THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES

(The woman and the Beast [I])

Revelation 17:1-6

Key Verse: 17:5

“This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT,

THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”

In chapter 16, seven bowl judgments were executed and out of the temple in heaven came a loud voice from the throne, “It is done.” Three series of the judgment of God’s wrath, seal, trumpet and bowl, were completed, only expecting the return of Christ. At the outpouring of the seventh bowl, the last plague, it is written in 16:20, “God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of God’s wrath.” In 14:8, God had warned about the destruction of Babylon through an angel proclaiming, “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.” When the warning was ignored, the judgment came true. In chapters 17 and 18, not written chronologically, the author John takes us backwards and describes the destruction of Babylon the Great in detail, which is indeed the end of the kingdom of this world, that is the kingdom of Satan. It is really important for us to know clearly how the kingdom of this world comes to an end and have eyes to see the history and the future of the earthly kingdom of this world. Chapter 17 shows the nature of the spiritual side of Satan’s kingdom and God’s judgment upon it, while chapter 18 shows the nature of its material, political and economic, side and God’s judgment on it. In both cases, it is called Babylon, the final great world empire of Satan. It is led by the Antichrist as to its material or political and economic side, and the false prophet as to its spiritual side. Both are destroyed by the seven last plagues and the coming of Christ. We are then in chapter 17 looking at the spiritual side, Babylon the religious empire and its destruction. Today we will study chapter 17 until verse 6 with the title, “The Mother of prostitutes.” Interestingly political Babylon is depicted as a monster/dragon, and spiritual Babylon as a mother.

**First, the great prostitute (1-2).** Verse 1 says, “One of the seven angels who had seven bowls came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters.” There are four women appearing in Revelation: the woman Jezebel in the church of Thyatira in 2:20, connected to the pagan culture, the woman representing Israel in 12:1, here the great prostitute and the bride of the Lamb in 19:7, which is the church. All the four women appear as symbols of religion. Here the woman the great prostitute is the great city Babylon that rules over the kings of the earth as verse 18 clearly mentions.

One of the seven angels said to John, “Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute.” This is a wonderful invitation to a great insight, not only for John, but for all of us. We see an interesting comparison when we read 21:9, “One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven plagues came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” Before showing the bride, the wife of the Lamb, the angel shows the prostitute.

The word “prostitute” is written here first and five times in Revelation, four times in this chapter (1, 5, 15, 16) and in 19:2, which says, “for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earthy by her adulteries…” And here 17:2 says, “With her the kings of the earth committed adultery of and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.” Here we are to know that the adultery is first of all the spiritual adultery, which leads to the physical adultery. The spiritual adultery, which is idolatry, is fundamental. When people do not recognize God, the physical degradation follows (Rom. 1:21-28). Moral corruption is the indicator of how far they have gone from God.

In the Old Testament, Israel was often depicted as an adulterous wife, since God calls himself as her husband (Isa. 54:5-6). God revealed his broken heart for Israel, when she abandoned the LORD her true husband and went after other gods of the nations of the world and became a prostitute. There is even a book Hosea in the Old Testament, in which God commanded Hosea to bring his adulterous wife back to him. In that book, God identifies himself in Hosea and thus show that God cannot desert his chosen nation Israel, though she deserted him. Here in Revelation “adultery” is in a precise expression “fornication” (KJV). Anyhow, here we see clearly God’s pained heart for the whole world. To God the whole world is his. God is the Creator of all, undoubtedly all people of the world. Nothing exits without his creation. No one is born apart from God’s creation. God says in Psalm 50:12, “the world is mine, and all that is in it.” Exodus 9:29 says, “the earth is the LORD’s.” God says, “The whole earth is mine” (Ex. 19:5). As the Creator God wants all people of all nations to come to know and recognize him at the right time as the only true God. In his first mission journey, Paul delivered a message to the people in Lystra, saying in Acts 14:15-17, “…We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” With these words Paul urged the people to turn to the living true God. God is not indifferent to the people of the world. When they seek after false gods, it is their committing the sin of fornication to him and he feels greatly hurt and takes such a pain.

Throughout the Bible it is a clear message that there is the only one true God. Deuteronomy 6:4 says, “Here, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” Jesus confirmed it by quoting these words in Mark 12:29, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.” In the book of Isaiah the oneness of God is spoken again and again. God says in 44:6, “I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God”, in 45:5, “I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God”, in 45:18, “I am the LORD, and there is no other”, and in 46:9, “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me.” Jesus again mentioned the only true God in John 17:3, saying in his prayer to God the Father, “Now this is eternal life that they may know you, the only true God….” Apostle Paul also said of God being one in 1 Corinthians 8:5, “For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came…” We see in Revelation to really stress that the Creator is the one true God. In chapter 4, the twenty-four elders in heaven worshiped God saying, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” (4:11). In chapter 14, an angel proclaimed the eternal gospel, saying, “Fear God and give him glory…worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water” (14:7).

Interestingly in the Bible not only Israel but also other nations were called “virgin” such as “Virgin Daughter of Sidon” in Isaiah 23:12, “Virgin Daughter of Babylon” in Isaiah 47:1 and “Virgin Daughter of Egypt” in Jeremiah 46:11. This was God’s hope for each of the nations to have a pure love relationship with the one true God. Babylon whom God once called Virgin Daughter of Babylon became the woman called the great prostitute. Spiritual prostitution brings much pain to God. May we know God’s pained heart more and more.

**Second, the mother of prostitutions (1-6).** Let’s look at verse 1 again.Verse 1 says, “One of the seven angels who had seven bowls came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters.” Sitting is the mark of distinction. Sitting is what kings did. They sat on their throne. It was a position of sovereignty. According to verse 15, the waters are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. The prostitute sitting on many waters shows her sovereign authority to rule, commanding all kinds of people, multitudes, nations and languages. The expression of these four kinds is the fourfold description of the unregenerate world in the future. The authority of Babylon is immense. This world religion of prostitution will sit in the commanding position over all the peoples of the world.

Verse 2 says, “With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.” This is the description of the alliance of the prostitute after the description of her authority. This prostitute religion is associated with the kings of the earth. The scope of this influence is vast. The prostitute becomes the ally of the whole world on the highest level of leadership: the kings, the sovereigns, the presidents, the emperors, the dictators, the premiers, the prime ministers, whatever they’re called.

John sees these kings, the kings from all over the world, committing fornication with the prostitute. That is becoming absorbed in this religious power. In deception, all the leaders of the world come together, prostituting themselves for one solitary religion. It’s amazing that the whole world is going to come together on this basis. They cannot come together on a political, economic basis. But the same power rules every false system of religion in the world.

The alliance is not just with rulers. It says also, in verse 2, “And the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.” “The inhabitants of the earth” refers to unbelievers in Revelation. The same folks described in verse 15 - the people, multitudes, nations, and tongues, the unregenerate - they all fall in; they are all victimized. Back in chapter 13, when the religion of Antichrist was being introduced, they were worshiping the dragon who is Satan, and they were worshiping the beast. 13:8 says, “All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast.” All of them fall into this worship. 13:14 says, “He deceived the inhabitants of the earth.” This is the false prophet who deceives them. They all come; they all worship the beast who has had a false, counterfeit resurrection. Everybody is sucked in on this deception. The imagery here in 17:2, “they were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.” Again, here the angel is not talking about real wine, not about real sexual immorality. He is talking about becoming a part of the false form of religion. They all get drunk with it; they are all intoxicated with passion for this religion. Totally, passionately, intensely they give their hearts to this prostituted Babylonianism. Satan orchestrates the whole thing. All the people and all the leaders come together in this great world religion.

Now in verse 3 it says, “Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns.” John was carried away in the Spirit into a wasteland. The Holy Spirit removed him from the conversation with the angel and took hjm into the place of wilderness. He said, “I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast.” We know that the beast is the Antichrist. She is sitting on the beast. The beast is another alliance of the woman prostitute and they work together.

It is the religious system that really captures the world. It is initially the religious system that is in control in those last days. For human beings are religious. At a time like great tribulation they are desperate to rely on and worship something beyond human, something supernatural. When they reject the true God, they tend to worship false gods. Satan and his demons use the religiosity of people and energize false religion. False religion becomes extremely popular.

The beast further is described in verse 3 as a scarlet beast, the color of luxury, the color of splendor, the color of royalty. It is also color of sin according to Isaiah 1:18, and some would say it is the color of blood. We could conclude a luxurious, splendorous, royal, sinful, bloody beast. And it says further of the beast that he was full of blasphemous names. Why? Because the world is now identifying him as God. As we studied in chapter 13, verse 1 says, “He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name.” Here in 17:3, “He was covered with blasphemous names.” It is self-deification. He’ll take every name that belongs to God and wear it himself. About seven heads and ten horns we will talk in the next lesson.

Then verse 4 says, “The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls.” This is about her apparel. Historically, prostitutes have generally adorned themselves in finery to attract attention, to allure with supposed beauty. And the prostitute Babylon is no different. The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet. What is that? Royalty, prosperity, nobility, wealth. This prostitute is going to be a prosperous prostitute. This is one who has plied her trade well and become extremely wealthy. This prostitute was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She is very wealthy with tremendous wealth. When religion is combined with the luxury and money power, it can work very powerfully. and effectively.

Verse 4 continues, “She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.” Another evidence of wealth is this golden cup, but out of it come abominations and the unclean things of her immorality. Jeremiah 51:7 says, “Babylon was a gold cup in the LORD’s hand; she made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad.” What a fulfillment of God’s prophecy!

We have seen the four aspects of the prostitute: authority, alliances, apparel, abomination.

Now verse 5 says, “This title was written on her forehead: “MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTIONS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” Now notice the name, the name is Mystery Babylon the Great. The reason it says Mystery Babylon is so that we don’t confuse this with some geographical location. Babylon cannot be confined to any one historical manifestation past or future. It has multiple equivalence. Any place that is characterized by false religion is a Babylon. The details of John’s description do not neatly fit any past city, whether literal Babylon, Sodom, Egypt, Rome or even Jerusalem. Nor do they fit any future city. But rather this is Mystery Babylon, something deeper and broader and wider and more profound and more mystical than any physical location. In fact, here is an undisclosed Babylon, a secret reality to be revealed in its final form. This is Babylon beyond geography. This is Babylon in mystery form. It is the Babylon of satanic deception. It would be safe to say that wherever satanic deception rules, we have a form of Babylon.

Babylon is to be better understood as sort of the archetypal head of all worldly resistance to God. It is a trans-historical Babylon. It is the Babylon of idolatry. It is the eschatological symbol of worldwide satanic deception and power. It is a divine mystery that can never be wholly reducible to empirical earthly institutions. Babylon represents, in this chapter, the religious culture of the world dominated by Satan the deceiver.

Now its comprehensiveness can be seen further by noting that it is Babylon the Great, it is mega-Babylon, something massive and far-reaching. Further it is described as ‘The mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth.’ That is to say that all of the prostitutes in the earth and all of the abominations in the world are spawned out of this Babylon. The final form of world religion will be the mother of all idolatry, the mother of all false religion. The Babylon of which John writes and that he sees in this vision is the very Babylon that once gave birth to all blasphemous idolatry. It is the very Babylon that once gave birth to all prostituted forms of religion.

We can understand this on basis of Genesis. After the Flood, men attempted to build a tower that reaches to the heavens to make a name for themselves. This act was rebellion against God. This was the first great humanistic enterprise. It was more than just humanistic; it was religious. It was the first form of false religion. It was the first time that men had been seduced into inventing a religion. This idolatry, this spiritual fornication, this abomination to God was led by a man by the name of Nimrod to mean This Nimrod, grandson of Ham was the first apostate and the apostate of the patriarchal age. rebel. The beginning of his kingdom was Babel later called Babylon. He at the city of Babylon in the plain of Shinar spawned a complex series of mystery religions that abominated God. And what God did was to scatter them changing their languages. With the scattering went the religion in a myriad of forms. These abominable beliefs spread through the whole world. Now we understand where all false world religions came from. Babylon mothered them all. She was the fountainhead of every false religion on the earth.

We see the source of all earth’s idolatries. Whether Confucianism, Islam, Hinduism, Shamanism, Taoism, Atomism, spiritism, astrology, Buddhism, Sikhism, mysticism, or whatever, she mothered them all. They all had the same source, they’re really not that far apart. She mothered them all and all her children will come home to her.

One-world religion is coming. There are efforts, of course, in the ecumenical movement to sweep away all dogma, to sweep away all distinctions that divide and move the world toward one great tolerance toward religion, to pave the way for this gathering of one-world religion. The ecumenical movement that’s bringing the various diverse factions, as we know it, of Christianity together is social action, existentialism, mysticism, and emotionalism. Seducing spirits are out doing their work, spreading the doctrines of demons, destroying the distinctiveness of the Christian faith. False teachers are busy doing their work. And in the end, as the Scripture lays out for us, they’re all going to come home to Babylon. We are to know that she is the unholy counterpart to the bride of Christ,

In verse 6, “I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.” Here we see her accusation after her authority, her alliances, her apparel, her abominations. Here is the indictment against her, the epitome of her crimes. False religions persecute true religion to the point of shedding the blood. This is a bloody battle. That’s why so many God-lovers were hated and killed by God-haters throughout history.

The word “prostitute” or “prostitution” is a very painful word between the closest relationship between the two. It is so on a physical level, and much more so on a spiritual level. God is a holy God and the God of love. He is perfect in power, love and purity. Our holy and loving God cannot bear with even a hint of impurity. He feels so much pain with the prostitution of the people of the world. Babylon is the leading factor, the mother of prostitutions and of abominations of the earth. So, God had to punish the great prostitute. May we keep pure love relationship with God in our Lord Jesus Christ, fighting against any kind of impurity and continually pray and do his work for the people of the world to turn the only true God.