

Revelation 17: The Woman on the Beast

The completion of God's wrath, begun in chapter 15:1, moves from the destruction of man's habitat to the destruction of the evil ones. Revelation 17 and 18 tell of the fall of the great city, Babylon, the prostitute. The text clearly explains many of these figures and images.

The Punishment of the Great Prostitute (Revelation 17:1-2)

Revelation 17:1-2

17 And there came one of the seven angels that had the seven bowls, and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot that sits upon many waters; 2 with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and they that dwell in the earth were made drunken with the wine of her fornication."

One of the seven angels, who had one of the seven bowls of God's wrath, is now escorting John through the vision, connecting these chapters clearly to the specific and only completion of God's wrath and not to some new-age theme or latter day revelation. The subject here is the punishment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters. The angel clearly defined the waters in verse 15, saying, "And he said unto me, "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues."

This is the same multitude over whom the beast is said to have authority in Revelation 13:7-8:

7 And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and there was given to him authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation. 8 And all that dwell on the earth shall worship him, (every one) whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that has been slain.

The woman sits on top of the multitude of the world—past and present. Verse 18 tells specifically, "The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth."

The great city—set opposite to the holy city, the heavenly Jerusalem—is the Babylon and Nineveh founded by Nimrod (Genesis 10:12), the Nineveh of Jonah (Jonah 1:2; 3:2), Sodom and Egypt (Revelation 11:8), and the Jerusalem of the Lord's crucifixion and Jeremiah's lament (Revelation 11:8; Jeremiah 22:8). The great city is these kings, but more, the great city is *the kings of the earth* of verse 19. That *the kings of the earth* had committed adultery with the prostitute and that the inhabitants were drunk with her adulteries show the degree of her influence in defiling mankind with sin.

The Prostitute and the Scarlet Beast (Revelation 17:3-5)

Revelation 17:3-5

3 And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness: and I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet-colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. 4 And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stone and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations, even the unclean things of her fornication, 5 and upon her forehead a name written, "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

When the angel carried John in the spirit into the wilderness, John saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast. The beast, whom we met in detail in chapter 13, has the fullness and completeness of evil, represented by the heads and horns. (See notes on chapter 13). The beast, which has the authority

of the dragon, the devil, united with the woman. The beast stands to the adulterous woman, Babylon, as Christ stands to the pure bride, the church, the New Jerusalem—evil with evil and righteousness with righteousness. The scarlet of the beast contrasts to the white of the Lamb. The woman’s dress of purple and scarlet, gold, and precious stones demands two comparisons. The first is to the wonder and purity of the dress of the woman, the bride, the church in chapter 12. That woman is clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and crown of twelve stars on her head—magnificent and wondrous. The difference is between a prostitute and a pure virgin. The second contrast to this great prostitute is the description of just such a woman in Jeremiah 4:30:

30 And you, when you are made desolate, what will you do? Though you clothe yourself with scarlet, though you deck yourself with ornaments of gold, though you enlarge your eyes with paint, in vain do you make yourself fair; (your) lovers despise you, they seek your life.

This description is immediately followed by a description of the pure virgin of Christ in Jeremiah 4:31:

31 For I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail, the anguish as of her that brings forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion, that gasps for breath, that spreads her hands, (saying), “Woe is me now! For my soul faints before the murderers.”

Perhaps more interesting than the evil woman’s dress is her cup filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. In contrast, Paul taught of the church that she is the pure virgin of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2). The one—the holy city, the church, the virgin—is a pure bride to Christ; the other—the great city, those of the world (17:15, 18)—is the prostitute of the beast. The prostitute’s cup, metaphorically standing for the contents, contains filth and abominable things. The church’s cup contains Christ’s blood of the new covenant in Matthew 26:28-29:

28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins.
29 But I say unto you, I shall not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

In his comparison of the two cups, Paul made this distinction in 1 Corinthians 10:18-22:

18 Behold Israel after the flesh: have not they that eat the sacrifices communion with the altar? 19 What say I then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 But (I say), that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God: and I would not that you should have communion with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of demons: you cannot partake of the table of the Lord, and of the table of demons. 22 Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

In verse 5, John learns from the title written on the prostitute’s forehead who she is. The word, MYSTERY, places the prostitute and her meaning within the specifics of God’s mystery as revelation where it means something that was once hidden but is now made known. In Revelation 10:6-7, the revelation of God’s mystery was to occur at the sounding of the seventh trumpet; and the narrative is still under the sounding of that trumpet during which the mystery of the woman on the beast is made known. John had written, “But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then is finished the mystery of God, according to the good tidings which he declared to his servants the prophets.

The mystery of God’s eternal purpose included the destiny of the saints and the sinners alike. The revelation of the mystery of the great city was part of its great antithesis, the holy city. That the prostitute’s fate should be sealed in this final revelation accentuates the victory and triumph of the pure bride of Christ. The scriptures assure repeatedly that all that was hidden is revealed. Paul wrote in Romans 16:25-27:

25 Now to him that is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept in silence through times eternal, 26 but now is manifested, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, is made known unto all the nations unto obedience of faith: 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever. Amen.

The phrase *all nations* in this passage includes those identified in verse 15 as the waters upon which the prostitute sits: people multitudes, nations, and languages. The revelation of the eternal God seals their fate. The revelation, including the fate of the prostitute, the great city, was put in effect in Ephesians 1:9-10:

9 making known unto us the mystery of his will, according his good pleasure which he purposed in him 10 unto a dispensation of the fullness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth; in him, (I say,)

In chapter 15 verse 1, John learned that with the last seven plagues, God's wrath was completed. The phrase *was completed* is passive past tense, and therefore, a fact accomplished by God. In addition, as the seventh angel poured out the last bowl of God's wrath in chapter 16:17, a loud voice from the throne said, "It is done." Among the resulting happenings were that the great city split into three parts, and that the cities of all nations collapse, and that God remembered Babylon and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Since the woman is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth (17:18), God now completes his revelation of that part of the mystery which was once hidden, but is now made known.

BABYLON THE GREAT is used to describe the great city that rules over the cities of the nations. Synonymously, the woman is the great city (17:18), and the great city, Babylon. Chapter 18 calls Babylon the *great city* three times in 18:2-3, 10, and 21, and implies the name many times over. The second angel announcing the impending doom had forecast in Revelation 14:8:

8 And another, a second angel, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, that has made all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."

Chapter 18 will describe the doom of Babylon the great in detail. As the New Jerusalem, the holy city, stands for the church; therefore Babylon, the great city, stands for the called out multitudes that followed the paganism of the Old Testament and the multitudes that followed the second beast, the false prophet of this revelation of God, the New Testament of Christ. The connection is to the beast out of the sea that marched across the world with his armies of Baal, from the flood, to Babel, to ancient Babylon, Nineveh, and throughout the world. This is the same beast, who was fatally wounded by Christ and his victory, but who rose again with the beast out of the earth, deceiving once again the multitude of mankind by his image and the false prophet (See notes of chapter 13). Other metaphors for the great city are in Revelation 11:8-9:

8 And their dead bodies (lie) in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.

THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH figuratively describes the evil nature of the woman, in contrast to the purity of the bride of Christ, the pure virgin. In chapters 17 and 18, *adulteries* is used four times; *adultery*, three times, illustrating the immorality of the woman. Infidelity to God led to the fall at Eden, to the destruction by the flood, to the ruin of Israel by the worship of Baal and the practice of her pagan immorality, and to the rejection and crucifixion of the Jesus Christ, the lamb.

The Mystery of the Woman and the Beast (Revelation 17:6-7)

Revelation 17:6-7

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 a great wonder. 7 And the angel said unto me, "Wherefore do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns."

John saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints—those set apart and those who bore the testimony of Jesus. *Blood* here is not to be taken as literal blood, as in physical persecution, for Christ himself told us in Matthew 10:28:

28 And be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

The saints and those who bear the testimony of Jesus are new creatures, born again of the water and the spirit. In John 3:5, Jesus answered:

I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

As Christ shed his earth blood on the cross, Christians shed their blood symbolically when they are buried with Christ in baptism—the likeness of his death, burial, and resurrection. The description of this new birth to a new life is explained in detail in Romans 6:3-7:

3 Or are *you* ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him through baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with (him) in the likeness of his death, we shall be also (in the likeness) of his resurrection; 6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with (him), that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin; 7 for he that has died is justified from sin.

The dragon, the beast, and the prostitute are after these new creatures to kill them once again spiritually. To understand the following chapters, one must understand that the battle is spiritual and the very souls of the saints are in jeopardy. In Revelation 13:6-7, John learned of the beast:

And he opened his mouth for blasphemies against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, (even) them that dwell in the heaven. 7 And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and there was given to him authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation.

God's wrath is upon these minions of evil and upon those who follow them according to Revelation 16:6:

6 for they poured out the blood of the saints and the prophets, and blood you have given them to drink: they are worthy. [They deserve.]

In this spiritual battle, the physical consequence to the saints and those who stand for the testimony of Jesus is minor—they may even lose their physical lives. But the devil is after their new life in Jesus.

Revelation 6:9 teaches:

9 And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

The angel sees that John was greatly astonished when he saw the woman and tells him that he is going to explain the mystery of woman and the beast she rides. The beast is the seven horned and ten horned beast met in chapter 13 (See notes on entire chapter). The numbers represent the fullness and

completeness of the beast's capacity to accomplish his purposes. In Revelation 13:2, John learned that "the dragon gave him his power, and his throne, and great authority." The beast stands to the dragon as Jesus Christ stands to the Lord God Almighty.

The Beast upon Whom the Woman Rides (Revelation 17:8)

Revelation 17:8

8 The beast that you saw was, and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss, and to go into perdition. And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, (they) whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast, how that he was, and is not, and shall come.

John has seen this beast before come up out of the abyss in Revelation 11:7:

7 And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss shall make war with them, and overcome them, and kill them.

They of this quotation are the witnesses [prophets] of chapter 11. He did not return from the abyss until they had finished their testimony. There are other references to the containment of the beast and the dragon. One regards the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2:2-12, beginning in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4:

3 let no man beguile you in any wise: for (it will not be,) except the falling away come first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, 4 he that opposes and exalts himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he sits in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God.

This is an apt description of the second beast, the false prophet who has the power of the first beast (see chapter 13). Paul continues in verses 5-8:

5 Remember you not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? 6 And now you know that which restrains, to the end that he may be revealed in his own season. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness does already work: only (there is) one that restrains now, until he be taken out of the way. 8 And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to naught by the manifestation of his coming;

Continuing in verses 9-12, the work and the coming of the lawless one is according to the work of Satan who is the dragon:

9 (even he), whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, 10 and with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this cause God sends them a working of error, that they should believe a lie: 12 that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

John finds the dragon similarly confined in Revelation 20:1-3:

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. 2 And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and cast him into the abyss, and shut (it), and sealed (it) over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be finished: after this he must be loosed for a little time.

Jesus described to his apostles who would do the binding and holding back of these evil forces in John 14:16-17:

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may be with you for ever, 17 (even) the Spirit of truth: whom the world cannot receive; for it beholds him not, neither knows him: *you* know him; for he abides with you, and shall be in you.

The Holy Spirit—Spirit of Truth—constrained the triad of evil until the witnesses had completed their work and the revelation was complete. In context, this will happen shortly, for at the conclusion of John’s writing, the revelation will be complete. It is this revelation, now in written form that continues to constrain the devil, the beast, and the false prophet. In the present context, John sees the same beast who once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction and whom he had seen before in Revelation 13:2-3:

And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as (the feet) of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his throne, and great authority. 3 And (I saw) one of his heads as though it had been smitten unto death; and his death-stroke was healed: and the whole earth wondered after the beast;

The phrase *now is not* also follows what John saw in Revelation 13:11-13:

And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like unto a lamb, and he spoke as a dragon. 12 And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his sight. And he makes the earth and them that dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose death-stroke was healed. 13 And he does great signs that he should even make fire to come down out of heaven upon the earth in the sight of men.

And *will come up out of the earth* describes not the future status of the beast to John, but his present status to us. The spiritual gifts were taken away releasing the man of lawlessness, the false prophet, and second beast; and when the apostles and prophets had completed the revelation, the beast would reemerge, but with power limited to the deceit of the false prophet, the second beast, and power of his image of the first beast, created by the false prophet. False religion and mammon [money] will reign. (See notes on chapter 13).

What John sees is effectively what Jesus and Paul described about the restraining power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit remained constraining the dragon and the beast until that which is perfect had come. Jesus had taught in John 14:25-26,

These things have I spoken unto you, while (yet) abiding with you. 26 But the Comforter, (even) the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you.

Paul taught that the spiritual gifts would cease when that which was perfect had come in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10:

8 Love never fails: but whether (there be) prophecies, they shall be done away; whether (there be) tongues, they shall cease; whether (there be) knowledge, it shall be done away. 9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; 10 but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.

James identifies God’s law as that which is perfect in James 1:25:

25 But he that looks into the perfect law, the (law) of liberty, and (so) continues, being not a hearer that forgets but a doer that works, this man shall be blessed in his doing.

The force that constrains and binds the devil and limits the beast is God’s complete Revelation of his will and word—first through the apostles and prophets and now through his written word. When the beast comes up out of the abyss, he goes to his destruction. The followers of the beast—those whose names are not in the book of life—will be astonished when they see the beast because he once

was, now is not, and yet will come. One only needs to view the present world of false religion, decadent sin, and the rampant materialism in service to mammon (money) to understand the horror and success of the beast. However successful that the beast seems, he is on his way to a destruction that will astonish his followers. How surprised these followers will be to find what they thought was the true path was the devil's super highway to their eternal destruction.

The Angel Explains the Vision of the Beast (Revelation 17:9-14)

Revelation 17:9-11

9 Here is the mind that has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sits: 10 and they are seven kings; the five are fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come; and when he comes, he must continue a little while. 11 And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven; and he goes into perdition.

The mind that has wisdom signifies the difficulty of the passage. Many interpretations are given, yet one is true. Seven heads is given the metaphoric comparison—*kings*. The commonality in this passage is government. Mountains as seats of power have consistently represented government, and kings are consistently those who govern. The prophets used mountains in this metaphoric sense: as in Isaiah 2:2:

2 And it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

In Jeremiah 51:24-25, Babylon is addressed:

“24 And I will render unto Babylon and to all the inhabitants of Chaldea all their evil that they have done in Zion in your sight,” says Jehovah. 25 “Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain,” says Jehovah, ‘Which destroys all the earth; and I will stretch out my hand upon you, and roll you down from the rocks, and will make you a burnt mountain.’”

Seven represented fullness and 10 represented completeness as studied in chapter 13. The governments spoken of here are full in their power and authority. It is also upon these governments that the woman sits. There are also seven kings. Seven fully powerful kings are controlled by the wanton woman, who sits over the kingdoms. Five of the seven kings have fallen. There are only five such kingdoms, all of which fit the description given. Micah 7:11-13 points to the places where one must look:

A day for building *your* walls! In that day shall the decree be far removed. 12 In that day shall they come unto *you* from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, and from Egypt even to the River, and from sea to sea, and (from) mountain to mountain. 13 Yet shall the land be desolate because of them that dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings.

From Egypt to the Romans, from the flood and Nimrod to John's revelation, there are only five such kingdoms: Egypt, Assyria, Persia, Babylon, and Greece. In Daniel 2, Daniel claimed four kingdoms until the kingdom of the Lord should come out of the mountains—four and not five, because Daniel began counting from his day forward after Egypt, in Daniel 2:44-45:

44 And in the days **of those kings** shall the God of heaven set up **a kingdom** which shall never be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty thereof be left to another people; but it shall break in pieces and consume **all these kingdoms**, and it shall stand for ever. 45 Forasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God has made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.

Notice that Daniel also describes how the beast—the kingdoms of the world—will be destroyed by the kingdom of God that will never be destroyed. The four kingdoms, then, have fallen, and one is. Of course, the one, which is, is the Roman kingdom—the kingdom in existence at the time that John was writing. However, there is one that is to come, and that kingdom will remain for a while. This final king represents the Holy Roman Emperors that followed the Roman Empire. The Holy Roman Empire was the last kingdom of this class of kingdoms. These kings are all of a class and all controlled by the prostitute who sits atop them. Of course, the undeniable connection is between the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church—the domain of the second beast, the false prophet.

The beast is an eighth king. The word, *an*, indicates a king but not one of the previous class. All these seven governments, from the flood until fragmentation of governments, were controlled by a king, the beast of seven heads (full in authority) and ten horns (complete in his might and power). The dragon had given “the beast his power, his throne, and great authority (Revelation 13:2).”

Revelation 17:12-14

12 And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings, who have received no kingdom as yet; but they receive authority as kings, with the beast, for one hour. 13 These have one mind, and they give their power and authority unto the beast. 14 These shall war against the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings; and they (also shall overcome) that are with him, called and chosen and faithful.

The ten horns are also ten kings, but kings and kingdoms of a different class from the seven in the preceding verses. They are complete, as the number, ten, indicates; and, therefore, apparently they will fulfill the rest of time until the end of the earth. Ten is not to be taken as literal here since there is no indication in the text, as with the seven kings, who are actually counted out. That they have not yet come means that they will receive kingdoms during the course of time. They give their power and authority to the beast who is now represented by the second beast, the false prophet, with his working and delusion of error (2 Thessalonians 2). They and their subjects worship the image of the first beast in Revelation 13:11-17:

11 And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like unto a lamb, and he spoke as a dragon. 12 And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his sight. And he makes the earth and them that dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose death-stroke was healed. 13 And he does great signs that he should even make fire to come down out of heaven upon the earth in the sight of men. 14 And he deceives them that dwell on the earth by reason of the signs which it was given him to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast who has the stroke of the sword and lived. 15 And it was given (unto him) to give breath to it, (even) to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as should not worship the image of the beast should be killed. 16 And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free and the bond, that there be given them a mark on their right hand, or upon their forehead; 17 and that no man should be able to buy or to sell, save he that has the mark, (even) the name of the beast or the number of his name.

Even the kingdoms of the earth make war against the Lamb. The true religion of Jesus has a history of repression. The persecution of the saints, the wars of religion and greed, the pervasive immorality, the spread of communism and other atheistic influences, religious terrorism and extremism, unconstrained materialism—all of these and more make for the war of wars against the Lamb. The end of that war will be victory for the Lord of lords, the King of kings, and his called, chosen, and faithful followers. This is the very same conclusion reached by Paul in discussing the outcome of the influence of the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians:

13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14 He called you to this through our gospel that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15.

The Beast and the Ten Horns Turn against the Prostitute (Revelation 17:15-18)

15 Then the angel said to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. 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. 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. 18 The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

In verse one, John saw the prostitute sitting on many waters. Here the angel tells John that the waters are people, multitudes, nations, and languages. The province of influence for this evil woman is worldwide for all time. That the beast and the ten horns hate the prostitute seems contrary to the last part of the passage where the woman—the great city, Babylon, the prostitute—rules over these very same kings of the earth. This paradox is easily resolved. The beast and the ten horns hate the prostitute so badly they bring her to ruin—eternal damnation. They figuratively eat her flesh and burn her with fire. The crux of the matter is that God allowed this in their hearts in 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12:

11 And for this cause God sends them a working of error, that they should believe a lie: 12 that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

In believing a lie, they allowed beast to rule with their power. Since the woman rides the beast, they both wage the war against the Lamb and his followers but to their destruction and according to the purpose of God. A few illustrating points are in order. Communistic governments, in theory and practice, fight immorality, a province of the prostitute. Yet, religion is discouraged or even outlawed, immorality is pervasive, and sin prevails. In our country, government activity exudes a religious air, maintaining a public appearance that is against sin and evil. Yet, prostitution thrives, gambling is government supported, media reports continuous mindless violence, unbridled materialism, and permissive sex. Advertisements depend on the attractions of the lust of the flesh and eye, and the vainglory of life—power, ambition, and earthly wisdom. Religious extremists who reject immorality in eating, drinking, and dressing wage their religious wars around the world, yet ignore the certainty of God's unchanging word and replace his word with their own. The beast rules, and the prostitute, that great city, rides atop him. In the end, the devil and beast and false prophet hate the people of the great city and delight in their sins. How shocked the people of the great city will be to find that the triad of evil hates them and seeks to destroy them eternally.

Revelation 17:18

18 And the woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.

The metaphoric comparison continues: the woman, the prostitute is the great city as the virgin is the New Jerusalem, the holy city, the church. How sad the kings of the earth will be to find and know the truth.

Chapter 17 forecasts the end of the beast and of this prostitute, the great city, Babylon. Chapter 18 will see the fall of Babylon, and chapter 19 will see the beast and the false prophet captured and thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.