

Mother of Harlots

Babylon is the origin of the first religion that opposed God after the world wide flood. Nimrod was the founder of Babylon, Nineveh, and other cities. Both the book of Genesis and the Jerusalem Targum together say that he was a very powerful hunter but also a very wicked man before God. He was the king over this Mesopotamian region. Genesis 11:1-4 tells us that the new citizens of the region started building a very unusual ziggurat called the Tower of Babel. Hammurabi (1700 B.C.) records that the top of the tower was “sky high,” and the Nippur Text says that the top “lies in heaven” (Sarna, Nahum M. Genesis. J. P. Torah Commentary, 1989, p. 83). The ziggurat appears to have been a religious temple. It was not just a narrow skinny tower but a huge object (see below). God did not want this false religion to prosper and so He changed their speech from a single language to numerous ones, making it difficult to communicate, and scattered them around the world according to Genesis 11:5-9. They moved to Europe, Russia, China, India, the southeast, the Americas, the islands, and Africa.

MOTHER OF ALL RELIGIONS. Some have wondered why archaeologists have found worldwide flood stories in every part of the world. The common theme among most of the flood stories is of a family and/or some animals escaping from a worldwide flood in a boat, raft, nutshell, or something that floats. Why is a flood story so common? Books have been written trying to provide a reason. But the answer is found in the fact that those who fled from Babylon knew about the flood. They told their children about Noah. The details of the story changed with time, but the basic thought is the same. The basic fact that a flood occurred is true. Any story repeated orally again and again will change.

Those who fled from Babylon started new

religions. Many of them had rejected the true God. They were building the tower! So it is not surprising that these new religions also had some common teachings, even though they were unbiblical. Today we find that many religions use remnants of that old religion. They use holy water, priests in long robes, various sacraments, the avoidance of certain foods, a string of beads used during prayer, priestly absolution, infant baptism, and prayers. In the mystery religions of Rome and Greece, the high priest wore a crown with



Sumerian Ziggurat in Ur

the title Pontifex Maximus. It is the same title that appeared on the crowns of the Roman Caesars, and the pope of the Roman Catholic Church.

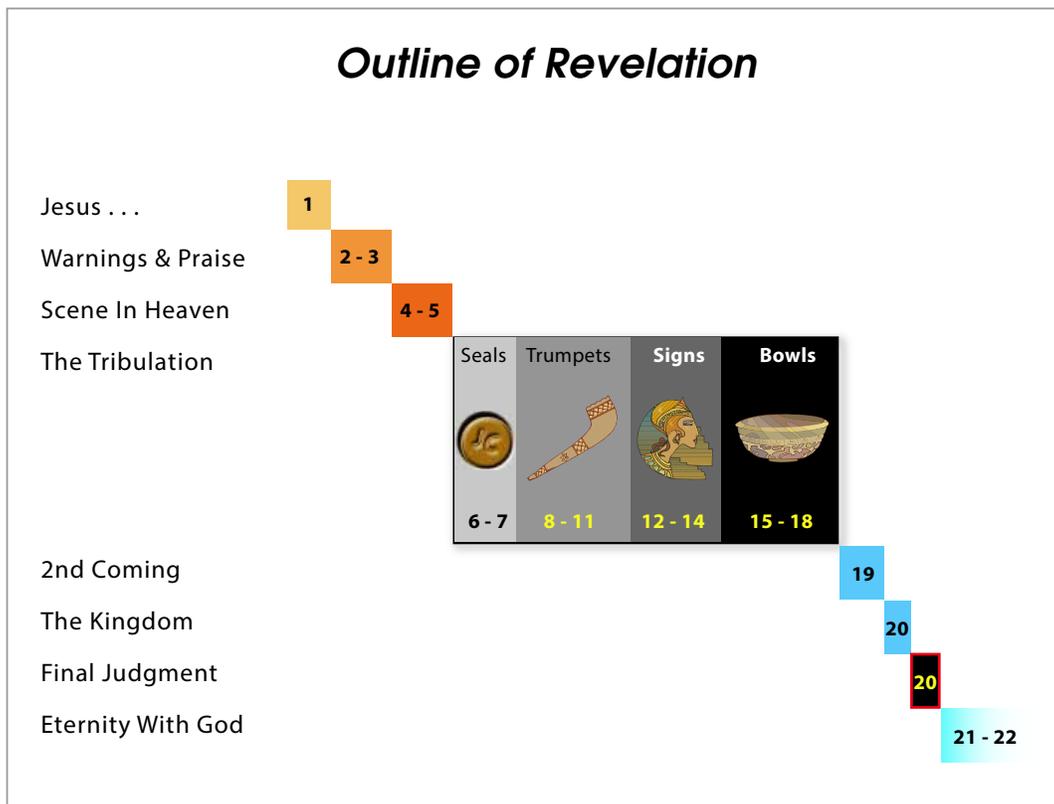
Some of the ancient Phoenician, Egyptian, Babylonian, Roman and

Greek religions believed in a goddess mother who held her infant child in her arms. In Phoenicia the goddess and infant were Astoreth and Tammuz, in Egypt they were Isis and Horus. In Rome they were Venus and Cupid, and in Greece they were Aphrodite and Eros. We do not know how much of this was imported from the religion in Babel, but many of the rituals practiced around the world are common, and Babylon was the origin of these false religions. Babylon was almost a success story for Satan.

THE HARLOT. In Revelation 15 seven holy angels were given seven bowls “full of the wrath of God.” Each bowl

ment of the great harlot who sits on 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.” (NASB) Rev. 17:1-2

The question is, “Who is this harlot who sits on many waters?” The answer starts to unfold if we ask, “What does ‘many waters’ mean?” The answer to this last question is found in verse 15. There we are told that the “waters” is a symbol and it refers to people, multitudes, nations, and tongues. In verse 2 we are told that the kings of the earth



was filled with a horrible plague. It was a time of judgment. In Revelation 16 each of those bowls was poured out on the earth. The people of the world suffered miserably, but they refused to submit to God. When we come to Revelation 17, we find that one of those angels had come to the Apostle John and offered to show to him, “the great harlot who sits on many waters.”

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I will show you the judg-

committed acts of immorality with her, and in Revelation 14:8 we were told that the nations will be drunk with the wine of her immorality. Together all of this means that the leaders of the world and the people in their countries will be involved in her immorality.

HER SIN. What is her sin? Her sin is idolatry. The expression “drunk with the wine of immorality” is symbolic of spiritual idolatry or the worship other gods and not the true God. They left the One they should have honored and worshipped. They were not faithful. Ezekiel 16:15-34

is an awesome illustration of spiritual idolatry. In the passage God uses graphic descriptions of sexual intercourse to illustrate the spiritual adultery - their lust for other gods. He also uses the word "harlot" to describe one who commits the immoral act of idolatry. This means that the world - kings and nations - will be involved in false religion.

Our world is not becoming better nor is the teaching of the church conquering the world for good. In fact, the church appears to be becoming more like the world. False religion is growing! This has been true since the tower of Babel. It is true today, and it is getting worse. We are living in strategic times. Jesus said the world would get worse before He came. It is . . .

THE VISION. Next the angel takes the apostle into a wilderness to see the harlot. The vision he sees is like a movie filled with symbols. It reminds us of a fantasy movie or some cartoon. Each symbol has a different meaning.

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. (NASB) Rev. 17:3

John saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns. The color of the beast we saw in Revelation 13 is finally revealed. He is not brown. He is scarlet. The beast's seven heads and ten horns were first revealed in Revelation 13. There we saw that the beast with seven heads represents the revived Roman Empire and the ten horns will



be ten kings or ten nations.

We are told that the harlot is sitting on this beast like a rider sits on a horse, camel, or elephant. This means she is in control of the ten kings or nations. Religion is a strong influence on politicians. It will be true then too! The Antichrist and his alliance of nations along with a world wide religion will control the world. Which false religion will be in control?

SEDUCTIVE WOMAN.

Next John notices that the woman is clothed with brilliant colors and jewels. She looks great; false religions are attractive to so many people.

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, and on her forehead a name was written, a 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. When I saw her, I wondered greatly. (NASB) Rev. 17:4-6

FALSE RELIGION IS ATTRACTIVE. But in her hand she holds a cup full of evil. That is what false religion offers. They look great, but in reality they are deadly. They take men and women away from God - not to Him. It is also not surprising that she has enjoyed persecuting both the Old Testament and New Testament saints. Notice that she has been around for a long time. She had persecuted the saints before Jesus was here on the earth. This woman is very old.

Believers have been persecuted for centuries by her and it will continue.

SPECIAL SHORT NOTE. Did you notice the expressions “the saints” and “the witnesses of Jesus”? The Holy Spirit makes a distinction between those who believed in God before the birth of Christ and those who believed afterwards. Even though we will all be together in heaven some day, the Holy Spirit calls the Old Testament believers “saints,” and the New Testament believers the “witnesses of Jesus.” Here we have the Old Testament saints and the church. Some believe the church has existed since Adam and Eve. If so, why make a distinction here?

MOTHER OF HARLOTS. The Bible and history tell us that Babylon was the origin of false religions. So we should not be surprised that this woman is called “Babylon The Great, the Mother of Harlots.” She is the mother of harlots - the mother

of idolatry and spiritual immorality. She is the mother of all false religion. Her origin began at the Tower of Babel, and false religion has spread throughout the world and down through time.

ANTICHRIST AND THE WORLD GOVERNMENT. Next John is told that the beast “was,” “is not,” and “is about to come up out of the abyss.”

And the angel said to me, “Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go

to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come. (NASB) Rev. 17:7-8

This is a reference back to Revelation 13:2, 12, and 14 where John was told that someone will attempt to assassinate the Antichrist, and then the Antichrist will fake his own death and appear to have returned to life. The world responds in amazement and worships.

The next verses give us some very valuable information about the Antichrist and the future world government.



Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes,

he must remain a little while. The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction. The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast. (NASB) Rev. 17:9-13

The explanation of these verses was given in great detail in our study of Revelation 13, and so we would encourage you to read that study again. In summary, the passage tells us that the old Roman Empire will come back to life in the form of ten nations. This will be an alliance of ten nations

which will bring peace to the Middle East (Dan. 9:27). The Antichrist will eliminate three of the nations or their leaders and take control. Scripture does not tell us how this is accomplished. He will not be their leader at first, but he will by the middle of the tribulation (after 3.5 years). At that point he becomes the eighth king and leads the seventh nation to rule over the land of Israel.

GO TO DESTRUCTION. Revelation 17:8 says that the Antichrist will go to destruction, and that is also the message of the next verse.

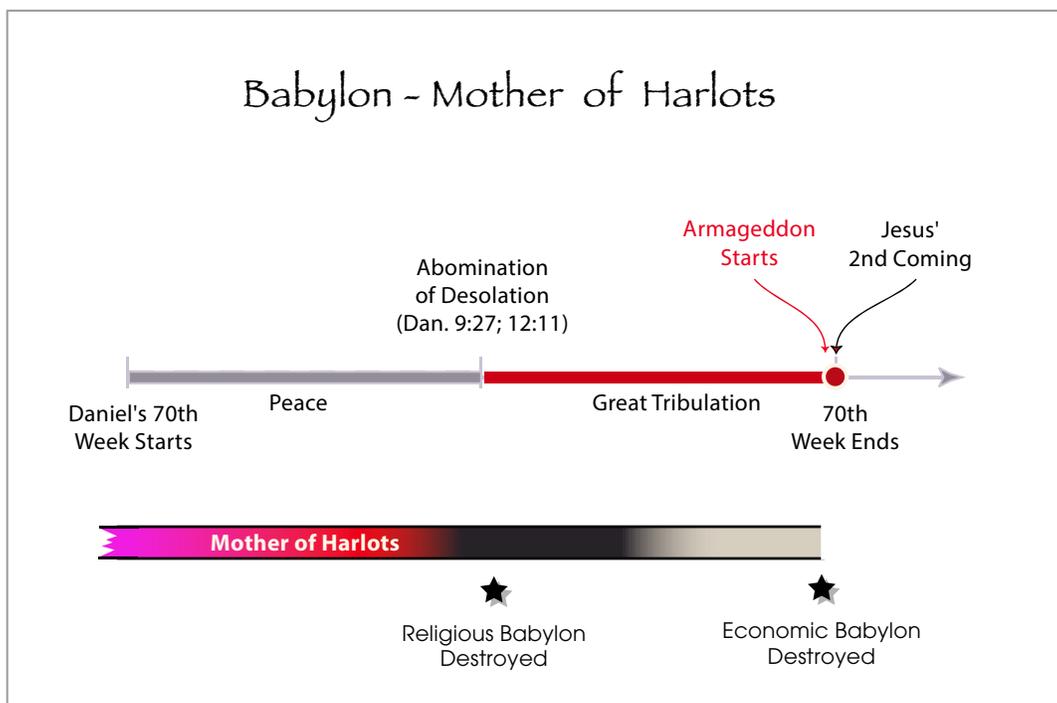
These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and

of peace.

But Jesus will win! He will win because . . . The next phrase is really wonderful. It is very awesome. Here it is. He will win because “He is Lord of lords and King of kings.” But He does not wage war alone. He comes with the saints of both the Old and New Testaments. Every believer will see this battle and see the victory. This will be better than television, movies, or being at a stadium. Christians will be there!

HARLOT DESTROYED. The explanations of the next two symbols have already been discussed.

And he said to me, “The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues. And



those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful.” (NASB) Rev. 17:14

The Antichrist and the other seven nations will attempt to defeat God, apparently in retaliation for the horrible plagues. One of the presidents of the United States of America in the last twenty years has said that an enemy external to this planet would unite the world (Reuters, “Reagan Images Star Wars,” International Herald Tribune, Paris, Dec. 5th, 1985). He was a correct when he made the statement. The world government will attempt to defeat God and bring their type

the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled. (NASB) Rev. 17:15-17

But the hatred of the kings for the woman is new. These world leaders will hate her and eventually destroy her after they have used her to gain control of the world. But they will not realize that they are fulfilling God’s will - His purposes.

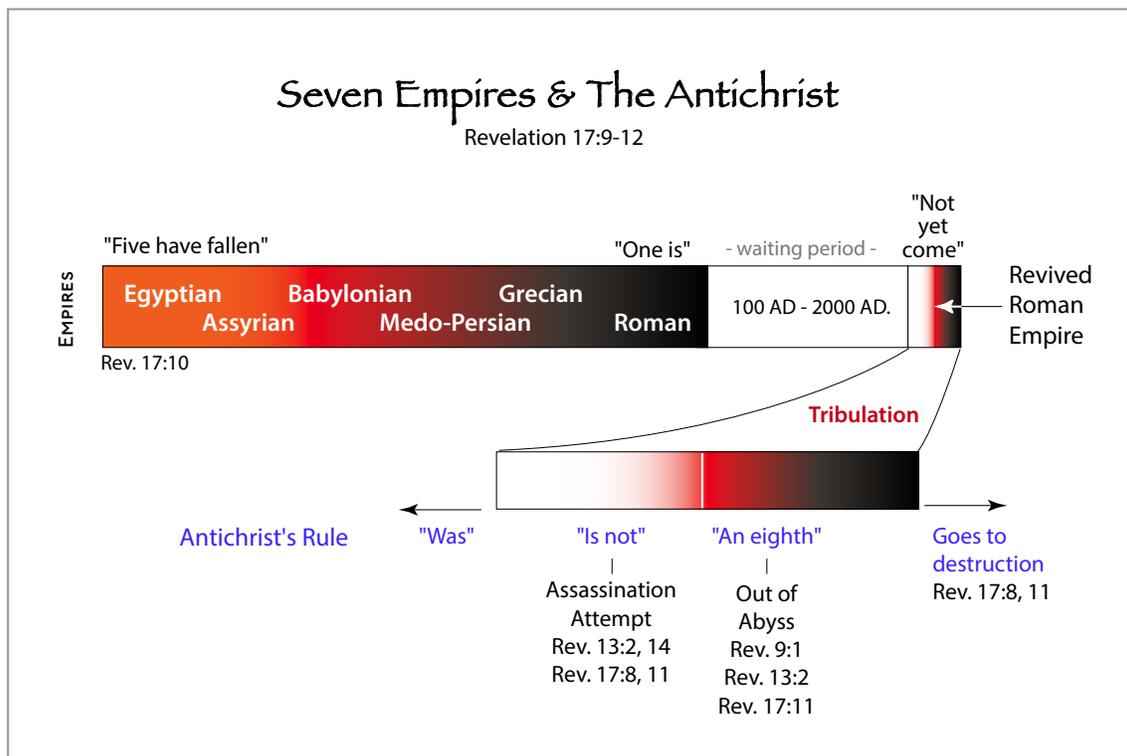
Once the Mother of All False Religions is destroyed, the Antichrist will be in absolute control, and the False Prophet will be encouraging the world to worship the Antichrist. The Antichrist will think he is King of kings and Lord of lords. But what he thinks will not be the truth. The Mother of All False Religion had to be destroyed in order for the Antichrist to be the only one the world would worship.

BABYLON A CITY? Next we are told that the woman is a great city, and she has great power over the leaders of the world. Her influence will be world wide.

The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth. (NASB) Rev. 17:18

for a solution, and some day they will find it. Both Daniel and Revelation say they will. When the solution is found by a group of ten nations, there will be peace in the Middle East - the center of the world's oil. They will control the Middle East and eventually their hatred for both Jews and Christians will become obvious and the peace in this region will prove to be only temporary.

Religious conflict will be at the heart of the final battle. It will be false religion against God. One writer of a major newspaper has recently said that he worries about Christians and what they believe. He went on to explain that they believe the Bible is true; they believe in the virgin birth of Jesus, and that the Bible is moral. He said that he worries



Did you notice that the meaning of the symbols came after John saw the vision. John saw the vision and the explanations were provided. This simple statement makes it very clear that the woman represents a city. She is a religious system that also has economic influence around the world. Babylon is an ancient city. When we come to Revelation 18, we will learn more about this woman.

CONCLUSION. Currently, in our world there is a great desire for peace in the Middle East. The world is searching

Christians will divide the world and his nation. He is wrong. Christians will not divide the world. False religion and the Antichrist will divide the world, and Christians will be the target. The Old Testament saints and Christians have always been the target.

A wave of persecution is growing against Christians. It has been controlled, but on some future day everything will change. In recent years Christians have been accused of being intolerant of others. But the truth is that true Chris-

tians have not changed their views about God. The world is changing its attitude towards Christians. Persecution may come soon, or it may not occur until the Antichrist gains power, but it is coming. It may come before the Tribulation.

But it will come according to God's plan. It will demonstrate that He is holy and that the world likes to sin.

Thus I will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their

iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud and abase the haughtiness of the ruthless. (NASB) Isa. 13:11

Some day God will prove Himself to be holy by removing all sin. Some day He will take those who believe in Jesus Christ to heaven. Why? Because He loves those who believe and seek Him. Are you seeking Him? Come quickly, Lord Jesus!