

Babylon the Great Prostitute

Introduction to the great prostitute

17:1

In the book of Revelation, the figure of a woman is used to symbolize a system of religious belief.

For example

Jezebel represents the pagan idolatry of the past, Rev 2:20

The sun-clothed woman represents Israel and the Jewish system, Revelation 12:1

The bride of Christ represents the church, Rev 21:9; 19:7-8

The great prostitute represents the false religious system of the tribulation, Rev 19:2

In the OT, harlotry is commonly used to denote religious apostasy.

“...she stands for a dominant world system based on seduction for personal gain...”¹

The great prostitute is the victim of great judgment, 17:1-6

The punishment mentioned

Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, 17:1b.

This appears to be the same angel who announces the Bride, the wife of the Lamb, 21:9 “When the great harlot with all her seductive allurements is exposed and destroyed, then the Bride of Christ will be seen in all her beauty and worth.”²

They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked...17:16b

The extent of the prostitute's influence

“who sits on many waters,” 17:1, 15

The nature of the prostitute's influence, 2-4

With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries, 17:2

¹ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT, p. 307.

² Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT, p. 307.

The nations entered into illicit relationships with her for profit.

The apostate religion of the day has widely influenced political leaders of the day and “were intoxicated,” that is, they lost all sense of ration and perspective because of her influence.

Purple and scarlet are colors of greatness, these are contrasted with the “fine linen bright and pure” of the bride of the lamb, 19:8

The golden cup she offers is all sorts of moral corruption and uncleanness, 4. She offers a golden cup, wealth, pleasure and prosperity to all who will follow her.

The source of the prostitute’s power, 5, 6.

She sits upon the scarlet colored beast

She rides the first beast to power and prominence. It appears that she “the false religious system” has power over the beast. He “empowers” her, giving her protection and wealth to control the earth

She has a name, v 5

There are seven other references to markings on the forehead in Revelation. One set is of marks with reference to wickedness (13:16; 14:9; 20:4) and the other as the seal of God 7:3; 9:4; 14:1; 22:4.

The name “MYSTERTY” probably means that it has a secret meaning that calls for wisdom to fully understand. 17:9 cf. 13:18.

“She” is a city, 5, the center of this activity, 18

She is the reason many believers are martyred, 17:6

She has taken fiendish delight in hounding believers to death³

The executor of the great judgment, 17:7-18

The beast from the abyss, 17:7-8

This beast is the second beast, the political ruler mentioned in 13:1-10.

This beast appears to have been dead and raised to life, 17:8; 13:3; 11:7, in some ways, imitating Christ’s resurrection from the dead, 1:18. 2:8

The need for wisdom, 17:9a

This is not obvious except for those who have wisdom

³ Barclay.

The explanation of the numbers 17:9-11

Mountains are seven kings

Five are fallen

Likely refers to five great kings of history past even from John's time, 17:10a

Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece.

One is

The government that was contemporary with John as he wrote... Rome

Not yet come: from John's perspective

The beast is the seventh, and he dies and comes back to life, he appears to be an "eighth."

The ten horns are current kings of the future which make up the beast's dominating empire, 17:12-13

They will make war with the Lamb during the tribulation, 14a

The end of the prostitute, 14b-18

"the Lamb will overcome them..." is a reference to "the battle of the great day of God almighty, 16:14; 19:11ff

She appears to have control of the beast and the ten nation confederacy (along with the peoples of the earth 17:15) but it does not last long. The beast of the Abyss will overthrow her and devour her. Satan's kingdom will divide against itself (Mark 3:24-26).

²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. ²⁶ And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.

God is at work in the hearts of evil people (17:17) to accomplish his perfect will, see Isaiah 44:28-45:7.

Proverbs 21:1

Babylon judged Israel (Jer 25:9-11).

These people have no idea they are accomplishing God's will.

What city is this?

Rome? Some think so, Rome is a city on seven hills.

Yet, verse 10 indicates these hills are seven kings...

It is hard to conclude that it is none other than Babylon on the Euphrates. OT prophecies are yet unfulfilled (Isa 13 and Jer 51).

Today, it is mostly uninhabited; a few US bases are there. Saddam Hussein had started to rebuild it.

Could the current conflict play a part in her rise to power? Perhaps.

It will someday become the focal point for a religious system staunchly opposed to the truth of the Lamb's followers.

It will thrive quickly and gain quick influence, the beast and ten kings will use it, then destroy it.

Olympic cities have been built in months. The city does not have to be numerically big to be powerful.

So what?

Be careful of the allurements of wealth, things.

17:4

1 Timothy 6:9-10

⁹ People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

“Need” is a funny thing... often the truth of the matter is “want.”

Be careful of anything that would seduce you away from the worship of the Lamb.

Money, ease, luxury, passion...

Remember that the kingdoms of this world have most often opposed the reign of the Lamb and all of his followers, Psalm 2.

You won't go through the tribulation...

You may have opposition because of your affiliation with the Lamb.

Count yourself among the faithful who suffer for Christ and his kingdom.