

Revelation 17

Chapters 17 and 18 go together. Chapter 17 reveals the destruction of the one world religion—who is here referred to as a “great prostitute” or “harlot.” Chapter 18 deals with the destruction of the Beast or one world government. Chapter 17 provides the interpretation for itself.

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits by many waters.² With her the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.”

One of the seven angels in chapter 16 invited John to “come” and witness the punishment of false religion. The “many waters” represents a multitude of people. The peoples “were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries” which simply means that they will fully embrace the worship of the Beast. “The inhabitants of the earth” will willfully participate in all the debauchery associated with the worship of the Beast.

³ Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. ⁴ The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. ⁵ The name written on her forehead was a mystery:

BABYLON THE GREAT

THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES

AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

⁶ I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God’s holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

Notice the phrasing of verse 3, “then the angel carried me away in the Spirit.” Another way of translating this, which would seem to fit the context better, is that the angel carried John away “in his spirit.” In other words, John was not physically carried away in his body but would have experienced a vision according to John Waalvoord in the Bible Knowledge Commentary.

John describes the beast that she rode upon as being “scarlet” in color. This would appear to correspond to the devil. False religion sits astride the seat of Anti-Christ’s location, Babylon. False religion will be adorned with all the enticements and adornments of the One-world religion. All of the trappings of this One-world religion—the worship of the Beast, will be so alluring and enticing to those who live during the Great Tribulation era.

The mysterious name upon her forehead was “Babylon the Great, the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth.” The very first commandment given in Exodus 20 was that people were to have no other gods before the Lord. Yet during the tribulation era, idolatry will be at a fevered pitch as people participate in a One-world religion.

John describes this One-world religion as being “drunk with the blood of God’s holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.” The persecution of God’s people, that is, those who will follow Jesus and refuse to worship the Beast, will be slaughtered as enemies of the state.

Waalvoord, et al, offered:

Babylon then is the symbol of apostasy and blasphemous substitution of idol-worship for the worship of God in Christ. In this passage Babylon comes to its final judgment.¹

The Angel’s Explanation

When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. ⁷ Then the angel said to me: “Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns.

John was completely amazed or shocked by what he saw but “the angel” explained the vision to him. There is a lot of symbolism in this chapter. One must not assume that there is a literal woman, rather the woman represents the deceiving nature of false religion upon the populace. The seven heads and ten horns are symbolic as well.

⁸ The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and yet will come up out of the Abyss and go to its destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not

¹ Walvoord, John F. “Revelation.” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck. Vol. 2. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985. 971. Print.

been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because it once was, now is not, and yet will come.

⁹ Notice the description of “the beast.” “The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and yet will come up out of the Abyss and go to its destruction.” The fact that the beast **was, now is not, and will come up** in the future is another indication of what was introduced in 13:3. The supernatural survival and revival of both the world ruler and his empire will impress the world as being supernatural and will lead to worship of the beast and Satan.²

This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits.¹⁰ They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for only a little while.¹¹ The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.¹² “The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast.¹³ They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast.¹⁴ They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.”

The seven heads represents seven hills. Rome has seven hills. The geographical description is why some scholars believe that Rome will be resurrected as a world power, hence the One-world government and One-world religion will be located in Rome. There is no definitive proof of such a claim however.

Note Waalvoord:

A close study of the passage does not support the conclusion that this refers to the city of Rome. Seiss, for instance, offers extensive evidence that the reference is to rulers rather than to physical mountains³

Spiritual insight “wisdom” is needed to understand this chapter. The beast has influenced people since the Fall in the Garden to worship idols. While the “seven

² Walvoord, John F. “Revelation.” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck. Vol. 2. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985. 971. Print.

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heads” clearly represent hills, one cannot argue definitively that it will actually be Rome itself.

The “ten horns” represent 10 kings who will each have a brief reign but they are united in opposition to the Lamb. They will give their power to the beast, that is, they will partner up with the devil to fight against Jesus when He returns. They will be no match for the Lamb will triumph with His saints.

¹⁵ Then the angel said to me, “The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. ¹⁶ The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. ¹⁷ For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to hand over to the beast their royal authority, until God’s words are fulfilled. ¹⁸ The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.”

After the angel explained the woman riding on the scarlet colored beast and all seven hills and 10 kings, John was given the rest the interpretation of the concluding section.

True to his nature, Satan will turn on the One-world religion. Although the One-world religion has been used to deceive countless multitudes to follow the Beast, once it’s purpose is completed and serves no further purpose, Satan will turn on this false religion. The description of the One-world religion’s destruction is rather graphic.

At what point during the tribulation will this event occur? Some believe this will occur at the time of the Anti-Christ’s declaring himself to be God at the mid-way point of the Tribulation.

Daniel 9:27 and Matthew 24:15 appears to support this idea.

Of great importance is verse 17. Although Satan, the Beast/Anti-Christ, will be the agent of destruction for this One-world false religion, it is imperative that one understand God has purposed its destruction. God has used wicked kingdoms to punish others throughout history. Although God has nothing to do with evil, He is Sovereign and will use the Beast (Anti-Christ) as the tool to destroy this One-world false religion.

So here, the angel explains that the “woman” was “the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.” Hence, the woman on the scarlet beast is symbolic of Babylon.

One must remember that Revelation is not one linear progression from chapter to chapter, otherwise great confusion will occur. Indeed some chapters do provide linear progression in the unfolding of the Revelation, but chapters 17 and 18 serve largely to provide more details of what will occur at the Battle of Armageddon or events leading up to the Second Coming of Christ.

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