

Revelation 17 Commentary

17:1-2 The Judgment of the Harlot of Babylon: Chapters 17, 18 and part of 19 deal with the judgment of Babylon the Great. In Revelation 17:1-6 the crimes for which God executes judgment upon the harlot, the Roman Papal system, are enumerated; in 17:7-18 her punishment and the means by which it will come to pass is pronounced.

She is called “The Great Whore.” According to Ephesians 5, Jesus is the spiritual husband of the church; therefore if a church unites with or receives favours of one who is not her husband, she commits spiritual adultery. The “kings of the earth” represent civil powers. When churches lose the power of the gospel to transform hearts and lives they turn to the power of the state to support their doctrines and thus they commit spiritual fornication. The “many waters” are the countless people (vs. 15) she has deceived and “made drunk” with her doctrines.

17:3-6 The main difference between the beast of Revelation 13 and the combined power represented by the beast and the woman here is that a distinction is made between the religious and political aspects of Papal power. The “scarlet coloured beast” represents the governments. The woman—the apostate church—rides upon the beast, symbolizing the church controlling the state. In contrast to the pure church of Revelation 12 this woman is “arrayed in purple and scarlet...with gold” and jewellery.

She is a part of “Babylon,” the great city that Satan has set up in opposition to the New Jerusalem of God. The Roman Catholic Church has proudly styled herself as “The Mother Church,” but here she is called “The Mother of Harlots.” From the mother have come the various Protestant denominations which profess to be clean and pure, vehemently rejecting the corruptions of the Catholic Church. But these churches have shown a distressing tendency to follow their mother’s example of sacrificing truth and the approval of God and to seek the power of the state to enforce doctrine, and thus they choose to become harlots with their mother.

She is truly “drunk with the blood of the saints.” History records the deeds of the papacy as it used the state to persecute and kill millions of faithful Christians during the Dark Ages. The Catholic Church has disguised herself with humble apologies for these actions, but she has not changed. The same spirit of persecution will again be exhibited against God’s faithful children who will not drink the wine of her corruption just before the second coming of Christ.

17:7-11 The beast has “seven heads and ten horns.” The seven heads are said to be “seven mountains on which the woman sitteth” (vs. 9) and “seven kings” (vs.10). These heads are the same as the ones on the dragon of Revelation 12 and the beast of Revelation 13. They represent the great world empires which Satan uses to persecute God’s people. Five of these powers which have been noted in the books of Daniel and Revelation are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Pagan Rome and Papal Rome. At the end of time, the power of Papal Rome is greater than ever, her deadly wound is healed and she again strongly persecutes God’s people as in former years. The revived Roman Catholic Church unites with apostate Protestants

and spiritists to form a religious-political entity that is supported by the governments of the world.

The historic centre of Rome was built on seven hills and has been known since ancient times as the “City of Seven Hills.” The phrase “seven mountains on which the woman sitteth” also serves to link the “woman” with the city of Rome establishing her once again as the Roman Catholic Church.

17:12-18 the “ten horns” are the nations of Europe and all the earth that rally under the banner of Rome. Daniel 7:7, 24; Revelation 16:14. They are also called “The waters...where the whore sitteth” (vs. 15) and “They that dwell on the earth...whose names were not written in the book of life.” See Revelation 13:8.

These nations give the end-time church-state alliance, which is Babylon the great, all of their strength to make war against Jesus, the Lamb, and His people who keep God’s commandments and have the faith of Jesus.

The nations of the world will support Babylon’s Sunday law. They will enforce her decree, and those who disobey will not be allowed to buy or sell. Ultimately, they support legislation calling for the death of God’s people. Revelation 12:17; 13:11-18; 14:12. However, when Jesus delivers His faithful followers (Revelation 19:11-20) the multitudes who have supported the great whore finally realize that they have been deceived and that they are eternally lost.

Enraged, they will turn upon their religious leaders, vs. 16. Thus, by God’s will, the punishment of the harlot of Babylon is carried out in part by her own allies.