

Lesson Twenty

Mystery of Babylon (17:1-18)

Babylon, the Capital of the Beast (17:1-3a)

17:1. Babylon, the symbolic name of the center of the beast's authority, has been previously mentioned (14:8; 16:19). "One of the angels who had a bowl" may be a simple reference that this vision is an elaboration of 16:19-21. "Come here" is one of the several summons of Revelation (4:1; 6:1,3,5,7; 11:12; 17:1; 18:4; 19:17; 21:9; 22:17a, 217b). Harlotry was often used in scripture for spiritual betrayal and idolatry. This spiritual plight is magnified in Babylon.

17:2. The kings of the earth participate in the harlot's immorality. "Wine of fornication" suggests the seductive nature of spiritual immorality. In typical apocalyptic-type code, Revelation gives us clues, similar to a riddle, related to the identification of the beast and its capital city Babylon.

17:3a. John "carried away in the Spirit" suggests he had an mystical or out of the body experience. An angel transported John in the wilderness to have this experience.

Breaking the Code to Identify Babylon, the Harlot (17:3b-13)

Clue One (1:b, 15). The beast that "Sits on many waters" is a reference to great wickedness and idolatry.

John interprets this clue for us in verse 15. The “many waters” is the multitude of nations. Therefore, clue one means Babylon will be a city of great wickedness and idolatry.

Clue Two (3b-4a): The woman sitting on a scarlet beast references sinfulness and wealth of the antichrist (13:1). Scarlet represents sin and is similar to the red color of the dragon/devil (12:3). Purple represents wealth. The beast controls the world’s economy (13:17). Gold, precious stones and pearls are further reference to excessive wealth and abundance.

Clue Three (3c, 4b, 5). Blasphemous names and abominations reference the spiritual wickedness of Babylon (13:1, 5-6). He declares himself to be sovereign over all matters of politics, economics, and religion. The name of the beast on the foreheads of his followers is a reference to ownership (13:17). Yet, the name is a mystery. It is not actually Babylon but a secret way to identify the final beast on earth. Abominations reference the despicable unholy quality of the beast.

Clue Four (3d; 9-10): The Beast has seven heads. The phrase, “mind with wisdom” indicates a riddle-like mind is needed to identify Babylon. The seven heads of the Beast are seven kings and seven hills. In biblical history hills were associated with power and empires (eg., Daniel 2:35; Jeremiah 51:25; Isaiah 41:15). Each king rules a kingdom or nation. John states that five

have fallen, one exists in John's day, and the final one has not yet arisen. The clue to the seven heads is the obvious succession of empires.

- The five fallen kings are most likely a reference to the Egyptian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Persian, and Greek empires.
- The sixth, which existed in John's day was the Roman Empire.
- The seventh is to come. This is a king/empire that will rule for a short time on earth.

Clue Five (3d, 12-13): The 10 horns are a confederacy of 10 kings. The purpose of the confederacy is to give power and authority to the beast. The reign of this confederacy is "an hour" or a short time. This is similar to that of the short reign of the beast himself (v.10b). The league of 10 nations is not a succession of kingdoms, but rather a confederacy of nations during the short reign of the beast. The phrase, "Have not yet received power" means that this confederacy of nations" did not exist in John's day.

Clue Six (6): Blood of the saints reference Babylon as the chief city of persecution against the saints of God (13:7). This city will be most known as the city leading violent assault against evangelical Jewish/Gentile Christianity.

Clue Seven (7-8, 11): The death and coming to life of the beast references a particularly identifying feature of the Beast (13:3, 12, 14). The beast was, does not exist

in the time of John, and will come again. His final existence is short-lived. He will return to the abyss (11:7; 12:1). Therefore, if the identification of the five previous kings and kingdoms are correct, the beast will come out of one of the ancient empires of Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Persia, or Greece. The beast is also an eighth head. One of the seven dies and comes back to life. This makes him one of the seven, and also an eighth.

Victory for the Lamb (17:14-18)

17:14. The beast and his confederacy of allies will persecute Christians. They make “war with the Lamb” but assaulting the body of Christ. The victor is the Lamb, who is the Lord of lords and King of kings. His followers are called, chosen, and faithful.

17:16-17. The Lord facilitates a civil war among the nations of evil. The confederacy of nations and the beast turn on Babylon, the capital of the Beast. Complete destruction is pictured in this verse. God incites this civil war among the nations of evil.

17:18. This is a final word of clarification. The woman or harlot is the capital of the beast.