

GOD WITH US
Part 12: THE APOCALYPSE
Message 3 – Revelation 12-18
The Counterfeit Kingdom

Introduction

In Revelation 10:8-11, John was given a little book to eat, a book that contained more visions and revelations concerning the future. Based on the contents of chs.12-18 we infer that the contents of the little book contained not only more details about God’s judgments coming down upon the Earth, but also details concerning the last effort of Satan to establish his kingdom on earth. Much of the content centers around Satan’s activity, his antichrist, his people and his city – Babylon the Great. From the Garden of Eden forward it has been Satan’s intention to thwart God’s rule on Earth and to establish his own kingdom. This was the offer he made to Jesus during the wilderness temptations – bow down to me, be my ‘messiah,’ and I will give you authority over the world, for it is all mine. In the last days, a final conflict will ensue between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. These chapters show that conflict unfolding in the final 7-year tribulation period on Earth, leading up to the return of Jesus. God’s response to Satan’s kingdom is the final outpouring of 7 bowls full of His wrath, culminating in the battle of Armageddon at Jesus’ return, bringing an end to Satan’s futile efforts, and the complete destruction of his kingdom and his bride – Babylon the Great.

Satan’s Attempt to Thwart the 1st Coming of Christ

This section begins with an incredible retrospective look at how Satan sought to thwart the 1st coming of Jesus into the world. We recall the attempt of Herod the Great to annihilate all the infants in Bethlehem, so as to kill the competing king who was reported to have been born into his realm (Matthew 2). Now we see the spiritual side of that story.

“A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth” (12:1,2).

The “woman” is the nation Israel, with the twelve stars on her crown representing the twelve tribes of Israel. It was through Israel that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, came into the human realm. In what follows we see that it was Satan who tried, through Herod the Great, to destroy the

male child born to the woman. From Genesis to Revelation we see that Satan's one main goal has been to steal humanity away from the Son of God (for Whom we were made; we are His inheritance, His beloved, His bride) and to shape humanity into a bride for himself. The final chapters of Revelation show us Satan's final, futile attempts to preserve and protect what He has been building since Genesis 1. The "strong man" has his house . . . but the "Stronger One" has come to destroy his house and take away his possessions (Luke 11:21,22).

"Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days" (12:3-6).

God the Father protected His Son from the attempt of Satan to destroy Him at birth. In the last days, Israel (the woman) will be protected from Satan's attacks for 3-1/2 years. This will likely be the same 3-1/2 years that the two special witnesses are protected while doing their prophesying and miracle-working in Jerusalem (Rev.11). Things will change, however, during the last 3-1/2 years of the Great Tribulation.

Satan raging on Earth after being Expelled from Heaven

"And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death. For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time'" (12:7-12).

It is apparent here that Satan has access to the throne-room of heaven, for he has been appearing there to accuse the children of God day and night. In the last days, however, Satan will be banned from any further access to the presence of God. After he has been finally thrown down to the earth and realizes that he has only a short time left to pursue his agenda, he goes on a desperate rampage to destroy the people of God wherever he finds them, while simultaneously attempting to establish his own kingdom on earth. In particular, Israel will be persecuted during the final 3-1/2 years prior to the return of Christ. (Recall that the 144,000 Jewish witnesses and the two special witnesses were protected by God for the first 3-1/2 years of the Tribulation period.)

“And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child. But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth. So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (12:13-17).

Unable to destroy the *Jewish* people of God in the last days, Satan goes off to attack the “rest of her children,” presumably the *Gentile* people of God who remain on the Earth at that time.

Satan installs his antichrist on Earth

Based on the wider teaching of Scripture, it is likely that the antichrist will appear in the middle of the final 7 years of history. Satan’s antichrist will be a human being who, in many ways, resembles Jesus Christ. He is invested with power (by Satan); he appears to have had some kind of ‘resurrection from the dead;’ he is able to dazzle the inhabitants of the earth so that they follow him; he is unflinching in his attack on the powers that are against him; he is empowered by a spirit-assistant. The apostle Paul described the antichrist as “the lawless one” whose coming coincides with Satan’s activity (2Thessalonians 2:3-12).

“And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names. And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And

the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority. I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast; they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?' There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven" (13:1-6).

Most ominously, the antichrist attacks the people of God on earth and is given the authority (by God) to overcome them (13:7). A time of tremendous trial and suffering for the people of God follows the rise of the antichrist. This is what Jesus predicted (Matthew 24:9-22) and what Paul anticipated with the revealing of "the lawless one." The N.T. prophetic passages are consistent in revealing the future rise of this antichrist individual. Note how at the end of the following section the saints are admonished to persevere until the end (13:10).

"It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. If anyone has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints" (13:7-10).

The antichrist's helper

We know that God exists in a perfect tri-unity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We also know that the Holy Spirit animates and empowers not only Jesus (during His earthly ministry), but also God's children. Now we see that Satan has his version of the trinity. Satan takes the place of the Father; the antichrist tries to replace the Son of God; and this other "beast" arises to imitate the Holy Spirit, as he animates and empowers the antichrist and causes people to worship him. Satan is desperately trying to give the world a replica of the kingdom of God.

"Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon. He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to

perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life. And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed. And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the freemen and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six” (13:11-18).

Some type of identifying mark will be required for people to prove that they have accepted the rule and authority of the antichrist. Without that mark, they will be hindered from engaging in normal commerce in this world. They will be “locked out” of the normal operating systems a world under the antichrist’s control. Greeks and Romans practiced something called gematria. It was a way of sending encoded messages to one another, using a series of numbers. For example, on the walls of Pompeii an inscription was found that read, “*I love her whose number is 545.*” It was a cryptic way of identifying someone without revealing their actual name. Only those with “inside information” could unlock the secret of the gematria. The anti-Christ will have the number 666. The history of the interpretation of this passage has revealed the futility of trying to identify the individual in our current setting(s). The identity of the anti-Christ will become clear to the wise in the end times, as all the other accompanying signs unfold. “Calculating the number of the beast” will become more realistic when the calculating is being done in the wider context of end-times events on earth, as Revelation has described them. The ‘full picture’ will help fill out the details.

The Lamb and the 144,000 on Mount Zion

We recall the sealing and protecting of 144,000 Jewish witnesses back in ch.7:4-8. Now we see these same special witnesses in heaven with the Lamb. They have faithfully completed their task on Earth and have been transported, either by death or by rapture, to heaven. They are with the Lamb, worshipping with the 24 elders and the 4 living creatures.

“Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and

before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth. These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless” (14:1-5).

Vision of the Angel with the Gospel

Here we have *an angelic witness* to people on earth concerning the truth of the gospel. I have often commented that God committed the precious truths of the gospel to humans, not to angels (even though they could have spread the message more quickly; they do not have a personal stake in the matter). But here, in the final days, we see God giving the gospel to an angel who will spread it to the whole Earth, giving people yet another chance to respond. There is a sense of urgency in God’s end-times methodology for spreading the gospel to the world.

“And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, ‘Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters’” (14:6,7).

Not only does the angel announce the good news, but also the sober news: the hour of God’s judgment upon the kingdom of Satan has come. People are admonished to fear Him and give Him glory, before it is too late. Another angel arrives to announce more specifically the fall of “Babylon the Great.” We will be told more about the fall of Babylon in chapters 17 and 18.

“And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality” (14:8).

The Cup of Wrath for those who worship the anti-Christ

I have spoken previously about “the two cups,” the cup of God’s wrath and the cup of blessing. Jesus drank the cup of God’s wrath (judgment) at the cross, so that we might drink what Paul called “the cup of blessing” (1Corinthians 10:16). Now, in this scene, we see people drinking the cup of God’s wrath. Why? Because they refused to accept what Jesus did for them when He drained the cup of wrath through His death on the cross.

“Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.’ Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, ‘Write, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them’” (14:9-13).

Two Reapers reap their Harvests from the Earth

Much has been written about the timing of “the rapture” (when God’s people on Earth are taken up into heaven to be with Jesus – 1Thess. 4:16-18). Some believe the rapture will occur before the final 7 years of tribulation on earth (the pre-trib. rapture position); some that it will occur at the mid-point, right before Satan sets up his kingdom with the anti-Christ (the mid-trib. rapture position); others believe that the rapture will occur at the end of the 7-year tribulation (the post-trib. rapture position); and another group (myself included) believe that it will occur shortly before the end of the 7-years, just prior to the final out-pouring of God’s wrath with the 7 bowls of judgment (the pre-wrath rapture position). On my view, we have in the next passage a reference to the rapture of God’s people out of this world sometime near the end of the tribulation.

This reaping occurs in two parts, one good and one bad. This is consistent with other passages of Scripture that speak of the separation that will occur at the end of the age: Luke 3:17 – the wheat gathered into the barn while the chaff is burned up with fire; Matthew 13:30 – the tares burned up while the wheat is gathered into the barn; Matthew 13:47-50 – the good fish gathered into containers, but the bad fish thrown away; Matthew 24:37-42 – one man taken from his field, the other left behind.

The First Reaper

The description of the first Reaper reads very much like a description of Jesus Christ. This is why in many translations the pronouns “He,” “His” and “Him” are capitalized, because the translators see this as a reference to Jesus. Here we see Jesus coming to claim His own “harvest” from the Earth, to gather His people from the four corners of

the Earth (see also Matthew 24:30,31). It is important to note that while this first reaper takes His harvest with Him, the second reaper throws his harvest into the winepress of God's wrath. Thus, we have one reaper (Jesus) representing salvation and deliverance from the wrath of God, and one representing judgment and destruction for those who continue to oppose God's will.

“Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, ‘Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.’ Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped” (14:14-16).

The Second Reaper

“And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, ‘Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe.’ So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses’ bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles” (14:17-20).

Preparations for the pouring of the 7 Bowls

Revelation chapters 15 and 16 are the saddest and most solemn chapters in the entire book. Ch.15 is essentially preparatory for the outpouring of the 7 bowls of God's final wrath in ch.16. There are no more pauses, no last-minute gospel messages, no pleadings from the divine throne room, no more angelic messengers announcing that the end is near. *This is the end of the current period of human history.* There are three haunting words in these two chapters: *last (15:1), finished (15:1) and done (16:17)*. They are haunting not only because they point to the utter finality of what we are about to read, but also because *they echo what Jesus said on the cross* after He had absorbed the full impact of divine judgment against sin: *It is finished (Jn.19:30)*. The sad reminder throughout the book of Revelation is that what was *already finished at the cross of Christ* needs to be *finished again . . .* because humanity rejected the satisfactory payment of Christ.

Seven angels prepared to “finish” the work of pouring out God's judgment on Earth. We see a multitude in heaven “*who had been*”

victorious over the beast” standing on the sea of glass before the throne of God. These may be those who were reaped from the Earth by the Son of God in the previous paragraph. The days of their persecution on Earth have ended and now the day of vindication has come. They are singing the “song of Moses,” a song composed of various O.T. references to God’s mighty deliverances of the Israelites from their oppressors.

“Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished. And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, ‘Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; for all the nations will come and worship before You, for Your righteous acts have been revealed’” (15:1-4).

The 7 angels appear, prepared to pour out the 7 final judgments of God on the Earth. In a solemn way, the “most Holy Place” in heaven is closed off to visitors until the 7 angels have poured out their bowls of judgment. The temple fills with heavy smoke from God’s glory and power. He is about to undertake His “unusual task,” the task of judgment (Isaiah 28:21).

“After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened, and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean and bright, and girded around their chests with golden sashes. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished” (15:5-8).

Six Bowls of Wrath

There is very little to say about these bowls of wrath. They are simply terrible as God’s judgments falls on all those who remain on earth, defiant to His rule. In several places here it is clear that the defiant ones on earth know *exactly* where these judgments are coming from – the God of heaven – yet, they remain obstinate in their refusal to bow to His rule and authority.

1st Bowl: Malignant sores on the followers of the antichrist.

“Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, ‘Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.’ So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image” (16:1,2).

2nd Bowl: All life in the sea destroyed.

“The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died” (16:3).

3rd Bowl: Fresh water turned to blood.

“Then the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters saying, ‘Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things; for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it.’ And I heard the altar saying, ‘Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments’” (16:4-7).

4th Bowl: Sun scorches humanity with fire.

“The fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire. Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory” (16:8,9).

5th Bowl: Kingdom of the antichrist darkened.

“Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain, and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds” (16:10,11).

6th Bowl: Armies prepare for Armageddon

We saw at Trumpet 6 a huge army of 200,000,000 gathering at the River Euphrates for a human conflict that destroyed 1/3rd of humanity. The 6th Trumpet was then followed by the return of Christ at the 7th Trumpet (see 9:13-16 and 11:15-19). Similarly, the 6th Bowl has the kings of the whole world gathering at the Euphrates for a war. Here, however, the human armies have been rallied by the anti-Christ to come together to fight against the armies of God. This is the same war described at the visible return of Christ in Revelation 19:11-21, the battle of Armageddon.

“The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east. And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false

prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. ('Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.') And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon” (16:12-16).

7th Bowl: It is finished.

“Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, ‘It is done.’ And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe” (16:17-21).

The 7 bowls of wrath have brought us to the end of God’s judgment and to the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ (detailed in ch.19). Now John is invited to come and see the judgment of Babylon the great, a vision that will encompass chapters 17 and 18.

Babylon the Great Exposed

There is a scene in the Old Testament that teaches us something about unseen realities. The king of Syria sent a large army by night to surround the city of Dothan to capture Elisha the prophet. When Elisha’s servant woke up the next morning and saw the Syrian army surrounding the city, he was terrified and cried out, *“O my master! What shall we do?”* Then we read the following words from Elisha:

So he answered, “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Then Elisha prayed and said, “O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.” And the LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2Kings 6:17).

An invisible spiritual force was there, protecting the servants of God; unseen to the naked eye, yet very real and active. There are spiritual realities, demons and angels, principalities and powers, at work in our world. Quietly, invisibly, they pursue the agendas given to them by

either God or Satan. Scripture consistently teaches about these unseen forces.

We are within 5 chapters of the end of the Bible and suddenly the curtain is pulled back on a subversive net, a counter-force that has been operative throughout human history, from Genesis to Revelation. Here she is identified as “Babylon the Great.” “Babylon” first appeared back in Genesis 11:1-9 at the tower of Babel – a tower intended to display the power and ingenuity of mankind; a sort of tribute to the kingdom of man and a denial of the kingdom and sovereignty of God. That is why God opposed the project; why He confused their languages so that they could not complete it. It became known as the tower of “Babel” because God frustrated their attempt to build a tower representing the antithesis of what God wanted for humanity – dependence on Him and relationship with Him.

That was the first appearance of this *influence* called “Babylon the Great.” She is not a city. She is the influence that builds the city of independence from God. The tower of Babel came to ruins, but Babylon the Great – Babylon the ‘matrix’ did not go away. She simply took on different clothing. *Babylon is a vast system of influence in our world; a system of evil; a world-view that stands for everything opposed to the kingdom of God. Babylon is Satan’s value-system for humanity; his operating system; his enticement to pursue glory apart from God.*

Later in history, when Nebuchadnezzar built the great Babylonian kingdom, he walked on his palace roof admiring the magnificence of his accomplishments. Listen to his words; hear his pride. You will hear Babylon the Great in the heart of this ruler:

He was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon. The king reflected and said, “Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30,31).

There is nothing wrong with building a great kingdom, a great city, a great tower, or a great corporation. God created us to rule and subdue the whole Earth. But when greed, pride and power begin to control the whole dynamic of the situation, when our project becomes our idol, and our way of defining ourselves, then Babylon the Great has shown her hand. Something noble is turned into something sinister. Instead of ruling and subduing the Earth for the glory of God, by the might of His power, we begin to operate independently of Him. That is the great seduction of Babylon the Great – *glory without God.*

In John's day, Babylon the Great was moving in and behind the Roman Empire with its extravagances, hatred of Christians, opulent greed, and rampant immorality. Surely, as John saw this stunning vision unfolding, he thought of the Roman emperors, their self-proclamations of deity, their abuse of power, their lavish parties, their circuses, their gross materialism, the martyrdom of Christians, and so on. The Rome of John's day was a secular manifestation of a power at work, the power of the mistress of the world, Babylon the Great.

But Babylon is not confined to one time or place. She plies her trade throughout history, casting a spell of vanity and godlessness over every culture, every age. Babylon is global ungodliness; the lies we believe, the snares that promise life but produce death. Babylon is the trick, the deception that captures us and keeps us from God. She is the preoccupation with everything but God. In Revelation 17 Babylon is exposed and then in ch.18 she is destroyed.

“Then 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, with 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.’ 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. 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, and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, ‘BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.’ And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus” (17:1-6).

Babylon is described here in many ways. She is *a great harlot* meaning that she is the ultimate defilement of all that is good and pure. She turns all of God's ways into debasement. *She sits on many waters.* She influences all the nations; she cannot be viewed as a single city or nation, or some distinct historical world power. She plies her trade on the street of the world throughout the course of history. *The kings of the earth commit acts of immorality with her.* This woman has sway over kings and rulers, over the power brokers on earth. World leaders are, without knowing it, lured into aligning their lives and their administrations with her values. She is the unseen force driving their hearts toward her agendas. *Those who dwell on the earth are made drunk with the wine of her immorality.* Unwittingly, the people of the earth are drinking her wine daily, overtaken by her ways, drunk with

her principles, intoxicated by her suggestions. Turn on your T.V.; she is there. Log on to the computer; she is there. Walk by the magazine stand; she is the face behind the faces. Turn on your radio; she is singing to you. She is seated on *a scarlet beast with blasphemous names*. This is the same beast we saw back in chapter 13, the antichrist. This means that she is completely aligned with the kingdom of Satan. *She is adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls*. She is extravagant in her luxury and beauty; very enticing. She doesn't sell herself and her value-system by being unattractive. She is an alluring mistress for the world. And while she makes the world drunk with the wine of her passions, she herself *is drunk with the blood of the saints*. She hates Jesus Christ and opposes all that He stands for. Throughout the ages, she has been the force behind the opposition to God's people. Where persecution is, she is there.

John needed help understanding this vision, so the angel gave him more details (that are even more perplexing to modern interpreters).

“When I saw her, I wondered greatly. 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. 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. Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, 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. The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction. 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. These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast. 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.’ And he said to me, ‘The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues. 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. 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. The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth’” (17:6-18).

This passage, full of exacting details, is extremely difficult to interpret. Let me give you the basic idea of what many interpreters (who take a futurist view of the book) think is being said here. The woman (Babylon the Great) will, in the last days, be aligned with the kingdom of the antichrist. That much is clear here. It appears, further, that she will be aligned with a confederation of kings who are part of antichrist's world rule during the last period of history. There are allusions in this passage to the city of Rome in John's day (seven hills) and to the succession of Roman emperors (seven kings). But this imagery, while based on then current realities, is likely pointing to an end-times confederacy that will seek to dominate the world. (A common technique of prophets was to see in present events a fore-shadowing of future events.) This end-times confederacy will be headed by the antichrist, who will be the ultimate evil successor to all previous rulers. His kingdom will be the final and ultimate manifestation of evil. The ten kings who receive authority for one hour (a short period of time) may well be the specific authority structure of the end-times (specifically, the last 3-1/2 years of the tribulation period). They will assist the antichrist in ruling the world and opposing the Lamb. The influence of Babylon the Great will animate this evil kingdom and guide the motives and values of these kings.

Strikingly, this federation of kings will, ultimately, turn on Babylon the Great and destroy her! *"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."* This seems to indicate that in the end, Satan's kingdom of evil will become divided against itself. It will begin to crumble in on itself due to greed, pride and power. The vast system of corruption, materialism and hedonism will self-destruct when it collapses under the weight of its own evil impulses. The following chapter describes vividly the ultimate downfall of Babylon the Great.

Babylon the Great Destroyed

"After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality'" (18:1-3).

Babylon the Great is about to fall. Instead of being a glorious city full of pomp and beauty, she has become *a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird*” – a toxic waste site of evil. Formerly, the great men of the world were drawn to her; but here, all will stand at a distance as they witness her downfall.

The people of God are called to “come out of her.” We live “in the world,” but we are not to be captured by the spirit of Babylon the Great.

“I heard another voice from heaven, saying, ‘Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her. To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, ‘I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning.’ For this reason, in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong” (18:4-8).

The kings and the great merchants of the earth stand in shock at the demise of Babylon the Great. They have profited the most from her influence; gained their power through her means; wielded their control through her methods; made their wealth through her luxuries. But this great city that has enamored them, this value system, this hidden matrix that keeps them blinded to the truth, will be revealed and judged by God in one day, one hour. We only need to remember the horror of the hour when the Twin Towers fell in New York City on 9-11. The stunned shock that was felt on that day was a small precursor to what mankind will feel on the day that Babylon the Great comes crashing down.

“And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’ And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more – cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives. The fruit you long for has gone from you,

and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you and men will no longer find them. The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls; for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!' And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance, and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What city is like the great city?' And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!' Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her" (18:9-20).

A strong angel announces the final doom of this world system that has for long centuries allured humanity away from the love of God.

"Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, 'So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer. And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer; and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery. And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth'" (18:21-24).

The celebration of independence from God will come to a sudden end. The song of the hedonist will be silenced. The mills of the materialist will be shut down. The city of lights will go dark. The bridal party will end. The investor's markets will crash. Communication devices will receive only error messages. The world system, as we know it, will come to a screeching halt. And those who depend on that system, those who love it, will stand and watch in shock.

There are two challenges given to us in these chapters. One has to do with **seeing**, and one has to do with **acting**. First, the challenge of seeing the unseen reality of malevolent spiritual powers. "*And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; AND I SAW a woman sitting . . .*" (17:3). "I saw . . ." Behind government, behind commerce, behind religion and behind marketing, behind all that you see in our present world system there is an evil system, a matrix that has been woven by

Satan to control, contain and blind people. We can choose to deny this invisible system, and to convince ourselves that all is well; but the book of Revelation pulls back the curtain and shows us that all is not well. If you take the truth of God, and swallow it (as John did the little book), you will begin to see her in your world, daily. If you walk in the Spirit and the Word, you will begin to sense that behind this grand party of life there is a woman offering us the wine of her delusions. Humans are captives in a kingdom that of evil, and they are blinded to its reality.

The second challenge here is one of response: *And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "COME OUT OF HER, my people, that you may not participate in her sins and that you may not receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities" (8:4).*

We are called to see her, and come out of her; to be "in the world" but not "of the world." The challenge for God's people is to examine our lives to see if, in any ways, we have been seduced by her. We enjoy a good movie; but has the message of the movie begun to shape our view of life? We love a good vacation; but has the desire for relief overtaken our willingness to endure hardship, if necessary, for the sake of our Lord? We like to engage in political discussions; but has our earthly citizenship become so important to us that we forget (or minimize) the fact that our true citizenship (politeuma, Philippians 3:20) is in heaven? We have the world at our fingertips; but have our handheld devices begun to consume our minds, our energies, our imagination? We like to look good, feel good, and be fit; but have we, like the ancient Greeks, slid over into the idolatry of the human form? We like to have a good party now and then; but have we started to live for the next party, the next escape, the next adventure? Have we become adrenaline junkies chasing the next rush? We like to get a good return on our investments; but have we slowly become lovers of money, rather than lovers of God?

Babylon the Great is, in the end, the "bride of Satan." It is no accident that this woman appears in Revelation 18, right next to the "bride of Christ" in Revelation 19. The Bible is coming to an end, and we see the two princes with their two brides – Jesus with His church, and Satan with his Babylon. When you pull back the curtain on the unseen realities around us, you realize that there are only these two kingdoms – the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. Which kingdom are you in? Which bridegroom are you living for? All of humanity can be found in either Revelation 18 or Revelation 19. Which chapter are you in?