

Living Word Fellowship Church

An Expository Explanation of Revelation Chapter 17

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Part I

A. Chapter Introduction:

John is carried into the desert which is different than before. It seems to relate to Isaiah 21:1-2. “That this is an allusion and not coincidental language is borne out not only by the fact that Isa. 21:1–10 is a vision of judgment against *Babylon* but also that “fallen, fallen is Babylon” from Isa. 21:9 appears in Rev. 18:2, as well in Rev. 14:8, which itself looks ahead to chs. 17–18. In both Isaiah and Revelation the desert is central to the vision, though in Isaiah the vision comes from the desert, while in Revelation the prophet is taken to the desert to see the vision.”¹

1. Moreover, elsewhere John places himself on earth (1:9–10), on sea and earth (10:8ff.), in heaven (4:1), on the seashore (13:1), and on a mountaintop (21:9–10) when he receives visions. There seems to be no great significance to the different locations except variety.²

B. Key Characters of chapter 17:

1. 17:1-12. There are three groups to be identified in this opening paragraph:
 - a) **The beast**, who has seven heads and ten horns.³
 - But in the midst of the seven-year period, this ruler broke his covenant with Israel (Dan. 9:27) and began to persecute the people of God as well as the nation Israel. Energized by Satan and assisted by the false prophet, “the beast” became the world’s dictator and its god. In this way, “the beast” was both “one of the seven [kings, kingdoms]” but also “the eighth.” His kingdom was nothing but revival of the Roman Empire (“one of the seven”), but it was a new kingdom (“the eighth”).⁴
 - Since “the beast” sets up his image in the temple about the middle of the Tribulation, we can assume that “the harlot” and “the beast” work together during those first three-and-a-half years. This is corroborated by the fact that the ten kings assist him in desolating “the harlot” (Rev. 17:16). These are the same ten kings associated with “the beast” when he sets up the “United States of Europe” during the first half of the Tribulation.⁵
2. **The harlot (vs. 1-2)** herself who rides the beast; and those referred to by many waters, later said to be “peoples and multitudes, and nations, and tongues” (v. 15).⁶
 - a) John’s readers would not be surprised when he used an evil harlot to symbolize a wicked city or political system. God even called Jerusalem a harlot (Isa. 1:21). Isaiah said that Tyre was a harlot (Isa.

¹ Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 851). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

² Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 851). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

³ Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Re 17:1). Moody Press.

⁴ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 613). Victor Books.

⁵ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 613). Victor Books.

⁶ Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Re 17:1). Moody Press.

23:16–17), and Nahum used this same designation for Nineveh (Nahum 3:4). (Read Jer. 50–51 for further historical parallels to John’s prophetic message.)⁷

3. **This woman (vs. 3)**, called ‘The mother of the harlots’ (17:5), **commits fornication with the kings of the earth (v. 2), and for a while dominates them.**⁸
 - a) Four times in this chapter, the woman is called a “harlot” (Rev. 17:1, 5, 15–16); and her sin is called “fornication” (Rev. 17:2, 4). Her evil influence has extended to the whole world, reaching even into high places (“the kings of the earth”).⁹
 - b) She is definitely some vast spiritual system that persecutes the saints of God, betraying that to which she was called. She enters into relations with the governments of this earth, and for a while rules them. I think the closest we can come to an identification is to understand this harlot as symbolic of a vast spiritual power arising at the end of the age, which enters into a league with the world and compromises with worldly forces. Instead of being spiritually true, she is spiritually false, and thus exercises an evil influence in the name of religion.¹⁰
 - c) This evil woman symbolizes the religious system of Babylon, and the waters symbolize “peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages” (v. 15). The angel informed John that the kings of the earth had committed adultery with the woman; in other words, they had become a part of the religious system which she symbolized (cf. 14:8).¹¹
 - d) The Babylonian mother spawns faithless children, whereas the mother of ch. 12 produces faithful offspring. Since the woman in ch. 12 and the bride in chs. 19 and 21 represent the church throughout the ages, so the harlot counterpart represents satanically infused economic-religious institutions throughout history. The whore is contrasted with the city of God and represents the ungodly metropolis, whose hub radiates economic and religious institutions. The woman of ch. 12 gave birth to the church, and the woman of ch. 17 attempts to exterminate the church.¹²
 - e) **A theory** - The angel informed John that the beast’s **heads are seven hills on which the woman sits**. Many ancient writers, such as Victorinus, who wrote one of the first commentaries on the Book of Revelation, identified the seven hills as Rome, often described as “the city of seven hills.” This identification has led to the conclusion this passage teaches that Rome will be the capital of the coming world empire. Originally Rome included seven small mountains along the Tiber River, and the hills were given the names Palatine, Aventine, Caelian, Equiline, Viminal, Quirinal, and Capitoline. Later, however, the city expanded to include the hill Janiculum and also a hill to the north called Pincian. While Rome is often referred to as having seven hills or mountains, different writers do not necessarily name the same seven mountains.¹³

4. **The ten horns (vs. 3)**, we are later informed, **are ten kings** (v. 12), certainly contemporaneous.¹⁴

⁷ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 612). Victor Books.

⁸ Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Re 17:1). Moody Press.

⁹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 612). Victor Books.

¹⁰ Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Re 17:1). Moody Press.

¹¹ Walvoord, J. F. (1985). *Revelation*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 970). Victor Books.

¹² Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 859). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

¹³ Walvoord, J. F. (1985). *Revelation*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 971). Victor Books.

¹⁴ Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Re 17:1). Moody Press.

5. **The seven heads (vs. 3)** are seven mountains (vv. 9, 10), which also represent kingdoms. We must never forget that every federation of kings in the OT, and here, is always opposed to God and the people of God (Gen 15:18-21; Dan 2:41, 42; 7:7, 20, 24; Ps 2:1-3; 83:1-8; Rev 12:3; 13:1; 16:12-16).¹⁵
6. **For “waters” (17:15)**, see Jeremiah 51:13. The destruction of the prostitute is described in images drawn from Ezekiel 23:11–35. Once in power, the beast and his associates will reject the authority of the prostitute’s system and throw off her rule. With that system destroyed, the Beast will then be introduced by the false prophet as the true god (13:12; cf. 2 Thess. 2:4).¹⁶

Conclusion of Part I

It is obvious that Satan is never tired of doing evil, never quits, no matter God’s opposition or protection from seeking to do evil, loves to mimic what God does, so as to deceive the hearts of many and is relentless in seeking to overthrow God’s power. It does not matter how many people die or how much destruction he projects upon the earth and mankind. All Satan intends to do is to be in power.

“All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (John 10:8-10; NASU)

“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 5:8-11; NASU)

¹⁵ Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Re 17:1). Moody Press.

¹⁶ Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (p. 746). Tyndale House Publishers.