

## Revelation 17

### I. Description of the Great Prostitute (17:1-6)

A. Sits on many waters - representative of nations and people

B. She was guilty of "seduction"

1. The kings of the earth
2. The inhabitants of the earth
3. Intoxicated them with her "wine"
  - a. Deadened their senses
  - b. Provided pleasure, ease of living, luxury?
4. What this involved in seduction
  - a. Pledges of allegiance to Rome
  - b. Involved acknowledgement of Rome's gods or Caesar as lord
  - c. This in exchange for the comforts of Rome, or at least fitting in



C. Prostitute sits on a beast, they are allies

1. Seven heads - Suggests intelligence
2. Ten Horns - Human power
3. Blasphemous names - Anti-God
4. Uses both power and seduction

D. Dressed in purple and scarlet

1. She was high class, luxurious
2. This suggest an "elite"ness to her.

E. Babylon

1. Proclaims the fall of Babylon the Great
  - a. Is 21:9 - Echoes Isaiah's prophecy against Babylon
  - b. Dan 4:30-31 - Babylon the Great - echoes Nebuchadnezzar's boasting
2. This is the third time Babylon is used as a figure for the enemy of the saints.
  - a. Rev 14:8 - First proclamation of its fall for the seduction of the nations
  - b. Rev 16:19 - Wrath of God against Babylon
  - c. Rev 17:5 - Vision of Babylon as the Great Harlot

- d. Rev 18:2, 10, 21 - The destruction of Babylon for killing the saints.
- 3. The figure of Babylon
  - a. For Romans, "Babylon" was a poetic reference to the archenemy the Parthians (which ruled old Babylonia)
  - b. Early Jews used "Babylon" as a code name for Rome
  - c. Early Christians used "Babylon" as a code name for Rome (1 Pet 5:13)
- F. She had been killing the saints
  - 1. Repulsive picture - "drunk with the blood of the saints"
    - a. Suggests a sick pleasure from the death of the saints
    - b. Echo of this in the vision of the two witnesses
  - 2. Specifically, this was the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. She wanted to silence Christians speaking out of Christ.
- G. Result: Great astonishment
  - 1. Perhaps John expected to see the destruction of God's enemies
  - 2. Instead, John is shown God's enemy drunk on the blood of the saints

## II. Explanation (17:7-18)

- A. One of the Bowl of Wrath Angels explains the mystery of the prostitute and the beast she rides.
  - 1. This section is one of the most hardest in Revelation to interpret
  - 2. Part of the difficulty is that you must interpret the interpretation
- B. Description of the Beast
  - 1. Similar description for other enemies
    - a. 12:2 - The Great Dragon
    - b. 13:1 - The Sea Beast
    - c. 17:3 - The Beast of the Harlot
  - 2. Seven heads - Suggests great intelligence
    - a. Represents "seven mountains" or "hills"  
Rome as the city that sits on seven hills as a common theme among Roman writers and poets
    - b. Also represents "seven kings"
      - 1) Could represent the major world kingdoms
        - a) "Mountains" represent kingdoms in apocalyptic symbolism
        - b) If this were the case, the scheme would be as follows:
          - (1) Five have fallen
          - (a) Egypt

- (b) Assyria
  - (c) Babylon
  - (d) Medo-Persia
  - (e) Greece
- (2) One is:
  - (f) Rome
- (3) One is to come
  - (g) Christianized Rome (began with Constantine)
- (4) The Eighth
  - (i) Other anti-Christian governments in the future
- 2) Could represent Roman kings?
  - a) Five have fallen
    - (1) Augustus (Octavius) 27 BC - 14 AD
    - (2) Tiberius 14-37 A.D.
    - (3) Gaius Caligula 37-41 A.D.
    - (4) Claudius 41-54 A.D.
    - (5) Nero 54-68 A.D.

Note - the tumultuous time after Nero's death in which three kings ruled in quick succession are not counted here.
  - b) One is
    - (6) Vespasian 69-79 A.D.

Note - If this scheme were correct, then Revelation was written during the time of Vespasian. The problem is that the historical situation does not fit Vespasian's time, but does fit Domitian's time. A solution is that John is writing during Vespasian's time about the future years under Domitian, thus John is not writing about life under Vespasian's time, but under Domitian
  - c) One is to come
    - (7) Titus 79-81 A.D.
  - d) The eighth
    - (8) Domitian 81-96 A.D.
- 3) There are other schemes - The things to keep in mind is the big picture, which is judgment against The Prostitute
- 4) Rather than being literal numbers, perhaps these

- are to be seen as apocalyptic
  - a) Seven kings, we are now on the 6<sup>th</sup>, the 7<sup>th</sup> is coming
  - b) Like the previous sets of seven, this is saying Rome is coming to her end
    - (1) Five have fallen
    - (2) One is (the sixth)
    - (3) One is coming (the final one)
  - c) The eighth king? - There is more to come, Satan will not be finished pursuing the saints with the fall of Rome
- 3. It once was, but now is not, an eighth king
  - a. It appears that the king died and came back to life
  - b. May be a reference to a popular legend that Nero,
    - 1) He committed suicide
    - 2) Legend was that he was not dead and would return to take possession of his kingdom
    - 3) Nero was a severe persecutor of Christians
  - c. Using the imagery of this well known myth, this may be saying that another king similar to Nero would rule Domitian is a "resurrected" Nero in that he also persecuted Christians
  - d. Also 13:3 - Reference to the "healed wound"
    - 1) Says something of recuperative power of Satan's allies
    - 2) Anti-Christian organizations can and do recuperate
- 4. Comes up out of the Abyss
  - a. Notice 11:7 - Comes up from the Abyss is in the present tense.
    - 1) It is a present action, not a one time action
    - 2) Satan's tools (the beast) keeps coming out of the Abyss
  - b. Satan does not let up
    - 1) If it is not Rome that opposes the saints, then it will be the Holy Roman Empire that will later on
    - 2) Even today, Satan still uses his anti-Christian governments as his "beast" to oppose the saints
- 5. Goes to his destruction
  - a. In the end, Satan and all his allies are destroyed
  - b. This needs to be kept in mind so as not to get lost in the details
- 6. Ten horns are ten kings
  - a. Will receive a kingdom for an hour, a short time
  - b. They give their power and authority to the beast
    - 1) These are vassal kings, client rulers
    - 2) They will do as Rome, the beast, directs

3) Probably a reference to all of the kingdoms that Rome conquers to add to its growing empire

C. The waters where the prostitute sits

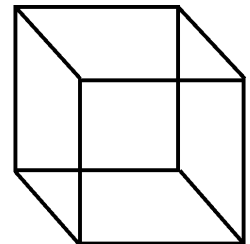
1. These represents the various nations that encompass the Romans empire
2. She has "seduced" them and made them her own

D. The woman

1. She is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth
2. The beast and the horns will turn against the prostitute
  - a. They will hate her
  - b. They will bring her to ruin
  - c. The will leave her naked
  - d. They will eat her flesh and burn her with fire
  - e. v.17 - God is behind this, he is in control
3. This demonstrates the self-destructive nature of sin
4. Interested historical notes:
  - a. Marcus Aurelius, 161-180 A.D., was a benevolent emperor but brutally persecuted Christians
  - b. Rome began a long decline
    - 1) From 235-284, there were more than 2 dozen emperors, all but one suffered a violent death
    - 2) Defenses on the Rhine and Danube collapsed, and the eastern provinces were invaded by the Persians

E. Optical Illusion

1. Which is the front and which is the back?
  - a. It shifts
  - b. First, it appears to be one thing, then appears to be something different.
2. Same thing happens here
  - a. Seven heads are seven hills = Rome
  - b. The woman is Rome
  - c. The beast represents the kings of Rome
  - d. The beast also represents the vassal rulers
3. BOTH the beast and the prostitute represent Rome
  - a. It ultimately turns in on itself
  - b. Demonstrates the self destructive nature of sin



F. Figure of Babylon

1. Point - Shows the futility of Babylon, she will lose
  - a. v.14 - They will make war against the Lamb
  - b. The Lamb will overcome them
2. Who would want to follow a defeated one?

3. Note on Satan's Methods:
  - a. First Beast - Intimidation
  - b. Second Beast - Deception and Discrimination
  - c. The Harlot - Seduction