

# Revelation Seventeen

Revelation 17 begins a parenthesis (to 19.10) which describes the divine judgment of Babylon (cf. 14.8, 16.19).

## The Character of 'New Babylon'

- Babylon is a city (cf. 17.18). See also 18.10, 16, 18, 19, 21. Babylon is classified as a literal city in addition to other cities of the nations which fell in the unprecedented earthquake of the seventh vial (16.19).
- Just as the original Babel (cf. Genesis 10.10; 11.1-9) comprised both a city (politics) and a tower (religion), so New Babylon will be the centre of false religion (Revelation 17) and world commerce (Revelation 18). These are two systems that operate independently of, and in opposition to, the true God.
- Religious New Babylon is presented as a harlot (17.5). She leads the world in the pursuit of false religion during the first 3.5 years of the Tribulation. Ultimately, she will be destroyed at the midpoint by the Beast and his confederate kings (17.16) who will destroy all religion, apart from the worship of the Beast alone.
- Commercial New Babylon will continue as the administrative centre of the kingdom of the Beast, until its destruction at the end of the Tribulation (18.5, 8).
- The guilt of the commercial system is anti-God materialism. This is philosophy that says that an accumulation of wealth and living in luxury are what give people meaning in life. Humans are pictured as lusting after material possessions (18.14). The passage does not condemn trade or possessions as such, rather, it is the human tendency to make material possessions the object of the soul's desire (Luke 12.15-21). That is idolatry.

## The Contrast in the Chapters

- Revelation 17 – religious New Babylon – uses *figurative* language which requires interpretation. Revelation 18 – commercial New Babylon – uses *literal* language which requires no interpretation.
- Religious New Babylon is symbolised as a woman identified as a "harlot". The word "mystery" is associated with her title (17.5). Commercial New Babylon is not referred to as a "mystery" and is called "that great city" on five occasions.
- There are two *different* agents used to judge the different aspects of Babylon. Though both judgments are, ultimately, from God, religious New Babylon is destroyed by the agency of the Beast and his confederate ten kings (17.16-17). But commercial New Babylon is destroyed directly with fire, possibly like that of Sodom and Gomorrah (18.8).
- That a different aspect of Babylon is in view in each chapter is suggested by the different messengers. In Revelation 17, the messenger is one of the seven angels which had the seven vials (17.1). In Revelation 18, John sees another angel "come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory," (18.1).
- In Revelation 17, the ten kings hate and destroy the harlot (17.16). In Revelation 18, the kings of the earth (which must include the ten kings) bewail and mourn the destruction of the city (18.9).
- The double mention of Babylon (14.8; 16.19) points to different times for the two judgments – separated by 3.5 years. Revelation 17 is the fulfilment of 14.8 which announces the fall of Babylon *prior* to the period when the Beast shall persecute the saints (cf. 11.2, 3, 7). Thus, the harlot is destroyed around the mid-point of the Tribulation.
- Revelation 18 is the fulfilment of 16.19 which announces the judgment of Babylon *after* the Beast is in power – his image is worshipped (16.2) and judgment is poured upon his throne and kingdom (16.10-11). Thus, the administrative and commercial city of the Beast is destroyed at the end of the Tribulation.

## The City of Babylon

- Babylon means Babylon. Revelation is filled with the names of many places, and they are all specific, geographical locations. For example, Ephesus, Smyrna, Laodicea and Armageddon. If John uses symbolic language to describe a place, he is sure to tell us clearly, "The great city (Jerusalem) which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt," (11.8).
- The parallels between the book of Daniel and Revelation are close and numerous. Daniel is also full of references to Babylon – for obvious reasons! The literal Babylon is where he was exiled.
- Both Isaiah (13-14) and Jeremiah (50-51) predict that Babylon would be *suddenly* and *completely* destroyed. These prophecies were not fulfilled in 539BC when Babylon fell to the Medes. Their fulfilment awaits the future Day of the Lord (Isaiah 13.6, 9), when, in conjunction with cosmic disturbances and supernatural signs in the heavens (13.10-13) Israel will be restored to the land and the Lord in an everlasting covenant (14.1-4; Jeremiah 50.2, 4-5).
- The present devastation of the region is the result of slow decay, not of sudden destruction. In fact, the site of Babylon of old has been the location of settlements of one type or another until very recent times (cf. Isaiah 13.19-20).
- It is therefore likely that Babylon will rise again to become a religious and commercial global centre of administration, closely identified with the world empire of the Antichrist.

## A Comparison of the Passage

- Revelation 17.1-19.10 forms a discrete section which describes the doom of Babylon in detail. It is an expansion and explanation of the seventh bowl judgment (16.19).
- The story of Babylon is complemented by a contrasting scene in Revelation 21.9-22.5 which describes another city, the holy city, new Jerusalem. This will be the eternal home of the redeemed.

Revelation 17	Revelation 21
Harlot city	Heavenly or holy city
Babylon city	Bridal city
Impurity of a harlot	Purity of a bride
Society of people marked by contamination and intoxication	Church in glory
Garments of earthly, colourful royalty	Fine white linen garments
Kings bring fornication	Kings bring glory
City saturated with uncleanness	Nothing that defiles can ever enter
Haunt of every unclean spirit	Habitation of the Holy Spirit forever
City sinks	City shines
Product of satanic action on earth	Result of redemption by the Lamb

## The Symbolism of the Harlot [vv.1-6]

**v.1.** That this passage is an amplification of Babylon's judgment announced in the last vial judgment is evident as **one of the seven angels** which **had the seven vials** came to **talk** with John. Not only will he *talk* (vv.1-2), but he will also *transport* John to see the woman (vv.3-6), then *teach* John the interpretation of the same (vv.7-18). The angel bids John to **come** that he might **show him** the judgment of the "great whore". This introductory formula will be repeated in 21.9 which points to an important contrast between Babylon, described as a *harlot*, and the *mother of abominations* (17.1, 5), and New Jerusalem described as "holy" and "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband," (21.2). The word **judgment** [*krima*] describes the execution of a judicial sentence. This will come in two parts, first, when the Beast with his ten kings turns on the harlot and destroys her (vv.16-17), and second, when God destroys the city of Babylon in one day (18.8).

The **great whore** [*pornē*] is closely associated with *fornication* (17.2, 6), which has corrupted the earth (19.2), and violently slain the servants of God (19.2), that is, the saints and martyrs testifying to the Lord Jesus (17.6). *pornē* describes a female prostitute – a common and graphic scriptural metaphor for spiritual unfaithfulness to God (cf. Jeremiah 3.6-9; Ezekiel 20.30). In prophetic language, prostitution, fornication, or adultery is equivalent to idolatry or religious apostasy. This harlot therefore represents all false religion and idolatry originating in Babel – including what is left (after the rapture) of professing Christianity. Thomas says, "She leads the world in the pursuit of false religion whether it be paganism or perverted revealed religion." Perhaps all remaining denominations and religions (excluding Islam which will have been largely destroyed at the beginning of the Tribulation, see notes on "When Gog meets God", Ezekiel 37-38) will coalesce into the largest, most powerful institution in the whole world – a one-world religious system that rules over the religious affairs of the world. Besides Babylon, several cities in Scripture are designated harlot cities because of their idolatry and pursuit of false religion – Nineveh (Nahum 3.4), Tyre (Isaiah 23.15-17) and even Jerusalem (Isaiah 1.21; Jeremiah 2.20). She is the **great** whore because she, above all others, is guilty of such fornication, influencing others to do the same. All this is centred in a city, the city of Babylon on the Euphrates – the administrative capital city of the Beast and his kingdom (v.18). The whore is described as **sitting upon many waters**. This is explained in v.15 as representing "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues". The fact she is sitting upon them probably illustrates *control* and *influence*, rather than geographical location. Therefore, "she rules and dominates the nations religiously, as the Beast does politically. Her following is an almost universal one," (Albert Leckie). This is a truly ecumenical monstrosity. Incidentally, Babylon is called the city that "dwellest upon many waters" in Jeremiah 51.13. This was a typical historical identification mark for Babylon as it was situated on the Euphrates and a large network of canals and irrigation channels (cf. Psalm 137.1).

**v.2.** The universal influence of the harlot is evident as both the **kings of the earth** and the **inhabitants of the earth** have **committed fornication** with her – every level of society is affected. She has led the nations, their rulers and their peoples to engage in unfaithfulness to the true God which is idolatrous worship (and its associated immorality). In John's day this was well illustrated by emperor worship. In places like Smyrna, citizens had to annually burn a pinch of incense on the altar and publicly acknowledge that Caesar was supreme lord. Earth's inhabitants are described as **made drunk** with the **wine of her fornication** – they are intoxicated with this false religion, whilst the harlot exerts a controlling influence on their behaviour. The metaphor of drunkenness suggests people behave somewhat irrationally, probably engaging in all kinds of immorality and debauchery (cf. Jeremiah 51.7).

**v.3.** The close association of the harlot (woman) with the Beast (Antichrist) is depicted in this verse. Henry Morris says, “The Beast represents political Babylon, the great whore is religious Babylon. The one is *governmental* rebellion and confusion, the other is *spiritual* rebellion and confusion.” The angel **carried John away in the spirit**, a phrase which occurs *four* times in Revelation (1.10; 4.2; 21.10). In an ‘out of body experience’, John’s own spirit was transported **into the wilderness** and enabled to receive a vision from God by the Holy Spirit. The wilderness is a reference to Isaiah when he received a “vision of the desert by the sea” in which he heard the message, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon,” (Isaiah 21.1-2, 9). The ‘desert’ could refer to the location of Babylon itself in the sandy wastes of the Persian Gulf or anticipate, in symbolic form, the harlot’s fate of “desolation” (17.16). The “great whore” (v.1) is now identified as **a woman**, drawing parallels with Zechariah 5.7 and Matthew 13.33. A woman is used as a symbol of the corrupting influence of Babylon because of her ability to give birth. She is a “mother”, the source from which all idolatrous abominations of the earth spring (17.5).

The woman is sitting on a **scarlet coloured beast** which has **seven heads** and ten horns. This immediately identifies the Beast as the first Beast of Revelation 13.1-9. The Beast represents both a king *and* a kingdom. The seven heads are explained in 17.9-10 as seven mountains representing seven kings. These are historical Gentile kingdoms that have been used by the Dragon through the ages to oppress and persecute God’s people Israel. Five had fallen (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece), one was existing in John’s day (Rome), one was yet to come (the final kingdom of the Beast). The **ten horns** represent ten contemporaneous kings that will reign with the Beast and unitedly yield their kingdoms to him (17.12-14). The Beast is **full of names of blasphemy** – names which were on the seven heads in 13.1. These names represent all the titles and attributes of deity that have been claimed by the false gods and idols of these pagan empires, and now, finally, by the Beast himself in his arrogant self-deification. The Beast is **scarlet** in colour, representative of splendour, magnificence and luxury (cf. v.4). Scarlet is also the colour of sin (Isaiah 1.18) and contrasts with the whiteness of righteousness and purity. Interestingly, the woman is **sitting** on the Beast indicating their close association and relationship. The picture probably goes no further than suggesting that this universal religious system (the harlot) will receive the support of political government (the Beast). The initial unifying and controlling factor of Antichrist’s kingdom will be religion. For the first half of the Tribulation, the Antichrist will use the universal appeal of the harlot for his own ends, seeking to strengthen his dominion and power.

**v.4.** This verse describes the appearance of the **woman** in more detail – primarily in terms of opulence, luxury and ostentation as well as abominable immorality. She was **arrayed in purple and scarlet**, the colours of decadence and wealth. Only royalty and the supremely wealthy could wear purple or scarlet garments in the ancient world because the dyes were inordinately expensive. Purple and scarlet were also the apparel of Roman emperors and senators. This false religious system will be adorned so as to lure the people of the world into its religious web. She was also **decked** (adorned) **with gold and precious stones and pearls** – the word “decked” literally meaning ‘to make golden’ (gilded). In ancient times, prostitutes often dressed extravagantly to seduce men. The extravagant dress is in sharp contrast to the “fine linen, clean and white” – the righteousness of the wife of the Lamb (19.8). The woman has a **golden cup in her hand**, which outwardly is appealing and attractive (cf. Jeremiah 51.7) and promises satisfaction for the thirsty soul but inwardly is **full of the poison of abominations** (loathsome impurity) and **filthiness** arising from her spiritual **fornication** (idolatry). The word “abominations” is specifically associated with idol worship (cf. Deuteronomy 18.9; 29.17; Matthew 24.15). Philip Harding solemnly reminds us, “Let us remember that anything which takes the place of Christ and draws the heart away from God and His word, is Babylonish in principle.”

Morris says the appearance of this woman epitomises the way of *false religion*. It masks “the dearth of real spiritual life by outward ostentation and sensual satisfactions. The state religion, supported by the political power impresses its devotees with ornate temples and golden images, jewelled garments, marble statues, hypnotic music, and delightful incense. In many religious systems of past and present, these luxuries are further augmented by temple prostitutes and sexual debauchery, in the name of the god or goddess of the particular cult.”

**v.5.** This harlot has a **name written on her forehead** – typical of prostitutes in ancient Rome which wore a headband with their name (cf. Jeremiah 3.3). In Revelation, a name or mark on a person identifies the owner or ruler of that person (cf. 3.12; 7.3-4; 13.16-17; 14.1). On this occasion, the name is divinely revealed for the purpose of identification. The word **mystery** is “a descriptive reference to the title, not a part of the title itself as implied by the capitalisation in AV. This can be seen by comparing the name given to the woman in 16.19 and 18.2,” (Walvoord). A Pauline mystery (e.g. Ephesians 3.3) refers to “that which, being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension, can be made known only by divine revelation,” (WE Vine). In Revelation, the word can also refer to a symbol that needs interpretation to be understood. Both are true here. God is revealing the symbolism of the vision and the true identification of this woman. “The true character and identity of the woman, previously kept concealed, are now objects of clear revelation,” (RL Thomas). The woman’s name is **Babylon the Great**, a vast universal system of false religion and idolatry which originated in Babel. This is why she is called the **mother of harlots** as Babylon is the polluted fountain from which all spiritual prostitution (idolatry)

flows. This mother of harlots stands in obvious contrast to mother Israel (12.1-5), the vehicle by which Christ came into the world. The phrase “mother of” describes features of the mother that are reproduced in others. Babylon is the mother of **abominations of the earth**, describing all the debased and immoral practices stemming from false religion.

Babel, and the wider kingdom of Nimrod (including Shinar and Chaldea) was the source of all the idolatrous systems of Canaan, Phoenicia, Assyria and Neo-Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. Jim Allen says, “Eastwards the development of Hinduism, Buddhism and Shintoism were all distortions of the same revealed truth and its debasement into animism and spiritism.” The family of this mother ultimately covered the globe. Many older assembly commentators identify this harlot with the Papal Rome and the Roman Catholic church – but this is only partly true. Catholicism is undoubtedly one of many abominations which have sprung from Babylon, but this “woman” has a long history of association with seven kingdoms stretching all the way back to Egypt! Her work is illustrated in the parable of the leaven, which leaven was introduced by a “woman” (Matthew 13.33). Leaven speaks of the constant attack by imitation, corruption and infiltration of the pure word of God (truth). This “great whore” is the end of the process – she symbolises the final form of human religion.

**v.6.** The final aspect of John’s vision is to see the woman **drunken with the blood of the saints** and the **martyrs of Jesus**. This is a gruesome and vivid way of describing the multitudes of true believers who have been martyred through the ages. Through faith they refused the idolatry of their day and were slain as a result. Babylon is guilty of their blood. The word **drunken** does not describe intoxication here but is an OT metaphor to depict the savage joy with which armies would slaughter their enemies – this is an intense lust for violence and slaughter (cf. Isaiah 49.26; Ezekiel 39.18-19). The blood of the **saints** probably refers to OT saints who have died for the testimony of God under the idolatrous systems of the pagan nations. The **martyrs of Jesus** are those who have witnessed to Christ in the NT era and been slain during the persecutions of pagan and papal Rome etc. The effect of the vision on John was to **wonder with great admiration** (astonishment) or “complete amazement” [NLT]. Perhaps John was shocked at the decadence and depravity of the woman as well as perplexed as to why God would allow such a vile creature to inflict such suffering on the people of God.

### **The Significance of the Vision [vv.7-18]**

**v.7.** The remainder of the chapter contains the angelic interpretation of the vision. The angel will **tell John the mystery** (that is, reveal the proper interpretation) of the **woman** (v.18), and the **Beast** that carries her (v.8) with its **seven heads** (vv.9-11) and **ten horns** (vv.12-17). The interpretation of the vision seems to be in response to John’s amazement, “Why are you astounded?” [NET]. John obviously has unanswered questions in his mind that the angel will now address.

### **The Beast [v.8]**

**v.8.** The description and language of this verse bears close parallels with 11.7 and 13.3. Remember, the **Beast** [*thērion*] is both a king *and* a kingdom, an emperor *and* an empire. Often an empire can be epitomised in a person, such as Greece in Alexander, or Babylon in Nebuchadnezzar, “Thou art this head of gold,” (Daniel 2.38). That the Beast **was**, looks back from the midpoint of the Tribulation. Jim Allen says, “the Beast has already had a meteoric rise in popularity and power until he had reached the highest pinnacles of empire (13.1-2). He has already had at the very least three and a half years of world leadership and possibly quite a few years even before this period.” Then, at the midpoint of the Tribulation, the Beast **is not** and **shall ascend out of the bottomless pit** [*abyssos*]. This is a reference to his pseudo death and resurrection (13.3) after having been mortally wounded by a sword (13.14). This is the ‘second coming’ of the Beast, the first being his arrival on the world stage when he arises out of the sea (13.1), the second being his ‘resurrection’ out of the abyss. At this point, the Beast will be satanically indwelt (see notes on 13.3). But, ultimately, the Beast will **go into perdition** – a reference to his eternal loss of well-being and final destiny in the lake of fire (19.20). Those that  **dwell on the earth** does not just describe physical location, but those who have chosen to be morally identified with earthly principles and the earthly prince (the Beast). They are earthly in nature and character. They shall **wonder** after the Beast (cf. 13.3) with awestruck amazement when they see him alive following his apparent miracle of resurrection. Earth-dwellers are those who are further identified as “all those **whose names** have not been **written in the book of life** since the foundation of the world” [NET]. They have rejected God’s offer of salvation and are therefore easily led astray by falsehood. The book of life is mentioned six other times in the KJV of Revelation (3.5; 17.8; 20.12, 15; 21.27; 22.19) – it is the register of the citizens that belong to heaven. **From** [*apo*] **the foundation of the world** describes the time *from which* names began to be written in the book, with the name of each saint being indelibly scribed at the moment of conversion.

### **The Seven Heads [vv.9-11]**

**v.9.** The angelic interpreter acknowledges that more than natural understanding is required to grasp what he will now explain, “This requires a **mind** that has **wisdom**,” [NET]. The call for spiritual wisdom (cf. 13.18) encourages the reader to seek divine help to grasp the meaning of the vision in general, and specifically, the double meaning of the mountains. According to the NET (and RV), “The **seven heads** are **seven mountains** the woman sits on. They are also seven kings”. The seven heads of the Beast (cf. 12.3; 13.1; 17.3) are seven mountains which symbolise seven kingdoms and their kings.

Mountains often symbolise kingdoms or empires in the OT (cf. Psalm 30.7; Daniel 2.35; Zechariah 4.7). As already noted (see 13.1), the mountains represent seven successive Gentile world empires (and their kings, cf. Daniel 7) that have persecuted and sought to extinguish Israel (and therefore the promised Messiah) down through the ages of time. These nations are Egypt (Pharaoh, cf. Exodus 1.22), Assyria (Sennacherib, cf. Isaiah 7.13-14), Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar, cf. Jeremiah 51.34), Medo-Persia (Ahasuerus, Esther 3), Greece (Antiochus Epiphanes, cf. Daniel 11.21-32) and Rome (Caesar, Matthew 2.16-18). The seventh and final empire, from John's perspective, had not yet arrived but would take the form of the empire of the Beast during the Tribulation. Of course, these have not been the only kingdoms that have been at enmity with God and His purposes – but there have been none like these empires in terms of their size and influence. They are legitimate 'descendants' of the original Babel, not only politically but also religiously for these empires were strongholds of idolatry and false religion. Hence, they are mountains **on which the woman sitteth** – false, pagan religion characterised them all. Her position of sitting suggests the influence of her false religion rather than complete control or governance. Many expositors interpret the imagery of the seven mountains as a reference to the city of Rome because it was widely known as the city on seven hills. However, the text requires a strict *political* identification of the seven mountains with seven kings – not a *geographical* identification. In addition, Rome is situated on ten hills, the highest of which is 275 feet – hardly appropriate to be described here in Greek as a mountain [*oros*].

**v.10.** Of the **seven kings** (identified above), **five are fallen, one is** and the other **is not yet come**. At the time of John's writing, the Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Medo-Persian, and Greek empires had fallen. Rome still existed in his day. The final world-empire of the Beast was yet to come. When it does come, **he must continue a short space** [*oligon*]. The word "must" suggests the place this ruler fills in divine purpose. The word *oligon* means 'little' and carries the thought of brevity. The kingdom of the Beast is limited by God and will be considerably shorter than the previous six empires. **v.11.** In a remarkable development, the Beast is described as not only belonging to the seven (kings), but is, in himself, the eighth (king) – "The Beast that was, and is not, is himself an eighth king and yet is one of the seven, and is going to destruction," [NET]. He is **of the seven** because his initial kingdom partakes of the character of the empires gone before. For example, this kingdom will combine the *speed* of Greece (leopard), and *strength* of Medo-Persia (bear) in its conquests, as well as the *authority* of Babylon in its rule (lion), see 13.2. Yet the Beast is both the seventh **and the eighth** king. He is the seventh king prior to his mortal wound. He is the eighth king *after* his so-called resurrection. This eighth king "is going to destruction," [NET] or **perdition**. Jim Allen warns, "That this is not a different person entirely is carefully guarded for he is still 'of [ek] the seven', nevertheless he is distinct. This refers to the change brought about in this man when, after his 'death' and 'resurrection', he is not merely the agent of Satan but a Satan-controlled man."

### The Ten Horns [vv.12-17]

**v.12.** The **ten horns** are interpreted by the angel as **ten kings** (cf. 12.3; 13.1) who rule simultaneously. These ten rulers receive delegated authority by ruling **with the Beast**. When the Beast appears, he has ten horns, and "upon his horns ten crowns" [*diadēma*] representing regal authority (13.1). This indicates the Beast will lead a confederacy of ten kings when he emerges on the world stage at the signing of the covenant (Daniel 9.27). This answers to the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image (Daniel 2) and ten horns of Daniel 7.7. Their confederate kingdom has a limited time span, lasting for only **one hour** which suggests a very short time – perhaps similar to the "hour of temptation" which describes the seven-year Tribulation period (Revelation 3.10), and coinciding with the "short space" of the reign of the Beast (v.10). **v.13.** The ten kings will have **one mind** (intention) to give total and absolute allegiance to the Beast. They will accept and commend every decision he makes. It is probably at the midpoint of the Tribulation they decide it is in their best interests to renounce their individual kingships and yield control of their kingdoms to the Beast. This will include both their **power** [*dynamis*, i.e. military capability] and their **strength** [*exousia*, i.e. sovereign authority]. **v.14.** The allegiance of the ten kings with the Beast will bring them into conflict with the Lamb. They **shall make war with the Lamb**, not only spiritually in joining the Beast in his persecution of the people of God, but also literally and physically at Armageddon (cf. 19.19). It is here **the Lamb shall overcome them** at His glorious revelation as **Lord of lords and King of kings** (cf. 19.16). These two titles mark the Lamb as supreme over all earthly power. He will be King over those who rule as kings, and Lord over those who exercise lordship. Interestingly, the order of the titles is reversed from 19.16. Here, the emphasis is on the Lordship of Christ because the contrast is between those who own Christ as Lord (the saints) and those who own the Beast as lord (ten kings). In Revelation 19, the emphasis falls on kingship for Christ comes to establish His throne and reign over the earth. The world will see Him first as King, then bow the knee to Him as Lord (Philippians 2.11). But Christ is not coming from heaven alone! Indeed, He has a company **with Him** that are **called** [*klētos*] and **chosen** [*eklektos*] and **faithful** [*pistos*] – they are the saints which form the "armies" of heaven (19.14)! Each individual saint was *called* by the gospel and *chosen* through faith in Christ (cf. Matthew 22.14). Such an individual proves to be *faithful* in service and characterised by steadfast allegiance to Christ (cf. 2.10, 13).

**v.15.** To complete the interpretation of the symbols John had seen, the angel explains the significance of the **waters** on which the **whore** was sitting. In the OT, water is a common symbol for people (Psalm 18.4; Isaiah 8.7), and here represents

**peoples** and **multitudes**, and **nations** and **tongues**, or “masses of people of every nation and language” [NLT]. As noted above (v.1), the waters represent the truly global and indiscriminate influence of this harlot’s false religion and idolatry.

**v.16.** Having explained the symbolism thus far, John is now shown the “judgment” of the great whore that he was invited to witness in v.1. Suddenly, and surprisingly, **the ten horns** (with the approval of the Beast, see JND) turn on the harlot with whom they seem to have had such a close relationship. Philip Harding says, “The Beast will bring in a new form of worship – the worship of the Dragon and of himself – thus the antichrist will seek to stamp out all forms of worship in order that this might be achieved. All who resist or refuse to conform will be put to the sword (13.15; 20.4).” Thus, the kings, together with the Beast, shall **hate the whore** indicating intense loathing and disgust. The political power has ‘used’ the religious power for its own ends, and to enhance its own popularity. Now the harlot religious system has worn out her usefulness and will be destroyed. Jim Allen finds a historical parallel in the days of Henry VIII, “With political and military power in his hands, decided he no longer needed the support of the Roman Catholic church in England and proceeded with the dissolution and destruction of the monasteries and the seizure of their wealth.” The next verse (v.17) seems to suggest that the time of the harlot’s destruction will coincide with the ten kings agreeing to give their kingdom to the Beast, i.e. in the middle of the Tribulation. This agrees with Revelation 14.8 where the doom of Babylon is announced prior to the statement of the third angel concerning those who worship the Beast and receive his mark.

The judgment is pictured in *three* vivid images, all of which have background in the OT. The kings and the Beast will:

1. **Make her desolate** (cf. Ezekiel 16.37-39; 23.29; 26.19; Hosea 2.3). This likely describes the plundering of her wealth, seizing her riches and rifling her buildings, whether temples, cathedrals, churches or institutions. Furthermore, they will **make her naked**, by destroying her pomp, pageantry and ceremonies, and exposing her moral corruption to public view.
2. **Devour her flesh** (Psalm 27.2; Micah 3.3). The figure suggests the savagery of wild beasts, though this is what men will do in slaying the chief officials and priests of the harlot.
3. **Burn her with fire** (Leviticus 21.9; Jeremiah 34.22). Finally, all the harlot’s physical places of worship will be burned to the ground. So complete will be her destruction, she will never be seen again.

**v.17.** Though the ten kings have their own reasons for destroying the harlot (not least the huge material wealth associated with false religion), it is **God** who is in ultimate control. Their decision to give the sovereignty of their kingdoms to the Beast was **put in their hearts** (minds) by God in order that **His will** (purpose) be fully accomplished. “The Beast and the ten kings are but the unwitting instruments to execute the mind of God on this false religious system,” (Jim Allen). This is not the first time God has used pagan nations or evil powers for His own ends – He used Babylon to judge Judah (Jeremiah 25.9-11) and Assyria to chasten Israel (Isaiah 10.5). However, the authority of the Beast is limited. It will last **until the words of God are fulfilled**, that is, until Scripture is accomplished. God will allow him to continue for 3.5 years, at which point the Beast will be removed to eternal destruction and “the kingdoms of this world... become *the kingdoms* of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever,” (Revelation 11.15).

### **The Woman [v.18]**

**v.18.** Finally, the angel finishes where he began. The “great whore”, **the woman**, is **that great city** which **reigneth** (extends its sovereignty) **over the kings of the earth**. Again, the great city in view is the literal and physical city of Babylon from which a false religious system has spread its influence across the kingdoms of earth. The woman is the symbol of a religious system, as indicated by the word “mystery” (v.5), that has its roots in this geographical city. Just as Wall Street is a literal place as well as an economic system, so Babylon refers to both a real city and a false religious system.