

Revelation 17 – The Harlot and The Beast

I. The Judgment To Be Explained (1-2)

A. The Angel Comes To Explain The Harlot (1)

1. One of the Angels that poured out the bowls
 - a. Perhaps this is an explanation of the final bowl judgments
 - b. Here, the judgments John has seen will be explained
2. The Harlot (Whore, prostitute) is here introduced
 - a. This will be explained in detail
 - b. Cases are made for Either Rome or Jerusalem
 - i. The Metaphor of a Harlot is used almost exclusively of Apostate Israel in the Old Testament
 - The only exceptions are Tyre in Isa. 23, and Ninevah in Nahum 3:4
 - Reference to Babylon's destruction in Jeremiah 51:13-14 - O you who dwell by many waters, rich in treasures, your end has come; the thread of your life is cut. The Lord of hosts has sworn by himself: Surely I will fill you with men, as many as locusts, and they shall raise the shout of victory over you.
 - ii. זָנָה (Zana) – to fornicate or be a prostitute, is continually used to describe Israel's covenant breaking nature
 - iii. The Harlot is Dressed as a High Priest of Israel and Rides the Beast of Rome
 - c. This "Babylon" is Literarily Set Opposite of the New Jerusalem
 - i. Rev. 17:1 – "Come Here" / Rev. 21:9 "Come Here"
 - ii. Rev. 17:3 – "in the Spirit" / Rev. 21:10 – "in the Spirit"
 - iii. Rev. 17:1 – The Harlot / Rev. 21:9 – The Bride
 - iv. Rev. 17:3 – in wilderness / Rev. 21:10 – high mountain
 - d. The Beast will Turn and Destroy the Harlot

B. The Angel Identifies The Reason For Judgment (2)

1. The Kings of the Land fornicated with Her
2. The People of the Land are drunk with Her Immoralities
3. Both the leadership and the laity have been seduced and participated in her idolatry
 - a. Idolatry is often portrayed as sexual immorality
 - b. These pictures will be explained in this chapter

II. The Vision of Babylon, The Harlot (3-6)

A. John is Carried Into the Wilderness (3a)

1. John is taken in the Spirit to the Wilderness and sees a woman
2. The last time we saw a “woman” in Revelation, she had fled into the wilderness
 - a. This was seen in Revelation 12
 - b. The woman there was National Israel who gave birth to the Messiah – possible that it is the same woman
 - i. This chapter will argue that the Harlot indeed represents apostate Israel
 - ii. Perhaps the woman in the wilderness aligned herself with the beast – and is seen here riding it

B. John Sees A Woman Riding a Beast (3b)

1. The vision demonstrates the relationship between the beast and the harlot
2. The priestly aristocracy aligned themselves with Rome in order to hold onto power and position
 - a. John 11:48 - If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.
 - b. We have already seen historical references to Jerusalem’s close relationship with Rome

C. John Describes the Harlot’s Appearance (4-5)

1. She is Dressed As A High Priest (4a)
 - a. “The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls,”
 - b. Aaron’s garments – Exodus 28:4-5 - *These are the garments which they shall make: a breastpiece and an ephod and a robe and a tunic of checkered work, a turban and a sash, and they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons, that he may minister as priest to Me. They shall take the gold and the blue and the purple and the scarlet material and the fine linen. “They shall also make the ephod of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen, the work of the skillful workman.*
 - c. Exodus 39:1-3 - *Moreover, from the blue and purple and scarlet material, they made finely woven garments for ministering in the holy place as well as the holy garments which were for Aaron, just as the Lord had commanded Moses. He made the ephod of gold, and of blue and purple and scarlet material, and fine twisted linen. Then they hammered out gold sheets and cut them into threads to be woven in with the blue and the purple and the scarlet material, and the fine linen, the work of a skillful workman.*

- d. Exodus 39:10-13 - *And they mounted four rows of stones on it. The first row was a row of ruby, topaz, and emerald; and the second row, a turquoise, a sapphire and a diamond; and the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; and the fourth row, a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They were set in gold filigree settings when they were mounted*
- e. Also the Temple Veil – Josephus 5:5:4 - but before these doors there was a veil of equal largeness with the doors. It was a Babylonian curtain, embroidered with blue, and fine linen, and scarlet, and purple, and of a contexture that was truly wonderful. Nor was this mixture of colors without its mystical interpretation, but was a kind of image of the universe; (213) for by the scarlet there seemed to be enigmatically signified fire, by the fine flax the earth, by the blue the air, and by the purple the sea; two of them having their colors the foundation of this resemblance; but the fine flax and the purple have their own origin for that foundation, the earth producing the one, and the sea the other.
- f. Also an allusion to Ezekiel 16:10-17 - *I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your hands and a necklace around your neck. I also put a ring in your nostril, earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your dress was of fine linen, silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour, honey and oil; so you were exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. Then your fame went forth among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of My splendor which I bestowed on you,” declares the Lord God. But you trusted in your beauty and played the harlot because of your fame, and you poured out your harlotries on every passer-by who might be willing. You took some of your clothes, made for yourself high places of various colors and played the harlot on them, which should never come about nor happen. You also took your beautiful jewels made of My gold and of My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images that you might play the harlot with them.*

2. She Has Profaned Herself (4b)

a. Old Testament Allusions

- i. She is compared to Babylon and the cup is allusion to Jeremiah 51:7 prophecy - Babylon has been a golden cup in the hand of the Lord, Intoxicating all the earth. The nations have drunk

of her wine; Therefore the nations are going mad.

- ii. Zech. 12:2 - "Behold, I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that causes reeling to all the peoples around; and when the siege is against Jerusalem, it will also be against Judah.
- b. This woman's cup may be a parody of the cups used by priests to present the libation offerings in the tabernacle
 - i. To the Jews, the religious system of the Temple and Jerusalem was beautiful and looked godly but at its heart it had forsaken God and given itself over to power, corruption, and idolatry
 - ii. This may present a parody of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement, holding a libation offering.
- 3. She Has a Name on Her Forehead (5)
 - a. This also parody's the name of the head of the High Priest
 - i. Exodus 28:36-38 - "You shall also make a plate of pure gold and shall engrave on it, like the engravings of a seal, 'Holy to the Lord.' You shall fasten it on a blue cord, and it shall be on the turban; it shall be at the front of the turban. It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall take away the iniquity of the holy things which the sons of Israel consecrate, with regard to all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord.
 - ii. Jeremiah 3:1-3 - God says, "If a husband divorces his wife And she goes from him And belongs to another man, Will he still return to her? Will not that land be completely polluted? But you are a harlot with many lovers; Yet you turn to Me," declares the Lord. "Lift up your eyes to the bare heights and see; Where have you not been violated? By the roads you have sat for them Like an Arab in the desert, And you have polluted a land With your harlotry and with your wickedness. "Therefore the showers have been withheld, And there has been no spring rain. Yet you had a harlot's forehead; You refused to be ashamed.
 - b. Her Name is Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots

- i. We have already seen Jerusalem described as Sodom, Egypt, and the “great city” which alludes to the description of Babylon
 - ii. She is the epitome of rebellion against God
- D. John Describes the Harlot’s Crimes (6)
 - 1. She is drunk with the blood of the saints and witnesses (martyrs) of Jesus
 - 2. The distinction is both Old Testament saints and followers of Jesus – (otherwise there would be no difference)
 - a. We have already seen that the Jews used the weight and power of the Roman beast to persecute the Christians
 - b. Matt. 23:34-37 - Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.

III. The Explanation of The Beast (7-15)

- A. The Beast Has The Appearance of Authority (7-8)
 - 1. The Angel Will Explain John’s Vision (7)
 - 2. The Beast is a Parody of The Lamb (8a)
 - a. The Language Used of The Lamb – “who was, is not, and will come”
 - i. This language is used of the Christ in Revelation 1:4, 1:8, and 4:8
 - ii. The beast presents himself as the true lord and savior – Beginning with Augustus Caesar, the emperors were often called the son of God. Nero was called the savior and the lord.
 - iii. The Caesar’s demanded to be venerated and worshiped – people were forced to offer incense to an image of the Caesar
 - b. The Language Also Has Some Basis in History
 - i. The Roman beast seemed to be dying as Nero died and civil war raged, but it was resurrected in a sense under Vespasian
 - ii. We saw this in Revelation 13:3-4 - I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was

amazed and followed after the beast; they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?"

iii. We will see this more in depth in verse 11

3. The People of The Land Marvel at the Beast (8b)

- a. Those who dwell in the land (the national Israelites) who are not written in the book marvel at the beast
- b. These are Jews who have rejected the Messiah
- c. They are not part of God's people – therefore, they have aligned themselves with the beast
- d. They marveled at Rome's great strength and might – rather than trusting in God's Messiah
 - i. (Remember this is the explanation of the judgment, we are being given the whole picture of why the judgment takes place)
 - ii. At the end of this chapter we will be told that the beast will turn on the woman and destroy her.

B. The Explanation of the Seven Heads (9-11)

1. They are Seven Mountains (9)

- a. Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits
- b. Anyone reading this would naturally see a reference to Rome here.
- c. Rome sat on seven famous hills – Aventine, Caelian, Capitoline, Esquiline, Palatine, Quirinal, Viminal.

2. They are Seven Kings (10)

- a. and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while.
- b. At the time of John's writing, five kings have fallen
 - Julius Caesar (49-44 B.C.)
 - Augustus Caesar (31 B.C – 14 A.D.)
 - Tiberius Caesar (14 – 37 A.D.)
 - Gaius Caligula (37-41 A.D.)
 - Claudius (41-54)
- ii. One king currently ruled (Nero 54-68)
- iii. One was yet to come and remain only a short time (Galba, reigned for about six months before he was assassinated)
- c. After Galba, there were two more emperors who took the throne and were killed in a matter of months (Otho and Vitellius)

- d. Finally, Vespasian (69-79) returned to Rome from Judea and took the throne, restoring order and stability.
- 3. The Beast is an Eighth (11)
 - a. There is no definite article before the word "eighth"
 - b. There is a definite article before the words "beast" and "seven" in v. 11 but not before the word "eighth"
 - c. This is significant in identifying the beast as AN eighth
 - i. "The definite article that clearly and repetitively defined the chronological series of heads / kings ("the five, the one, the one to come) vanishes before "an eighth" is mentioned. i.e. It refers not to any one particular individual, but to the revival of the empire itself under one who is outside of the originally specified seven kings. The Empire is arising from ruin." – Dr. Ken Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, p. 76
 - ii. The text says that he is "of the seven" (notice that it does not say ONE of the seven. That is sometimes supplied by translators. In the NASB "one" is in italics. In the ESV, it says he "belongs to the seven"
 - iii. Galba was technically the eighth emperor, although his reign was questioned and brought civil war. But he was not "of the seven" in the sense that he brought order and power back to the empire. Vespasian did that. He was technically not the eighth but he was "an eighth."

C. The Explanation of the Ten Horns (12-14)

- 1. The Provincial Kings (12-14a)
 - a. They are 10 Kings (12)
 - i. These are the sub monarchs under the Roman empire – They receive their power from the beast, but only for a short time
 - ii. We have already seen that Rome placed many local provincial "kings" in place to keep order in their provinces (i.e. king Herod was given his rule by Rome)
 - b. They give allegiance to the beast (13)
 - i. Their purpose is to align themselves with Rome to destroy Jerusalem as the judgment of God comes to fruition
 - ii. They will give all their resources and powers to the beast in order to destroy Jerusalem
 - iii. We saw this before as the frogs ("demonic spirits") brought all the kings to Meggido to destroy the city

- c. They fight against the Lamb (14a)
 - i. They did not just come against Jerusalem
 - ii. The beast and his under rulers also go after the Christians.
 - iii. Before his death, Nero became the first and greatest Roman persecutor of Christians, blaming the great fire of Rome on them.
 - iv. Even after the destruction of Jerusalem, the persecutions of Christians continued until 313 A.D.
- 2. The Victory of the Lamb (14b)
 - a. The Lamb will Conquer (14b)
 - i. The beast will ultimately be defeated by the Lamb
 - ii. The Lamb is the true sovereign – the true power
 - iii. He is king of kings and Lord of lords, regardless of what the emperor or his followers believe
 - b. The Lamb's People are the True People (14c)
 - i. The people of the Lamb are the true covenant people of God
 - ii. Those who follow the Messiah are the called, the chosen, and the faithful
 - iii. The idea of faithful here is those faithful to the covenant of God. Jesus has fulfilled the covenant promises and those are faithful to the covenant who are found in him.

IV. The Destruction of The Harlot (15-18)

A. The Explanation of The Waters (15)

1. The waters on which the harlot sits are shown as many peoples and nations
2. The Jews' influence in all corners of the Empire was massive
3. Philo of Alexandria writes - Concerning the holy city I must now say what is necessary. It, as I have already stated, is my native country, and the metropolis not only of the one country of Judaea but also of many, by reason of the colonies which it has sent out from time to time into the bordering districts of Egypt, Phoenicia, Syria in general, and especially that part of it which is called Coelo-Syria and also with those more distant regions of Pamphylia, Cilicia, the greater part of Asia Minor as far as Bithynia, and the furthestmost corners of Pontus. And in the same manner into Europe, into Thessaly, and Boeotia, and Macedonia, and Aetolia, and Attica, and Argus, and Corinth and all the most fertile and wealthiest districts of Peloponnesus, (282) And not only are the continents full of Jewish colonies, but also all the most celebrated islands are so too; such as Euboea, and Cyprus, and Crete. "I say nothing of the countries beyond the Euphrates, for all

of them except a very small portion, and Babylon, and all the satrapies around, which have any advantages whatever of soil or climate, have Jews settled in them. (283) So that if my native land is, as it reasonably may be, looked upon as entitled to a share in your favour it is not one city only that would then be benefited by you, but ten thousand of them in every region of the habitable world, in Europe, in Asia, and in Africa, on the continent, in the islands, on the coasts, and in the inland parts. (284) And it corresponds well to the greatness of your good fortune, that, by conferring benefits on one city, you should also benefit ten thousand others, so that your renown may be celebrated in every part of the habitable world, and many praises of you may be combined with thanksgiving.” – On the Embassy to Gaius (281-)

4. J. Stuart Russell – “The authority exercised by the Jewish race in all parts of the Roman Empire previous to the destruction of Jerusalem was immense; their synagogues were to be found in every city, and their colonies took root in every land”
5. Acts 2:8-11 - And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.”
6. Matt. 23:15 - Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

B. The Judgment on The Harlot (16-17)

1. The Beast Will Destroy the Harlot (16)
 - a. The beast and his auxillary kings will turn on the harlot
 - b. They will come against the city of Jerusalem to destroy her and make her desolate
 - c. This is a fulfillment of many texts in the Bible
 - i. Daniel 9:26-27 - Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.
 - ii. This destruction is a reference to Ezekiel's proclamation of Jerusalem's destruction in Ezekiel 16:36-41 - Thus says the Lord God, “Because your lewdness was poured out and your nakedness uncovered through your harlotries with your lovers and with all your

detestable idols, and because of the blood of your sons which you gave to idols, therefore, behold, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, even all those whom you loved and all those whom you hated. So I will gather them against you from every direction and expose your nakedness to them that they may see all your nakedness. Thus I will judge you like women who commit adultery or shed blood are judged; and I will bring on you the blood of wrath and jealousy. I will also give you into the hands of your lovers, and they will tear down your shrines, demolish your high places, strip you of your clothing, take away your jewels, and will leave you naked and bare. They will incite a crowd against you and they will stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords. They will burn your houses with fire and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women. Then I will stop you from playing the harlot, and you will also no longer pay your lovers.

- iii. This is also a fulfillment of Jesus' words in Matt. 22:2-7 - The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. Again he sent out other slaves saying, "Tell those who have been invited, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast." But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire.

2. God Will Give the Harlot's Kingdom to the Beast (17)

- a. The harlot's kingdom will be given to the beast
 - i. Notice that it is the harlot's kingdom here, not God's
 - ii. They have forfeited the kingdom of God by rejecting the Messiah and established their own based on religious rites and ritual

- iii. Also notice that it is God Himself who will hand over the harlot's kingdom to the beast
- b. This was accomplished in the destruction of Jerusalem as Titus killed or enslaved all the people of the city
- c. Today, in Rome the Arch of Titus bears inscriptions of Titus marching the treasures of Jerusalem and the Jews into Rome. The Menorrah can clearly be seen pictured on Titus' arch.

C. The Identity of the Harlot (18)

- 1. She is identified as "the great city" a reference to Babylon
- 2. We have already seen the phrase "the great city" used of Jerusalem as it is also called Sodom and Egypt
 - a. Josephus writes in Wars 7:8:7 - And where is now that great city, the metropolis of the Jewish nation, which was fortified by so many walls round about, which had so many fortresses and large towers to defend it, which could hardly contain the instruments prepared for the war, and which had so many ten thousands of men to fight for it? (376) Where is this city that was believed to have God himself inhabiting therein? It is now demolished to the very foundations; and hath nothing but that monument of it preserved, I mean the camp of those that have destroyed it, which still dwells upon its ruins;
 - b. The city and the pomp and religiosity ruled over the kings of the land and seduced them into corruption, greed, and ultimately destruction