Detailed Study of Revelation Chapter 17

Revelation 17 is a crucial chapter in the apocalyptic vision of John, as it delves deeply into the **symbolism of the great prostitute**, **Babylon the Great**, and her eventual judgment. This chapter is important for understanding the nature of **false religion**, **idolatry**, and the final **judgment of God** upon human rebellion, particularly through the lens of the **world system** that stands in opposition to God. From a **dispensational** perspective, Revelation 17 addresses the **spiritual deception** and the role of **false religion** in the Tribulation, which culminates in God's **judgment**.

Exegetical Breakdown of Revelation 17:1-18

1. The Great Prostitute and the Beast (Revelation 17:1-2)

Revelation 17:1-2 (ESV): *"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, 'Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.'"*

- **Greek Word Study:**
  - **"Prostitute" (Greek: *porne*)** – *Porne* refers to a **woman involved in sexual immorality** or **fornication**. In this context, it is symbolic of **spiritual unfaithfulness** and **idolatry**, as this figure represents a corrupt, **false religious system** that seduces nations and people away from the true worship of God.
  - **"Sexual immorality" (Greek: *porneia*)** – This term encompasses all forms of **immorality**, but here, it specifically refers to the **spiritual adultery** of the people of the earth, who have been led astray by false systems of worship.
  - **"Drunk" (Greek: *methyo*)** – The use of *methyo* (to be drunk or intoxicated) is symbolic of the **deceptive influence** of false religion, where people are **spiritually intoxicated** by lies and **false promises**, leading them into sin.
- **Theological Insight:** The **great prostitute** represents **false religion** and **idolatry** that corrupts the world. The image of **drunkenness** reflects how people, intoxicated by the lies of false systems, abandon the true worship of God in favor of **false gods**. The kings and nations of the earth fall into this spiritual adultery, aligning themselves with this **false religious system**, much like Israel's historical unfaithfulness in the Old Testament.

2. The Woman Seated on the Beast (Revelation 17:3-6)

Revelation 17:3-6 (ESV): *"And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: 'Babylon the Great, Mother of Prostitutes and of Earth's Abominations.' And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus."*

- **Greek Word Study:**
  - **"Scarlet" (Greek: *kokkinos*)** – The term *kokkinos* refers to a **bright red** color, which often symbolizes **wealth**, **luxury**, and **sin**. Scarlet here indicates the **opulence** of the false religious system but also its **bloody nature**, associated with **persecution** of the saints.

- **"Abominations" (Greek: *bdelugma*)** – This term refers to **detestable things** or **idols**. In the context of this chapter, it refers to the **idolatrous practices** and **false worship** that the woman promotes, which are an **abomination** to God.
- **"Martyrs" (Greek: *martyras*)** – The term *martyras* refers to those who have **witnessed** for Christ, often to the point of **death**. This emphasizes the role of **persecution** by false religious systems, as they have shed the blood of believers.

- **Theological Insight:** The **woman riding the beast** is **Babylon the Great**, a **symbol of false religion** that has aligned herself with the **beast (the Antichrist)**. The scarlet beast represents the **worldly, political system** that supports and empowers the false religious system. The woman's **luxurious appearance** reflects the deceptive allure of false religions, while her **bloodlust** for the saints illustrates the **persecution** of the true believers in Christ by these systems.

3. The Mystery of the Woman and the Beast (Revelation 17:7-11)

Revelation 17:7-11 (ESV): *"But the angel said to me, 'Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated. They are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he does come, he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth, but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction.'"*

- **Greek Word Study:**
  - **"Mystery" (Greek: *mystērion*)** – This term refers to something that is **hidden** or **revealed only by divine intervention**. The mystery here refers to the **hidden nature** of the relationship between the **beast** and the **false religious system**.
  - **"Seven heads" (Greek: *kephele*)** – The seven heads represent **seven mountains** and **seven kings**, a symbol for the **seven major powers** or **kingdoms** that have influenced world history and have persecuted God's people.
- **Theological Insight:** The beast represents a **worldly, political system** that serves as the **instrument of Satan**. The **seven heads** and **ten horns** reflect both the **historical powers** that have influenced the world and the **future role** of the Antichrist. The **beast's resurrection** from the abyss indicates the **demonic power** behind the world's political system, which will ultimately be **destroyed** by God.

4. The Ten Horns and the Final Judgment (Revelation 17:12-18)

Revelation 17:12-18 (ESV): *"And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."*

- **Greek Word Study:**
  - **"Kings" (Greek: *basileus*)** – The ten horns represent **ten kings**, who are future rulers that will align themselves with the **Antichrist**. These rulers are not yet in power but will come into authority during the **Tribulation** period.

    - **"War" (Greek: *polemos*)** – This term refers to **battle** or **struggle**, particularly a **spiritual battle**. These kings will **war against the Lamb (Jesus Christ)**, but ultimately they will be defeated by Christ's **sovereign power**.
- **Theological Insight:** The ten kings symbolize **ten nations** or **regions** that will rise up to align with the **Antichrist**in the **final battle**. They will wage war against Christ at **Armageddon**, but ultimately **Christ will triumph**. The chapter concludes by affirming that **God's sovereignty** is ultimate: despite the apparent power of the beast, it is God who will **judge** and **defeat** all opposition to His kingdom.

Application Questions for Today's Christian Audience

1. **How does the image of the "great prostitute" challenge our understanding of false religion today?** Revelation 17 warns against **idolatry and false worship**. What forms of **false religion** or **idolatry** are prevalent in today's world, and how can we guard ourselves against them?
2. **What can we learn from the alliance of political powers with the beast?** The chapter highlights the danger of **political alliances** that go against God's will. How can Christians today be mindful of **aligning** with systems or governments that promote **immorality** or **oppression**?
3. **What does it mean for us that "the Lamb will conquer them"?** The ultimate **victory of Christ** over all forces of evil should be an encouragement to believers. How does this truth shape our understanding of **spiritual warfare**and **faithfulness** in the face of adversity?
4. **In light of this chapter, how should we view the concept of judgment?** The judgment of **Babylon** is a serious reminder of the consequences of **spiritual unfaithfulness**. How does this shape our view of **God's justice** and our call to be **faithful** witnesses in the world?

Conclusion

Revelation 17 presents a vivid and symbolic picture of **false religion**, represented by **Babylon the Great**, and the **evil political system** led by the **beast**. The chapter outlines the seductive nature of idolatry, the alignment of worldly powers with the forces of evil, and the ultimate **triumph of Christ** over all opposition. For today's Christian audience, this chapter serves as a powerful reminder to avoid the **deceptive allure of false religions** and to remain **faithful to Christ**, who will **ultimately conquer** all evil systems.