

A Survey of Revelation

Week 10: The Destruction of the Evil Empire
Revelation 17:1-18:24

A Brief Overview of the Book of Revelation

A. Introduction to the Book (Revelation 1)

B. Letters to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3)

C. The End of the World As We Know It: God's Judgment Upon the World and Satan (Revelation 4-19:5)

1. The Vision of Heaven and the "Beginning of the End" (4:1-5:14)
2. The "Seal" Judgments and the Rapture (6:1-8:1)
3. The "Trumpet" Judgments (8:1-11:19)
4. The Conflict with the False Trinity (12:1-13:18)
5. The "Bowl" Judgments (14:1-16:21)
6. The Destruction of the Evil Empire (17:1-18:24) } *This week, we are here!*

D. A Whole New World: The Return of Christ and the New Heavens and the New Earth (Revelation 19:1-22:21)

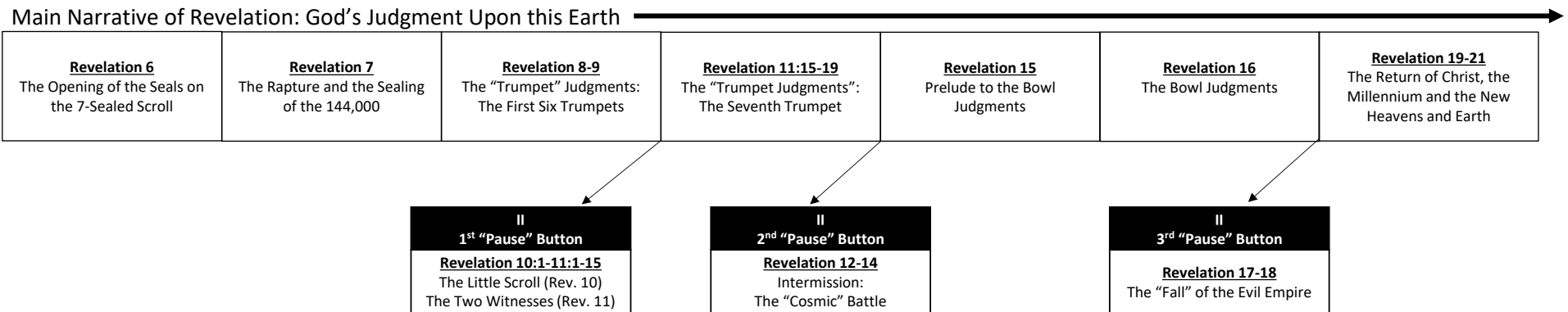
1. The Return of Christ and the Millennium Kingdom (19:1-20:15)
2. The New Heavens and the New Earth (21:1-22:11)
3. Epilogue to Revelation (22:12-21)

Introduction to Revelation 17-18

- Last week, in Revelation 15-16, we saw God brings His final judgment on the world. This brings up right up until the very end of the earth as we know it; the next major event will be the return of Christ to this earth.
- But before John details for us the return of Christ, he hits the “pause button” one last time in chapters 17-18 to give us a final vision of the final, evil, end-time empire and the judgment that God brings on it.
- The relationship between Revelation 17-18 and Revelation 15-16 can be thought of this way:

Revelation 15-16 describes *God’s judgments*.
 Revelation 17-18 describes *what God is judging*.

- In the context of the rest of the book of Revelation, here’s how it all fits together:



- There are three major sections to Revelation 17-18:
 - [1] John gives us a vision of a “beast” and the “prostitute” that rides it (Revelation 17:1-6).
 - [2] John describes the final, evil, end-time world empire (Revelation 17:7-14).
 - [3] John details the self-destruction of the final, evil, end-time world empire (Revelation 17:15-18:24)

[1] Revelation 17:1-6 - The Vision of the Prostitute and the Beast

John is given a vision of the final, evil, end-time world empire being ridden by a mysterious “prostitute.”

Revelation 17:1-6

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 by 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.”

³ Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. 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. ⁵ The name written on her forehead was a mystery:

BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES
AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

⁶ I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God's holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. (Rev. 17:1-6 NIV)

Interpretation

- Before John is given a picture of the destruction of the final empire(s) of this earth, he is first given a vision of both a **prostitute** and a **beast**.
- It's important to note that these are two separate images, though obviously intertwined: the prostitute *sits* on the beast (Rev. 17:3), but they are not the same thing and are described differently.
 - The ***beast*** is the same beast of Revelation 13. It represents the final, evil end-time world empire and it also represents the leader of that empire, the Anti-Christ.
 - The ***prostitute*** represents and is the personification of the universal and sinful drive for materialism, wealth and power, and the pursuit of these things above all.
- The idea behind this image is that throughout all of history, behind every empire on this earth, from Babel until today, there has always been the same controlling influences: the insatiable desire for wealth, economic prosperity, and power, and the willingness to do anything—kill, murder, and completely compromise values and morality—in pursuit of that goal. **This is the “prostitute” that sits upon the “nations” (“beasts”) of this earth; it is the prostitute that ultimately drives the beast.**



- At the end of time, the Anti-Christ will exploit this drive for materialism, wealth and power to gain people’s allegiance to him through the “mark of the beast” (Rev. 13:16-17) and the false religion that forms around him; no one will be able to do business—and therefore no one will be able to be prosper—unless they show allegiance to the Anti-Christ and receive his mark.
- The finer points of this image are detailed below.

The “Prostitute” The Drive for Materialism, Wealth and Power	
Description	Interpretation
<i>“sits on many waters” (v. 1)</i>	the “waters” are defined in v. 15 as the people who pay homage to and support the corrupting influence of money and power
<i>“with her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries” (v. 2)</i>	the promise of economic prosperity and power has seduced rulers of this earth from the beginning of time, like a prostitute seduces an adulterer
<i>she also “sits on the beast” (v. 3)</i>	the promise of economic prosperity and power are often what drive the decisions of kings and empires
<i>she is “dressed in purple and scarlet” and was “glittering with gold, precious stones, and pearls” (v. 4)</i>	this is a picture of her wealth; dyes were expensive at that time, and the fact the prostitute wears purple <i>and</i> scarlet shows her luxurious adornment, as well as the gold, stones, and pearls, that she wears
<i>on her head is written, “Babylon the Great Mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth” (v. 5)</i>	“Babylon” was the most notorious empires in the Old Testament; it was the one that destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and led the Israelites into captivity; the prostitute is thus the embodiment of evil
<i>she is “drunk” on the blood of martyred Christians (v. 6)</i>	it is often the pursuit of economic prosperity and power that often motivates the murdering of God’s people and even makes it look attractive (hence being “drunk”)

The “Beast” The Final, Evil, End-Time World Empire	
Description	Interpretation
<i>“dressed in scarlet” (v. 3)</i>	a picture of the wealth of this final, evil, end-time empire (see note on the prostitute’s scarlet, above)
<i>“covered with blasphemous names” (v. 3)</i>	this reminds us of the beasts’ description in 13:5-6, and describes the way that the beast and its ruler (the Anti-Christ) sets itself up against God.
<i>“seven heads and ten horns” (v. 3)</i>	this will be explained in greater detail in the next section

[2] Revelation 17:7-14 - The Final, Evil, End-Time World Empire

After describing this vision of the prostitute and the beast, John gives us more detail about the beast—the final, evil, end-time world empire that will come upon this earth.

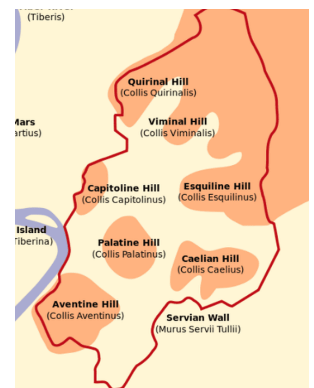
- Following the vision of the prostitute and the beast, John is “astonished” (v. 6).
- And so an angel gives John an explanation. He begins by first giving John an understanding of the “beast” (17:7-14)—the final, evil, end-time world empire and its leader, the Anti-Christ.
- He says four things about this final, evil, end-time world empire:

- 1 The final leader of this empire—the Anti-Christ—will be the recipient of some “miracle” (Rev. 17:18).
 - o John is told that the beast “once was, now is not, and yet will come.”
 - o This seems to be a repeat of what John told us about the Anti-Christ in Revelation 13: the Anti-Christ will be the recipient of some sort of miracle, where he will appear to be dead but will come back to life.

One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast. (Rev. 13:3 NIV)

- 2 The final, evil, end-time world empire will be in the model of many evil empires that came before it, most notably Rome (Rev. 17:9-11).

- o The final, evil, end-time world empire will **not** be an anomaly on this earth. There have already been empires like it—most notably Rome.
- o This is made clear by the “seven heads” of the beast, which clearly refer to two things:
 - **First, the seven heads refer to “seven hills” (v. 9)** This is a clear reference to the Roman empire; the city of Rome was said to be the city that sat on “seven hills” (see picture). **Thus the final, evil, end-time world empire will be in some way a “reincarnation” of the Roman Empire.** (It does not need to necessarily be where the Roman Empire originally was, but it will be like the Roman Empire in “spirit.”)



The seven hills of the city of Rome.

- **Second, the seven heads refer to “seven kings” (vv. 10-11).** This is obviously much harder to interpret, not only because it’s not clear who these seven kings are, but also because we are told that the beast “is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction” (v. 11). What could this refer to?

The most plausible interpretation in my opinion is that they refer to the empires of this earth who have been the most notorious persecutor of God’s people: the most Satan-influenced empires of this earth. Six of them have already existed; the seventh will be the final evil end-time empire:

1. Egypt
 2. Assyria
 3. Babylon
 4. Persia
 5. Greece
- } “five have fallen” (17:10)

6. Rome → “one is” (17:10)

[Break] → “the other has not yet come” (17:10)

7. The Final, Evil, End-Time Empire

This empire will have a ruler who is NOT the Anti-Christ (#7).

This ruler will die or be removed from power, and then the Anti-Christ will take over (#8).

} “but when he does come, he must remain for only a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.” (17:10-11)

The most important thing to note about this detail is that the final, evil end-time world empire is not an anomaly in the world’s history. There have always been empires that persecute God’s people. There have always been “types” of Anti-Christ. History repeats itself. Why? Because although rulers come and go, the forces behind those rulers stay constant: one either serves God or Satan. At the end of time, Satan will have one last chance to do his evil through a final Anti-Christ. But, by God’s mercy, this Anti-Christ’s reign will very limited—7 years, at most.

- ③ The final, evil, end-time world empire will be the result of a union between 10 nations (Rev. 17:1-14).
 - The final detail we are given about the beast is that it has “ten horns.” We are told that they refer to “ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast” (v. 12).
 - This likely refers to some sort of “confederacy” that will occur at the end of time. 10 nations will swear their allegiance to the Anti-Christ / the final, evil, end-time world empire, and in exchange the Anti-Christ will give them new authority and power.

- These 10 kings are likely “kings of the earth” who participate in Armageddon at the end of time (v. 13; see Rev. 16:16; 19:19).
 - Their “rule” will be very short-lived (symbolically referred to as “one hour”), however, as Jesus will vanquish them instantaneously.
 - This description has some historical precedence; though Rome had one “emperor,” it had 10 provinces with “kings” (client-kings) who ruled over them.
 - This description also has biblical precedence; Daniel 7:7 and 24 also talks about 10 “kings” from whom the Anti-Christ will arise.
- ④ The leader of this final, evil end-time empire—the Anti-Christ—and the other rulers who are a part of it will end up turning against their own people, including those who are not Christians, leading to its destruction (Revelation 17:15-18:24 – see next section).

[3] Revelation 17:15-18:24 - The Self-Destruction of the Evil Empire

After giving detail about the final, evil, end-time world empire, the angel now returns to the vision of the Prostitute and predicts her demise and the demise of all involved with her.

Civil War – Revelation 17:15-18

- Although the Anti-Christ exploited people's desire for materialism, wealth and power (the "prostitute") to gain control, we get the sense in Revelation that something happens, and people start to show more allegiance to the "prostitute" than to the Anti-Christ himself; in other words, their drive for materialism, wealth and power, outstrips their desire to pay allegiance to the Anti-Christ.
- This causes the Anti-Christ and the other rulers of this earth to hate the prostitute, and to end up turning against their own people.
- This leads to a civil war which brings about the destruction of the final, evil, end-time empire.
- **Thus Satan turns against and destroys his own!**

¹⁵ Then the angel said to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. 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. ¹⁷ For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to hand over to the beast their royal authority, until God's words are fulfilled. ¹⁸ The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth." (Rev. 17:15-18 NIV)

- This is ultimately all a part of God's purpose (v. 17), and it will be the way that the final, evil end-time world empire will be destroyed: it will be destroyed by its own rulers.

"Lament" for Babylon (Revelation 18:1-24)

- This section concludes with a "lament" over the destruction of this final, evil end-time world empire.
- There are four sections to this lament:
 1. **An Angel Announces the Fall of Babylon (18:1-3):** Here we see an angel announcing the demise of the empire; it has ultimately become, the angel tells us "a haunt for every impure spirit...every unclean bird...every unclean and detestable animal" (Rev. 18:2). The evil end-time empire will become a playground for Satan and his demons; they will turn against human beings and torture them.

2. **A Call for God's People to "Come Out"** (18:4-8): Second, an angel warns people that this final evil empire will be met soon with God's judgment, and command the people of God to get out before God's judgment is poured out on it and the earth.

3. **Ironic Songs of "Lament" for the Profiteers of Babylon** (18:9-19): Third, there is a song of sadness sung by three groups of people who have profited the most off of the final, evil, end-time empire: kings (18:9-10), merchants (18:11-17a); and traveling businessmen (18:17b-19). With the demise of this kingdom, they have no more income and they are sad (never mind all the evil committed by this empire and likely the millions of people losing their lives in its destruction; their only interest is income).

4. **The Final Doom of the Final Empire** (18:21-24): Finally, an angel announces the final destruction of the final empire, with a special emphasis on the financial ruin of it. Their businessmen were the "important people" of the world (v. 23); the Christians were the ones killed. But how great a reversal there will be at the end of time! Christians will rule, and those who profited off an evil empire will face eternal ruin!

It is important to note that though Revelation 17-18 is about a final, evil, end-time world empire, this empire is also the embodiment of all of the world's evil empires throughout all of history, and the spirit that motivates them—greed, materialism, and the desire for power and control, and the pursuit of these things above all else.

And it's also important to note that the spirit that motivates empires is ultimately a spirit that motivates people—including you and me, if we are not careful.

Application: Just Say “No”

- There’s an interesting scene in Revelation 18. As this final, evil, end-time empire is burning—with likely millions being killed—those who profited off of it are standing in the distance, watching it burn. This is their reaction:

¹⁷ Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. ¹⁸ When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?' ¹⁹ They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: "'Woe! Woe to you, great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!' (Rev. 18:17-19 NIV)

- This shows the **corrupting power of greed**. It has the ability to make us cold to the things of this world, and is ultimately a tool used by Satan to bring us to ruin.
- This is why Jesus said in Luke 12:15, “**Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.**”
- That’s why one of the most godly things we can learn in this life is **self-control**; learning to say “no” to the desires we have for “more”—desires that cannot ultimately be fulfilled.

***What do you need to say “no” to this week?
Where do you need to practice self-control?***

Don’t forget to email questions!

Homework for next week: Read Revelation 19-20 at least twice this week.

Discussion Questions

1. We saw today an interpretation for the “prostitute” that says it is the drive for materialism, wealth, and power, and the pursuit of these things above all else.
 - a. Do you agree with that interpretation? Why or why not?
 - b. Where have you seen this “drive” motivate people and plunge people into ruin (1 Timothy 6:9)?

2. In Revelation 17:7-14, John gives us some details about this final, evil, end-time empire here on this earth. Re-read that passage.
 - a. Why do you think God wants us to know some details about this empire? What purpose does knowing these details serve?
 - b. What does the knowing of these details bring you, personally? Fear? Comfort? Understanding? Something else? Why do you react that way?

3. We saw this week that the evil, end-time empire will be in the model of many other empires that have appeared on this earth who have gone after God’s people. How aware are you of the persecution of Christians by other nations right now? What are ways you have seen of people supporting our brothers and sisters in Christ in other nations and what they’re going through? (If you’re doing this in a group, maybe assign someone to do research on the persecuted church and come with something to share about it next week.)

4. At the end of time, we will see Satan turn against his own and destroy them. What does that teach us about the ultimate end of the things Satan uses to lure is in with in this life?

5. How do we personally guard against our own desire for wealth, power, materialism?

6. Is there something you need to say “no” to this week? Is there some place where you need to practice “self-control”? Where is it and why?