

As you remember, Revelation 12 introduced a woman who symbolized God's covenant people—Israel. But the woman in Revelation 17 is not the same. The woman in Revelation 12 is pursued and persecuted by the dragon. The woman in Revelation 17, by contrast, rides the beast to prominence. She partners with worldly power, gains influence over the nations, and intoxicates the earth with a counterfeit spirituality.

But she will not last.

Jesus is the Judge, and He will bring righteous wrath against spiritual Babylon. Her collapse will be sudden—faster than her rise—because God will finally and fully expose what she truly is.

Revelation 17 — The Judgment of a Corrupt Religious System

Revelation 17 pulls back the curtain on a sobering end-times reality: God will judge a false religious system that has deceived nations, corrupted worship, and trapped multitudes in a counterfeit hope. This chapter is not mainly about one person. It is about a system—spiritual seduction on a global scale—religion without the living Christ, devotion without truth, and influence without purity.

Jesus warned His disciples:

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”

False religion is dangerous precisely because it looks safe. It offers spirituality without surrender, comfort without repentance, and belonging without truth. It speaks about God while keeping people from God. But Revelation 17 makes one thing clear: the Lord will not allow deception to endure forever. He will judge it, dismantle it, and replace confusion with truth—because worship belongs to Him alone.

I. Babylon as a Biblical Picture of Confusion (Revelation 17:1)

John is told:

“Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters.”

In Scripture, “Babylon” becomes a symbol of confusion—humanity’s organized rebellion against God, especially in the realm of worship. At Babel (Genesis 11), man attempted to exalt himself and reach heaven on his own terms.

Many of what we now call “New Age” movements trace their philosophical roots back to the same spirit that animated Babel. At Babel, humanity sought spiritual enlightenment and unity apart from submission to the living God. It was an attempt to reach heaven on human terms—to access hidden knowledge, power, and transcendence without repentance or obedience.

That same impulse resurfaces in every age: spirituality without the cross, enlightenment without surrender, unity without truth. Whenever people seek mystical experience, secret wisdom, or divine connection apart from the revealed Word of God and the person of Jesus Christ, they are echoing the ancient rebellion of Babel.

The desire for the spiritual is not wrong. God created us with that longing. But when that longing is detached from truth, it leads to confusion rather than clarity—just as it did in Babylon.

God intervened, confused their language, and scattered the nations. Babylon, from that point forward, is a picture of spiritual disorder: man trying to approach the divine apart from God's revealed truth.

And that spirit of Babylon shows up whenever people trade a living relationship with God for man-made spirituality—systems that promise access to God through rituals, hierarchy, human merit, secret knowledge, or religious performance.

II. The Heart of the Deception: A Substitute Mediator

Revelation 17 is describing spiritual unfaithfulness—what Scripture often calls “harlotry” when people replace the true God with a false object of trust.

This deception thrives on the same lie: “You need something other than Jesus to reach God.”

But the gospel declares something wonderfully simple: we do not need a human go-between to gain God's favor. We do not need spiritual elites. We do not need a ladder of rituals to climb. We come by grace, through faith, through Christ alone.

God does not rank His children by spiritual class. In Christ, every believer has access. Every believer is loved. Every believer is invited.

And Jesus Himself taught that leadership in His kingdom is not about lording over others but serving others:

“Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.”

Where religious systems elevate status, power, and control, Jesus lifts up humility, truth, and love.

Application:

Be careful of anything that subtly shifts your trust away from Jesus. If your confidence is in your performance, your religious identity, your traditions, your church involvement, or your moral résumé, you will never have peace. Peace comes from Christ—crucified and risen—our only hope.

III. The Woman and the Beast: Religion Riding Power (Revelation 17:2–6)

John sees a woman sitting on a scarlet beast:

“So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.”

The woman represents a corrupt religious influence. The beast represents political power hostile to God. Together they form a terrifying partnership: religion used as a tool of control, and government energized by spiritual deception.

The angel explains that the “many waters” are:

“peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.”

This is global. The seduction reaches across cultures and continents.

And the woman is described as outwardly impressive—purple, scarlet, gold, precious stones—but inwardly corrupt:

“having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.”

This is one of the great warnings of Scripture: spiritual corruption often comes wrapped in beauty, wealth, and influence.

And then John sees the ugliest proof of all:

“And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.”

False religion persecutes true faith because truth exposes counterfeit.

Application:

Don’t mistake popularity for truth. Don’t assume something is from God because it looks impressive. The real measure is always: does it exalt Jesus as Lord, honor His Word, and produce holiness and love?

IV. The Mystery Explained: Heads, Horns, and a City (Revelation 17:7–14)

The angel interprets the vision. There are layers here—historical and future—showing how evil repeats patterns and how Satan works through empires and rulers to oppose God.

John is told:

“The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits.”

This points to an identifiable city known for seven hills, and also to a broader reality of ruling powers.

Then he speaks of kings—some fallen, one present, another coming—followed by an “eighth” who is “of the seven.” The vision communicates that the beastly power is both continuous and recurring: evil takes new forms, but it is energized by the same rebellion.

Yet the outcome is not uncertain:

“These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.”

I love the simplicity of that. The world gathers. Hell rages. The kings align. Demonic power drives the agenda. And then the Lamb overcomes them.

No anxious struggle. No suspense about who wins. The victory belongs to Jesus.

And His people are described three ways: called, chosen, and faithful. God is at work in His people, and His people respond by continuing with Him.

Application:

Stay faithful. The world may grow darker, but your King is not threatened. Your calling is not to panic. Your calling is to endure, to remain steady, and to keep your eyes on Jesus.

V. The System Turns on Itself: Religion Devoured by the Beast (Revelation 17:15–18)

Then comes a shocking twist: the political powers that once used the religious system turn against it.

“And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire.”

Evil is never loyal. Satan’s kingdom devours its own.

And then we are told something that should sober us:

“For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose.”

God remains sovereign even over rebellious rulers. He does not author their sin, but He can direct history to accomplish His righteous plan. He can use even the wrath of man to serve His purposes, and He will bring judgment exactly when He determines.

Finally, the angel says:

“And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.”

The seduction is tied to a real-world center of influence—an organized system that merges spiritual corruption with global power.

Practical Application

1. Guard your worship.
The greatest spiritual danger is shifting trust away from Jesus—substituting religion for relationship.
2. Test everything by Scripture.
Spiritual experiences, traditions, and leaders must be weighed against God’s Word.
3. Refuse spiritual pride.
Jesus does not build His people into a ladder of status. He forms a family of servants.
4. Stay faithful when culture mocks truth.
The Lamb overcomes. Your calling is steady obedience until He comes.

A Challenge for Believers

Do not flirt with Babylon. Do not drink from a golden cup that looks holy but is filled with poison.

Keep your faith simple and pure: Jesus Christ crucified, risen, reigning, and returning.

He saved us when He shed His blood on the cross. His resurrection declares that He is God, Savior, and Lord. Hold fast to Him. Walk in humility. Love the truth. Serve others. Stay faithful.

An Invitation to Non-Believers

Revelation 17 is a warning because deception is real. But it is also an invitation because salvation is real.

God does not call you into a system. He calls you to His Son.

Jesus died for your sins. He shed His blood to purchase your redemption. He rose from the dead, proving that He is Lord over death and judgment. He offers forgiveness and eternal life to all who will come.

Turn from sin. Turn from self-trust. Turn from empty religion. Come to Jesus.

Call on Him today. He will forgive you. He will cleanse you. He will make you His own.

And instead of being swept up in the confusion of Babylon, you will belong to the kingdom of the Lamb who overcomes.