

Revelation 17:1-18
“The acts of the apostates”

I. Intro

II. Vs. 1-6 Rotten religion

III. Vs. 7-18 The mystery of religion

I. Intro

Chapters 17-18 are about God’s judgement upon the false world systems: Chapter 17 deals with the *false religious system*, while chapter 18 deals with the *false political and commercial system*. The first six verses of this chapter, we are given the description of this false religious system, in verses 7-15 John explains the symbols he had used to describe this false religious system. Finally in verse 16-18 John tells us of God’s judgment of this system.

II. Vs. 1-6 Rotten religion

Vs. 1 One of the seven angels, (perhaps the 7th as he was sent to judge the false religious system 16:19), now comes with his bowl to John but before he does anything he wants to show John an unusual sight. *“Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.”* Verses 1-6 go on to give us three important things about this “great harlot”:

- A. Her effect upon the world (verses 1-2)
- B. Her wardrobe (verses 3-4)
- C. Her revealed mystery (verses 5-6).

Her effect upon the world (verses 1-2)

To unravel what John records for us based upon what the angel tells him all we have to do is look further on in this chapter and in so doing *we discover four things*.

1. Verse 18 identifies the harlot with a “*great city*” that was “*reign over the Kings of the earth*”. Furthermore, this great city was wealthy based upon her royal attire in verse 4 yet it was the center of idolatrous worship as well as the persecution of the Church. Verse 15 speaks of this city’s worldwide influence and verse 9 tells us that it was located on seven mountains. The question is, “*What city at the time of John’s writing of this reigned over all the earth, was wealthy, was the center of idolatrous worship and persecuted the church and was located on seven mountains?*” There can only be one that fit this and that would be **Rome**.
2. In verse 6 John says that having seen her causes him to “*marvel with great amazement*” only to have his amazement questioned by the angel in verse 7. Several things all combined to caused John to be so overwhelming amazed:
 - a. A harlot dressed not in her normal attire but in royal clothes
 - b. A harlot that had such intoxicating influence over all the Kings of the earth
 - c. A harlot who prior to this was an ordinary woman riding a dressed-up beast full of blasphemy
 - d. A woman not only drunk but drunk on the blood of the saints

You will notice that the angel informs John that this woman is none other than a “*great harlot*” he sees her as a woman, a woman saying things dressed in a manor not familiar to him, doing things that he never imagined. **What John sees is religion but not a religion that was unrecognizable to him but rather religion that had the form of what He followed in fact it looked outwardly like that which had been the passion of his life.** The Church is called the “*bride of Christ*”! Oh it had become glorious but not with the glory of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit but rather glorious with fading glory of the world and

its system powered by satan whom she rides. Do not miss understand me **this was not the true “bride of Christ”** as she has drunk the blood of the martyrs and made war with the Lamb. Paul wrote to his young protege in 2 Tim. 3:1-5 *“know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, **having a form of godliness but denying its power.** And from such people turn away!”* That is what we see here **“a form of godliness”** having replaced the power of Christ with religious ceremonies which worship nothing more than itself and cannot be fitted to worship anything including satan. Religion is a Latin term that means ***“laws that bind”*** and in the fullest of definitions means, *“an emotional expression of devotion to a superhuman power through a system that binds a person to their belief!”* That is NOT what Christianity is, (***although clearly at times it has been reduced to this***). A religious person is seen by the outward things they do that causes them to feel and appear spiritual. But that is NOT what true Christianity is, ours is a relationship. A relationship is NOT concerned with maintain outward appearances but rather in growing closer to the person they love these can best be measured not by the outward self-righteous pomp of religion but rather by love and humility. Religion seeks to get mankind to trust in their own “goodness” seen in their works such as ***“church affiliation, religious ordinances, and spiritual experiences”***. **Religion offers the false hope of being right with God along with or apart from the Person and work of Jesus!**

3. In verse one John is told that this harlot is upon “***many water***” and we need not guess as to what is meant by this as he is told in verse 15 that “*many waters*” are “*are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.*” This Religion has a worldwide influence and appeal like Jesus’ parable of the mustard seed in Mathew 13:31-32. The part of the Church that world sees is “***favorable***” and enhances its appetites for the things of the world, it is this religious Church that grows into superstructures that sit upon the beast.
4. Verse 2 also informs us that the political powers that be commit fornication with her. This began around 300 A.D. with the Roman emperor Constantine as the state joined the Church and Church embraced the state. John had already written of the danger of this “***mixed marriage***” in 1 John 2:15 saying, “*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*” Not only have the political rulers of the world-committed fornication with religion their citizens have become drunk with the wine of her fornication. They have had their senses clouded where they could no longer distinguish religion from relationship. In 2 Cor. 4:4 Paul writes that “*if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.*”

Her wardrobe (verses 3-4)

Vs. 3-4 As John is led away into the wilderness he sees a woman whom the angel called a “great harlot”, yet John sees arrayed in splendor. The difference is obvious as the angel sees religion, as it really is, and mankind can only upon what it is on the outside. The 13th chapter told us that this

woman would be sitting on the antichrist and here we see her riding satan which seems to suggest that religion will both be supported by satan as well as seem to have dominance over him at least until the 16th verse where he will destroy her. The beast is fully of names of blasphemy which religion will have to compromise with in order to ride the beast.

Her attire again is that of royalty full of the trappings of wealth far from the humble trappings of true Christianity. It is to this Church Jesus said in the 3rd chapter verse 17 “*you say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing!; and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked*”. In her hand is a golden chalice filled with abominations and filthiness. Her alliance with the world has made her both powerful and wealthy but as those increased any purity and truth left!

Her revealed mystery (verses 5-6)

Vs. 5-6 Her name involves a “**mystery**” which is scripture is something once hidden that now has been revealed. Her name ties her in with a city founded by Nimrod called Babylon, (Gen. 10:8-11, 11:1-10). The name Babylon comes from the root word Bab-El that meant, “**gate of God**” but latter came to mean “**confusion**”. *It was in this location that the idolatrous descendants of Noah built a tower to attempt to bypass God in their desire to communicate with the heavens.* Instead, God destroyed their ability to communicate with each other. She is further called the “***Mother of Harlots***” thus she is the original system of false worship which has seduced all mankind to worship upon works and not upon having a relationship. You can trace this worship and see how it seeks to confuse man by becoming an imitation of true Christianity, for instance:

- a. They practiced the worship of a mighty warrior named Nimrod who was the 4th generation from the flood; his grandfather was Ham who uncovered Noah’s nakedness. His wife’s name was Semiramis (also known as Ashtart the fertility

goddess), she gave birth in her virginity to a son named Tammuz who was said to be a savior to his people. Tammuz was born on Dec. 25th and his birth was celebrated by bringing an evergreen tree into the house and decorating it with silver and gold.

Tammuz was said have been gored by a bull and died in which his body lay in the wilderness three days upon which he came back to life. The people celebrated his resuscitation by coloring eggs and the worship of rabbits, naming the day Ashtart day of, as we know it “Easter”. There were drawings of Semiramis, and Tammuz known as the “*Queen of heaven*” with a baby Tammuz in her arms. All of this is well documented and was part of the hodgepodge of religions of the Roman empire.

Religion is what was behind the crusades and inquisitions as well as the martyrdom of countless true believers. Religion in all its trappings has sought block the way to God by elevating education, personal works, or a man as mediator between God and mankind. God did not create the “Church” as a system to approach Him, no the Church is simply called to fellowship with Him and to proclaim the truth about Him to a hurting world. We are all to be brothers and sisters, servants of Jesus and one another living as examples of people who have personally experienced God’s love and grace. What makes us “*right before God*” **has everything to do with Him and nothing to do with us!**

III. Vs. 7-18 The mystery of religion

Vs. 7-8 What John marveled at, the angel question, but why such an astonishment as this mystery has been given to us in the prophecies of Daniel 2:40-44, 7:7 as well as what he has already seen in chapter 12 and 13 is this unveiling. This religious system will be one in which the world governments of the revised Roman empire will have no problem with. The angel describes

the beast in which this apostate church rides as one that “*was and is not*”. Some see this as referring to a monarchy or imperial form of government which will be revised and will indeed be the antichrist empowered by satan. *It appears as though the apostate church will be used to help ease people into satan worship as they will be caught up in false religion only to have their belief system switched to that of marveling at the beast they were riding.* In John 5:43 Jesus said, “*I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.*”

In this book of life is written all the names of those who have been saved by Jesus and this was before the foundation of the world. There are two truths about this from two separate perspectives.

- a. John 3:16 The “Whoever” perspective: That is “whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”. This is from our point of view and upon our trust in Him.
- b. John 15:16 “You did not choose Me, but I chose you” perspective: Their names were placed in this book before time and the only way we will know if our name is there is to look and see which you will be able to do so based upon our repentance and trust in Him.

Vs. 9-10 The A.S.V. translation is preferable here as it reads “*The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth: and they are seven kings; the five are fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a little while.*” The difference is the NKJ adds a sentence break and the words “*there are also*” which is not in the Greek.

Simply put what John records is that the seven heads are seven hills or mountains in which is further explained as seven Kings or kingdoms. There are those who see this as referring to Rome’s location upon the seven hills, while others see it referring to world ruling empires which

are also referred to us as mountains in (Ps. 30:7, Jer. 51:25 and Dan. 2:45). History reveals six of these empires as “Babylonian, Assyrian, Egyptian, Persian, Greek and Roman”.

Vs. 11-13 The Bible speaks of two more empires to come in the last days and John is told that five have fallen (Babylonian, Assyrian, Egyptian, Persian, Greek), one is that would be the Roman empire and one had yet to come. The seventh ruling empire will come out of the sixth (Roman) as Daniel sees in 2:33 & 7:20 which will form a 10-nation confederation which will have authority for only a short time in their allegiance to the antichrist.

Vs. 14-18 The purpose of this is to untie the religious system with that of the political economic system of the world in which they will make war with the Lamb and the world will follow after the antichrist. The 15th verse begins to give us the interpretation of that which John saw which end is given us here. The very system that carries the apostate church in the end will destroy it once it has served its purpose. Satan always seeks to accomplish his goals of power and worship but will never share it with that which gained it for him. All of the world’s trappings will be stripped from religion and it will be devoured by that which she had hoped to ride to her glory.