

CHAPTER 17

The central figure of chapter 17 is the woman or “great harlot” who sits upon many waters. This translation of the words “great harlot” is taken from the ASV and will be used in this commentary.

In order to understand chapter 17, the basic meaning of the “great harlot” must first be established. The term “harlot” carries the meaning of not being faithful to one man. If this is translated into spiritual terms, it would designate those who are not faithful to the one true God. Just as harlots have many physical partners, spiritual harlots worship many gods. They are unfaithful to the true God. They are committing spiritual fornication. This great harlot is described as committing spiritual fornication with the kings of the earth, which means they have joined themselves together to persecute and even kill the saints. (See v. 6.) Therefore, this great harlot is representative of those who claim to be spiritual, but they refuse to worship the true God according to the ways he has commanded.

References in the Old Testament support this interpretation. In Isa. 1:21, Israel is referred to as the “faithful city;” however, when that nation left the ways of God, it became a harlot. In Ex. 34:14-17, God warned the Israelites not to marry the inhabitants of the lands around them lest they “go a-whoring after their gods.” Also Jer. 3:1 states, “But thou has played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again unto me, saith the Lord.” Therefore, “harlot” was a well-known term used by the Jews to

describe spiritual unfaithfulness to God. The only sure way to interpret Revelation is to study the usage of these symbols throughout the Scriptures and apply those meanings to the symbols used in Revelation.

Since the harlot represents those who worship something other than the true God, or have once worshiped God but later turned away from him, nothing in the history of the world fits this symbol more perfectly than the apostate church. The apostate church arose because of a gradual wandering away from the teachings of the Scriptures and a setting up of laws designed by men to worship God. It was spiritual fornication. Man was unfaithful to the true God and began to worship other gods or, more specifically, a man who claimed to be God on earth. This situation is perfectly described in 2Thess. 2:3-4. As Paul writes to the Thessalonian church explaining that the second coming of Christ was not going to soon take place, he says, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God."

Roman Catholicism grew out of a falling away from the true teachings of God. One man eventually set himself up as God on earth by claimed infallibility and called himself "Pope," which means "father." We have but one Father, and he is our God in heaven. Today millions of people around the world still worship the man in this same office. They believe that he is incapable of error and that he acts as a direct messenger from God. In fact, he actually "exalteth himself above all that is called God" because he claims the right and ability to change the laws that God has given man to follow. He places himself higher than God.

Although this is the basic meaning of the "great harlot," it is by no means the entire fulfillment. The "great harlot" includes anyone today who claims to follow God but not according to the teachings of the New Testament. It also includes anyone who has been a member of the church but

has left to follow other gods. This great harlot represents anyone who is not worshiping God according to the way he has designed. They are committing spiritual fornication!

THE VISION OF THE HARLOT

Verse 1. And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither, I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:

This vision is introduced by one of the angels that had the seven vials of wrath. He invites John to see the judgment of the great harlot. There may be no significant reason why this particular angel shows John this vision, but it is noticeable that this great harlot will end up in destruction, just as those people did who disobeyed God and received the seven plagues.

The subject of this vision is the judgment of the great harlot. We will take a symbolic look at the fate of this great harlot as it has already been determined by God. She is first described as sitting upon many waters. There is no doubt about the meaning of these “many waters” because they are defined in verse 15 as “peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.” The great harlot will affect or control vast numbers of people around the world. Many people throughout the Christian age have been deceived or forced into worshiping according to the dictates of this great harlot. Because of this, many have committed spiritual fornication!

Verse 2. With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.

The kings of the earth commit fornication with this great harlot, and the people of the earth are made drunk with the wine of her fornication. For kings of the earth to commit fornication with her indicates that they have shared in her deeds. They have aided her in her desire to commit spiritual

fornication. This means that many governments of the world have been, and still are, partners with this great harlot. They combine their powers in order to control their people, and in doing so, they cause them to partake of that spiritual fornication also. To understand that situations such as this have existed, all we have to do is look back through history to the time of the Holy Roman Empire. The powers of the Roman Catholic Church and the government of Rome combined forces to rule the people. The “church” made laws for man to follow in worshiping God and the Roman government enforced them. During this period of world history, many were convicted and even executed as heretics simply because they refused to worship according to Catholic doctrine. (For more information, refer to encyclopedia articles concerning the Medieval and Spanish Inquisitions.) Man-made religious powers have joined forces with governmental powers to cause many to commit spiritual fornication. This situation still exists in many places today although it may have taken a slightly different form by becoming more subtle in its ways.

Other verses to study in connection with verse 2 are 14:8 and 18:3. In both passages the language is similar and must be referring to the same situation. In comparing these verses along with verse 18, it becomes clear that the “great harlot,” “Babylon,” and the “great city” are three different ways of describing the same thing. “Babylon” indicates that these people are great enemies of God; the “great harlot” shows they are committing spiritual fornication; and the “great city” shows the vast number of people involved in this spiritual fornication. The “great city” is also used to show the contrast between those who oppose God and those who serve him as Christians in his “holy city.” (See Heb. 12:22; Rev. 22:2,10,19; 3:12.) These forces are also described in chapter 13 as the beast out of the sea and the beast out of the earth. For a complete understanding of this chapter, chapter 13 must be studied. For the serious student of Revelation, comparing all these symbols would be a tremendous and interesting study to pursue. All of the relationships and similarities can never be covered in a

book such as this. We hope to give some basic interpretations that will be helpful in your own private studies of Revelation.

It should also be noticed that in 14:8 all nations were “made” to drink of the cup of her fornication. Considering that verse in light of verse 2, we see that many people follow this great harlot willingly, while others are forced to follow. Either way, those who partake of her evil ways of spiritual fornication become a part of her and will receive the judgment that God will levy against her.

Verse 3. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

John was taken into the wilderness to view the judgment of this great harlot. Exactly why this vision takes place in the wilderness may not be completely understood. Most likely it defines the place of operation of this great harlot. In 12:6, the “woman,” which was symbolic of the true church of our Lord, fled into the wilderness where God cared for her. In that passage, the wilderness is symbolic of the world of sin. This symbolism is taken from the Old Testament. During the time of Moses, the Israelites, God’s chosen people under the law of Moses, actually wandered in a wilderness for forty years and were fed literal manna sent from heaven. They were seeking to enter their promised land. They are called “the church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38). In the spiritual likeness of this, the church of the New Testament, God’s chosen people under the law of Christ, wanders in the world today feeding on spiritual manna from God, which is his Word. We are also seeking our spiritual promised land of heaven. This enables us to conclude that the wilderness represents this world of sin in which we live. Therefore, verse 3 teaches that the great harlot operates today in the spiritual wilderness of this world. Obviously, this harlot is not under the same protection as the woman of chapter 12, but rather, she is a part of the “wilderness” which the true church wanders in

today. She is a source of persecution and temptations that the church must overcome in order to enter into our promised land of heaven.

The vision that John sees in this wilderness is a woman sitting upon a scarlet-colored beast, which has seven heads and ten horns. The meaning of the beast will be discussed in detail in verses 8 and 9. But, for our purposes of interpretation here, it simply represents those governments that use their powers in order to persecute God's people. The point of verse 3 is to show the close relationship between the great harlot and the beast. The great harlot, or religious powers of men upon this earth, is riding the governmental powers of nations – the beast. This shows that these powers join forces and help each other control the people of the world. This exact situation occurred only a few hundred years after the time of Christ. The religious powers of Roman Catholicism joined forces with the governmental powers of the Roman Empire to control both the physical and spiritual aspects of man's life. Roman Catholicism "rode" the Roman government. Laws concerning man's worship to God were made by the religious powers and enforced by the secular government of Rome. People who were considered heretics by the Catholic Church were tried, punished, and even executed by the civil government of Rome. These actions plunged the world into a period of history known as the Dark Ages. This is only one example where religious powers and governmental powers have combined to dictate the type of religious activities their people must follow. Although this powerful combination of forces may not exist today to the extent it once did, there are still many nations whose governments are greatly influenced by strong religious powers. Some of these governments may even depend on these religious organizations in order to remain in power.

It would be a mistake to believe that the Roman Catholic Church is the total fulfillment of this "great harlot." This great harlot includes all people of all ages who commit spiritual fornication. This "great harlot" has simply changed forms. It was once basically the Roman Catholic

Church because that religious power controlled the earth. Eventually, both the political and religious powers of this religious organization were somewhat diminished. As this took place, many other false religious organizations began to come into existence. They began to have a great influence in the religious and political lives of many people. This “great harlot” changed forms but continued to operate under many different names instead of one. This helps us understand that the “great harlot” still rides the beast today. (This very situation was foretold in verse 5. Consult that verse for other comments.)

Verse 4. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:

Being dressed with expensive clothing and adorned with valuable jewels shows the vast amount of riches controlled by the “great harlot.” All through the Dark Ages, the amount of wealth and possessions accumulated by the Catholic Church is almost beyond comprehension. This religious power controlled a great amount of the world’s wealth. It was accumulated because of the “abominations and filthiness of her fornication,” which she held in a golden cup in her hand. The spiritual fornication, which she committed with the kings of the earth, enabled her to obtain great wealth. Still today, a great amount of wealth is possessed or controlled by false religious organizations. Many of these religious powers survive because of the tremendous amounts of money they are able to raise and control.

Verse 5. And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

A further identification of the great harlot is written in her forehead. She is called “Babylon the Great.” Babylon was a great enemy of God’s people during the Old

Testament times. It is used symbolically in this passage to describe the great harlot as a great spiritual enemy of God's people. The religious powers who are committing spiritual fornication are spiritual enemies of God's people.

During the Dark Ages, Roman Catholicism was responsible for the persecution of many people. Anyone attempting to worship God in any way other than that designed by the Catholic organization was considered a heretic and was sought out and punished. Any religious organization today who commits spiritual fornication by worshipping God in ways other than that which is outlined in the gospel is an enemy of the true church. Christians may not suffer as many physical persecutions as they did at one time, but there are still nations today in which Christians are in physical danger because they practice their religious beliefs. The persecutions that Christians suffer today are directed more toward the mental aspect of their being rather than the physical. Today, Christians are harassed and belittled because they will not participate in certain activities that the Bible condemns, but society considers acceptable. Many times it is difficult to be a Christian and stand for the truth.

This great harlot is also described as the "mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." Although this may be an unpopular interpretation of this passage, there is almost no mistaking its intended meaning. Shortly after apostolic times, the church began drifting away from the teaching of the Bible. It became the apostate church, or the church that had fallen away. Eventually, the religious power of the Roman Catholic Church arose out of this apostate church. It became a religious power that was committing spiritual fornication. This religious power practically ruled the world through the Dark Ages. In 1517, Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the All Saints Church in Whittenberg, Germany. This is generally considered to be the beginning point of what became known as the Reformation Movement. Although this began as an attempt to reform the Catholic Church, it actually led to the present situation in which there are

literally hundreds of religious organizations that are also practicing spiritual fornication. This “great harlot” became the “mother of harlots and abominations of the earth.” She gave birth to many false religious organizations. Any religious practice that is not according to the Bible is spiritual fornication. It is an abomination to God. This is why it is so important for Christians to accept their responsibility of teaching and spreading the gospel to a world lost in sin.

Verse 6. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.

The great harlot is pictured as being drunk with the blood of saints and martyrs of Jesus, which indicates the excessive amount of blood shed by this harlot. This again points to the period of world history known as the Dark Ages. During this time, many were persecuted and killed because they refused to submit to man-made laws of worship. (For more information on this subject, consult *Fox's Book of Martyrs*, edited by W. Grinton Berry.)

As John observed this “great harlot” riding the seven-headed beast, he wondered with great admiration. This is an expression of total amazement. (See v. 7 for comments.)

THE MYSTERY REVEALED

Verse 7. And the angel said unto me, 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.

The angel asked John, “Wherefore didst thou marvel?” The ASV translates the word “marvel” as “wonder.” John did not in any way believe this beast was something marvelous to be followed. He was totally astonished at what he was seeing. He stood in amazement as he observed a great vision that he did not understand. We know he did not understand the vision at this time because the angel

perceived this and reassured him by stating that he would show him the “mystery” of the woman and the beast that carried her. The remainder of chapter 17 is an explanation of the beast, which the woman rode, and the relationship between the two.

The beast that the great harlot rode is described as having seven heads and ten horns. This same beast is described in 13:1 as the beast out of the sea. The great harlot is another description of the beast out of the earth, which was introduced in 13:11. Coffman writes concerning the harlot, “She rides the sea-beast; she is the land-beast!”¹ This chapter is an expansion of the meaning of the “beast out of the sea” and the “beast out of the earth.” The term “beast” shows that this great religious power possessed the powers of civil government, and the term “harlot” shows that she commits spiritual fornication. (For a discussion of the “beast” as a symbolic term, see the introduction to chapter 13.)

Verse 8. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: 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.

The beast that this harlot rides is described as the “beast that was, and is not, and yet is.” A similar description is applied to the beast out of the sea in 13:3. In that passage, the beast is described as having one of his seven heads “wounded to death” but this “deadly wound was healed.” In verse 10 there is an additional description of these heads: “Five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come.” By combining the descriptive statements in these three passages, we can see that this beast must represent something of which five are already fallen and one is in existence during the time of John but will fall and then be restored as the seventh head of the beast. There are many ideas concerning the meaning of this seven-headed beast, but we believe that Coffman correctly identifies the seven

heads as “seven world-kingdoms hostile to God and to his people, namely, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and a seventh to arise at a future time after Revelation was written.”² This seventh head would then represent the Holy Roman Empire, which was the next worldwide kingdom to arise after the fall of the Roman Empire in A.D. 476. Many reasons will be given as we continue our study through the text concerning why we believe this interpretation to be correct.

This seven-headed beast represents those governmental powers of this world that oppose God. The number “7” stands for divine completeness. Therefore, the possibility of another worldwide kingdom still exists; however, significantly enough, there have been exactly seven worldwide governments throughout biblical history. It is likely that in this passage the number “7” carries a dual meaning. There have been seven worldwide governments, and they fulfill God’s plan concerning governments that control the entire world. They are complete. We know that the governments of this world are in power because God wills them to be. This concept is supported by the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 4. Daniel interpreted the king’s dream to mean that God would remove him from power and later raise him up again as king of Babylon. This was done in order that Nebuchadnezzar might “know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will” (Dan. 4:32).

All people who dwell on this earth, whose names are not written in the book of life, will be amazed at the resurrection of this seventh head. The same statement is made in 13:8 concerning the beast out of the sea that had one of its seven heads wounded to death but was healed. The beast out of the sea is the same beast that is being described in this chapter. Also, 13:8 states that all who dwell on the earth would worship this beast. The people of this world wondered at the powers of this beast. They listened to its great speakings and blasphemies, and they worshiped it. This is exactly what happened within a few

hundred years after Christ ascended to heaven. The Roman Empire fell in the year A.D. 476. It became the head that was “wounded to death” (13:3). It was also the beast that “was, and is not.” In A.D. 800, the powers of the civil government of Rome combined with the religious power of the Catholic Church to form the Holy Roman Empire, which ruled the world. This brought back the power of the fallen Roman Empire in the form of a religious-governmental power. The death wound had been healed. The beast that “was not” once again existed. This seventh head, Holy Roman Empire, is also referred to as the great harlot in this chapter. Two powers actually combined to form one government. One part was the civil government, which is described symbolically as the “beast.” The other was the religious part, which is symbolically described as the “great harlot.”

The relationships in Revelation are almost endless. The beast that John saw “ascend out of the bottomless pit” is the same as the “beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit” in 11:7. In that passage it is described as making war against the two witnesses, the church, and “killing” them. The beast is also referred to as the “great city” in 11:8, just as it is in this chapter in verse 18. All of these passages are closely related and must be studied together in order to have the full picture.

Verse 9. And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.

“The mind which hath wisdom” means that the things being revealed in the following verses can be understood if one is willing to study the Bible and apply that knowledge to the symbols used here. Many fail to understand verse 9 because they literalize the mountains. They are commonly interpreted as the seven mountains upon which Rome is built. If this were true, the seven heads of the beast would also represent the mountains upon which Rome is built because they “are seven mountains.” If the woman that sitteth on these mountains is Rome, the beast would be the

land upon which Rome is built. This would make it all but impossible to interpret the death wound and healing of one of these heads (13:3).

Also, many interpret the seven heads of the beast as seven kings who ruled the Roman Empire. If this were true, one of the kings would have had to die and then be resurrected from the dead. (See v.8; 13:3.) This is commonly answered with a Roman myth, which states that the Emperor Nero was resurrected as the Emperor Domitian. Anyone who believes the Bible certainly knows that this did not happen, and to base an interpretation of the Bible on a heathen myth is almost absurd.

Verse 10. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.

The best translation of verse 10 is the ASV, which renders it, "And they are seven kings." The seven kings are the same as the seven mountains and the seven heads of the beast. This is just one more clue to the meaning of the seven-headed beast. The word "king" in this text carries with it the meaning of a sovereign. To be in agreement with the symbols used in this chapter, this must refer to sovereign nations or kingdoms. This same symbolic language is used in Dan. 7:17-23. Four great beasts were to rise out of the earth from the time of Daniel until the time of Christ. In Dan. 7:23, the fourth beast was referred to as the fourth kingdom upon the earth, which would devour the whole earth. This was the kingdom, or beast, which would be in power when Christ came the first time to set up his everlasting kingdom, the church. (See Dan. 7:14, 27.) Therefore, this fourth beast must have represented the Roman Empire, which was in power during the time of Christ. In Dan. 7:17, these four beasts are referred to as four kings. Therefore, the term "king" is used to refer to a kingdom. The same is true in our text. The seven kings are referring to seven kingdoms.

Of these seven kingdoms, five are fallen, one is, and the other is not yet come. "The one is," or the kingdom in

power during the time of the writing of Revelation, would be the Roman Empire. The five that have fallen would be the five worldwide kingdoms which ruled the world previous to the Roman Empire. They were: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece. The one “not yet come” would be the Holy Roman Empire; the next and only worldwide kingdom to have existed since the fall of the Roman Empire. This interpretation agrees with verse 8, which describes the beast as being one that “was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit.” It also agrees with 13:3, which pictures the beast as sustaining a deadly wound and having the deadly wound healed. These are all references to the fall of the Roman Empire and its future resurrection in the form of the Holy Roman Empire, which is the seventh kingdom, or beast. When this seventh kingdom arises, it must continue a short space. There is absolutely no way to determine the exact amount of time referred to as a short space. The only thing which we can know for certain is that it would not continue to dominate the world until the end of time. It would come to an end. This is exactly what happened. The Holy Roman Empire did lose its worldwide powers.

Verse 11. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.

An eighth beast is introduced in verse 11. This also lends credence to the thought that each of the 7 heads of the beast stands for a specific worldwide kingdom because in this verse we see an eighth beast. Therefore, we are being given an actual count of the worldwide kingdoms that have existed throughout the history of the world.

This eighth beast comes from the one “that was, and is not... and is of the seven.” In order to determine the identity of this eighth beast, we must determine which kingdom is referred to as the one that “was, and is not.” Verse 8 refers to this beast as the beast that “was, and is not, and yet is.” Therefore, it refers to a kingdom, which was in power, but lost its power, and later regained it. This is the same

kingdom as the “one is” in verse 10. The kingdom in power during the time of John’s recording of Revelation was the Roman Empire. Therefore, the one which “was, and is not” is the Roman Empire. It was wounded to death or fell in A.D. 476. This death wound was healed, and the Roman Empire rose again in the form of the Holy Roman Empire. This eighth beast is a manifestation of the Roman Empire and the Holy Roman Empire. It is the beast that “was, and is not,... and is of the seven.” The only plausible explanation of this is the worldwide power of the Roman Catholic Church and the religious organizations that were born by her, which still exists today. The “great harlot” is now being referred to as a “beast” because it will continue to oppress God’s people, both physically and spiritually, until Christ comes again. The headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church is located in the Vatican in Rome, and it exerts a vast amount of both religious and political pressures throughout the world. Many other false religious organizations exert tremendous amounts of pressure on governments throughout the world. The structure and authority of the once powerful Roman Empire is still with us today in a religious form. It is the eighth beast. As discussed in verse 3, this beast may include the many powerful religions on this earth today that oppose God by refusing to follow his ways, or by worshiping other gods.

This interpretation is further upheld by the statement, “and goeth into perdition,” which means destruction. In 2Thess. 2:3-4, there is an explanation of the apostasy that began to take place in the church shortly after the time of the apostles. It says that there would be a falling away and the man of sin would be revealed, “the son of perdition.” Then 2Thess. 2:8 explains that this son of perdition will be destroyed with the brightness of Christ’s second coming. Therefore, these powerful false religions, which began by falling away from the true teachings of the Bible, will remain in existence until Christ completely destroys them at his second coming. This eighth beast is a religious beast that possesses great power today and controls the thoughts and actions of untold millions, or billions, of people.

Although the final destruction of this beast will be at the second coming of Christ, chapter 18 gives a great deal of information concerning its destiny before Christ comes again. When he does appear the second time, he will completely destroy everyone and everything that opposes him.

Verse 12. And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast

According to verse 3, this seven-headed beast also has ten horns. These horns represent ten kings that had not risen to power at the time of the writing of Revelation. As was explained in verse 10, these kings represent kingdoms. The number “10” is used in Revelation to symbolize completeness; therefore, these ten horns represent a complete number of kingdoms that are to have power with the beast. Unlike the seven heads, no specific information is given about these ten kingdoms. Because of this, we should not try to name any certain powers that they might represent. Instead, we should realize that they represent all governmental powers that would arise after the fall of the seventh head of the beast (Holy Roman Empire.) The seventh head (Holy Roman Empire) in verse 10 was to continue for a short space. Then an eighth beast (religious beast) would arise, and these ten horns (governmental powers) would be in power at the same time of this eighth beast. The seventh head represented the Holy Roman Empire, which gradually lost its worldwide powers toward the end of the Middle Ages. As this took place, many powerful nations began to arise throughout the world. No one power has dominated the world since the time of the Holy Roman Empire. This period of time is symbolically described as the “ten horns.” There is no way of knowing how many kingdoms will exist during this time, or how long each one will last. According to verse 16, and all of chapter 18, this situation will exist until Christ comes again. This places the world today in this period of time described as the “ten horns.”

These ten kingdoms are to be in power one hour with the beast. This would be the eighth beast (religious beast) since the seventh head of the beast has already fallen. This shows that these ten kingdoms and the eighth beast are to be in power at the same time. Since the eighth beast is the final manifestation of the Roman Empire remaining in the form of the Roman Catholic religious organization, along with many other false religious organizations that were borne by her, the situation being described here shows that many governmental kingdoms are sharing power, or combining powers, with false religious powers in order to rule the people of the world. This exact situation is taking place in many countries around the world today. The power of false religious organizations reigns supreme in many nations today. These false religious powers are a controlling influence in many governments as they establish laws for their people to follow.

To receive power “one hour” with the beast would mean that these governments coexist with the beast for an undefined period of time. Some may exist for many years and some for only a few. While these governments remain in power, they will share their powers with the beast. The powerful forces of the apostate church, or false religion in general, may see many governmental powers rise and fall, but the religious powers will remain intact. The religious organizations draw their power from the powerful forces of the various civil governments. This causes many to worship God according to laws designed by this spiritual beast. The power of the religious beast may also be extended to the influences that many false religious organizations have in the world today as they impact laws made by governments. All governments are influenced by the religious beliefs of the people in that nation. Following the false religious beliefs of the beast, which is supported by the 10 horns, will cause many to commit spiritual fornication and be lost in the sight of God.

Verse 13. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.

These ten kingdoms have one mind in the sense that they all share their powers with this eighth beast, or false religious organizations. They strengthen the beast. Because of the great influences of false religions, the governmental kingdoms will seek to honor the requests of the religious beast. This will enhance the powers of the government in order to control the people of that nation. In this manner the “10 horns” support the beast. They give their power and strength unto the beast. The religious powers and governmental powers of this world work together in order to rule the people. It should be pointed out that regardless of the type of political government in power, this same religious beast still has a tremendous amount of influence on it. This is how many governmental kingdoms have “one” mind to share their powers with the religious beast.

Verse 14. These 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.

These governmental kingdoms and the religious beast will make war against the Lamb. There have been, and possibly still are, some places where Christians are in danger of physical persecutions because of their public worship to the true God. This religious beast constantly wages spiritual war against the saints through its false teachings. In this manner, the ten kings and the beast are waging war against the saints. As Christians we must understand that the world does not appreciate the true teachings of the gospel because the gospel condemns them if they refuse to obey it. This lesson is taught over and over in the series of the seven last plagues. The people of this world are interested in the material things of this world, and they will levy all manner of persecutions against Christians who are trying to warn them that they should live according to the teachings of the gospel. By these physical and spiritual persecutions against Christians, they are making war against the Lamb.

This war will rage as long as the earth stands. Christians

are to take comfort in the fact that the Lamb will be the final victor because he is Lord of lords and King of kings. In other words, Christ is more powerful than any force that could possibly exist on earth. He is presently reigning on his throne in heaven and ruling in his spiritual kingdom, the church. When he comes the second time, he will destroy all powers that exist, and he will deliver the kingdom up to God who will reign supreme forever and ever. (See 1Cor. 15:24.)

Those who follow him are called, chosen, and faithful. In 2Thess. 2:13b-14a, we read, "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto he called you by our gospel." Man is called by the gospel, and those who obey it are referred to as the "called" or "chosen." Mt. 20:16b says, "For many be called, but few chosen." Those who answer the call of the gospel are the called, chosen, and faithful. They are Christians.

Verse 15. And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.

Verse 15 is helpful in interpreting chapter 17, as well as other passages throughout Revelation, because it defines the "many waters," which the great harlot was sitting upon (v. 1). They represent "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues." This great harlot influences and controls a vast number of people. This spiritual beast, which began as the apostate church and later became the "mother of harlots" (v. 5), has controlled multitudes since its origin. It controls them both spiritually and physically by using powerful governmental forces to carry out its own desires.

Since this information about the great harlot is given in this particular place in the text, we are able to conclude that the eighth beast is referring to the same thing as the great harlot. This is another example of how different characteristics of the same force are sometimes described by more than one symbol.

Verse 16. And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.

Before entering into the discussion of verse 16, it must be pointed out that chapter 18 is a commentary on this verse. We will give the basic interpretation here, but for a full understanding of verse 16, chapter 18 should be studied.

This is an interesting verse because, as discussed in verse 12, the world is now in the period of time in which the ten horns, or ten kingdoms, are in power. During this period of time, there will be multiple kingdoms. The world will not be ruled by some powerful worldwide kingdom. Again, there is no way of knowing how long these kingdoms will stand or how many there will be, but this is the situation that prevails in the world at this present time. This makes the information given in verse 16 refer to events that are still in the future. We do not in any way claim to be able to predict the future. So our comments will be based entirely on the symbols as they have been used throughout the book.

The indication in verse 16 is that there will come a time upon the earth when the civil powers of government will turn against the religious powers of this world and eventually destroy them. This seven-headed beast with the ten horns represents wicked civil governments, which persecute God's people and oppose his ways. The ten horns are a part of that beast; they represent a time when the civil powers will be divided among many nations. There will not be one worldwide kingdom. These ten horns, or multiple kingdoms, will hate the harlot and make her desolate. The harlot represents all forms of false religions. It began with the apostate church of Rome and later became the mother of harlots or other false religions (v. 5). Therefore, the civil governments of this world will eventually turn against the powers of false religion and destroy them. To make her desolate and naked, and to eat her flesh and burn her with fire shows the totality of the destruction. There is

absolutely no way of knowing when this will happen or how it will be accomplished. It could be tomorrow, or it could be thousands of years away. We can be sure that, eventually, it will take place.

There are governments today that are presently attempting to do this very thing. Many communist countries seek to prohibit, or at least closely regulate, any religious activities that take place within their borders. Many wars fought today are political/religious wars. This struggle may continue for many years, but eventually civil powers will overcome and destroy these religious powers that rob them of some of their authority over their people. Maybe we should also remember that governments can have adverse affects on religious organizations in subtle ways as well as violent. They may enact laws that make it difficult for religious organizations to continue to exist. On the other hand, they may allow their citizenry to do many things that are totally contrary to God's will and sinful in his sight; thereby, eventually causing these religious organizations to be overcome by the sinful atmosphere around them. Again, we do not know how this will take place, but we can be sure that, eventually, it will happen.

The ASV renders verse 16 slightly different: "And the ten horns which thou sawest, and the beast, these shall hate the harlot, ..." Regardless of which version may be exactly correct, the meaning remains the same. This beast is the beast that the great harlot rode in verse 3. The ten horns represent the dividing of the power of this beast among many nations. The ten horns are a part of the beast and will share the governmental powers of the world at this time. They will eventually work together to destroy the powers of false religion.

We were told in verse 1 that the subject of this vision is the judgment of the great harlot. This vision has taken us from the time of her beginning through the time of her destruction.

Verse 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.

In verse 8, comments were made concerning God's control over the civil powers that rule throughout the world. Refer to that verse and the comments concerning Nebuchadnezzar's dream recorded in Daniel 4. Rom. 13:1 states, "For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." Those who are in power on this earth today rule because God allows it, and he will "put it in their hearts to fulfill his will."

Since we cannot foresee the future, it is impossible to completely understand why God deals with the people of this world as he does in matters of civil governments. God's desire for man is that all would be saved, but that obviously will not happen because of man's refusal to obey his commands. We have no way of knowing what political situations in this world will be the most advantageous for spreading the gospel. We have no way of knowing what governmental powers are needed in order to keep sin from raging uncontrolled. We may believe that we know which types of governments are best for us; however, all too many times, our decisions are based on our physical desires rather than our spiritual needs, which should be considered first. Very likely, there are people who are obedient to the gospel because they live in difficult situations. Possibly, they would not be Christians if times were easy. On the other hand, there are probably those who are Christians because they do not face physical persecutions, which might be more than they could endure. Governments of this world are in power because God desires it to be so. They are fulfilling the will of God. We must put our trust in God.

God also puts it in the hearts of the rulers of the kingdoms of this world to "give their kingdom unto the beast." Verse 12 states that the kingdoms are to receive power one hour with the beast, which is the eighth beast of verse 11. (See v. 11 for an explanation of this eighth beast.) The kingdoms of this world will support this beast or harlot. (See v. 3.) They will honor her requests. They will do what is necessary for this beast, or harlot, to exist. This will take place "until the words of God shall be fulfilled."

This is probably a reference to the things that have been described in this vision. The kingdoms of this earth will support the beast until all things described in this vision have been completed.

One question that might be asked at this point is: Why does God make it possible for this spiritual beast to exist in the world since it commits spiritual fornication against him? Again, we might point out that we may not always understand why God chooses to do things in a certain way. Our ways are not necessarily God's ways (Isa. 55:9). There is at least one probable reason why this beast exists. It exists in order to assist the existence of the true church. A hint of this is in 12:15-17 where the devil is described as making war against the glorious woman, which represents the true church. Rev. 12:16 says, "And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth." It might be impossible for the true church to exist if all people outside it were completely opposed to God and had no spiritual thoughts whatsoever. Sin would rage so rampant that anyone who even spoke against it might be killed immediately. Imagine what the world might be like if there were no spiritual activities at all, except for faithful Christians. Sodom and Gomorrah are probably the best examples we have of such a situation. Because many people are spiritually minded, even though they are worshiping God by their own means thereby committing spiritual fornication, they enable the true church to exist. Therefore, God allows this beast, the harlot, to exist in order to create an atmosphere conducive to the existence of the true church.

Verse 18. And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.

The woman, or great harlot, which has been the subject of this vision, is also described as the "great city." In 18:2, the great city is referred to as "Babylon the great." "Babylon the great" was also the name written in the forehead of the great harlot (v. 5). The great harlot is this woman that reigneth over the kings of the earth. This

makes it easy to see that all of these symbols are used to describe the same thing – false religions that commit spiritual fornication against God. The symbol of a “city” is used in many cases to indicate a group of people who have a common purpose. A good example of this is Heb. 12:22 where the church is referred to as “the city of the living God.” This city of God represents all those who have one thing in common – they are Christians. This “great city” is used symbolically in the same manner except it is further defined as being a harlot. This would mean the great city represents all those who commit spiritual fornication.

The great city “reigneth over the kings of the earth.” This ties the meaning of this verse to verse 17, which says that they agree to “give their kingdom unto the beast.” In the sense that these kingdoms give their power and authority unto the harlot, she is ruling over them. Her wishes and desires are granted by the kings of the earth.

¹James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979), p. 396.

²Coffman, p. 293. As quoted from Albertus Pieters, *Studies in the Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Win. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), p. 214ff.