

Who Is the Whore of Babylon?

The Whore of Babylon (Revelation 17)

1 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you *the judgment of the great harlot* who is seated upon many waters, 2 with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the dwellers on earth have become drunk.” 3 And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and *I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.* 4 *The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication;* 5 and on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “*Babylon the great, mother of harlots and of earth's abominations.*”

6 And I saw the woman, *drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.* When I saw her I marveled greatly. 7 But the angel said to me, “Why marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of *the beast with seven heads and ten horns* that carries her. 8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to perdition; and the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will marvel to behold the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. 9 This calls for a mind with wisdom: *the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated;* 10 *they are also seven kings,* five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain only a little while. 11 As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to perdition. 12 *And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings* who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. 13 These are of one mind and give over their power and authority to the beast; 14 they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”



15 And he said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the harlot is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues. 16 And the ten horns that you saw, *they and the beast will hate the harlot; they will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire,* 17 for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and giving over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. 18 *And the woman that you saw is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth.*”

1. Three Figures:
 - a. The Whore
 - b. The Beast with 7 Heads and 10 Horns
 - c. The Lamb
2. What is the Whore Doing?
 - a. Fornicating with the Kings of the Earth
 - b. Drunk with the blood of the Martyrs
 - c. Riding the Beast
 - d. Sitting on 7 Hills
3. What about the Beast?
 - a. Blaspheming God
 - b. Causes the world to “marvel”
 - c. Produces “Kings”
 - d. Makes war with the Lamb
 - e. Turns on the Whore; burns her with fire

The Whore of Babylon = The Roman Catholic Church?

1. Protestant Interpreters (cf. picture above, Lucas Cranach, 1522 A.D.)
 - a. Fundamentalists: David Hunt, *A Woman Who Rides the Beast* (1994)
 - b. Martin Luther: “I now know of a certainty that the papacy is the kingdom of Babylon...”
(*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 1.2)
2. Reasons:
 - a. Babylon = a code name for Rome
 (“She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings” 1 Pet 1:13)
 - b. Seven Hills = seven hills in Rome
 (“the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated” Rev 17:9)
 - c. Purple and Red = colors of the Catholic clergy
 (“She [the Whore] is clothed in ‘purple and scarlet’ (verse 4), the colors of the Catholic clergy” David Hunt, *A Woman Who Rides the Beast*)
 - d. Wealth of the Whore = wealth of the Catholic Church
 (She has “gold,” “jewels” etc. Rev 17:4)

The Whore of Babylon = The Roman Empire?

1. Almost all Modern Scholars:
 - a. Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy* (T. & T. Clark, 1993)
 “The book of Revelation uses two major, complementary images of the evil power of Rome. One is the sea-monster (‘the beast’)... the other image is the great city Babylon, first named in 14:8, and then portrayed as a woman, ‘the great harlot’, in chapter 17. Babylon is the city of Rome.” (*Climax*, 343)
 - b. David Aune, *Revelation* (3 vols. Word Biblical Commentary, 1998)
 “While “the great city” is applied to Jerusalem in [Rev] 11:8, in Rev 17-18 the phrase “the great city” refers clearly to Rome, implicitly or explicitly designated “Babylon.” (vol. 3, 959).
2. Reasons: Scholars turn the Whore and the Beast into one Figure rather than two
 - a. Scholars assume Rome because Rome was “the greatest of cities” for pagans
 - b. The Seven Hills the Woman is Seated Upon = seven hills of Rome
 - c. Peter apparently uses “Babylon” as a code name for Rome (1 Pet 5:13)

The Whore of Babylon = The City of Jerusalem

1. Several Catholic Interpreters:
 - a. Michael Barber, *Coming Soon* (Emmaus Road, 2005)
 - b. David Currie, *Rapture* (Sophia Institute, 2003)
 - c. Scott Hahn, *The Lamb’s Supper* (Doubleday, 1999).
2. Jerusalem Interpretation:
 - a. The Whore = wicked city of Jerusalem
 - b. The Beast = the Roman Empire
 - c. The Lamb = Christ and his persecuted Church

Reason #1: John Tells You that the Whore is Jerusalem!

1. The Whore in Revelation 17:
 “And the woman that you saw is *the great city* which has dominion over the kings of the earth.” (Rev 17:18)
2. The Measuring of Jerusalem in Revelation 11:
 Then I [John] was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told: “Rise and measure *the temple of God* and the altar and those who worship there, 2 but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample over *the holy city* for forty-two months. And I will grant my two witnesses power to prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days... And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that ascends from the bottomless pit will make war upon them and kill them, 8 and their dead bodies will lie in the street of *the great city* which is allegorically called Sodom and Egypt, *where their Lord was crucified*. (Rev 11:1-8)

Reason #2: Jerusalem is Called a “Whore” or “Harlot” in the Old Testament

“How *the faithful city* [Jerusalem] has become *a harlot*, she that was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers” (Isaiah 1:21)

Again the word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, make known to *Jerusalem* her abominations, When I passed by you again and looked upon you, behold, you were at the age for love... I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine... And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor which I had bestowed upon you, says the Lord GOD. But you trusted in your beauty, and played *the harlot* because of your renown, and lavished your *harlotries* on any passer-by. "How lovesick is your heart, says the Lord GOD, seeing you did all these things, the deeds of a brazen *harlot*... *Adulterous wife*, who receives strangers instead of her *husband*! (Ezekiel 16:1-32)

When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself *a wife of harlotry* and have children of harlotry, for *the land commits great harlotry* by forsaking the LORD." (Hosea 1:2)

Wine and new wine take away the understanding. My people inquire of a thing of wood, and their staff gives them oracles. For a spirit of harlotry has led them astray, and *they have left their God to play the harlot*. They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains, and make offerings upon the hills, under oak, poplar, and terebinth, because their shade is good. Therefore your daughters play the harlot, and your brides commit adultery. (Hosea 4:11-13)

Reason #3: The Beast Destroys the Whore: Rome Destroys Jerusalem

1. The Whore and the Beast are *not* the same figure:

And the ten horns that you saw, they and *the beast will hate the harlot; they will make her desolate* and naked, and devour her flesh and *burn her up with fire*. (Rev 17:16).

2. Rome and Jerusalem worked together:

- a. King Herod: appointed by Roman Empire—not a true king
- b. Pontius Pilate: worked with Jerusalem authorities to crucify Jesus

3. The Roman-Jewish War: ends in destruction and burning of Jerusalem (70A.D.)

The Number of the Beast: 666 (Revelation 13)

1 And I saw *a beast* rising out of the sea, with ten horns and *seven heads*, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it *the dragon* gave his power and his throne and great authority... 4 Men worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "*Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?*"... 7 And it [the beast] was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation, 8 and all who dwell on earth will worship it, every one whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of *the Lamb* that was slain...

16 Also, it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, 17 so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. 18 This calls for wisdom: let him who has understanding reckon *the number of the beast*, for it is a human number, its number is *six-hundred and sixty six*. (Rev 13:1-18).

1. The Characters:

- a. The Dragon = Satan
- b. The Beast from the Sea = Roman Empire
- d. The Lamb = Christ

2. The 7 Heads of the Beast and the 7 Caesars (Barber, *Coming Soon*, 6)

“The seven hills are seven heads who are seven kings, ‘five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain only a little while.’” (Rev 17:19-10)

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| 1. Julius Caesar | 49-44 B. C. |
| 2. Augustus | 31 B.C. – A.D. 14 |
| 3. Tiberius | 14-37 A.D. |
| 4. Caligula (Gaius) | 37-41 A.D. |
| 5. Claudius | 41-54 A.D. |
| 6. Nero | 54-68 A.D. |
| 7. Galba | 68-69 A.D. |

Nero is the sixth king, reigning at the time Revelation is written. The one after Nero, Galba, reigned only “a little while” – six months in fact.

3. The Number of the Beast:

- Hebrew Letters: numeric value (like Roman Numerals, I = 1, V = 5, X = 10)
- Greek form of “Nero Caesar” transliterated into Hebrew = 666
- Ancient Christians: some altered it to 616 (Latin form of Nero in Hebrew)
- Caesar Nero demanded *allegiance* (the “mark”) and *worship* as a god (cf. Cain)
- Satanic Perversion: compare the 144,000 (cf. Rev 7; Exod 13:9)

Reason #4: The Harlot City is Replaced by the New Jerusalem, the Bride

1 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority; and the earth was made bright with his splendor. 2 And he called out with a mighty voice, “*Fallen, fallen in Babylon the great!* It has become a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit, a haunt of every foul and hateful bird; for all nations have drunk the wine of her impure passion, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich with the wealth of her wantonness.” 4 Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, “*Come out of her my people*, lest you take part in her sins, let you share in her plagues; 5 for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. 6 Render to her as she herself has rendered, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed. 7 As she glorified herself and played the wanton (or “whore”), so give her a like measure of torment and mourning. Since in her heart she says, “*A queen I sit I am no widow, mourning I shall never see,*” 8 *so shall her plagues come in a single day, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she shall be burned with fire;* for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.” (Rev 18:1-8)

9 Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you *the Bride, the wife of the Lamb*. 10 And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me *the holy city of Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God*, 11 having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. 12 It had a great high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed... 21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass. 22 And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. (Rev 21:9-22)

For Dr. Pitre’s Bible Studies on CD, go to www.BrantPitre.com

For more information on the book of Revelation, see Michael Barber’s book, *Coming Soon: Unlocking the Book of Revelation & Applying Its Lessons Today* (Steubenville: Emmaus Road, 2006)