **five** great world empires that had previously **fallen**. They were Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greek. These were great mountainous empires, all Gentile empires that ruled the known world – but they had all come and gone.

Then there is the **one** that **is** – the one that would be in existence at the time of John’s writing, and that would be the Roman Empire. These were great world empires that ruled the known world in the past, but then we are told, there is one that **has not yet come** – a future empire – a seventh world empire, and it’s out of this seventh empire that the Antichrist – a man possessed at some point in his life with a demon, who will emerge onto the world’s stage to create his own empire – an **eighth** world empire.

Now, in regard to the **ten horns**, they represent a future alliance of ten leaders, ten world powers that will band together to form the empire of the Antichrist. They will help him rule. They will answer to him, they will serve his purposes, and they will give all their power and authority and military might to him. They will even come together with their forces at the Battle of Armageddon to **war against the Lamb** when He returns with His people – but these leaders and their forces will be utterly destroyed.

So, for a short time, the Antichrist and those with him will act in unison, under one leader, with one religion, one government, one economy, and if you think about it – **wasn’t that the picture of those in Babel?** – and just as the tower of Babel was brought to an abrupt halt by God – God also has surprising plans for this future false religious system as well. Let’s continue beginning with **verse 15**. We are told,

¹⁵ And he said to me, “The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues. ¹⁶ And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. ¹⁷ For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled.

So far, the Antichrist and the great harlot who represents the false religious system exist together. If you remember, the great harlot was sitting on top of the beast, she was supported by the beast, she even appeared to have control of the beast, but the Antichrist is consumed by his own glory and power – and, surprise, surprise – he devours the great harlot – he strips this false religion of everything – nothing is left of her. Evil turns on itself, and the great harlot is betrayed by the power she rode in on.

As I see it, this would occur at the mid-point in the Tribulation period where the Antichrist sets himself up in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem and demands to be worshiped. As the abomination of desolation, he tells the whole world to worship him, and I believe that's when the False Prophet sets up the image and the whole world is commanded to worship the Antichrist. Ultimately, the Antichrist will not tolerate the worship of anything or anyone else except himself. He is to be their god and he wants no competition – even from a false religion he once supported.

And just so you know – this was God's doing. Consistent with what we have seen several times in the Old Testament, God sometimes used one wicked group as an instrument against another wicked group. Here, God will use the Antichrist to come against this false religious system of the Tribulation period.

We have one more verse, **verse 18** which seems to serve as an introduction for the next chapter. It reads,

The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.”

As I described to you earlier, this Babylon appears to be both a literal city, just like the great city of Rome in John's day, but it also seems to represent a massive global system, comprised of religious, and political, and economic sub-systems. We looked at the false religious system during the Tribulation period this morning – next week, we will look at the others.

So, how does this apply – to you and me – in the here and now? Earlier, I told you that in the Bible, harlotry and adultery were often used as images to represent unfaithfulness to God – used as pictures which describe an affection for God that is misplaced and misdirected, and if we are not careful, that can happen to any of us.

Listen to what the Apostle Paul had to say in **2 Timothy 3**, beginning with **verse 1**. I am going to read this from the New International Version because it's a little easier to follow. Paul says to this young pastor Timothy,

¹But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.

Like a married man who is flirting with a woman who is not his wife, what Paul just described are people who have turned their affection from God and have turned it elsewhere, and as a result, it has harmfully impacted their character and their conduct to the degree that they live as if there is no God. They live as if He doesn't really matter.

Our greatest danger is to lose our affection – to lose our first love for God by being enticed and seduced and entangled in the things of this world, attractive things, even those things we might describe as religious and spiritual, and I say that because religious and spiritual does not necessarily mean biblical. I hope you see the difference because I fear there are many who do not. Like the old man on the Mo-ped, be careful with what we get attached to for it could harm you in the end.

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