

The seventh vial of the previous chapter has brought us once again to the threshold of Christ's return to the earth, but the vision again takes a detour in chapters 17 and 18 to describe the judgment and destruction of "Babylon" which is both a system of false religion and a literal city. Chapter 17 looks at the nature and judgment of Babylon as a religious power while the next chapter looks at it as an economic power.

**Verses 1-2:** One of the seven angels which had poured their vials of judgments on the earth in the previous chapter now invites John to come with him to see the judgment of "the great whore that sitteth upon many waters." The waters are explained in v. 15 as representing the peoples of all nations and tongues over the entire earth, showing the worldwide influence of the great whore. The kings and people of the earth are said to have engaged in and become drunk on the wine of her "fornication" which likely refers to the spiritual and religious fornication with which she has seduced the world to turn away from the One True God to fulfill their own ungodly desires.

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<sup>3</sup> So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

**"So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness"** - John's perspective now changes from being in heaven to now being on the earth in a wilderness.

**"and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns"** - Scarlet is the color of luxury, splendor and royalty. The description of this beast matches that of the beast of Rev. 13:1 who is the Antichrist. The angel will explain the meaning of the heads and horns later in this chapter. The woman is sitting on the beast, implying her power over it and its support of her. The woman is Babylon (v. 5) which will be a governing city over the earth (v. 18), and the Antichrist will support the city's influence over the world and use it to his own advantage.

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<sup>4</sup> And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:

**"And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls"** - This woman will indulge herself in all the luxuries of the world (implied by the scarlet color) and will exert her power and influence over the world (implied by the royal color of purple). She has rich tastes and has made herself wealthy as indicated by her adorning herself with gold, precious stones and pearls.

**"having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication"** - She has a golden cup which completes the image of beauty and wealth except for the fact that the contents of the cup reveal her methods for acquiring her wealth and power. She has led the world away from the One True God and into false religions and idolatry which are described here as the "abominations and filthiness of her fornication."

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<sup>5</sup> And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

**"And upon her forehead was a name written"** - In Rome it was customary for prostitutes to wear a headband with their name on it. This woman identifies herself as a prostitute by having her name written on her forehead.

**"MYSTERY"** - In scripture a mystery is a truth that has been hidden in the past but either now or at some point in the future will be revealed. The full identity of spiritual Babylon has yet to be revealed.

**"BABYLON THE GREAT"** - The woman is Babylon, a city that will be in a position of spiritual authority over the world (v. 18). She will govern the world through false religion and will profit from it.

**"THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH"** - All false religions can be traced directly or indirectly back to the tower of Babel where men attempted to build an idolatrous monument. God had commanded mankind to populate the earth but instead they were staying in one place and attempting to build a tower to reach up to heaven to challenge God's authority. Idolatry is an abomination to God and all the other abominations associated with false religion are the result.

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<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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.

**"And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs [witness] of Jesus"** - There have been more of God's people killed throughout history by religion than by secular perpetrators. This woman has become intoxicated by the blood she has shed of those who have the testimony of Jesus Christ and appears to enjoy it. The Greek word for "martyrs" means "witness." So many have died as witnesses for Christ that our word "martyr" has taken on the meaning of someone who has died for their beliefs.

**"and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration [to wonder]"** - John is amazed at the sight of this woman sitting on a scarlet beast and can't help but stare and try to comprehend what he's seeing.

**"And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel [wonder]? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman..."** - The angel notices John's amazement at what he is seeing and offers to explain the meaning behind the woman, the beast, the seven heads and the ten horns. He's essentially telling John "There's no need for you to wonder about the mystery of this woman because I'm going to explain it to you."

<sup>8</sup> 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 that thou sawest was, and is not”** - Likely a reference to the apparent death and resurrection of the Antichrist as the remainder of the verse seems to support.

**“and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit [the abyss]”** - This phrase seems to indicate that after the “resurrection” of the Antichrist (real or faked) he may become possessed by a demonic force from the abyss. I have often wondered if people who have near-death out-of-body experiences may not be coming back as the same person, perhaps replaced or possessed by a demonic impersonator. This may become true for the Antichrist.

**“and go into perdition [destruction]”** - The Antichrist is destined for destruction and is even called the “son of perdition” (2 Th. 2:3).

**“and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder...when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is”** - This verse speaks of people “whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world” will be amazed and impressed by the beast’s apparent resurrection. God knows who will be saved and has written their names in the book of life, but the names of these people are not in this book and so they will believe the Antichrist’s resurrection and his claims of deity.

<sup>9</sup> And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.

Commentators debate the meaning of the heads but the angel attempts to clear up the debate by giving us an important piece of information that he says we will be wise to pay attention to: *the seven heads are seven mountains*. In scripture a mountain is often used to represent a kingdom, such as the stone cut without hands that destroyed the image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. In the dream the stone became a mountain (representing Christ’s kingdom) that filled the whole earth (Dan. 3:35). The seven mountains likely represent the seven great kingdoms of the world: Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome and the Antichrist’s revived Roman empire. The angel also repeats the fact that the woman is sitting on these mountains, representing the controlling influence of false religion on each of these kingdoms.

<sup>10</sup> And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. <sup>11</sup> And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.

**“And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come”** - In scripture a king and his kingdom are often referred to interchangeably, so each of these seven kings represent the kingdoms they ruled. In John’s day the first five kingdoms no longer existed, while Rome (the “one is”) was currently in power. “The other is not yet come” refers to the Antichrist and his kingdom which is still yet to come.

**“and when he cometh, he must continue a short space”** - As evil and oppressive as the Antichrist will be, it fits into God’s plan to allow him to continue for a short time. However, God will limit his time and he will be destroyed when Christ returns.

**“And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition”** - This phrase is cryptic since it’s unclear how the seven kings can suddenly be eight. It may be that after his apparent “resurrection” the Antichrist will be like a totally different man. Before his “resurrection” he will seem to be peace loving but afterward he will be power-hungry and will demand the worship of the entire world. This lends support to the theory that he will become demonically possessed after his “resurrection” and will undergo a distinct personality change. He will be “of the seven” in the sense that he will also be the ruler of a world empire. When Christ returns he will “go into perdition” and be destroyed.

<sup>12</sup> And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. <sup>13</sup> These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.

The angel now explains the meaning of the ten horns, which he describes as ten kings who will only attain their brief time in power because of the Antichrist. He will give these kings their authority and in return their only goal is to support and obey him. They will devote all of their resources and influence in service to the Antichrist and his agenda.

<sup>14</sup> These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.

**“These shall make war with the Lamb”** - At Christ’s return these ten kings who will be gathered together with their armies at Jerusalem to support the Antichrist will engage in an insane and futile attempt to fight against Christ and His armies. **Rev. 19:19** “*And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.*”

**“and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings”** - The armies of the world will not have a chance against Christ because they will be foolishly attempting to fight God, the rightful Sovereign over the entire earth. See Psa. 2:1-5.

**“and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful”** - Christ’s army that returns with Him are the redeemed of the earth that He has called and chosen to be His and they have been faithful to Him despite the persecutions of Satan and the Antichrist.

**Verses 15-18:** The angel continues explaining what John is seeing, describing the worldwide influence of the woman (Babylon) and how that the ten kings will hate her for it and will destroy her. It will be God that puts this hatred in their hearts in order to fulfill His will and word. The angel confirms that the woman represents Babylon, the city that will reign over the kings of the earth, perhaps as the Antichrist’s capital city. It seems that the ten kings destroy the harlot as a world religion in this chapter while the city itself is destroyed in chapter 18.