

# The Corruption of the Ages

Revelation 17

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For the threefold division of the Book of Revelation see Rev. 1: 19.

1. "The things which thou hast seen" — Rev. 1: 12-18, The Son of man in judicial character among the seven churches set as lampstands in the world.
2. "The things which are" — Rev. 2 and 3, The history of the church in responsibility.
3. "The things which shall be after these" — Rev. 4: 1 to Rev. 22: 21.

The third section presents the ways of God in claiming His rights, putting down evil and establishing His will and authority in the capable hands of Christ.

The second section ends with the presentation of Christ as the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the Creation of God. How solemn the warning, with present rebuke and chastisement, that judgment is coming — "I will spue thee out of My mouth."

Praise God, the rapture will take place before the stroke of judgment falls, and His own shall be gathered to Christ in the glory. The apostasy will be complete and the man of sin will be revealed. The rights of God are, for a time, usurped by a man who will be acclaimed with adulation by apostate religion. This development of evil is seen in Revelation 17. The corruption of the ages is there consummated in "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

The worst idolatry of all time will be seen in her, a man shall be worshipped as though he were God! Whilst her true character, Mystery, is generally hidden, God gives light as to her to His saints. Whilst the Mystery of God in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge is that of the union of Christ and the church, the Mystery of evil is the union of the corrupt and false church with the bestial head of the revived Roman empire after the true church has been raptured to heaven to join her glorious head, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Babylonish union is neither organic nor spiritual. It is political and economic, with territorial wealth and expansion as its end. Babylon will be powerful and far reaching in influence. She sits upon the many waters (see verse 15), and she rides upon the beast. For a time he is under her control. Religion then rules politics and uses them for the expansion of her own power. So the barren waste into which John was carried in the Spirit was a fitting vantage point for contemplating her! She was set upon a scarlet coloured beast and was decked in the garb of imperial splendour. Every indication of opulence was hers. Also the features of corruption and licentiousness — attendants of idolatry in its most extreme form. According to verse 5 she mothered others like herself. Hatred of God and His people energised her. She was relentlessly opposed to the witnesses of Jesus. His very lowliness incensed her. There was certainly no room for such moral grace in her scheme of things. Little wonder that John was amazed at the sight of her.

Verse 8 — "the beast . . . was" — it had had a past history; "and *is not*" — had lost its power for a period; and "*shall ascend* out of the abyss" — it shall be revived by diabolical power.

The seven mountains of verse 9 identify the beast with Rome — the political and administrative centre of the revived Roman Empire.

The seven heads speak of the historical forms of government which had been dominant in the

past. Five had had their day; one was in being when the Revelation was given through John; another was to come and to continue for a short period. The beast of the prophecy was to embody and to continue in himself all the ruthless features of the rulers which had preceded him; and in that sense, while he was an eighth he was of the seven. On this beast the woman sits!

If the Mystery of Christ and the Church is God's masterpiece (Col. 2: 1-3), then this mystery in Revelation 17, the woman and the beast, is the devil's masterpiece. In THE Mystery we have Christ and the Church — the Man and the woman. In the consummation of evil the woman for a time takes precedence over the man (the beast). Divine order, as in the creation, is denied — the woman rules the man! (See 1 Cor. 11: 3).

We are now undoubtedly living in a day when coming events cast their shadows before! The scenes are setting for the great religious apostasy — the "falling away," prophesied in 2 Thess. 2. Ecumenicity, universal religion, will reach its climax in the Babylonish system. Even in our day, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the move towards world-wide church union leads to subservience to Rome. The motto still stands, "semper idem" — always the same. The world-church will gain territorial power. What an unholy alliance shall that be between the counterfeit church and the devil-empowered revived Roman Empire under its bestial head! (Please read Revelation 12: 9; Rev. 13: 4; and Rev. 17: 8). If the revival of the beast is predicted so also is his doom, for twice over we read he shall go into destruction, verses 8 and 11. The earth wonders at the revival of the beast, but it is the wonder of the deceived! They are unknown of God, their names are not written in the book of life. The end of verse 8 says they wonder "when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is."

The climax hastens. Let us remember that when these prophetic ways are resumed on earth the church will already have been raptured to heaven by the Lord Himself. In Rev. 11: 15 the seventh angel sounds his trumpet to announce the setting up of God's kingdom in power under the administration of Christ. This will terminate the tribulation of the last half of the last prophetic period, three and a half years. The tribulation, resulting from the beast being unfaithful to the covenant he makes with the Jews for a week of years, cannot take place until the Roman empire is revived in its final form. This evidences that the church will NOT go through the tribulation; the Lord having come for His church, this heavenly company will be in heaven while these events run their course on earth.

After the opening of the sixth seal, as described in Rev. 6: 12-17, chaos abounds in the spheres of human government. This opens the way for the master-man to emerge and bring cosmos out of chaos. During the trumpet judgments, six of them in Rev. 8 and 9, the evil machinations of the two beasts which are described in Rev. 13, will be given full exercise. In the period covered by the six trumpets the great tribulation runs its course for three and a half years; forty two months or twelve hundred and sixty days brought to an end by the coming of Christ in power and great glory, according to Rev. 11: 15 — "The kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever."

The final judgments, the seven vials commence while the beast's eminence is at its peak (see Rev. 16: 2).

The pouring out of the seventh vial introduces the fall of Babylon (Rev. 16: 19), and this is gone into in some detail in Rev. 17 and 18. The ten horns of Rev. 17: 12 are ten kings allied with the Roman beast in the hope of eventually receiving kingdoms from him. While for a season they all, with the beast, serve the purpose of the woman, they become tired of her — "And the ten horns which thou sawest, *and* the beast, these shall hate the harlot, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and shall burn her with fire." They receive power with the beast. They have one mind; their power and strength is given to the beast. What a confederacy! They are united in their hatred of the

Lamb. How different the Lamb from the beast! There is no weakness with the Lamb, He shall overcome them; He is Lord of lords and King of kings! In the day of His victory He is accompanied by those who had been true to Him in the day of His rejection, those who are called, chosen and faithful.

How ever diabolical the march of evil in the false queen, the beast, the ten kings, and with them the anti-christ, the imposter king of Israel (called in Rev. 19: 20 the "false prophet"), there will be made manifest, as one has said, that "God is behind the scenes and He moves all the scenes He is behind." So here, in spite of their mutual hatred of and opposition to God and the Lamb, God uses the ten kings and the beast as the rod of His judgment against THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. While they had turned against the harlot they were, unwillingly, carrying out the will of God (see Rev. 17: 17) — "For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil His will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until *the words of God* shall be fulfilled."

How encouraging for tried saints in this the church's day in witness and responsibility, whatever the weakness and declension, God holds the reins and will bring about His will and surely fulfil His word. The corruption of the ages which we see growing towards its climax will come under the stern and irrevocable judgment of God, "In one hour is thy judgment come." "In one hour so great riches is come to nought." "Her sins have reached to heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities." "Strong is the Lord God who judgeth her." "God hath judged *your* judgment upon her." Rev. 18: 20 (N. Tr.).

Truth shall triumph. Faithfulness shall be honoured. God will execute punitively upon the religious corruption that holy judgment which has led apostles and prophets, with the heavenly saints, to stand apart in holy separation from man's organised system of things. Rev. 18 gives details of the doom of apostate christendom. God has the last word, and He would encourage the faithful of the present day (and also those of the coming post rapture days) with the light of His *certain* victory, to the end that we all may be marked by faithfulness in the present day.