

## “Use It or Lose It!” (Revelation 17-18)

The old saying is true: “Use it or lose it.” This past Friday evening, I played in a church-sponsored basketball game designed to raise money for our summer missions’ trip to Honduras. There was only one problem: Eleven years ago when I failed to be drafted into the NBA, I decided to hang up my sneakers. I have played very little full-court basketball since. Needless to say, I was not able to match my glory-days of old. The expression, “Use it or lose it” rang in my ears as I struggled to run up and down the court.

The expression, “Use it or lose it” also applies to other areas of life. The best-built house, if it is unoccupied for too long, will begin to fall to pieces. A house was meant to be lived in. A vehicle that sits idle and is rarely driven tends to have more mechanical problems than one that receives regular use. Cars and trucks were made to be driven. Those of you who learned a foreign language in high school or college know that if you don’t continue to use that language, you will lose it.<sup>1</sup> “Use it or lose it” is true spiritually as well. We must use what God has given us. If we don’t, we run the real risk of losing our productivity as disciples. Our effectiveness in life is dependent on the proper use of God’s blessings. Neglecting what we’ve been given or squandering God’s provisions places us in dangerous territory.

Fortunately, God desires for you to be an effective and productive disciple. Instead of experiencing chastisement for wasting your God-given privileges and responsibilities, He wants you to live with hope and confidence. Revelation 17 and 18 are intended to motivate disciples in the importance of growing in Christian faithfulness. Today, your sermon order will be “super-sized” so you can grasp the flow of these two chapters. It is important to recognize that Revelation 17 and 18 are parenthetical in that they do not advance the revelation chronologically.<sup>2</sup> Instead, these chapters are an amplification of one of the main features of the tribulation: the place, function, and final judgment of Babylon. This fact is an important emphasis in Revelation. The Lord devotes two chapters of material to Babylon.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is very important to our study and understanding of Revelation.

Before we delve in, I must ask: Do you like to solve problems? Do you enjoy following clues and solving mysteries? If so, you will love Revelation 17. In this chapter, we will attempt to unfold a mystery: Who is “Babylon the great?” Then in Revelation 18, we will unpack the reasons God judged Babylon and how these chapters apply directly to our lives. Beginning in 17:1-6, John records a mysterious vision: **“Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me,<sup>4</sup> saying, ‘Come here,<sup>5</sup> I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on<sup>6</sup> 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.’<sup>7</sup> 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. The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality,<sup>8</sup> and on her forehead<sup>9</sup> a name<sup>10</sup> was written, a mystery,<sup>11</sup> ‘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. When I saw her, I wondered greatly.”**

There are several words and phrases that I would like you to underline or circle in your Bible. First, in 17:1, note the words **“judgment,” “the great harlot,”<sup>12</sup> and “sits on many waters.”** Second, note the word **“immorality”<sup>13</sup>** which is seen twice in 17:2 and again in 17:4. Third, in 17:5, note the phrase **“Babylon the great, the mother of harlots, and of the abominations of the earth.”**

The main idea of this chapter is **“the great harlot”** (also called **“Babylon the great”**) will be judged. Her predominant sin is **“immorality,”** which is a figure for spiritual unfaithfulness.

In 17:7-18, an angel interprets the vision for John. Even with the help of an angelic interpreter, there is a great deal in this chapter that I am not sure I understand. This should not come as a surprise to anyone familiar with Old Testament prophecy. There is much in prophecy that is not understood until after it has been fulfilled. In 17:8, the Beast on which the harlot is seated is the Antichrist of chapter 13.<sup>14</sup> This Beast is a counterfeit of our Lord in that he **“was”** and **“is not”** and **“is about to come”** (cf. 1:4, 8). This phraseology apparently also refers back to Rev 13:3, 12, and 14 where the Beast is resurrected. Regardless of the details, we know the ultimate fate of this Beast will be destruction (cf. 19:20; 20:10). But before he meets his end, he will deceive **“those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.”** The flip side of this verse is very encouraging to the believer when you notice that your name has been written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world. Your name was not placed there at the point of your salvation. Your name was there before you were saved...before you were born...even before the foundation of the world. If you have believed in Jesus as your Savior, you can be confident that God chose you and has placed your name in the Book of Life.<sup>15</sup> What an encouragement! You didn’t choose God; He chose you! Because He chose you, He will be sure to preserve you in His grace.

In 17:9-14, the angel moves on to the interpretation of the Beast’s **“seven heads”** and **“ten horns.”** Much effort has been expended in attempts to identify the seven **“mountains”**<sup>16</sup> and/or the seven **“kings”** of these verses, on which the harlot sits. Verse 9 should caution us not to look for an interpretation that is either quick or easy. John writes, **“Here is the mind which has wisdom”** or **“this calls for a mind with wisdom”** (NIV).<sup>17</sup> This same expression is also found earlier in Revelation, in conjunction with calculating the number of the Beast (13:18). Since no one has identified the Beast, neither do I feel that anyone has conclusively identified these seven heads (17:3, 9-11) or ten horns (17:3, 12-14). What we can know is this: The **“seven heads”** represent seven past, present, and future kings/kingdoms (cf. Dan 7:17, 23),<sup>18</sup> while the **“ten horns”** represent ten kings who will be subject to the Antichrist himself (cf. 13:1-10).<sup>19</sup> This harlot not only lines herself up with the kings of the earth and those who dwell on the earth, but also has an alliance with the Antichrist himself. Yet, 17:12 informs us that the harlot’s reign with the Beast will be for a short time, in the words of John, for **“one hour.”**

In 17:13-14, we learn that these ten kings will be united in their submission to the Beast and in their willingness to wage war with the Lamb (cf. 16:14, 16).<sup>20</sup> Their single purpose will be to rule the world and they will submit to the Antichrist’s leadership to achieve this end.<sup>21</sup> At the very end of the tribulation these kings will fight against Jesus Christ as He returns to earth (cf. 16:14, 16; 19:19-21). The Lamb will defeat them and will prove to be Lord of Lords and King of Kings (19:16); the title the Antichrist seeks to claim in his worldwide empire. Those with Christ accompany Him from heaven (cf. 19:14). They are **“the called, the chosen, and the faithful.”** These three terms epitomize Christians.

In 17:15, we learn that **“the waters”**<sup>22</sup> **on which the harlot sits”** are the Gentile peoples of the world.<sup>23</sup> By reigning over<sup>24</sup> the kings of the earth, the harlot also rules over the constituencies of the kings. If the reign of the ten kings is short, the **“reign”** of the harlot appears to be even shorter. For a time, she **“reigns”** from the back of the Beast, supported by the ten kings. After a short time something will happen which will cause the Beast to turn against the harlot, so she will be cast aside, shamed and dishonored (17:16).<sup>25</sup> This will fulfill the sovereign purpose of God, which is the humbling of the harlot (17:17).<sup>26</sup>

Verse 18 brings us to the climax of the chapter—the unveiling of the true identity of “**the great harlot,**” or “**Babylon the great.**” Her true identity is disclosed by the designation “**the great city.**” Is she ancient Babylon? The rebuilt Babylon in Iraq? Ancient Rome? The revived Roman Empire? Apostate Christianity? The United Nations? The United States? How do the Scriptures describe her? Does her description fit that of any other in the Bible? I have come to the conclusion there is only one city that can be called “**the great city,**” and that city is Jerusalem.<sup>27</sup> The following observations bear this out.<sup>28</sup>

**1. Jerusalem is identified as “the great city” in Revelation (11:8; 16:19).**<sup>29</sup> Jerusalem is the place where the Lord was crucified (11:8). Jerusalem was also the scene of Christ’s resurrection (Luke 24) and will be the site of His return in glory (Zech 14:5). It is the capital city of God’s chosen people. Jerusalem is the place where God chose to manifest His glory to all the earth in a special way (Ps 87:2-5). It is also the place where God will fulfill His promises to Israel.

**2. Jerusalem is mystically called “Sodom and Egypt” (11:8).**<sup>30</sup> This gives a key precedent to symbolically naming Jerusalem with the name of an enemy empire. This tells us two things: We should not be surprised if John does it again, and Jerusalem is being painted in a negative light in Revelation.<sup>31</sup>

**3. Jerusalem, which is called “the great harlot” and “the great city,” is contrasted with the New Jerusalem, which is likened to a chaste “bride” and “the holy city.”** The similarity and difference between these two Jerusalems is suggested in 17:1 and 21:9-11. It is also important to note that whenever the word “city” is used in Revelation, it always refers to the old or new Jerusalem.<sup>32</sup>

**4. Jerusalem is distinguished from other cities in such a way as to agree with her designation as “the great city” (16:19).** John writes, “The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.” One must grant the conclusion that “the great city” is Jerusalem, but having done so, we find that the “great city” is distinguished from all others, which are lumped together as “the cities of the nations.” It should be quite evident that the “cities of the nations” are Gentile cities, thus distinguishing Jerusalem from these Gentile cities.

**5. Israel merits the designation, “the great harlot” because she is married to Yahweh.** Another nation cannot commit adultery against God if she is not married to God.<sup>33</sup> As the Lord’s wife, it is Israel who distinguishes herself as “the great harlot” because she is in a covenant with God and her harlotries surpass all others (Ezek 5:7; 16:32-34, 46-48, 51; cf. also chap 23).<sup>34</sup>

**6. The sins of “the great harlot” are those that can best be attributed to Israel, and its capital city, Jerusalem (17:6; 18:20, 24).** No city I am aware of has had more of the blood of the prophets and saints than that of Jerusalem. Other cities, including Rome, have shed the blood of the righteous, but Jerusalem more than all of them. The above verses seem to be direct paraphrases from Jesus’ words in Matt 23:35, 37-39; Luke 11:50-51; and 13:34-35.<sup>35</sup>

**7. The identification of Israel as “the great harlot” is consistent with the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel’s future.** God’s covenant with Israel still governs the future of this chosen people. Her persistent waywardness, culminating in the rejection and execution of the Messiah, calls for divine discipline. While God’s earlier discipline of His people took the form of her dispersion (cf. Ezek 22:13-16), in the last days God will bring His people back to Jerusalem where He will chasten and refine them (Ezek 22:17-22). The purpose of the tribulation is not just to punish men for their sins.

The principle purpose of the tribulation is to chasten wayward Israel so she will repent and turn to God. The awesome anger of God, which we see in the three tribulation judgments, is required by the willful rebellion (harlotry) of Israel. Just as Ezekiel foretold the gathering of Israel to Jerusalem to be refined, Revelation describes it. Those who see no future for Israel fail to recognize the way in which Revelation depicts the fulfillment of God's promised chastening, restoration, and blessing of His people, in keeping with His covenant with her (Isa 1:21-26).

**8. The identification of Israel as “the great harlot” best harmonizes with the details of Revelation, which anticipates the conversion of Israel.** The 144,000 are faithful Jews who are said to be “first fruits to God” (14:4). This is in light of God's promise to restore His people to a place of privilege and blessing. The city of Jerusalem is “trodden down by the Gentiles,” but this is limited to a period of 3½ years (11:1-2). The account of the “woman and the Dragon” in Revelation 12 reflects Israel in light of God's purpose for His chosen people. But the description of Israel as “the great harlot” adds Israel's willful disobedience to our perspective. Unbelieving Israel will, for a short time, have a position of prominence and leadership, with the support of the Beast and the ten kings, but both will turn against her, bringing about the oppression and persecution of Jerusalem and Israel. This persecution will end with the war between the Beast and the kings of the earth and God. When God prevails, Israel will turn to God in faith and be restored to a place of blessing.

**9. The hard-line condemnation of Israel as “the great harlot” is altogether consistent with our Lord's condemnation of the harlotry of Israel's finest—the Scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders of that day.** Jesus frequently laid into the Pharisees and Sadducees for their religious hypocrisy and sinfulness. In Matt 23, He labeled them “hypocrites” (23:13-15, 23, 25, 27), those that “devour widows' houses” (23:14), “a son of hell” (23:15), “blind guides” (23:16, 24), “fools” (23:17), “blind men” (23:17, 19, 26), those that are “full of robbery and self-indulgence” (23:25), “whitewashed tombs” (23:27), “full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (23:28), “sons of those who murdered the prophets” (23:31), “serpents... brood of vipers” (23:33).

**10. The harlot is dressed in purple, scarlet, and gold (17:4; 18:15).** These colors are used in the Old Testament to make sacred garments for Aaron and his sons, so they may serve as priests (Exod 28:4-6; cf. Jer 4:30-31).

**11. The harlot's lovers will strip her and ruin her (17:16; cf. Ezek 16:37-39).** This is reminiscent of Israel's history.

**12. Jerusalem is called a great city that says she is no widow (17:18; 18:7-8; cf. Lam 1:1).** Again, this too is reminiscent of Israel's history.

**13. John was astonished by the identity of Babylon.** In 17:6b, he literally “marveled a great marvel.” He probably wouldn't have been surprised if it was Rome, ancient Babylon, or the apostate church.<sup>36</sup>

**14. The preeminence of Jerusalem is completely consistent with Satan's purposes.** Satan's desire has always been to usurp God's glory and the worship that is due Him alone. If Satan were to be given the authority to rule over any one people on the face of the earth I am convinced that it would be Israel, for this is the people who are the “apple of God's eye.” And if Satan were to choose any one city from which to rule it would surely be Jerusalem. The “great harlot” rides on the Beast because Satan sees this to be to his advantage. When he has sufficiently used her, he will cast her aside and turn against her.

Because Satan is particularly interested in Israel and Jerusalem, the momentary “reign” of Israel with Satan’s support is very plausible. If our Lord turned down Satan’s offer of ruling over the kingdoms of the earth (cf. Matt 4:8-9), unbelieving Israel will find this offer too tempting.

We must use the Bible to interpret the Bible biblically...not the political landscape of our world to try to expose mystery Babylon. We are not to use the “signs of the times,” the newspaper, or our favorite prophecy teachers to interpret Bible prophecy. Jerusalem seems to be the best option available to us.<sup>37</sup>

One issue that can be troubling in nailing down all this symbolism is 17:18. Speaking of the harlot it says: **“The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.”** If you know your history, you’ll understand that Jerusalem never ruled over the kings of the earth. You’d be partially right. The closest Israel ever came to leading the world was during the time of Solomon. The kings and queens of the nations came to Jerusalem to seek his wisdom. Here’s the point that John is making: Israel was intended to be the leading nation of the world. She had a covenantal right and responsibility to govern the world (Isa 42:6; 60:15). Israel had the God-given privilege of being a light to the nations. She was supposed to be the leader in wisdom and righteousness. God would even bring the goods of the nations to her as a sign of His blessing. God upheld His part of the covenant, but Israel failed to use what God had given, in His way, to achieve His purposes. As we’ll see, she squandered it all on herself. The result is the light of the nations will become a red light district.

In Rev 18:1-8, we learn that Israel perverted the blessings of God. **“After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.’ I heard another voice from heaven, saying, ‘Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her. To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, ‘I SIT AS A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW, and will never see mourning.’ For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.”** These eight verses unfold the divine discipline of “Babylon.” This is a call for God’s application of the *lex talionis*, the law of retaliation (cf. Matt 7:2; Gal 6:7-8). To pay back double is a way of saying to pay back fully (Exod 22:4, 7, 9; Isa 40:2; 61:7; Jer 16:18; 17:18; Zech 9:12).

Let’s look at the specific ways she squandered her blessings.

**1. Israel misused her influence (Rev 18:9-10).** John states, **“And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’”** Jerusalem had great connections. For a time she was highly respected by other nations. Rather than influence them Israel adopted their corrupt practices. The idea of fornication with the kings of the earth simply means that the Jews adopted the ungodly perspectives and practices of the surrounding nations.

When she was destroyed they didn't weep because Jerusalem had made a positive spiritual impact on their lives. The kings wept at the ruin of one who led them into idolatry.

We must constantly examine ourselves and our church to see if we are being the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Matt 5:13-16). How are you handling your sphere of influence? Are you praying for your family members, friends, co-workers, and classmates who do not know Jesus Christ? Are you intentionally building relationships with unchurched people? Have you been taking steps toward sharing your verbal witness with the people you know are without Jesus Christ? How is your conduct away from church? Think about those people in your sphere of influence who haven't believed in Jesus. Now imagine seeing that person trust in Christ. Or envision that person who has difficult questions that you feel unable to answer. You prayed for them, loved them, and invited them to Emmanuel on a Sunday morning. Picture them seated next to you. Although your eyes should be closed at that point, watch them raise their hand signifying their acceptance of Christ.

How are you handling your sphere of influence with other believers? Parents, are you raising your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord? Husbands, are you loving your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it? Wives, are you respecting your husband's God-given leadership in the home? Are you encouraging other believers and pushing others to go to the next level spiritually? Are you living the authentic and caring life that characterizes a member of the family of God?

Imagine the people in your life becoming all that God equipped them to be. Kids grow up to be adults who are completely sold out to Christ and His cause. They stand up for Christ regardless of the assaults that come against them. Spouses grow in their faith and marital relationships are rock solid. They're growing in love and intimacy. Imagine Emmanuel becoming a place where real community is happening. We're able to share our darkest sin or deepest wound because we know we're truly accepted no matter what. Lost people and the multitudes that only show up on Sunday morning are drawn to this genuine community.

[Israel not only misused her influence...]

**2. Israel misspent her affluence (Rev 18:11-19).** John writes, **“And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more—cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives. The fruit you long for has gone from you, and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you and men will no longer find them. The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls; for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!’ And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance, and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, ‘What city is like the great city?’ And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!’”** Her resources were misspent. Rather than use God's blessing to bless the world and spread His message further abroad, Israel spent it all on herself. Notice that the poor aren't lamenting over the destruction of

the city. The merchants and sea traders cry because their “cash cow” is dead. How do you see the luxury of this world? Do you see it as it really is? Can you use it without getting it into your heart?

How would you feel if the luxuries in your life that you have come to consider necessities vanished? Would it break your heart if you saw the things of this world go up in smoke? Or is your heart in heaven, fixed on Christ? How are you managing the money and material possessions God has placed in your hands? Where are your financial priorities? Does God have first place in your checkbook? Picture this: The ministries of Emmanuel Baptist Church reach all over the world, positively changing the lives of millions. You can’t walk into a school or a business or a subdivision in Thurston County without bumping into at least one saint who is passionate for Jesus Christ and who loves lost people because of the influence of Emmanuel Baptist Church.

**3. Israel trashed her testimony (Rev 18:20-24).**<sup>38</sup> John writes, **“Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.’ Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, ‘So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer. And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer; and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery. And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.”** The righteous are told to celebrate the demise of Jerusalem and its temple and its worship practices. The list of things that are said to be no longer found in the city speak of the testimony of unbelieving Israel. There is no more life. Just like Israel we have a choice with all that God has given us. Unbelieving Israel has been irresponsible over its history, yet the Lord still has a plan for His people. In the last days, He will raise them to a position of prominence...only to bring them down in discipline.<sup>39</sup> He will then draw many to Himself. I pray that we will not have to be like Israel. May you and I learn from her example and seek to avoid God’s discipline. May we not have to be brought low in order to get serious about God.

You can “use it or lose it.” Today, will you begin to maximize your life? Will you be faithful to use your time, talents, treasure, truth, and relationships to be God’s man or woman? That’s how you use it so you won’t lose it.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> These two illustrations came from Joel Smith, “Use It or Lose It,” *Rev 17-18*:

<http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=42019&ContributorID=2857>.

<sup>2</sup> Rev 17-18 gives further supplementary information about matters referred to in the chronological sections (7:1-17; 10:1-11:14; and 12:1-15:8).

<sup>3</sup> The Lord also devoted two focused chapters to write to the seven churches in Asia Minor (Rev 2-3).

<sup>4</sup> It was one of the angels who poured out the bowl judgments who served as John’s guide as he viewed these events in his vision.

<sup>5</sup> There is similarity between this angel’s invitation to John and the one in Rev 21:9. This is the first of many clues that the New Jerusalem (21:9-22:5) is the divine counterpart of humanistic Babylon.

<sup>6</sup> It is probably better to translate the Greek preposition *epi* as “beside” rather than “on” many waters since she sits astride the Beast (17:3). Evidently the Beast and she were on the shore in John’s vision (cf. John 21:1). See Thomas L. Constable, *Dr. Constable’s Notes on Revelation* ([www.soniclight.com](http://www.soniclight.com); 2003 Edition), 156.

<sup>7</sup> The “wine” of the harlot’s immorality is her one world religion. She will assault any system of belief that holds to a mutually exclusive doctrine. Everyone must conform to a religiously correct viewpoint. Christians will not be able to claim that Jesus is the only way to heaven without persecution (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

<sup>8</sup> The woman’s clothing was purple, symbolic of royalty, and scarlet, representing luxury (cf. Matt 27:28; Mark 15:17, 20; John 19:2, 5). Her ornaments included gold, precious stones, and pearls, jewelry that made her look like a queen. The cup in her hand added to her royal appearance, but it contained idolatrous abominations (cf. Deut 18:9; 29:17; 32:16; Jer 51:7), namely, unclean things connected with her spiritual immorality. The harlot wore expensive, attractive garments and accessories that made her externally appealing, but she is a counterfeit beauty. What is inside her is unclean.

<sup>9</sup> It is not clear whether this woman’s name was on a headband or on her forehead (cf. Rev 7:3; 9:4; 13:16-18; 14:1; Jer 3:3).

<sup>10</sup> Her name was a “mystery,” namely, something not previously revealed but now made clear. A name in Scripture represents everything about the person who bears it, often the person’s reputation. The content of the mystery is what John revealed here, especially the new revelation about its evil character and judgment (17:17-18).

<sup>11</sup> Some translations consider the word “mystery” (*musterion*) a part of the name written (“Mystery Babylon the Great,” so KJV, NIV), but the gender of both *onoma* (“name”) and *musterion* are neuter, while the gender of “Babylon” is feminine. This strongly suggests that *musterion* should be understood as an appositive to *onoma* (“a name, i.e., a mystery”). See NET Study Bible: <http://netbible.bible.org/>

<sup>12</sup> “The great harlot” is the personification of spiritual fornication or idolatry (Isa 23:15-17; Jer 2:20-31; 13:27; Ezek 16:17-19; Hos 2:5; Nah 3:4). In Old Testament prophetic discourse the imagery of the harlot is commonly used to denote religious apostasy. A harlot offers sexual satisfaction outside of marriage. Apostate religion offers religious satisfaction outside the principles of God’s Word.

<sup>13</sup> “The kings of the earth” committed immorality with Babylon by uniting with her in power, material possessions, false worship, and pride.

<sup>14</sup> For a fuller understanding of the resurrection of the Beast, please see my sermon on Rev 13.

<sup>15</sup> In Rev 13:8 the Book of Life belonged to the Lamb who has been slain from the foundation of the world, emphasizing God’s plan to redeem humanity. Here, the emphasis shifts slightly. Not only did God plan to redeem humanity from the beginning, He planned who would be redeemed from the beginning. No stronger statement of the sovereignty of God in things pertaining to salvation in found in the entire Bible. See Kendell H. Easley, *Revelation: HNTC* (Nashville: Holman, 1998), 309.

<sup>16</sup> “Mountains” can be symbolic of the rule or power of kingdoms/governments (see Ps 30:7; 68:15-16; Isa 2:2; 41:15; Jer 51:24-25; Dan 2:35, 44; Hab. 3:6, 10; Zech. 4:7).

<sup>17</sup> The call for special wisdom in Rev 17:9a probably has in view the ability to grasp this double meaning of the mountains [i.e., as individuals and kingdoms].

<sup>18</sup> One view that is satisfying to most is that the seven heads are seven kingdoms. John writes, “Five have fallen” (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece), “one is” (Rome), and “the other is yet to come” is the Antichrist’s final world empire. The next statement is rather confusing. The Beast that was and is not is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven. This statement is made clear by the phrase, “was and is not.” The Antichrist’s kingdom will be the seventh world power in this vision (Dan 7:19-25), but when he dies and is resurrected then he also becomes the eighth and it is at that point that he is on his way to destruction as mentioned earlier.

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<sup>19</sup> What is the difference between the seven kings (represented by seven heads) and the ten kings (represented by ten horns)? Simply this: The seven kings (17:10) are successive kingdoms because they rule one after another over centuries of time. The ten kings (17:12) are contemporaneous kings who rule at the same time in history. This verse tells us the ten horns are ten kings who “have not yet received a kingdom” when Revelation was written in 96 A.D. Because the ten horns are on the seventh head, these ten kings will come to power during the tribulation. Daniel 2:44 tells us “and in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed...” That means when Jesus returns to earth to set up His millennial kingdom, he will destroy the Antichrist and the kingdom he rules.

<sup>20</sup> These “ten kings” have one purpose and will. They give their military power and political authority to the Beast. This is an amazing phenomenon, that ten powerful nations will all voluntarily surrender their sovereignty and their military forces to one man! It gives us insight into how extremely brilliant and intimidating this man will be a man of extraordinary charisma and political insight, inspiring both awe and confidence in a world shaken by the judgment of God.

<sup>21</sup> Evidently he will have to put down three of them who revolt against him (Dan 7:24; cf. Rev 12:3; 13:1; 17:3).

<sup>22</sup> Water is a common symbol for people in the Old Testament (e.g., Ps 18:4, 16; 124:4; Isa 8:7; Jer 47:2).

<sup>23</sup> “Many waters” represents humankind: “peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues” (17:15), not a specific geographical site. This fact indicates that it is Babylon as a symbol that is in view here rather than the physical city. The phrase “sits on many waters” indicates the harlot’s authority to rule. She dominates the world religiously. People from all over the world will buy into her religion. This whore reigns over a worldwide religion at this point, which dominates the one-world government.

<sup>24</sup> Lit. “Having a kingdom over.”

<sup>25</sup> See 1 Kgs 21:23-24; 2 Kgs 9:30-37; cf. Ps 27:2; Jer 10:25; Mic 3:3; Zeph 3:3.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. 16:13-14, 16; Judg 7:22; 1 Sam 14:20; 2 Chron 20:23; Jer 25:9-11; Ezek 38:21; Hag 2:2; Zech 14:14.

<sup>27</sup> Relatively few Bible scholars hold this conclusion. The reason may be because many have been persuaded by various extra-biblical historical arguments and commentary traditions.

<sup>28</sup> I have been greatly helped by the work of Bob Deffinbaugh, *God’s Final Word on the Last Times* (unpublished notes) and D. Ragan Ewing, *The Identification Of Babylon The Harlot In The Book Of Revelation* (<http://www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/st-essay/ragan/toc.htm>, July 2002).

<sup>29</sup> There are other great cities in the Bible; such as Nineveh (cf. Jonah 1:2; 3:2; 4:11; Nah 3:1, 4) and Tyre (Isa 23:15-17) but in the Bible only Jerusalem can rightly claim to be the great city. Jeremiah thus prophesied that the nations would refer to Jerusalem as this great city (Jer 22:8).

<sup>30</sup> We are compelled to conclude that “the great city” is Jerusalem, both by the context (11:1-2) and the crime of the city, which was the crucifixion of Christ (11:8).

<sup>31</sup> D. Ragan Ewing, *The Identification Of Babylon The Harlot In The Book Of Revelation* (<http://www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/st-essay/ragan/toc.htm>, July 2002), 4:9.

<sup>32</sup> Rev 3:12; 11:2, 8, 13; 14:20; 16:19; 17:18; 18:10 (twice), 16, 18 (twice), 19, 21; 20:9; 21:2, 10, 14-15, 16 (twice), 18-19, 21, 23; 22:14, 19.

<sup>33</sup> It is critical to note that “harlot” imagery is only used of two other nations other than Israel: Tyre (Isa 23:15-18) and Nineveh (Nah 3:4-5), both of which had formerly been in covenant with the Lord.

<sup>34</sup> The harlot is symbolic of the high priest, the temple and also of the city of Jerusalem. Much of the imagery can also be found in Jer 3:1-3 where the Lord condemns Jerusalem or Judah for her unfaithfulness. Remember that God’s covenant people, Israel, were considered His wife. When they turn to pagan religions He describes them in these terms: “‘If a husband divorces his wife and she goes from him and belongs to another man, will he still return to her? Will not that land be completely polluted? But you are a harlot *with* many lovers; yet you turn to Me,’ declares the LORD. ‘Lift up your eyes to the bare heights and see; where have you not been violated? By the roads you have sat for them like an Arab in the desert, and you have polluted a land with your harlotry and with your wickedness. Therefore the showers have been withheld, and there has been no spring rain. Yet you had a harlot’s forehead; you refused to be ashamed’” (see also Jer 3:6-10).

<sup>35</sup> See also Jer 7:6; 19:4; 22:3; Ezek 7:23; 11:6; Acts 7:51-53; 1 Thes 2:14-15.

<sup>36</sup> I do acknowledge that John would have been astonished if “the great city” was referring to a future rebuilt Babylon. However, this view is unacceptable because it is clear from the OT that Babylon will not be rebuilt (Jer 50:11-17, 28-29, 33-34; 51:10-11, 24, 35-36, 49, 56).

<sup>37</sup> I will be the first to acknowledge that every view has inherent weaknesses. My goal is to adopt the view that has the least amount of problems.

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<sup>38</sup> One of the hurdles in adopting the Jerusalem position is Rev 18:21: “Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, ‘So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer.’” Zech 14:1-8 (esp. 14:4) reveals that there is going to be an earthquake, which will radically transform the landscape/terrain of the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem area. This could be the destruction of the “old Jerusalem” in preparation for the new. In that sense, we would expect something to become of the old, to make way for the new.

<sup>39</sup> We must not overlook that Israel’s time of “ruling over the kings of the earth” (17:18) is still future. Students of prophecy who looked for the literal fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel believed that Israel would once again be a nation and dwell in the Promised Land. This was a prophetic necessity that in 1948 became a historical fact. If biblical prophecy says that Israel will assume a place of power among the nations, we can be assured it will be so. The fact that Israel is the geographical center of the earth, and that the Middle East is laden with natural resources (not the least of which is oil), makes such prominence very believable.