

Revelation 17-19

Revelation 17:1–19:21 (ESV)

Chapter 17: “A Woman Sitting on a Beast” (Revelation 17)

The Great Prostitute and the Beast

17 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, 2 with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.” 3 And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. 5 And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.” 6 And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

1. The 7th bowl has begun the final judgment.
2. An angel shows John the destruction that is to come upon “Babylon.”
3. The name “Babylon” at verse 5 is symbolic for the “anti-church” that tries to deceive the saints. Why use “Babylon” as a symbol? The great city historically was the capital of the Babylonian empire. What were they known for? Open idolatry (and where there is idolatry, there is always wickedness, unrighteousness, and evil) and Babylon was also the instrument that conquered Judah and Jerusalem (“Babylon” therefore also represents the enemies of God’s people).
4. Sitting upon “many waters” in verse 1 describes the pervasive influence throughout the world.
5. The “woman” verses 3 & 6 and “great prostitute” verse 1 is the opposite of the woman clothed with the sun in chapter 12 (the Church). However,

this reminds us that Satan, the world fallen to sin, and the sinful nature counter every thing God's does with anti-versions of God's good creation and work. God has priests, Satan has priests; God has Sacraments, the devil has sacraments; God's people pray, Satan's people "pray,"; God's people are known by their works, Satan's people are known by their works. God uses the numbers 7 and 10 for good and holy things; Satan uses the numbers 7 and 10 for blasphemous things (verse 3).

The holy "woman" the Church has the marks of the Holy Church.

The "woman" of verse 6, the "great prostitute" is adorned as Anti-Church... Verse 4 presents that she is very, very IMPRESSIVE... note how "purpose and scarlet" for example are holy colors in the Christian Church, but here these colors are used to deceive.

At verse 3, this "woman" is seated on "a scarlet beast" ... this "beast" (recall our discussion about the beast of the sea and the beast of the land from Revelation chapter 13). In both cases, the aim of the beasts is to draw humanity away from faith in Jesus Christ.

"The kings of the earth/the rulers of the nations" verse 2 seek the power of the Anti-Christ forces and join in the powers of Beasts (the power of Satan in the world). It appears that the Beast has more to offer than God does. The woman creates the illusion that the things of the world are more important than the things of God. She seduces people to seek the false gods of this age.

What is deceptive about the "crowns" of this life? (discuss)

Why is the faith less attractive? Answer: The Cross over A Crown.

But there is still a CROWN, but a better one Christ. What's the difference between the true Crown and the false crowns?

The woman is clothed according to the values of the world and despises the greater clothing: the righteousness of Jesus Christ possessed by the saints. Verse 4.

The Church has a cup of blessing (Holy Communion), she has, however, an anti-cup...the cup of abominations through which she deceives her followers. (Verse 4)

She has something written on her head. You Christians have something written on your head. What is of our head (our mind and thoughts) demonstrate to whom we belong. We remember our baptism and to whom we belong. Verse 5.

Verse 6: Her occupation? To destroy the saints; to destroy Christians.

When I saw her, I marveled greatly. 7 But the angel said to me, “Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her.

1. The holy relationship between Christ and His bride the Church is a biblical “mystery (Ephesians 5:32). But here at verse 7, we learn of an anti-mystery. Verse 5: the woman has the title of “Mystery” on her forehead. She is powerful in her masquerading as the true church, but her mysteries lead to destruction.

VERSE 8:

8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And 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, because it was and is not and is to come.

1. This beast which the great prostitute sits on is the Antichrist. Again, He mimics the LORD. So, He “was and is not and is to come” ... likewise Jesus:
 - a. WAS: alive on earth
 - b. WAS NOT: died on the cross
 - c. AND IS TO COME: second coming

Satan:

- a. WAS: actively tempting Christ during the Lord’s public ministry
- b. WAS NOT: defeated by Christ on the cross
- c. AND IS TO COME: his end-time manifestations

9 This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; 10 they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. 11 As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction.

1. The seven-fold kingdom may be a reference to the great empires of the ancient world from an A.D. first century perspective, representing all of civilization (including for example, Egypt and Rome). That is, one of those that have fallen from a first century perspective would be Egypt. One that IS at the time would have been Rome. Another yet to come which includes all empires yet to come might be one of the modern manifestations which go after Christianity, martyr Christians, forbid Holy Scripture, and promulgate teachings and ideologies which resist God’s Word.
2. The 7th would be all of the anti-Christian powers – through world empires -- yet to come from a first century AD perspective.
3. There will always be world powers that seek to destroy the Church.

4. The Beast is the 8th active throughout history...the Beast/Anti-Christ is behind all the empires that fight against Christ and His Church. This represents the power of Satan.

12 And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast.

1. Remember apocalyptic numerology: 10 stands for completeness. These “ten kings” are all the world powers combined against Christ and His Church. This is the complete onslaught against the Church over the ages. But each one has authority only for “one hour.” They don’t last, they fall. They come to nothing. Only one King endures: The LORD Jesus Christ.

13 These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. 14 They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”

1. The anti-Christ worldly powers are united from the standpoint of being against Christ and His Church.
2. They “make war” = all out opposition against Christ and His Church.
3. But they cannot stand against the Lamb who is “Lord of lords and King of kings,” a glorious title of the Lord Jesus Christ!
4. Note, however, there are those who are “with him”
 - a. They are called
 - b. They are chosen
 - c. They are faithful

15 And the angel said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.

See verse 1 above.

16 And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire,

Remember that the prostitute, the woman is a false church, and yes “she” sits upon the Antichrist, but the Antichrist will not put up with the imitation of the Church forever...his full evil will not even tolerate a veneer...his full ugliness must break-out. Evil will become increasingly naked and apparent.

17 for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. 18 And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.”

1. God is not an accessory to evil, but He remains in ultimate control.
2. God ensures that His purposes will not fail.
3. God can work good even through evil.
4. God has a greater plan and His works are and will be fulfilled completely.
5. The “great city” at this time of writing was Rome. It had a strong veneer of spirituality and a kind of religion (this woman in purple and scarlet) and at the time, yes, had dominion over all of the other kings on earth. But, as you know, she fell. God’s Word stands true.