

Revelation — Chapters 17 & 18

Babylon the Great Whore and Her Judgment

An Outline of "The Revelation" — Walter Scott From The Faith and The Flock, 1910–1911

The relation of Babylon to the Beast (see Chap. 8) and to the political powers of Christendom, along with details of her judgment, are, in the main, the subject matter of the Chapters now under consideration. Babylon is the concentration of all antagonistic to God religiously. The first Beast of Rev. 8, her partner in crime, is the embodiment of the powers hostile to God politically. The former is the more wicked of the two. The seductive influence of Babylon is to the ruin of souls. The brute force of the Beast is exercised in connection with the temporal interests of men. As systems they co-exist and co-operate in the coming crisis. Babylon, however, is destroyed before the Beast. It is the Beast which effects the political ruin of Babylon, whereas the Lord at His coming destroys the Beast.

Chapter 17 is a deeply interesting one, and naturally divides into two main parts: (1) Babylon described, vv. 1-6; (2) the Beast in its relation to Babylon and to the Lamb, vv. 7-18.

Babylon; or The Great Whore, Vv. 1 to 6

The name Babylon, confusion, which had its historic rise in Shinar (Gen. 11:1-9), points to the professing Church in moral ruin and disorder. The Whore, in contrast to the Bride, represents the professing body as utterly loathsome and corrupt. She sits upon “many waters” (v. 1). These waters signify “peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues” (v. 15). She rules over vast populations.

Her sway over the nations is nigh universal. The severance of Church from State may be witnessed in our days, but prophecy points to a union of the two more general than history records. The Church—corrupt and loathsome—will yet again be in the ascendant, and ride the Beast. The great whore will be Satan’s counterfeit of the true church. The pretensions and wickedness of the vast consolidated systems of Christendom—fused into one—is justly and rightly termed the Whore and harlot, and mother of all religiously apostate and vile—not the papacy only, that, with the 1,300 sects now in existence, shall then be the display of the Devil’s unity. It will be a gigantic system of spiritual whoredom—the vilest thing beneath the sun. “The kings of the earth, and the inhabitants of the earth,” that is,

Christendom in its widest extent, is brought within the sphere of the harlot's awful influence (v. 2). Then the woman, that is the system, sits upon a scarlet-colored beast, the civil power (v. 3).

The Beast is the revived power of Rome presented first in a ten- kingdom form, then as one great and mighty empire under its renowned head "the little horn" (Dan. 7), who unifies the Empire.

The greatness and glory of the Empire is intimated in the scarlet color of the Beast. The first mention of the Beast in the Apocalypse is in Chap. 11:7, where it is witnessed in its last and worst character, not "out of the sea" (8:1), its historical rise, but "out of the bottomless pit," its Satanic revival in the last three years and a half of its existence. But the Beast is further described as "full of names of blasphemy," that is open, daring blasphemy will characterize the Empire in all its parts, throughout its whole extent. The "seven heads" represent successive forms of government, and its "ten horns" signify so many kings or individual rulers (vv. 10, 12; compare with 8:1).

We have had a passing glance at the Beast (v. 3). Now the Seer, amazed, turns once again to view the harlot—the vilest thing on God's earth. Her grandeur, her pomp, her pride, her idolatry, and her bloody character, are all found in the so-called Christian church in the last days. The woman made the inhabitants drunk with her fornications (v. 2), now she is herself drunk with the blood of God's saints (v. 6).

The Beast and The Harlot, Vv. 7 to 18

The mystery of the woman and the Beast is next disclosed by the angel. The history of the Beast is summed up in four brief crisp sentences (v. 8). "The Beast that thou sawest." The imperialism of the Empire and as it existed in John's day. "And is not." The mighty Empire of Rome is, politically, non-existent. The Empire as such has ceased to exist for nearly 15 centuries. "Shall ascend out of the bottomless pit," or abyss. The Empire in the last phase of its existence shall be Satanic in its source and character. "And go into perdition," its eternal doom. The resurrection of the Empire, amidst, and out of, universal civil and political chaos, is a wonder to the Christian apostates of that day. Both the woman and the Beast have their seat in Rome (vv. 9, 18). The Antichrist makes Jerusalem the seat of his government (Dan. 11:36-39; 2 Thess. 2). The Beast is of the seven, yet an eighth (v. 11). The meaning is that the historical rise and course of the Empire (8:1) will present certain features characterizing it to its close, but the last emperor is a distinct monarch unlike his predecessors, the only one Satanically inspired—an eighth, he stands alone.

The ten kingdoms forming the territorial extent of the Empire are first presented as separate kingdoms (v. 12). Then the “ten” wearied, we suppose, with mutual jealousies, and unable longer to preserve the balance of power, combine, and with one consent place themselves—kings, kingdoms, and armies—under the rule of the Beast. We have had alliances of certain kingdoms, but the one contemplated in the prophecy before us, is undoubtedly the most gigantic confederation of powers the world has ever witnessed. Will this mighty alliance of kingdoms in Western Europe work for blessing? No. There are two objects which the Beast, towering in his strength and arrogant in his pretensions, seeks to accomplish. (1) To make war with the Lamb. (2) To destroy the woman—the Great Whore. The Beast does both. The order, however, in the text is not the order in historical sequence. Babylon is first destroyed, then the war against the Lamb is undertaken, the issue of which is the irremediable destruction of the Beast.

The ten kings (horns) and the Beast (v. 16) very quickly throw off the authority of the Whore, and become openly profane. Brute force characterizes the Beast and the royal heads of the various kingdoms.

Every semblance of religion goes in the destruction of the whore.

God and Christ are openly defied (Psa. 2). All this, and more, is simply the accomplishment of the Divine Will (v. 17). The Whore is now out of the prophetic circle of events. The Beast in its after brief history is simply an exhibition of brute force. It knows no law human or divine. Its own will is its sole authority. It marches in its pride, its arrogance, its strength, and, we may add, in its madness to do battle with God Almighty and the heavenly army. And this is Europe! All the powers great and small are gathered in the last decisive conflict. The powers of Christendom, and not merely the ten kingdoms of the western part of Europe, hurl themselves against the Rock of Ages (19:19), only to suffer a destruction eternal in result.

It will be observed that in the last verse of our chapter the Woman is named, not the Whore. This last is her title and character in the closing hours of the crisis, nigh at hand. The Woman represents the papacy located in Rome—the seven hilled city.

Chapter 18 must not be regarded as a continuation of the subjects of the previous chapter, i.e., Babylon and the Beast. Our Chapter opens with the well-known biblical formula, “After these things,” which intimates a subject by itself, and really forms a vision distinct from what has gone before or from what follows. Babylon is the prophetic subject of the Chapter. Here we have no mention of the human instruments in her destruction.

Neither the ten kings nor the Beast come into view. The material forces and political ascendancy of the Whore are noted in Chapter 17. But here, God is regarded as the Source of the utter judgment of that iniquitous system so abhorrent to Him. Here too, her destruction is complete. The burning referred to in vv. 8 and 18, is subsequent to that of the previous chapter, v. 16. After her destruction by the ten kings and the Beast, she exists, but as the representative of hell on earth (v. 2).

If the kings of the last great confederacy destroy the Whore (17:16), other kings mourn her destruction (18:9). Her political dethronement has been accomplished by the Beast and ten kings

(17), to be followed by her complete and final downfall (18). All outside the Roman world who had been enriched by her mourn and lament. Her ruin is thorough (v. 8) and sudden (v. 10). Heaven and all who have ever suffered at her hands rejoice (v. 20; 19:1-3). What a strange scene! The utter extinction of the religious corruption of the earth mourned and lamented in the great religious circle of Christendom, while all heaven and the redeemed rejoice and sing. In the Church the Holy Ghost now dwells, but in the corrupt church of the future, Satan will take up his abode. The contrasts between the Whore and the Bride are numerous and suggestive.