

***THE SEDUCTIVE INSTRUMENT OF SATAN
EMPLOYED IN HIS WAR AGAINST CHRISTIANS***

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PART 1. THE PROSTITUTE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE BEAST (17:1-6)

The vision is of the prostitute sitting on a scarlet beast that swims in a lake of water in the desert (17:1,3).

a. Explanation of the symbols

17:1 “One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me:” Because these angels are executors of God’s final judgements in the period between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming, this vision also points to events towards the end of the New Testament period! They are executors of God’s final judgement over Babylon (cf. 16:19). Revelation chapter 17 explains the essential nature and history of the prostitute, Babylon, and Revelation chapter 18 explains the execution of her condemnation. The fact that *one* of the angels that had the seven bowls appears indicates that the vision is one of a curse for the wicked (17:1) or a blessing for the Church (21:9).

“Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute.”¹ The great prostitute (see verse 3). The prostitute is called ‘Babylon’ because she always opposes the bride of Christ, called ‘the New Jerusalem’ (21:9-10).

She is the symbol of the seductive world. She is called *a prostitute (harlot)*² and *not an adulteress*³. Therefore, she can never represent the false *bride or wife* of the Lamb⁴ (cf. 21:9), that is, the false or apostate Church⁵ and also not the Roman Catholic Church, the papal system, the religious aberration of the Roman Empire⁶.

She is called a prostitute, because she “made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries” (14:8), that is, she has *seduced* the whole (evil and antichristian) world to *spiritual adultery* against God. The symbol indicates that she allures, tempts, seduces, and draws people away from God, that is, the God who revealed himself in the prophets of the Bible and finally in Jesus Christ. “The kings of the earth have committed adultery with her” (18:3,9), because through her seduction, that is, her instigation and guidance, they have rejected the living God and have given themselves over to sin and worldliness, to sexual immorality, occultism, idolatry, lies and murder (cf. 9:20-21; 21:8).

¹ δειξω > δεικνυμι (vifa) σοι το κριμα της πορνης της μεγαλης

² η πορνη

³ η μοιχαλις

⁴ η νυμφη η γυναικα του αρνιου

⁵ the view of Dean Alford, W, Milligan and Leon Morris

⁶ the view of Larkin and Greijdanus

“who sits on many waters.”⁷ The waters symbolise or represent the peoples, multitudes, nations and languages of the world, that is, humanity as it lives on earth in her divisions and groups (17:15) and as it opposes and persecutes the Christian Church (cf. Isaiah 8:7; 17:12-13; Jeremiah 47:2; Psalm 93:3-4). The fact that she sits on many waters means that she has sovereign seductive power over the (evil and antichristian) nations on earth, over humanity as they live on earth (17:15) and over the kings of the earth (17:18). The prostitute, the beast and the godless nations are in the midst of the desert, that is, they are struck by God’s curse. Compare “the springs of water’ for Christians in Revelation 7:17, which is a symbol of God’s blessing.

17:2 “With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.”⁸ The antichristian governments of the world are completely infatuated with the seductions of her antichristian culture and luxury and yield entirely to her allurements and enticements. They are fond of the luxuries of this world and are pleased with the cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eyes and the boastings of what they possess and what they accomplish (1 John 2:16).

17:3 “Then the angel carried me away in the spirit into a desert.”⁹ See Revelation 1:10 and 4:2. Through this angel John’s human spirit and not his physical body was carried into the desert. This vision was therefore not made up by John, but a revelation from God.

In this vision John sees the woman sitting on the scarlet beast (verse 3), not only on many waters (verse 1), but also in the desert (verse 3). The desert is the place where the Church (the woman) had fled (12:6.14). It symbolises a temporary shelter for the Church out of reach of Satan (compare Israel’s journey of forty years through the desert out of reach from their enemy Egypt).

The great prostitute is depicted as sitting in the desert. In spite of all her glitter, she is utterly lonely and unhappy and will soon be covered by sand and forgotten. For her the desert symbolises the dry, barren, empty, wild and dead fate that awaits her. It represents her being struck by God’s curse¹⁰ (Jeremiah 17:5-6; Isaiah 13:19-22; cf. 1 Corinthians 16:22; Galatians 1:8-9).

“There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns.”¹¹

The scarlet beast. The red colour of the scarlet beast signifies his wealth, beauty, glittering and royal clothing. The reddish colour can also point to the much blood he sheds in association with the prostitute (17:6). The reddish colour can also point to his association with the red¹² dragon (12:3).

The blasphemous names point to its rejection of the living God and its absolute godlessness.

Its seven heads and ten horns shows that this scarlet beast (17:3,8), the beast that comes up from the Abyss (11:7) and the beast out of the sea (13:1) are one and the same beast!

The scarlet beast symbolises Satan’s *antichristian governments and its persecutions*, especially in the great world empires that follow one another in the period between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming. In Revelation 11:7 and 17:11 he is more specific the final manifestation of this beast, the final antichrist during the period of the great tribulation before Christ’s second coming.

The great prostitute. The great prostitute is inseparably connected to the scarlet beast. The fact that the prostitute sits on the scarlet beast may symbolise two things and both are true.

It may symbolise that Satan’s antichristian governments and its persecutions carry Satan’s antichristian world and its seductive culture forward. The antichristian politicians in the world support and promote the antichristian seductive culture in the world!

⁷ της καθημενης > καθημαι (vppn) επι υδατων πολλων

⁸ μεθ ης επορνευσαν (viaa) οι βασιλεις της γης, και εμεθυθησαν > μεθυσκω (viap) οι κατοικουντες (vppa) την γην εκ του οινου της πορνειας αυτης

⁹ και απηνεγκεν > αποφερω (viaa) με εις ερημον εν πνευματι

¹⁰ αναθεμα

¹¹ και ειδον (viaa) γυναικα καθημενην (vppn) επι θηριον κοκκινον (scarlet), γεμον > γεμω (vppa) [τα] ονοματα βλασφημιας, εχων (vppa) κεφαλας επτα και κερατα δεκα

¹² πυρρος

It may also symbolise that Satan's antichristian world and its seductive culture actually determine how Satan's antichristian governments and its persecutions function. The antichristian culture influences and determines the antichristian politics. The sinful world and its seductions determine how the rulers of this world and their inhabitants live on earth, that is, they live an antichristian and immoral life.

The great prostitute represents *Satan's antichristian world and its seductions*, especially in industry and commerce, business and finance, education and justice, luxuries and pleasures, art and sports, and certainly also in every kind of worldly religion. In short it represents *Satan's antichristian culture* connected to the world empires throughout the period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming. In Revelation 17:16 she is more specific the final manifestation of this prostitute during the period of the great tribulation before Christ's second coming.

17:4 "The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering (literally: covered) with gold, precious stones and pearls."¹³ The prostitute was dressed in purple and scarlet. This refers to her very close association with the scarlet beast and her bloodshed of many Christians: she is drunk with the blood of the saints (17:6). She was also covered with gold, precious stones and pearls. Her extravagant dress and jewels remind of immoral Tyrus (Ezekiel 28:13). This external depiction refers to her being a queen and a seductress. She represents a certain kind of dominion over the nations of the world and its governments, namely, a seductive dominion over the nations.

"She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries."¹⁴ A golden cup must seem to hold a very precious drink and therefore is designed to entice. Yet, the cup holds nothing but abominations, the unclean things pertaining to the woman's harlotry. Whatever the world uses to turn people away from God is found in this cup: sex outside marriage (in sex-magazines, sex-videos, sex-shows, and in sexual immorality practised)(2:14; Leviticus 18:6,20,22,23; Numbers 25:1-2), games in which one becomes completely absorbed (sports, hobbies, computer games, theatres, gambling, TV soaps), materialism and luxuries (clothes, cars, holidays, foreign travel), worldly fame and power, lusts of the flesh and pleasures of the sinful world, etc. The contents of her cup includes things that are bad in themselves as well as things that become bad because one does *not view them as means but as ends in themselves (completely detached and independent from God)*: for example, art for art's sake, music for music's sake, voluntary service for voluntary service's sake, etc. The content of the cup is poison to everyone who drinks from it!

17:5 "This title was written on her forehead: Mystery."¹⁵ No one is without a distinguishing mark: the genuine Christians bear the name of God on their foreheads (7:3; 14:1). The followers of the beast bear his mark and name on their foreheads (13:16-18). And the great prostitute also bears a name on her forehead (17:5).

'Mystery' is not her personal name, but an indication of the essence of the woman and also of the beast on which she rides. It includes something mysterious, something inexplicable, something strange, something miraculous, something to be marvelled at, which needed an explanation by the angel (17:7). The powers of hell work in and through the prostitute and the beast and will one day completely possess them (13:2; 17:8). Satan's antichristian seductive world riding on Satan's antichristian political world not only lures people into sin, but especially causes people to marvel, to be dazzled by the fact that they (the beast and the prostitute) seem to possess indestructibility. Every time they are destroyed in history, they reappear again in another form! The recurring destructions and reappearances of the prostitute riding on the beast becomes Satan's false imitation of the once for all death and once for all permanent resurrection of Jesus Christ. Everything related to Satan is imitation, camouflage, bluff, lies, deceit, creating illusions and temporary.

¹³ και η γυνη ην (viiia+) περιβεβλημενη > περιβαλλω (vprgm) πορφυρουν και κοκκινον, και κεχρυσωμενη > χρυσοω (vprp) χρυσιω και λιθω τιμω και μαργαριταις

¹⁴ εχουσα (vppa) ποτηριον χρυσου εν τη χειρι αυτης γεμον (vppa) βδελυγματων και τα ακαθαρτα της πορνειας αυτης

¹⁵ μυστηριον

“Babylon the great.”¹⁶

Babylon is not a literal city, but a symbol. She is not the rebuilt city of Babylon. Although she is called the great city, she is also identified as a prostitute. Therefore, she does not simply refer to the literal city, which was built on the bank of the river Euphrates (Jeremiah 51:62-64). She is a symbol. Her name reveals that she is in the present what the city Babylon once was in the past (Isaiah chapter 13 and 14): a proud and arrogant city, conquering and overpowering everyone, trampling on God and his people and elevating herself to speak and act as God.

The Old Testament background of Babylon. The prostitute is a worldly city, reminding us of the pleasure-mad, arrogant, presumptuous Babylon of old. Nimrod, the grandson of Ham, built the first city centres of the world including Babylon and Nineveh (Genesis 10:6-12). Babylon was the centre of evil, arrogance, pride, ruthlessness, relentless aggression and opposition to God (Isaiah 13:11; 14:6,12-14). Babylon lived by many waters, had a flourishing agriculture, and was rich in treasures (Jeremiah 51:13). Babylon was the centre of false religion: idolatry and sorceries (Isaiah 46:1,6,7; 47:9,12,13). She made the nations of the whole earth drunk with her wine: she attracted, seduced and conquered them (Jeremiah 51:7). But even the old Babylon with her idols and treasures fell. ‘The sea or waters’ representing the nations destroyed her (17:15-16; Isaiah 21:9; 47:7-15; 48:20; Jeremiah 50:37-40; 51:41-44,55-56). She is a worldly city reminding us of the merchant city of Tyre (Ezekiel 27:1-14,33; 28:1-5) and its fall (Ezekiel 27:34-36; 28:18-19).

Babylon is a symbol of the seductive world throughout world history. The catalogue of goods found in her shows that she is a great industrial and commercial metropolis (18:11-13). ‘Babylon the great’ therefore symbolises the world as a centre of industry and commerce, business and finance, art and culture, etc., which by means of all these things seeks to entice and seduce everyone, especially Christians, to turn away from God. She represents the world viewed as the centre of luxury, glamour and vice, as the embodiment of “the cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eyes and the boasting of what he has and does”, “the world and its desires that pass away” (1 John 2:16-17). She is the symbol of the godless and wicked world.

The scarlet beast is clearly past, present and future (17:8-10). Thus, Babylon the great is also viewed as past, present and future. Its form changes, but its essence remains. Thus, the great prostitute called “Babylon the great” represents *Satan’s antichristian world and its seductions* at any moment of world history.

The manifestation of Babylon, the seductive world, in John’s day. The great prostitute called Babylon the great was present in one form or embodiment in John’s day. This is clear from calling the seven heads of the scarlet beast on which the great prostitute sits seven hills (17:9) and from calling her the great city that rules over the kings of the earth (17:18). Her form or embodiment in John’s day was the city of Rome as centre and seat of the Roman Empire. John sees the Rome of his day as filled with vanity, luxury, pleasure, etc. Rome attracted the kings of nations to her pleasures in every domain of life: industry, commerce, art, culture, games, etc. She intoxicated the kings of the earth with the wine of her adulteries (17:2). Even Christians were torn to pieces by wild animals or burnt on the stakes for the amusement and pleasure of the public (17:6). She was called a great city, because of her significance, power and influence in the world, even if it was evil.

The exhortation to come out of Babylon, the seductive world. “Come out of her, my people! So that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues” (18:4; cf. Isaiah 52:11). This admonition is not only intended for Christians living close to the end of world history, but to Christians living in every age and in every place (2 Corinthians 6:17)! Babylon the great is Satan’s antichristian world-culture and its seductions throughout the period from Christ’s first coming to Christ’s second coming. Babylon the great is always the opposite of the heavenly or New Jerusalem (Hebrews 10:22-24; Revelation 21:9-10). Satan’s antichristian world, people and culture is always the opposite of Christ’s new world, people and culture. Both symbols are introduced by one of the angels who had the seven bowls (17:1 and 21:9).

Therefore, *the fall of Babylon the great* not only refers to the final judgement day, but also to the demolition of every preceding concentration of worldly enticement (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; 1 John 5:4-5). *The final fall of Babylon the great* coincides with Christ’s second coming.

¹⁶ Βαβυλων η μεγαλη

“the mother of prostitutes and the abominations of the earth.”¹⁷ Her name further reveals her mission, namely, to cause the nations to apostatise from the God who revealed himself in the Bible and in Jesus Christ. Her goal is to cause the nations to do whatever is detestable in God’s eyes (contrast Matthew 6:33). Satan’s antichristian world represents a terrible seductress.

17:6 “I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.”¹⁸

The prostitute is depicted as sitting on the scarlet beast. She derived all her glory and power from the beast. But the city of glitter and feasting is also the city of blood and tears. The city is drunk with the blood of Christians (those who bore the testimony of Jesus). Whoever will not do what she does or induces is killed (cf. 16:6; 18:24). The saints are true believers in Christ, who bore the testimony of Christ, who remain faithful to Christ and obey God’s commandments (14:12; cf. 1:9; 6:9). Satan’s antichristian world represents the terrible persecutor and tempter of the Church.

“When I saw her I was greatly astonished.” The vision greatly astonished John. He did not understand it. The angel needed to explain the vision to him (17:7-18). Thus, Revelation 17:7-18 is an interim passage explaining the relationship between the prostitute and the beast.

b. Different views about the mystery (17:5)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The mystery is the prostitute herself, the fact that the final antichrist *during the first half of the future tribulation period* will have a bride. This futurist view makes a distinction between a spiritual bride (the prostitute) and a literal city (Babylon). Thus the name of the prostitute, ‘Babylon the Great’ (17:5) does not refer to the literal city of rebuilt Babylon, but to *a religious and apostate system of the papal Church* (the Roman Catholic Church). The prostitute is not a literal woman, but a composite of all the followers of all false religions.¹⁹

Second view. (The correct explanation) The mystery is the fact that the scarlet beast together with the prostitute riding on it seem to possess indestructibility, eternity and thus divinity. Every time they are destroyed in history, they reappear in again another form. The mystery is an indication of *the essence of the prostitute* (the antichristian seductive world) *and the beast she rides* (17:7): they have something mysterious and inexplicable: they seem to possess indestructibility.

c. Different views about Babylon (17:5)

There are four views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The first futurist view) Babylon, the great prostitute, is *a symbol* of the Universal (Catholic) Church in Rome (religious Babylon) *during the first half of the future tribulation period.*²⁰

Second view. Babylon, the great prostitute, is *a symbol* of Satan’s antichristian culture in several different historical manifestations: appearing in the Old Testament city of Babylon, (17:5), in the New Testament city of Rome (the sixth king, 17:9,18), in the papal system and power throughout the whole New Testament period (the seventh king, 17:10) and finally in the end-time Universal Papal Church (the eighth king, 17:11).²¹

Critique.

The woman is called *a prostitute (harlot) and not an adulteress*. Therefore, she can never represent the false *wife* of the Lamb (cf. 21:9), that is, the false or apostate Church and also not the Roman Catholic Church with its papal system, which is a religious aberration of the Roman Empire.

¹⁷ ἡ μητηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγματῶν τῆς γῆς

¹⁸ καὶ εἶδον (viaa) τὴν γυναῖκα μεθουσαν (vppa) ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτυρῶν Ἰησοῦ

¹⁹ Larkin, Revelation p. 151

²⁰ Larkin, p. 122, and Larkin, Revelation pp. 149-153

²¹ Greijdanus pp. 249-250,256,258

Third view. (The second futurist view) Babylon, the great prostitute, is *a symbol of pagan culture throughout all history.*²² In Revelation chapter 17 the mid-tribulation premillennialist, Tenney, *adopts the inaugurated millennial view.* He says: “The great prostitute *represents* more than one city or civilisation and more than one era of history. It conveys the sum total of pagan culture, social, intellectual, and commercial, that had opposed and oppressed the people of God from time immemorial.

Fourth view. (The correct explanation) Babylon, the great prostitute, is *a symbol for Satan’s antichristian world and its seductions,* especially in industry and commerce, education and justice, luxuries and pleasures, art and sports, and certainly also in every kind of worldly religion. It is a symbol of *Satan’s antichristian culture* connected to the world empires *throughout the period from Christ’s first coming to Christ’s second coming.* The prostitute called ‘Babylon’ always opposes the bride of Christ, called ‘the New Jerusalem’ (21:9-10).²³

PART 2. THE BEAST AND ITS HISTORY (17:7-11)

a. Explanation of the symbols

17:7 “Then the angel said to me: ‘Why are you astonished? I will explain to you.’”²⁴ The vision greatly astonished John. He did not understand it. The angel needed to explain the vision to him. Between the description of the prostitute (17:1-6) and her punishment (18:1-24) comes a piece of explanation (17:7-18). Revelation 18:1 can easily follow Revelation 17:1-6. Revelation 17:1, “Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute” refers to the contents of Revelation chapter 18. The explanation of the angel proves that this description did not originate with John.

“the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides.”²⁵ The word mystery does not refer to a secret, but to a revelation of something that was previously unknown. The mystery is an indication of the essence of the prostitute and the beast she rides. It includes something mysterious, something inexplicable, something strange, something miraculous, something to be marvelled at, and something that needed an explanation by the angel (17:7). The non-Christians will marvel at the fact that the prostitute riding on the beast appears as something that “was and is not and will be present”, that is, as possessing indestructibility, eternity and thus divinity. Every time they are destroyed, they reappear again in another form.

The text does not say, “The mystery of the woman and *the mystery of* the beast she rides”. The word mystery refers to the woman riding on the beast and shows that there is only *one mystery*, not two. The revelation concerns the fact that although *the form* of the beast keeps changing throughout the period between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming (“it was and is not and will be present”), *its essence and relationship* to the prostitute remain the same. Throughout world history, the co-operation between the antichristian governments and antichristian culture may be observed.

“which has the seven heads and ten horns.”²⁶ The angel further explains that the seven heads has a twofold symbolical significance: on the one hand, the seven heads represent the embodiment of the beast in John’s day and on the other hand, the seven heads represent all the embodiments of the beast throughout history (17:9-10).

17:8 “The beast which you saw was and is not and is on the point of coming up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction.” “The beast, which you saw”, means that during the explanation John no longer sees this vision in his spirit.

²² Tenney pp. 82-84

²³ Hendriksen pp. 200-202

²⁴ Δια τι εθαυμασας (viaa); εγω ερω > λεγω (vifa) σοι

²⁵ το μυστηριον της γυναικος και του Θηριου του βασταζοντος (vppa) αυτην

²⁶ του εχοντος (vppa) τας επτα καφαλαις και τα δεκα κερατα

The beast, which John saw in his vision, has several manifestations. “The beast *was* and *is not* and *is on the point of coming up* of the Abyss *and go* to his destruction” (17:8a).²⁷ Or “the beast *was* and *is not* and *will be present*” (17:8b).²⁸ The beast exists, ceases to exist, and then reappears stronger than ever before. The beast changes constantly and is totally unreliable!

Contrast the beast with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, “who *is*, and who *was* and who *is to come*” (cf. 1:8).²⁹ He never ceases to exist. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). He is the eternal Unchangeable One in essence, in character, in word and in deed. He is always present and will always remain faithful to his character, promises and threats. As he shows himself to be in the past and present, so he will be in the future! He is the eternal “I am” (Exodus 3:14; John 4:25-26; 6:35; 8:12,24; 10:9,11; 11:25-26; 13:13; 14:6,10; 15:1,5; 18:36-37; Mark 14:61-62).

The explanation begins with the final manifestation of the beast as the final antichrist and his final antichristian empire (17:8,11; cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4) and then summarises his former manifestations (17:9-10). Any particular manifestation of the beast exists for a time (“he was”), then ceases to exist (“is no more”) and finally he reappears in another form (“is on the point of coming up”). The beast is a reference to all the world empires with their powerful rulers taken together as one whole beast. He is a composite of Daniel’s four beasts, which refer to kingdoms or world empires (Daniel 7:2-8,17). The number 4 is the number of the world and the four beasts in Daniel symbolise the totality of the world’s empires. Throughout history the beast manifests himself in different forms, but remains essentially the same.

The beast will resemble Christ in two ways: in his rule and in his death and resurrection. First, the beast did what Christ refused to do: he bowed and worshipped Satan and received the power to rule over all the kingdoms of the (evil and antichristian) world (13:7; cf. Luke 4:5-7). Second, of the beast is said that “he was and is not and will be present” (again for only a short while). In this he will resemble Christ who said, “I am the Living One. I was dead, and behold *I am the living one from eternity to eternity*” (1:18).

Yet of the beast is written, “He will go to his destruction”! Apparently the beast will suffer a deadly wound and be healed again (13:3). People will think that he was dead for some time and then he will suddenly appear again. This will fascinate humanity. But everyone whose name is written in the book of life will be able to distinguish between Christ and the beast!

“The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see³⁰ the beast, because he (literally) was and is not and will be present.” Only non-Christians, that is, all people whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world (cf. 13:8) will worship the beast. The book of life is mentioned in Old and New Testament (Exodus 32:32-33; Daniel 12:1; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12,15; 21:27).

Those whose names have been written in the book of life. Revelation 3:5 says: “I will never blot his name out of the book of life”. This does not imply that from the beginning of this world, God had written all people’s names in the book of life, and that gradually he erases the names of those who do not repent. Such an interpretation rejects the doctrine of election and supports the doctrine of the free will of man. However, it is not man, but God who determines one’s salvation (Acts 13:48; Romans 8:7-10,29-30; 9:6-29; Ephesians 2:8-9)!

Revelation 3:5 and the other passages rather mean that *from the beginning of this world*, God has elected certain people in a sovereign and gracious way unto salvation. Those he elected, he effectively calls and draws *in time* to Christ (John 6:44,37; 17:2,6,9,24; Romans 8:29-30; 9:6-18; 11:4-6; Ephesians 1:4-5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:9-10; 1 Peter 1:2). Both their election before time, their rebirth by the Holy Spirit in time and their perseverance to the end of their life is a sovereign and gracious act of God (John 3:3-8; Romans 8:31-39; Philippians 1:6)! God’s calling is always *an effective calling*.

²⁷ το θηριον ο ειδεις (viaa) ην (viia) και ουκ εστιν (vira), και μελλει (vira) αναβαινειν (vnpa) εκ της αβυσσου, και εις απωλειαν υπαγει (vira). Mello + pres. inf. = periphrasis for the fut.

²⁸ το θηριον οτι ην (viia) και ουκ εστιν (vira) και παρεσται > παρειμι (vifd)

²⁹ ο ων (vppa) και ο ην (viia) και ο ερχομενος (vppn)

³⁰ και θαυμασθησονται (vifp) οι κατοικουντες (vppa) επι της γης, ων ου γεγραπται (vifp) το ονομα επι το βιβλιον της ζωης απο καταβολης κοσμου, βλεποντων (vppa)

Although they too will certainly die physically and their names will be erased from all kinds of books or records on earth, they will never be erased (blotted out) from the book of life. When they die physically, they will never be forgotten, because Christ himself will acknowledge them as belonging to him before God the Father and all the angels (Matthew 10:32-33).

Those whose names have not been written in the book of life. Their names never appear in the book of life. They were never chosen nor effectively called by God. They can never get their name recorded by means of their own free will or their own merit (either by religious works or by humanitarian good works). Romans 8:7-8 teaches the complete disability of the human will. Isaiah 64:6 teaches the absolute insufficiency of religious works. Ephesians 2:8-9 teaches that if men are saved, they are saved by God's grace and never by their own works, so that no one would be able to boast before God in the final judgement day. No one deserves salvation – all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). No one can make a legitimate excuse (Romans 3:19). And if God would not save one single person, he would still be perfectly holy and perfectly righteous (just and fair). In the last analysis a person is saved because God has shown his free love, mercy and grace to him.

17:9 Literally: “Here (in this place, meaning: at this point, in this case) the mind that has wisdom (is needed)” (cf. 13:18).³¹ The explanation about the history of the beast cannot be grasped easily. Wisdom (from heaven) is needed to do that. The angel further explains that the seven heads of the beast have a twofold symbolical significance: On the one hand, the seven heads represent the embodiment of the beast in John's day and on the other hand, the seven heads represent all the embodiments of the beast throughout history, before and after the time of John.

“The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits”.³² “The woman sits on seven hills” (17:9) is a shortened expression of the sentence, “the woman sits on the scarlet beast that has seven heads” (17:3). She sticks out above these heads. The seven hills refer to the seven hills on which the city of Rome has been built. The seven hills is a particular manifestation of the beast in history (the Roman Empire) and the city sitting on top of those seven hills is a particular manifestation of the great prostitute in history (the city of Rome as the centre and seat of the Roman empire)(cf. 17:18). That is why *the great prostitute* is also called (the city) *Babylon the great*, a symbolic name for the city of Rome (1 Peter 5:13). The city of Rome sitting on its seven hills is the manifestation of the great prostitute sitting on the scarlet beast of John's day. Rome in John's day was the centre and seat of the antichristian government and its persecutions as well as the centre and seat of the antichristian culture and its seductions.

“They are also seven kings.”³³ The book of Revelation is an apocalyptic book packed with symbols. In Revelation, the beast is a composite of Daniel's beasts, which refer to kingdoms or world empires (Daniel 7:2-8,17). They symbolically represent all the empires in the history of the world that oppress and persecute the Church, whether in the past, the present or the future.

The seven kings (17:10a). Seven is the number of divine completion and perfection. The word ‘king’ may refer figuratively to some possessor of the highest power, like the Messianic King (Matthew 2:2; 27:11), Jesus as the King of the Christians (Matthew 25:34; John 18:36-37; Revelation 17:14; 19:16), God as King (Matthew 5:35; 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:15; Revelation 15:3), or a king of evil spirits in the Abyss (9:11). It may also refer to actual earthly kings (1:5; 6:15; cf. Matthew 17:25). And it may refer to *kingdoms or empires* as they are represented by their kings (Daniel 7:17,23).³⁴

The beast with its seven heads (13:1; 17:3) represents much more than the Roman Empire or its emperors. The seven heads of the beast represent *the totality of world empires*, which in one way or another have ruled in the past, rule in the present and will rule in the future over God's people, oppress them, exile them, seek to destroy them and actually destroy them. They are world empires that oppose God and his people.

³¹ ὅδε (here, in this case) ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἐχὼν (ἔχων) σοφίαν

³² αἱ ἑπτὰ κεφαλῆαι ἑπτὰ ὀρη εἰσὶν, ὅπου ἡ γυνὴ καθίεται (ἕρμ) ἐπ' αὐτῶν

³³ καὶ βασιλεῖς ἑπτὰ εἰσὶν (ἑπτὰ)

³⁴ Goldingay p. 136. ‘malkiw’: The kings stand for their kingdoms (cf. NIV Daniel 2:38; 7:23 and 8:20-22).

17:10 “Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while.

17:11 The beast who was, and is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.”

Five kings have fallen (17:10b)³⁵. These five represent examples of how “the beast was and is not”. The word ‘fallen’ is not used of people or Caesars dying, but points to world empires that have fallen apart, have been destroyed and have disappeared (cf. 14:8; 16:19; 18:2). For example: in John’s day, the five world empires that had already fallen could be:

(1) the Old Babylonian empire (about 2500 - 1100 B.C.) (cf. Genesis 10:8-12; 11:1-9,31)

(2) the Assyrian empire (883 - 610 B.C.) (cf. 2 Kings 15:19-20,29)

(3) the New Babylonian empire (626 - 539 B.C.) (cf. 2 Kings 24:1-2,10-17; 25:1-21)

(4) the Medo-Persian empire (539 - 331 B.C.) (cf. Esther 1:1-2; 3:6,8,9,13)

(5) the Greek-Seleucid empire (312 - 56 B.C.) with its great forerunner of the final antichrist, Antiochus IV (175 - 163 B.C.) (cf. Daniel chapter 7-12; 1 and 2 Maccabees).

In John’s day these former mighty world empires were no more! All these kingdoms in which the beast had been embodied perished! The beast, in the form of the Old Babylonian Empire, the Assyrian Empire, the New Babylonian Empire, the Medo-Persian Empire and the Greek-Seleucid Empire, was no more! They are an example of “the beast was and is not” (17:8ab).

(6) The sixth king (17:10c). The sixth empire, that “is”³⁶, was in John’s day the Roman Empire of the first century (31 B.C. - 98 A.D.) with its many Caesars (cf. Matthew 2:1-17; 27:11-26). The Roman Empire in the West lasted until 476 A.D and in the East until 1453 A.D.

What excites the wonder and admiration of non-Christians is that the beast seems to have the ability to raise its head anew after every defeat! This represents an example of how “the beast was and is not (is no more) and yet shall be present”³⁷ (17:8b). ‘The mystery’ is probably the fact that the prostitute and the beast on which she rides again and again reappear after it has disappeared from history. It is the head that has healed after it had been fatally wounded (13:3). However, what non-Christians fail to see is that, under every form and in every embodiment the beast goes into perdition! This is a great encouragement for Christians!

(7) The seventh king (17:10d). The seventh empire is from the viewpoint of the apostle John “the other that has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while”³⁸.

The seventh empire with its king probably represents a collective title for all the antichristian governments (all the empires) (1 John 2:18,22) between the fall of Rome and the final empire of the final antichrist just before Christ’s second coming, because the entire period between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming is “but a little while” in the eyes of God (17:10). Compare this with the description of the entire New Testament period as a time, times and half a time (12:14), 42 months (11:2; 13:5) or 1260 days (11:3; 12:6), all representing a period of time that is determined in a sovereign way, measured and limited by God himself. Nevertheless, each manifestation of the beast would only remain for a little while (17:10). Each manifestation of the beast in history is destined to go to his destruction (17:11). This is a great encouragement for Christians!

(8) The eighth king (17:11).³⁹ The eighth empire is literally “out of the seven”⁴⁰ which one may compare with Daniel’s “ten horns and the other little horn that came up in the midst of them” (Daniel 7:8,20). This eighth empire with its king is a reference to the final manifestation of the beast, the final antichristian empire under the final antichrist towards the close of history (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4,9-12).

The eighth empire with its king that is “out of the seven” probably refers to the re-establishment of an empire with conditions that also existed in those previous seven empires. What all readers of the book of Revelation must grasp, is that also this final manifestation of the beast in history will go into perdition (17:10; 19:20)! This is a great encouragement for Christians!

³⁵ οι πεντε επεσαν (viaa)

³⁶ ο εις εστιν (vipa)

³⁷ Οτι ην (viaa) και ουκ εστιν (vipa) και παρεσται (vifd)

³⁸ ο αλλος ουπω ηλθεν (viaa), και οταν ελθη (vsaa) ολιγον αυτον δει (vipa+) μειναι (+vnaa)

³⁹ και το θηριον ο ην (viaa) και ουκ εστιν (vipa), και αυτος ογδοος εστιν (vipa), και εκ των επτα εστιν, και εις απολειαν υπαγει (viaa)

⁴⁰ εκ των επτα εστιν

Conclusion. The beast out of the Abyss (11:7), the beast out of the sea (13:1), or the scarlet beast (17:3) represents Satan's *antichristian governments and its persecutions*, especially in the great world empires with their kings that follow one another throughout the period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming. The head that had been fatally wounded probably represents the mystery that the beast always seems to rise again after it has been destroyed, right up to its final embodiment in the final antichristian empire and the final antichrist (17:7-11). Again and again this beast appears in a new embodiment. The forms change, but the essence remains the same throughout the period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming. Again and again this beast in one of its historical forms goes into perdition.

b. Different views about the beast (17:8)

There are four views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. The scarlet beast refers to the Roman Emperor Nero *at the beginning of the New Testament period*. This is the so-called Nero revived legend (Nero revidivus). The Romans believed that after Nero committed suicide he would become alive again and appear as another Caesar.

Second view. (The futurist view) The scarlet beast is identical with the beast out of the sea who rules *during the future tribulation period*.⁴¹

Third view. The scarlet beast refers to the final antichrist *at the end of the New Testament period*. Some interpreters say that the reference is to an incarnation, possession or animation of Satan in certain individuals in the past and again in the future towards the end of history (cf. 17:17). In the past such an incarnation of Satan had allegedly taken place in Antiochus IV (175-163 B.C.), who tried to eradicate the worship of the living God in Israel (Daniel 8:23-25; 11:21-39). In the future such a manifestation of the beast as the final antichrist will astonish all the non-Christian inhabitants of the earth (13:8) through his victories (13:4,7) and his miracles (13:12-15). He will be worshipped by all non-Christians.⁴²

Fourth view. (The correct explanation) The scarlet beast refers to the antichristian empires with their governments *throughout the history of the world*. The reference is to all the world empires with their powerful rulers taken together as one whole beast. The beast is a composite of Daniel's beasts, which refer to kingdoms or world empires (Daniel 7:2-8,17,23; 8:20-22). The number 4 is the number of the world and the four beasts in Daniel symbolise the totality of the world's empires. Throughout history the beast manifests himself in different forms, but remains essentially the same. It includes its manifestations in Babylon, Rome and the reign of the final antichrist.

c. Different views about the seven kings (17:10)

There are five views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. The seven kings represent seven *historic* world empires. This is the *empire-historic* view. The seven kings are *literally* seven historic empires. The seven historic empires are:

- the old Babylonian Empire
- the Assyrian Empire
- the new Babylonian Empire
- the Medo-Persian Empire
- the Greek-Seleucid Empire
- the Roman Empire
- and the Antichristian Empire.

Critique.

This view has difficulty trying to explain the eighth king.

Second view. The seven kings represent seven literal kings of the Roman Empire of John's day. This is the *chronological-historic* view. The seven kings are *literally* and chronologically seven Roman Caesars in John's day. John wrote the book of Revelation probably during the reign of Domitian (81-96 A.D.). The

⁴¹ Tenney p. 84-85

⁴² Greijdanus p. 253

word 'kings' is taken in its literal and usual meaning and refers to actual historical kings. Kings refer to actual historical Caesars of the Roman Empire.

The head that had been fatally wounded and healed (13:3) probably represents the Roman Empire of John's day. Emperor Nero (A.D. 54-68) cruelly persecuted the Christians in the period A.D. 64-68. He crucified them, covered them with pitch or oil, nailed them to posts and then burned them as torches for the amusement of the mob. He also burned the city of Rome and then falsely accused the Christians of doing this. Finally in A.D. 68 he committed suicide at the age of 31 years.

Many could not believe that Nero was dead and thought that he would return together with the Parthians to regain the throne. When that was no longer possible, people believed that he would rise again from the dead. Thus the Nero revived (Nero revidivus) *legend* arose. As persecutor Rome received a death-stroke. But under Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96) the Roman Empire again cruelly persecuted the Christians.

Critique.

Nero did not fall in a battle as the cleft head suggests. He also never reappeared after his death.

Those who regard the seven heads as literally seven Caesars of Rome have great difficulty with assigning seven names out of these thirteen Caesars.

Julius Caesar		Otho	A.D. 69
	<u>Julio-Claudian Dynasty</u>	Vitellius	A.D. 69
Augustus (Octavian)	31 B.C. – A.D. 14		<u>Flavian Dynasty</u>
Tiberias	A.D. 14 – 37	Vespasian	A.D. 69 – 79
Gaius (Caligula)	A.D. 37 – 41	Titus	A.D. 79 – 81
Claudius	A.D. 41 – 54	Domitian	A.D. 81 – 96
Nero	A.D. 54 – 68	Nerva	A.D. 96 – 98
Galba	A.D. 68 – 69	Trajan	A.D. 98 – 117

They say that Julius Caesar was actually no formal Caesar and that Galba, Otho and Vitellius were Caesar for too short a time and thus never fully Caesar. Therefore they conclude that Vespasian would be the sixth Caesar, the "one who is" (17:10c) and that this part of Revelation was written during his reign. And then Titus would be the seventh Caesar, "the other who has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while" (17:10d). He ruled only for two years. Then Domitian would be "the beast, who was, is not and will be present as the eighth". He would be the revived Nero, who "belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction" (17:11).

However, the eighth king does not come from Hades, the realm of the dead, but from the Abyss (17:8), which refers to hell, the place of demons (9:1; 20:1; Luke 8:31)! He will not just die physically, but go to his eternal destruction, the fiery lake of burning sulphur, where he will be punished eternally (17:8,11; 19:20; 2 Thessalonians 2:8). And he will appear only towards the end of history, when God's words are fulfilled (17:17).

History does not support the revival of Nero, the connection between Domitian and ten other kings, and also not Domitian's death by an act of God. The interpretation as if John refers here to the legend of the revival of Nero would make John prophesy things that did not actually happen in history and would make the book of Revelation an invention of John instead of a revelation of God through Christ and one of the angels who had the seven bowls. This interpretation must be rejected as speculation.

Third view. The seven kings represent all the world empires that culminate in the papal and antichristian world dominion *later in the New Testament period*. This is a *symbolic-speculative* view.

The seven heads represent all the world empires taken together. The head that had been fatally wounded (13:3) probably represents the dying of the Roman Empire that existed in John's day. The Roman Empire split in 476 A.D. in two parts (the Western Roman Empire in Rome and the Eastern Roman Empire in Constantinople). Then it finally died completely 1453 A.D., when Constantinople fell. The healing takes place in the rise of the papal world dominion (the seventh king) until the antichristian world dominion of the final antichrist (the eighth king).⁴³

⁴³ Greijdanus p. 204

Critique.

The interpretation of the seventh king as representing the papal dominion must be rejected as speculation.

Fourth view. (The futurist view) The seven kings cannot be clearly identified, but one of the seven successive rulers will ultimately reappear as the antichrist-beast at the height of his power in the middle of the future tribulation period. His reappearance is in the future, because the ten kings (17:12) have not yet appeared on the stage of history.⁴⁴

Fifth view. (The correct explanation) The seven kings represent all the world empires, *past, present and future right up to the final antichristian empire before Christ's second coming*. This is a *symbolic view*.

The seven kings represent all the world empires taken together. The word 'kings' is not taken in its literal and usual meaning, but rather in its apocalyptic meaning as *kingdoms or empires as they are represented by their kings* (Daniel 7:2-8,17,23; 8:20-22). These world empires are nevertheless very literal and real in history! Although the seven hills refer to one manifestation of the beast in John's time, the seven heads refer to much more than all the emperors of the Roman Empire. The head that had been fatally wounded (13:3) represents the mystery that the beast always seems to rise again after it has been destroyed up to its final embodiment in the final antichristian empire and the final antichrist (cf. 17:7-11).

d. Different views about the seventh king (17:10)

There are four views.

First view. The seventh king represents the papacy⁴⁵

Second view. The seventh king represents the nominal Christian Roman Empire beginning with Constantine the Great⁴⁶

Third view. The seventh king represents the Germanic nations that overwhelmed Rome

Fourth view. (The correct explanation) The seventh empire with its king probably represents a collective title for all the antichristian governments (all the empires)(1 John 2:18,22) between the fall of Rome and the final empire of the final antichrist just before Christ's second coming.

e. Different views about the eighth king (17:11)

There are three views.

First view. The re-establishment of the ancient Babylonian empire

Second view. The re-establishment of the ancient Roman Empire⁴⁷

Third view. (The correct explanation) The eighth empire with its king probably refers to the re-establishment of an empire with conditions that also existed in those previous seven empires.

PART 3. THE TEN HORNS AND THEIR CERTAIN DEFEAT (17:12-14)

a. Explanation of the symbols

17:12 "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom."⁴⁸ Horns symbolise strength, might and power of the wicked and the righteous (1 Samuel 2:10; Psalm 75:10). God will make the horn (power) of king David grow (Psalm 132:17). Horns are used in prophetic actions to scatter people (Zechariah 1:18-19) or to destroy the enemy (1 Kings 22:11). The seven horns of the Lamb indicate Christ's absolute divine power and authority in heaven and on earth (5:6; cf. Matthew 28:18). The ten horns of the dragon indicate Satan's complete destructive power on earth (12:3). The ten crowned horns of the beast indicate the beast's arrogant and cruel exercise of destructive power all over the earth (13:1), especially exercised through kings or people in authority in various areas of life (17:12).

The word 'kings' is not taken in its literal and usual meaning, but rather in its symbolic meaning as kingdoms or empires as they are represented by their rulers. The word 'horns' symbolise people with authority in some area. The number 'ten' is the number of completion on earth. Thus, the ten kings symbolise the total number of mighty people in every realm on earth: government, law, industry, commerce,

⁴⁴ Tenney pp.84-85

⁴⁵ Greijdanus p. 256

⁴⁶ Hendriksen p. 274

⁴⁷ Modern futurists believe that the Revived Roman Empire will consist of Europe and the Middle East.

⁴⁸ και τα δεκα κερατα α ειδες δεκα βασιλεις εισιν (vira), οιτινες βασιλειαν ουπω ελαβον (viaa)

military, business, finance, education, mass-communication, art, sports and even religion *insofar they serve the central political authority*. These ten kings may refer to the same kings as in Revelation 19:19 who fight on the side of the beast.

Every worldly ruler has his satellites and long standing connections through which he executes his authority. Thus, not only the false religions (the false prophet) and the immoral institutions (the great harlot) of the world, but also the mighty people within secular organisations (the ten horns) will aid the antichristian governments (the beast) in their persecution and oppression of the Militant Church and individual Christians. Their purpose is on the one hand to aid the antichristian governments in their opposition to Christ and on the other hand to better their own position, power and wealth by combining their fate with that of the beast.

“but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast.”⁴⁹ From the viewpoint of John, these ten kings had not yet received a kingdom. Whenever they are appointed, their authority will last only “for the duration of one hour”⁵⁰. Their reign and kingdoms will be very short. Compare this very short period with the statement that also every manifestation of the beast in history would remain for a little while (17:10), including the reign of the final beast (the final antichrist) who would only reign for a symbolic 3½ days (11:7-11)! This is a great encouragement for Christians!

17:13 “They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast.”⁵¹ Their purpose is self-aggrandisement (increasing their own power, rank and wealth). In order to reach this goal, they will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make corrupt win-win deals with the beast and reign in company of the beast.

All these horn-kings have one design and that is to help the beast in its conflict with Christ and Christ’s Church. Their purpose is to exterminate the Church and to eradicate every reference to Jesus Christ and his message. Together with the beast, they will make war against the Lamb and his cause (17:14).

17:14 “They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will *certainly* overcome them because he is the Lord of lords and King of kings.”⁵² Throughout history, and especially throughout the New Testament period until the end of history, the beast and his allies, the mighty people in every realm on earth will again and again make war against Christ and his Church. But again and again Christ defeats and destroys every form of antichristian dominion. In every area of life they have and will have great successes and for a while will seem to have and actually have the upper hand (cf. 11:7-10; 13:7,15-18). Their antichristian dominion may happen in institutions like schools, universities, banks and law firms, but also in geographical areas like cities or countries. But after a short while, they are defeated and will certainly be defeated. Every kingdom of antichrist perishes! This is apparent from past history, but will especially be true at Christ’s second coming (cf. 11:11-12; 16:14-21; 19:11-21; 20:7-10; 2 Thessalonians 2:8). This is a great encouragement for Christians!

“- and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.”⁵³ Christians are never alone in their gatherings or in their ministries and battles on earth! They are always in the presence of Christ (Matthew 18:20; 28:20). Because Christ conquers, they conquer (Romans 8:31-39). Spiritual battles in every area of life, like industry and commerce, education and justice, must be fought against the mighty ones in these areas (17:14), against all those who carry the mark of the beast and against all spiritual forces of evil (Ephesians 6:12). All those belonging to Christ will certainly gain temporary victories and finally the eternal victory through Christ.

The evidence for belonging to Christ, that is, for being chosen, is always two things: their calling by the sovereign God (which is God’s responsibility) and their faithful perseverance to that calling (which is man’s responsibility).

Eternal election is manifested in *the effective calling* of God unto salvation. The fact that at some time in history God through Christ called certain people to believe in Christ unto salvation and to follow Christ is the

⁴⁹ ἀλλὰ ἐξουσιαν ὡς βασιλῆεις μιαν ὥραν λαμβανουσιν (vīpa) μετὰ τοῦ θηρίου

⁵⁰ The fourth case: duration, and not the third case: point of time (Revelation 18:10,17,19)

⁵¹ οὗτοι μιαν γνῶμην ἐχουσιν (vīpa), καὶ τὴν δύναμιν καὶ ἐξουσιαν αὐτῶν τῷ θηρίῳ δίδουσιν (vīpa)

⁵² οὗτοι μετὰ τοῦ ἀρνίου πολέμησουσιν (vīfa), καὶ τὸ ἀρνίον νικῆσει (vīfa) αὐτούς, ὅτι κύριος κυρίων ἐστὶν καὶ βασιλεὺς βασιλείων

⁵³ καὶ οἱ μετ’ αὐτοῦ κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοὶ

manifestation of the fact that before the creation of the world God in Christ chose them to be his children (cf. John 6:44-45; 17:2; Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:4-5; 2:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:9-10; 1 Peter 1:2; 2:9).

Eternal election is manifested in *the faithful perseverance* of Christians. The word 'pistis' means 'faith', but in the book of Revelation, it generally means 'faithful'. Faithfulness is a fruit and manifestation of genuine faith (1:5; 2:10,13; 3:14; 13:10; 19:11; 21:5; 22:6). And genuine faith is both a gift from God (Acts 13:48; 16:14; 18:17; Ephesians 2:8; Philippians 1:29; Hebrews 12:2; 2 Peter 1:1) and a responsibility of man (Mark 1:15; John 1:12; 3:16,18; 5:46-47; 6:29). The fact that Christians respond to God's calling and remain faithful to Christ is the manifestation of the fact that they have been chosen (cf. 1:9; 2:10). Genuine Christians do not allow anything to pull them away from Christ!

But a person who thinks that he is a Christian, but is continually disobedient and unfaithful to Christ, can never be sure that he would be saved. Assurance of salvation is based on the promise of Christ (1 John 5:11-13) and on living in Christ (John 10:27-28; 14:21,23; 15:5).

b. Different views about the ten kings that give their power to the beast (17:12-13)

There are three views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. The ten horns represent ten *historical* kings of the Parthians that would aid the revived emperor Nero to return to the throne *in the first century A.D.* The word 'kings' is taken in its literal and usual meaning and refers to actual historical kings. In A.D. 68, Nero committed suicide. This could be interpreted as being chased out of Rome. The revived Nero legend says that Nero would return and punish the city of Rome with the aid of the Parthians (ten horns).

Second view. (The futurist view) The ten horns represent ten *future* historical kings that would aid the future antichrist *during the future tribulation period.*⁵⁴

Third view. (The correct explanation) The ten horns represent the *symbolic* totality of mighty people in every realm on earth that aid the various antichristian governments throughout the whole New Testament period.⁵⁵

c. Different views about the certain defeat of the ten kings (17:14)

There are two views. See the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. The ten kings are defeated *only once at Christ's second coming.* Just when the final antichrist and the ten kings think they have won, Christ himself will appear at his second coming and he will overcome them because he is the Lord of lords and King of kings (cf. 19:11-21; 2 Thessalonians 2:8). All those belonging to Christ will be with him when he conquers them.⁵⁶

Second view. (The correct explanation) The ten kings representing the mighty ones of the earth are defeated again and again *throughout the whole New Testament period* and finally at Christ's second coming.⁵⁷

PART 4. THE WATERS, THE WOMAN AND HER PUNISHMENT (17:15-18)

a. Explanation of the symbols

17:15 "Then the angel said to me, 'The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages.'"⁵⁸ The picture of the vision is described in a literal way, but it has symbolical significance. In his vision, John had seen in the desert a kind of lake or pool of water from which the prostitute on the beast emerged. This is the picture. In Revelation 13:1, the sea from which the beast emerges symbolically represents all the nations of the world that rage and roar (Psalm 65:7; Isaiah 17:12). In Revelation 17:1,15, the many waters on or at which the woman sits is explained as symbolising peoples,

⁵⁴ Greijdanus p. 257

⁵⁵ Hendriksen p. 205

⁵⁶ Greijdanus p. 257, Bavinck pp. 270-277

⁵⁷ Hendriksen p. 205

⁵⁸ Τα υδατα α ειδες > 2nd aorist of οραω (viaa), ου η πορνη καθηται > καθημαι (vorn), λαοι και οχλοι εισιν, και εθνη και γλωσσαι

multitudes, nations and languages, that is, humanity as they live on earth in their divisions in countries and languages and as they constantly surge against the Church. The prostitute sits on these waters. This symbolically means that throughout the whole New Testament period Satan's antichristian culture together with Satan's antichristian governments would dominate all civilizations of nations that are not committed to the God of the Bible.

17:16 “The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.”⁵⁹ The antichristian governments of the world initially support, but afterwards destroy the antichristian seductions of the world. The sovereign God of the Bible allows the enemies of Christ and the Church to destroy one another! This happens throughout the whole history of salvation: God allowed the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples to turn on each other with their swords (Judges 7:12,22). God sent a panic that struck the whole army of the Philistines so that in total confusion they struck each other with their swords (1 Samuel 14:15,20). God set ambushes against the army of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir so that they rose up against one another and helped to destroy one another (2 Chronicles 20:22-23). And God will summon a sword against Gog on all his mountains. Every man's sword will be against his brother. In this way God will execute his judgement (Ezekiel 38:21-22).

In the beginning, the rulers of the earth become infatuated with the treasures and pleasures of the antichristian world and its seductions (1 John 2:16). In spite of God's warnings and call to repentance, they harden themselves. By continually hardening themselves, they finally become hardened, because God gives them over to a depraved mind and degenerate life (Romans 1:18-32). In the end, when they finally see their foolishness and feel revulsion, it is too late to repent and change. Then in hatred they destroy their own culture (cf. Hebrews 12:15-17)! Although their hatred comes out of their own hearts, their hatred is nevertheless bound to God's will and control. God's enemies can never do more evil than God allows: the power they have has been given to them by God (cf. 13:7,15). The enemies of God even become instruments in God's hands to destroy one another and thus to accomplish God's eternal purpose (17:16-17; cf. Proverbs 16:4).

The very encouraging message of this chapter is: “No matter what form the beast takes during the course of history, it will always perish”! Past history has already proved that: the Old Babylonian empire, the Assyrian empire, the New Babylonian empire, the Medo-Persian empire, the Greek-Seleucid empire, the Roman empire, and many anti-Christian empires thereafter have already perished! At the second coming of Christ, the final empire of antichrist will also go to destruction (cf. 11:11-12; 16:14-21; 17:11; 19:17-21; 20:7-10; 2 Thessalonians 2:8)! This is a great encouragement for Christians!

The beast carries the prostitute. *In the beginning*, the antichristian governments and all their mighty people in every area of life *support* every form of the antichristian world and its seductive culture. In the beginning the antichristian governments *enjoy* the antichristian culture. They drink of her cup filled with every form of wickedness and get intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries (17:2,4). They are completely infatuated with the seductions of her antichristian culture and luxury and yield entirely to her allurements and enticements. They are fond of the luxuries of this world and are pleased with the cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eyes and the boastings of what they possess and what they accomplish (1 John 2:16).

The beast destroys the prostitute. *But in the end*, when law and order breaks down (2 Thessalonians 2:6-8) and the antichristian culture has undermined the antichristian governments in governing the people, the governments and all their mighty people in every area of life *will turn against* every form of the antichristian world and its seductive culture. They will *hate* the antichristian culture. They will hate the results of their own government. They will bring the prostitute to ruin, leave her naked and burn her with fire. They will cast her off, strip her of her extravagantly gorgeous garments and costly ornaments and destroy her utterly (cf. Ezekiel 23:25-30). The meaning is that there comes a time when these worldly leaders and people see what great fools they have been to indulge in antichristian culture and its lawlessness! But then it will be forever too late (cf. Luke 16:23-31)! The beast together with its horns will destroy the prostitute. This means that in a sense the sinful world destroys itself! What the sinful world sows, the sinful world reaps (Galatians 6:7-8)!

⁵⁹ και τα δεκα κερατα α ειδες και το θηριον, ουτοι μισησουσιν (vifa) την πορνην και ηρημωμενην > ερημωσ (vgrp) ποιησουσιν (vifa) αυτην και γυμνην, και τας σαρκας αυτης φαγονται > εσθιω (vifm), και αυτην κατακαουσουσιν > κατακαιω (vifa) εν πυρι

17:17 “For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God’s words are fulfilled.”⁶⁰ The unexpected unity between the ten kings and the beast in their purpose to destroy the prostitute comes from the sovereign God. He puts it into their hearts to accomplish his (God’s) purpose (Isaiah 14:24,27; Romans 9:10-18). Although the wicked are responsible for the wicked decisions and plans they make, the outcome of their plans is always determined by the sovereign God of the Bible. The Lord’s thoughts and ways are much higher than those of people and kings (Isaiah 55:8-9). ‘The Lord works out everything for his own ends – even the wicked for a day of disaster’ (Proverbs 16:4). ‘In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps’ (Proverbs 16:9). God permits sin, but does not approve of sin. God has a hand in the action in which sin is, but not in the sin of the action.

God’s thoughts, plans and revealed words will ultimately be fulfilled! His threats will also be fulfilled (Jeremiah 18:5-10). When rulers and people, through their own godlessness and wickedness continue to suppress and exchange the truth of God and continue to harden their hearts against God’s repeated warnings, God finally lets them have their way, withdraws his grace, hardens their hearts permanently and gives them over to a depraved mind and to a degenerate life-style (Romans 1:18-32).

- First, such people become infatuated with the pleasures and treasures of this world and harden themselves against God.
- Then, God withdraws his grace and allows them to get hardened (or hardens them) and gives them over to a depraved mind and degenerate life.
- Finally, when it is too late, they experience revulsion of feeling.
- Examples of such worldly sorrow that brought death are Esau (Hebrews 12:15-17), Saul (1 Samuel 15:22-29), Judas (Matthew 27:1-5), the rich show-off (Luke 16:23-31) and the people who do not genuinely repent with godly sorrow, but only have worldly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:10).

The message for the readers of the book of Revelation is to refuse to yield to the temptations of this world (cf. Matthew 4:8-10) and to make sure that they do not miss God’s grace (cf. Hebrews 12:15). There comes a time when repentance and remorse will be too late!

17:18 “The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.”⁶¹ The prostitute ‘Babylon’ and the city ‘Babylon’ are one and the same reality, because the prostitute is called “Babylon the great” (17:5) and is identified with the great city (17:18). The prostitute and the city Babylon are *different symbols, but point to the same reality!* Both the prostitute Babylon and the city Babylon made the kings drunk with the wine of their adulteries (17:2; 18:3; 14:8); both are dressed in purple and scarlet and jewels (17:4; 18:16); both shed the blood of Christians (17:6; 18:24) and both are destroyed by burning (17:16; 18:8-9,18; 19:2-3). The invitation to witness the destruction of Babylon “Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute” (17:1) is actually described in Revelation 18:1-24. Revelation 17:7-18 is an interim explanation of the ‘mystery’ concerning the relationship between the woman and the beast she rides.

Compare the different symbols used for the Body of Christ: the Bride (21:9) and the New Jerusalem (21:10). Also compare the different symbols for Christ in the Bible: Servant, Prophet, Priest, King, Prince of Peace, righteous Branch, Shepherd, Lamb, Lion, Morningstar, and the First and the Last!

⁶⁰ ο γαρ θεος εδωκεν (viaa) εις τας καρδιας αυτων ποιησαι (vnaa) την γνωμην αυτου, και ποιησαι (vnaa) μιαν γνωμην και δουναι την βασιλειαν αυτων το θηριω, αχρι τελεσθησονται (vifp) οι λογοι του θεου.

⁶¹ και η γυνη ην ειδες εστιν η πολις η μεγαλη η εχουσα (vppa) βασιλειαν επι των βασιλειων της γης

b. Different views about the prostitute who is initially carried and afterwards destroyed (17:16-17)

There are three views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The prostitute symbolises the end-time Universal Papal Church. It is destroyed *in the middle of the future tribulation period*.⁶²

Second view. The prostitute symbolises the end-time Universal Papal Church that has also become a worldly economic power. It is destroyed *shortly before Christ's second coming*.

The apostate Church will be the religious aberration during the final Roman Empire. God's punishment of the ancient city of Babylon (cf. Jeremiah chapters 50-51) also becomes God's punishment of Rome, the seat of the false Church (17:9,18). This punishment is executed in Revelation chapter 18 shortly before Christ's second coming. The antichrist and his allies cannot act in complete freedom. Even through their evil plans God executes his eternal plan in a complete sovereign way.⁶³

Third view. (The correct explanation) The prostitute symbolises the antichristian world and its seductive culture *throughout the whole New Testament period*. It is repeatedly destroyed until its final destruction *at Christ's second coming*.

Throughout the whole New Testament period the antichristian political powers destroy the antichristian religious, philosophical, scientific, economic, financial, judicial and agricultural culture it initially supported. The governments destroy their own cultures because they always discover too late that the antichristian cultures they had fostered inevitably destroy their governments! What the antichristian political governments sow, they inescapably reap (Galatians 6:7-8)! In the end the pleasures of sin always disappoint!⁶⁴

⁶² Larkin p. 122

⁶³ Greijdanus pp. 249-250,256,258

⁶⁴ Hendriksen pp. 206-207