

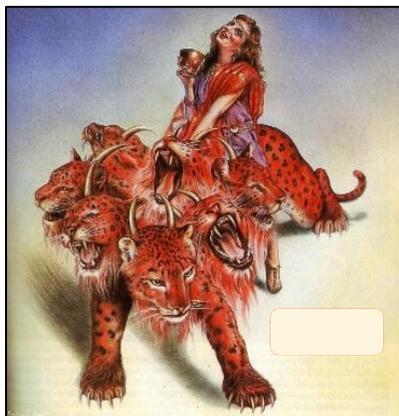
PART 11: THE TRIBULATION, CONT'D

CHAPTER 17

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MAIN IDEA



Chapter 17 describes two entities. First, is the prostitute, also called “Babylon the great” (17:5), which seems to be symbolizing a false religious system and a great city (17:18). Second is the “scarlet beast” which seems to be symbolizing the Antichrist.

At first the prostitute is sitting on the scarlet beast indicating that the false religion has control over the beast. This most likely takes place during the first 3½ years of the Tribulation. Eventually, the scarlet beast (Antichrist) comes to the point where he no longer needs to be subservient to the prostitute, so he and his forces will destroy the prostitute (17:16). The overthrowing of the prostitute by the scarlet beast will most likely occur at the mid-point of the Tribulation when the Antichrist performs the Abomination of Desolation (Matt. 24:15), and people will be forced to worship him (cf. Rev. 13).

COMMENTS

The Prostitute

The prostitute is most likely a false religious system. In the Bible, the term prostitute¹ is often used figuratively to symbolize a *spiritual departure from God and His truth* by an individual, a city, or a nation.² Examples of this can be found in Isaiah 1:21, and Ezekiel 16:15-17 where Jerusalem is called a prostitute when the people turned away from God and worshipped idols. It seems to be very attractive on the outside. Another example is in Nahum 3:4 where the city of Nineveh is called a prostitute because it was an attractive city on the outside but vicious and deceitful on the inside, practicing

¹ The Greek word for “prostitute” is the word *porne*, which is often translated in the NT by the word “harlot” (Jeremiah and Carlson 195). In Revelation 17 it is used in the spiritual sense to describe a religious system that opposes God by enticing people to follow her instead. (Mounce 547).

² (Lindsey 231)

things like witchcraft.

What does this prostitute represent? Walvoord believes the woman to be apostate Christendom in the end time. He further conjectures that those who profess to be Christians, but are not, will be left behind after the Rapture and will develop their own form of “Christianity.”³ Lahaye believes the woman to be idolatry practiced on a world-wide scale.⁴ Lindsey considers the woman to be an occultic amalgamation of all the world’s religions. This would include black magic, demon contact, séances, miraculous materializations, witchcraft, astrology, and sorcery.⁵ David Jeremiah views it as an apostate religious system that will combine weak Protestantism with Catholicism, spiritualism, humanism, and the occult into one great satanic connection.⁶

Notice the following aspects associated with this woman:

- *She sits upon many waters (17:1, 15).* The “many waters” are defined as peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages indicating that this apostate religion will be worldwide. The inhabitants of the earth will be intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries. There will be a strong allure to this religion. No doubt it will be attractive on the outside
- *The kings of the earth commit adultery with her (17:2).* Apparently, world leaders will be drawn into this false religious system. This could be done under the desire to have a single world religion so that all nations are united spiritually. Words such as “tolerance,” “inclusion” can easily be used to enforce a single world religion requiring religions to give up their beliefs for the sake of world unity.
- *She is sitting on a scarlet beast (17:3).* The scarlet beast is symbolically the Antichrist.
- *She is dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls (17:4).* It appears to be an apostate religious system which is associated with clothing of purple, scarlet, gold, precious stones, and pearls.⁷ She holds a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. The exact meaning of this cup is unclear. It may be an object closely associated with the practices of this apostate religion.
- *On her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes, and of the abominations of the earth” (17:5),* The term “mother” may be referring to the way this religious system has included, and dominated, all other false religions of the world.

³ (Walvoord 604).

⁴ (LaHaye 264)

⁵ (Lindsey 234-235).

⁶ (Jeremiah and Carlson 198).

⁷ Some scholars have noted the connection between the Roman Catholicism and these items, especially with the ceremonial attire worn by the Pope, but this view is not widely held today. (ESV Crossway Bibles 2486).

- *She will martyr Christians (17:6)*. She is drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. Christians will be hated because they will be proclaiming the Bible which clearly says there is only one way to God, and that is through Jesus Christ. This will be contrary to the apostate world religion (the prostitute) which will require all religions to give up their beliefs for the sake of world unity.
- *The prostitute is described as being a great city (17:18)*, which is closely associated with the old Roman Empire.⁸ This city is probably the headquarters for the apostate religious system.

The Scarlet Beast

The scarlet beast is described as having seven heads (seven hills) and ten horns. This is the same seven-headed beast (Antichrist) described in Revelation 13:1.

Seven heads (17:3, 7, 9-10). The seven heads represent two things. First, they represent seven hills, and secondly, they also represent seven kings or kingdoms.

Seven hills (17:9). This may be a reference to the city of Rome which has been associated with her seven hills⁹ throughout Roman literature and on coins of her day. It may also be describing a literal city of Babylon which will be rebuilt and become the commercial center of the world.

Seven kings or kingdoms (17:10). Five of these kingdoms have fallen, one is, and one is to come (17:10). This is probably referring to those great world empires which began with the original Babylon of Nimrod's day (Genesis 10:8-10). The five kingdoms which have fallen could possibly be Nimrod's Babylonian Empire, the Assyrian Empire, Neo-Babylonian Empire of Daniel's day, the Medo-Persian Empire, and the Greek Empire.¹⁰ They could also be the five Roman kings or emperors that had fallen when John wrote this prophecy.¹¹

The kingdom which has not yet come (17:10) is possibly referring to the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire of John's day ("is") was never conquered by anyone; it fell from within because of its own moral breakdown in AD 476. The kingdom "which has not yet come" is possibly describing a future revived Roman Empire.¹²

The eighth king (17:11). This eighth king comes out of the revived Roman Empire and is eventually destroyed. This is probably describing the Antichrist, and his kingdom

⁸ (ESV Crossway Bibles 2488). Rome.

⁹ Palatine, Aventine, Caelian, Equiline, Viminal, Quirinal, and Capitoline. See *Seven Hills of Rome*, Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_hills_of_Rome>

¹⁰ (Walvoord 608)

¹¹ The five which have fallen could be Julius Caesar, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero. (Jeremiah and Carlson 201).

¹² (Walvoord 608).

