Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Destruction of the Final World Religion, Part 1
Scripture: Revelation 17:1-6
Code: 66-59

We are privileged, and I think you know that, because we have what I suppose everyone in the world wishes they had, and that is perfectly accurate information about the future. It's laid out for us on the pages of Scripture most completely in the book of Revelation, the last book in the Bible.

For months and months now we have been working our way through this tremendous book. It has been a marvelous journey for us to go back to the future, going back to the Word of God penned two thousand years ago, and yet preeminently accurate and timely and informative about the future of our world. We find ourselves now in chapter 17. We're going to spend a few weeks in this chapter because there is so much that is here that we need to understand.

Chapter 17 deals with the destruction of the final world religion. Human beings are religious. They are worshipers by creation, by nature. They will worship something somewhere and that is because God made them to be worshipers. He made them to reach out to something beyond themselves, namely the supernatural, specifically Himself. He made them with a longing and a restlessness and a desire and a capacity to relate to Him as the divine Creator. That is why it is correct to say that man is restless until he finds his rest in God. Man was made with a God-shaped vacuum that only God can fill. He is an incurable worshiper who will bow inevitably at some shrine, if not the true God then gods of his own inventions.

Since the fall of man recorded back in the third chapter of Genesis when he rebelled against God, God cursed man. And because man was cursed, because he is now by nature sinful, his nature has been perverted and so that innate longing to know God has been twisted. Man still reaches out for the supernatural but no longer does he long for the true God. In fact the Bible says no man seeks after God. His residual religiosity makes him long for some deity, but it's usually a deity that accommodates somehow his sinfulness. And now his need for a relationship with God is corrupted because of his love of sin. And so as Romans chapter 1 describes it in very clear terms, "Even though they knew God they did not honor Him as God or give thanks but they became futile in their speculations, their foolish hearts were darkened, professing to be wise they became fools and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image."

It is characteristic of the fallenness of man that his built-in longing for God is corrupted. He is hopelessly religious. He is a worshiper. But he does not any longer seek the true God. If a relationship with the true God is ever to be consummated, the true God must seek him for man no

longer seeks God.

Playing on this religious bent, this desire for someone or something to worship, Satan and his demons then energize false religion. False religion is extremely popular. It accommodates man's perverted longing without bringing him under the authority of the true God. Satan goes into action disguised, as 2 Corinthians 11 tells us, and his disguise is as an angel of light and his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.

So you have man with a perverted desire to worship. He looks for any God but the true God, not wanting to bring himself under the authority and the power and the rule of the true God, he invents some kind of deities that are spawned by Satan himself out of what the Apostle Paul calls doctrines of demons and seducing spirits. So you have all over the world, for the most part, a rejection of the true God and in His place a myriad of false deities.

Rebellious, then, against the true God, man is a partner of Satan and Satan's demons and forces in the development of damning religious enterprises. Wonderfully, graciously and mercifully, though man does not any longer seek the true God, the true God seeks man. And immediately after the Fall God began to look for man, to bring him back, to redeem him from sin and death and false religion. But Satan wages a constant war against that divine enterprise, a campaign to get people lured into and trapped in false systems that worship not the true God but some abomination claiming to be God.

Because this is so much a part of the fabric of human life, we're not surprised to see it come to a head in the last days. Just as everything else reaches a sort of final form in the end, false religion will reach its culminating form as well. In the last days of man on earth, just prior to the return of Jesus Christ in a period of time known as the Great Tribulation when the wrath of God is being poured out on the world, there will be a culminating of all of Satan's antigod schemes, including one great universal final form of world religion. All the several separated parts of satanic religion will come together in one great world religion.

Satan, as you well know, has spawned all the false religions. They're really one and the same, they just have different names and a few different rites and ceremonies, but they're basically all the same. They fit in and out of varying cultures for varying purposes and reasons in Satan's enterprise, but ultimately they are all the same. They are systems that attach themself to non-existent deities, systems that teach that man can save himself by his own works and his own achievement and his own self-righteousness, that the way to God is through ceremony, ritual, rite, things like that. It's all the same. And it will come together in one great world final form of religion in the very end.

In chapter 17 we are introduced to it, let's look at the first six verses. "And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me saying, `Come here, I shall show you the

judgment of the great harlot who sits on the many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality.' And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a cup, a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality. And upon her forehead a name was written, MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus and when I saw her I wondered greatly."

It's not surprising that he wondered at such an incredible, shocking, amazing vision. This introduces us to the final form of world religion. Now we understand, don't we, that the final world empire of Satan ruled on earth by the Antichrist who is assisted by the false prophet will be a military, materialistic, economic and political kingdom. But it will also be a spiritual and religious one. Chapter 18 shows the nature of the material side of Satan's kingdom, chapter 17 shows the nature of its spiritual side. Chapter 18 describes God's judgment on the material aspect of that kingdom, chapter 17 shows God's judgment on the spiritual aspect of that kingdom. In both cases it is called Babylon, the final great world empire of Satan led by the Antichrist as to its material side, and the false prophet as to its material side will be destroyed. And the destruction of each of those two parts is described first in chapter 17, the spiritual, then in chapter 18, the material.

Now keep in mind that chronology stops at this point. You remember chapter 16 closed with the seventh bowl being poured out, the last plague. That is followed immediately by praise in heaven, chapter 19, and then the return of Jesus Christ. So the chronology really jumps from chapter 16 verse 21 right in to chapter 19. Chapter 17 and 18 take us backwards and describe for us not the judgment but what is being destroyed by that judgment, namely the world empire. So we're now getting a deeper look into the spiritual and then the material components of the world of Satan, the world of Antichrist, the world of the false prophet that is going to be destroyed by the seven last plagues and the coming of Christ. We are then in chapter 17 looking at the spiritual side, Babylon the religious empire and its destruction.

In this chapter we will see three things...the exposure of the system, the explanation of the system and the extermination of the system...the exposure, the explanation, and the extermination. But before we even get to those three points, which we will not get to tonight, before we even get there, there are many things that I need to say to you.

Go down to verse 5, and we need to grasp verse 5 because this gives us the name of this religious world empire and the name itself fills in the significance of it. Its name is MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS, AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. That is the biblical name for the system of satanic Antichrist religion that is the final form of world worship. And

in this chapter we're going to see after its exposure and explanation, its extermination. Now remember, twice already John has been told that Babylon is doomed and Babylon will be destroyed. He was told that in chapter 14 verse 8, as well as right there in chapter 16 verse 19. Now he gets the details on that, the details as to what Babylon is and how in fact it is to be destroyed. These two chapters then describe for us the character of the world being destroyed by the day of the Lord events culminating in the seven-bowl judgments. Here then is the sweeping description of the world system of Satan, Antichrist and the false prophet which the wrath of God and the day of the Lord will destroy. It is Babylon political and spiritual. Political Babylon is depicted as a monster, and spiritual Babylon is depicted as a mother. And we'll see that distinction.

Now notice the name, the name is MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT. I take it that the term "mystery" should be associated with the name. The name is MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT. And the reason it says Mystery Babylon is so that we don't confuse this with some geographical location. Babylon cannot be confined to any one historical manifestation past or future. It has multiple equivalence. Any place that is characterized by false religion is a Babylon. The details of John's description do not neatly fit any past city, whether literal Babylon, Sodom, Egypt, Rome or even Jerusalem. Nor do they fit any future city, but rather this is Mystery Babylon, something deeper and broader and wider and more profound and more mystical than any physical location. In fact, here is an undisclosed Babylon, a secret reality to be revealed in its final form. This is Babylon beyond geography. This is Babylon in mystery form.

At the time John wrote this, by the way, there was a Babylon. It was a viable city. It had a Jewish population. In fact, the Jewish population of Babylon are responsible for what is known as the Babylonian Talmud, a very significant commentary on the Old Testament historically.

So in John's day there was a city called Babylon. This is not that city. We also believe that in the future there will be a rebuilt Babylon and interestingly enough there is already one being rebuilt by Saddam Hussein and that rebuilt Babylon will certainly play a geographical and significant historical role in the kingdom of Antichrist to come. But the Babylon described here is a Mystery Babylon the great, not that city of the past and not the rebuilt city of the end times. This is some...some unknown mysterious secret Babylon to be unfolded in the future. It is the Babylon of satanic deception. It would be safe to say that wherever satanic deception rules and reigns, you have a form of Babylon, a kind of Babylon.

Babylon is to be better understood as the sort of the archetypical head of all worldly resistance to God. It is a trans-historical Babylon. It is the Babylon of idolatry. It is the eschatological symbol of worldwide satanic deception and power. It is a divine mystery that can never be wholly reducible to empirical earthly institutions. Babylon represents, in this chapter, the religious culture of the world dominated by Satan the deceiver.

Now its comprehensiveness can be seen further by noting that it is Babylon the great, it is mega-Babylon, something massive and far-reaching. Further it is described as "THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." That is to say that all of the harlots in the earth and all of the abominations in the world are spawned out of this Babylon.

Now let me tell you what that means. This is where I want to spend some time tonight because it's so fascinating. Harlotry, or prostitution is the standing symbol in Scripture for one thing...it is the standing symbol in Scripture for idolatry. Wherever you see spiritual harlotry, or spiritual prostitution in Scripture it is the standing symbol of idolatry. Whenever people turned to other gods, rather than the true God, it was prostitution. It was joining oneself to a harlot.

In Jeremiah it tells us, for example, in chapter 3 verse 6, "Then the Lord said to me in the days of Josiah the king, `Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree and she was a harlot there.'" What does that mean. Well Israel set up idol groves, they went up and were worshiping things carved out of wood and he says that is harlotry. And verse 8, "And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel..." and so forth. Verse 9, "It came about because of the lightness of her harlotry that she polluted the land and committed adultery with stones and with trees."

Ezekiel speaks of the very same thing, and I wish we had to read through all of these great texts, but I'm just pointing them to you, you need to read them for yourself. Again Ezekiel chapter 16, God is indicting and He says in verse 30, "How languishing is your heart, declares the Lord God, while you do all these things, the actions of a boldface harlot, when you built your shrine at the beginning of every street and made your high place in every square," that is idols, they set up idols. "In disdaining money you were not like a harlot, you adulterous wife who takes strangers instead of her husband. Men give gifts to all harlots and you give your gifts to all your lovers," and so forth.

The imagery of harlotry is associated with idolatry. The book of Hosea again, the whole book is all about that. God is represented by Hosea. Hosea depicts God and his harlot wife, Gomer, is the symbol of Israel who has her many lovers and her many harlotries.

So what you have here is this, Babylon the Great, the Mother of all Idolatry. The final form of world religion will be the mother of all idolatry, the mother of all false religion. Listen now to what I say or you'll miss everything. The Babylon of which John writes and what he sees in this vision is the very Babylon that once gave birth to all blasphemous idolatry. It is the very Babylon that once gave birth to all prostituted forms of religion, and in the end they all come home to mother.

There's another interesting note to make. Frequently throughout the book of Revelation women appear as symbols of religion. In, for example, chapter 2 and verse 20 you will remember the

indictment of the church at Thyatira, "I have this against you, you tolerate the woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess and she teaches and leads My bondservants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols." There is a form of false religion that is identified with a woman. In chapter 12, again interestingly enough, "A great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun," and here is the great religion, the great nation Israel identified as a woman. In chapter 19, I think it's verses 7 and 8, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give glory to Him for the marriage of the Lamb is come and His bride has made herself ready." Israel is seen in the picture of a woman and the church is seen in the picture of a woman as a bride, a magnificent and beautiful image, indeed it is. Chapter 19 verse 2, "And judgments are true and righteous as God renders them for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality." There you see the false religious system again called a harlot, another designation of a woman in connection with religion. You have another reference to the bride in chapter 21 verse 9.

So in Revelation the figure of a woman is used symbolically of religion, true religion and false. But here in this case it is a harlot, not Israel the wife of God, not the church the bride of Christ, but here you have a harlot woman. And this imagery of motherhood fits because she gives birth, only she gives birth to harlots...harlot after harlot after harlot after harlot. This is Babylon. Isaiah calls ancient Babylon the queen of kingdoms, again following that feminine imagery, Isaiah 47:5.

So here is what you have. Babylon the Great spawning all manner of harlots which are forms of idolatry. Babylon giving birth to all forms of false religion across the world. This is the mother of them all. This is the source of all earth's idolatries. And as I said, she spawned them all way back in Genesis, and we'll see that. And in the end they all come home to mamma and they're all collected around her again. She is the unholy counterpart to the bride of Christ, whether Confucianism, Islam, Hinduism, Shamanism, Taoism, Atomism, spiritism, astrology, Buddhism, sheikism, mysticism, or whatever, she mothered them all. They all had the same source and they'll all come back together in the end. They're really not that far apart. She mothered them all and all her children will come home to her.

Now what is this telling us? This increasingly, at least from our perspective, this increasingly irreligious world is in the end going to become intensely religious as it falls into Satan's power with Antichrist as its deity. Back to chapter 13 for a moment, we'll show you the final form of religion in terms of its deity and its worship. Chapter 13, you see the beast or the Antichrist, and it tell us in verse 4, "And they worshiped the beast...I'm sorry...and they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast and they worshiped the beast." Who is worshiping Satan the dragon and who is worshiping Antichrist, the beast? Back to verse 3, "The whole earth." The nature of the final form of world religion will be Satan worship and Antichrist worship. Verse 8 tells you the comprehensive nature of this, "All who dwell on the earth will worship him."

It's coming, folks, a one-world religion. We seem to be very irreligious in our country. That's changing rather rapidly. There are efforts, of course, in the ecumenical movement to sweep away all dogma, to sweep away all distinctions that divide and move the world toward one great tolerance toward religion, to pave the way for this gathering of one-world religion. The deity will be somebody they can see. It will be, I really believe, a form of humanism for some, a form of supernaturalism for others as they focus on the dragon or the supernatural being behind the human Antichrist. The ecumenical movement that's bringing the various diverse factions, as we know it, of Christianity together is social action, existentialism, mysticism and emotionalism. Seducing spirits are out doing their work, spreading the doctrines of demons, destroying the distinctiveness of the Christian faith. False teachers are busy doing their work. And I really believe in the end, as the Scripture lays out for us, they're all going to come home to Babylon.

And there will be a compelling need for religion because of what's going on in the world, as the seals of God's judgment unfold, as the trumpets of God's judgment blow, as the bowls of wrath are poured out. People are going to be looking for some deliverer, some deity, and they're going to turn to the Antichrist because they'll be so successfully deceived by the demon forces all over the globe.

And as I said earlier, all the false religions of the world apart from true Christianity are essentially the same anyway. They advocate false gods. They're designed by Satan, propagated by demons. They are self-achieving righteousness and ceremonial holiness kind of religions and they all come together under the same banner ultimately. When the full deception comes, when Satan's really done his work and the full complement of demons released out of the pit and from being bound at the Euphrates River, two hundred million more, when they ply their trade all over the earth, the deception will be monumental.

Now the question is this...why Babylon? How is Babylon the mother of all idolatries? How is Babylon the mother of all abominable religions? Well that is the very important question. And we have to return to the ancient world to find out. Before we can understand the Babylon religion of the future, we have to comprehend the Babylon religion of the past. We've got to see the mother to which they all return. So let's go back to Genesis chapter 11.

Genesis chapter 11 verse 1, after the Flood, Noah and his family, Shem, Ham and Japheth and their wives began to repopulate the world. And, of course, verse 1 says, "The whole earth used the same language and same words." They all came out of the same family. "It came about as they journeyed east they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, `Come, let us make bricks, fire them thoroughly.' They used brick for stone and they used tar for mortar. And they said, `Come, let us build for ourselves a city and a tower whose top will reach into heaven. Let us make for ourselves a name, lest be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.' And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built and the Lord said, `Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language,' and this is what they began to

do and now nothing which they purposed to do will be impossible for them." They have tremendous unity and tremendous power. "Come...says God...let us...the trinitarian, plural...go down and there confuse their language that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth and they stopped building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel because there the Lord confused the language of the whole earth and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth."

What was going on here? Rebellion, rebellion against the true God. What were they building? They were building a monument to man. This was the first great humanistic enterprise. Verse 4, "Let us make for ourselves a name." But it was more than just humanistic, it was religious. What they were building in this tower was called a ziggurat, you may have read that name if you read ancient history. And on the top of a ziggurat was placed, would you believe, the sign of the zodiac. Priests were then ordained who by the use of the ancient zodiac were supposed to chart the course of the stars and therefore gain spiritual wisdom and read the future. This was defiant rebellion against the true and only God.

Isn't it amazing? God had drowned the whole world, you'd think they have gotten the message. The only people remaining were the righteous family of Noah, and yet it doesn't take very long before the sinfulness and the rebellious heart of man who no longer seeks God but seeks false religion finds fruition to its seeking and develops a false religious system. The whole world was in on it. It was the first form of false religion. It was the first form of demon worship. It was the first time that men had been seduced into inventing a religion. Demons for the first time impersonating the true God.

This idolatry, this harlotry, this spiritual fornication, this abomination to God was led by a man by the name of Nimrod. Go back to chapter 10 of Genesis. "The sons of Ham, verse 6, were Cush and Mizraim and Put and Canaan. The sons of Cush were...and they're named...Cush became the father of Nimrod." Not far removed from Ham, is he? "He became a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord, therefore it is said, `Like a Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord.'" He became the standard of power. "And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel and Erech and Accad and Calneh in the land of Shinar." The beginning of his kingdom was Babel.

His name is said by some, Nimrod, to mean rebel. He is the first foreshadowing of Antichrist. His brashness can be seen in that he was before God. He boldly would attempt to take his place before God. He had power, he had might, he had a kingdom which means he was a ruler. And his headquarters were at Babel, or as it was later called, Babylon. So Nimrod was Satan's first false spiritual leader.

And it was Nimrod who basically established this complex system of idol worship that was intended to counterfeit God's truth and lead people to damnation. That's what Satan wanted to do and Nimrod was a willing subject.

And by the way, just as a historical note. After the ziggurat at Babel, it became common in the ancient world for people to build huge mounds of sun-dried bricks dedicated to heathen deities and to the zodiac. And the zodiac, as you well know, is still with us, isn't it?

The root meaning of the word "Babel" could be "gate of God." Maybe that's what they thought it was. But its name became synonymous with confusion, babble. When someone babbles even in English, we say they speak in a manner that is not understandable, confusion. And later the name became as we know it, Babylon.

Now listen, Nimrod, grandson of Ham, the first apostate, the apostate of the patriarchal age, at the city of Babylon in the plain of Shinar spawned a complex series of mystery religions that abominated God and exalted Satan. And then what did God do? God...what? Scattered them. Now you understand where all false world religions came from. Babylon mothered them all. She was the fountainhead of every false religion in the earth. And when God scattered them all over and changed their languages, with the scattering went the religion in a myriad of forms, these abominable beliefs spread through the whole world. But Babylon was the mother of them all.

Now, that's enough for tonight. Next time we'll look at the text. Let's pray.

Father, we want to thank You for the clarity of Your truth. We want to thank You that You have led us in a right path to trust Your holy Word and not some mixture. Father, we bless Your name that You have saved us from Satan's deception. We know the world is going that direction, and we must be faithful to the truth and to call men to the truth and to call men away from the deceptions. Lord, I would pray that by Your grace and Your mighty power You would invade false religion and You would continue to rescue many. We know that this church is filled with people who have been rescued out of the Babylonish/Christian mix, we thank You for that. And we pray that You'll make us sensitive, Lord, to reach out and preach the truth of Jesus Christ, not some satanic confusion. Thank You again, Father, for Your mercy to us as undeserving sinners, to keep us from damning lies. May we be faithful to the truth and to proclaim the truth. And may we be used to lead many to righteousness in Christ's name. Amen.

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