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## ***Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation***

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### **Revelation 17:6-18: “The Woman and the Beast”**

**General idea:** John is astonished; he cannot believe the audacity of this great prostitute and her unashamed willfulness to sin and leading others to do so. But, the angel reassures John that this prostitute, the beast, and their entire minion are condemned and judged and will go to eternal damnation. Thus, they are the ones who will be ultimately astonished when they see their ways punished by His Way. The angel further explains the meaning of these images for him and his churches so he can take and convey the hope of Christ to those whose hope wavers. Those who have oppressed the Church and conducted evil and reproach to those who are righteous are condemned and judged and will be sentenced soon. Yet, these evil governments will seek to rise up and fight against God for one last time, but they will not succeed. Mere man cannot fight against the Lord of all, the King of kings! God’s plan cannot be thwarted or manipulated; it will be fulfilled. We can trust in Him!

**Vs. 6-18, Contexts:** John is clearly writing to the seven churches and consequently to people being persecuted by Rome. Rome was a blood-thirsty, pagan empire that oppressed its people, especially Christians, who were considered criminals and slaves and used for sadistic entertainment. Rome was extremely corrupt and fell because of it. Thus, the imagery of Rome in this passage may be referring to the persecution and martyrdom the early Christians faced in life under Rome, either as illustration or as the principle point. In addition, this is a template for how evil and its power operates in the past, present as well as in the future. This is also leading to its future, its self destruction. Rome at this time gave away food to appease its citizens while they enticed them with sins and heinous amusements of people being slaughtered in arenas. Placating to Rome gave one privileges; standing up to it gave one death or the loss of land and rights. The issue before the Church was compromise and loyalty—would their allegiance be to a prostitute Rome, to Christ, or to what? Some theologians have suggested that “Babylon” referred to apostate Jerusalem, but there is little Jewish evidence for that. The principle arguments against Jerusalem as the subject matter of this passage is that it does not sit on *many waters* nor did it reign over other nations at this time!

The main issue at stake is *compromise* and how we seek to rationalize our sins as OK, ignoring our Lord, and doing as we please. This is the way of the world that leads to judgment and condemnation. In Christ, there is no condemnation but there is still the choice to do as we please in our Christian lives, which I called “liberty.” He still loves us, but are we going astray in our churches and personal lives? Are we seeking out the harlot and not Him? Remember, this letter is to Christians who are misleading their churches!

**Word and Phrase Meanings:**

- *Drunk with the blood of the saints/martyrs/witnesses...testimony to Jesus.* *Saints* here refers to “witnesses” as in a court of law, of Christ whose testimony showed who He is. This is a comparison of what is evil to what is good, a parody of evil and why we need to have hope and trust in Christ (Is. 23:17; Jer. 51:7; Acts 22:20; Rev. 2:13; 14:8; 16:6; 17:6; 18:3).
- *Greatly astonished/wondered.* John was “marveled” as in *awestruck* by the audacity of the situation; this is not admiration as in approval, rather astonishment with disgust (2 Cor. 11:14).
- *Once was, now is not, and will come up/that was, and is not, and yet is.* Perhaps John sees that Satan is active for a time and then is stopped. This also means the beast’s power was gone or limited for a time, and then he rises up for a final battle. Some see this as Satan’s actual appearance on earth. Also, this is the symbol that evil is persistent, the universal struggle between good and evil, between God and Satan, even when we do not see it or admit to it. This phrase also alludes that ‘persecutions are coming’ persecutions tend to have a pattern, as told in Daniel. This, in context, means the attempt to counterfeit God, as the Lamb of God (Gen 3:1, Job 1:7; Dan. 7; 1 John 12:31, 16:7-11; Acts 1:16-18; 2 Thess. 2:7; 1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 1:4-8,18; 2:8; 4:8; 9:1-11; 13:2-3; 12:9-10; 20:7).
- *Book of life.* (See Revelation Study 13:5-8)
- *Go to his destruction.* Evil will have its day of judgment, and its ultimate fate has been set by God. This may also be referring that although evil is a genuine reality and it is unrelenting, there will be a time to come when God places a stop to it. He also limits it, for the believer, with His grace by not allowing anything to come to us that we can’t bear or learn from (John 15:16; 17:12; Acts 15:10-11; Rom. 13:4; 1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Thess. 2:3).
- *Will be astonished.* Evil will be judged; in the meantime, they will think they are in the clear and are doing OK. This is a great comfort for struggling Christians under persecution (Rev 20:1-3, 7-10).
- *Seven heads are seven hills.* Refers to Rome, as the original Rome was an association of seven hill colonies on the bank of the Tiber River. This also refers to its festival of “Septimontium.” This was an image on some of the Roman coins (Rev. 2:14).
- *Seven hills.* In context the words “mountains” or “nations” mean *political kingdoms or territories*. This was also a common title, literary pictogram, and symbol for Rome. Its banner and seal bore an image of “the city on seven hills.” (Roman writers of the time used this image such as Martial, Virgil, and Cicero.) In Jewish writings, this meant judgment (Sibylline Oracles 2:18; 11:109-116). John often uses complementary symbols to make his point as he does with *kings* in this passage.

- *Seven kings.* From the first emperor Augustus, to Domitian, there were seven; thus, it is a possible connection to the then current state in Rome to the Seven Churches, or a metaphor for us on corruption and the dangers of following it. This can also be a metaphor for the power of the Roman Empire or the succession of the mighty, ancient kingdoms of Egypt, Babylon, Meds, Persia, Rome, and/or one that was forgotten or yet to come. The main meaning for us is that we as Christians do not need to fear any evil power—past, present, or future! All of the kings were dead or will die and God is still in control. There were many myths in the Emperor Worship cults that the dead emperors would rise, come back, and seek revenge on all those who do not worship them. This was very popular and feared (Rev. 13).
- *Five have fallen.* May refer to the cycle of persecutions or that in the succession of the seven Roman Emperors at the time of the writing, two are left to come.
- *Destruction.* Referring to "perdition," as that evil is self destructive and will fall upon itself.
- *Ten horns.* Rome, at this time, had ten, main, imperial provinces, representing the totality or conspiracy of evil. Possibly refers to Daniel's 10 kingdoms and kings and/or the meaningless succession of kings who have contempt for God. This is also an allusion to the Parthian threat as it describes their leadership structure and their horse fittings "Satraps." This does not appear to mean "angel kings" (Dan 7:24; Rev. 16:12-16; 19:19; 20:08).
- *Not yet received a kingdom...Lamb will overcome them.* Meaning nothing can challenge God. Any human conspiracy against God, no matter how vast and well planned, is nothing to God. God will prove His Way and make evil and apostasy pay (Psalm 2:2; 83:5; Is. 1:21; Jer. 2:20; Ezek. 16 7 23; Micah 1:7).
- *One hour.* Means a short period of time and/or a period of temptation (Mark 13:11; Rev 3:10).
- *Will give.* Referring that at this time, it is beyond temptation and deception; they are willing and thus responsible for their choice (Rev. 13:4; 16:17).
- *King of kings.* A title for the Parthian kings. It is an insult to the reference as a title for God and the real "King of kings." Christ is Lord, and the supreme sovereignty. This is also alluding to those who rule over Jerusalem (Deut. 10:17; Psalm 136:2-3; Ezek. 26:7; Dan. 2:37, 47; 10:17; Acts 4:26-27; 1 Tim. 6:15).
- *Then the angel said to me.* This angel commences to explain to John these symbols. The "waters" are the confused people while the devil's deceptions and hatred turn upon themselves and mutually destroy each other (Rev. 3:15-16 8:10,11 17:1).
- *The beast/the devil hates...will hate the prostitute.* Evil has no real companionship or loyalty, and will turn on even itself, meaning it will self-destruct. Evil will turn upon

itself and others that are evil; there is no loyalty or good character in wickedness. They only gather for their own selfish reasons that fit them at the time. This is also a possible allusion to the fall of Rome and how its kings and provinces quickly abandoned their commitment and faith to Rome in the fifth century. (Jer. 4:30; Lam. 1:2; Ezek. 16:37-41; 23:9; Amos 1:4; John 8:44; Rom. 6:23; 2 Thess. 2:8-12).

- *Eat her flesh and burn her with fire.* Meaning self-destruction, as one's depravity equates one's loss. Also, that one evil judges other evil as they punish each other. This is a possible reference to how Nero burned Rome with the consequence being the loss of his empire and then his life. Without faithfulness, we have nothing. It can be how the Barbarians, and then later the Goths, overran Rome and destroyed it. This can also mean political powers and their lust for power and control. In addition, God uses one evil to judge another evil. This is also a theme of evil and Satan; after he uses people, he destroys them (Lev. 21:9; Jer. 51:11-29; 52:3; Joel 2:11; Amos 1:4; Dan. 7:11).
- *Give the beast their power to rule.* Evil dominates this world but has limited power and authority.
- *God has put it into their hearts.* This is a picture of God's grace and assurance that He is with us in dire times, and that he is still in control, even when we do not see Him (Is. 54:16-17).
- *The great city* is a colloquialism for *Rome*, as we might say "Wall Street," referring to stocks and business, not necessarily the actual street. Thus, this is referring to the evils of Rome or the attitude and way of the evils of Rome. It also alludes to Jerusalem breaking her covenant with God (1 Kings 10:24; Ezra 1:4-7; Rom. 2:17-24).
- *Rules over the kings* is also a colloquialism for *Rome*. There was no doubt to John's readers—John was clearly referring to Rome and its evils. But, the application and context was to the seven churches!

### **Thoughts and Applications:**

These people think they do not need Christ and that they will escape the judgment of God! Such people and thinking is only contemptible and self destructive, because nothing can challenge God. Any human conspiracy against God, no matter how vast and well planned will utterly fail, as no evil effort on our part will bear out successfully against His Way. Nor will our obnoxious behaviors or apostasy in a church will pay out success. So why do it? Meanwhile a call is being issued by God, at the same time manipulations on our part, our sinful nature and schemes battle His Church from His own flock. While the immorality of the world are being constructed and promoted by the evil ones, each one beckoning the allegiance and loyalty of the people of earth to choose—either follow the harlot of evil, or the Bride, the Loving Lord of Hosts (Rev. 21:9). This beast, whether it is a specific personality or a theme, seems to appear

and cause havoc and chaos, then manipulates the situation so it seems not to be directly responsible. From a chaos in a mismanaged church to the malevolent evils from the ways of the world keep fighting against God. So, people are tricked, thinking sin is OK, and that Satan and evil are not to be blamed, or the cause. Thus, evil seemingly is not always present, but its effects are and will continue to be so, until God places His final stop on it. In the meantime we, the faithful, should not bow to evil or apostasy or even apathy for that matter. Our eyes are to be on Christ and Him alone.

The main prostitution we should worry about as Christians is Church Leadership falling to pride, apostasy, and the ways of the world versus faithfulness to Christ! Never think evil is just in the world and not in our local church. Gossiping in God's site is as evil as evil can be, just look up "gossip" in a concordance and see what He says about it! So is leading a church our way and not His! How we lead a church says what our real devotion and character is about, is it placating to pride, false agendas and trends or worshiping and glorifying Christ as Lord? How will your church be led?

The main meaning for us is to heed Christ's love, grace, and call, and that any evil power—past, present, or future—is not to be feared by us Christians! The phrase, God has *put it in their hearts*, refers that He is still in control. Even when the world seems to be in chaos and discord, He is there with us, ever faithful and still in charge. Our duty and call is to fix our eyes on Christ, not on the troubles. This is the key to dealing with suffering and when life does not seem to make sense (2 Cor. 4:18; Heb. 12:1-3).

## The Four Prevailing Views

**The Preterist view:** They see this passage as the ways and means as well as God's judgments of oppressive Rome or apostate Jerusalem. The *seven hills* is seen literally as Rome, either as the ones attacking Israel in 70 A.D. or the ones John is speaking about. Most in this camp see this as dealing with the seven successions of Caesars—Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, and then Galba or Vespasian (some of these had very short reigns such as Galba, Otho and Vitellius). The *Great Prostitute* is seen as the apostate, either Rome and its evils or Jerusalem and its rejection of God as Lord, trading allegiance to Him for compromise and apostasy. Thus, Jerusalem is prostituting itself to Rome by supporting and partaking of its evils as Jesus pointed out in Matthew 23. Others see this as Nero's evil terror reign against the Christians. The *ten horns* are seen in the same way, symbolizing the kings of Rome, or the ways and means of these evil Emperors or evil apostate Jerusalem. Others see the *kings* and *horns* as the provinces of Rome and the partaking of its inequity, mainly the persecution of Christians.

**The Futurist view:** Most in this camp see this passage as Rome coming back into power, the Catholic Church or another entity as its theme. Others see this as Jerusalem or the succession of the great Kingdoms of Daniel and the seventh kingdom that has not come as of the writing concerning the reign of the antichrist. The *ten horns* is seen as ten evil rulers under the control of the beast and antichrist, waging havoc upon the

earth, such as future Europe and the fifth beast of Daniel, chapter seven, in the last days. Most in this camp see this as a parallel to Daniel, chapter seven. They also see this as leading up to the battle of Armageddon. The *king of kings* is seen as Christ and the *waters* as the nations in defiance to Him. Some see this as the Roman Catholic Church coming into greater dominion and influence with apostasy. The *hate the prostitute* theme is seen as rivalry between factions of evil and/or the beast—after he uses people, he destroys them. Others see this as an assertion to Jezebel and how evil she was.

**The Idealist view:** They see this passage as Nero himself and his inflicting tribulations upon the early church, or the theme of his evils upon humanity over the centuries. *Hills* are seen as the peaks of evils, from totalitarian and anti-God governments, from Rome to Hitler. The *ten horns* are seen as the Parthian kings and/or the kings from the east. Others see these as the provinces of Rome or its allies, while others take a futurist view and see this as a future Europe, as the fifth beast of Daniel, chapter seven. Others see this as a symbol for anti-Christian powers dominating and persecuting the faithful. Some see this as the kingdoms that form after the fall of Rome, which lead up to the Holy Roman Empire of Caligula. These are the powers and themes that war with God and the Lamb, such as persecutions, and even apostasy in the Church. *God has put it into their hearts* means that God is still in charge, sovereign even and in spite of evil governments.

**The Historicist view:** They see this passage as Rome, in antiquity, as a theme of a persecuting power who is evil and bows to false gods and wicked ways such as Rome's fall because of its vices as in "the road to perdition," or to papal Rome in the Middle Ages taking over from Rome prior to the Reformation. Some see this as Rome transitioning to the first Christian Emperors such as Constantine, and their battles with the old Rome vanguard and its evil ways, and the struggle to convert to Christianity. Others see this as the evil papacy. The *ten horns* are seen as the various kingdoms that spouted up hastily and that are anti-church, persecuting the faithful, such as The Holy Roman Empire and the West versus the Eastern papacy. Others see this as the succession of Roman-Gothic English kingdoms such as the Anglo-Saxons and Visigoths. The harlot burning is seen as the fall of Rome and it being literally burned by the Goths. Some see this as the French Revolution in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

***The Essential Inductive Questions*** (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?

8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

**Additional Questions:**

1. Are you eager for Christ's return? Why would someone not be? What have you been astonished by concerning this?
2. Have you seen people sin who are unashamed by it? How did you feel? What do you suppose can be done to show such people that life has a purpose and that it is in Christ?
3. How would you describe the willfulness and audacity of this beast or evil powers to combat against God?
4. How can your faith be strengthened when you go through a trial, knowing that those who have oppressed your faithfulness and conduct will be condemned and judged, and will be sentenced soon?
5. How and why cannot mere man fight against the Lord? Why do we try to do so? Can you give examples? What about in the church?
6. Governments will seek to rise up and fight against God for one last time, but they will not succeed. How and why do they think they can succeed? How does this relate to power, and people's agendas in the church seeking to command and control what is God's?
7. How and why should your church be judged for failure to *repent* and apostasy? What would Christ consider apostasy that you or your church leadership might rationalize as being OK?
8. Who has command of you and your church? Is it pride, trends, and agendas, or is it God and His preeminence? What are you going to do about it? What does Christ want you and your church to do?
9. How and why does evil fail? Why does evil have no company or loyalty, and turns on even itself? How does it comfort you that God's plan cannot be thwarted or manipulated, that it will be fulfilled and thus we can trust in Him?
10. How has understanding the background and word meanings helped you better understand? What causes people not to want to know the truth, choosing just to rely on their own thinking and presumptions? How do our presumptions get in the way of our growth in Christ?

11. When you go through trials and troubles, what reassures you? What can you do to be better at reassuring others when they have such issues and troubles? What can you do to be better at encouragement and kindness?
12. Church leadership falling to pride, apostasy, and the ways of the world versus faithfulness to Christ—this is the main prostitution we should worry about as Christians. So, what can we do about this?

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