

# THE DESTRUCTION OF EVIL: PART ONE

## Lesson 11

### Revelation 17



#### WELCOME

Have you ever seen friends or allies turn on each other? What was the result?

#### INTRODUCTION

Seven angels poured out the seven bowls of God’s wrath in Revelation 16.<sup>1</sup> Now, one of those angels will give John a greater explanation of the 7th bowl judgment. In Revelation 17, the evil systems of the world are personified by a great prostitute sitting on a beast. “In a dramatic turn of events, the beast on whom the prostitute rides will turn on her and destroy her ... This is how evil operates. Destructive by its very nature, it turns on itself.”<sup>2</sup>

#### Tips for meaningful engagement with the Word:

- Think of this lesson and lesson 12 as parts one and two, together offering an in depth explanation of the 7th bowl judgment—the Lamb’s step-by-step victory over evil.
- There is a lot of symbolism in this lesson and most of it is mysterious, leaving the reader with some questions still unanswered. However, even while recognizing and accepting the mystery it is important to continue to focus on the truths that are known: Jesus is victorious, evil will be destroyed and believers are overcomers because we belong to the ultimate Overcomer.

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<sup>1</sup> In 7th bowl judgment vision, the great city of Babylon and all worldly systems that rejected God were destroyed by a massive earthquake and 100-pound hailstones. (**Revelation 16:17–21**).

<sup>2</sup> Barton, 206

- Some of the images in the book of Revelation represent the same thing throughout and some are more fluid—their meaning changes as they are used in different contexts.<sup>3</sup> The footnotes will help you with the familiar images that have a different meaning in this chapter. (For example: the wilderness, the woman, etc.)
- The verse numbers have been removed from the Scripture passages and footnotes have been inserted. These footnotes are intended to help clarify the passage and provide better understanding.



## WORD

*As you come to the Word, pause and ask God to make it come alive for you. Ask Him to make it understandable and transformational.*

### Revelation 17:1–18

*One of the seven angels who had poured out the seven bowls came over and spoke to me. “Come with me,” he said, “and I will show you the judgment that is going to come on the great prostitute,<sup>4</sup> who rules over many waters.<sup>5</sup> The kings of the world have committed adultery with her, and the people who belong to this world have been made drunk by the wine of her immorality.”<sup>6</sup>*

<sup>3</sup> Fee, xxi

<sup>4</sup> This prostitute is later identified as Babylon (17:5), and is described as representing “the great city that rules over the kings of the world” in Revelation 17:18. The original readers most likely assumed this prostitute was the Roman Empire, but she represents much more than one world power. “This ‘great prostitute,’ Babylon, symbolizes any economic, political, or military system that is hostile to God ... all the forces in the end who will come together to oppose God.” (Barton, 196)

<sup>5</sup> These waters are explained in Revelation 17:15 as, “masses of people of every nation and language.”

<sup>6</sup> Babylon represents those who would seduce humanity away from their true lover, Jesus Christ, leading them into immorality and idolatry (Revelation 17:2, 4; 18:3, 9; Jeremiah 51:7). (Duvall, 208) “In the Old Testament, Israel’s relationship to God was compared to a marriage in which God was the husband and Israel was the bride. By worshipping other gods, the people violated their marriage covenant with God and assumed the role of a prostitute, who embraced many lovers (Hosea 2:5; Jeremiah 2:20, 3:1–14; Ezekiel 16:36). The unfaithful one might ‘dress in crimson’ and deck herself ‘with ornaments of gold,’ but the prophets warned that all her primping would be in vain, for in the end her lovers would destroy her (Jeremiah 4:30), which is the fate of Babylon in Revelation 17:16.” (Koester, 156) The kings and people who have committed themselves to the world’s evil have rejected the faithful love of God and have instead fully embraced all of the immorality the prostitute stands for.

*So the angel took me in the Spirit into the wilderness.<sup>7</sup> There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that had seven heads and ten horns, and blasphemies against God were written all over it.<sup>8</sup> The woman wore purple and scarlet clothing and beautiful jewelry made of gold and precious gems and pearls. In her hand she held a gold goblet full of obscenities and the impurities of her immorality. A mysterious name was written on her forehead: “Babylon the Great, Mother of All Prostitutes and Obscenities in the World.”<sup>9</sup> I could see that she was drunk—drunk with the blood of God’s holy people who were witnesses for Jesus.<sup>10</sup> I stared at her in complete amazement.*

*“Why are you so amazed?” the angel asked. “I will tell you the mystery of this woman and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns on which she sits. The beast you saw was once alive but isn’t now. And yet he will soon come up out of the bottomless pit and go to eternal destruction.<sup>11</sup> And the people who belong to this world, whose names were not written in the Book of Life before the world was*

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<sup>7</sup> “John is ‘in the Spirit’ or ‘carried away by the Spirit’ four times in Revelation (**1:10**; **4:2**; **17:3**; **21:10**), indicating that his experience and message are from God. Although the ‘wilderness’ can serve as a positive symbol in Revelation (e.g. **12:6**, **14**), here it connotes a desolate setting for judgment.” (Duvall, 233)

<sup>8</sup> The woman sitting on the scarlet beast is the great prostitute. The fact that the beast is described as “scarlet” is meant to connect it to the red dragon (Satan) in chapter 12. The descriptions of the beast having seven heads, ten horns and blasphemies written on it connects it to the beast from the sea in **Revelation 13:1**. (Barton, 198)

<sup>9</sup> “This woman is a picture of Babylon, the empire that had taken God’s people into captivity; she is also a picture of Rome with its luxury and decadence. But she is far more than just one particular city or empire in history. She is actually the ‘mother’ of them all. She [represents] the source of all evil, the source of all rebellion against God throughout history, of which various nations have taken part.” (Barton, 199-200) The Greek word translated here as “obscenities” is *bdelygma* meaning “a foul thing, a detestable thing; of idols and things pertaining to idolatry.” (<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G946&t=KJV>) She is the source of all idolatry, of things that take the place of God.

<sup>10</sup> Her main goal, her reason for being, is to hurt, slaughter and conquer the people who follow Jesus; in fact, she revels in their destruction. She is completely against God and all that is good. (Barton, 200; Duvall, 234)

<sup>11</sup> The symbolism in this verse is unclear. “This [beast] could refer to Satan as he exercised power [‘was once alive’], was bound when Christ died [‘but isn’t now’], and then will have a time at the end of history during which to exercise great authority on the earth and go into battle with God at Armageddon [‘yet he will soon come up’] before he is finally destroyed. This also could describe the beast in **Revelation 13:3** who had ‘seemed wounded beyond recovery’—but the fatal wound was healed!” (Barton, 201)

made, will be amazed at the reappearance of this beast who had died.<sup>12</sup>

*“This calls for a mind with understanding: The seven heads of the beast represent the seven hills where the woman rules. They also represent seven kings. Five kings have already fallen, the sixth now reigns, and the seventh is yet to come, but his reign will be brief.”<sup>13</sup>*

*“The scarlet beast that was, but is no longer, is the eighth king. He is like the other seven, and he, too, is headed for destruction.<sup>14</sup> The ten horns of the beast are ten kings who have not yet risen to power. They will be appointed to their kingdoms for one brief moment to reign with the beast. They will all agree to give him their power and authority.<sup>15</sup> Together they will go to war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will defeat them because he is Lord of all lords and King of all kings. And his called and chosen and faithful ones will be with him.”*

*Then the angel said to me, “The waters where the prostitute is ruling represent masses of people of every nation and language. The scarlet beast and his ten horns all hate the prostitute. They will strip*

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<sup>12</sup> “This resurgence of evil power will convince many to join forces with the beast.” (Barton, 201) John is “emphasizing the great distinction that exists between the followers of the Lamb and those who give their allegiance to the beast.” (Mounce, 314) Those whose names are in the Book of Life are not seduced by the reappearance of the beast.

<sup>13</sup> There are multiple theories as to what the seven heads (seven hills, seven kings) represent. One theory is that because the city of Rome was famous for its seven hills, this was referring to Rome and seven of its emperors (kings). But this theory is hard to substantiate as one has to force any list of emperors to fit into the equation by tweaking and omitting. Another theory is that they represent seven world kingdoms: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece (those that have fallen), Rome (the one that is), and one yet to come. But again it is necessary to force, tweak and omit kingdoms to make this list work. (Barton, 202-203) “A better option is to consider the symbolic significance of the numbers in the passage. Seven represents the fullness or completeness of the beast’s power (**12:3; 13:1–2**). ... In the end, however, the beast remains a messianic pretender and, like all other false messiahs, is doomed to destruction.” (Duvall, 240)

<sup>14</sup> “While this imagery may seem to us to be unnecessarily obscure, it reveals the true mystery [and deceptive nature] of the beast...” (Barker, 1208) “This section indicates the climax of Satan’s struggle against God. Evil’s power is limited and its destruction is on the horizon.” (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2195)

<sup>15</sup> The ten horns, or ten kings, “represent the totality of pagan political powers allied with the beast in the epic [final] battle. Their reign will be short lived, but even then they have a shared purpose: to submit their power and authority to the beast in an all-out war against the Lamb.” (Duvall, 240)

*her naked, eat her flesh, and burn her remains with fire.<sup>16</sup> For God has put a plan into their minds, a plan that will carry out his purposes. They will agree to give their authority to the scarlet beast, and so the words of God will be fulfilled. And this woman you saw in your vision represents the great city that rules over the kings of the world.”<sup>17</sup>*

1. What are your immediate, uncensored thoughts after reading this chapter?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. The great prostitute is a symbol for all evil and reveals evil’s seductive but destructive allure. Even as believers we struggle with making things, ideas, people and motivations more important than God in our lives. We are tempted by the allures of comfort, possessions, having our opinions heard, our appearance, our image, selfish use of our time, etc. In what areas of your life do you struggle to fight evil’s attractive seduction?

How could you talk honestly to God about those struggles?

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<sup>16</sup> “True to his very nature, the beast eventually turns on the woman and destroys her. A powerful image: evil turns on itself. Evil implodes on itself. Evil self-destructs.” (Johnson, 297) “Three metaphors of judgment are mentioned: stripping her naked (symbolizing shame; **Revelation 3:18; 16:15**), eating her flesh (anticipating the feast of **19:17–18, 21**, where the wicked are devoured), and burning her with fire (a common image of judgment throughout Revelation).” (Duvall, 241)

<sup>17</sup> Chapter 18, to be discussed in the next lesson, will go into more detail about this city, Babylon, and its destruction.

3. In **Revelation 17:3–4**, the prostitute rode in on the beast looking beautiful and victorious, celebrating the destruction of those who follow the Lamb. However, **17:16** says *“The scarlet beast and his ten horns all hate the prostitute. They will strip her naked, eat her flesh, and burn her remains with fire.”* What does this reveal about the nature of the evil?

How have you seen or experienced the self-destructive nature of evil?

4. **Revelation 17:15** says, *“The waters where the prostitute is ruling represent masses of people of every nation and language.”* Do you perceive evil to be this widespread? Why or why not?
5. God is sovereign; He has complete power and authority. In the end, even those who are evil will unknowingly carry out His plans (**Revelation 17:17**). What questions or comfort come to you when you think about God’s sovereignty?

6. **Revelation 17:14** says that the Lamb's "*called and chosen and faithful ones will be with him.*" "'Called' (*kletoi*) means to be invited. Christians have been called with a purpose to be a part of God's kingdom. 'Chosen' (*eklektoi*) means those whom God has selected or drawn to himself. Christians have been drawn to God for salvation in Christ. 'Faithful' (*pistoi*) means those who show themselves trustworthy, dependable, and loyal."<sup>18</sup>
- a. In what ways do you see yourself as called, chosen and faithful?

b. How do you struggle to see yourself as called, chosen and faithful?

c. **Revelation 17:14** also says that His called and chosen and faithful ones will be with Him when He defeats evil. As you think about being with Christ when evil is defeated, what thoughts, emotions or questions come to mind?

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<sup>18</sup> Barton, 205-206



## WORSHIP

*Take a moment to enter into a time of worship—both on your own and with your community—to show praise, adoration and love for God.*

Jesus wins because He is Lord of all lords and King of all kings.  
**(Revelation 17:14)**

Jesus has many other names that declare truth about Him. Think of some others and write them down (e.g. Light of the World, Messiah, Prince of Peace, etc.).

As you write, praise Him for who He is using those names.

**Psalm 9:7–10** highlights the value of knowing God’s name(s). Read this Psalm as a prayer of praise.

*But the LORD reigns forever,  
executing judgment from his throne.  
He will judge the world with justice  
and rule the nations with fairness.  
The LORD is a shelter for the oppressed,  
a refuge in times of trouble.  
Those who know your name trust in you,  
for you, O LORD, do not abandon those who search for you.*





## WITNESS

*Believers are called to reflect Christ in the world. This section will help you engage with how to be a witness—reflecting Christ—this week.*

As a child of God you are called, chosen and faithful. You do not need to fear Satan and evil; you are and will be victorious because you belong to Christ. You don't need to panic when it seems like evil is winning. Christ will not be overcome; He is the supreme Overcomer. How could these truths bless you and those around you this week?

