



Rise and Fall of the Prostitute

Revelation 17:1-18



The Revelation of Jesus Christ Rise and Fall of the Prostitute Revelation 17:1-18

Main Idea: The pleasure of the world will ultimately fall to the righteousness of God.

While the wrath poured out in Revelation 16 represents the spiritual victory of the Lamb of God over the world and the last attempt for people to return to the one true God, Revelation 17 and 18 detail the total defeat of the Satan and the kingdom of Babylon. Throughout the course of Revelation 17, John employs imagery that would be easily identifiable to the modern day reader, where the interpretation and implication could easily be understood. Yet, as with most scriptures and prophesy in the bible, there are likely dual meanings. The immediate understanding and context and the much larger scope as time comes to a conclusion. Ultimately, the hearts of man and the desires of the flesh have no fundamentally changed throughout history. While the technology and context changes, the temptation remains the same; to sell ourselves and our identity to the prostitute for momentary pleasure at the cost of our spiritual well being.

The Prostitute of Babylon

As John sees the prostitute, even he is filled with wonder regarding this woman's allure and charm. Her seduction knows no bounds and spreads across nations and peoples. The expanse of the waters represents the nations and the world, displaying the depth of her influence. She draws people in with the promise of pleasure at the expense of their very identity. In order to unite themselves with the prostitute, they must abandon the promises and hope of God for the momentary and fleeting pleasures. John describes the prostitute as drunk with the blood of the saints and the martyrs. She presides over their death, rejoicing as those who follow God meet their demise. Furthermore, she embodies the temptation of sin that allures people to itself only to have them meet their untimely ruin.

Yet, ultimately, the followers of the Lord will not taste the fullness of death and the prostitute will taste the fullness of God's wrath. The people will turn on the prostitute in the end. The promises of a prostitute cannot fulfill as they bring only false momentary fleeting pleasures. When met with the pain and agony from the seven bowls of wrath, the charms of the prostitute no longer serve any purpose or protection. Her momentary pleasure could not withstand the fullness of the wrath of God and the rulers of the world, who once marveled at her presence will now scorn her false promises. The prostitute sold her body to provide pleasure for others, yet those who sought her pleasure ultimately brought her to her own destruction. What she once thought would provide pleasure now provides only death.

The Rulers of the World

The seven horns represent seven rulers who preside over the various aspects of history. Scholars debate the identity of these kings, some even naming specific kingdoms and names. Yet, whatever the interpretation, they represent the rulers of the world, whose reach extends across all the world. The mountains would have reflected the seats of Roman power during that day. John's contemporary audience would have seen Rome as the meaning of this and to some extent they would be right, but, as with most things, the scope of God's plan moves beyond our understanding. The immediate meaning implies that even the powerful Rome would fall and the eternal meaning that no power of the world would last. Throughout history, kings will view themselves as gods and align themselves with the great beast through the allure of the prostitute who promises power and pleasure.

Yet, towards the end of time, the ten lesser kings of the day, the powers of the world, will receive authority for a brief time, only to secede that authority to the beast. They assert their authority but giving it to the beast in an effort to feel powerful. The beast makes people believe that his power will never end and thus, the rulers of the world make the beast their Lord. When the beast calls for war upon the one True God, the rulers of the world will align themselves with the beast and link their end to the end of the beast. They follow their ruler to the insane consequences of

death that the beast knew from the beginning.

The Beast of Babylon

The beast of Babylon is easily identified as the beast from Revelation 13 using much of the same imagery of before, such as seven crowns and ten horns. As the rulers of the world across time all submit to the will and authority of the beast, they cement their fate and stand against the Lord God Almighty. In the defeat of the beast, he brings with him all whose names have not been written in the book of life.

John describes the beast as the one “who was, is not, and is to come” a variation on the description of the Lord God Almighty from Revelation 1:8 (was, is, and is to come). In the immediate sense, this represents the beast as the seventh and eighth ruler, appearing to die and resurrect in competition with Jesus Christ. The beast only masquerades as a god, giving off the image of the life. In truth, the beast seal its fate the moment they rebelled against God attempting to usurp the throne. God tossed the beast down into the bottomless pit and now brings the beast out for its final destruction.

God will reign victorious over all creation. As appealing as the prostitute’s charms, the power of the world, and the offer of protection of the beast may be, only God can save mankind.

Discussion Questions

- God is both King and full of grace. Why do people respond to God's presence with hostility? Why do they scoff at the hand of God?
- What is the reach of the influence of the prostitute? What does this tell us about the power of the temptation?
- Why did the rulers turn on the prostitute? What does the reaction of the rulers to the prostitute tell you about fleshly desires and pursuits?
- If we are being honest, what are some of the things we seek instead of God? Why do we do these things?
- How does the pleasure of God supersede the pleasure and power the world offers? What should our response be to the presence of the Lord?