

Revelation 17: The judgment of the harlot, the false global religious system. KV 1-2.
Chapter 12-14 are on the tribulation's participants, mainly the evil ones destroyed in the bowls. Chapter 17 is on "systems" in particular the false religion that misled the world.

1. The introduction to the vision. 1- 6

An angel offered to show John the judgment of the harlot in **v1-2**, probably picking up from 16:19 on Babylon. It is the false religious system that deceives kings to worship the antichrist and his idol, and the immorality of v2 is basically spiritual. The vision shows a harlot and is clearly different from the beast of 13:11-18 which depicts the false prophet (**3-6**). Rather the harlot embodies the system led by the false prophet. She is in purple and scarlet denoting respectively royalty and luxury. Yet she has a cup of abominations, namely the spiritual immorality of idolatry and the blood of saints martyred in the tribulation (6). She is revealed in v5 as Babylon the Great. This could be literally the city of Babylon but it is still in ruins. More likely it is a figurative reference to Rome. Thus the word mystery is used. Furthermore in 1Peter 5:13, Babylon was also used to represent Rome. It is the centre of emperor worship, similar to the veneration of the antichrist.

2. The explanation of the vision. 7-18

As John watches in amazement, the angel offers to explain the vision (**7**). The harlot is sitting on a beast and the explanation starts with this creature (**8-14**). Its appearance of seven heads and ten horns (3) is rather similar to the beast depicting the antichrist in 13:1-10. However here it is a scarlet beast and the blasphemous names are all over rather than just on the heads in 13:1. As the harlot depicts the religious system, it is best to take this beast as the empire which the antichrist leads. The similarity of the beasts merely shows the intimacy of the empire with its leader so that it personifies him. His false resurrection in 13:3 will then explain v8. The antichrist's empire must have crumbled with his "death" and thus it "was and is not". With the false resurrection, his empire ascends from the abyss but will be destroyed in the bowls. Those among the lost will be mesmerized by this empire as much as they are by the antichrist. The meaning of the seven heads is given next (**9-11**). Often a symbol has only one meaning but in v9, John states that the heads has a dual sense. Perhaps this is the reason for the call on wisdom. The seven mountains is firm evidence that Babylon is indeed Rome for even now it is called "the city on seven hills". Then the seven kings in v10 can only make sense if they are taken as "kingdoms" or "empires". Historians agree that the six previous world empires are Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece and Rome. It fits with v10 for Rome still stands in John's era while five have indeed fallen. The antichrist's empire is yet to come, but last only for a while or 3½ years (13:5). As for his empire being both the seventh and eighth, v8 is the explanation for it crumbles and re-ascends. The meaning of the 10 horns is in **v12-14**. These are 10 kings coming to power with the antichrist but only briefly for an hour. They will relinquish power to him and join his war against Christ. There is more on the harlot in **v15-18**. The water is the mass of humanity she deceives including the kings in v18 but interestingly they and the beast will turn against her. No reason is given but probably on the way to Armageddon in 16:12-14, the kings will destroy Babylon (chapter 18).

Lesson to Ponder: Evil ruler and false religion go together. We should keep our faith free from this world's politics and ensure that our power is from Christ alone.

Revelation 18: The pronouncement and lament for Babylon's fall. KV 21.

The chapter provides the reason why Babylon will be judged and destroyed for eternity.

1. Pronouncing the fall of Babylon. 1-3

John says that the pronouncement is “after these things” **(1-2)**. It must be after the vision of the harlot on earth and an angel descended from heaven declaring Babylon's fall. The city will be totally destroyed and as in most uninhabited ruins, it will be a haunt for wild birds. In some NT manuscripts, “animals” are also in the text and translations such as ESV have included them. Demons do dwell in birds and animals (Mark 5:12) and thus Babylon is cited as their dwelling place. The reason for Babylon's fall is stated to be the immorality with the kings **(3)**. It must be spiritual, namely the worship of the antichrist. However in v3 merchants are mentioned, revealing that the religious system is filled with commercial interest. The Greek word in v3 used for describing their focus is “strenos” which is unrestrained luxury. It will be a vital feature of the false religion in the last days.

2. Warning of separation from Babylon. 4-8

The other voice is probably Christ's as it is addressed to “my people” **(4)**. The warning is for believers on the false religious system and it is to actively come out from the start. If not, we will suffer her severe judgments **(5-7)**. In v7, “strenos” is mentioned again now as a verb for luxury is her lifestyle. However there is also pride, glorifying herself as the Queen, totally immune to judgments. Luxury and pride do go together but judgment comes in one day, short and quick **(8)**. It fits well with the 10 kings turning on the harlot towards the end of the tribulation (17:12), burning the city on their way to Armageddon.

3. Mourning by the different client groups of Babylon. 9-19

The mourning of their client groups is now described. It starts with the kings and again spiritual immorality and living luxuriously (strenos) are cited **(9-10)**. They weep in v10, not out of love but fear, for they too will be judged. The merchants are next and here the focus on luxury is clearly evident **(11-16)**. Similarly the reason for their lament is not love but that their cargoes cannot be sold (11). Note that in v13, they also trade in human lives. Commercialism without God will inevitably devalue human lives and hurt them.

The next group is the seafarers, like sailors and ship owners **(17-19)**. This is interesting for Rome or even Babylon does not have a sizable harbor. Perhaps Rome will construct one in the future. A plausible theory that will harmonize the details is that Babylon could be Constantinople or Istanbul, which is the other “Rome” of the empire. It was built like Rome with seven hills and there is a large harbor. Possibly the false prophet will make this his new centre, uniting Christianity and Islam into one false religion. The rationale in this theory is rather intricate and perhaps it is the reason in the call for wisdom in 17:9.

4. Final declaration and celebration of Babylon's fall. 20-24

The final section actually gives the reason for the chapter. It is a call for rejoicing on Babylon's violent fall **(20-21)** and in contrast the city will never celebrate again **(22-23)**. This is because in her is the blood of the saints **(24)**. John looks in amazement in 17:6 on the harlot drinking the saints' blood and an entire chapter is given to explain the reprisals.

5. Round of praises for the judgment of Babylon. 19:1-4

The phrase “after these things” suggests that this follows the vision of Babylon's fall. In v1-2, the praises are from a “great multitude” or “ochlos polus” in Greek, appearing only in 7:9 for a crowd of both angels and saints in heaven. It is similar here and in fact the saints are specifically addressed in v5. They are praising God for “avenging the blood of His bondservants”, the reason for the vision of Babylon's fall in chapter 18. A second round of worship before God's throne affirms that her judgment will be eternal (3-4).

Lesson to Ponder: So precious are His saints that retribution is double for the slayers (6).