

Revelation 17
The Scarlet Woman and the Scarlet Beast

Revelation 17 (NKJV)

¹ Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters,
² with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.”

³ So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast *which was* full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

⁴ The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.

⁵ And on her forehead a name *was* written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

⁶ I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement.

⁷ But the angel said to me, “Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

⁸ The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

⁹ “Here *is* the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits.

¹⁰ There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, *and* the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time.

	<p>¹¹ The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition.</p> <p>¹² “The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast.</p> <p>¹³ These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast.</p> <p>¹⁴ These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those <i>who are</i> with Him <i>are</i> called, chosen, and faithful.”</p> <p>¹⁵ Then he said to me, “The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.</p> <p>¹⁶ And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire.</p> <p>¹⁷ For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.</p> <p>¹⁸ And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.”</p>
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The Desolation of the Harlot (Rev. 17)

The scene begins with *an invitation* (Rev. 17:1–2). One of the angels asks John to come and see what God will do with “the beast’s” worldwide religious system. 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”).

Following the invitation, John was carried away “in the Spirit” into the wilderness. There he saw “the harlot” and wrote down *the description* of what he saw (Rev. 17:3–6). Genesis 2 speaks of a pure bride in a lovely Garden; but by the Bible’s end, civilization has degenerated to an impure harlot in a wilderness! That is what sin does to the world.

The description is very full. The woman is dressed in expensive garments, decorated with gold and precious stones. She is holding a golden cup in her hand and is drunk with the blood of the saints. On her forehead (see Rev. 13:16; 14:1) she wears a special name.

Her posture is important. She is seated upon “many waters” (Rev. 17:1), and upon a scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns. No wonder John was “greatly astonished” (NIV) when he beheld the woman and “the beast.”

But what did it all mean? Thankfully, the angel gave John (and all believers) *the explanation* of these symbols (Rev. 17:7–18).

Let's begin with *the woman*. Revelation 17:18 makes clear that she is identified with a city that existed in John's day ("reigns" is present tense). This city is prosperous and powerful, but also idolatrous ("blasphemy") and dangerous. For one thing, it pollutes the nations with its filth and abomination (pictured by the golden wine cup); for another, it persecutes those who belong to the Lord (Rev. 17:6). Power, wealth, pollution, persecution: these words summarize the "great harlot's" involvement on a worldwide scale.

The woman's name also involves "mystery" (Rev. 17:5). In the New Testament, a "mystery" is a hidden truth that only the spiritually initiated can understand. To grasp one of God's mysteries requires spiritual intelligence and discernment. In this case, the mystery has to do with Babylon.

The city of Babylon was founded by Nimrod (Gen. 10:8–11). The name *Bab-el* means "the gate of God." Ironically, the famous tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1–9) was an idolatrous attempt by man to defy God. When the Lord sent judgment on the builders by making mankind's one language into many, the word *bab-el* came to mean "confusion." Later in history, Babylon became a great empire before finally falling to Media-Persia. But from the beginning of Nimrod's city in Genesis 10, an insidious anti-God "Babylonian influence" has been felt throughout history.

The woman is "the great harlot," but she is also "the mother of harlots." The Babylonian system has, in one way or another, given birth to all false religions. She has also seduced men into opposing God and persecuting His servants.

The seven mountains (Rev. 17:9) probably symbolize the city of Rome, built on seven hills. Certainly in John's day, the Roman Empire was living in luxury, spreading false religion, polluting the nations with its idolatry and sin, and persecuting the church.

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. 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.)

As noted earlier, scarlet is the color of Satan (Rev. 12:3) and of sin (Isa. 1:18). Scarlet was a popular color in Rome, and both scarlet and purple were associated with rank and riches.

But the woman must not be separated from "the beast" that carries her. "The beast" has seven heads and ten horns. The seven heads symbolize seven mountains (Rev. 17:9) and also seven kings or kingdoms (Rev. 17:10), in keeping with Old Testament imagery (Ps. 30:7; Dan. 2:35). I have already suggested that the seven mountains can be interpreted geographically as the seven hills of Rome, but they may also be interpreted historically as seven kingdoms.

According to Revelation 17:10, five of these kings (or kingdoms) had passed off the scene, one was present in John's day, and one was yet to come. If so, then the five *past* kingdoms would be Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece. The *present* kingdom would be Rome, and the *future* kingdom would be that of "the beast." In order to understand Revelation 17:10–11, we must consider Revelation 17:12.

"The beast" not only has seven heads, but also ten horns, which represent ten kings. But these are very special kings: they enable "the beast" to rise to power and are even willing to yield their authority to him. Recall that at the opening of the first seal (Rev. 6:1–2), Antichrist began his "peaceful" conquest of the nations. He organized a "United States of Europe," brought peace to the Middle East, and appeared to be the great leader the troubled world was seeking.

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”).

But how does all this relate to Babylon? The “Babylonian system” of false religion has been a part of history since Nimrod founded his empire. Scholars have discovered it is amazingly like the true Christian faith! Alas, it is Satan’s counterfeit of God’s truth. Babylonians practiced the worship of mother and child, and even believed in the death and resurrection of the son.

Readers in John’s day would identify “the harlot” with the Roman Empire. Readers in the Middle Ages might identify it as the Roman ecclesiastical system. Today, some believers see “the harlot” and the Babylonian system in an apostate “world church” that minimizes doctrinal truth, rejects the authority of the Word, and tries to unite professed believers on some other basis than faith in Jesus Christ.

However, in the days when John’s prophecy will be fulfilled, an amazing thing will happen: “the harlot” will be made desolate by the very system that carried her! It is important to note that “*the beast*” carries “*the harlot*.” Satan (and Antichrist) will use the apostate religious system to accomplish his own ends (i.e., attain world power); but then he will do away with “the harlot” and establish his own religious system. And all of this will be the fulfillment of God’s Word (Rev. 17:17).

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.

Throughout history, political systems have “used” religious bodies to further their political causes. At the same time, church history reveals that religious groups have used politics to achieve their purposes. The marriage of church and state is not a happy one, and has often spawned children that have created serious problems. When dictators are friendly with religion, it is usually a sign that they want to make use of religion’s influence and then destroy it. The church of Jesus Christ has been most influential in the world when it has maintained a separated position.

Compare the description of “the harlot’s” desolation with that of the death of Jezebel (2 Kings 9:30–37).

Finally, note that those who trust the Lord are not influenced by “the harlot” or defeated by the kings (Rev. 17:14). Once again, John points out that the true believers are the “overcomers.”

Satan’s counterfeit religion is subtle, requiring spiritual discernment to recognize. It was Paul’s great concern that the local churches he founded not be seduced away from their sincere devotion to Christ (2 Cor. 11:1–4). In every age, there is the tremendous pressure to conform to “popular religion” and to abandon the fundamentals of the faith. In these last days, we all need to heed the admonitions in 1 Timothy 4 and 2 Timothy 3 and remain true to our Lord.

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¹Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Re 17:1

17:1, 2 The reference to **one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls** marks this passage as a continuation of 16:17–21. The coming reference to “BABYLON THE GREAT” (v. 5) has the same linking effect. **Many waters** are interpreted in v. 15 as “peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.” Although Babylon is only called the **harlot** in vv. 1, 5, 16, and 19:2, her habitual **fornication** was introduced in 14:8, as was her imminent and well-deserved **judgment**. Both the **kings of the earth** and the **inhabitants of the earth** are seduced into committing spiritual adultery with Babylon. The indication is that she made them **drunk with** power, material possessions, false worship, and pride. The **wine** of Babylon’s fornication (14:8) is judged forcefully and finally by God in “the wine of the fierceness of His wrath” (16:19).

17:3 In the Spirit describes John’s spiritually exalted state as he receives the various visions of the Book of Revelation (1:10). **The wilderness** is where the **woman** identified as “Babylon, the mother of harlots” (v. 5) is seen sitting on a **scarlet beast** (12:3; 13:1). Since this woman normally “sits on many waters” (v. 1) and since the woman who gave birth to the Child-Ruler fled into the wilderness as a place of protection (12:6, 14), perhaps Babylon here is seen as being in league with the dragon and the beast as they ferociously pursue God’s people (12:13–16). The description of the scarlet beast clearly identifies him with the beast from the sea—the Antichrist—in 13:1, 5, 6. The *ten horns* are interpreted in v. 12 as ten kings; they may represent the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar’s vision (see Dan. 2:41).

17:4 The woman, Babylon, is dressed like a queen (18:7), wearing **purple, scarlet, gold, and pearls**. Though the appearance of “the great harlot” (vv. 1, 5) is regal, her royal **golden cup** is **full of abominations and . . . filthiness**, speaking of idolatry and unclean acts that disgust God. This description is given first from the standpoint of people, who look at the outer appearance, and then from the perspective of God, who knows the heart (see 1 Sam. 16:7).

17:5 The **name** on Babylon’s **forehead** may imply that Babylon is ultimately subordinate to the beast (13:16, 17). **MYSTERY** may be the first part of the title for **BABYLON THE GREAT**. But based on the use of the word *mystery* in v. 7, this verse should probably read, “on her forehead a mysterious name was written.” The title itself suggests that all spiritual harlotry and abominable acts in history are somehow the offspring of Babylon.

17:6 The woman Babylon is **drunk with the blood of the saints** and Christian **martyrs** (see Matt. 24:21), as well as by “the wine of her fornication” (v. 2). Thus, her actions are doubly repugnant to the Lord, as are the acts of anyone who persecutes God’s people. The woman’s hatred of Christianity is clearly portrayed in this verse. Being drunk from saints’ blood implies a time of extraordinary slaughter.

17:8 The description of **the beast** as one who **was, and is not, and will ascend . . . and go to perdition** is a conscious contrast to the description of God in 1:4, 8. *Was* apparently indicates that the beast had been manifested in the past (see Dan. 7). *Is not* suggests that the beast was not working his evil in John’s day. *Will ascend . . . to perdition* suggests eternal ruin or punishment. Those **whose names are not written in the Book of Life** (13:8; 20:12, 15) are deceived by the beast because they do not know its certain eternal destiny. All they **see** is one who once existed and has now made an incredible reemergence.

17:9, 10 The mind which has wisdom possesses divinely aided spiritual understanding, which is a mind receptive to God's truth (1:3). The clause may possibly be connected with v. 8 rather than v. 9, and may refer specifically to wisdom in understanding who the beast is. It may also refer to the following verses, the interpretation of the heads, the beast, the horns, and **the woman** (see vv. 1–6). The **seven heads** of the beast (v. 3) symbolize both **seven mountains** and **seven kings**. Since the word *mountains* also means “hills” in Revelation (14:1), most interpreters understand this as referring to the seven hills along the Tiber River, a well-known designation of the city of Rome. However, *seven mountains* may also refer to successive world empires, since mountains are typically symbols of earthly kingdoms or empires (see Ps. 30:7; Jer. 51:25; Dan. 2:44, 45). According to this view, **five** would be past kingdoms (perhaps Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece), with sixth being the Roman Empire and seventh another which **has not yet come**. Perhaps it is to be a revived Rome Empire. *Kings* may refer to Roman emperors, but this is unlikely since more than five had reigned before the writing of Revelation.

17:11, 12 The beast . . . is . . . the eighth, and is of the seven: The beast is related to the seventh king, but also has a separate identity. The obscure wording may express the worldwide amazement that the beast was healed from a deadly wound to rule the world again (13:3). It seems that the eighth world empire is some form of a revived Roman Empire over which the Antichrist establishes the imperial authority of a dictator. He will overcome three horns, or nations (see Dan. 7:20), and will claim universal authority. **one hour:** A limited time is allotted to the **ten kings**, or **ten horns** (see 1:3; Dan. 2:34, 41, 42), who will **receive authority** to rule alongside **the beast** (18:10, 17, 19). The Lord's sovereignty is not threatened in these statements of sequence and duration because the beast cannot change the fact that he, because of God's just judgment, **is going to perdition**. The time frame for these events may coincide with 16:14, in which the preparations for the battle at Armageddon are described.

17:13 The ten kings who ultimately rule under the authority of the beast (v. 12) cooperate fully and **give back their power and authority to the beast**. Some understand these ten rulers to be provincial heads in the Roman Empire in John's day, while others take *ten* symbolically to mean a host of national powers aligned with the beast. Still others see a ten-nation confederacy, perhaps a revived latter-day Roman Empire (see Dan. 7:7, 19, 20, 23, 24).

17:14 The ten kings in league with the beast will be so bold as to **make war** against **the Lamb** (Christ). He, the all-powerful **Lord of lords and King of kings** (19:16), will easily **overcome them** at His second coming (19:19–21). This wording is in direct contrast with 13:7, where the beast and his forces are allowed by God “to make war with the saints and to overcome them.” Many of those whom the beast defeated and even killed are now numbered in the conquering army of the Lamb. The Lord's army is composed of the **called, chosen, and faithful**—probably the heavenly soldiers of 19:14.

17:16, 17 The ten horns (the kings of v. 12) will grow to hate Babylon, **the harlot**. As a result, they will expose and then utterly destroy her. Since this description is similar to God's judgment on Babylon in 18:8, it seems that the Lord sovereignly uses the forces of the beast as His instrument of judgment on the kingdom of Antichrist (ch. 18) before they themselves are destroyed (see 19:19–21). With the advent of the beast as a supreme ruler given to self-deification (see Dan. 11:36; Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2), Satan has originated an entirely new order.

This order is so radically different from the great harlot (vv. the beast, or perhaps the political aspect of Babylon, turns upon and destroys the religious aspect of Babylon.

17:18 The woman in John's vision (vv. 1–6) is the **great city** Babylon (16:19), yet is also the ancient "mother of harlots" (v. 5). Thus, the satanic influence of this city over the world's leaders has continued from Babel through Babylon to Rome (v. 9, 10), its classic manifestation in the first century A.D.

2

1. *Her position. 17:1.*

17:1. John the apostle/prophet is invited by **one of the seven angels, which had the seven vials** (bowl judgments), to witness the judgment of (1) **the great whore** and (2) her position (**that sitteth upon many waters**). The reader is not left to his own resources in the interpretation of this important chapter, but he must scrutinize every clue given. Harlotry is amply explained in passages of the Old and New Testaments (cf. Ezk 16:15; Hos 1–3; Jas 4:4; II Pet 2:14). Both adultery and harlotry are sins of physical immorality which are made to represent spiritual defection and apostasy. Wherein her harlotry consists is explained in verses 4–6 of this chapter and in 18:3–5, among other passages. **The many waters** upon which she sits are interpreted explicitly (stated in vs. 15) as **peoples** and **nations**.

2. *Her sin. 17:2.*

2. Her dominant position over the nations could be political or spiritual. Those interpreters who believe the domination is political identify the harlot as the Roman Empire. Those expositors who consider the rule and subjugation are spiritual/religious, among whom the present writer is one, identify her as a corrupted papal Rome, with the inclusion under her hegemony of all systems and sects which are basically anti-Christian, not excluding apostate Christendom. So grievous were her acts of immorality (mentioned twice in this verse) that the results are likened to a drunken stupor.

3. *Her seat on the scarlet beast. 17:3.*

3. In verse 1 the position of the harlot was described in its wide scope, all nations and peoples; here she is seen sitting (dominating and domineering) **upon a scarlet-colored beast**. Is the harlot the same person as this woman? Context and logic demand an affirmative reply. The meaning of her riding the scarlet beast, replete with **names of blasphemy**, and **having seven heads and ten horns**, is that the religious system is controlling and subjugating the political power (cf. 13:1 for the connection with the beast from the sea). In short, at Rome the political power is under the absolute sway of the religious system. This was revealed supernaturally to John by the inditing Spirit. The **scarlet color** indicates the glory and splendor of the political power, but it cannot hinder the suppressive control of the religious leaders.

4. *Her clothing. 17:4.*

4. Some six elements are introduced to demonstrate the wealth, luxury, and extravagance of the harlot. But all is utilized toward the one end—her uncleanness and immorality (cf. 18:19 for a picture of extensive wealth). The **golden cup** here is related to the enticements spoken of in verse 2.

5. *Her name. 17:5.*

²Radmacher, Earl D. ; Allen, Ronald Barclay ; House, H. Wayne: *The Nelson Study Bible : New King James Version*. Nashville : T. Nelson Publishers, 1997, S. Re 17:1

5. There is no mistaking her identity, for her **name** is written **upon her forehead**. Roman harlots in their brazenness wore a label with their names on their foreheads (cf. R. H. Charles. op. cit., II, p. 65). The name contains a mystery, a disclosed secret for this time. Her widespread influence is underscored by the repeated references to her greatness. She is the source of godlessness and idolatrous practices throughout the world (cf. for a lengthy sketch, H. A. Ironside, op. cit., pp. 285–302). In the Greek text of the United Bible Societies her name is in normal lower case except for the *B* in “**Babylon**”; AV, ASV, NASB, and NIV use the upper case. What is the intended meaning of this verse? It is stating that literal Babylon of old is typical, symbolical of religious Babylon (cf. Jer 50:38; 51:7). For a parallel usage, see 11:8 of Revelation. **MYSTERY, BABYLON** is in fact the mystery of iniquity in its final form (cf. II Thess 2:7).

6. *Her bloodthirstiness. 17:6.*

6. To this point one may feel that the harlot system is guilty of atrocities in the moral and spiritual realms alone. But she is culpable of much more. The blood of the saints and witnesses for Christ has stained her hands. In 18:24, the climax of the two chapters on Babylon, she is again charged with being **drunken with the blood of the saints** who have been martyred on earth. Thus, the harlot cannot be literal Babylon nor papal Rome alone, it must comprehend all godless systems, consummating at last in this hideous figure. Here it is professing Christendom with her motley followers persecuting and slaying the saints of God; it is not now pagan emperors as in the days of the early Christian centuries. No wonder John was amazed. He was astonished that the professing church of his day could become so degenerate in a coming day.

7. *The mystery of the woman. 17:7.*

7. What the Apostle John saw still needed to be explained to him in its details. Since the disclosure was granted him, not to perplex but to instruct him, the angel (cf. vs. 1) promises to clarify **the mystery of the woman, and of the beast**.

8. *Identity of the beast. 17:8–13.*

8. There is a consensus among interpreters that the **beast** (the same as 13:1) is the Roman Empire: its historic appearance, its long disappearance, and its future reappearance. As to its motivation in reappearing, it will come from **the bottomless pit**, devilish empowering, and finally find its end in perdition. The ancient Roman Empire was destroyed in its imperial form in John’s time in A.D. 476. That political power is not in existence today. But Satan will see that it is revived to fulfill his purpose. Notice that, as to his human origin, the beast is from the nations (cf. 13:10); but as to its supporting power, it is a satanic revival. Such a resurrection of the old Roman Empire, almost endlessly scoffed at by unbelievers and even many believers, will amaze the earth dwellers, who are plainly stated to be unbelievers. John **wondered** (vs. 6); the world of a coming day also **shall wonder**.

9. It is immediately stated that it takes God’s **wisdom** to understand the disclosure. The **seven mountains** (or hills) are proof that mystical Babylon cannot be ancient, literal Babylon, which was situated in a plain and not on mountains. However, it is known that Rome is built on

AV Authorized Version
ASV American Standard Version
NASB New American Standard Bible
NIV New International Version

seven hills (e.g., the Quirinal, Capitoline, Palatine); classical writers familiarly spoke of “the city of seven hills” (cf. Charles, op. cit., II, p. 69).

10. If there has been a variety of views to this point, it has surely been increased to confusion in verses 10–11. Who are the **seven kings**? The text plainly states that five are past, one is present, and the last is future. R. H. Charles (op. cit., II, p. 69; followed by Barclay, op. cit., p. 181 et al) names them as Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero, then Vespasian, and finally Titus. The reign of the last is held to be a short one, thus fulfilling the text. However, much discussion has been expended on the state of the original manuscript and a Nero *redivivus* (resurrected) for 17:8, 11, 14. It is poor exegesis to find fault with the condition of the original Greek when the interpretation does not fit the exigencies of the case. History will verify that in Roman rule six types of government are to be found: kings, consuls, dictators, decemvirs, and military tribunes; the sixth is the imperial form, which was in existence when John was on Patmos. The seventh type is the Roman Empire under a new head (cf. 13:1). This government will have ten kingdoms (cf. Dan 2 and 7), never equalled before and all subject to the beast (cf. Gaebelein, in loco; also Ottman, pp. 309–311), whose tenure of office will be brief.

11. The human revival of the empire (cf. 13:1) in the Tribulation Period will be followed by the hellish revival (cf. vs. 8), which is so complete in itself as to be called an **eighth** feature (eight is the number of resurrection). There will be an organic connection between the last two stages of the Roman Beast in his sovereignty. He will be one of the seven, but distinct enough to be considered the eighth (cf. Dan 7:7–8, 23–26).

12. The **ten kings** kingdom (cf. 13:1) is the form in which the Roman Empire will be revived. It has never existed thus before (cf. Dan chs. 2 and 7). Verses 10 and 12 both stress the shortness of this rule: **a short space** and for **one hour**. The precise time has been given earlier in the book more than once.

13. The confederated kings of the revived Roman Empire will have **one mind** and purpose: total subservience to the Roman Beast.

9. *The victory of the Lamb. 17:14–18.*

14. What is the goal of the confederated powers? Nothing less than **war with the Lamb**. Recall the war in heaven between Michael and his angels (cf. 12:7ff.) and the dragon and his angels—quite an unequal combat. But here the balance of power is infinitely against the ungodly armies. **The Lamb shall overcome them ... and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.** The issue is never in doubt; it is victory for the Lamb and His redeemed (not angels) in heaven, as can be discerned from the three adjectives that conclude the verse. Notice the honorific, well-deserved title of the Lamb. Here, by anticipation, is another preview of Armageddon, yet to be fully set forth in 19:14–21.

15. Peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. In an apocalyptic book with rich symbolism and a multiplicity of participants, there is need for occasional explanation; so this verse identifies the waters of verse 1.

16. Here illumination is given concerning the **beast** and his underlings who were dominated by the apostate system (vs. 3). In some way not stated, the subservient ones turn the tables and vent their hatred against the harlot. So thoroughgoing will their judgment on her be, that it must be expressed by four concepts: desolation, nakedness, consumption (cannibalism), and burning (cf. with the fate of Jezebel of old, II Kgs 9:30–37).

17. Overruling all the feelings of the enemies of the harlot, it will ultimately be God who directs them to execute His judgment on her. All He has given in the prophetic word **shall be fulfilled**.

18. The **woman** of this verse is the same as the one in verse 16, and indeed throughout the chapter. This verse is not an unnecessary addendum to the chapter. It reveals (1) that the woman (harlot), though a colossal system of apostasy and idolatry, is also to be thought of in terms of **that great city** of her headquarters, namely, Rome; and (2) that her reign is worldwide (**over the kings of the earth**).

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³ *KJV Bible Commentary*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1994, S. 2701