House of Cards (Revelation 17 & 18)

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:15-17 NIV)

Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:21 NIV)

"Worldliness is whatever any culture does to make sin seem normal and righteousness be strange." (Beale 2008, 300)

Revelation 17

The Apostle John used graphic and visual words to shock his Christian readers into seeing their godless culture for what it really was. The Roman Empire, worshipped as deity through the goddess *Roma*, was in eyes of God "the mother of all prostitutes." In these vv. Rome is referred to by a name which the Hebrew Christians would remember from their heritage: "Babylon." This woman is opposite the pure woman of Revelation 12: 1-2 and the "bride-city of Christ" in Revelation 21. (The latter two represent the redeemed people of God.)

vv. 1-6 describes the vision: a prostitute riding atop this hideous demonic beast. She is arrayed in affluence and luxury. She is seductive and intoxicated "with the blood of martyred believers." The prostitute/beast vision centers on idolatry, immorality, luxury, and persecution. John is marveled and horrified by this. Verse 1 said that the prostitute was about to be judged; yet John saw a sensuous display of extravagant debauchery. It appears as if Satan is winning! But the angel explains the vision.

In vv. 7-18 the angel says that the Lamb, not the prostitute/beast is the conqueror. Jesus, not Caesar, is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was the final death blow to Satan, who before his final fall turns on his followers. In vv. 16-18, Satan, who knows his time is short, destroys his own. The beast attacks the prostitute, tearing her to shreds. V. 17 makes it clear that all of this is under the sovereign hand of God. Anything Satan does ultimately backfires because he is no equal; only a frustrated and deluded insurgent.

Revelation 18

This chapter is a lament over the fall of Babylon/Rome—and every corrupt, godless, economic system over the course of history. In the spirit of Jeremiah 50-51, John writes that the prostitute's fate was sad but inevitable. There are several points to see in these vv.

1. 18:7 says that arrogance and hubris were at the core of the prostitute. "She glorified herself", "I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see"—these are statements of conceit and pride.

2. 18:8 says that when the end came, it did so swiftly. She truly was a "house of cards."

3. 18:9-19 says that those who mourned over her did so because they could no longer consume her affluence. She was loved for her stuff and her stuff alone. The lengthy lament shows how much they lusted for material acquisition and luxury.

4. 18:20 say that the community of the redeemed must rejoice over her fall! And why? Because she was evil, selfish, godless and murderous!

5. From vv. 11-13: "Those of us in the United States should read the cargo list carefully, for all the items were exploited by Rome at the expense of other nations from whom they were taken. The 'first world' fits this picture closest, for now the average first-world household contains most of the items mentioned here. We live in incredible luxury compared to most of the rest of the world." (Osborne 2002, 660)

6. There is no neutrality. You are counted either among the prostitute and the beast or the bride and Christ. You are either are a citizen of Babylon or the New Jerusalem. You are either marked by the beast or sealed by the Lamb. Worship Caesar or worship Jesus.

7. "The absence of God in the mainstream media should alert us to the fact that when we uncritically leave ourselves open to the perspective of the media's worldview, then slowly but surely, it leads us to cease thinking of the things of the Lord in the details of our every day life. The next time you watch TV or see a movie, ask yourself, 'What is the director wanting me to see?' The mindset that God is not active in the daily affairs of people can destroy us. What we revere we resemble, either for ruin or restoration." (Beale 2008, 299)