

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

*The Mystery Babylon, Pt 1*  
**Revelation 17**

**Keywords:** Revelation, End Times, False Religion, Idolatry, Babylon, Prophecy

**PowerPoint Presentation included:** None

**SermonAudio Blurb:** Do you know how this world functions? How good are you at interpreting life situations and making decisions that are proper for a child of God? Do you have a solid understanding of the nature of spiritual warfare? These are questions that will be answered in this introductory sermon for Revelation 17. We are able to see how God works in this fallen world and how there is a great, invisible war that wages all around us. The better we grasp this the better we live before God and man.

**I. Introduction.**

A. **Read chapter 17.**

B. To live life well can be rather challenging due to various issues but a key one is learning to properly interpret this world and our place in it.

C. Three things that help a person to properly interpret life.

1. First is a right relationship to God.

a. He is the creator and sustainer of this world, so we must be rightly related to Him as it is His world.

b. Fear of the Lord = beginning of wisdom. Wisdom is learning to skillfully apply God's Word to life.

2. Second is to grasp that this world is fallen and under the curse of sin.

a. Sin is anything contrary to the character of God or His will.

b. This is the nature of *bevel* that we are learning from Matt Miller in Ecclesiastes.

c. This is why Paul warns each of us in Ephesians 5:15-16, "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil."

3. Third, that there is a lot more going on in all of creation than what we easily perceive with our senses.

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- a. This is where chapter 17 comes into play for it is speaking of the influence of Satan and his army of demons over the millennia of human existence.
- b. Paul told us also in Ephesians 6 that our real battle is not with what we can see and feel; rather, it is really with the powers of darkness which we cannot see.
  - (1) Most of us know that passage.
  - (2) But how many of you have it always in your thinking as you consider things that you will or will not say or do?
- c. The better you understand how Satan works in this world broken by sin the better you can navigate it.
- d. Look at 17:1-6.
  - (1) There is this vision of a woman who is both powerful in influence and filled with evil.
  - (2) When John is given this vision verse 6 says he was filled with wonder. The question to ask is why. And the answer is simply that he is seeing the vastness of a system that has worked in and through humanity across the centuries.
  - (3) The angel explains this in the verses that follow. He explains that the hills and horns that are seen in the vision represent kingdoms and kings.
  - (4) And this is something that is simply mind-boggling if you let it sink in.
  - (5) This system is satanic and vile and it is working behind and in everything that belongs to this age. And its influence and destruction is felt everywhere and through all time.
  - (6) And we see in chapter 17-18 God destroying it and establishing the righteous rule and kingdom of Jesus Christ.

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- D. So how best to teach this is what I have thought about, knowing that this was coming our way. I think we need a foundation laid first and it will be laid in two ways:
1. First, showing us the hidden world of this harlot, this spiritual dimension that we too often forget about.
  2. Second, show the way the bible develops this city known as Babylon throughout the scripture, all leading up to Revelation 17-18.
    - a. This again is not part of the chronology of the book. Rather it covers a large amount of human history in this vision.
    - b. Its doom was pronounced in 14:8 but no details really given.
    - c. Then in 16:19 we saw the results of the seventh bowl being poured out and it said, “And Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.”
    - d. What we have not had was any explanation as to why this city was being singled out, chapters 17-18 fill in those details.

## II. Grasping The Real World — The Whole World.

- A. The bible, if you read it carefully, opens up for us the glory and mystery of a world of spiritual creatures that are at work behind the scenes, so to speak.
1. If you read through the bible with any regularity there are passages where you find yourself scratching your head. They are passages that seem to speak to something that is both strange and a bit scary or unsettling.
  2. Starting in Genesis 3 we realize that there are a lot more going on than we realize. A whole lot more. And as we keep reading we quickly find more and more about a group of being who are suprahuman beings. We know them usually as angels and demons
  3. In the Old Testament we find a common image being painted of God. He is portrayed as a warrior.
    - a. Exodus 15 celebrates the victory of God over the Egyptian army.
      - (1) He is called a warrior in 3 because He hurled the army into the sea (4).

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- (2) vs 6 we see that He shatters the enemy.
- (3) His kingship is proclaimed in vss 1 and 18.
- (4) And it even anticipates the temple where the people of Israel will gather to sing God's praises.
- b. This is then seen in the official hymn book of Israel.
  - (1) Psalm 24.
    - (a) This is a psalm that describes how the people were to enter the temple to celebrate and worship YHWH.
    - (b) Notice that it begins with an absolute statement about God as king and creator.
    - (c) That is not just a fact. It is in a sense a victory shout. It is Israel being instructed to shout out that YHWH is Lord over all.
    - (d) In vs 2 the statement of Him founding the earth upon the seas is a statement of the chaos that was at the beginning of creation and how God, personally, brought order and stability to it all.
    - (e) Now see the divine warrior imagery that flows from these proclamations.
      - i) He is the King of Glory.
      - ii) He is YHWH, strong and mighty.
      - iii) He is YHWH, mighty in battle.
      - iv) He is YHWH of the hosts/armies.
    - (f) Therefore we are to come to the Temple and worship Him and celebrate Him in a proper manner.
  - (2) Psalm 46.

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- (a) Here the people of Israel declare God as their place of safety.
  - (b) He is their true, divine warrior-king and He dwells with them in the Temple (4-5).
  - (c) He is the destroyer of nations.
  - (d) He is the exalted above the nations.
  - (e) He is the Lord of hosts.
- B. Who are these powers and authorities?
1. Three times they are mentioned in Ephesians (1:20-23; 3:10; 6:10-18).
  2. They are not just something Paul came up with, nor are they ideas unique to the New Testament world. They have a very strong Jewish history .
  3. These were beings, created by God, who were in rebellion against God. Their job was to oversee humanity and to ensure the righteousness and justice prevailed. But they rebelled and instead drive and push the nations to evil, injustice and chaos.
  4. We don't have a clear picture of everything about them in the bible but we do have many places that make mention of them that helps us get a sense of them.
  5. Deuteronomy 32:8-9.
    - a. Part of a song Moses made the whole nation learn.
    - b. Here is where a complex sermon gets more complex. If you have the NASB or NIV it reads at the end of vs 8 "the sons of Israel." But if you have the ESV then it reads, "the sons of God."
      - (1) This is due to their choices in Hebrew texts. ESV is likely the correct one. It is interesting that in the LXX it reads "angels of God."
      - (2) That phrase, "Sons of God" always, in the Old Testament, refers to angelic beings (both good and evil).

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- c. What is going on in this passage is that Moses is saying that all of the nations that exist or ever existed He placed archangels over them. In other words, there are angelic beings appointed to each nation.
  - d. We see an example of this in Daniel 10.
    - (1) In chapter 9 we see Daniel making a prayer of confession on behalf of Israel. Gabriel, the archangel, came to him in a vision and gave him instruction on what was to come with the Messiah and the end of times.
    - (2) Now three weeks later, while he is still mourning over the vision (2-3) and Gabriel again comes to him. Notice what he says in vss 12-13 and try to get your head around it.
    - (3) Then read vss 20-21.
  - e. What you have in this passage is what is going on all over the world. These angelic powers at war. They are all created by God and subject to Him.
6. Psalm 82 shows us a bit more about them and their responsibilities and failings.
- a. They were to promote true peace (shalom), well-being and justice but they don't (2-5).
  - b. Because they did not obey God they would be judged (6-7).
  - c. Notice how they are referred to as "gods." This is not uncommon in the Old Testament.
    - (1) There is only the One True God. But these beings created by God are also referred to as gods. In the New Testament they are called powers and principalities.
    - (2) Again we see this in Psalm 29:1.
      - (a) The ESV again does a better job translating it which is "sons of God" again.

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- (b) Now, what is going on in this Psalm? David is telling the angelic beings, both good and bad, to do proper worship and homage.
  - (c) Why? Because He alone is the Most High God, He is their creator and sustainer as well.
  - (3) Also Psalm 96:4-5.
  - (4) 1 Kings 20:23-30.
  - (5) Genesis 6:1-6 is the great rebellion.
- C. When we come to the New Testament we see similar ideas.
- 1. 1 Corinthians 2:6-8.
    - a. Paul shows us here that the "rulers of this age" are not interested in bringing about God's "shalom" or peace but rather they oppress mankind.
    - b. They instead stand behind or over mankind and manipulate ideas and plans so as to kill Jesus Christ.
    - c. But, because God's wisdom is far greater, they did it in ignorance and actually achieved God's plan.
    - d. As a result they are described in vs 6 as those who are "passing away." They are defeated, yet not yet gone.
  - 2. 1 Corinthians 15:24-26.
    - a. In this classic passage on the resurrection we see that the work of God is not yet done.
    - b. What Jesus Christ started when he died and rose again shall be fully accomplished when he raises all from the dead.
    - c. We live in that in-between time. If we are wise we keep this promise before us. If we begin to believe this age then we lose hope and conform ourselves to this age and its desires.
  - 3. Colossians 2.13-15.

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- a. The certificate of debt is the reality of our failure to stand up to God's law. We are guilty, all of us.
  - b. Notice then how he connects the "disarming" of the rulers and authorities by Jesus' death and resurrection.
  - c. This was God's plan and purpose in the death of Jesus. He would defeat the sin that grips us and the powers that enslave us.
4. Paul show this all the more in 2 Corinthians 4:4.
- a. Satan seeks to dominate humanity. Which is why John says that the whole world lies in the lap of him in 1 John 5:19.
  - b. How does he do this? Primarily through deception and accusation. The first to unbelievers and the second to both unbelievers and believers.
5. It is interesting that though the cultures in the day of Paul saw that there were many gods, Paul shows that at best they are these spiritual powers under the sovereign rule of God.
- a. 1 Corinthians 8:4-6.
  - b. Galatians 4:8-11.
6. Colossians 2:8.
- a. This shows us that there are not "neutral" patterns in our social lives.
  - b. Rather these are being manipulated by these powers to bring mankind into enslavement and conformity to this age.
7. Ephesians 6:11-12
- a. Note that this comes at the end of a teaching related to marriage, parenting, and employment.
  - b. I won't go into great detail here but it is worth noting that in vs 12 the term "world forces" or "cosmic powers" or perhaps "powers" literally means "world-graspers".



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- c. There is a sense of how these powers are seeking to grasp and take over that which is not their's to have. Very much like Genesis 6.

## **III. Conclusion.**

- A. We need to be wise and aware so that we do not wander into silly or dangerous speculations.
  1. This stuff can fascinate us to the point of self-destruction.
  2. We can also ignore it to our great peril. Look at any marriage where the man and woman are not actively striving to conform the marriage to God's standard and you see the cost of ignoring the lies of these powers.
- B. Understand also that we do not actively engage these powers.
  1. That is not how we are to live, calling down curses upon them or challenging them.
  2. We fight them by simply conforming ourselves by faith to what God calls us to be. We are rebelling against the power of this age by not being conformed to it.
- C. So though we don't actively engage these powers, we, as the people of God, should be trying to resist them through resisting the effects upon this world and humanity.
- D. This is where the Missional Triad comes into play. We are to be actively seeking to be a blessing in our cities.
- E. In addition we should be looking for ways we can alleviate the suffering in this world without compromising the gospel.
  1. This is why you should be involved in works of compassion as Christians.
  2. This is the reason I travel around the world teaching pastors so that they can engage their cultures with the rebellious gospel of Jesus Christ.
- F. Finally, try to become an expert in living in this world that God called "Good" and which is fallen by the sin of Adam, and delight in it as redeemed people.

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1. God shall renew this world one day and that is what we long for.
  2. But until that day comes we should still see the glory that is still found in this broken world.
  3. We can show people that there is something more than just lust and hate and envy.
    - a. Play your games not for power or prestige but for the sheer pleasure in what "play" actually means.
    - b. Build relationships that are true and deep, not on what you get out of them.
    - c. Eat and drink to God's glory, knowing that all of it is a good gift from him.
    - d. Look at your spouses, your children, your in-laws and your neighbors not as burdens but as fellow image-bearers of the Most High God. Live with them in that way.
    - e. And in all of this remember that you are free to live this way because Jesus has redeemed you and you have been transferred out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his marvelous light.
- G. Recognize that these powers exist but then move on in a greater faith and obedience to Jesus Christ.
1. Realize that they are present and at work.
  2. But even more importantly, remember that they are under the sovereign control of God.
  3. Give thanks that through Jesus Christ we have victory.

## **IV. Benediction/Doxology.**

**For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

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## **Small Group Questions**

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*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
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- **What stood out to you in this sermon? Where were you challenged to perhaps adjust your thinking?**
- **In all honesty, how often are you considering the reality of the spiritual world and these forces?**
- **The key parts of our existence are God/Faith, Society, Family, Government, Leisure and Finances. As a group, work through these and how you might be able to discern the subtle and not-so-subtle presence of these spiritual forces.**
  - **Example: James 3:13-18 shows two types of wisdom. Apply this to situations in your lives and you can see what “power” is at work.**
  - **Example: Colossians 3:5-17 gives us values and attitudes that are of this world or of the New World to come. Again, apply this to your life events and you can see things a lot clearer.**
  - **Final example: Hebrews 10:23-25 gives three clear commands. How do the powers of this age work against these to destroy you?**