



February 2, 2011

The WHORE of Babylon

Revelation 17

¹*And* one of the seven angels who had the seven censers came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters,

²with whom the kings of the earth *have fornicated*,

and (*with whom*) those dwelling on the earth were made drunk from the wine of her fornication."

³And 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, *having* seven heads and ten horns. ⁴The 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 *indeed* the impurities of her *fornication*. ⁵And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." ⁶And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. (VMT)

1 The Fourth scene (7 censers) unfolds into the Fifth Scene

The Great Prostitute- she is Babylon (17:5, 18) which is associated with Rome, 1st century Christians would likely have the mental image of the goddess *Roma*. She is the antithesis of the righteous woman in Revelation 12:1-6, 13-17. The Prophets often compared pagan cities to harlots (Ezk 16:15-16)

"Seated on many waters"- Babylon (Jer 51:13) was on many canals & Rome is on rivers and seas

2 Kings of the earth- rulers and important people of every kind

Sexual immorality- a common analogy to idolatry, apostasy, and hatred for God

Become drunk- intoxicated with power, violence, economic clout, pagan religiosity, etc

3 The wilderness- where Mother Church fled in chapter 12, the whore imitates the true church

Scarlet beast- the color symbolizes the pretentious grandeur of the Roman Empire

Full of blasphemous names, 7 heads, 10 horns- The Beast from the Sea reappears (13:1-10)

claiming spiritual wisdom (7 heads) and earthly dominion (10 horns).

Brighton: "That so-called 'political beast' does not evolve but remains the same." (p. 436)

Which member of the Anti-Trinity was the Beast from the Sea?

What is the significance of the prostitute being the one *riding* the beast?

4 woman... in purple & scarlet, gold & jewels- symbolizes arrogance, opulence & self-satisfaction

Golden cup full of abominations- stresses this image as drunk on wealth, power, violence, & vice

5 on her forehead was written- remember 13:16-17, what does this contrast and what does it say about the woman?

6 Drunk with the blood of the saints/witnesses- Rome's blood thirst for persecuting Christians

Revelation 17:6-14- When I saw her, I marveled greatly. ⁷But the angel said to me, "Why do you marvel?

I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast which bears her with the seven heads and the

ten horns. ⁸The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the abyss and go to

destruction. And those dwelling 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. ⁹This calls

for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven hills on which the woman is seated; ¹⁰they 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. ¹¹As for the beast that was and is not, he himself is the eighth but it belongs to

the seven, and it goes to destruction. ¹²And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet

received a kingdom, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast.

¹³These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴They 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 the called and chosen and faithful ones."

8 "was, and is not, and is about to rise"- a perversion of God's title in 1:4, the beast is a fraud

- “go to destruction”- the final judgment will be more clearly depicted in the sixth scene
- 9 “seven heads = seven hills on which the woman is seated,”- v1- seated on many waters, here hills Rome is the famous city that sits on seven hills
- 10 7 heads are “also 7 kings, 5 of whom have fallen”- likely referring to 5 emperors of Rome We cannot determine which specific emperors fit each of the seven kings because the overall symbol is the main point. The 7 heads point to a great spiritual reality about rulers who claim divinity. “All oppressive earthly rulers that come and go throughout the entire period of time covered by the prophetic message of Revelation (Christ’s ascension to his return) are symbolized by these seven kings as well as by the beast itself. *The number seven is symbolic and represents all earthly powers and rulers who claim spiritual authority by which they justify and sanction their despotic dominion over their subjects, in particular as it is used in opposition to the church of Christ.*” (Brighton, 449)
- 11 the beast... is the eighth- best understood as a summary, including all earthly tyranny
Brighton: The beast then together with its seven heads, becomes and is for all time until the End a terrifying symbol that represents all earthly powers and dominions and rulers that exercise tyrannical authority under the pretense of divine sanction. (p. 450)
- 12 10 horns = 10 kings who have not yet received a kingdom- 10 (totality), horns (strength)
Brighton: the ten horns would indicate ruling powers in all their naked might and total oppression, sanctioned not by the claim to divine authority but by the action of conquering power itself under its own authority. (p. 451)
- 13 “one mind”- the beast and the 10 kings are in agreement, ultimately working for Satan
“the Lamb will conquer them”- victory at the cross is carried to completion when Christ returns
- 14 “make war”- possibly literal, symbolically though it is direct opposition to Christ and his teaching
“the called, chosen, & faithful ones”- God’s elect saints conquer through the Lamb

Revelation 17:15-18- ¹⁵And the angel said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. ¹⁶And 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, ¹⁷for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose *and to act with* one mind and *to hand* over their *kingdom* to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. ¹⁸And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth."

- 15 waters = peoples/multitudes/nations/languages- the new symbol is fourfold meaning whole world
- 16 ten horns and the beast will hate the prostitute- the earthly rulers will turn on the false religion
“desolate and naked”- cf Ezek 23:1-34- the condemnation of the spiritually adulterous
- 17 This verse makes it clear that God is working in all of this to accomplish his judgment on the Beast and his kingdom and his mistress
- 18 woman = great city- this is Rome in John’s day and we must understand the religious implications over and against the political ones that people will try to make today.

Brighton: As ancient Babylon was at one time mistress of the world, and as imperial Rome was such at the time of John’s receiving the message of Revelation, both are types of or manifestations of the harlot sitting on the beast, the significance of whose meaning goes far beyond that of ancient Babylon and Rome, the city of seven hills... There will always be such “magnificent and depraved” mistresses (whether cities or governing powers and nations) which will, even unknowingly, be under the control of the dragon (Satan) for the purpose of making war against the woman and her seed, the church (12:17).

Next Week:

The Fall of Babylon and an Eschatological Sing-a-Long