

John has described the time of the great tribulation with its awful persecution of the saints by Antichrist, and he has portrayed the antichristian civilisation which would not repent under the outpourings of God's wrath in the plagues of the seven trumpets and the vials. All that remains is to announce the coming of the end. Babylon will be overthrown, as previously intimated (14:8) ... and the great rebellion which began in Babel, and developed through the millennia, has done 'full circle' as it eventually returns to Babylon.

The chapter begins with an invitation to John by one of the seven angels who had been holding one of the seven vials, <sup>17:1</sup> Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore [*πόρνη, harlot, prostitute*] that sitteth upon many waters. She used her charm to seduce, <sup>2</sup> *the kings of the earth* [*to*] have committed fornication [*πορνεύω*], and *the inhabitants of the earth* have been made drunk [*intoxicated*] with the wine of her fornication. Her purpose is to entice, and she is exceptionally successful. She sitteth upon many waters does not refer to a geographical location such as Rome (which sits on *one* water, the River Tiber), but of ancient Babylon with its network of canals (cf. Jer. 51:12 ... Babylon. <sup>13</sup> O thou that dwellest upon many waters). Babylon represents the manifestation of the combined history of godless nations (cf. Gen. 11:1 And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. <sup>2</sup> And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. ... <sup>4</sup> And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. <sup>5</sup> And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower ... <sup>6</sup> And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language ... <sup>7</sup> Go to, let us go down ... <sup>8</sup> So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. <sup>9</sup> Therefore is the name of it called *Babel*).

John is then 'carried away' in the spirit into the wilderness, where, in the vision, he saw <sup>3</sup> a woman [*the whore*] sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy *i.e. claim to be as God*, having seven heads and ten horns [*cf. 13:1, the Antichrist*]. ... She is being borne along (supported) by the Satanic influence from which she takes her lead. She sitteth upon many waters (v.1), having been elevated over the nations of the earth, having achieved her success by being exalted by the beast, and anyone hesitant in their adoration was compelled to comply (13:11-14).

She is beautiful to look at, <sup>4</sup> the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls. She is extravagantly lavish, receiving universal applause as she proudly struts on the world's stage. ... The people of the world 'dribble over her' for she has the most dazzling, stunning personality! ... However, contained in the golden cup in her hand was the full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication. ... Presented as an alluring seductress, she was rotten to the core, and every part *evil*!

Her identity is further expressed by the name on her forehead, <sup>5</sup> MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. ... Not satisfied with being one of many harlots, she prided herself in being ‘the *mother* of harlots’, the mistress, the ‘madam’, over all the harlots. She had ‘sold herself’ to the beast whose desire was to destroy God’s people, <sup>13:7</sup> And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. ... That is *her* agenda also, <sup>17:6</sup> And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of *Jesus*, - she is noted as the main focus of the beast, allied with the beast, and false religion, and spiritual defection, idolatry and apostasy, and Babylon the city most known for persecuting and martyring God’s people. And as John looked at her, he marveled with great amazement at her magnificence and her ‘unrestrainedness’.

Noticing John’s reaction, the angel enquired of him, <sup>7</sup> Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns. ... It’s not two mysteries, – of the woman *and* the beast, - but *one* mystery because their evil purpose is the same. ... The angel explains to John, I will tell thee *the mystery* of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns ... It is a ‘mystery’ because (i) the unsaved mind cannot comprehend it, and (ii) it is a ‘mystery’ because there is no simple identification with any *single* historical city for *the mystery* of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns, relates to an adulterous association in every episode of history from the formation of Babel, through every godless world power until the final period of the Antichrist and the false prophet.

And the angel continues to explain, <sup>8</sup> The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition. ... The beast *was*, - he previously existed when he arose out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy (13:1). However, one of his heads *[was] as it were* wounded to death (13:3) - he apparently ceased to exist for he appeared to die, and he is described as and is not (17:8). He will have a future existence though when he <sup>8</sup> shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, which will be the future manifestation of the incarnation of Satanic evil: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. However, this final expression of the beast upon which the harlot is seated will be ‘short-lived’ for he is destined to go into perdition, which is his final and eternal doom.

John is now about to explain what he saw, and how it only can be seen by the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth (v.9). This would seem to indicate Rome, which literally is built on seven

mountains, *however*, in the following verse John continues, <sup>10</sup> *And* there are seven kings [*representative of 'kingdoms'*]. five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. If Roman 'kings' equal Roman 'emperors', from the first Emperor Augustus who began to reign in 27 BC to the last Emperor Romulus Augustus in 476 AD there were at least *seventy* Emperors/kings'. ... Therefore, it is incompatible to hold to a view of literal mountains and not hold to a view of 'un-literal' 'kings'!

So, what then do they mean? In Scripture a hill or a mountain is a symbol of power or rule, e.g. Dan. 2:35 Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a *great mountain*, and filled the whole earth. ... Is. 2:2 And it shall come to pass in the last days, that *the mountain of the LORD'S house* shall be established in *the top of the mountains*, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

If, then, we understand seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth to mean seven 'kingdoms', three times John has said the beast is not alive presently, and twice he said the beast will appear in the future ... but he does not exist in the 'now' (<sup>8</sup> The beast that thou sawest was, and *is not*, and shall ... <sup>11</sup> And the beast that was, and *is not* ... <sup>11</sup> And the beast that was, and *is not* ...) ... however, he *will* ascend out of the bottomless pit (v.8) ... <sup>10</sup> ... and when he cometh. In other words, he has been on earth in the past, he is not here at the moment, but he is coming, and when he comes, he must continue a short space [*a brief moment*] (v.10) and afterwards he will go into perdition (v.8).

This beast (v.11) that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition. ... If the heads are manifestations of the worldwide kingdoms at enmity with God throughout history, the beast is (i) broadly-speaking, indicative of the anti-God secular powers, and (ii) it relates to one particular 'kingdom' which will re-emerge at the close of the age, as prophesied in Daniel.

In the prophecy of Daniel, the great enemy of God's people, - the historical application of the 'Antichrist', - was the wicked Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan. 8:9 And out of one of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land. ... 'Antichrist' in the form of Antiochus is gone, for he died in 164 BC, and is no more. However, in the imagery of Rev. 17, he <sup>8</sup> shall ascend out of the bottomless pit in the person of the Antichrist. ... Therefore, this beast that was [*in the past, in history*], and is not [*now, at the moment*], even he is the eighth, and is of the seven. ... In other words, this final (the eighth) beast is not a new beast but advances from one of the seven (and is of the seven), and he will be the full embodiment of the Antichrist.

John proceeds to explain the ten horns, <sup>12</sup> And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but *they will* receive power as kings one hour *[for a very short period]* with the beast. Ten is the number of completeness which indicates the fulness of anti-Christian domination from which, - at the end, - will arise the Antichrist (cf. *Dan. 7:7* After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. ... <sup>24</sup> And the tene horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings.) He will rule supreme and unopposed, complete in their devotion, <sup>13</sup> These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. ... At this time there will be only one religion for all religions have will become subsumed within the worship of the Antichrist.

With an overwhelming sense of their invincibility, the Antichrist and his allies shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful (v.14). ... The Lamb, accompanied by the saints, are already assured of the victory!

As the chapter concludes, attention returns to the harlot, <sup>15</sup> And he *[the angel]* saith unto me, *The [many, v.3] waters* which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. This confirms the harlot sitting on the beast upon many waters (v.1, 3) is 'riding high' in popularity in the kingdom of the world. She is the main attraction in a complex filthy civilisation consisting of the peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. ... However, a civil war suddenly erupts which results in the beast, followed by the ten kings, turning on the great whore (v.1), <sup>16</sup> And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast *[v.3, 7, 12]*, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. ... God's enemies turn on each other, <sup>17</sup> For God *[Who is in controll]* 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 ... and it is at a time when the woman, the beast, and the nations seem to have been working successfully together. Nevertheless, God disrupts the ungodly rabble ... and an enemy divided against itself cannot stand!

What a turn of events! ... *God* hath put in their hearts to fulfil *his will* ... He is in control, even over such profound wickedness. Finally, in this chapter, the angel explains to John, <sup>18</sup> the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth. ... which in the apostle's time was Rome, but in the end time, *will* be Babylon.