

## Revelation Chapter 17 - John Karmelich

1. This lesson is called "Know Thy Enemy".
  - a) This is a saying used in warfare. It is also used in sporting competition. In order to compete against somebody or some team, one needs to know as much as possible about them in order to compete against them.
  - b) It applies in Christianity as well:
    - i) If we are to avoid sin, we have to know what is sinful.
    - ii) If we are to avoid demonic forces, we have to understand their tactics.
    - iii) This does not mean we have to indulge in sin. The issue is to recognize it and recognize the forces behind that sin.
  - c) Chapters 17-18 describe the ultimate end of the demonic forces that oppose God.
    - i) The good news is this is the last of the judgment chapters.
    - ii) If you've survived these Revelation lessons so far, you can handle the last two. ☺
2. Let me summarize where we left off in Revelation and how it applies to this chapter:
  - a) In the last two chapters, God was busy judging the earth. ☺
  - b) We get the impression that the "saved" were already taken off the earth at this time.
  - c) Understand that the judgments were specific. It was not a big cluster of bombs. ☺
    - i) The judgments were designed to teach the inhabitants of the world that God is in charge. For example, water was turned to blood color as punishment for murdering those who believed in Jesus. (Reference Revelation 16:3-4).
    - ii) One gets the impression some people do survive this judgment period, only because in Chapter 20 we read of Jesus ruling on earth. Jesus has to rule over "somebody", and therefore, I'll argue that some do survive through this period.
  - d) This leads to Chapters 17-18: The destruction of "Babylon".
    - i) These two chapters fill in some details from previous chapters.
    - ii) We are now going back in time from the events of Chapter 16.
    - iii) Revelation 14:8 gave a one-line prediction about the fall of Babylon. One of the judgments in Chapter 16 focused on its destruction. (Ref.: Rev. 16:19).
    - iv) Chapters 17-18 are disclosing more details about Babylon's destruction.
3. OK, what is Babylon, why is it destroyed and why should I care? ☺
  - a) Babylon was an ancient city that was the capital of the Babylonian Empire. The city existed for centuries, even after the fall of the Babylonian Empire. It is located in modern Iraq. Part of the city has been excavated and it is now inhabited, although it is no longer either a capital or even a significant city.
  - b) The term "Babylon" has its roots in Genesis. The "Tower of Babel" is in that location. That story in Genesis 11. It was about a mighty hunter (of men) named Nimrod (Genesis 10:9) who organized the first rebellion against God.
    - i) The term "Babylon" does refer to a literal city, but it can also refer to any and all organized rebellion against the God of the Bible.
    - ii) The Babylonian religion had multiple gods. When the Persians conquered the Babylonians, their priests moved to the Persian Empire, which then adapted many of the same pagan gods. When the Greeks conquered much of the Persian territory, the same pagan system influenced the Greek Empire. The Roman society also adopted the multiple god philosophy that had its roots in Babylon.
    - iii) The point is even though the Babylonian city and empire fell a long time ago, its influence, especially on pagan gods, was still around at the time of John's writings.
    - iv) Babylon is a literal location. It is also a symbol term for any religious system that opposes the God of the Bible.

- c) One has to understand that it is not a matter of worshipping little statues. Those statues represented what one really worshipped. Some gods represented pleasure. Some gods represented fame and fortune. It is the same "gods" we have today, only at that time, there were individual gods to focus what one really wants in life.
- d) The final question: Why should we care? This gets back to the title "Know thy enemy".
  - i) In this lesson, I'll talk a lot about what Babylon represents. In summary, the word-picture is about any and all organized efforts to oppose the God of the bible.
  - ii) These two chapters focus on the destruction of Babylon. Understand that this will definitely happen one day.
  - iii) Revelation is written to Christians. Revelation 1:4 said that this book is written to the seven churches in Asia. The idea is not for the Babylonians to understand this prediction, but Christian believers. We are to understand the ultimate judgment and destruction of the organized effort to oppose God.
  - iv) A point of this chapter is that the destruction of Babylon is not just the destruction of an organized government that opposes God, but an organized religious system as well. Remember there is a "false trinity" that is involved. Besides Satan and the antichrist, Chapter 13 spoke of a false worship leader during this scenario.
  - v) Let me change the perspective: We as Christians are to avoid sin. What we are going to read in these two chapters is the ultimate consequence of giving one self over to that sin. I'll argue that as long as one believes Jesus paid the price for your sins, you cannot lose your salvation. At the same time, Satan can make you an ineffective witness for God by getting you and me to focus our time and energy on "things" other than God. This includes false religious beliefs.
  - vi) This "organized rebellion" against God is not just to attract unbelievers, but believers as well. (Remember Chapter 17 is "back dated" from Chapter 16 and covers the entire Great Tribulation era.) My point here is to recognize Satan's tactics in this rebellion. We'll develop this idea more as we go.
- 4. Chapter 17, Verse 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.
  - a) Verse 1 is the key to both Chapters 17 and 18. It describes the purpose of these chapters.
  - b) In these verses, an angel ("one of the seven") tells John, who is writing Revelation to come and see the "punishment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters".
  - c) Before we discuss this "great prostitute", let's set the scene a little:
    - i) John spent the last two chapters describing the final judgment on earth.
    - ii) Chapters 15-16 described seven angels with seven bowls. Each bowl was filled with some sort of "judgment". One at a time, each angel poured his bowl out on earth, and then some judgment happened on earth.
    - iii) Here in Chapter 17, the seven angels are all done. You get the impression that one of those seven angels, after taking a shower, ☺ walked up to John with a towel around his neck and said in effect, "Hey John, now that it's all over, let me fill in some details about one of those seven specific judgments. You see, there is this great prostitute who sits on many waters. Let me explain what that means".
  - d) This chapter explains what each word-picture means. Let's start with the "prostitute".
    - i) Chapter 17, Verse 18 says, "The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth." That means the prostitute is not a literal woman.
      - a) Verse 18 says the prostitute is a city. This city is being compared to a prostitute for how the city acts.
      - b) Remember that Verse 1 says this chapter is about this prostitute being judged. Therefore, this chapter is about the judgment of this city.
    - ii) If you haven't figured it out yet, the city is "Babylon". More on that coming up.

- e) Verse 1 finishes with the fact this prostitute "sits on many waters".
    - i) Chapter 17, Verse 15 says, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages."
    - ii) The point is this city "sits" on peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. The idea is this city controls and influences a large worldwide empire.
  - f) This leads us to the speculation of what is "Babylon"?
    - i) At the time of John's writing, Babylon was an insignificant city.
    - ii) At the time of John's writing Rome controlled the world. It would make sense that if John is writing about life in his time, the word "Babylon" is a code word for Rome, as the Roman Empire ruled the world.
    - iii) Personally, I don't worry about whether or not Babylon is literal Babylon or Rome. The point is when the antichrist runs this worldwide empire, there will be a central city that benefits from being the head city of that empire. Some believe it will be Rome. Some believe it will be the City of Babylon resurrected. Some argue it is another city. The important point is not to ponder which city it will be, but to understand that a great organized effort will occur to oppose the God of the Bible, and the "capital" of this great effort will be judged.
5. Verse 2: With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."
- a) The key to understanding this sentence is to understand the word-pictures.
  - b) First, let's start with the word "her". The "her" refers to the prostitute of Verse 1.
    - i) Again, Verse 18 of this chapter says the prostitute is a city, not a person.
  - c) Now let's talk about the rest of the sentence.
    - i) Remember that in the bible, the words adultery and idolatry are synonyms.
      - a) Adultery is to be unfaithful to one's spouse.
      - b) Idolatry is to be unfaithful to God.
      - c) In both cases, one is turning from one's commitment.
    - ii) This is why the term "adultery" is used as a substitute for "idolatry".
  - d) If you think about it, one cannot have a literal adulterous relationship with a city.
    - i) My point is we know this is not meant to be taken literally. It is a word picture.
  - e) The whole idea of Verse 2 is this city, nicknamed a prostitute, caused the world to turn from God and organizes a "religion" that goes with the antichrist and this final empire. Revelation uses this picture of a prostitute as the city is tempting people to follow along.
  - f) The verse says the kings of the earth are "intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries".
    - i) The idea is this city enticed the world to follow the antichrist (and its accompanying religion). It is being compared to the temptation of giving in to adultery. That is why this city is compared to a prostitute.
  - g) So what does it mean? It means this city is the "center" of idolatrous worship. If people are going to worship "something", there has to be an object of that worship. This city is the headquarters of this worship.
  - h) At the time of John's writing, the key example of this was Pagan-Rome. Rome was not only the center of government, but also the spiritual center. There was a "high-priest" of Rome and it was a government official. The influence of Roman paganism spread through out the Roman Empire.
    - i) For those of us who see the Great Tribulation as a single, future event, there will be a "religious movement" that goes with this final world empire. The religious aspect is technically separate from the government aspect, but they work hand in hand to gain control over this world-based empire.
  - i) Remember the purpose of Revelation 17 and 18 are to show the final judgment of this city (called a prostitute). Whatever and wherever this city is, it is condemned by God for organizing this rebellion. We'll read of its destruction by the end of Chapter 18.

6. Verse 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.
- a) Just when you thought Revelation was weird enough, it gets worse. ☹ The secret to understanding Revelation is to take it in "bite size chunks" and the pieces all make sense.
  - b) Let's talk about where John was when he wrote this:
    - i) He was on an island called Patmos. (Ref.: Rev. 1:9). This was a Roman penal colony where John was sentenced for the crime of Christianity.
    - ii) John was "taken" up to heaven where he sees all of the visions described so far in this book. (See Rev. 4:1). I picture John being handed a bunch of legal pads and pens so he could write all the things down. Somehow, somehow, John was able to record all that he saw.
    - iii) Here in Chapter 17, Verse 3, we read of John being "carried away by the Spirit into the desert". Why this was done is not stated, so we can only speculate.
    - iv) The most common argument given is the word "desert" is similar to the "wilderness" back when the Exodus occurred. When the Israelites failed to believe God about entering the Promised Land, they were sentenced to wander in the desert (or wilderness) for forty years. (Ref. Numbers 14:33-34).
    - v) The idea of "wilderness" or "desert" in the bible is a word-picture of separation from God. The word picture is that if one is not drawing close to God, one is "getting away" from God and living in a place of wilderness.
    - vi) The point of all of this is John is about to describe a "beast". This beast is in a location that is not associated with God to begin with.
  - c) Onto the rest of the verse: "A woman was sitting on a scarlet beast".
    - i) Understand that there are two characters in focus: A woman and a beast.
    - ii) The woman is the same prostitute described in the first two verses. This will become clearer as we go through the rest of this chapter. Again, it is not a literal woman, but a "city" as stated in Verse 15.
    - iii) The "beast" is a little easier, because it was already described earlier in Revelation.
      - a) Back in Revelation 13, Verse 1, it said, "And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name."
      - b) Here in Verse 3 it says, "(A) beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns."
    - iv) That has to be the same "beast". Back in Chapter 13, this beast is the antichrist.
    - v) Verses 9 and 10 of this chapter describe the seven heads and ten horns. We'll save that commentary for those verses. For now, just know that it describes the governmental system that is lead by the antichrist.
  - d) This verse says the woman rides the beast. That means that the woman (again, a city) "benefits" from being on the back of the beast. It also can mean that this woman/city has some control, like a horse rider pulling the reigns.
7. Verse 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.
- a) What popped in my head is the old expression, "Never try to teach a pig how to sing. It's a waste of your time and it irritates the pig." ☹ Here is this prostitute all dressed up in purple and scarlet with all sorts of jewelry. She's still a prostitute.
  - b) I get the impression this prostitute is not dressed up in order to attract customers, but the idea is this prostitute is benefiting from "good business". Remember in Verse 3 this woman "rides the beast", which is the government controlled by the antichrist. Here we read of the financial benefits of partnering with the antichrist and his system.

- c) The colors "purple and scarlet" are associated with royalty. This is another sign of this woman (city's) benefit of association with this end time government system.
  - d) The "gold cup" is a sign of kingly authority and power (See Genesis 44:5). The "cup" here is not meant to be literal as the prostitute is not a literal woman. It is another word-picture of the power this woman based on the antichrist and his world's power.
  - e) Now let's back up and understand the application of these verses:
    - i) This prostitute becomes rich because she's become dependant upon the government for her power. There is an application to "organization religion" in the danger of becoming dependant upon the government for its survival.
    - ii) The danger of any church, even a Christian church is when it gets too "chummy" with the government in power. It is tempting to be the official state religion because then all of one's bills are paid for and there is no more passing the plate asking people for money. The danger is one becomes dependant upon the government and compromises one's belief in God. One becomes tempted by the power of being associated with the government and turns away from God.
    - iii) Don't get me wrong. I'm not claiming Christians are part of this "prostitute city-system". The idea is false teaching will try to pair-up with government in order to gain legitimacy and power. It is also a corrupting influence to the true church.
    - iv) My title of this lesson is "know thy enemy". It is not the government. The idea is the temptation of the Christian church to say, become dependant upon anything other than God itself.
8. Verse 5: This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES, AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.
- a) Know that most translations put all of these words in upper case, as to understand that this is a title. The NIV translation also puts this in four separate lines. We'll break it down by each of the four separate lines to understand the meaning.
  - b) First, understand that in Roman culture, prostitutes would wear a headband with their names on it for identification. Here this woman/prostitute is showing her "headband".
  - c) The first word is "Mystery". In the original Greek language, that word means, "something not revealed until now". The idea is the mystery is no longer a mystery as the meaning is now revealed to the reader.
  - d) The next title is "BABYLON THE GREAT".
    - i) Remember that this woman is a city. That is coming up in Verse 18.
    - ii) Here we know that this "woman" (city) is "Babylon".
    - iii) Does it mean the literal city of Babylon or Rome or somewhere else?
      - a) Scholars have been debating this one for centuries. To me, the important issue is not the "where" but the "what". The idea is when the Great Tribulation occurs, there will be a key city that is the central location for this organized "spiritual" rebellion against God.
  - e) The third line is, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES.
    - i) The key word is "mother". The idea is this woman (city) "gives birth" to this organized rebellion against God.
    - ii) Again, the word Babylon is also associated with the "Tower of Babel". It is the same root location. That was man's first attempt to organize itself in rebellion against God. This final "Mystery Babylon" is man's final attempt at rebellion. Just as Eve was the "mother" of all living creatures, so Babylon represents the "mother" of all organized attempts to rebel against God.
  - f) OK, John, I get all of this. What's really going on here?
    - i) The idea is when this antichrist comes to power, there is an organized, world-religion that is associated with this person. This world religion is a separate entity, but is still associated with this final world government.

- ii) Remember this woman "rides" the beast. The idea is that this woman (city) benefits from the rise to power of the antichrist.
    - iii) Remember that people need to worship something. In order for Satan to turn people from God, he needs to offer a substitute. My personal view of this religious movement is it will include the tag line, "All religions are right and as long as we're nice to each other and help each other, it doesn't matter what is our concept of God". Thus, this "harlot" is the center of some sort of false-religion worship where people are free to worship God however they want with no significant changes to their lifestyle. She "prostitutes" people to accept this religion.
      - a) You get the impression that the antichrist's rise to power is to incorporate or at least accept a growing one-world religious movement.
  - g) I should mention here while it is important to teach people about Jesus, we should allow and encourage freedom of religion. State sponsored religion forces people to worship something, and it is not done out of their heart. Christianity is exclusive and does teach that the only way to heaven is to accept Jesus' payment for one's sins. We can't force that message on people. Our job is to change people one heart at a time.
    - i) At the same time, we need to recognize what is false. That is the idea behind my title, "Know thy enemy". Chapters 17-18 are about the ultimate doom of this false religion and final world rebellion against God. If this system is "going down", we should recognize it when it comes and see it as God sees it: "As a prostitute trying to turn people away from worshipping God."
  - h) The final phrase is, "AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH".
    - i) I'm not exactly sure what that means, but it does not sound pleasant. ☺
    - ii) The idea of an "abomination" is that it is so disgusting you don't even want to think about it. The idea is it is not only a sin, but a very bad sin at that.
    - iii) Remember that the first of the 10 Commandments is to worship God alone and not have any other false gods. The idea is to avoid idolatry. Here is this false religion that probably accepts anything and everything that is opposed to the God of the bible. It is a great and final rebellion against what the God of the bible stands for.
    - iv) One thing to catch is that Revelation does not spend a lot of time in this chapter describing the details of the sins. The idea is that God sees this system as some sort of sinful prostitute and the sins are so bad, it is an abomination. The point of this chapter (and the next chapter) is this "Babylon" gets judged and destroyed.
    - v) To understand the details of the sins, the idea is to study your bible and understand what God requires in terms of obedience. Any and all types of rebellion of our behavior toward God are "summarized" here by "Babylon".
      - a) When we turn from God, it is called sin. Chapter 17 is describing a great organized "religious" effort to turn from God. That is why it is compared to a prostitute. The idea is it is tempting to turn from God. It is much more than say, a momentary temptation of our lives to turn from God, it is about a blunt, and outward, organized rebellion against God.
      - b) In a sense, Satan is giving nonbelievers what they want. They want world peace without having to change their lifestyle or their desires. They want a god that will accept them just as they are. That is the final organized religion that worships false gods.
9. Verse 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.
- a) Remember this woman is not a literal woman, but a city. This city is the capital of a worldwide empire that is openly rebellious to God. Here in Verse 6, we see that the woman is "drunk with the blood of the saints".

- b) The first point of this verse is that this city, this government system makes Christianity a death sentence. A system that is declaring "all religions are right" cannot have people walking around saying, "The only way to heaven is through Jesus". Let's say this final religion doesn't declare all religions are right, but only their religion is right. Either way, it cannot tolerate the idea of Christians saying the only way to salvation is by Jesus.
  - c) One can find historical periods like this.
    - i) There were Roman Emperors who would torture and kill Christians. It became a "game" as Christians were given over to be eaten by lions and other disgusting acts. The Romans became creative in their methods of killing. One can see such acts of violence as "the woman drunk with the blood of the saints".
    - ii) Even during the Middle Ages, there were periods where the Roman Catholic Church would put to death Christians who would not declare their allegiance to the pope. Many Protestant and Jewish people were horribly tortured and killed during that time era.
    - iii) Some see this Revelation prophecy as "past tense" as it described some of these historical periods. I disagree mainly because there was no historical "final destruction" of any city like this, at least not as described here in Revelation. Like most Evangelical Christians, I see this as a future, single event and ending with God judging this worldwide false religion movement.
  - d) Notice the last part of Verse 6: When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.
    - i) Stop and think about all the things John has seen in Revelation:
      - a) John has seen Jesus appear in all sorts strange visions.
      - b) John has seen angels destroying the world.
      - c) John has seen visions of the antichrist and demonic forces.
      - d) Yet, despite all of this, this woman astonished (shocked) him!
    - ii) The question is what is so special about this vision that caused John to be astonished as opposed to everything he's seen so far in Revelation?
    - iii) Remember that John lived in a time era where Christian persecution existed. The fact this woman persecuted Christians would not be astonishing to John. There must be something more to it.
    - iv) The answer is not given. What is speculated is that John saw Christians being persecuted in the name of Jesus. For example, in the Middle Ages, Roman Catholic "Christians" put to death Protestant Christians. There were wars between Christian groups. The speculation is during this end time, this final world religion incorporates parts of Christianity in the sense they incorporate all religions and say, "everyone is welcome".
  - e) One last thing: Notice John saw two groups. The verse says the woman was drunk "with the blood of the saints, (and) the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.
    - i) Some translations argue this is two groups, some argue it is one. The idea is this woman was "drunk" from the saints and those who were martyred for Jesus. If one believes it is two groups, most likely it refers to Gentile and Jewish Christians. It's a trivial point, but understand that there may be two groups in focus here.
10. Verse 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.
- a) In the last verse, John wrote that he was astonished by what he saw. Apparently, the angel that talked to him knew John was astonished. The angel said in effect, "Why are you shocked by this stuff? Let me explain to you what it means."
    - i) The actual explanation is the rest of the chapter.
    - ii) Personally, I love when the bible explains stuff directly, as it makes my job easier. If the bible interprets itself, we are done. ☺

11. Verse 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) Remember that this chapter has a number of "characters": A woman, a beast that the woman rides, and "many waters" which are multitudes of people.
  - b) Verse 8 begins by describing "the beast" itself.
  - c) Verse 8 says the beast, "Once was (past tense), now is not (present tense), and will come up (future tense) out of the Abyss."
    - i) The Abyss is a Greek word that refers to hell. It means a "bottomless pit".
    - ii) We know this "beast" is demonic, because it comes out of hell.
    - iii) Based on Verse 11 coming up, most likely it refers to the antichrist. The text says this guy existed at one time, currently does not exist, but will exist again. I suspect that means at one time the "spirit" of the antichrist existed in some person(s).
    - iv) The word "antichrist" means one who opposes Christ. 1st John 2:18 states that many antichrists have come, but there is one significant "the" antichrist to come.
    - v) The "will come" is the key point. The idea is that during the Great Tribulation, this "coming world leader" (i.e., the antichrist) comes back again.
12. Verse 9: "This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. <sup>10</sup> They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. <sup>11</sup> The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction."
  - a) Remember what this chapter is about: It is about the judgment of a "woman". This woman is the one who "who rides the beast" as stated in Verse 7. Here in Verses 9-11, the text is giving some information about the beast himself.
  - b) Verse 7 says, "The beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns".
    - i) Verses 9-10 explain the seven heads. We'll get to the ten horns in a moment.
  - c) Verse 9 says, "The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits."
    - i) Verse 10 says, "They are also seven kings."
  - d) First let's talk about the "seven hills". Here is a case where I don't like the translation. The Greek language has separate words for "hills" and "mountains". The Greek word here actually means "mountains". Let me explain why this is important.
    - i) Many believe the "beast" refers only to Rome. Rome is traditionally known as a city built on seven hills. The problem is Verse 10 says the seven hills/mountains are also seven kings, five of which are fallen." Those seven hills in Rome are still there, and none have imploded. ☹ My point is I disagree with this view.
    - ii) A key to bible interpretation is always context. If Verse 10 were not there, one could argue that the seven "hills" refers to Rome. The fact that the text says the seven mountains/hills are also kings tells me it is something bigger than that.
    - iii) In the bible, the word "mountain" can be used as a word-picture for government. The idea is a mountain stands out over the land just as the government stands over the people. The Temple Mount is built on Mount Zion. When Jesus comes back, he will rule from that mountain.
  - e) Now let's move on to: "Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come".
    - i) Remember we're still talking about the "five kings" of Verse 10.
    - ii) I've read commentaries that state when John wrote this, there were five Roman Emperors who have died prior to John, one "is" and one is yet to come. The view is the antichrist is a "model" of Emperor Nero, who was the 7th emperor. That's a view, that fits the text, but the problem is Verse 10. This 7th king to come also had 10 "sub-kings" around him, based on Verse 12. That doesn't fit the Nero theory. Historically, there were never ten other kings that submit their power to Nero.



- iii) I stated in an earlier lesson that when John wrote Revelation, there were five great empires that had previously existed: 1) The Egyptian Empire, 2) The Assyrian Empire, 3) The Babylonian Empire, 4) The Mede-Persian Empire and 5) Greek Empire. It might help to think of empires in terms of control over Israel. For example, a Chinese Empire is not relevant, as it never ruled over Israel.
  - iv) At the time of John's writing Rome ruled over Israel. That was the sixth king (or empire) that is "present tense". There is also a 7th king that is "yet to come".
- f) The rest of Verse 10 says, "But when he does come, he must remain for a little while".
  - i) This is referring to the "final king", which would be the antichrist himself.
  - ii) The point of this phrase is God allows the antichrist to rule, ultimately to serve God's purpose and plan. The antichrist is thrown into hell in Chapter 19. The point here is that the antichrist is "future", but he does not rule forever.
- g) Verse 11 then says, "The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king".
  - i) Here's the point: There were five great empires that ruled over Israel, as stated a little while back. At the time of John's writing, the Roman Empire is the sixth great empire that ruled over Israel. The Great Tribulation describes a future, final empire that rules over Israel, and most of the world. That's the "seventh king".
  - ii) The point of Verse 11 is the antichrist is not himself one of the great empires, but a leader that emerges from this final empire. This empire emerges first, and then the antichrist emerges as the leader. That is why he is the "eighth of seven kings".
  - iii) Time for a disclaimer: There are many views on this topic. Some commentators argue that Revelation is "all historical" and some argue it's all allegorical. The most common view among Evangelicals is that it is future and it is literal event. In this futuristic view, there is "the" antichrist" that leads this final world empire.
- 13. Verse 12: "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast."
  - a) Remember that in Verse 3, John saw this beast with seven heads and ten horns.
    - i) To recap, the "seven heads" refers to seven kings and seven mountains. Most likely, the mountains are nicknames for the seven kings. Some argue the seven mountains refer to Rome, as that city is known as the "city on seven hills".
  - b) We are now done describing the seven heads. Now we get to the 10 horns (i.e., 10 kings).
  - c) Verse 12 says the "Ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast."
    - i) In other words, the "beast" (antichrist) works with 10 other future-kings. This final world-empire is controlled by 10 kings. They eventually turn their power over to the antichrist, as we'll see in Verse 13.
  - d) Let's stop for a breather. ☺ Why are we getting all of these details?
    - i) Remember the purpose of this chapter is to show John (and us) how the woman "riding" the beast is going to be judged in the end.
    - ii) In order to describe the judgment, God first has to explain (via an angel) just who is this woman (a city) and who is this beast (the antichrist and his empire).
    - iii) Remember my title of this lesson: "Know thy enemy". You and I may never see all of this. Hopefully, we'll be watching all of this from the mezzanine in heaven. ☺ The point is to show us there once was a first organized rebellion against God in the Tower of Babel story. There will be a last organized rebellion against God here in Revelation 17. God calls it "Babylon" to tie it to the "Tower of Babel" rebellion.
    - iv) What's the application? Throughout history, there have been organized rebellions against the God of the bible. There have also been Christian churches that have been corrupted by partnering with governments or false teachers. There are historical applications of these verses happening on a smaller scale. The key is to beware of who we "partner" with as Christians.

- v) A purpose of this chapter is to show that one tactic of false teachers is they can "ride on the back" of a corrupt government. False religion and bad government go hand in hand. This has been the case throughout history. Evil people wanting to rise to power always embrace religion for their own political gain. The key for us is to recognize it when it happens. That is what I mean by "Know thy enemy".
- e) Meanwhile, back to the beast. ☺
- 14. Verse 13: They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast.
  - a) Who are they "they"? The "they" refers to the ten kings of the previous verse.
  - b) The main thing you need to know about these ten kings is that they all agree to be junior executives to the antichrist. ☺
  - c) The reason God wants us to know this is so that we can recognize this antichrist's rise to power and distinguish it from other historical empires or future empires.
    - i) For example, when the European Union was formed in the last few decades, some thought, "Aha, this is that final world empire!" The problem is there is now more than ten nations in this union and nobody is submitting power to anyone. This Union could eventually lead to the antichrist, but the European Union as it stands right now does not fit the prophecy of this chapter.
    - ii) If you think about people in power, they never want to submit their power to anyone else. What is unusual about this prophecy is ten kings are willing to submit their power to a single person. That would be an "unusual sign" and would help us to recognize this event when it happens.
- 15. Verse 14: They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings--and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."
  - a) This verse is saying there are the ten kings, lead by the antichrist, who war against Jesus. Jesus is described earlier as "The (sacrificial) Lamb" for our sins. (Ref. Rev. 5:6, 12).
    - i) The verse goes on to say Jesus will win, because, "He is king of kings..."
    - ii) This is another description of the Battle of Armageddon. We've touched on it briefly in previous lessons. We'll discuss it more detail in Chapter 19.
  - b) Verse 14 says those people with Jesus will be "His called, chosen and faithful followers".
    - i) That means when this war happens, Christians will follow Jesus into battle.
    - ii) That does not mean Christians can die in this war. When we get to the battle in Chapter 19, it is more of an "instant wipeout" than it is a war.
    - iii) The reason Jesus is called "The Lamb" here has to do with the Christian saints who have the privilege of following Jesus into this battle. Those believers (could be all Christians) can only be a part of this battle as Christians accept Jesus' sacrificial payment for our sins. The "Lamb" reference is for us Christians to appreciate.
  - c) When it comes to reading Revelation, I've never had a problem with all of these strange visions. To me, "if God is God", He could create angels, demonic creatures, or do all of these world judgments as described. There is a classic saying among bible teachers that goes, "If you can handle the first sentence of the bible (about God creating the world), you can handle the rest of the bible". In other words, if you can accept the fact there is a God and He is powerful enough to create everything, one can accept all the bible miracles.
    - i) With that said, this is a verse that is troubling to me. Here are these ten kings, which govern over a worldwide empire, making war against God!
    - ii) In other words, I don't have a problem with what God can do. It still baffles me to this day what man is capable of doing in a sinful state.
  - d) I suspect these ten kings are fooled in that they don't believe Jesus is God. Obviously, if they believed Jesus was the true God, they would not be convinced they could win this battle. Even if they did believe Jesus was God, this group was somehow convinced they could win. Maybe they thought if Jesus is "part human", he could be defeated.

- e) This verse contains the only "praise-line" in the chapter. Here, Jesus is called "King of kings and Lord of lords".
  - i) To use a popular cliché today: God is large and He is in charge!"
  - ii) Next time we are felling down, remember that Jesus is "King of kings".
  - iii) When we don't know how we are going to get out of a particular problem or situation, remember that Jesus is "King of kings and Lord of Lords".
  - iv) If Jesus is big enough to single handedly defeat this demonic lead, world-empire and beat them, Jesus can handle your problem and my problem.
  - v) Understand that Jesus cares just as much about our problems as he does about winning this battle one day.
- 16. Verse 15: Then the angel said to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages.
  - a) Back in Verse 1, it read, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters".
    - i) The purpose of this chapter is to show the punishment of this prostitute.
    - ii) What was never defined is what the "waters" are. The answer is here in Verse 15, where it says, "peoples, multitudes, nations and languages".
  - b) Remember that the "woman" is a city, which is coming up in Verse 18.
    - i) The point here is the city rules, controls, and greatly influences a large multitude of people. Remember earlier we had ten kings. The implication is the ten kings are the rulers over this large multitude of people.
  - c) Why is the woman (city) being judged? Because this beast (the antichrist) and this city (the "woman") organized a worldwide rebellion against God.
    - i) One also gets the impression that all of these multitudes of people are still held accountable. In other words, they can't say on judgment day, "It wasn't our fault. We were swayed by the antichrist and we couldn't help ourselves".
    - ii) God holds everyone accountable. People who refuse to accept Jesus become susceptible to accept just about anything and everything.
    - iii) Remember that nonbelievers want world peace too. We all do. The difference is nonbelievers want peace without having to accept God or have to change their lifestyle. Therefore, the world is more than willing to accept a world empire if it brings a false sense of world peace.
- 17. Verse 16: The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.
  - a) Again, Verse 1 stated the purpose of this chapter: To show the punishment of this prostitute. Verse 18 (coming up) says the prostitute is really a city.
  - b) Here in Verse 16, we see the actual punishment taking place. It says the "beast" (i.e., the antichrist) and the ten horns (i.e., the ten kings under the antichrist) will hate the prostitute. The second sentence says, "They (these rulers) will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire."
    - i) Remember this "woman" is a city. Therefore, when the text says, "they will eat her flesh", it is not a literal reference to cannibalism. The idea is the antichrist will double-cross this city (i.e., religious center of worship) and destroy it. I do believe the final part of the text that says, "Burn her with fire" is literal.
  - c) Let me explain this another way: Throughout history, many kings and emperors have used the religion of that day to help them rise to power. Those kings have partnered with the religious leaders in order to rise to power. Kings and emperors never want to share their power with anyone. Once they achieve the power they want, the religious leaders are no longer useful to them, and there is no reason to keep those religious leaders alive. The kings kill the religious leaders as the kings see those religious leaders as a threat to their power. That is what I see happening here.

- d) One of the issues I brought up earlier is the danger of the Christian church partnering with government leaders. Such churches then become dependant upon the government for their survival. In such cases, Christian churches have to compromise what they believe in order to appease that government.
  - e) Getting back to the antichrist and his ten buddies, remember that this "city" in focus is a center of religious worship, but it is not a Christian church. It is a city that has organized religion, but it is probably some sort of "all-religions-are-right" and "let's all just live in peace together" type of movement. A religion that worships everything really worships nothing. It is an insult to God to have such a religion. It is truly mans' attempt to try to please God without having to accept God's free provision for sin.
  - f) The irony here is that it is the antichrist who destroys this city and not God Himself. The antichrist himself will be punished in a few chapters. The point is God Himself did not have to "zap" this woman/city/movement as the antichrist himself does the damage. The lesson is to be careful who we partner with in life. That is another reason why I call this lesson, "Know thy enemy". The Bible warns Christians never to partner with unbelievers. (Ref. 2nd Corinthians 6:14). Revelation Chapter 17 is a good example of that danger.
18. Verse 17: For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled.
- a) I need at this point to go back to Exodus and quote something Moses said to Pharaoh: "For by now I (God) could have stretched out my hand and struck you (Pharaoh) and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. But I (God) have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." (Exodus 9:15-16, NIV)
    - i) If you study ancient history, you will know that Egypt had a great empire that ruled the Middle East for many centuries. The Pharaoh that dealt with Moses was one of the most powerful emperors of all time. Yet, Moses told the Pharaoh to his face that God Himself raised Pharaoh up, ultimately for God's purpose.
  - b) That leads us back to Verse 17. It says, "For God has put it into their (the 10 kings) hearts to accomplish his (God's) purpose". That purpose is for the 10 kings in power to give their power to the "beast", which is the antichrist.
    - i) As I stated earlier in the lesson, kings and emperors become addicted to power. Nobody who becomes a king wants to give that up. The point here is that God, "working behind the scenes" has the power to convince these 10 kings to give their power to the antichrist. The kings think it is their idea to give up their power. Here in Verse 17, we realize that God is "pulling the strings". The same way God raised up Pharaoh by working behind the scenes is the same way God persuaded these kings to give up their power.
  - c) The point of all of this is to teach and remind us how God works and how God is capable of working when He chooses.
    - i) The bible teaches that all government leaders are God ordained. (See Romans 13:1). God works behind the scenes to raise up leaders, both good and bad, ultimately for His own purposes.
    - ii) That doesn't mean we should say, be lazy in work and think, "If it is God's will, He will promote me to power". God knows all things, but we don't. We don't know how things will turn out so we are to work "as if" God wasn't involved. We shouldn't use God as an excuse to avoid hard work or say, not vote in an election.
  - d) Now that we've established what God is capable of doing, we can get back to the verse.
    - i) God "allows" the antichrist to rise to power.
    - ii) The "unusual miracle" is that ten kings willingly give up their power in order for this antichrist to rise to power. The point is, it is not demonic influence that allows these kings to give up their power. It is "God ordained".

- iii) Ultimately, all of these people are judged and lose in the end. The point is God allows the antichrist to rise to power, to fulfill God's purposes in judgment.
  - iv) Back in Exodus, God allowed this Pharaoh to rise to power. It meant the entire Jewish nation had to go into slavery due to this Pharaoh. At the same time, God "used" this Pharaoh ultimately to show off God's power.
  - v) The point of all this is to understand that God allows "bad people and bad things" to happen, ultimately for His own glory. We may not understand why all of this is happening, but God does. During difficult times, one has to take comfort in the fact that "God is large and God is in charge" and trust in the fact that whatever is happening, ultimately happens for God's glory. This may not alleviate the pain, but it will help us to understand the eternal perspective.
19. Verse 18: The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."
- a) I've pretty much beaten this verse to death already, so I won't add a lot more. ☺
  - b) One thing I pondered is, "Why wait until Verse 18 to announce this prostitute is a city?"
    - i) Why not state this right after Verse 1? Why wait until the end of the chapter?
    - ii) (Remember the chapter breaks were not part of the original text. My point here is that God waited for 17 verses to tell us the "woman" is really a city.)
    - iii) I believe the idea is not for us to be fooled and think this prostitute is literal. The idea is for us to contemplate how God sees this city: As a prostitute. She may look pretty all "fixed up" as described in her clothes and jewelry earlier in the chapter. In the end, she's still a prostitute. God wanted to emphasize the immorality of this "woman" far more than God wanted us to know it is a single city.
  - c) This leads us back to "Know thy enemy".
    - i) Satan does not walk up to us with horns and pitchfork. (There is no bible basis for that description!) False teachers do not have name badges that say, "Hello, I'm a false teacher and I'm here to draw you away from God!" World leaders do not come out and say, "I'm here to control your lives and lead you to destruction."
    - ii) The point is all things that work against God try their best to appeal to us. Prostitutes get dressed up to entice us. False leaders claim to be the real deal. "Knowing thy enemy" is to see past all of enticing factors and see them for what they are and the fact they are doomed in the end. The key for us is to not be part of the multitudes that are swayed by such enticements.
    - iii) Does that mean I have to hide behind a rock in fear of Satan and his demonic forces? ☺ No. Jesus is "King of Kings and Lord of Lords". The bible teaches us that "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." (1st John 4:4 NKJV). One does need to pray for protection and pray to be strong against temptation. The point is we are unable to resist such temptations without God's help.
20. Let's pray: Father, Help us to be strong against temptation. Give us the discernment to recognize what is sinful and harmful to our lives and give us the strength to avoid such temptations. When we do sin, help us to recognize it as such and give us the strength to turn back to You and lead us in the right direction. Help us to be aware of the tactics of the enemy and to realize their ultimate destruction. Help us to remember that You are in charge and You care for our lives. Help to keep in mind that Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords and watches out for us daily. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.