I know we picture Jesus as gently holding us, patting us on the back, saying, "There, there, it'll be all right," and sometimes that is precisely who He is. Yet more often, that is not the voice of Jesus we hear, it is the echo of your mother speaking. Thank God for mothers, but Jesus is seeking to get us to stop being babies. He wants us to grow up into His image.

Francis Frangipane

REVELATION CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Handout Twenty-three

Prayer Study #422

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In Chapter Seventeen and Eighteen we are going to see the fall of great Babylon. The identity of Babylon is one more of those highly debated and controversial topics in scripture. J. Vernon McGee sees the 17th chapter as dealing with spiritual Babylon, the harlot or whore as modern translations call her. This is the apostate church, whereas chapter 18 is dealing with commercial Babylon.

While there is some evidence that the apostate church may be headquartered in Rome, I think we do wrong to assign this as merely Roman Catholicism. Much of the church is apostate no matter what label it puts on itself, and this time period will be marked by the one-world church with all of the churches sharing an ecumenical unity. We see the dangers of this in movements such as Chrislam, which tries to combine both Islam and Christianity. Some of these churches are active even now in the United States and even in the Bible belt. I also remind you that most Biblical scholars believe that Thyatira prophetical symbolizes the Catholic Church, meaning that Sardis would represent the churches of the Protestant Reformation. Yet Thyatira is commended by the Lord for their works, love, service, faith, and patience, while Jesus says nothing good about Sardis, except for a small remnant who have not defiled their garments.

For me Babylon symbolizes the world system, both in the commercial sense and in the spiritual sense. In the latter we are reminded of the great mega churches who compromise the truth of God's word because they don't want to offend financial backers. They have made the Church of Jesus Christ into a country club type organization that has no power and no real commitment to Christ.

Revelation 17

<u>The City that Became a Prostitute</u>

17 *One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls then came and spoke to me, saying, Come with me! I will show you the doom (sentence, judgment) of the great harlot (idolatress) who is seated on many waters,*

2 *[She] with whom the rulers of the earth have joined in prostitution (idolatry) and with the wine of whose immorality (idolatry) the inhabitants of the earth have become*

intoxicated.
3 *And [the angel] bore me away [rapt] in the Spirit into a desert (wilderness), and I saw a woman seated on a scarlet beast that was all covered with blasphemous titles (names), and he had seven heads and ten horns.*

Ultimately, we will all reap what we sow. While we can be continuously cleansed (1st John 1:7) by the blood of the Lamb, when we come to the Lord with repentant hearts, the law of reaping and sowing is still a spiritual principal. The Word says, *"They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind"* (Hosea 8:7). The time is coming when the apostate church will reap in judgment what she has sown.

The idea here is that God is a faithful lover of His people who have turned their backs on Him. This is a sin against the love of God. The sin of a harlot is not about her own sin but also about the fact that she persuades others to sin. This should be a big wake-up call for the Church to return to Biblical principles so that the Church will not be deceived by the seduction of the apostate church and the anti-God world system.

It is interesting to note that John was taken by the Spirit to the wilderness. Many Bible characters received their most powerful calls and revelations when they were in the wilderness. (Examples: Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, etc.) It is here where we find no one to turn to except to God.

This woman, we learn in verse 9 and 18, is a city and that city is Rome, which will be the religious capital of the world. The beast has been previously identified as the Antichrist, ruling over the restored Roman Empire.

The Great Whore

4 *The woman was robed in purple and scarlet and bedecked with gold, precious stones, and pearls, [and she was] holding in her hand a golden cup full of the accursed offenses and the filth of her lewdness and vice.*
5 *And on her forehead, there was inscribed a name of mystery [with a secret symbolic meaning]: Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes (idolatresses) and of the filth and atrocities and abominations of the earth.*

This woman has all the trappings of royalty and luxury, rich with worldly things. The name on her forehead is mysterious to those in the dark, but to those in the light it is crystal clear. Most Biblical scholars take this to mean that Babylon is in reality Rome. In Rome, as in other ancient cities, each temple had sacred prostitutes. To have intercourse with them was considered an act of worship.

6 *I also saw that the woman was drunk, [drunk] with the blood of the saints (God's people) and the blood of the martyrs [who witnessed] for Jesus. And when I saw her, I was utterly amazed and wondered greatly.*

John is speaking here of the delight that Rome had in not just killing the Christians as a legal necessity but also pursing and persecuting them before their deaths as entertainment and sport.

This persecution began with Nero. Most scholars believed that he had Rome set on fire because he wanted to rebuild the city in his own honor. The Senate would not go along with Nero, so he had the city burned. To save his own skin, he decided to blame the Christians and use them as a scapegoat.

One of the first non-Christian writings that included a reference to Jesus was written by Tacitus. He wrote about this great persecution, the first and in many ways the most savage against Christians, of Nero against the believers:

"All human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor [Nero], and the propitiations of gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class populace. Christians, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius, at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a more mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred of mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs, and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burned, to serve as a nightly illumination when daylight had expired…Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion, for it was not, as it seemed for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty that they were being destroyed."

In verse 6 the saints probably refer to Old Testament saints, and the *martyrs of Jesus* refer to New Testament saints.

7 *But the angel said to me, Why do you wonder? I will explain to you the [secret symbolic meaning of the] mystery of the woman, as well as of the beast having the seven heads and ten horns that carries her.*

8 *The beast that you saw [once] was, but [now] is no more, and he is going to come up out of the Abyss (the bottomless pit) and proceed to go to perdition. And the inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been recorded in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world will be astonished when they look at the beast, because he [once] was, but [now] is no more, and he is [yet] to come.*

9 *This calls for a mind [to consider that is packed] with wisdom and intelligence [it is something for a particular mode of thinking and judging of thoughts, feelings, and*

purposes]. The seven heads are seven hills upon which the woman is sitting.
10 *And they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one still exists [and is reigning]; the other [the seventh] has not yet appeared, and when he does arrive, he must stay [but] a brief time.*
11 *And as for the beast that [once] was, but now is no more, he [himself] is an eighth ruler (king, head), but he is of the seven and belongs to them, and he goes to perdition.*

Here the seven hills symbolize Rome. Most scholars believe the seven kings are Roman emperors, although some believe the seven are the different forms of government through which Rome passed (kings, consuls, dictators, decemvirs, and military tribunes). The five *who have fallen* could be Julius Caesar, who was assassinated; Tiberius, who was poisoned or smothered; Caligula, who was assassinated; Claudius, who was poisoned; and Nero, who committed suicide. The one who exists could be Domitian who was living in John's day and who was eventually assassinated. The other who is *yet to come* is referring to Antichrist.

12 *Also the ten horns that you observed are ten rulers (kings) who have as yet received no royal dominion, but together they are to receive power* and authority as rulers for a single hour, along with the beast.
13 These have one common policy (opinion, purpose), and they deliver their power and authority to the beast.
14 They will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will triumph over them; for He is Lord of lords and King of kings—and those with Him and on His side are chosen and called [elected] and loyal and faithful followers.
15 And [the angel further] said to me, The waters that you observed, where the harlot is seated, are races and multitudes and nations and dialects (languages).
16 And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will [be the very ones to] hate the harlot (the idolatrous woman); they will make her cheerless (bereaved, desolate), and they will strip her and eat up her flesh and utterly consume her with fire.
17 For God has put it into their hearts to carry out His own purpose by acting in harmony in surrendering their royal power and authority to the beast, until the prophetic words (intentions and promises) of God shall be fulfilled.
18 And the woman that you saw is herself the great city which dominates and controls the rulers and the leaders of the earth.
These ten horns may stand for all the world powers or those who rule over the different divisions of the Roman Empire. They will be led by the Antichrist and will make war against the Lamb. They will also hate the apostate church with such violent hatred that they destroy the false church. The destruction of the apostate church will clear the way for the worship of Antichrist.

J. Vernon McGee comments on this portion of scripture: "*This is the frightful but just end of the apostate church. However, it does not improve the situation. Rather it introduces the darkest period for religion in the history of the world. The reign and religion of Antichrist is the darkest hour the earth will know, and yet it is the inevitable end of the distrust, which began in the Garden of Eden when men failed to believe God. It was given new impetus at the Tower of Babel, which was a rallying place for those against God. And finally it climaxed in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ when men rejected the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Having rejected the truth, the only alternative left for man is to believe the big lie, the strong delusion. History will culminate in the catastrophic coming of Christ to this earth, as we will see in chapter 19.*"