

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. Today we will introduce Revelation 17-19.

REVELATION CHAPTER 17 TO 19 teaches that **the present sinful world will certainly pass away**.

Part 6 of the book of Revelation consists of chapters 17-19 and describes the destruction of 3 enemies together: the antichristian culture (prostitute), the antichristian religion (false prophet) and the antichristian government (beast).

First. Revelation 17 describes the kingdom of this present godless and wicked world.

One. The woman sitting on the beast. (17:1-5).

The picture is of a great prostitute sitting on a scarlet beast in a network of water canals in the desert. “The kings of the earth” commit adultery with her and the inhabitants of the earth are intoxicated by the wine of her adulteries. “The desert” is a symbol of *the very place to which the Church fled* (12:6). “The waters” is a symbol of *the evil and chaotic nations on earth that are constantly opposing and persecuting the Christian Church* (17:15). The picture is of the city of Babylon on the Euphrates river surrounded by canals of water cutting through the desert. The city is the centre of politics, commerce and religion and it is filled with the great people of the world.

The woman is a prostitute. While “the scarlet beast” out of the sea is a symbol of *Satan’s antichristian governments*, especially *the great world-empires* that follow one another in history, as Daniel chapter 2 and 7 teaches, the woman is a symbol of *Satan’s antichristian seductive world culture*. The woman is “sitting on the beast” symbolising *the close relationship* between the beast and the woman, that is, *between the antichristian politics and the antichristian seductive culture in the world*. They always support one another and co-operate to destroy Christians. The woman is the opposite of the radiant woman in Revelation 12:1, which is a symbol of *the Church*. This woman is not a symbol of the false Church, because she is not called “an adulteress”. She is called “the prostitute”, because she is the symbol of *the kingdom of this godless and wicked world, the antichristian world-powers of all ages, the manifestation of the evil world-culture, its immoral institutions and its wicked people*.

The power of the woman. “The golden cup in her hand filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries” is a symbol of *whatever is used by the evil world to entice people to turn away from the God of the Bible, who revealed himself in Christ*.

The woman is a symbol of Babylon (17:5-7). The title on the forehead of the great prostitute shows that she is identified with “Babylon”, which is another symbol representing *the godless and wicked world together with all its evil and abominations*. This Babylon is pictured in terms of the historic and worldly city of Babylon, which was pleasure-loving and arrogant, a concentration of luxury, vice, and glamour of this world. “Babylon” represents *the world as the centre of industry, commerce, art and culture*, which by means of all these things seeks to entice and seduce people to sin and draw them away from the living God.

Like the beast, the woman is viewed as existing in the past, the present and the future (17:8-10). The two are very closely associated. The prostitute and the beast change their outward form throughout history, but their essence remains the same. Thus, “the great prostitute, Babylon” represents *Satan’s antichristian seductive culture* throughout the history of this world and at any moment in history. The capital of the Roman Empire of John’s day was filled with vanity, luxury and pleasure and it attracted both “the kings of the earth” and “its inhabitants” (17:2). “The kings of the earth” represent *the leaders in every domain of life like commerce, art and religion*.

Two. Christians within this evil culture of the world (17:6).

Babylon of John’s time was filled with the blood of Christians. Christians in the time of John were *torn to pieces by wild animals in the arena* for the amusement and entertainment of the public.

The great prostitute, Babylon, always opposes the Bride, the new Jerusalem. Because both cities are introduced by one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls (17:1; 21:9), both are symbols throughout the period from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ. A voice out of heaven says to Christians throughout the history of this world, “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, and so that you will not receive any of her plagues” (18:4).

“The fall of Babylon” in chapter 18 refers to the demolition of every preceding concentration of worldly enticement and its final demolition. The fall of the last great Babylon will coincide with the second coming of Christ. Then the world together with its godless and wicked culture will finally be destroyed for ever (cf. 14:17-20; 16:17-21; 2 Pet10-13).

Three. The history of the beast within this evil culture of the world (17:7-11).

“The *mystery*” means what was formerly unknown, has become known by revelation. God reveals the history of the beast, which is a symbol of *Satan’s antichristian governments in world history*.

“The beast was and is not and is on the point of coming up out of the Abyss and goes to destruction”. The beast “was” means that in the past, the beast took on the outward forms of the ancient world empires of Ancient Babylonia, Assyria, New Babylonia, Medo-Persia and Greece, as described in the book of Daniel. The beast “is not” means that all these previous forms of the beast have perished and no longer exist! Nevertheless, the beast is “on the point of coming” means that he is again and again “present”. Satan’s antichristian government in world history always takes on a new outward identity. After every defeat it seems to have the ability to raise its head anew. This causes the non-Christian inhabitants of the earth to be astonished when it appears again in world-history. Christ reveals that whatever outward form Satan’s antichristian government takes, it always goes to its destruction! Also the final antichristian empire will certainly go to its destruction.

The form of the beast in the time of the apostle John had seven heads and ten horns.

“The seven heads” has a twofold symbolical meaning: On the one hand, they are a symbol of *the Roman Empire in John’s day*, because Rome is built on seven hills. On the other hand, they are symbols of “seven kings” representing *all the previous embodiments of Satan’s antichristian governments throughout history*. Based on Daniel chapter 2 and 7, the seven kings represent seven kingdoms or antichristian world-empires known in the Bible. The first 5 kings, which have already fallen, represent the empires of Ancient Babylonia, Assyria, New Babylonia, Medo-Persia and Greece. The 6th king represents the Roman Empire that is present in John’s time. The 7th king represents another empire that has not yet come. But when it comes, it must remain for a little while. The emphasis is on the word “remain” and it represents collectively all the antichristian governments between the fall of the Roman Empire and the final empire of antichrist just before the second coming of Christ. The period between the first and second coming of Christ is here described as “a little while”, just as the “3½ years” in chapter 11-13 also indicate a short while. The 8th king represents the beast in its final form just before the second coming of Christ. He will be the final antichrist in history, but also he will certainly go to his destruction.

Four. The unbelieving inhabitants of the earth (17:8).

Throughout the period between the first and second coming of Christ there will be Christians and there will be “the inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world”. While non-Christians will be astonished and deeply impressed by these antichristian governments of the world, the Christians should take no part in them.

Five. The mighty politicians and businessmen of the world (17:12-13).

“The ten kings” who have not yet received a kingdom, but will receive authority as kings along with the beast for one hour are symbols that represent *the mighty people of the world in every realm of government and defence, industry and commerce, art and education, culture and religion* insofar they serve the central authority of the beast. Their goal is to serve their own interests and therefore they oppose Christians. In order to reach their goal, they give up their power and authority to the beast. However, Christ reveals that they will only reign with the beast for “one hour”, that is, for *a very short time*. Thereafter the beast will reign alone as the totalitarian ruler. During their very short reign, their one purpose is to help Satan’s antichristian government in its conflict against Christ and the Church.

Six. The evil culture of this world is at war against Christ and Christians (17:14).

For a short while it may seem that the beast and his antichristian empire have gained the upper hand. But the theme of the whole book of Revelation is, “Jesus Christ will overcome them because he is the Lord of lords and King of kings - and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers”. All people, who are chosen by God from eternity and have been irresistibly called by God in history, will certainly overcome their opponents together with Christ. Every antichristian kingdom in world-history will certainly be defeated by Christ, including the very last antichristian kingdom of the beast just before the second coming of Christ.

Seven. The woman is destroyed by the beast (17:15-18).

Although the prostitute and the beast always supported one another and co-operated to destroy the Church, in the end, the beast and his associates will hate the prostitute, strip her of her extravagance and destroy her. The meaning of this is that there comes a time when the worldly people and their leaders will realise what fools they have been to allow themselves to be infatuated and seduced by the luxury, pleasures and culture of the sinful world, but then it will forever be too late! They will no longer have any opportunity to repent. God finally hardens the hearts of those who have hardened themselves against his repeated warnings. In the end, the pleasures of sin always disappoint!

Second. Revelation 18 describes the fall the kingdom of this present godless and wicked world (18:1-24).

The symbolic picture in chapter 18:1-24 is concerning the fall of Babylon.

One. The announcement of the fall of Babylon (18:1-8).

The fall of Babylon is certain. An angel with great authority announces the fall of Babylon as if it has already taken place, so certain will its fall be! This godless and evil culture of the world will fall and become utterly desolate. Babylon will fall, because the nations, the kings and the merchants have committed adultery with her.

The nations, kings and merchants represent non-Christians. “The kings” are symbols representing *all the people of power and influence in every area of human life*. “The merchants” are symbols representing *all the people who have set their hearts on materialism* in this world. “They committed adultery” means that they *have become infatuated with her pleasures and treasures and have yielded to Babylon’s temptations and enjoyed her luxuries*.

The admonition “to come out of Babylon” is addressed to all God’s people in the Old Testament period (Isa 48:20) and in the New Testament period (2 Cor 6:16-18). This proves that “Babylon” is not just a literal city in the end-time, but is a symbol representing literally *the whole world as the centre of seduction in every age*. “To come out of Babylon” means *to have no part in her sins and not to be ensnared by her allurements*. Sometimes it may seem that God has forgotten Babylon’s sins, but in the day Babylon falls, it will be evident that God has remembered her crimes. Babylon will be punished and will be “paid back double” for what she has done and will “receive a double portion” from her own cup. This does not mean that Babylon will receive twice as much punishment as she deserves, but that she will *receive the exact counterpart of her sins*. She will receive the exact amount of punishment she has earned! The scales will balance exactly. And her doom will come on her suddenly, in one day.

Two. The lamentations and rejoicing about the fall of Babylon (18:9-20).

The prostitute Babylon sees the heyday of her glory, luxury, power and fame slip away from her, so that the people of the world can no longer find anything attractive in her. In the end, the prostitute Babylon proves to be a great disappointment to everyone. Much too late the governments of this world, the kings, the merchants and sea travellers realise that they have been fools to commit adultery with her. As she is destroyed, a threefold lamentation of the kings, merchants and sea travellers is followed by the rejoicing of the saints, the apostles and the prophets (18:20). When evil is punished, evil people always lament, but righteous people always rejoice. The apostle John’s picture is based on conditions of his time, but the picture is essentially the same in every age. Everything that is precious in the world has no abiding value, because it all perishes. “The present form of this world is certainly passing away” (1 Jn 2:15-17). Everything people have pinned their hopes on and built their trust on will collapse! In contrast to the lament of the impenitent, all God’s people are called to rejoice, because the fall of Babylon is God’s just punishment for the way the godless and wicked world has treated Christians.

Three. The irrevocable and irreparable character of the fall of Babylon (18:21-24).

A mighty angel picked up a very large boulder and threw it into the sea, to symbolise the fall of Babylon. He threw it “into the sea” so that it may *disappear completely and become absolutely irretrievable* (Mic 7:19). This godless and wicked world as centre of seduction will perish forever. The pleasure-mad, arrogant world, with all its seductive luxuries and pleasures, with its antichristian philosophy and culture, with its teeming multitudes that have forsaken God and have lived according to the lusts of the flesh and the desires of the mind, will certainly perish and never rise again!

Third. Revelation 19 pictures the final victory: the exultation in heaven for God’s just judgements, the rejoicing for the wedding of the Lamb, the second coming and the final battle.

One. The heavenly rejoicing about the overthrow of Babylon and the coming of the wedding of the Lamb (19:1-10).

Joy at the complete overthrow of the godless and evil culture of the world. After the fall of Babylon, the great multitude of holy angels and the Church triumphant in heaven shout “Praise the Lord”, because God alone saves, his judgements are true and just and he alone reigns. They rejoice because “the wedding of the Lamb” has come.

The marriage customs of Israel were the following: First “the betrothal” takes place, which is more binding than engagement. The terms of marriage are accepted in the presence of witnesses and God’s blessing is pronounced on the union. From that day the groom and bride are legally husband and wife. Then “an interval of separation” follows, during which the groom pays the dowry to the father of the bride. Sometimes this takes the form of service rendered, which may take several years. Then there is “a wedding-procession” just before the wedding feast. The bride and groom adorn themselves. The groom accompanied by his friends, who sing and carry torches, proceed to the house of the bride and convey her in a returning procession to his own home or that of his parents. Finally, “the wedding-feast” including the wedding-banquet takes place. These festivities may last seven or even two times seven days.

The relationship of a bridegroom and bride is throughout the Bible a symbol of the relationship between God and God's people or Christ and Christians. The Church has this relationship to Christ. From eternity, the Church was *chosen* in Christ. Throughout the Old Testament period, the coming wedding of the Church, the community of the Messiah, was *announced* in prophecies. At the first coming of Christ, the Church was *betrothed* to Christ and the dowry was paid for her by his precious blood. The interval of separation is a symbol of *the entire period between the first and second coming of Christ, during which the Church makes herself ready by clothing herself with Christ's righteousness and holiness* (Rom 13:14; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 4:20-24). In the eyes of God this interval and the whole world-history happening within this period is but a short time (cf. 2 Pet 3:8). At the second coming of Christ, Christ and his host of angels come in a *procession* from heaven to take the Church to "the wedding of the Lamb". Thus, the wedding of the Lamb *begins at the second coming of Christ* (Mt 22:1-14; 25:1-13)! The wedding-feast will last, not for seven days or seven years, but for all eternity on the new earth! His reign of peace will last, not for just 1000 years, but for all eternity on the new earth! John was so overwhelmed by what he saw that he fell down in worship before the angel, but the angel prevented him from worshipping him.

The testimony of Jesus is "the spirit of prophecy". This means that *the true contents and understanding of Old Testament prophecy* is what Jesus Christ has revealed to us in the New Testament (Jn 1:18; 3:11; 1 Pet 1:10-12).

Two. The presentation of the Author of this victory, the Rider on the white horse (19:11-16).

The picture is of a rider on a white horse, namely *Jesus Christ at his second coming*. Compare this with the rider on the white horse in Revelation 6:2, namely Jesus Christ at his first coming.

His names are "Faithful and True", "the King of kings", "the Lord of lords" and "the Word of God", because only in Jesus Christ does God fully reveal and express himself. In the Bible, a name indicates the character or position of the bearer and therefore "the name which no one knows but Christ himself" probably expresses *Christ's inner relationship to God the Father*.

His appearance. "Blazing eyes" symbolise *penetration of everything* with a view to judgement. "Many crowns" on his head symbolise *total victory*. "A robe dipped in blood" symbolises his coming in judgement *to execute severe punishment*. "The armies of heaven" are *the hosts of holy angels*. "A sharp sword protruding from his mouth" symbolises *destruction* and not the preaching of the gospel. "He rules with an iron sceptre" symbolises his *authority to rule* on earth and to do with all the nations what he wants, especially to dash his enemies to pieces like useless pottery. "He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty" symbolises that it is *Christ who executes God's judgement on earth* (14:19; Jn 5:22).

Three. The final great battle that executes the final judgement on all Christ's enemies (19:17-21).

The picture is of an angel summoning all the birds to gather for the great supper of God's judgement. This indicates that Christ's victory is absolutely certain! This final battle, in which beast, the kings of the earth and their armies are gathered to "make THE war or battle" against Christ and his army, is called "the battle of Armageddon" (16:16) or the battle involving Gog and Magog (20:8). The battle is not described. It is not a protracted battle with now this and then that side winning. "With the breath of his mouth", that is, with *a single word or puff* (2 Thes 2:8), with "fire coming down from heaven" (20:9) and with "hailstones falling on people" (16:21), the Lord Jesus Christ will defeat the enemies! He will capture the beast and the false prophet and throw them alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur.

Parts 5 to 7 of the book of Revelation are parallel. Remember, the apostle John does not see future history in chronological order, but visions about events that happen in parallel. The punishment of the people who had received the mark of the beast in Revelation 15-16 (pt 5), the punishment of the three helpers of Satan: the great prostitute or Babylon, the beast or antichrist and the false prophet in Revelation 17-19 (pt 6) and the punishment of the dragon or Satan in Revelation 20 (pt 7) are parallel. Although their histories have been presented under different symbols in different visions and in different parts of the book of Revelation, Satan's antichristian governments, religions, seductive cultures and all the wicked people go down together with Satan at the second coming of Christ!

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Read Revelation 20. Tomorrow we will introduce Revelation 20.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".