

The Mother Of Harlots

Revelation 17 Notes

The Identification Of The Harlot Babylon (vss. 1-6)

- The waters on which the harlot of John's vision sits are symbolic of the nations and such over which she ruled, which stood between her and invading nations and that added greatly to her wealth. In the Old Testament, four cities were designated as harlots: Nineveh (Nahum 3:1, 4), Tyre (Isaiah 23:15-17), Babylon (Isaiah 47:5-15) and Jerusalem (Isaiah 1:21). This harlot is a combination of the characteristics of the harlots of old: the conquest, rapine and cruelty of Babylon; the commerce of Tyre; the pleasures of Babylon; and the religious whoredom of Jerusalem. Rome was an adequate symbol of all that had gone before her.
- Like those in Isaiah's day (29:9), these that dwell in the earth were drunken, but they were intoxicated with the strong drink of lust and the treacherous wine of power and conquest (cf. Habakkuk 2:5, 15).
- The beast represents the Roman Empire, described as scarlet-colored, which supports the harlot, who is attired in scarlet. Scarlet was the symbol of luxury and splendor, proving a mark of distinction. The scarlet of sin is opposite to the white of righteousness and purity (cf. Isaiah 1:18).
- The harlot is adorned with gold, precious stones and pearls -- all that attracts attention, impresses and allures with a sense of seductive grandeur. She strives to cover her true harlot's character with the outward splendor and glory of a queen. The world may serve its drink in a golden cup, but what it offers is abominable in the sight of God, and leads to degradation and death. It contains all that appeals to the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and pride of life, but it results in base and filthy consequences.
- The word "mystery" is probably a part of the name itself, indicating not something hidden but something made known; for whatever mystery may have enshrouded this woman is now openly exposed. That which the harlot would keep hidden is now unmasked; she is the mother-harlot of all seduction and everything detestable in the sight of God.
- In the harlot's intoxicating drink is the blood of martyrs who had offered their lives for Christ on the sacrificial altar, no matter what form that may have taken. Many saints in God's kingdom had fallen slain at her feet, victims of her wiles and their own weakness.

The Explanation Of The Mystery Of The Woman And The Beast (vss. 7-14)

- The vision was intended to strike an emotional chord in John's mind; also, a part of the angel's mission was to explain the mystery to John. The woman and the beast are inseparable, for lust rides upon and controls any self-seeking, persecuting political beast.
- John seems now to identify the beast with the emperor, for the empire is personified in its emperor. It is the beast who authorizes the persecution of the saints on whose blood the harlot was drunk. In the discussion on the head that received the "deadly wound" and was healed, it was concluded that Nero had received the "deadly wound," and his life was revived in Domitian. The earth dwellers are amazed at the beast's vitality -- how he can enter the abyss of destruction, revive and come forth in another form to continue his wicked work.
- The heads, mountains and kings are not to be thought of as seven individual kings or seven forms of government, but as a symbol of secular anti-Christian power. Repeatedly John has used seven as the symbol for completeness or perfection, and ten for the fullness of power. The beast represented the total of forceful anti-Christian or anti-theistic opposition, and the harlot represented that which is lustful, enticing and seductive -- all that appeals to the flesh. The seven kings, therefore, were a symbolic number, representing all kings or kingdoms, past, present and future that would oppose the kingdom of God.
- They "which have received no kingdom as yet" look to the future for their reign. They probably symbolize the total future powers aligned with the beast, the total number of kings and small kingdoms that ally themselves with the world opposition to Christ. The time period of these is relatively short -- "one hour" -- a period signifying brevity.
- As the saints are to be perfected together in one mind and one spirit, with one soul, striving for the faith of the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 1:27), which mind is the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5), so the beast and his associates are of one mind -- the mind of the dragon. These with one accord give their power and authority to the beast in opposition to the Lamb.
- These ten kings who have subordinated themselves to the beast, together with the beast, shall war against the Lamb and His forces. All opponents of the Lamb are doomed to defeat, however, for when the dragon was cast down (12:7-10) all authority and power were given to the Lamb (Matthew 18:18), and all things were put in subjection under His feet (Ephesians 1:20-23; 1 Peter 3:22). Not only shall God be victorious in this war, but His followers, identified as the "called, and chosen and faithful" shall share in the triumph.

Further Identification Of The Harlot (vss. 15-18)

- The angel next explains that the many waters represent the empire and the many ethnic groups and nationalities over which Rome held sway (cf. 5:9; 13:7). A major weakness of Rome was its inability to amalgamate the diverse peoples into one. Rome could conquer and control by force, but it had no cohesive power with which to cement the conquered into a homogenous kingdom.
- Love among men or nations has often turned to hatred as intense as the affection it replaced. This change would result in the destruction of the harlot; she would be made desolate, stripped her of her grandeur and wealth, her flesh eaten and consumed, and her remains destroyed by burning with fire. As long as nations can get what they want from one another, they continue to commit economic and political fornication.
- God's objective in putting it in their hearts to come to one mind was that His words of judgment against the harlot would be accomplished. Not a word failed.
- Rome was the mistress of nations. She symbolizes the world of lust, seduction and the allurements of all that appeals to the flesh. The church has had two great enemies and one rival for the affection which is rightfully hers. The enemies who sought her destruction were the beast out of the sea and the beast out of the earth. The rival, who was also an enemy, is the world which tries to entice and persuade her to commit spiritual fornication.