

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 5/26/10 Wednesday Evening

Series: *A Walk through the Book of Revelation*

Revelation 17 "The Judgment Climaxes"--part 3

We're on a journey that continues this evening. We're walking verse by verse through the final book of the Bible. When studying Revelation, it would be easy to get lost seeing the trees and miss the forest. From a literary perspective, the Revelation is structured in *four visions* (Ladd, p. 220).

#1 The vision of Christ and His letters to the seven churches (chs 1-3)

#2 The breaking of the seals of the scroll, the seven trumpets, and seven bowls (chs 4-16)

#3 The revelation of the consummation of God's redemptive purpose (17:1-21:8)

#4 The heavenly Jerusalem (21:9-22:5)

Our study this evening will be in Revelation 17, the beginning of the third vision. Chronologically, the events of chapter 17 will occur at the end of the tribulation period. John's vision of the seven bowl judgments has just finished. One of the seven angels approaches him, and here's what happened...

I. The angel showed John something (1-6a).

First he told John, then he showed John...

A. First, he told John about the coming punishment of the great prostitute (1-2).

Just who is this woman? Notice some details...

Q: What's true of this "prostitute?"

1. *She sat on many waters.*

2. *She enticed the kings of the earth.*

3. *She intoxicated the inhabitants of the earth.*

We'll discuss the significance of these details in a moment, but for now, let's tackle this one. Just who is this "woman?"

Ladd suggests that the harlot is "Babylon, the symbol of human civilization with all its pomp and circumstance organized in opposition to God (p. 220)." Some believe it's a reference to Rome, but Ladd observes that Rome was not built on many waters. Babylon was. Historical Babylon was built on a network of canals. He suggests the "fornication" is a reference to intimate commerce that will occur between the kings of the earth and Babylon, a sharing of vast wealth and prosperity. The union, then, is based on economics for the purpose of commercial gain.

Strauss takes a different slant, suggesting that in the book of Revelation the figure of a woman is used symbolically of religion (in 2:20 Jezebel represents pagan idolatry of the past; the Bride of Christ represents the true Church in 19:7-8). Strauss writes (291), "A wife who is unfaithful to her husband is an adulterous woman. A church which calls itself Christian, and which courts an alliance with the godless world-system, commits spiritual adultery (James 4:4). God calls her a harlot."

So Strauss believes the harlot in Revelation 17 represents what he calls "a vast international system of error, religious in character, and so close in resemblance to Christianity that millions are deceived by it...It is a combination of apostate Protestantism, Romanism, and atheism. It is the huge ecumenical church of the last days (291)."

B. Then, he let him see it (3-6a).

Q: How did it happen? Verse 3

John sees a "woman" in verse 3 that's the same person the angel mentioned in verse 1 (the "prostitute"). John describes the woman...

1. *She was sitting on a scarlet beast.*

Q: Who is this beast? We'll see in a moment.

2. *She was dressed in purple and scarlet.*

3. *She glittered with gold, precious stones, and pearls.*

4. *She held a gold cup.*

Q: What do the images of gold, etc. indicate about her?

5. *She had a title on her forehead.*

Q: What was the title? What does the title tell us about the identity of the prostitute? She is "Babylon." She is the "mother of prostitutes." She is the mother of "abominations of the earth."

Here's what she will do...

6. *She was drunk with the blood of the saints.*

Q: What does that indicate?

So just who is this "woman" called "Babylon the Great?" It seems to be some worldwide religious system (the second beast in Rev 13?).

Some have asserted that the harlot is the Roman Catholic Church. But as Strauss rightly observes (293), "The great harlot is called, 'the mother of harlots,' [17:5]. If she is the mother of harlots, her origin must be traced back beyond Romanism, for there was no pope before the fourth century. The insidious principles of Babylonianism might be found within the Roman Catholic Church; however, they were practiced long before the Roman Catholic Church came into existence."

The identity of "Babylon" takes us back to Genesis 10. There we meet Nimrod and find this statement (Gen 10:10), "The first centers of his kingdom were Babylon."

Remember Babel in Genesis 11? Babel was man's attempt to show it could reach God based on its own ingenuity. Babel was man's rival to God. Man chose an alternate way to God. Such is apostasy.

The spirit of Babel is seen throughout the Bible, and it will climax at the end of the age with the mother of prostitutes.

So what do these images mean in Revelation 17? I'm comforted to know John, too, was confused! Look at his response in verse 6...

Thankfully, the angel helps us...

II. The angel explained to John the significance of what he saw (6b-18).

Q: What did the angel say he would do for John? Verse 7...

A. Here's what is true of the beast (7-17).

1. *He will be ridden by the woman (7).*

2. *He will come out of the Abyss (8a).*

3. *He will astonish the inhabitants of the earth (8b).*

4. *He will possess seven heads (9-11).*

Q: Where have we seen a seven headed creature before? In Revelation 12--the dragon, and in Revelation 13--the beast out of the sea.

Q: What do these hills represent? The angel tells us...

These are seven hills on which the woman sits.

Note: See *NIV footnote*; this is a reference to Rome.

These are seven kings, five are fallen, one is, one is to come.

The beast is an eighth king.

5. *He will possess ten horns (12-14).*

These are ten kings who will reign with the beast (12).

Note: This indicates some kind of alliance.

These kings will give power to the beast (13).

These kings will make war against the Lamb, but fail (14).

B. Here's what is true of the woman (15-18).

1. *She will control multitudes, nations, and languages (15).*

2. *The beast and the ten kings will turn against her (16-17).*

Q: In what manner, and why?

They will hate her and bring her to ruin (16).

They will do so because God put it in their hearts (17).

Discuss: Why is that statement significant?

3. *The woman is the great city that rules the kings of the earth (18).*

Discussion:

1. Many of the details of Revelation 17 are difficult to interpret (even John seemed confused!). We mustn't miss the

forest for the trees. What's the point of Revelation 17?

2. Some people want to be dogmatic about their interpretation of the details. In what ways can this be dangerous?
3. What do we learn about true believers from this chapter? See verses 6 & 14?
4. This chapter makes it clear that followers of Jesus must have a proper view of suffering as they live for their Savior in this world. Describe some characteristics of a proper view of suffering.
5. What aspects of Revelation require further study?