

St. Therese Catholic Church

Book of Revelation

Chapter 17

March 25, 2025

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Overview

- This chapter begins the conclusion of the book of Revelation. John divides the last part of his book into three well-defined sections before a final epilogue (271).
- 17:1-19:10: A glorious angels shows John a vision of a city depicted as a woman, the great whore of Babylon, that goes down to utter destruction.
- 19:11-21:8: Consists of four visions, tells how God routs his enemies, judges the dead, renews creation, and establishes the new Jerusalem.
- 21:9-22:9: Presents another city depicted as a woman, the new Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb that continues forever and ever.

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Come Here

- One of the seven angels: The judgment on the great harlot is carried by one of the seven angels who held the bowl of wrath (272).
- Come here. I will show you: The phrase seems to allude to Daniel 2:28-29 where it refers to God's plan to overthrow every evil kingdom and replace it with a "kingdom that shall never be destroyed." (Dan. 2:44) (McIlraith, 147)
- Come here. I will show you the bride: Whereas Chapter 17 presents the great harlot, chapter 21 presents Wife of the Lamb (McIlraith, 147).

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Two Cities

Babylon (=Old Jerusalem)	The New Jerusalem
Seventh chalice: destruction of Babylon (16:7-21)	Final seventh vision: descent of the New Jerusalem (21:1-8)
"Come, I will show you" (17:1)	"Come, I will show you" (21:9)
"the great harlot" (17:1)	"the Bride, the wife of the Lamb" (21:9)
"And he carried me away in the Spirit" (17:3)	"And in the Spirit he carried me away" (21:10)
"I saw a...woman arrayed in purple and scarlet, bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls" (17:4)	"having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal" (21:11)
"mother of harlots and of earth's abominations" (17:5) or "falsehood" (21:27)	"nothing unclean shall enter it, not anyone who practices abomination" (21:27)
"names not in the book of life" (17:8)	"only names in book of life" (21:27)

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Great Harlot

- Great harlot: The image of a prostitute is drawn from Israel's prophets, who used the term to describe pagan capitals, such as Tyre and Ninevah, that become exceedingly wealthy and powerful through trade and seduced other nations into corrupt economic, political, and religious relationships (272).
- Near many waters: Ancient Babylon was located on the Euphrates River, known for its impressive network of irrigation canals (272).
- Kings of the earth: Have committed fornication with her, have shared idolatry (McIlraith, 147).

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Great Harlot

- Became drunk: The inhabitants of the earth (“earth dwellers”) have drunk the wine of Babylon and became drunk on it, drunk from her idolatry and other evil works (McIlraith, 147).
- Deserted place: The harlot is so wonderfully attractive that John must be taken in the Spirit to the desert where he has God’s protection before he sees her. Seen from there she can present no danger to him, and, in the Spirit, he can properly understand what is seeing (McIlraith, 147).

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Woman Seated

- Saw a woman: Readers are meant to recall the heavenly woman of chapter 12, who symbolizes the people of God.
- This woman in the wilderness, however, is the exact opposite, representing “the inhabitants of the earth,” the people who do not belong to God. (273).
- Seated on a scarlet beast: Her posture suggests both a superiority over and a dependence upon her mount (273).



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Woman Seated

- Blasphemous names: This is the grotesque creature of 13:1-10 (sea beast), authorized by "the huge red dragon" (12:3) to receive idolatrous worship from the whole world and to wage war on God's people (273).
- Note: Cities were often described as women in this first part of the world at that time, including Jerusalem (McIlraith, 148).



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Woman Seated

Description	Meaning
Wearing purple and scarlet	Required expensive dyes and implied pretensions of royalty and wealth
Adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls	She is presented as a high-class courtesan, enriched by the gifts of her wealthy clients.
Held in her hand a cup that was filled with abominable and sordid deeds of her harlotry	Abominations and the impurities of her fornication – what is unclean and unfit for God's presence.
On her forehead was written a name, which is mystery.	A literary device to indicate her identity – she is a follower of the beast

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Woman Seated

- Drunk on the blood: A metaphor for violence and bloodthirstiness. Not only is Babylon murderous, but she has killed those who are the holy ones and the witnesses to Jesus (274).
- A picture of greater wickedness could not be painted. The worst crimes of idolatry, murder, immorality, and sacrilege belong to Babylon (274).



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Woman Seated

- The beast represents political power opposed to Christ and his Church, while the whore represents the empire as a socioeconomic and cultural whole that is corrupt and displeasing to God (274).
- Just as the woman of chapter 12 represents the people of God and the Bride of the Lamb, the whore represents human society that is closed to and in rebellion against God, the culture of “the world” (274).



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Marriage Covenant

- In this book, we are dealing with the New Covenant where Christ is the Bridegroom.
- The members of the seven churches are his espoused Wife. We have seen from the seven letters that there is a temptation to idolatry even among church members.
- The danger here is of sinking back into Babylon. Reliance on money instead of God can also tempt one back to Babylon. This caused Jesus to sternly rebuke those in Laodicea (McIlraith, 148).

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Challenging Verses

- Rev. 17:6b – 14 and the verses that follow It are among the most difficult to interpret in the book of Revelation.
- Like some passages from the prophets and other apocalyptic literature, an angel explains the meaning of the vision that John is beholding – though in a rather cryptic way! (276).
- The obscurity of the references has only encouraged scholars to try to identify the rulers and events, but no consensus has been reached (277).

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Interpretation of Vision

- Beast that you saw: The angel describes the beast cryptically.
- Existed once...but no longer: The beast is a past and future threat, rather than a present one, thus echoing the earlier vision of the beast seeming to be “mortally wounded” and then “healed” (13:3, 12, 14) (277).
- As John’s first vision of the beast hinted three times that the beast imitates Christ’s death and resurrection (13:3, 12, 14), this vision hints that the beast counterfeits Christ’s resurrection (17:8, 11) (278).

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Interpretation of Vision

- Key: According to John's vision, the human race is divided into two groups:
 - Those who are in awe of the beast and "worship" it (13:8)
 - Those whose names are "written...in the book of life," that is, those who were chosen by God from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:14) and who belong "to the Lamb who was slain" (278).

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Interpretation of Vision

Description	Explanation
Seven heads of the beast represent the seven hills	Rome was the city on seven hills
Seven heads of the beast also represent the seven kings – five have fallen, one still lives, and the last one has not yet come	The revelation to John is somehow in the middle of the story. There is little agreement as to the identity of the Roman emperors alluded to here.
Ten horns that you saw represent ten kings who have not yet been crowned.	In Revelation, the ten kings are the beast's allies, who unite their power and authority under the beast to fight with the Lamb.

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Interpretation of Vision

Early Roman Emperors		
1	Julius Caesar	d. 44 BC
2	Augustus	27 BC – AD 14
3	Tiberius	14 - 37
4	Gaius (Caligula)	37 - 41
5	Claudius	41 - 54
6	Nero	54 - 68
7	Galba	68 – 69
8	Otho	69
9	Vitellus	69
10	Vespasian	69 - 79

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Interpretation of Vision

- Five have fallen, one still lives: If we start with Julius Caesar, the sixth is Nero (McIlraith, 152).
- Only a short while: The Caesar who reigned after Nero, Galba, only reigned six months, fulfilling a “short while.” (Barber215)
- An eighth king: John does not call him “*the* eighth,” but simply, “*an* eighth.” The eighth king, then, may be a symbol. “Eight” was a symbol for the resurrection and new beginnings in first century Judaism and Christianity. Christ was raised on the “eighth” day. The eighth king, therefore, is likely a reference to the reestablishment of the Empire – its “resurrection” – under Vespasian (Barbara, 216).

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Interpretation of Vision

- The ten horns: The angel then goes on to identify the ten horns as ten kings who are potential allies of the beast, in John's time, of Rome (McIlraith, 153).
- Some have seen these ten kings as representing ten rulers appointed by Caesar. The Herodian dynasty would be included in these "client kings" (Barbar, 216).
- In union with the beast, they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them. We will see this battle at the end of Revelation 19. The reason why Jesus conquers them is because he is the Lord of Lords and King of Kings (McIlraith, 153).

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Liquid Metal

- In Terminator 2, the villain was the T-1000 sent back in time to kill John Connor while he is still a child.
 - The T-1000 is made up of liquid metal, known in the movie as mimetic polyalloy, which allows it to shapeshift into other people or objects that come into contact with it.
 - The beast in Revelation is akin to liquid metal - rooted in history yet changes shape to fight the Lamb.
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- Rulers and governments such as Rome, Hitler, & Stalin have arisen whose conduct resembles that of the beast (281).

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Demise of Babylon

- In Rev. 17:15-18, the prophecies are of a startling fact about the demise of the harlot Babylon, a fact not even hinted at earlier in the book. Babylon is destroyed by the very beast (and its allies) on which she is seated (283).
- Although in some way the beast and the ten kings supported or sustained her to this point, and like her, were persecutors of God's people, the true attitude of the beast and its allies toward Babylon is revealed to be hatred, a hatred finally expressed in a sudden, horrific, and devastating attack. God inspires evil to destroy evil (283).

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Interpretation of Vision

Description	Explanation
Waters represent large numbers of people, nations, and tongues	The harlot has influence over nations through commerce
Hate the harlot	Hatred because of wealth, luxuriant living, or the beast's diabolical hatred toward the human race
Leave her desolate and naked	Plunder her wealth
Consumer her with fire	Total destruction of Babylon

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Demise of Jerusalem

- One scholar, Michael Barber, argues that the harlot sitting atop the beast is Jerusalem – as the holy city was supported by Gentile authority.
- The image of the beast turning on the harlot and burning her down is a graphic description of the destruction of Jerusalem – for in the year 70, Rome truly did burn down the city (Barber, 217).
- The “great city” (Jerusalem) turned sinful itself. She was responsible for getting other nations “drunk” with immorality (17:2). By forsaking God, she has not only condemned herself to judgment but has also led the Gentiles into blindness. Jerusalem is the “false prophet.” (Barber, 217).

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Demise of Snowball

- Another possibility is that that the harlot is a cat riding atop a bearded dragon.
- While the cat has led many astray (hence the name “stray cat”) with its seductive power, God will conquer it by the Lamb and protect his holy ones.



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God in Control

- For God has put into their minds: Despite the seeming power of evil in the world, God is in control. In God's wisdom, it is evil that will bring judgment on evil – an event that will signal the beginning of the end (283).
- Great city: The harlot is the great city that exercises sovereignty over the kings of the earth. To first century readers, this city is Rome (283).
- Nevertheless, as we shall see, the meaning of Babylon cannot be confined to a single city or empire (284).

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Summary of the Beast

Attributes of the Beast

The beast is a demonic spirit embodied in an empire and a human ruler.

The beast is allowed to persecute and seemingly triumph over “the holy ones,” imprisoning and killing them.

The beast mimics Christ by appearing to have come back from the dead.

The beast is served by a second beast, the false prophet, who persuades the people to worship it.

Those not written in the book of life admire and worship the beast.

The beast collaborates with the harlot Babylon until it turns on her.

The beast blasphemes God and his people, making divine claims.

God is in control of all that the beast does against His people and Babylon.

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Next Time

- Tuesday, April 1st



Revelation 18

The Fall of Babylon

18:1 - 24