

## Harlot & the Beast

### Revelation 17

#### The Great Prostitute and the Beast

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, 2 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.” 3 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. 4 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. 5 And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.” 6 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. 7 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. 8 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. 9 This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; 10 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. 11 As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. 12 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. 13 These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. 14 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.”

15 And the angel said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. 16 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, 17 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. 18 And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.”

## Harlot and the Beast

Have you ever heard the saying “everybody has their price?”

This statement is popular because it is absolutely true for an unregenerate world in its rebellion against Christ.

The child of God is different. We have seen throughout the book of Revelation that the children of God, whose names are written in the Book of Life, will persevere in the midst of temptation and persecution. Every man in the world may have his price, but the child of God will cling to Christ at any cost. He sees that the true King is worth more than all the riches of this world combined.

Nowhere is the condition of the lost world more on display than in Revelation 17. The world owes Yahweh a debt of respect, gratitude, and worship for his Creation. Instead, the world system has played the harlot and sold itself for gold, jewels, and clothing.

Those in covenant with Yahweh have a fundamentally different relationship. The world sells itself to the bidder who offers the most appealing price at the moment, but God does not deal with mankind on a temporary transactional basis. A relationship with God is covenantal — it is eternal and offers far more than meaningless momentary pleasure.

Our teaching and preaching on Revelation 17 intentionally focuses on the spiritual lesson behind the harlot and the beast more than on the names, times, dates, and places of this chapter. There are so many possible explanations it can make your head spin.

Keep in mind that this is a form of Biblical prophecy which tends to contain both immediate and longer-term fulfillments of itself. The prophecy is equally applicable to the people alive who are hearing it for the first time as well as readers in the future who are being warned about promised events. This is certainly true for the identity of the harlot.

Verse 5 identifies the harlot with Babylon, which carries a unique role as a place of spiritual significance throughout all of the ages of Scripture.

In Genesis 11 Babylon is associated with the thwarted schemes of the people of Babel. In the story of Abram, it is associated with the land he left behind to pursue Yahweh. In the age of the kings and the prophets, Babylon becomes a place of judgment, a place of exile, and ultimately a place where Yahweh demonstrates his sovereignty over all of the nations of the earth.

I remember during the first Gulf War people were wondering if Saddam Hussein was the anti-Christ because he had supposedly begun to rebuild Babylon and was trying to position himself as the reincarnation of a Babylonian empire. I have no idea if this is even true, there was no internet to fact-check in the dark days of the early 1990s.

Discussion Guide for September 24, 2017

Babylon in the immediate context of Revelation referred to Rome. All of the miniature prostitutes who were seducing the people and persecuting the church were doing so because there was an emperor in Rome compelling them to do so. In the age of Protestantism people were convinced that the Rome was the beast and the prostitute was the pope. (It's seldom noted the role that fear of Rome played in the founding of the United States. One impetus in forming colonial militias was that colonists did not believe King George was going to continue to offer adequate protection against the Catholic powers of France and Spain in North America. Americans would later make alliances with these two countries against Britain, but they initially were afraid that the

In the age of Protestantism people were convinced that Rome was the beast and the prostitute was the pope. In fact, fear of Rome actually played a role in the founding of the United States.

One impetus in forming colonial militias was that colonists did not believe King George was going to continue to offer adequate protection against the Catholic powers of France and Spain in North America. Americans would later make alliances with these two countries against Britain, but they initially were afraid that the Catholic countries were hopelessly under the influence of the great prostitute and would shed blood in persecuting American Protestants if they were left undefended. Many of the founding fathers were descended from French Huguenots and grew up hearing stories of the persecution of the true church by Louis XIV at the behest of Rome.

We are safe to say that Saddam Hussein is not specifically in view in Revelation 17. But, we could be reading a prophecy of the spirit of pride and arrogance prevalent in our current world system.

Almost all of the leaders of the world are more than willing to sacrifice justice and submission to Yahweh for money, power, sex, and fame. And this doesn't just refer to political leaders. This prophecy can apply to practically all of the world's systems – politics, business, military, education, pop culture, media, religion, etc.

Like all temptations, none of the things that people pursue are intrinsically bad. They become an object of spiritual prostitution only when pursued outside of glad submission to Christ.

Babylon represents a world system that has sold any allegiance to God to receive whatever is convenient at the moment.

Innocent people are crushed. The gullible are led astray. Enemies of Satan are persecuted.

Revelation 17 encourages us that despite its apparent pride and strength, this world system will eventually come to its own ruin.

## Discussion Questions

- What do you identify with Babylon and Rome in the world today?
- In what ways have you seen the world prostitute itself?
- What things are the systems of the world pursuing today that are in conflict with Christ?
- Why is prostitution a fitting analogy?
- Why does the siren song of the prostitute still carry temptation for Christians?
- Do you see your own heart as pursuing Christ or pursuing the cheap thrills of the world?
- How do we remain aware of our affections?
- How does Revelation 17 give you hope for justice in the future?