

Revelation 17

Judgment of Religious Babylon

- Revelation 16:1-21 detail the events of the pouring out of the 7 bowl judgments. Now, from Revelation 17:1 thru Revelation 19:9 we are given a more detailed description and elaboration on the events and effects of the 7 bowls. This elaboration section is dedicated to describing the final destruction of Babylon in its religious, political and commercial form.
 - The entirety of Revelation 17 deals with religious Babylon and her destruction, which most likely occur at the beginning of the Great Tribulation. The apostate church is destroyed in favor of a world religion worshipping the beast (see Revelation 13:4).
- Revelation 17 is composed of 3 parts:
 1. The harlot and the beast (v. 1-6a)
 2. The symbolism and its significance (v. 6b-14)
 3. Judgment of the great harlot (v. 15-18)

Part 1— The Harlot and the Beast (v. 1-6a)

Revelation 17:1-2— ¹ And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I shall show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, ² with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality."

- In v. 1 we are not told which angel is speaking, perhaps the 7th bowl angel, but we can't be dogmatic. But here in this section the angel that is speaking initiates a conversation with John and uses the same phrase in 21:9 when introducing ***the bride, the wife of the Lamb***.
 - This angel is going to show the judgment of ***the great harlot*** (i.e. religious Babylon). Here in v. 1-2 we are being told that ***the great harlot*** has been judged and this chapter describes the implementation of that judgment against her.
- Here in Revelation 17 the term ***harlot*** (Greek: *pornē*) is a reference to the same ***harlot*** we first saw introduced in Revelation 14:8. Where Revelation 14:8 describes ***what she does***, here in Revelation 17 the term ***harlot*** is used to describe ***what she is***.
 - In spiritual terms, a ***harlot*** is one who practices fornication, prostitution and adultery as part of the idolatry of a false religion.
 - In the Old Testament ***Nineveh*** (Nahum 3:1, 4), ***Tyre*** (Isaiah 23:15-17) and ***Babylon*** (Jeremiah 23:17) are charged with ***harlotry***. God even charges Jerusalem with playing the ***harlot*** in Isaiah 1:21 and Jeremiah 3:8-9.

- Robert Thomas— “This woman represents all the false religions of all time, reaching back to the tower of Babel (Gen 10:9-10; 11:1-9), to the regime of antichrist, to include those who apostatize from biblical Christianity.”

- John describes the degree of influence and control ***the great harlot*** has in v. 1 with the phrase, ***the great harlot who sits on many waters*** . . .

- The phrase ***many waters*** is a term used to refer to the world’s population. This term, ***many waters***, in reference to the world’s population is affirmed down in v. 15 . . .

Revelation 17:15— . . . And he said to me, “The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.”

- Note also that ***the great harlot*** is described as ***sitting on many waters***. The word ***sit*** (Greek: *kathēmai*) can also mean ***enthroned***, meaning that ***the great harlot*** has control over the world’s population.
- And while ***many waters*** is used to refer to the world’s population, it is also a term that corresponds to Babylon’s geographical position on the Euphrates River. Jeremiah speaks of Babylon as ***you who dwell beside many waters*** (Jeremiah 51:13). But Revelation 17:15 clarifies that this term is intended as a reference to the world’s population.
- Then, in v. 2 John is told ***what the great harlot is guilty of . . . with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality.***
 - The phrase ***kings of the earth*** refers to world leadership. ***The great harlot*** is working in concert with the world’s leaders.
- Remembering that this chapter addresses the subject of ***Babylon’s religious defection***, in v. 2 when John describes ***Babylon’s actions as acts of immorality***, he is referring to Babylon’s ***religious prostitution*** with the world’s leaders in a compromising alliance.
 - Religious Babylon’s ***immorality*** was her work in leading the world into ***idolatry***, resulting in the world’s defection into ***apostasy***. We are warned of this defection from the truth in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 . . .

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4— ³ Let no one in any way deceive you, **for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed**, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

- As we see in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, ***the great harlot’s*** role is to lead the world into idolatry, paving the way for the arrival and ascension of the antichrist.
- In the last part of Revelation 17:2 . . . ***and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality*** . . . John reveals that an alliance is forged by the world leaders, with the apostate religious system that leads to ***drunkenness*** of the ***earth dwellers***. The picture here is one

of an allegiance of the unbelieving world with antichrist that is so strong that it “intoxicates” them and creates an even stronger desire to commit idolatry. This has its fullest manifestation at the beginning of antichrist’s rule at the midpoint of the Tribulation, where people are beginning to choose which side they are on.

- Then, having explained in v. 1-2 what he was about to see, beginning in Revelation 17:3 the angel begins this new revelation by taking John to a new vantage point to see events unfold . . .

Revelation 17:3— And he carried me away *in the Spirit into a wilderness*; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns.

- Here in v. 3 we have the third of John’s four references to being *in the Spirit*.

Revelation 1:10— I was *in the Spirit on the Lord's day*, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet,

Revelation 4:2— Immediately I was *in the Spirit*; and behold, a throne was standing *in heaven*, and One sitting on the throne.

Revelation 21:10— And he carried me away *in the Spirit to a great and high mountain*, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God

- Here in Revelation 17:3 John is *carried away in the Spirit into a wilderness*. The term *wilderness* is a place of desolation; a solitary wasteland. This is not the same place as where the *woman* of Revelation 12:14 is taken. This *wilderness* alludes to Isaiah’s oracle concerning the *wilderness* in Isaiah 21:1 . . .

Isaiah 21:1— The oracle concerning *the wilderness of the sea*. As windstorms in the Negev sweep on, It comes from the wilderness, from a terrifying land.

- The Isaiah 21 passage contains the first reference to *fallen, fallen is Babylon* (Isaiah 21:9), which is repeated in Jeremiah 51:8, Revelation 14:8 and 18:2 . . .

Isaiah 21:9— "Now behold, here comes a troop of riders, horsemen in pairs." And one answered and said, "*Fallen, fallen is Babylon*; And all the images of her gods are shattered on the ground."

Jeremiah 51:8— Suddenly *Babylon has fallen* and been broken; Wail over her! Bring balm for her pain; Perhaps she may be healed.

Revelation 14:8— And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, "*Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great*, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality."

Revelation 18:2— And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "*Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!* And she has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.

- From the vantage point that John is taken to see what he describes in v. 3 as **a woman sitting on a scarlet beast**. John then describes this **woman** as being **full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns**.

- The **woman's** position on top of **the beast** signifies her influence and power over **the beast**. It denotes an intimate relationship between the two.
- This is the same beast that is described in Revelation 13:1, with only the color **scarlet** added to the description . . .

Revelation 13:1— And he stood on the sand of the seashore. And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names.

- One commentator writes . . . “the beast is the empire, or more particularly, the ruler who perfectly embodies the spirit of the empire. He controls the system, politically, but the woman represents the false religion that gives spiritual cohesion to the system.”
- In Revelation 17:3 the **beast's** color of **scarlet** matches part of the woman's clothing (**purple and scarlet**) in the next verse and symbolizes luxury and splendor. But in Scripture **scarlet** is also the color representing sin (Isaiah 1:18) and is a stark contrast to white, the color symbolizing righteousness and purity.
- John Walvoord remarks regarding the beast . . . “here is a secular power that blatantly and profusely profanes the name of the true God, but the ecclesiastical and religious authorities have no qualms about forging a close alliance with such a ruler and kingdom.”

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- In Revelation 17:4-5 John then describes the **woman** . . .

Revelation 17:4-5— 4 And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality, 5 and upon her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth."

- As mentioned above, the **woman** is described as being **clothed in purple and scarlet**. These two colors of fabric were rare and expensive in antiquity and symbolize **royalty (purple)** and **splendor (scarlet)**.
- Next, John describes how the **woman** is **adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls**. The word **adorned** (Greek: *periballō*) means “to array or surround oneself with.” The picture is of excessive adornment. The prophet Jeremiah uses similar language to describe how the nation of Judah adorns herself as a harlot in Jeremiah 4:30 . . .

Jeremiah 4:30— And you, O desolate one, what will you do? Although you dress in scarlet, although you decorate yourself with ornaments of gold, although you enlarge your eyes with paint, in vain you make yourself beautiful; your lovers despise you; they seek your life.

- In the time in which the apostle John lived the description of such ornate adorning would have called to mind the similarity to the manner in which temple prostitutes adorned themselves.
- Next John describes that the **woman** is holding *in her hand a gold cup full of abominations of the unclean things of her immorality*.
 - Here the **gold cup** adds to the image and appearance of royalty, but the context of the cup speaks to her depravity. We see similar imagery in Jeremiah 51:7.

Jeremiah 51:7— *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.*

- While the **woman** sees the contents of her cup as glorifying to herself, God shows it to be what it truly is . . . **abominations**. The word **abominations** (Greek: *bdelugma*) denotes an object of disgust.
- John then tells us the **abominable things** in her **cup** . . . *unclean things of her immorality*.
- In Revelation 17:5 John then reveals the **woman's true identity** . . . *upon her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth."*
 - The practice of putting a name on the forehead is an ancient practice. It indicates one's identity or, in the case of servants or slaves, the identity of one's master. We see examples in Scripture.
 - Those who take the **mark of the beast** will have his name on their foreheads . . .

Revelation 13:16-17— *16 And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand, or on their forehead 17 and he provides that no one should be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name.*

- The 144,000 sealed Jewish witnesses will have God's name on their foreheads . . .

Revelation 14:1— *And I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.*

- Christ, Himself, will have His name written on Him and on His thigh . . .

Revelation 19:12— *And His eyes are a flame of fire, and upon His head are many diadems; and He has a name written upon Him which no one knows except Himself.*

Revelation 19:16— *And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "King of Kings, and Lord of Lords."*

- In the eternal state we will have God's name written on our foreheads . . .

Revelation 22:3-4— 3 And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; 4 and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.

- The historian, Seneca, points out that in the first century harlotry was legal and practiced openly. The prostitutes wished for their prospective clients to know who they were and where to find them. For this reason, it was common for prostitutes to put their names above their doorways and to wear headbands with their names on their foreheads.
- **Interpretive question:** When John says that *upon her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth,"* **what does he mean? What is the mystery?**
 - A **mystery** (Greek: *musterion*) is something that cannot be known unless it is revealed by God. Here in Revelation 17:5 God is revealing the **mystery** of the identity of the **harlot** to us.
 - It is best to understand John's statement to be that **the harlot** has a name that remains a mystery to **those who dwell on the earth**.
 - The **mystery of the woman's name** and her evil intentions is now revealed for us to know. While those who dwell on the earth don't see it or know it, God reveals that the **harlot** has a name. But while **Babylon** has a name, the **mystery** may be what that name means. **The answer to the mystery is that the name on her forehead means "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth."**

What is the significance of the woman's name being *Babylon the great*?

- In identifying the woman as **Babylon the great**, John also reveals her role in world history as **the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth**. **But why? What does this mean?**
 - Going back to Genesis 10:10, and then in Genesis 11 we learn that after The Flood some of the descendants of Noah's son, Ham, settled in Shinar, including Nimrod. The name of the kingdom that Nimrod founded was Babel. It was in Babel that the people disobeyed God and sought to make a name for themselves by building a tower to heaven. Because of their disobedience, God confused their language, causing them to scatter throughout the earth.
 - The land of Shinar would eventually become known as Babylon. Located on the Euphrates River, the capital was also called Babylon. At the height of its power Babylon was an extraordinarily large and wealthy city known for its magnificence. The hanging gardens of Babylon constructed by Nebuchadnezzar was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world.
 - Babylon was the location of the Jewish exile in 605 B.C. and was the location in which the prophet Daniel lived during the exile and where he received his prophecies from God.
 - So, going back to the founding of Babylon . . . Babel . . . the name Babylon remains synonymous with disobedience to God. It is where the people rebelled against God. **Babylon was the original location of idolatrous practice and disobedience.**

- While Babylon is known as a region and as a city, it is also the name given to the vast religious system for all that is opposed to God. **And in the future, Babylon will become the world's leading city religiously and commercially and will be the headquarters for the beast, politically.**
- So, in the inscription on her head, we learn that *Babylon the great* is identified as the **first cause of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth. It started with her, in Shinar, in Genesis 11.**

Babylon's relationship to false religions

- The founding of Babel by Nimrod occurred in approximately 3,000 B.C.
- The wife of Nimrod became the head of the so-called Babylonian Mysteries, which consisted of secret religious rites developed for the purpose of idol worship in Babylon. Her name was **Semiramis** and she was a high priestess of idol worship.
 - According to preserved extrabiblical records, Semiramis gave birth to a son, Tammuz, whom she claimed was conceived miraculously.
 - Tammuz was considered a savior of his people, a false messiah, purported to be the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15 of the promise to Eve to bring forth the seed to crush Satan.
 - The legend of the mother and child was incorporated into religious rites and is repeated in various pagan religions.
 - Idols picturing the mother as the queen of heaven with the babe in her arms are found throughout the ancient world and religious rites were introduced promising cleansing from sin.
 - Within this false Babylonian system, there was a priestly order which furthered the worship of mother and child, practiced the sprinkling of holy water and established an order of virgins dedicated to religious prostitution.
 - The Roman Catholic Church also practice worshipping mother and child (Mary and Jesus) and practice the sprinkling of holy water.
 - Tammuz, the son, was said to have been killed by a wild beast. After the death of Tammuz a period of 40 days of mourning was prescribed, after which he was resurrected.
 - Despite an intervening period of 2500 years, the worship of Semiramis and Tammuz was still practiced in the time of the prophets. In Ezekiel 8:14 we see this referred to . . .

Ezekiel 8:14— Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the LORD 's house which was toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz.

- The Roman Catholic Church's concept of 40 days of Lent is based on the 40 days of mourning for Tammuz.

- Likewise, in Jeremiah 7:18 Jeremiah mentions the heathen practice of making cakes for the queen of heaven as well as offering incense to the queen of heaven (Jer. 44:17-19, 25).

Jeremiah 7:18— "The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the **women knead dough to make cakes for the queen of heaven**; and they pour out libations to other gods in order to spite Me.

- The queen of heaven was a female deity that was actually worshipped in Judah until Judah's exile to Babylon in 586 B.C.
- The Roman Catholic Church also practices the worship of a female deity, referring to Mary as the queen of heaven.
- In Canaan the worship Baal was another form of the religion practiced in Babylon. Baal is considered identical to Tammuz.
- In ancient Egypt we see the queen of heaven going by the name **Isis**. It is the son of Isis, **Ishtar**, who is mourned through the giving of **Ishtar eggs**. The practice of giving out "**Easter eggs**" was adopted by the Roman Catholic Church.
- The Babylonian cult survived into the church age. The chief priests of the cult in Pergamos (site of the church at Pergamum) wore crowns in the form of the head of a fish, in recognition of Dagon, the fish god, with the title, "keeper of the bridge," that is, the "bridge" between man and Satan represented on the crowns. The Roman equivalent of the title, Pontifex Maximus was used by the Caesars and later Roman emperors and ultimately adopted as the title for the Bishop of Rome . . . **the Pope**. The Roman Catholic church even adopted the pagan head gear.
- In the early centuries of the church in Rome the mystery religion of Babylon combined with the Christian faith and has continued to this present day.
- John Walvoord— "It is a sad commentary on contemporary Christendom that it shows an overwhelming desire to return to Rome in spite of Rome's apostasy from true biblical Christianity. Apostasy, which is seen in its latest form today, will flower in the ultimate form in this future super-church, which will apparently engulf all Christendom in the period after the rapture of the church."
 - Recall that in His rebuke of the church in Pergamum, the Lord condemns them because they were tolerant of idolatry within the church, which was leading to immorality.
- The modern movements of Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT), the emerging church and the Catholic "come home" movement all show that the false church of the end times is alive and well and is waiting to emerge and take over in the end times.
- So, you can see that Babylon has always been at the center of idolatry and pagan worship. She will remain so to the end of the age.

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- John closes his identification and description of **the woman** in Revelation 17:6 . . .

Revelation 17:6— And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. And when I saw her, I wondered greatly.

- This statement by John speaks not only to the history of apostate Christendom in the past, where many believers were martyred in the Reformation and the Spanish Inquisition, but the future martyrdom of the faithful during the reign of antichrist, which we be worse than ever.

Part 2— The symbolism and its significance (v. 6b-14)

Revelation 17:6— And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. And when I saw her, I wondered greatly.

- In response to what John is shown in v. 1-6, he describes his own reaction at the end of v. 6 . . . **And when I saw her, I wondered greatly.**
 - The phrase ***I wondered greatly*** literally means “**I marveled a marvel.**” This indicates John’s astonishment at what he sees. In light of all that John has seen thus far in Revelation, there is no indication as to why this particular revelation is so astonishing to him. But apparently the angel also notices John’s astonishment because he says in v. 7 . . .

Revelation 17:7— And the angel said to me, "Why do you wonder? I shall tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

- Notice in v. 7 that a different term is used to describe the woman. In v. 3 she is described as **sitting** on the **beast**. Here in v. 7 she is now described as being **carried** by the **beast**.
 - Robert Thomas believes that this difference is due to the fact that in the first half of the Tribulation **the woman** is dominant, while in the second half of the Tribulation **the beast** is dominant over **the woman**.
- As we have seen several times in our study of Revelation, there are **mysteries** of God that He chooses to reveal to we readers. We previously saw in Revelation 10:7 that God revealed the answer to the cries of the souls under the altar (Rev. 6:10) regarding **when their blood would be avenged on those who had killed them**. In Revelation 10:7 God reveals the answer to that **mystery** that their deaths would be avenged immediately, with the blowing of the 7th trumpet.
- Now, here in Revelation 17:8-14, God reveals the **mystery of the woman and** also the **mystery of the beast that carries her**. In this passage the angel adds new information about **the beast** to details we first saw in chapters 11 and 13.

Explanation of the beast

Revelation 17:8— "The beast that you saw was and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.

- To begin, the phrase, *was and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss*, is difficult to interpret.
 - **Robert Thomas says that v. 8 is a prophecy concerning *the beast* and v. 9-11 are then given to explain and help us understand the prophecy.**
- Robert Thomas— “In each of his appearances in Revelation the term *the beast* is either an empire or the ruler of that empire. Each head of *the beast* is a **partial incarnation** of satanic power that rules for a given period, **so the beast can exist on earth without interruption in the form of seven consecutive kingdoms**, but he can also be nonexistent at a given moment in the form of one of the empire’s kings. The nonexistent beast in v. 8 must therefore be a temporarily absent king over the empire that will exist in the future.”
- The phrase, *the beast that you saw was*, signifies the rule of antichrist in the first 3 ½ years of the Tribulation in the revived Roman Empire as a man who rules over the empire’s 10 nation confederacy.
- The next phrase, *and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss* signifies the beginning of antichrist’s career as a result of the death wound he suffers in Revelation 13:3 in which he now satanically energized. This is in the midpoint of his rule.
- **Conclusion:** Revelation 17:8 is a description of *the beast* just **before *the beast*** from the sea begins his 3 ½ year reign. It signifies that the first 3 ½ years of the Tribulation will have persecution of God’s people, sanctioned by the world power under antichrist’s rule. It will intensify at the midpoint where antichrist assumes a **superhuman form** and his kingdom is marked by a worship of himself within his kingdom (Revelation 13:8).

Reaction of the earth-dwellers

- Following the historical account of the rise of *the beast*, in v. 8 we then see the reaction of the unbelieving “earth-dwellers” to the rise of *the beast* . . . *And those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast, that he was [prior to being satanically energized] and is not [suffers the death wound] and will come [satanically energized]*.
 - Here we learn that *those who dwell on the earth . . . unbelievers . . . will wonder (marvel)*. This **wondering** or **amazement** will be a result of the antichrist’s **is not** condition and subsequent resurrection. Remember the reaction recorded in Revelation 13:4 . . .

Revelation 13:3-4— 3 And 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; 4 and 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?"
 - John reminds us that it is the unbelievers who will fall for the deception. John describes them in Revelation 17:8 as *those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world . . .* These are the non-elect and they will accept the miraculous resurrection of *the beast* as a sign of his invulnerability.

- What they do not realize is that **the beast** is coming up from the **abyss** and that he is destined to go to perdition, and so are they!

Revelation 17:9-10— 9 *"Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, 10 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.*

- In Revelation 17:9 the angel then goes back to explain the meaning of **the beast with seven heads and ten horns** (Rev. 17:3).
- In the phrase, **the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits**, many commentators over the centuries have strongly defended the view that this is a reference to Rome, her emperors and the pope.
 - Their defense of this view is primarily based on the view that Roman Catholicism is a corrupt and evil world religion. And the fact that the city of Rome is surrounded by **seven hills** thus corresponds to v. 8 in which **seven head are seven mountains on which the woman sits**.
 - Even today there is strong agreement regarding the view that the antichrist is the Catholic Pope.
- A preferable view of the phrase, **the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits**, is that the **seven heads are seven mountains** represent **seven successive empires of history** (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, Revived Rome).
 - In support of this view is the fact that in the Old Testament **mountain** or **hill** was a term used to represent **kingdoms along with their kings** (Psalm 30:7; Isaiah 2:2; Jeremiah 51:25; Daniel 2:35).

Psalm 30:7— O LORD, by Thy favor **Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong; Thou didst hide Thy face, I was dismayed.**

Isaiah 2:2— Now it will come about that In the last days, **the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it.**

Jeremiah 51:25— "Behold, I am against you, **O destroying mountain**, who destroys the whole earth," declares the LORD, "and I will stretch out My hand against you, and roll you down from the crags and **I will make you a burnt out mountain.**

Daniel 2:35— "Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became **a great mountain and filled the whole earth.**

- In the phrase, **the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits**, note **the woman's** position is **on the seven heads** versus her **sitting on the beast** in v. 3. Thus v. 9 gives a more precise position of **the woman**.

- The picture here is of **the woman**, who represents a false religious system, from the time of Babel, riding upon the **seven empires**. Her influence is not by governing, but by imposing a false religious system upon them, throughout man's history.
- We see further clarification of the **seven heads** in v. 10 . . . **the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, 10 and they are seven kings.**
 - The **seven kings** represent **seven literal Gentile kingdoms that follow one after another**
 - In Daniel 7:17 and 23 we see these **seven kings** from Daniel's perspective in 586 B.C. Remember that Daniel uses **king and kingdom interchangeably**.

Daniel 7:17, 23— 17 'These great beasts, which are four in number, are four kings who will arise from the earth [Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome]. 23 'Thus he said: 'The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth (Rome), which will be different from all the other kingdoms, and it will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it.

- Here in Revelation 17:10 John records that **five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come**.
 - This refers to **five** Gentile world powers which had already existed by the time John wrote Revelation.
 - **It is important to remember** that the **five kingdoms** of the past that John speaks of are **not simply the largest or strongest kingdoms in human history, but are kingdoms that have severely persecuted God's people . . . Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece.**
- After having stated that **five have fallen**, John then says that **one is**. From John's perspective in the first century A.D., the dominant **kingdom** was **Rome**.
- Then finally, John states that **the other has not yet come**. Again, from John's perspective the Revived Roman Empire was an empire whose rise to power was far into the future.
- The final phrase in v. 10 states, **and when he comes, he must remain a little while**. This phrase signifies the short-lived rule of the future leader of the last kingdom yet to come . . . the Revived Roman Empire.

Revelation 17:11— "And the beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction.

- In Revelation 17:11 John then reveals that this final world leader is over the seventh kingdom (the Revived Roman Empire) and becomes **an eighth** after suffering the **fatal head wound** (Rev. 13:3) and is resurrected as the Satanically energized **beast** of the last half of the Tribulation and is destroyed by Christ at His Second Coming.
 - The phrase, **and is one of the seven**, signifies his rule **before** the fatal head wound and in John's time this king and kingdom was yet to come.

- This **seventh head** is the kingdom that is in place immediately after the rapture of the church. But instead of falling, like the leaders before him, we learn in Revelation 17:11 that **he goes to destruction** . . . literally, **he departs into perdition**. His destiny is met at the hands of the Lord where he will be cast into **the Lake of Fire** (Rev. 19:20).
- In summary, Revelation 17:8-11 is the final form of Gentile world power under the influence of Satan with ultimate apostasy under the rule of antichrist.

Explanation of the meaning of the beast's ten horns

Revelation 17:12— *"And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings, who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour."*

- According to Daniel 7:7 & 24 these are rulers who will receive their dominions in the last days. This is the form that the **final earthly empire** will take before the return of Christ, beginning with the Tribulation and culminating in a **world empire** at the 3 ½ year point under the rule of antichrist.
 - At the time the angel speaks to John this kingdom is yet future. That is the meaning of the phrase in v. 12, **who have not yet received a kingdom**. But these 10 kings will receive a kingdom in time to give their kingdom to the beast (v. 17) and to wage war with the Lamb at Armageddon (v. 14).
- We also learn in Revelation 17:12 that once these **ten kings receive their kingdoms, they will exercise their authority as kings with the beast for one hour**.

Question: What is the significance of this **one hour**? Is it to be understood literally or symbolically?

- Robert Thomas points out that after the 3 ½ year point of the Tribulation, after the antichrist returns to life following his fatal head wound, he will invest these **ten kings** with their authority to serve him, but their reigns will be very brief. Therefore the **one hour** should be interpreted as **"a very short time."**
 - John Walvoord says, "some time after antichrist begins his 3 ½ year superhuman reign he will invest these kings with their power to rule and will reign until their war with the Lamb at His return" (Rev. 17:14).
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- In Revelation 17:13 John describes how the **ten kings** give their total and unanimous support to **the beast** . . .

Revelation 17:13— *"These have one purpose and they give their power and authority to the beast."*

- And not only are these **ten kings** unanimous in their support of **the beast**, they are unanimous in **the beast's** war against **the Lamb**.
- Then in Revelation 17:14 we have a parenthetical statement whose purpose is to elaborate on the statement in v. 13 . . .

Revelation 17:14— *"These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful."*

- Here in v. 14 John tells us, explicitly, that the **ten kings will wage war against the Lamb**. The war that John speaks of here is **the battle of Armageddon**, which was first mentioned in Revelation 16:16 and will be described in greater detail in Revelation 19:19-21.
- Then, as if they thought they actually had a chance, in Revelation 17:14 we see the result of any creature who thinks he can defeat God . . . **and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings . . .**
 - These two titles . . . **Lord of lords and King of kings** . . . signify the absolute supremacy of the Lord Jesus. This title will again be used in Revelation 19:16, at His Second Coming . . .

Revelation 19:16— *And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."*

- But in Revelation 17:14 we also learn, for the first time, that at the Lord's Second Coming that He will not be alone. John reveals here in v. 14 that **those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful**. In Revelation 19:14 we see further information regarding those who are with the Lord . . .

Revelation 19:14— *And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.*

Question: Who is it that is being described accompanying the Lord in Revelation 17:14 and 19:14?

- The phrase this used of those accompanying the Lord is **the called and chosen and faithful**. The terms **called** and **chosen** specifically apply to **the saints, not angels**. It is **us** . . . the redeemed saints . . . who will be in the company of the Lord at His Second Coming. All of God's elect will be with the Lamb at His triumphal return. We also see this described in Jude 14 . . .

Jude 14— *And about these also Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "**Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones**"*

- Does this imply that the holy angels will not be accompanying the Lord too? **No**. They will certainly be accompanying the Lord too. But as an encouragement to the saints, and in answer to the obvious question, "will we be with the Lord at His Second Coming?" John reveals that we will, indeed, be with Him at His triumphal return.

The judgment of the harlot (v. 15-18)

Revelation 17:15— *And he said to me, "The **waters** which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues."*

- In v. 15 the angel who is speaking to John refers to **the water which you saw**. This is a reference back to the **many waters** in v. 1 . . .

Revelation 17:1— And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I shall show you the judgment of **the great harlot who sits on many waters**

- In the Old Testament the term **waters** is a common symbol for **people**, as seen in Psalm 18:4; 124:4; Isaiah 8:7 and Jeremiah 47:2.
- Here in Revelation 17:15 the term **waters** is used to define the control the **harlot** has over the population of the world of unbelievers under the apostate rule of antichrist.

Revelation 17:16— And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire.

- Then, in a remarkable and sudden shift, in Revelation 17:16 we see a description of how **the beast** (antichrist) will turn against the world religious system (the **harlot**) so as to make worship of **the beast** the only approved form of religion in the world.
 - It is very likely that this event occurs after **the abomination of desolation**, at the midpoint of the Tribulation.
 - This is, in effect, Satan's kingdom dividing against itself. The angel does not give an explanation for this change, but it is clear that **the harlot** will become the object of hatred to those whom she once controlled.
 - These acts of hatred are described in Revelation 17:16. The **beast will hate the harlot and . . .**
 - 1. will make her desolate.** This phrase means that the **beast** will plunder her wealth and strip her of her treasures.
 - 2. will make her naked.** This phrase means she will be stripped of her adornments and her immorality will be laid bare. Where she was previously described in Revelation 17:4 as being **clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls**, her lavish adornments will be stripped from her.
 - 3. and will eat her flesh.** This phrase describes what wild beasts do when they come upon a carcass. It is a vivid picture of the utter destruction of one creature by another, as we see in Psalm 27:2 . . .
- Psalm 27:2— When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh, My adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell.**
- 4. and will burn her up with fire.** This phrase hearkens back to Leviticus and the judicial method prescribed by God for carrying out judgment on those who profane themselves with fornications and adulteries . . .

Leviticus 20:14— 'If there is a man who marries a woman and her mother, it is immorality; both he and *they shall be burned with fire, that there may be no immorality in your midst.*

Leviticus 21:9— 'Also the daughter of any priest, *if she profanes herself by harlotry, she profanes her father; she shall be burned with fire.*

- The **beast** will use his control over the legal system to have **the harlot** condemned, resulting in a complete destruction of her religious system, leaving **worship of the beast** as the only approved religion.

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- Then, in Revelation 17:17 we are reminded that God is sovereign over the affairs of the world . . .

Revelation 17:17— "For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God should be fulfilled.

- This statement in v. 17 harkens back to Proverbs 21:1 . . .

Proverbs 21:1— The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.

- Both Revelation 17:17 and Proverbs 21:1 remind us that God is sovereign and He moves the hearts of men according to His irresistible will to accomplish all that He has ordained.
- In this instance the **ten kings** and **the beast** are fully convinced that they are fulfilling their own will. But in actuality, they are fulfilling God's will. This is a reminder of Genesis 50:20 and Joseph's statement to his brothers regarding their treachery in selling him into slavery . . .

Genesis 50:20— "And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

- We also see in Revelation 17:17 that while the **ten kings** and **the beast** have their own **common purpose**, they don't realize that the **common purpose** they share is also **God's purpose**.
- And as we see in Revelation 17:17, this **common purpose** will continue **until the words of God should be fulfilled. Without knowing it, their common purpose will be the fulfillment of this book of prophecy.**

Revelation 17:18— "And the woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth."

- The angel then closes this message to John by telling him who **the harlot . . . the woman . . .** is. She is **the great city . . . Babylon**.
 - In Revelation 14:8, 16:9 and 17:5 **the great city** is named. She is **Babylon the great**.
 - In the book of Revelation **Babylon the great** is the **political, religious and economic center of the world**.

- Here in Revelation 17 the focus is upon the **woman** as a personification of the **religious system** of the end of the age which had its origin in Babylon. In the Tribulation this city will become a focal point for a religious, apostate system in opposition to God. **The woman** will thrive and gain influence until she becomes an impediment to the ego and designs of **the beast** and he then sets out to destroy her to solidify his own position of power and authority.
 - In the next chapter John will be shown the fall and complete destruction of Babylon's political, religious and economic system.
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Conclusion

- The destruction of **the harlot of Babylon** . . . the ungodly world religious system . . . can be placed at the midpoint of the Tribulation. Most likely these events described in Revelation 17:16-18 will occur after **the abomination of desolation** in which **antichrist sets himself up as god**.
- But prior to her destruction, during the first 3 ½ years of the Tribulation **the woman . . . apostate Christendom** . . . will flourish and establish its power over all the world. During this period there is a measure of religious freedom as indicated by the fact that the Jews will have their temple (Rev. 11:1) and will be allowed to worship and have temple sacrifices (Dan. 9:27).
 - But while other religions will be somewhat tolerated during the first half of the Tribulation, there will still be great religious persecution on a scale never before seen.
- But it is the second half of the Tribulation that will see a dramatic shift in religious persecution.
 - After **the abomination of desolation** the antichrist will seek to consolidate his power and will not tolerate any form of religion or worship that does not have him as the object of that worship.
 - With the help of the **ten kings**, antichrist will set out to stamp out and destroy all other forms of worship.
- But we are reminded in Revelation 17:17 that all these things will occur according to God's will. Thinking they are opposing God and thwarting God's will, men will be doing exactly what God has ordained **and is telling us here that He ordains**.