

Revelation Chapter 17

Revelation chapter 17 goes back and fills in some of what has already happened during the Tribulation. Chapter 16 is when the Great Tribulation is finished. Now chapter 17 covers the specifics of when Babylon the Harlot or the Religious Babylon is Destroyed (see article "[Babylon the Harlot](#)").

Archaeologists tell us that Babylon is the cradle of civilization. Located on the shores of the Euphrates River, the ruins of this city have revealed some of the most ancient documents of past generations.

This city begun by Nimrod, who was a rebel before the Lord, authored some of the greatest evils ever to fall on humankind. Two of these evils will be destroyed during the Tribulation period. Revelation 17 is the destruction of the religious Babylon that takes place about the center of the seven years after the Antichrist declares himself to be God and no longer needs the One World Religion.

In chapter 18 we will read about the destruction of the commercial, political Babylon when it takes place at the end of the Great Tribulation.

In ancient days Satan seemed to make Babylon the capital of this evil operation. From this headquarters was started false religion, humanity's attempt for self-government in defiance of God's will and city dwellings for commercial and social purposes contrary to God's command to "be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28).

These great evils, which have damned the souls of millions by substituting counterfeit solutions to natural human problems that would ordinarily lead a person to God, will all be destroyed at the end of the Tribulation period. Chapter 17 describes the coming judgment of God on the religious system that has enslaved the human race in superstitious darkness for centuries.

The woman is a great city: "The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth" (Rev. 17:18). Many have taken this to mean that the woman represents the capital city of Antichrist's kingdom, but this cannot be, for Antichrist himself rules over the kings of the earth.

If then, the woman is not the Antichrist, what other possible explanation can we have for such unanimous world dominance? The only answer is the one system before which all kings, dictators, and nations have been forced to bow down throughout history, that is, *the Babylonian religion of idolatry*. One cannot go anywhere in the world without being confronted with some semblance of the idolatry.

No system in the world's history has enslaved more people than this awful religion. It should not take us by surprise that this prostitute woman, the religious system, is referred to as a city. When used symbolically, a woman is always intended throughout the Scripture to signify a spiritual or religious movement. If a good woman, it is "Jehovah's wife" or "the bride of Christ". If an evil woman, such as "a prostitute," it represents the evil religious system of idolatry.

Since the woman who rides the beast gets her authority from the beast, the Holy Spirit uses this description to show how religious Babylon and governmental Babylon are so intertwined they are presented together. However, they are destroyed at different times. The prostitute (religious Babylon), is destroyed by the "beast and the kings of the earth," who "hate the prostitute" and kill her.

This clears the way for Antichrist to fulfill the lifetime dream of Satan to get people to worship him. She is destroyed in the middle of the Tribulation; Babylon the governmental system will be destroyed at the end, when commercial, political Babylon is destroyed (Rev. 18). With "Mystery Babylon, the Mother of Prostitutes" out of the way, "all inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast, all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (Rev. 13:8).

The Vision of the Woman - Ten details describe this woman:

1. The great prostitute;
2. Who sits on many waters;
3. With her the kings of the earth committed adultery;
4. The inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries;
5. A woman sitting on a scarlet beast;
6. Dressed in purple and scarlet;
7. Glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls;
8. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries;
9. On her forehead: Mystery Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes and of the Abomination of the Earth;
10. Drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

Even before we come to the angel's interpretation of this vision, it is clear that we are not dealing with a mere human being, for no one woman can commit fornication with the kings of the earth, nor can a woman be "drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus."

Verses 1-3: Chapters 17 and 18 picture the judgment of God on a system, empire, or city called Babylon the Great (17:5); it is a more detailed description of the seventh vial (16:17). The "great whore" (verse 1), is named "BABYLON THE GREAT" (in verse 5). Chapters 17 and 18 show her "judgment". The "waters" represent the various peoples and nations of the earth (verse 15). She "sitteth upon" them in the sense that she has worldwide influence. Her harlotry and "fornication" refer either to physical immorality or (more likely), spiritual adultery. Idolatry and religious apostasy (compare Isa. 1:21; 23:16-17; Jer. 2:20-37; 13:27; Ezek. 16:15-43; Hosea 2:5; Nahum 3:4). The "kings" and "inhabitants of the earth" have opened their arms to her influence.

The “beast” is the first Beast of chapter 13, the Antichrist and his empire. Her sitting upon the Beast represents the intimate association between the Antichrist and the harlot (an association of support, influence, or control).

Revelation 17:1 "And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:"

“Seven angels”: The reference to these angels’ links chapters 17 and 18 with the vial (bowl), judgments (chapter 16), which extend to the second coming of Christ (see note on 16:17). Chapters 17 and 18 focus on one aspect of those vial judgments, the judgment of Babylon. The judgments already described are identified as targeting the final world system.

“Great whore” (see note on 14:8). Prostitution frequently symbolizes idolatry or religious apostasy (compare Jer. 3:6-9; Ezek. 16:30ff; 20:30; Hosea 4:15; 5:3; 6:10; 9:1). Nineveh (Nahum 3:1, 4), Tyre (Isa. 23:17), and even Jerusalem (Isa. 1:21), are also depicted as harlot cities.

“Sitteth on many waters”: This picture emphasizes the sovereign power of the harlot. The picture of a ruler seated on a throne, ruling the waters, which symbolize the nations of the world (see verse 15).

This "whore" here is not a literal woman. In Hosea, his wife (who was a whore), was speaking of Israel. Here, this "whore" is speaking of the idolatrous church.

This statement "sitteth upon many waters", speaks of large groups of people. This is not the true church. This is the apostate church. God calls it the harlot church; the church that is not faithful to God, the church that is worldly. This church, while claiming to be Christian, finds many reasons to conform to the beast and the evil world system. This will be the one world religion which will appear after the church (Christians), have been raptured (see article “[One World Religion](#)”).

This, without question, is the part of the church that has compromised with the world and is no longer a chaste virgin in the sight of God. I truly believe that a large portion of the church falls into this category today. Worldliness has crept into our churches. The sad thing is that if she would repent, God would take her back, but she will not repent.

The Bride of Christ is called a city, and that is the portion of the church which has not compromised. The other (opposite), side of that is the harlot. It is also called a city but is evil because of compromise. This is not only the apostate church in Rome, but the apostate in many other churches, as well. Again, the waters let us know that this apostate church is throughout the masses of people.

Revelation 17:2 "With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication."

“kings ... have committed fornication”: The harlot will ally herself with the world’s political leaders. Fornication here does not refer to sexual sin, but to idolatry (see note on 14:8). All the world rulers will be absorbed into the empire of Satan’s false christ.

“Wine of her fornication”: The harlot’s influence will extend beyond the world’s rulers to the rest of mankind (compare verse 15; 13:8, 13:14). The imagery does not describe actual wine and sexual sin, but pictures the world’s people being swept up into the intoxication and sin of a false system of religion.

We see here, that this universal apostasy (unfaithfulness to God), does not affect just one class of people. This unfaithfulness is from the very rich and powerful (kings), to the very poor.

The same way a drunken person naturally has no earthly idea what he is doing, this apostate group is so carried away with the world that they, too, do not realize the terribleness of what they are doing. God will judge this idolatrous church. Judgment begins at the house of God.

Revelation 17:3 "So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns."

“In the spirit”: Compare 1:10, 4:2; 21:10). The Holy Spirit transports John into the wilderness (a deserted, lonely and desolate wasteland), perhaps to give him a better understanding of the vision.

“A woman”: The harlot (of verse 1), Babylon.

“Scarlet colored beast”: The Antichrist (compare 13:14, 14:9; 16:10), who for a time will support and use the false religious system to effect world unity. Then he will assume political control (compare verse 16). Scarlet is the color of luxury, splendor and royalty.

“Full of names of blasphemy”: Because of his self-deification (compare 13:1; Dan. 7:25; 11:36; 2 Thess. 2:4).

“Having seven heads and ten horns”: This pictures the extent of Antichrist’s political alliances (see notes on verses 9-12; 13:1).

This "wilderness" here, I believe, means the world. This "scarlet colored beast" shows evil world power.

Since this woman sits upon this beast, it means that her power comes from this evil beast (in Revelation 18:2), as It supports her. This woman, it appears, has decided to trust the powers of this world over God's power.

Seven denotes spiritually complete, ten denotes world government, and horns denote power.

You can easily see, since she is on top of this thing, she guides it, but receives her support from the beast. The word "scarlet" can be very good or very evil. In this case, it is very evil. This great evil (blasphemy), that this woman (church), has committed is spiritual adultery (the watering down or changing of the Word).

Verses 4-6: The elegant clothing and jewelry of the "woman" show her wealth and attractiveness, but her activities are filthy and abominable to God. Her mystery name is **BABYLON THE GREAT**".

Much of the world's idolatry can be traced back to historical Babylon (compare Gen. 11:1-9), including the mother-child cult of Semiramis-Tammuz (compare Jer. 44:16-19; Ezek. 8:9, 14), which entered other cultures as Ashtaroht-Baal, Aphrodite-Eros, Venus-Cupid, and even Madonna-Child. As the fountainhead of idolatry, Babylon the harlot is the **MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATION OF THE EARTH**. The harlot has killed many of God's "saints" and Christian "martyrs" throughout the ages, and will do so again during the Tribulation period. Admiration" (Greek thauma), here means "amazement" (compare 13:3; 17:6).

Revelation 17:4 "And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:"

"Purple and scarlet": The colors of royalty, nobility, and wealth. The woman is portrayed as a prostitute who has plied her trade successfully and become extremely wealthy.

"Decked" Prostitutes often dress in fine clothes and precious jewels to allure their victims (compare Prov. 7:10). The religious harlot Babylon is no different, adorning herself to lure the nations into her grasp.

"A golden cup": Still another evidence of the harlot's great wealth (compare Jer. 51:7); but the pure gold is defiled by the filthiness of her immorality. Just as a prostitute might first get her victim drunk, so the harlot system deceives the nations into committing spiritual fornication with her.

This "fornication" here spoken of, I truly believe is spiritual adultery or compromise with the world. God will tolerate most anything except the worship of someone else or something else. I truly believe this has to do with the watering down of Jesus (Who He is).

Ancient Babylon is a type or prefigure of this future Babylon. The harlot will do what literal Babylon did in the past:

- (1) Oppress God's people, and
- (2) Propagate a false religious system.

Semiramis (also known as Ishtar and Isis), who was both Nimrod's wife and mother, was worshiped as the "mother of god" and a "fertility goddess" because she had to be extremely fertile to give birth to all the pagan incarnate gods that represented Nimrod.

Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth.

The color scheme of this one world religion as defined (in Rev. 17:4), is most revealing: "The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet." If you are familiar with pictures of the Vatican Council as published in national magazines, you will have observed that the bishops and cardinals wore purple and scarlet robes.

You will also see that the pope and other church leaders are "glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls." They hold "a golden cup in their hand, filled with abominable things and the filthiness of their adulteries." These abominable things and adulteries are the idolatry and worship of gods other than Jesus Christ. In Rome can be seen all manner of idols in the very headquarters of the Roman Church. More costly surroundings can scarcely be found than in the Vatican.

The Catholic Church is many times decorated this way, but I believe this includes all of the apostate churches, Protestant and Catholic. Perhaps this is people sitting on a church pew, but not really being the bride of Christ. There are some in all churches, but most assuredly the church in Rome. You can see great masses of gold, silver, and jewels. Usually when a church building is decked out like this, it is in an area where there is abject poverty.

"Purple" indicates that this was in the church, because purple means godliness. This was a false godliness.

This "golden cup" also indicates this is inside the church, because gold symbolically means the purity of God. We know this "cup" belonged to God. To me, it just means that the sins of the world have been brought into the church.

This "fornication" here spoken of, I truly believe is spiritual adultery or compromise with the world. God will tolerate most anything except the worship of someone or something else. I truly believe this has to do with the watering down of Jesus.

Revelation 17:5 "And upon her forehead [was] a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

"Forehead": It was customary for Roman prostitutes to wear a headband with their name on it (compare Jer. 3:3), parading their wretchedness for all to see. The harlot's forehead is emblazoned with a 3-fold title descriptive of the world's final false religious system.

"Mystery": A New Testament mystery is truth once hidden, but in the New Testament revealed (see notes on Matt. 13:11; Eph. 3:4-5). Spiritual Babylon's true identity is yet to be revealed. Thus, the precise details of how it will be manifested in the world are not yet known.

“BABYLON THE GREAT”: This Babylon is distinct from the historical, geographical city of Babylon (which still existed in John’s day). The details of John’s vision cannot be applied to any historical city (see note on 14:8)

MOTHER OF HARLOTS”: All false religion stems ultimately from Babel, or Babylon (compare Gen. chapter 11; see note on 14:8).

Just as God marked the 144,000 with the name of the Father, and just as the bride of Christ is marked with the name of Christ, we see here this group marked on the forehead. This name alone makes you know how evil and worldly this church is.

This worldly part of the church, though nominally Christian, is yet more faithful to the world than to God. Notice here, that the church that pretends to be Christian and is not, does more to cause harm than those worldly people who claim to be lost. The worldly church always persecutes the faithful church. This evil in the church is an abomination to God. It is a mystery how this could happen in the church.

As the fountainhead of idolatry, Babylon the harlot is the MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH; the harlot has killed many of God’s saints and Christian martyrs throughout the ages, and will do so again during the Tribulation period.

Revelation "17:6 And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration."

The blood of the saints ... martyrs of Jesus”: Some see the first group as Old Testament saints, and the second as New Testament saints, an unimportant distinction since this pictures the “witnesses”, or martyrs, of the Tribulation. John’s point is that the harlot is a murderer. False religion has killed millions of believers over the centuries, and the final false system will be far more deadly than any that preceded it.

The faithless part of the church is guilty of the blood of the saints. In Matthew 12:20 we read that Jesus says "He that is not with me is against me". This watered-down church is actually causing great problems for those who are sold out to God. We do know that Rome had a great deal to do with the death of the martyrs and even had a hand in crucifying Jesus.

Of course, the Jews (church), of that day had even more to do with the crucifixion of Jesus. However, the most blame for His death has to be placed on each of us. Sin placed Jesus on the cross. He went to the cross to crucify sin. His sacrifice stopped us from being a servant to sin.

The wonder of it all is, that with the Bible as their guide, how could these people get so far away from God and still occupy a pew? The answer is quite simple. They never read or study their Bible themselves. They allow someone else to read it and tell them what it is saying.

I truly believe that much of the problem lies at the shepherd’s feet. So many preachers are overlooking the need for the spiritual growth of their people. In the 34th chapter of Ezekiel, it says God will take the sheep away from the shepherds that do not care for them. Shepherds

BEWARE! We are not to be as concerned with "our" needs as we are with the needs of "our people".

We see from the last few scriptures above that this is probably speaking of Rome and the Catholic Church, who have brought the compromise. Even more than that, it is speaking to individuals in all churches who have compromised themselves.

2 Timothy 3:5. "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away."

A person claiming to be a Christian on the outside, but who is not on the inside. It's so easy to point to someone else, but in so doing we should examine ourselves as well.

Verses 7-8: These two verses contain a more detailed explanation of the entities depicted symbolically as a "woman" and a "beast". The Beast as an empire goes through four stages, from the viewpoint of the beginning of the Tribulation period"

- (1) It "was", that is, it existed in the form of the ancient Roman Empire.
- (2) It "is not", that is, it has not existed as an empire since the fifth century and will not exist again until the Antichrist gains worldwide authority during the Tribulation period.
- (3) It "shall ascent out of the bottomless pit", that is, Satan will raise up the Antichrist as his false messiah and give him worldwide rule (compare 11:7; 13:3-4); and
- (4) The Antichrist will be cast into "perdition", the lake of fire (compare 19:20). Unbelievers will "wonder" in amazement at this revival of the power and glory of the Roman Empire (compare 13:3).

Revelation 17:7 "And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns."

"Mystery": Not that Babylon is a false system of religion, because that is already known, but that the beast will fully support the harlot and together exert vast influence over the whole earth.

The Vision of the Beast - Five details describing the beast are given:

1. Blasphemous names (verse 3);
2. Had seven heads (verse 3);
3. And ten horns (verse 3);
4. The prostitute rides it (verse 7);
5. The beast was, and is not, and will come up out of the bottomless pit (Abyss), and go to his destruction (verse 11).

The careful Bible student will immediately recognize this beast even before examining the angel's interpretation. In the first place, it is similar to the beast (of Rev. 13), and doubtless represents what all beasts used symbolically represent: either a king or a kingdom that opposes God's will.

When John sees the great prostitute, he is "greatly astonished?" Actually, some parts of this vision should have been familiar to John, for it is obviously the same beast as that described (in chapter 13).

The angel introduces his explanation with the words, "This calls for a mind with wisdom" (verse 9), which indicate that only someone with the wisdom of God (found in the Word of God), can understand this vision.

Revelation 17:8 "The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is."

“The beast”: Both a king and kingdom are referred to by this term.

“Was, and is not; and shall ascend” A reference to the Antichrist’s false resurrection (13:3-4; 12-14; see note on 13:3).

“Out of the bottomless pit”: After his “resurrection”, the Antichrist will become possessed by a great demon from the abyss (see notes on 13:1, 3).

I believe this mark indicates that the power given unto this group comes from the bottomless pit.

Here it is speaking of the reforming of the old Roman empire. The old Roman empire has been reformed by the ten common market nations in Europe today. In my opinion, these "ten horns" are these ten common market nations. The headquarters for these ten nations is in Rome. In 1954 the 10 Member States were: Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom.

“Go into perdition”: Eternal destruction (compare verse 11; Matt. 7:13; John 17:12; Phil. 1:28; 3:19; 2 Thess. 2:3; Heb. 10:39; 2 Peter 2:3; 3:7, 16). This is the lake of fire, the place of Antichrist’s destruction (19:20).

“Book of life”: The roll of the elect, written in eternity past by God (see note on 3:5). Only the elect will escape the Antichrist’s deception (Matt. 24:24).

“From the foundation of the world” (see note on 13:8; compare 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2; “long ages ago”). A frequent phrase (Matt. 13:35; 25:34; Luke 11:50; John 17:24; Eph. 1:4; Heb. 4:3; 9:26; 1 Peter 1:20), referring to God’s pre-creation plan.

Go to chapter 13 and re-read the first 2 verses and the descriptive comments of those two verses for an accurate description of what the beginning of verse eight's meaning is.

This word "perdition" means ruin, loss, or damnable. This Roman empire was in great power, it fell, and then revived again in the ten nations. It is a wonder how Berlin was divided into two parts after World War II. This was done so the line of the old Roman empire would be the same. Of course, the governments of U.S. and Russia did not know why they did this, but it established the old territory anyhow.

"The beast that thou sawest".

"Whose names were not written in the book of life". The false religious system of the end times will be very convincing and popular among the unsaved, but those who have committed themselves to Christ will understand that anything idolatrous is not of God.

Revelation Chapter 17 Questions

1. What did one of the seven angels promise to show John in verse 1?
2. Where is this located?
3. What does many waters mean?
4. Is this, whore, a literal woman? Explain.
5. What kind of church does God call this?
6. While this church claims to be Christian, it conforms to the _____ and the _____.
7. The bride of Christ, besides being all believers, is sometimes spoken of as a _____.
8. These waters let us know they are located where?
9. In verse 2, speaking of kings tells us what?
10. What does apostasy mean?
11. Who will judge this idolatrous church?
12. In verse 3, who was sitting on the scarlet-colored beast?
13. How many heads and horns were mentioned in verse 3?
14. What does this scarlet-colored beast symbolize?
15. Where does the woman 's power come from?

16. What is the great sin this woman (church), has committed?
17. Who is verse 4 describing?
18. What does the golden cup symbolize?
19. What was the name written on her forehead?
20. In verse 6, the woman was drunken with what?
21. In Matthew 12:20, how does God separate people?
22. What is the main reason Christians are being deceived?
23. In Ezekiel 34, what warning does God give the preachers?
24. We know that spiritually this message is to all apostate churches, but literally, who is it to?
25. What does the angel promise to reveal to John?
26. Who is the beast that was, and is not, and yet is?
27. Where does its power come from?
28. What group makes up the old Roman empire today?
29. Where is the headquarters for this group?
30. What city was divided in World War II and made the line correct for the old Roman empire?
31. What two major countries divided this city unaware that they were forming the old line?
32. Give a synopsis of what you believe this lesson is telling us.