

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.  
Rev. 1:3

# Verse by Verse Through the Book of Revelation

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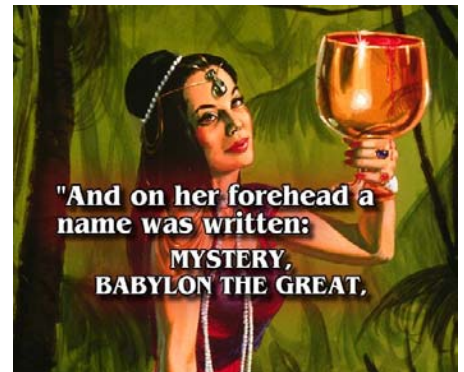
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## REVELATION CHAPTER 17

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Chapter 17 consists of two distinct parts: (1) the symbolic vision of vs. 3-6, which John saw, and (2) what he was told (v. 7) in explanation of it as recorded in vs. 8-18.

Part one sets forth the crimes of Babylon, and thus constitutes Heaven's bill of indictment, a declaration of why the divine sentence is to be pronounced upon her (see v. 6).



Part two sets forth the sentence itself and the means by which it is to be executed. Babylon's criminal career reaches a climax under the sixth plague (see 16: 12-16), whereas the sentence decreed is executed under the seventh (see 16:17-19; 17:13-17; 18:4, 8; 19:2)

So part one is concerned with events under the sixth plague, and part two with those under the seventh. Chapter 17 tells about the final crisis, when Satan puts forth his supreme effort to annihilate God's people. (see ch. 12:17) and when all the powers of the earth are arrayed against them (Great Controversy 834).

God permits Satan and the human agencies allied with him to carry forward to the verge of success their plot to annihilate the saints. But at the moment the blow is to be struck God intervenes to deliver His people. The hosts of evil, arrested in the very act of attempting to slay the saints, stand without excuse before the bar of divine justice (see Dan. 12:1; Early Writings 282-285; Great Controversy 635, 636).

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**Little wonder that John was filled with amazement as he beheld the climax of the great drama of the mystery of iniquity (see ch. 17:6).**

1. **And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials,** The identification of this angel as one of the seven plague-bearing angels of chs. 15 and 16 implies that the information about to be imparted to John is related to the seven last plagues.

**And talked with me saying unto me,** Possibly the angel addressed John before taking him off in vision.

**Come hither;** Or “Here!” The expression has the force of a command.

**I will show unto thee the judgment** Greek krima “sentence” or “verdict”

**of the great whore** Greek porne “prostitute” In Greece prostitutes were usually purchased slaves. The Old Testament prophets often compare apostate Israel, which repeatedly went “a whoring” after heathen gods (Eze. 23:30; Isa. 23:17; Eze. 16:15) with as adulterous woman.

**that sitteth upon many waters** That is, exercises absolute power over many peoples and nations.

2. **With whom the kings of the earth** That is, the political powers of the earth which place their authority and resources at the disposal of the “great whore.” The kings of the earth are her accomplices in crime against God’s people.

**have committed fornication,** This refers to an illicit alliance of professed Christians with some master other than Christ, in this instance to a religio-political compact between an apostate church and the nations of the earth. Compare Isa. 23:15, 17.

**and the inhabitants of the earth** As a result of the course followed by their leaders, the inhabitants of the earth are deceived into cooperating with the policy of the great whore.

**have been made drunk** That is, completely intoxicated. The normal powers of reason and judgment have been stupefied and the spiritual perception benumbed. Compare Jer. 51:7; 2 Thess. 2:9, 10)

**with the wine** they “drink” or believe the “wine” of false doctrine. This “wine” is Satan’s deceptive policy of uniting all the world under his control, together with the falsehoods and “miracles” by which he advances his policies.

**of her fornication** Or her prostitution. The alliance between apostate Christianity and the political powers of the earth is the means by which Satan proposes to unite the world under his leadership.

3. **So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness** The sensation of motion, ‘being carried away,’ was probably designed to aid John in making the mental transition from his own time and place to those in vision.

**and I saw a woman** This woman (Rev. 17:1) is the great whore or mystical Babylon the Great. Mystical Babylon constitutes the organized religious opposition to God’s people, probably from the beginning of time, but here, particularly, at its very close

**sit** The form of the verb denotes continuing action. The great whore is represented as being in direct control of men: a) as individuals, b) their religions, and c) their policies of civil government (see v. 18). It has ever been characteristic of apostate Christianity to attempt a union of church and state, in order to consolidate religious control over public policy.

**upon a scarlet colored** In prophecy scarlet is the color of sin—compare the great red dragon of Rev. 12:3.

**beast**, Represents political powers. **Note: the beast represents political power and the woman represents a religious power. So, the religious power (woman) is “steering” the political power (the beast).**

**full of names of blasphemy**, Covered with names of blasphemy indicates it stands in opposition to God.

**having seven heads and ten horns.** May represent seven major political powers—we don’t know yet—the number 7 often has symbolic rather than a literal value. Horns always represent power.

4. **And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls,** This prostitute is gaudily dressed and vulgarly bedecked. She stands forth in striking contrast with the “bride” of the Lamb whom John saw arrayed in fine linen, clean and white. (see Rev. 19:7,8)
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**having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:** The gold of the cup deceives men with respect to the nature of the contents. (see v. 2)

5. **And upon her head was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.** Babylon is referred to as “great” in view of the fact that this chapter deals most particularly with Satan’s great final effort to secure the allegiance of the human race through religion. “Babylon the Great” is the name by which Inspiration refers to the great threefold union of: a) the papacy, b) apostate Protestantism and c) spiritualism.

The “daughters” of this “mother” are all the Protestant churches who follow her erroneous teachings of immortality of the soul, Sunday sacredness, and who will believe in the apparitions of the Virgin Mary and will believe that Jesus has come when Satan appears!

6. **And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus:** Babylon is utterly intoxicated with her past success at persecuting the saints (see Dan 8:25; Matt 24:21; Rev. 6:9-11; 18:24).

**and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.** Literally translated as amazement.

7. **And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.** The rest of the chapter is the angel’s interpretation of the “mystery” or the symbolism of the vision. The “beast” is explained in vs. 8-17 and the “woman” in v. 18.

8. **The beast that thou sawest was, and is not;** Some identify the “was” period of the beast with that of pagan Rome, the “is not” period with the brief interval between the end of pagan persecution and the beginning of papal persecution and the “yet is” period with that of papal Rome.

**and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit,** (Many Bible scholars believe that this is the period of “yet is” and marks the period when the “deadly wound was healed:

**and go into perdition:** This indicates the utter end of the beast.

**and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, (Be amazed)**

**whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world,** The book itself has been in existence since that time—not the names in it

**when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.** I believe that the people of the earth will at first be amazed when the Papacy ignites its office of inquisition. It “was” then it “was not” and “yet is” when persecution is again revitalized against those who won’t go along with the pagan beliefs of immortality of the soul, the false Sabbath, and the recognition of the virgin Mary as part of the god head.

9. **And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sitteth.** Seven heads apparently represent seven major political powers through which Satan has sought to destroy the people and the work of God on earth. Whether or not Inspiration intended these heads to be identified is not clear. The number 7 is often symbolic. Others see the first five heads as Babylon, Persia, Greece, Roman Empire and the Papacy. The sixth and seventh heads they see as France and the United States, or the United States and a world organization or restored papacy.

Others see the seven heads as the seven persecuting powers since God first had a chosen people. This would be: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, The Roman Empire and the papacy.

Seven mountains probably an allusion to Rome with its seven hills. The woman sitting on the seven heads and seven mountains indicates that she is in control of them.

10. **And there are seven kings:** Or “and seven kings are they.” These “kings” are not in addition to the “heads” and the “mountains” but, presumably, identified with them. How much distinction, if any, is intended between the “kings” and the “mountains” is not clear.

**five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come;** Those who say the first five heads are Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Greece would then say that the “one is” would refer to the Roman Power in John’s day. And the “other” would refer to the papacy who had not come in John’s day. This seems to be the most likely interpretation although there are several other interpretations for those who are interested in studying further.

**and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.** If this refers to the papacy it would refer to a brief or short space of time—those persecuting years of the middle ages and the brief attempt at persecution at the end of time.

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11. **And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.** This is the beast in its revived state, in the “yet is” period. Some consider the eighth power to be the papacy alone; others suggest that it represents Satan at the time when he attempts to impersonate Christ. (2 Thess. 2: 6-12) I believe it represents both Satan and the papacy combined because it arises out of the seventh head.

It would seem that this is the period when God permits Satan to use the papacy in a cooperative effort to annihilate the saints.

12. **And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet;** These ten horns aren't positively identified by any Bible commentary that I can find! Some take ten to be a round number and, as such, to refer to all the powers of the category spoken of as “horns” irrespective of their precise arithmetical number. Some think these are the same 10 horns represented in Daniel and earlier in Revelation. Others, on the basis that they receive “power as kings one hour with the beast” consider that they cannot, therefore, be identified with the various nations that arose during the breakup of the Roman Empire.

**but receive power as kings one hour with the beast.** One hour of prophetic time would be 2 literal weeks. Most Bible Scholars take this to mean a brief but unspecified period of time rather than 2 literal weeks.

This brief “hour” of ch. 17:12 witnesses the climax of satanic planning for the unification of the world through a compact between the apostate religious organizations of the earth, as represented by the woman, and the political powers of earth, as represented by the beast.

13. **These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.** Greek gnome which is translated “will.” The nations of the earth, represented by the ten horns purpose to unite with the “beast” in forcing the inhabitants of earth to drink the “wine” of Babylon and to kill all who refuse to cooperate.
14. **These shall make war with the Lamb and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.** With the world united under the leadership of the “beast” the final stage of the warfare against Christ and His people now begins. This is the “battle of that great day of God Almighty.” **Under the sixth plague preparations are made for the battle which is fought under the seventh plague.** Christ intervenes at the moment the forces of evil launch their attack on the saints, at the opening of the seventh plague.

15. **And he saith unto me. The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.** The angel again refers to what John saw. This interprets what the waters mean.
16. **And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.** Heretofore the horns had given their support to the policies advocated by the “woman” (papacy) particularly to the plot to slay the saints. But when Christ overcomes them they turn on her, realizing that she has deceived them.

Desolate and naked means left in embarrassment and shame.

It would seem that the whore is to be violently, pitilessly destroyed by the very powers that had so recently supported her. A figurative woman would, of course, be burned figuratively.

17. **For God hath put in their hearts to fulfill his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.** Rev. 17:16,17 constitutes the climax of the chapter, presenting “the judgment of the great whore,” the topic announced by the angel in v. 1. This sentence will be meted out to Babylon under the seventh plague.
18. **And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.** Literal Babylon was the “great city” of ancient times. From the days of Babel the city of Babylon has been representative of organized opposition to the purposes of God on earth. See Gen. 11:4-6.