

Revelation 17

Judgment on the Great Prostitute

Introduction:

This chapter marks the beginning of a new and shorter vision (17:1–21:8) than the one that ended in chapter 16. When the third vision is read as a whole, the theme is striking and obvious. Two women symbolize two cities. First is the lewd prostitute, Babylon the Great; second is the pure bride, New Jerusalem. The first is the finest product of human technology and achievement, one final terrible display of civilization apart from God. The second is the finest product of divine grace, the eternal flowering of God's people. Sandwiched between John's view of the two cities is the coming of the Bridegroom and his wedding—presented in just those terms (19:6–10).

Easley, Kendell H. Revelation. Vol. 12. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998. Print. Holman New Testament Commentary.

Theme: The judgement of the great prostitute.

Key Verse: Revelation 17:1 (ESV) 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,

I. The reason for the judgement of the great prostitute. vs 1&2

A. The prostitute is seen as influencing many nations.

Revelation 17:1 (ESV) 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.

"The many waters" are interpreted by the text to refer to many people and nations.

Revelation 17:15 (ESV) And the angel said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.

B. The kings of the earth have committed fornication with her.

Revelation 17:1 (ESV) 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,

Revelation 17:2 (ESV) 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.”

1. This is most likely to be taken metaphorically for the kings seeking aid from Babylon as opposed to aid from God thus spiritual immorality.
2. However, spiritual adultery often results in actual physical adultery as well.

C. The woman's power is derived from the beast.

Revelation 17:3 (ESV) 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.

Rev 17:3 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.

D. The peoples of the earth have been drunk with the wine of that fornication

Revelation 17:2 (ESV) 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.”

“The people of the earth have joined the rulers in their actual and religious adultery. In Jer. 51:7 Babylon is condemned for making “the whole earth drunk” so that “they have now gone mad,” building on Jer. 25:15–16, where God said, “Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath [= Rev. 14:10] and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad” (cf. Isa. 51:17). It is common for commentators (e.g., Mounce, Sweet, Roloff, Beale) to see this also as political and economic subversion, for Rome seduced the nations with promises of luxury and power. This is brought out more clearly in 18:3, 7, 9, 11–16, 19, 23 but is implicit here as well.”

Osborne, Grant R. Revelation. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002. Print. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament.

II. The description of the great prostitute that is to be judged. 3-6

A. The prostitute is not a literal woman but rather a city.

Revelation 17:3 (ESV) 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.

Revelation 17:18 (ESV) And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.”

B. The prostitute is adorned in beautiful and costly attire.

Revelation 17:4 (ESV) 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.

The symbolism explains the attraction that the kings of the earth have to her - namely the wealth that she has accumulated and the luxuriousness of her lifestyle.

C. However, though the prostitute appears to be desirable from her outward appearance, she is in fact filthy and her conduct is abominable.

Revelation 17:4 (ESV) 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.

The filth is a result of her fornication. She is in fact diseased and passes the disease upon all who commit fornication with her.

D. The prostitute is identified as Babylon.

Revelation 17:5 (ESV) And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.”

Revelation 16:19 (ESV) The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath.

Rev 16:19 And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to

give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

1. The word Mystery is descriptive and not a part of the title.
2. Babylon is a Mystery - the truth of Babylon is revealed only to the initiated.
3. She is seen as being responsible for numerous abominable practices being spread throughout the world.
4. Revelation 17:5 (ESV) And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations."
5. Many understand "Babylon" as metaphorical and see the city as actually being Rome.

E. The abominations of the woman is explained as the persecution of the saints.

Revelation 17:6 (ESV) And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her, I marveled greatly.

1. We discover that the abominations that were in the gold cup was nothing less than the blood of the martyred saints.
2. So much blood has been shed, that she has become drunk in consuming that blood.

Revelation 17:6 (ESV) And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her, I marveled greatly.

F. John is confounded by what he sees.

Revelation 17:6 (ESV) And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her, I marveled greatly.

He marveled in the sense of not understanding all that he saw.

III. The description of the great prostitute that is to be judged explained. 7-12

- A. The angel interprets the vision.

Revelation 17:7 (ESV) 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.

- B. The beast will come back to life that will cause the non-believers to be amazed.

Revelation 17:8 (ESV) 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.

"The parts of the interpretations in this chapter tend to be introduced by that you saw, 17:8, 12, 15, 16, 18), referring back to the vision of 17:1–6a. The one exception is 17:9, where the phrase is not used to introduce the interpretation of the seven hills. This is a parody of both God and Christ. In 1:4, 8; 4:8; 11:17; and 16:5, God is entitled (with some variation), "the one who was and who is and who is to come." Now the beast "once was and is not and is about to ascend from the abyss and go to destruction." It is clear from 13:4, 5, 6b, 8, 15 that the beast demands worship as "the god of this world" (see 2 Cor. 4:4). In the same way, the "was and is not" parodies Jesus' death and resurrection. In 1:18 Christ says, "I am the Living One. I was dead, and behold, I am alive for eternity" (also 2:8). The beast imitates this in 13:3, 12, 14 with his "mortal wound that is healed," and this in one sense alludes to that (building on the Nero redivivus legend, see Caird, Wall). The phrase "was and is not" also points forward to the "eighth king" of 17:11, the Antichrist who "was" with Satan, "is not" here right now, but "will come" at the end of history.¹⁶ In other words, the Antichrist will assume power and take upon himself divine attributes but is the absolute opposite of divinity."

Osborne, Grant R. Revelation. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002. Print. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament.

- C. The seven heads explained.

1. The seven heads are seven mountains.

Revelation 17:9 (ESV) This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven

heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated;

This is a strong case for the city of Rome.

2. The seven heads additionally are seven kings.

Revelation 17:10 (ESV) 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.

- a. As an aside, this fact becomes very interesting and very important. That is, the 7 crowns stand for two very different things at the same time.
- b. They represent both mountains and kings.
- c. One symbol having more than one interpretation is another aspect of Revelation that becomes very challenging in interpretation.
- d. Five of these kings are past at (presumably) the time of the writing of Revelation.

Revelation 17:10 (ESV) 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.

- e. One king is present (presumably) at the time of the writing of the Revelation.

Revelation 17:10 (ESV) 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.

- f. One king is future (presumably) to the time of writing of the book of Revelation.

Revelation 17:10 (ESV) 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.

- g. The future king will reign but a brief period of time.

Revelation 17:10 (ESV) 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.

- h. The beast becomes the eighth king but is so closely identified with the seventh king that he is numbered with him.

Revelation 17:11 (ESV) As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction.

- 3. The ten horns are kings also.

- a. These 10 kings are all kings yet in the future.

Revelation 17:12 (ESV) 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.

- b. These 10 kings rule in conjunction with the beast.

Revelation 17:12 (ESV) 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.

- c. The 10 kings form a perfect alliance.

Revelation 17:13 (ESV) These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast.

- d. The 10 kings give complete allegiance to the beast.

Revelation 17:13 (ESV) These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast.

- e. Thus the beast receives full governmental support throughout the world.

- f. It should not be lost that this a precursor to the fact that Jesus will return and rule over all of the earth.

IV. The judgement of the great prostitute explained.

A. These 10 kings will make war with Christ.

Revelation 17:14 (ESV) 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.”

B. The lamb will master these 10 kings.

Revelation 17:14 (ESV) 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.”

C. The lamb will master them because He is sovereign.

Revelation 17:14 (ESV) 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.”

D. The lamb will master the kings because God's people are faithful.

Revelation 17:14 (ESV) 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.”

The waters upon which the woman sat represented people.

Revelation 17:15 (ESV) And the angel said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.

Rev 17:15 And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.

E. The kings will turn on the great prostitute.

Revelation 17:16 (ESV) 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,

They will not be faithful to the prostitute the way that the lamb's people

are faithful to Him.

- F. In turning upon the prostitute they will totally devastate her.

Revelation 17:16 (ESV) 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.

- G. All of this will be accomplished because the Lord is sovereign.

Revelation 17:17 (ESV) 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.

- V. Conclusion:

