

REVELATION 17

Introductory Comments:

- We have seen the three cycles of seven judgments played out now. In the first two cycles (seals and trumpets), there was an interlude before the final judgment. In the last cycle (bowls), there was no interlude. Chapter 16 ends with the seventh bowl being poured out and a scene of Judgment Day. As we begin chapter 17, we might expect to see another cycle of seven. Instead, we are shown in more explicit detail how the devil and his kingdom shall be judged in the End. We have seen this judgment expressed already, but chapters 17 and 18 hone in on the judgment of God's enemies to emphasize the glorious truth that He will avenge His saints as promised. Thus, in these "Judgment Scenes," we see the judgment of the Prostitute (Harlot) of Babylon, the two beasts, and the dragon, along with all the wicked who belong to the devil's kingdom. God is a God of Justice – too often, people think of Him as the "smiley face in the sky." He is love, but He is also perfectly just, and He will judge and punish His enemies.

Rev. 17:1-2

- "One of the seven angels . . ." – Some identify this angel as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit (Dr. Gieschen, professor at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, for example). While this is certainly possible, it is not probable. This is most likely a created angel employed by Christ and inspired by the Holy Spirit to share these visions with St. John.
- "The great prostitute (harlot)" – certainly John sees this in his context and identifies her with Rome. But, we shouldn't see this as referring only to Rome, but rather as symbolizing all evil empires and peoples that go against God's will throughout every generation.
- "With whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality" – we see sexual immorality all over the place today (just look at the fight to make homosexuality a legitimate partnership in our country). But, truth be told, this is nothing new. Sexual immorality has been around since the beginning, after the Fall in the Garden. Thus, the image of the Great Prostitute of Babylon and her perversions are a reference to the immorality that occurs throughout every generation. And, a constant equation throughout history has been that the more power one has, the more inclined towards sexual immorality one has been. One only needs to look at the history of kings (and other rulers) right up to the present day to see this played out.

Rev. 17:3-6

- "The adornments of the Woman" – To the world, she looks beautiful, but, in reality, she is an abomination. The book of Revelation un.masks things for what they are – great earthly military and political power are nothing before God; the earthly lusts and perversions are satisfying for the sinful human flesh, but are abominations before God. All the evils in the world seem like they are unstoppable, but they will come under God's wrath, be judged, and destroyed.
- "She is seated on a scarlet beast" – Same beast as in ch. 13; the woman is an ally of Satan, who manifests himself as the beast.
- The best way to understand the Prostitute of Babylon is to contrast her with the Bride of Christ (the church). She represents all unbelief, just as the church represents all belief. All unbelievers are wed to the Prostitute, while all believers are wed to Christ. Her name, "Babylon the Great," is contrasted with the New Jerusalem (Satan's followers vs. the Church, made up of Christ's followers).
- The Prostitute's influence spills over to all nations of all times. In other words, to try to identify her with some specific country, city, or historical figure, is to misunderstand what she symbolizes, namely evil, unbelief, and blasphemy. For example, the Prostitute is alive and well in the United States today, as is evident in the crass sexual immorality and moral decline we see, even as she

was alive and well in the first century, manifesting herself through the immoral and evil emperors of the Roman Empire.

- What we also see here depicted is another picture of Satan's attempt to mimic God with his "Unholy Trinity." The Woman represents the second beast and the "scarlet beast" she rides represents the first beast, both of whom we met in chapter 13. The scarlet color of the beast is the same color of the Dragon (cf. 12:3), showing that Satan is behind the activities of the Woman and the Beast in the world. Satan wants to be God. Thus, he creates his own Woman (Bride) to mimic Christ's Bride (the Church) – see note above.
- "Drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" – Satan's number one goal is to destroy God's children. His weapons are temptation and deceit. He uses the apparent beauty and attractiveness of the Prostitute to lure sinful human beings away from the truth. He convinces them that engaging in sexual immorality is perfectly fine and not sinful in any way. The fact that God does not condone such behavior shows, according to Satan, that He wants to rob men and women of pleasure and happiness (the same trick he pulled on Eve in the Garden). "Come worship me," the Dragon implores, "for I will allow you to live out all of your fantasies." And when children of God fall into his deceitful temptations, there is great rejoicing in Satan's kingdom. He and his demons revel in this. And, even when Satan and his demons fail to lure God's children away, they use the evil powers in the world to persecute and kill them, reveling in that, as well. Of course, the whole point of Revelation is that God and His saints will have the last laugh, for those who have been slain for the faith will live forever in Paradise, while Satan, his demons, and all unbelievers will suffer eternal torment in Hell.
- "Seven heads" – represents the perfect craftiness and cleverness of Satan through his beasts (Satan is very good at what he does!). "Ten horns" – represents the governmental and political powers through which Satan works to achieve his goal. Both of these also have specific historical identifications as well, as we will see.
- "Mystery, Babylon the Great, Mother of Prostitutes and of Earth's Abominations" – This is the title given to the Prostitute of Babylon, for she, in the employment of Satan, is the source of all immorality in the world. Again, contrast her with the Bride of Christ, the Church, as they are complete opposites.

Rev. 17:7-14

- "I will tell you the mystery . . ." – St. John "marvels greatly" at the vision before him, but the angel assures him that he will make things clear.
- "The beast . . . was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction" – Here is a reference to the "little season" Satan will have when he is unleashed before the End. The beast "was" – Before Christ came, Satan was allowed to stop the Gospel from going forth and to enter the heavenly throne room to accuse God's children. We see the success he had throughout the OT Era as the Gospel was kept pretty much to the Israelites, and, even more, to the remnant within the Israelite nation which believed. The beast "is not" – When Christ died on the cross, He crushed the serpent's (Satan's) head, and when He rose from the tomb, He destroyed death and Hell forever. Satan was thus bound and no longer able to stop the Gospel and no longer had access to the heavenly throne room. Throughout the NT Era, the Gospel will be allowed to go throughout the world and Satan is powerless to stop it. We have seen the result of this, as there are Christians all over the globe. The beast "is about to rise . . ." – Satan will be unleashed for a short time before the End to "deceive the nations" once again (cf. Rev. 20). During this "little season," Satan's war against the Church will be intensified. He will infiltrate the Church with many false teachers and turn the multitudes away from the truth of the Gospel. But, all of this will be for naught, as the End is already written in stone. Satan and his entire kingdom will be defeated and will "go to destruction" in the End. The angel reveals all of this to St. John, and thus,

to us, to warn us against that time to come, that we may remain steadfast in the Word and inherit the Kingdom prepared for us.

- “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” – All unbelievers will be enamored by the beast when he appears before the End. They will be attracted to Satan’s deceptions and there will be a great apostasy (turning away from the Truth). The true Christian Church will be nothing more than a rather insignificant remnant during Satan’s “little season.” The vast majority of those who claim to be Christian will actually belong to Satan’s kingdom. What is sinful will be promoted as good, and what is good will be promoted as nonsense.
- “This calls for a mind with wisdom . . .” – Like with the number 666 in 13:18, the angel says that understanding these things requires godly wisdom. As we saw, the number 666 had an historical identification (Nero Caesar), but also represented all evil rulers of all time right up to the End. So, in the same way, the “seven heads” has an historical identification and refers to the Rome, which was built on “seven hills.” According to the angel, this also refers to “seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does he must remain only a little while.” While this could have some historical reference, the deeper meaning here is figurative and refers to Satan’s activities through rulers in the world throughout history, not just specific Roman Emperors. The parallel between the beast who “was, is not, and will rise” cannot be overlooked. The “king” who “has not yet come” thus signifies the End-Time Antichrist through which Satan will “deceive the nations.” This is clear given the statement that this last “king must remain only a little while.” This is yet another reference to Satan’s “little season” before the End. Likewise, the “ten horns” refer to “ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast.” Again, this is a symbolic reference to Satan’s “little season” when the rulers of the world will unite with him to make war with Christ’s Church. The numbers “seven” and “ten” here indicate that Satan’s “little season” will be “perfect” and “complete,” i.e., just as God has planned, so that He will be vindicated in the End and no one will be able to call Him unjust on Judgment Day.
- “The Lamb will conquer them . . .” – As bad as things will get during Satan’s “little season,” the End is already sealed. The Lamb has already conquered the Dragon. This will come to ultimate fulfillment when the Lamb returns in glory. To all the world, it will seem as though the Dragon and his beasts have been victorious, but this is merely an illusion, for the Lamb will be shown to all in the End that the victory is His. This provides great comfort for the Church of the Lamb, for all who believe in Him can rest assured that no matter how bad things get in this world, theirs is the victory with the Lamb forever and ever. Amen.

Rev. 17:15-18

- This last section simply reveals that all will not be well in Satan’s kingdom. There will be in-fighting and destruction from within. Evil does not have the capacity to live in peace and harmony. Thus, the evil alliance will be broken near the End, as those who belong to Satan’s kingdom will lash out at each other and try to destroy one another. In the midst of this in-fighting, the Lamb will appear in great glory and all who belong to Satan’s kingdom will be destroyed together.