

Study 34: Revelation 17:1-8

- 1 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters.**
- 2 With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."**

- Who is the great prostitute? There have been many theories and I emphasize that they were only theories, no matter how authoritatively they were presented. I do not believe it is one particular person or movement in history. I think it is rather the prevailing philosophy or cultural system of any age or people that sets itself up as an option to serving God.
- A prostitute does what he or she does for money. A prostitute is a substitute for what God intended for the marriage relationship. Thus, this prostitute is a counterfeit economic system that promises pleasure and peace in return for some economic return.
- Under that definition, communism, capitalism, socialism and any other –ism that does not make God its central focus is the “prostitute.” So is liberation theology, liberalism, and all the false sects and cults that don’t make Jesus the center of attention and worship.
- Even in my lifetime, I have seen many systems promise prosperity and the answers to human problems and suffering. To date, all have failed. Yet that has not prevented leaders (kings) and their followers (the inhabitants) from becoming infatuated (intoxicated) with the possibilities of these systems and their teachings.
- Not only is prostitution mentioned in these verses, but adultery is as well. These are descriptive of how intimate the kings and inhabitants become with their philosophies and systems. But because these systems do not focus on and glorify God, their intimacies are misplaced.
- Are you putting your trust or “becoming intimate” with anything that does not put God at the center? Is your hope in politics, economics or the wisdom of men? If so, then you are flirting with a “girlfriend” or “boyfriend” that isn’t your spouse! You are married to God and His ways. Read what James’ epistle had to say:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is

hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (James 4:1-7).

- This says it all: an "adulterous people" are friends with the world and its systems, which are in direct opposition to the things of God.

3 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.

- I have been to Israel on numerous occasions and have traveled through its deserts. They are desolate places, but are somehow beautiful and breathtaking. They are places of loneliness, for not many live there, and areas that are dry and hot. At night, many deserts are cold without the sun.
- Sometimes God will take you to a desert place in your life to speak to you and give you revelation and understanding about what He is doing or going to do. I am in a desert place in my life as I write this, but it is a good time.
- God took Moses and David into the desert to speak and train them for leadership and ministry. God the Father also took Jesus to a desert as He began His public ministry. If Jesus had some time in the desert, don't you think you will as well?

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry (Luke 4:1-2).

- It appears that this was an important time in Jesus' life and ministry, for Matthew, Mark and Luke all record what happened in the desert. Make sure you take good notes of what God speaks to you in the desert as well.
- It appears the devil is busy in the desert too. This is where Jesus encountered His temptations and this setting is where John sees the woman riding on the scarlet beast.
- When you have your desert experience, carefully evaluate everything you hear and see. Make sure it is heaven speaking to you. I don't say that to scare you, but everything we receive, whether by prophetic word from others or through the still, small internal voice, must and should be checked out to make sure it is biblical and sound. It never hurts to share it with someone who knows you and is spiritually mature.

4 The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.

- This woman was dressed well, which would make her attractive to others at first glance. And we know this to be true of sin in general:

He [Moses] chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time (Hebrews 11:25).

- We would do well to tell people that sin **does** bring pleasure; there is no denying that. But sin's pleasures are passing, and its reward does not last as long as the reward of righteousness. Sin brings pleasure at first, but what it costs in the long run is not worth what it gives in the short run.
- It seems that everyone has a "cup" to drink, one offered by God and the other offered by the world system.

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39).

- What cup are you drinking from? And what is your attitude as you drink? If you are drinking the cup of suffering, then you must do it as unto the Lord. If you are drinking any other cup, repent! There is nothing that can take the place of doing the will of God in the manner that God desires.

5 This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

- This woman has a mark on her forehead just like the other followers of the beast. Do you think this is a literal marking to be on some woman, or do you think it is symbolic? If you think it is symbolic, then the "666" mark would also be symbolic.
- This woman is symbolic of all the anti-God systems and philosophies that ever have existed or ever will.
- Remember, what could this have meant to the early church, to whom the book of Revelation was addressed? They were under the control of Rome and Rome was idolatrous, corrupt and anti-Christian. But what would this book have meant to a believer in Eastern Europe twenty years ago? They were under the control of the Soviet communists, who were idolatrous, corrupt and anti-Christian.
- Do you see that the message of Revelation is that it is impossible to find refuge or solace in anything or anyone, except God. We cannot expect any world system to be righteous unless it is based on the law of God. So why put your trust there?

- Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

6 I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.

- There have been and may very well be again, many institutions, economic systems and political movements that have fed themselves on persecuting the Church. Certainly Rome in the time of John and Revelation was doing this. Figuratively speaking, they were intoxicated by power and how they used it to thwart the Church. But all their efforts have been futile, with only short-term success. Why? Let's look at Psalm 2:

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him (Psalm 2:1-12).

- These anti-Christ movements are all doomed to failure. While they bring tremendous suffering and even martyrdom for the saints, those very things are their undoing.
- Let's review: the message of Revelation is one of victory, not of fear or depression. Yes, there have been many who have opposed the Church and some even tried to eradicate it. They have all ended in failure and have themselves been exterminated while the Church has continued. Even the most recent anti-Christian movement, Islam, as powerful as it is, cannot resist the purpose of God forever. They will end like very other movement who has opposed God and the Church.
- John was astonished by what he saw, and the Church is often astonished at its enemies and their hatred. Yet the enemies of the Church are taking out their hatred of the invisible God on the visible Church.

7 Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns.

- The angel began to explain to John what he saw. One of the best rules to follow for biblical interpretation is to find what the Bible explains about itself. Don't make up your own interpretations, but follow those that are provided. If the Bible gives no insight into what it says, and that passage or image is obscure, then be very careful about how you interpret that passage. You may have an opinion about what it says, or you may find a practical application, but you must be very careful not to insist that "the Lord showed you" what it meant.

8 The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.

- A popular series of novels loosely based on Revelation and the end times mistakenly portrays this scenario as a literal person who will be killed and then raised from the dead. Do you think this is what the early Church took this to mean? I doubt it.
- Those who don't know our God, whose names are not written in the book of life, are susceptible to all kinds of spiritual misinterpretation and delusion. In my own lifetime, I have seen whole people groups follow a charismatic leader to their own destruction and pain. As soon as one anti-Christ movement ends (is killed), another raises up to take its place.
- When communism in the Soviet Union fell apart, some people thought the world would be a safer place. Today, totalitarianism is alive and well, and the world is a more dangerous place. This astonishes some people. It should not surprise the people of God.
- The beast is always fathering new ideas and promoting new leaders. They are all part of the anti-Christ purpose that the devil promotes by any and all means. Even the thinking that all religions are the same and that there are many roads to salvation are part of this "beastly" anti-Christian system.
- There is only one answer for the world's problems and it is Jesus. Anything else, no matter how promising it may look, is a fraud. The book of Revelation is focusing on the supremacy of Christ and the reality of the devil who opposes Him. But the good news is that we in Christ are victorious, even through martyrdom.