

The Revelation

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Revelation 17:1-18

Vss. 1-13

- We are told in vs. 18 that the woman, the harlot, is Rome. Primasius, a 6th century bishop who wrote a commentary on Revelation, says that Rome here is called a harlot because God is creator of all, and she turned her back on God, her Creator, and prostituted herself with devils. Other writers say it is because Rome was an “allurement to godlessness and immorality” and point out that in the Old Testament prophets referred to Nineveh (Nahum 3:4), Tyre (Is. 23:16-18), and even Jerusalem (Is. 1:21) as being harlots for the same reasons.
- The woman: She is clothed in the colors of power and luxury. She is covered with gold, gems, and pearls to show her wealth. She holds a golden gup filled with all that makes her lovers drunk. She has on her forehead a harlot’s frontlet of gold coins spelling out a mystery name, that is, a name known to John’s people, but that would be unintelligible to outsiders. Why the image of a harlot? Even Rome’s own writers described her as a “filthy sewer” (Seneca) and “the place into which from all over the world all atrocious and shameful things flow and where they are the most popular” (Tacitus). Perhaps here was the very image of Empress Messalina. Roman (not Christian) historians write of her not-so-hidden life as a late-night brothel prostitute and of her contest in the imperial palace with the city’s most famous harlot to see who could take on the most clients in a 24-hour period...Messalina won.
- The cup: Rome is drunk on the blood of those who have died martyrs for Christ. The harlot is intoxicated with persecution of the church. Nero’s persecution of the church following the great fire of 64 AD was so brutal, even the most jaded Roman was appalled. “...there arose a feeling of compassion (for the Christians), for (the

- persecution) was not, as it seemed for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty that they were being destroyed" (Tacitus).
- The beast: Scarlet, with 7 heads and 10 horns. Vs. 9 tells us the 7 heads are the 7 hills/mountains on which the woman (Rome) sits and that they represent 7 kings. Vss. 12-13 tell us the 10 horns are 10 kings who give their power and authority to the beast. We first met the beast in Ch. 13 where we found that since the birth of Christ and Caesar Augustus to the time of John and Emperor Domitian, there had been seven Roman emperors. In between the 7 were 10 interim rulers, thus the 10 horns.
 - Two notes: 1) without John speaking the angel knew his thoughts (vs. 7) – God always knows our hearts and minds. 2) many were amazed at the beast (vs. 8) – evil will always find people to impress, but evil is doomed.

Vss. 14-18

- The 10 horns/kings think they are waging war on the Lamb on behalf of the woman, but God placed it in their hearts to execute His purpose. They were doomed by God's judgement and they have provided the means of their own destruction and the destruction of Rome. The Lamb wins. So again, even in the face of evil, though we may not see it in our own time or understand what we see, God is always working all things together for good, according to His purpose.