



# FAITH PRINCETON SUNDAY SCHOOL

REVELATION 17:1-8. Woman and Scarlet Beast (part 1)

SUNDAY, AUGUST 30, 2026

## REVELATION 17 Observation Worksheet

Chapter Theme \_\_\_\_\_

### 17 Doom of Babylon

1 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, 2 with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality." 3 And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality, 5 and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." 6 And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly. 7 And the angel said to me, "Why do you

wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

8 “The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.

## ***Enduring Word Commentary:*** **Revelation 17:1-8 The Fall of Religious Babylon (part 1)**

### **A. The concept of Babylon.**

**1. Revelation 16:19 and 14:8 have already declared Babylon's fall. In Revelation 17-18, the fall of Babylon is carefully detailed.**

**2. Babylon is mentioned 287 times in the Scriptures, more than any other city except Jerusalem.**

a. Babylon was a literal city on the Euphrates River. [Genesis 11:1-10](#) shows that right after the flood, Babylon "was the seat of the civilization that expressed organized hostility to God." (Tenney)

b. Babylon was later the capitol of the empire that cruelly conquered Judah. "Babylon, to them (the Jews), was the essence of all evil, the embodiment of cruelty, the foe of God's people, and the lasting type of sin, carnality, lust and greed." (Tenney)

c. To those familiar with the Old Testament, the name *Babylon* is associated with organized idolatry, blasphemy and the persecution of God's people.

i. "In John's day Rome epitomized all the antagonism and opposition to the Christian faith." (Mounce) In some ways, the city of Rome was the clearest fulfillment of the Babylon attitude. If we had to pick one city today that most exemplifies the world system, perhaps we would say that Los Angeles is the Babylon of today.

**3. The concept of Babylon is greater than Revelation 17-18 and the Antichrist's reign. Babylon was present in John's day (typified by Rome), in our day, and throughout history, as the *world system*. But under the Antichrist, Babylon (in both its religious and commercial aspects) will have influence over the earth as never before.**

**B. The great harlot (religious Babylon) is described.**

**1. (1-2) Described by the angel.**

**Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication."**

**a. I will show you the judgment of the great harlot:** Her **judgment** is assured at the outset. There is never any doubt regarding the fate – and ultimate failure – of Babylon.

i. As a religious system, Babylon came into being long before Christianity, but in Satanic imitation it anticipated the coming true Messiah. According to religious history and legend, the Babylonian religion was founded by the wife of Nimrod (a great-grandson of Noah), named Semiramis. She was a high priestess of idol worship, and she gave birth to a son who she claimed was conceived miraculously. The son, named Tammuz, was considered a savior. Many ancient artifacts remain with the familiar motif of the mother Semiramis holding the savior-infant Tammuz, which predate

Christianity. It was also said that Tammuz was killed by a wild beast and then miraculously brought back to life. Baal was the local, Canaanite name for the Babylonian Tammuz.

ii. The Bible makes specific mention of some of the features of the classic religion of Babylon:

- Ezekiel protests against the ceremony of weeping for Tammuz ([Ezekiel 8:14](#))

- Jeremiah mentions the heathen practice of making cakes for the queen of heaven ([Jeremiah 7:18](#)) and offering incense to the queen of heaven ([Jeremiah 44:17-19](#), [44:25](#))

b. **Who sits on many waters:** Here, Babylon **sits on many waters**; that is, she presides over many nations (compare with [Revelation 17:15](#)). She has a universal, international character.

i. This is unification of all false, idolatrous religion, with representatives from apostate Catholicism, Protestantism, as well as a smorgasbord of other religions of the world.

ii. “The woman pictures false religion that will dominate the world in the tribulation period.” (Hocking) Many people like to identify this **great harlot** with the Roman Catholic Church, but false religion is not limited to any one church.

iii. “That Rome and the Romish system are involved, may readily be admitted; but that this is all, and that the sudden fall of Great Babylon is simply the fall of Romanism, or the utter destruction of the city of Rome, must be emphatically denied.” (Seiss)

c. **The inhabitants of the earth were made drunk:** Religious Babylon intoxicates kings and peoples. Karl Marx was *partly* right when he said, “Religion is the opiate of the masses.” He was

partly right because *empty religion is the opium of the masses*.

d. **Made drunk with the wine of her fornication:**

The idea of **fornication** often has strong associations throughout the Bible with idolatry. Since this is a well-accepted religious system, it is likely to appear as attractive and spiritual, though not necessarily moral.

## 2. (3-6) What John saw.

**So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written:**

**Mystery,  
Babylon the Great,  
the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth.**

**I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement.**

a. **He carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness:** John is carried away into the **wilderness**; the desolate nature of the wilderness is an appropriate setting for a vision of judgment.

b. **Sitting on a scarlet beast:** The harlot rides the same beast (**seven heads and ten horns**) that was previously seen in [Revelation 13:1](#) – the Antichrist and his dictatorship.

i. “Her position, that of riding the beast, indicates on the one hand that she is supported by the political power of the beast, and on the other that she is in a dominant role and at least outwardly controls and directs the beast.” (Walvoord)

ii. Her association with blasphemy and the dragon’s beast are clearly seen from God’s perspective. But to the people of the earth she will look quite religious, and have the “faith” everybody wants.

c. **The woman was arrayed:** The woman is clothed with emblems of luxury (**purple... gold and precious stones**) and government (**scarlet**). Yet she offers idolatry (**abominations**) and impurity (**filthiness of her fornication**) in this sumptuous setting.

i. **Purple** and **scarlet** were colors of splendor and magnificence; the dyes to make fabric these colors were rare and costly.

ii. “We find in the course of church history that one of the deadliest marks of ecclesiastical corruption is the lust for temporal power.” (Barnhouse) Purple and scarlet were the colors of *rulers*, whether economic or political.

d. **On her forehead a name was written:** The name on her forehead identifies her in more ways than one. Roman prostitutes frequently wore a headband with their name engraved upon it.

i. “In spite of all her glamour she is nothing but a prostitute.” (Johnson)

ii. There is a stark contrast between the woman of [Revelation 12](#) (representing Israel, God’s people), and this woman (representing idolatrous, false religion).

iii. “These two Women, thus related, and set over one against the other as opposites and rivals, must necessarily be interpreted in the same way. As Antichrist corresponds to Christ as a rival and antagonist of Christ, so Great Babylon corresponds to the Woman that bears the Man-child, as *her* rival and antagonist.” (Seiss)

e. **MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT:** This title is not for *literal* Babylon; but its *spiritual* (**mystery**) representation, which is the source (**mother**) of all idolatry (**abominations**) and spiritual adultery (**harlots**).

i. This harlot must be larger than any one branch of a religious institution. She is the embodiment of Satan’s own ecumenical movement – the religion of the world system.

ii. Our world, strong with the philosophy that it doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you believe, is prepared for the harlot’s seduction. We see the casual disregard for the truth crippling the church today.

f. **Drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus:** The woman not only persecutes, she also *revels* in her persecution of the godly as a drunk revels in wine.

g. **I marveled with great amazement:** John was amazed because this wasn’t pagan persecution (such as he knew in his day), but *religious* error and persecution. This is a *psuedo-church*, thirsty for the blood of the saints. “False religion is always the worst enemy of true religion.” (Walvoord)

i. We should never forget that some of the most vicious persecution conducted against true Christians has been done in the name of the church. In the days when the Roman Catholic

Queen Mary ruled England (known as *Bloody Mary*), some 288 Christians were burnt at the stake for their stand for Christian truth between 1555 and 1558. The first of these martyrs was a man named John Rogers, who, as he stood chained to a stake, and the fire rose around him, up to his legs and shoulders, he rubbed his hands in the flames as if he were washing his hands in cold water. Then he lifted his hands to the heavens and held them high until he was completely consumed by fire. Rogers went to the stake with such calm and dignity that the French Ambassador wrote that he went to his death “as if he was walking to his wedding.” His courage was so evident that the huge crowd burst into applause when they saw him walking to the stake.

### **C. The great harlot is interpreted.**

#### **1. (7) The angel tells John that the harlot will be explained to him.**

**But the angel said to me, “Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.**

**a. I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her:** The focus of the explanation is on the **beast**. It appeared that the harlot ruled (*rode*) the Antichrist<sup>13</sup> system, but he is the dynamic factor, using her as tyrants have always used religion – as a mere tool to accomplish their purposes.

#### **2. (8) The beast carrying the woman is plainly connected with the beast of Revelation 13.**

**The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the**

**Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.**

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