



The Prostitute

(Rev 17: 1-6 NIV) One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. (2) With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries." (3) Then the angel carried me away on the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. (4) The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was girded with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. (5) This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY: BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. (6) I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.

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It is a great temptation in this chapter to rush on to the interpretation -- we get so little help from the Apostle in this, we cherish all we get -- but we must resist. He is about to interpret a vision; let's see the symbolism of that vision before he tells us to whom it applies.

Adultery in the Old Testament is always figurative of idolatry. See, for example, Hosea 1 or Ezekiel 16. We must contrast this picture with the later one of the pure Bride of Christ. What most don't know (didn't either, until I found this) is that adultery/idolatry is not an "either/or" proposition; it's a "one or many proposition.

The Canaanite religions had a creator God named "El" -- sound familiar? It's one of the names of God. They also had many others, including his consort, Astarte, the fertility goddess. So the temptation was not either Jehovah or the other gods; it was "El" AND the other gods. (Very similar to adultery's temptation of "your wife" or "your wife and other women.")

Prostitution is also used as a symbol for idolatry. (See, for example, Jeremiah 3:1-9). It's worse; you get paid for it. (What do you think of "evangelists" who get rich at it?) The name on the forehead was a common Roman practice; it allowed a prostitute to use a false name (and one Empress, at least, did just that). Note particularly the charge is the "mother" or prostitutes -- not content with being one, she raises more.

Note one thing: like all sin, this is attractive! The clothing is royal and rich. Note also: the view is better from a distance -- in the wilderness, the desert, where the air is clear. The church sees her Lord more clearly in the times of suffering, too.

Mystery Babylon takes some explaining. John would have been familiar with the story. It begins with Nimrod, who, by rabbinical tradition, was a hunter of souls. He it was who inspired the tower of Babel (hence the name Babylon) -- the tower of pride. In doing so, he started a mystery religion. In that religion his consort, Semiramus or Rhea, gave birth -- *virgin birth* -- to a son, Tammuz. This son was slain by a boar, but (surprise!) rose again, celebrated by the feast of Ishtar. His mother was worshiped as the "Queen of Heaven" (see Jer. 44:16-22). The sign of this religion? A cross!

Now, the chief war god of this religion was Bel. Remember the emperor Constantine? He claimed to be a Christian -- but on the reverse of his coins is a temple of Bel. Many feel that at his time Christianity merged with this Babylonian cult (still very much alive at the time). This is also the religion that gave us the "modern" forms of much of astrology, seances, "black magic" and some of witchcraft.

John knew all this. He would have seen in Babylon all that I have just described.

Drunkenness, as Jeremiah 51:6-9 and especially 25:15-17 would have it, is God's way of destroying the mighty. As the Greeks would have put it, "He whom the gods would destroy they first make mad."

(Footnote: McGee and Smith see two Babylons, religious and commercial. The interpretation is unique, and emphasizes the perils of this book.)

Mystery Explained

[Rev 17:7-8 NIV] Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished?" I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns. **[9]** The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to its destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.

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Your interpretation of the phrase, "once was, now is not, .." depends upon your interpretive view:

- Futurists see this as the revival of the Roman empire (e.g., Talbot seeing this as Mussolini).
- Amillennialists, when they see anything here at all, tend to feel that this is an expression paralleling the Nero redivivus myth -- that Nero would rise again to persecute the church.
- Historicists see this as the papacy rising out of the death of the Roman Empire.

All agree that the view is future to John's time. All agree (for reasons soon to be obvious) that the beast is an expression of Rome.

This beast is said to come "out of the Abyss." The expression is rare in Scripture, but we do know this about it:

- It is the place where demons are condemned (Luke 8:31)
- For the historicist, in the 5th trumpet, it is the source of Mohammed.
- By identification with the Abyss, we know it is this beast who kills the two witnesses (Rev 11:7)
- It is where Satan will be bound for the thousand years (Rev. 20)

What may we conclude? Just and only this: it is the source and sinkhole of spiritual evil.

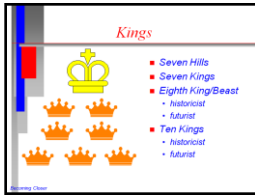
Finally, there is that curious expression that those whose names are not written will be astonished. One author (Wilcox) suggests why:

- They see the three-fold character of the beast: that he was, is not and comes again.
- They miss the four-fold character: was, is not, comes again *and goes to destruction*. Those whose names are in the Lamb's book of life know who wins.

Interpretation

(Rev 17:9-12 NIV) "This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. (10) They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. (11) The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction. (12) "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast."

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Seven Hills, by unanimous interpretation, means Rome, the “city on seven hills”

Seven Kings has three major interpretations, not really associated with specific theories (variants, however, are):

- Some hold them to be specific emperors (the list varies); usually with the idea that the one who “now is” (Nero? 666?) will be a type of the AntiChrist to come.
- Some hold this to be the order of Roman government types:
 - Kings, consuls, dictators, decemvirs and tribunes, followed by
 - Ceasars, followed by
 - (“Yet to be” -- futurist) or the Dukes of Ravenna (in tribute to the Emperor in Constantinople)
- Others hold these to be the great empires of antiquity:
 - Assyria, Egypt, Babylonia, Medo-Persia and Greece, followed by
 - Rome, followed by
 - Revived Rome (which gives rise to the eighth king, the Antichrist)

The Eighth King splits neatly between historicist and futurist:

- The historicist says it’s the Pope.
- The futurist says it’s the coming Antichrist, ruling the revived Roman Empire.

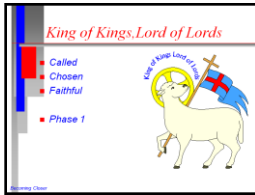
The Ten Kings, all agree, are to be identified with the ten toes in Daniel’s statue. The view from there splits:

- Amillennialists see a variety of possibilities. One interesting one is that like the Parthians of old there will be ten satraps in the empire of the Antichrist.
- Futurists hold these ten to be kings yet to come. A common suggestion (pun intended) used to be the Common Market nations -- until the membership went beyond ten.
- Historicists see it as the ten fragments of the papal empire, usually given as the kingdoms of the Vandals, Visigoths, Suevi, Alans, Burgundians, Franks, Britions, Huns, Lombards and Ravenna.

Called, chosen and faithful

Rev 17:13-14 NIV) They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. [14] They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

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We often slide over these verses.

Called - like those in the Old Testament, where God was very specific about his call. He called Abraham, Moses, Samuel. He called to Israel (which very often did not listen). In this age, He calls to all of us (2 Th 2:4). But the call is not enough.

Chosen - Abraham, Israel (the people) and David were all among "the chosen" -- and Mark 13:20 calls those of us chosen "the elect." Some are chosen for specific tasks (e.g., Paul); but all of us are chosen by God (1 Th 1:4) according to the foreknowledge of God (1 Peter 1:2)

But this too is not sufficient. We must be **faithful**. We have only to look at those Old Testament examples to see it; we must be faithful, even to the point of death (Rev 2:10).

One other thing: we see these ten kings starting out supporting the prostitute. Later, things are different. In the historicist view, this represents the turning of these ten kings against the papacy.

The Ten Turn

(Rev 17:15-18 NIV) Then the angel said to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. (16) The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. (17) For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled. (18) The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

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The waters are given clear interpretation here. Those who see in this the Catholic church show how universal she is by this.

The ten turn: this is interpreted in three ways:

- Historicists see this as those ten nations turning against the papacy. Some became Protestant; others, like France, actually attacked the papacy.
- Some futurists see this as the ten nations of the Revived Roman Empire turning against the apostate church (usually Roman Catholic) which clears the way for direct worship of the AntiChrist.
- Other futurists -- those of the "Two Babylons" theory -- see the apostate church leaving Rome to establish a new religious capital at (where else) the site of the original Babylon. This is destroyed by the Antichrist at the middle of the 7 years; Rome itself is destroyed at the end of the seven years.

One thing is clear; until he returns again, God uses the wicked to punish the wicked. Guess who is in control?