

## Revelation Chapter 17

### 1) **The Woman Sitting on the Beast (17:1-17:18)**

- 2) **1** Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, **2** with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.” **3** And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. **4** The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. **5** And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.” **6** And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her, I marveled greatly. **7** But the angel said to me, “Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. **8** The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. **9** This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; **10** they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. **11** As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. **12** And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. **13** These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. **14** They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.” **15** And the angel said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. **16** And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, **17** for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. **18** And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.”

- a) “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, **2** with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.” (17:1-2)
- i) Such great importance was attached to Rome as the center of the persecuting power of the first century the three whole chapters are given to portray her doom.
- (1) Such doom was foreshadowed in:
- (a) Rev. 14:8 - Another angel, a second, followed, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.”
- (i) Isaiah 21:9 - And behold, here come riders, horsemen in pairs!” And he answered, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the carved images of her gods he has shattered to the ground.”
- (b) Rev. 16:19 - The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath.
- ii) Seated on many waters - symbolic of the people over whom she reigns.
- (1) Rev. 17:15 - And the angel said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.
- iii) with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality – spiritual immorality in idol worship.
- iv) with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk – seduction of the kings of the provinces within her empire, to partake of evil with her.
- v) Isaiah 1:21-23 - **21** How the faithful city has become a whore, she who was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. **22** Your silver has become dross, your best wine mixed with water. **23** Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not bring justice to the fatherless, and the widow’s cause does not come to them.
- vi) Jeremiah 23:14-17 - **14** But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his evil; all of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah.” **15** Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets: “Behold, I will feed them with bitter food and give them poisoned water to drink, for from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has gone out into all the land.” **16** Thus says the Lord of hosts: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets

- who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. [17](#) They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, ‘It shall be well with you’; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, ‘No disaster shall come upon you.’”
- b) And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. (17:3)
- i) Two different signs of two allied creatures have been given.
- (1) Rev. 12:3 - And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems.
- (2) Rev. 13:1-2 – [1](#) And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. [2](#) And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear’s, and its mouth was like a lion’s mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.
- (3) The dragon, Satan, was described as being red.
- (4) The first henchman of the dragon is not described with a color, but it is described as seven heads and ten horns, with blasphemous names on its heads.
- (5) The scarlet beast is a symbol of the empire which supports the wicked city, and the woman is a symbol of the wicked city, Rome.
- (6) “Sitting on” indicates the woman controlled the beast.
- c) The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. (17:4)
- i) She wore the clothing of the rich and was adorned with jewelry of the rich.
- ii) But the golden cup she held indicates by its contents what she really is.
- (1) Rev. 17:6 - And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.
- d) And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.” (17:5)
- i) Mystery – something not understood, usually made known by revelation.
- ii) It is uncertain whether “mystery” was part of the name, or whether the woman was a mystery.
- iii) John probably knew that Babylon was a heap of ruins, and remains so today except for some efforts that Saddam Hussein made to rebuild the ancient city.

- (1) Jeremiah 51:37 - and Babylon shall become a heap of ruins, the haunt of jackals, a horror and a hissing, without inhabitant.
- (2) Perhaps that is why John was amazed – marveled.
- iv) Babylon had been renowned for its ungodliness and hatred of God’s people.
- v) The angel was about to reveal the mystery to John – the mystery of the woman and the beast upon which she was seated.
  - (1) The futurist view is that the literal city of Babylon will be restored in the last days.
  - (2) The continuous-historical view says that this is the apostate Roman Catholic Church.
    - (a) The Catholic view says that this is Martin Luther and the reformation movement.
    - (3) The best view is the explanation given to John.
- e) And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her, I marveled greatly. (17:6)
  - i) Over-indulged, not on wine, but on the blood of the saints.
  - ii) Seduced the nations to join her immorality
    - (1) Rev. 17:2 - with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.”
- f) The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. (17:8)
  - i) Rev. 13:3 - One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast.
  - ii) Rome expected Nero to be reincarnated, and a myth called the Nero Redivivus Myth was well known to the Romans.
  - iii) Was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction.
    - (1) Was –Nero as the emperor of *persecuting Rome*
    - (2) Is not – Nero committed suicide in March of 68 AD.
    - (3) Is about to rise from the bottomless pit – Domitian (Nero reincarnated, the emperor of *persecuting Rome* 81-96 AD).
      - (a) Nothing good came out of the bottomless pit – only evil
        - (i) Rev. 9:1-ff - 1 And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. 2 He opened the shaft of the

bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft.

- (4) Go to destruction
  - (a) Rev. 19:20 - And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.
- iv) And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.
  - (1) Dwellers on earth – all except God’s people
  - (2) None of the dwellers on earth would have their name written in the book of life – they had been deceived into worshiping the image of the beast and receiving the mark of the beast.
  - (3) From the foundation of the world – the eternal plan God made from the beginning to offer salvation to mankind.
  - (4) Will marvel
    - (a) perhaps at the mythical reincarnation of Nero in the person of Domitian.
    - (b) Rev. 13:3 - One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast.
    - (c) Also note that the empire was in disarray for a while after the death of Nero, when there were three “emperors in 1.5 years but stabilized under Vespasian (69–79 AD).
- g) **9** This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; **10** they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. (17:9-10)
  - i) This calls for a mind of wisdom
    - (1) Something important is about to be given.
    - (2) Rev. 13:18 - This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.
  - ii) The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated.
    - (1) Rome – the city built on seven hills.
    - (2) If there was any doubt about Babylon being symbolic of persecuting Rome (17:5), it is now clarified.

- (3) If the angel had stopped here, perhaps the need for wisdom would be minimalized, but the angel gives more interpretation.
- (4) In reference to the woman (city of Rome), the seven heads were seven hills.
- (5) In reference to the beast (the Roman empire), the seven heads were seven kings.
- iii) they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while.
  - (1) Five of whom have fallen
    - (a) August – 17 BC to 14 AD (natural death)
    - (b) Tiberius – 14 to 37 AD (natural death)
    - (c) Caligula – 37 to 41 AD (murdered by soldiers)
    - (d) Claudius – 41 to 54 AD (poisoned)
    - (e) Nero – 54 to 68 AD (suicide)
  - (2) one is,
    - (a) Vespasian – 69 to 79 AD (natural death)
    - (b) Revelation written during this time (one is)
  - (3) the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while.
    - (a) Titus – 79 to 81 AD (natural death)
- h) As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. (17:11)
  - i) Domitian – 81 to 96 AD (murdered)
  - ii) The eighth is of the same kind as the seven – an emperor of Rome.
- i) The interpretation of what the angel explained to John has been debated.
  - i) Another view that some like is:
    - (1) Five of whom have fallen
      - (a) Egypt (or Ancient Babylon)
      - (b) Assyria
      - (c) Babylon
      - (d) Medo-Persia
      - (e) Greece
    - (2) one is,
      - (a) Rome
    - (3) the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while.

- (a) The Roman Empire made “Christian” by Constantine (?)
- (4) An eighth
  - (a) An anti-Christian government in the future (?)
- ii) I do not subscribe to such a view. I do not see that it passes the test of being meaningful to Christians in the first century.
- j) **12** And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. **13** These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. **14** They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.” (17:12-14)
  - i) And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power,
    - (1) Some characteristics of the ten kings
      - (a) They receive authority for a short time (one hour)
      - (b) They are allied with the beast
      - (c) They hand over their power and authority to the beast
      - (d) They make war on the Lamb.
        - (i) Rev. 16:13-14 - ... For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.
      - (e) The Lamb will conquer them.
      - (f) They will (eventually) hate the woman (17:16)
    - (2) One explanation is that the ten are rulers of Rome’s provinces.
      - (a) Italy
      - (b) Achaia
      - (c) Asia
      - (d) Syria
      - (e) Egypt
      - (f) Africa
      - (g) Spain
      - (h) Gaul
      - (i) Britain
      - (j) Germany



- (3) The ten carry out all the agenda of the woman and the beast, but were a great fear to Rome – fear of rebellion.
- (a) Acts 19:40 - For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion.”
- k) **15** And the angel said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. **16** And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, **17** for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. **18** And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.”
- i) Water – peoples and multitudes and nations and language
- (1) Rev. 17:1 - “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters,
- (2) During the latter part of the first century, Rome was near the zenith of her greatness, with boundaries extending from the British Isles to the African deserts and from the Atlantic Ocean to the Euphrates River.
- ii) Ten horns
- (1) Rome’s fear is realized, and the allegiances of the provinces changed dramatically.
- (2) Even the beast turned against the woman.
- (3) Daniel 2:41-43 - **41** And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. **42** And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. **43** As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay.
- (4) Verse 17 states that such a change was according to the plan and purpose of God.
- (5) Rev. 17:13 - These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast.



(6) God has put it into their hearts ... (17:17)

(a) The ten horns were unwittingly following God's plan by handing over their power and authority to the beast.

(b) They did this until the words of God were fulfilled.

(i) The words of God as given to John in Revelation.

(ii) They helped to fill the cup of the woman with evil and the blood of Christians until God was ready to unleash his wrath.

(7) the woman that you saw ... (17:18).

(a) Is the city of Rome – that had dominion over the kings of the earth.

### 3) Pictures

a) Seven Hills, woman sitting on the beast

