

Revelation 17 Commentary

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EDITORIAL ADDENDUM - Below are two links to articles that address whether there are 2 Babylons or one Babylon in Revelation 17 and Revelation 18.

- [The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17-18 Part 1 of 2](#) Charles H. Dyer
- [The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17-18 Part 2 of 2](#) Charles H. Dyer

THOUGHT - Before you are biased by Dr Dyer's article take a few minutes and make your own observations of Revelation 17 and Revelation 18. Your objective is simply list the facts about Babylon in each chapter. Then compare your observations in the two chapters. Let me give you a "jump start" -- compare Revelation 17:2 and Revelation 18:3,9. What do you observe? Now do the same comparison regarding the other facts you observe in both chapters. Is the Babylon described in Revelation 17 the same as or different from the Babylon described in Revelation 18? God is not a God of confusion (1Co 14:33+) and my contention is that if you do the simple observations suggested, you will arrive at a confident conclusion regarding Babylon. Then you can read Dr Dyer's articles and the commentary.

Dyer opens with these comments: The world is rushing toward a catastrophic period of time referred to as the Tribulation. God has sovereignly chosen to reveal many details of that period through the inspired writings of His prophets. A correct interpretation of these details is essential for a proper understanding of God's program for the future. One key factor in interpreting God's prophetic program is the identification of the eschatological Babylon described by John in Revelation 17-18. This section occupies a significant portion of the Book of Revelation, and it provides a graphic account of God's future judgment on evil. However, one faces many problems in attempting to identify the end-time system of evil that the section presents. This two-part series attempts to provide answers for these problems through an analysis of the chapters individually, synthetically, and prophetically. The relationship between chapters 17 and 18 is crucial to a proper understanding of the Babylon referred to in both. Do Revelation 17 and 18 separately describe two distinct Babylons? Or are the two chapters a unit that presents but one Babylon?

Revelation 17:1

In the previous chapter, John is shown the seven angels having the seven last plagues—the seven bowl judgments. He sees the seven bowls poured forth, including the last bowl wherein a voice from the [Temple](#) declares "It is done!" The effects of the previous chapter, at the pouring forth of all the bowls, include all aspects of God's wrath being poured out on the earth reaching to the beginning of the [Millennial Kingdom](#) (Rev. 20:4+). All of these events are future to the time of John's writing. Now, one of the angels of the previous chapter shows John a perspective which precedes the events he saw in the previous chapter. This includes additional information concerning the destruction of Babylon and the final consummation of the wrath that John saw prophetically poured forth. Beginning with Revelation 17+ and continuing through Revelation 20:3+, John is shown additional detail concerning aspects of the bowl judgments and their recipients. This includes the destruction of Babylon (Rev. 17:16-18+, Rev. 18:1-24+, Rev. 19:1-3+), the [Beast](#) and his armies (Rev. 19:11-21+), and the binding of Satan (Rev. 20:1-3+).

one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls

This is one of the seven angels which John saw earlier as a "great and marvelous" sign (Rev. 15:1+) which were given "seven golden bowls of the wrath of God" (Rev. 15:7+). These bowls were poured out in the previous chapter. Since this angel shows John

the woman, Babylon (Rev. 17:18⁺), perhaps this is the angel who poured out the seventh bowl during which Babylon was destroyed (Rev. 16:17-19⁺).

Come, I will show you

The same phrase is used later, probably by the same angel, when John is shown the Lamb's wife: "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife" (Rev. 21:9⁺). The Great [Harlot](#) of this chapter is to be contrasted with both the Lamb's wife and the woman of Revelation 12⁺. See [A Virgin and a Harlot](#) and [Babylon and the New Jerusalem](#).

the judgment

The Great Harlot is associated with Babylon (Rev. 17:5⁺, Rev 17:18⁺; Rev.18:21⁺ ; Rev.19:2⁺). The prophets foretold the judgment which would come against Babylon. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah devote major passages to this topic which are essential background to an understanding of this chapter (Isa. 13, 14, 47; Jer. 50, 51). As we have seen before, prophecies in the [OT](#) often contain a mix of near-term and far-future predictions. In the case of the prophesied destruction of Babylon, the near-term aspects were fulfilled in the capture of Babylon by Cyrus (Dan. 5:30-31⁺), but the city of Babylon has never been destroyed as predicted by the far-future aspects of Isaiah's and Jeremiah's prophecies. See [The Destruction of Babylon](#). She is to be judged because she has corrupted the earth with her fornication and shed the blood of God's servants (Rev. 17:6⁺; Rev.19:2⁺).

the great harlot ([porne](#))

She is "great" in the sense of having a dominant role in spiritual idolatry throughout history. In her is found the origin of all other "daughter harlots" (Rev. 17:5⁺), for she predated them and begot (influenced) them. Her harlotry speaks of her abominable practices and spiritual idolatry. See [The Great Harlot](#).

who sits on many waters

The description of the woman shown John includes many aspects which are similar to that of Babylon at the time of Isaiah and Jeremiah. Jeremiah says concerning Babylon: "O you who dwell by many waters, abundant in treasures, your end has come" (Jer. 51:13a). Yet there are also differences. During the time of Jeremiah, Babylon resided *by* numerous waters: "Babylon was surrounded by the Euphrates, which divided to form many islands, and a large lake was nearby."¹ "Nebuchadrezzar's Babylon was the largest city in the world, covering 2,500 acres (1,000 hectares). The Euphrates, which has since shifted its course, flowed through it, the older part of the city being on the east bank."² The Great Harlot now sits *on* ([π](#), [epi]) many waters which are "peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues" (Rev. 17:15⁺). This speaks of both her influence and support, no longer restricted to the plain of Shinar (Gen. 10:10; 11:2; Dan. 1:2; Zec. 5:11), but now extending throughout the world. The Great Harlot seen by John influences a much wider realm than [Babylon of Old](#). Her influence was scattered worldwide with the introduction of languages in the judgment of Babel (Gen. 11:9). The waters upon which she sits are the waters from which the first Beast arose (Rev. 13:1⁺).

EDITORIAL ADDITION - Harlot ([4204](#)) [porne](#) from **perano** - to sell. Porno-, as prefix in pornographic) is a woman who practices sexual immorality as a profession. **BDAG** adds it can be used figuratively of " a political entity hostile to God, prostitute, whore, fig. ext. of 1 (Isa 1:21; Isa 23:15f; Jer 3:3; Ezk 16:30-31, 35) as the designation of a government that is hostile to God and God's people Rv 17:15-16." **Babylon** is called pórnē, the great harlot, being the chief seat of idolatry since porneía is symbolic of idolatry (Rev. 17:1, 5, 15, 16; 19:2). [What is the whore of Babylon / mystery Babylon? | GotQuestions.org](#)

Porne - 17v - Matt. 21:31; Matt. 21:32; Lk. 15:30; 1 Co. 6:15; 1 Co. 6:16; Heb. 11:31; Jas. 2:25; Rev. 17:1; Rev. 17:5; Rev. 17:15; Rev. 17:16; Rev. 19:2

Porne in Septuagint - Gen. 34:31; Gen. 38:15; Gen. 38:21; Gen. 38:22; Lev. 21:7; Lev. 21:14; Deut. 23:2; Deut. 23:17; Deut. 23:18; Jos. 2:1; Jos. 6:17; Jos. 6:23; Jos. 6:25; Jdg. 11:1; Jdg. 16:1; 1 Ki. 3:16; 1 Ki. 12:24; 1 Ki. 21:19; 1 Ki. 22:38; Prov. 5:3; Prov. 6:26; Prov. 29:3; Isa. 1:21; Isa. 23:15; Isa. 23:16; Isa. 57:3; Jer. 3:3; Jer. 5:7; Ezek. 16:30; Ezek. 16:31; Ezek. 16:35; Ezek. 23:43; Ezek. 23:44; Hos. 4:14; Joel 3:3; Nah. 3:4;

Revelation 17:2

with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication

The kings of the earth committed fornication with the [Harlot](#) both because of the allure of her harlotries, but also because she "reigns over the kings of the earth." Throughout history, she has wielded powerful influence over various rulers of nations beyond Babylon. *Fornication* is [πόρνευσαν](#) [eporneusan - see [porneuo](#)], meaning to prostitute, practice prostitution or sexual immorality generally, but also used figuratively to denote the practice of idolatry (Hos. 9:1; Jer. 3:6; Eze. 23:19; 1Chr. 5:25).³

To prostitute something is to take that which has a proper use and to turn it into an improper use. A prostitute takes sex, which has a proper use, and perverts it with an improper use, turning it into something illicit, causing fornication. In this case, the harlot represents "religion," which has a proper use (Jas. 1:26-27), but here has been prostituted for improper use. Rather than serving, it rules. The false use of religion causes spiritual fornication. The word *fornication* is used both of physical unfaithfulness and also of spiritual unfaithfulness, as in Hosea 1-2; Jeremiah 2:20; 3:1-9; Ezekiel 16:15-41; 23:5-44, etc. It is with this woman that the kings of the earth commit fornication (Rev. 17:2⁺), showing this to be a unity of religion and state.⁴

This aspect of the Harlot is identical with that of the city Babylon: "She has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (Rev. 14:8⁺); Those who fornicated with her were also deceived by her sorcery (Rev. 18:23⁺). Some believe she differs from Babylon itself, but we believe the Scriptural evidence points in the direction of identity. The woman is "that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth" (Rev. 17:18⁺)—Babylon. See [One or Two Babylons?](#) Like Tyre of Isaiah's day, the Harlot has both commercial and spiritual aspects which are opposed to God: "And it shall be, at the end of seventy years, that the LORD will visit Tyre. She will return to her hire, and commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth" (Isa. 23:17).

and the inhabitants of the earth

As went the leaders, so went the people. Not only kings, but an entire global populace was influenced by her. Although she influenced the inhabitants throughout history, it is the earth dwellers of the time of the end which are her final drinking partners. See earth dwellers.

made drunk with the wine of her fornication

They were made drunk from the wine she served up (Rev. 14:8⁺). Because neither she nor the inhabitants of the earth chose to respond to the light which all men are given concerning God (Rom. 1:18-21), God used her rebellion to make all the nations commit even further to their errant path. "Babylon was a golden cup in the LORD'S hand, That made all the earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; Therefore the nations are deranged" (Jer. 51:7). In the same way that the three unclean spirits go forth to draw the kings of the earth to God's supper (Rev. 16:13-14⁺ cf. Rev. 19:17⁺), so too Babylon was a golden cup *in the LORD's hand*. It was her who first made them drunk, but in their consistent rejection of God and their drunken stupor they returned for more which God allowed her to continue serving up.

EDITORIAL ADDITION - Immorality, commit ([4203 porneuo](#) from [pornos](#) = literally the purchasable one, the one you buy, the harlot, the prostitute) means to prostitute one's body to the lust of another, to give oneself to unlawful sexual intercourse. To commit fornication. Used as a Hebraic sense as a figure of speech to describe one who worships idols rather than the living God. Note in the uses of *porneuo* in the Septuagint (see below), Israel was pictured as a woman (God's wife - Jer 31:32, Isa 54:5) who was unfaithful and like a wife who became a prostitute, figuratively committed acts of immorality against God. However as worship of idols is often associated with literal immorality in Scripture, the OT uses of *porneuo* surely picture both literal and figurative fornication.

Revelation 17:3

So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness

It was the Holy Spirit Who carried John while the angel accompanied him. In the same way that John was transported to heaven to see the vision of the throne (Rev. 4:2⁺), so now he is transported to the wilderness, the vantage point for viewing the [Harlot](#). See commentary on [Revelation 4:2](#). His previous vision of the [Beast](#) rising from the sea was seen while he stood on the sand of the sea (Rev. 13:1⁺). Later, John will be carried away "in the Spirit to a great and high mountain" where he is shown the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:10⁺).

I saw a woman

John sees this woman in the *wilderness*, whereas he saw the woman of Revelation 12⁺ as a great sign in *heaven*. The woman is [The Great Harlot](#) which the angel was to show John (Rev. 17:1⁺). Later, she is specifically identified: "And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth" (Rev. 17:18⁺). In this case, "great city," is Babylon (Rev. 14:8⁺; Rev. 18:10⁺, Rev. 18:16⁺, Rev 18:18-21⁺; Rev. 19:21⁺).

sitting on a scarlet beast

Scarlet is [κόκκινον](#) [*kokkinon*]: "Scarlet cloth, dyed with [κόκκος](#) [*kokkus*], a scarlet 'berry,' actually the female of a scale insect that

clings to oak leaves, dried and crushed to prepare a red dye."⁵ The beast is scarlet, because it is closely related to the fiery red dragon which empowers it (Rev. 12:3+ cf. Rev. 13:2+). Her **sitting** on the **beast** may speak less of influence and more of support. "The Woman seated on the Beast does not signify that she will rule over him, but intimates that he will support her."⁶ Because the Beast represents a series of kings and kingdoms stretching through history, there is a tendency among many expositors to take the Harlot as an exclusively religious figure. The fact that she is seen riding upon the Beast is thought to necessitate her identification as exclusively religious, but not political:

The fact that the woman is riding the beast and is not the beast itself signifies that she represents ecclesiastical power as distinct from the beast which is political power. Her position, that of riding the beast, indicates on the one hand that she is supported by the political power of the beast, and on the other that she is in a dominant role and at least outwardly controls and directs the beast.⁷

Editorial Comment on Dr Andy Woods on **SITTING ON A SCARLET BEAST** - The woman, or Babylon, gets supremacy in some sense over the beast, the beast and his allies aren't going to like that and they are going to turn violently on Babylon and burn her flesh with fire because God has put it in the hearts of the beast and his allies to do this and that's how Babylon is destroyed. That's the mystery. ([Sermon](#))

Scarlet (2847) [kokkinos](#) from [kokkus](#) = kernel, grain, seed) (Latin = coccineus) means scarlet, crimson, red. In the neuter **kokkinos** is a substantive ("to kokkinon") referring to the scarlet cloth, dyed with kokkos, a scarlet "berry," which is actually the female of a scale insect that clings to oak leaves, dried and crushed to prepare a red dye (cp coccus [kermes] ilicis). **Kokkinos** is the Greek word used to translate the Hebrew word for CRIMSON (tola) in Isa 1:18 and in that passage is a figurative description of our sins (they are "red like crimson [Hebrew = tola; Lxx = kokkinos]").

Thayer - a kernel, the grain or berry of the ilex coccifera; these berries are the clusters of eggs of a female insect, the kermes (cf. English carmine, crimson), and when collected and pulverized produce a red which was used in dyeing, Pliny, h. n. 9, 41, 65; 16, 8, 12; 24, 4), crimson, scarlet-colored: Plutarch, Fab. 15 = phorein kokkina = scarlet robes.

BDAG - Philo; Jos., Ant. 8, 72 v.l.; Just., D. 46, 5) red, scarlet chlamus kokkinos = a red cloak of the 'sagum purpureum (paludamentum)' of Roman soldiers, a cheaply dyed garment in contrast to the expensive 'purple' garments whose hues were derived from shellfish and worn in the upper classes

TDNT on **kokkinos** - This word means "scarlet" (cf. the furnishings of the sanctuary in Ex. 26:1 etc., the scarlet stuff in Lev. 14:4, and the scarlet clothing of 2 Sam. 1:24). In the prophets scarlet is linked with sin, either as the opposite of white (Is. 1:18) or as a sign of luxury (Is. 3:23; Jer. 4:30). In the NT 1. Jesus is clothed in a scarlet robe in Mt. 27:28. This was probably a soldier's cloak; the king of peace, in a mocking misrepresentation, is thus clothed in warlike garb. 2. In Heb. 9:19 scarlet wool is mentioned in connection with atonement under the law (cf. Lev. 14:4, 6). 3. Scarlet and purple denote the pomp of Babylon's demonic power in Revelation. Arrayed in purple and scarlet, the woman sits on a scarlet beast (17:3-4). The fiery red of 6:4; 12:3 differs from the scarlet here, which epitomizes demonic abomination, lasciviousness, and ungodly power. The Messiah's army is clothed in white linen and rides on white horses (19:11ff.); the robes are made white in the atoning blood of the Lamb (7:14). We thus have a striking contrast to the woman who is clothed in scarlet and rides on a scarlet beast. [O. MICHEL, III, 810-14]

While we do not deny the significant religious role assigned to the Harlot, taking her to be an ecclesiastical *system* contradicts what Scripture records—that she is a *city* (Rev. 17:18+; Rev. 18:21+-19:2+). There is no reason why she must be an ecclesiastical system when Scripture says she is a city. Moreover, she is also associated with wealth and excess (Rev. 17:4+)—these may speak equally of both politics and religion. The Beast represents the historic development of kingdoms empowered by the dragon (Rev. 12:3+; Rev. 13:1+) and its ultimate manifestation at the time of the end. The Harlot is the city Babylon in all its aspects—combining commercial, political, and religious influence. She has ridden the beast throughout history.

full of names of blasphemy

The Beast which arose from the sea had a blasphemous name (Rev. 13:1+; *names*, [MT](#) and [NU](#) texts). The blasphemous names reflect the blasphemous mouth which speaks great things against God (Rev. 13:5+). See commentary on [Revelation 13:5](#).

having seven heads and ten horns

The Great Harlot rides upon the same Beast which arose from the sea (Rev. 13:1+) which also had [seven heads](#) and [ten horns](#) (Rev. 13:1+). These same heads and horns were seen upon the great red dragon who empowers the Beast (Rev. 12:3+). The seven

heads are seven mountains and seven kings (Rev. 17:9-10⁺). The ten horns are ten kings (Rev. 17:12⁺ cf. Dan. 7:7, 20, 24). See commentary on [Revelation 12:3](#) and [Revelation 13:1](#). In order to understand what this chapter reveals concerning the Beast, the seven heads, and its ten horns, see [Beasts, Heads, and Horns](#).

A Woman Rides the Beast

[8](#)

Revelation 17:4

arrayed in purple and scarlet

Her purple and scarlet clothing is called “fine linen” (Rev. 18:12⁺). *Fine* is [βύσσινον](#) [byssinon], which is used of “fine linen goods”⁹ and speaks of her external finery and wealth (Est. 8:15; Lam. 4:5; Luke 7:25; 16:19). Her attire reflects her commercialism: “Merchandise of gold and silver, and precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet” (Rev. 18:12⁺, 16⁺). Purple and scarlet were also the colors of royal vestment (Jdg. 8:26; Est. 1:6; Mat. 27:28). The scarlet may reflect her identification with the [Beast](#) who carries her, who is also scarlet. The color of her garments contrast with the finewhite linen of the overcomers, the saints (Rev. 3:5⁺, Rev 3:18⁺; Rev 19:8⁺, Rev 19:14⁺). Those who attempt to make the [Harlot](#) Jerusalem note the similarities between aspects of the harlot and what is said concerning apostate Israel and her leaders:

Gentry points out that the color and adornment of the harlot in Revelation 17:4⁺ reflects the Jewish priestly colors of scarlet, purple, and gold (Ex. 28:33). These same colors were also found in the tapestry of the temple. Beale notes that the combination of the words in the Greek that describe the harlot’s garb is identical to the LXX description of the Jewish high priest’s garments. According to Beagley, the outward beauty of the cup and its inward impurity is reminiscent of Christ’s denunciation of the Pharisees in Matthew 23:35. In addition, the woman’s title of harlot written across her forehead in Revelation 17:5⁺ is a direct reference to Jeremiah 3:3 where God told apostate Judah that she had a harlot’s forehead.¹⁰

While such parallels are interesting, it is important to note that the Harlot is closely identified with Babylon and there are many reasons we can be certain that Babylon cannot be Jerusalem. See [Babylon is Jerusalem?](#)

adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls

The woman not only practices spiritual harlotry (idolatry), she is also consumed with materialism and wealth.

In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, ‘I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.’ Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her. (Rev. 18:7-8⁺)

She shares this characteristic with the Beast she rides who disregards all gods, exalts himself above them, and in their place shall honor another god with gold, silver, and precious stones (Dan. 11:38). The Harlot wears *identical attire* as the city. “That great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls” (Rev. 18:16⁺). This indicates that the Harlot and the city are one and the same (Rev. 17:18⁺). See [One or Two Babylons?](#)

a golden cup

This is the cup which she herself drinks and wherein she has mixed what she proffers to the nations (Jer. 51:7; Rev. 14:8⁺; Rev 18:6⁺). Like the Pharisees of Jesus’ day, the outside of the cup is lustrous and beautiful, but inside it is “full of extortion and self-indulgence” (Mat. 23:25-26).

full of abominations

Abominations is [βδελυγμάτων](#) [bdelygmatōn - see [bdelugma](#)]: “Anything that must not be brought before God because it arouses his wrath.”¹¹ “Anything connected with idolatry.”¹² God warned Israel through Moses:

When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you *anyone* who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, *or one* who practices witchcraft, *or* a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things *are* an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you. (Deu. 18:9-12)

She is the mother of harlots and of abominations of the earth (Rev. 17:5⁺). Thus, she birthed the abominations which are found in

the cup which she serves. From this, we know that the woman is not just a figure of the time of the end, but has her roots stretching back to early history. Thus, both the Harlot and the [Seven Heads](#) on the Beast which she rides stretch back to early history. See [Five Fallen Kings](#). See [Babylon of Old](#). Those who confuse the Harlot with Jerusalem fail to consider important aspects of the [OT](#) record which preclude such an identity:

1. The abominations which Israel practiced were *learned from the surrounding nations* (1K. 14:24) “When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations” (Deu. 18:9 cf. 1K. 14:24; 2K. 16:3; 21:2; 2Chr. 28:3; 33:2; 36:14; Eze. 20:7-8). Thus, neither Israel nor Jerusalem can be the *mother* of these practices.
2. The city of Jerusalem is first mentioned in the book of Joshua (Jos. 10:1).¹³ As a city associated with harlotry and abomination, Jerusalem lacks the necessary significance in early history necessary to fulfill all of what is said of the Harlot.
3. The Great Harlot is associated with Babylon, not Jerusalem. See [Babylon is Jerusalem?](#)

The cup is *full* indicating her readiness for God’s judgment.

and the filthiness of her fornication

Filthiness is [κάθαρτα](#) [akatharta], meaning that which is “impure, unclean.”¹⁴ Her fornication results in defilement, for she is *unclean*. This describes that which is morally indecent as well as ritually not acceptable.¹⁵ In the previous chapter, the same term described the “three unclean ([κάθαρτα](#) [akatharta]) spirits” (Rev. 16:13⁺). Her idolatrous practices and abominations led to impurity and defiled the land: “The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their impurity” (Ezra 9:11b). Her own fornication was promoted to foreign nations across the globe (Rev. 14:8⁺). The [MT](#) text has *the fornication of the earth*.

Revelation 17:5

on her forehead

Like the sealed of Israel (Rev. 7:3⁺; Rev 14:1⁺) and the [Beast](#) worshipers (Rev. 13:16⁺), the woman is also identified on her forehead. She has a harlot’s forehead and refuses to be ashamed (Jer. 3:3). The label on her forehead as the mother of harlots is to be contrasted with the engraved golden plate on the turban of the high priest which read, “HOLINESS TO THE LORD” (Ex. 28:36-37). He is set apart to God, she is set against God. See [A Virgin and a Harlot](#) and [Babylon and the New Jerusalem](#).

a name was written

Was written is [γεγραμμένον](#) [gegrammenon], perfect tense participle, *having been written*. The name was written in the past and she remains so labeled.

MYSTERY

Mystery is [μυστήριον](#) [mystērion], indicating something unknowable by man unless and until revealed by God. The antidote for *mystery* is not investigation or discovery, but *revelation*. See commentary on [Revelation 1:20](#). The mystery relates to her identity and relationship to the seven-headed beast with ten horns (Rev. 17:7⁺). Fortunately, the angel provides additional information to reveal aspects of her mystery (Rev. 17:7⁺). It is unfortunate that “MYSTERY” appears in capitals as if it is a part of her title:

We believe that the English translators have misled many by printing (on their own authority) the word ‘mystery’ in large capital letters, thus making it appear that this was a part of ‘the woman’s name.’ This we are assured is a mistake. That the ‘mystery’ is connected with the ‘Woman’ herself and not with her ‘name’ is clear from Rev. 17:7⁺, where the angel says unto John, ‘I will tell thee the mystery of the Woman, and of the Beast which carrieth her.’¹⁶

A better translation would be, “And on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, ‘BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH’ ” (Rev. 17:5⁺, NASU). Her true title lacks the term “MYSTERY,” but is merely “Babylon the great” (Rev. 18:2⁺). The incorporation of “MYSTERY” as her title has led many to identify *two Babylons*, one commercial and one spiritual. Yet aspects of the [Harlot](#) and the city Babylon are virtually identical—both involving a merger of both spiritual and commercial. See [Mystery Babylon?](#)

BABYLON

The woman is not said merely to be *Babylon*, but there is a *mystery* connected with her identification as such. She is not [Mystery Babylon](#), but *Babylon*. However, aspects of who she is are unknown until God reveals them. Here, John is shown that the Harlot is

to be identified with Babylon. See [Babylon and the Harlot](#).

mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth

She corrupted the earth with her fornication (Rev. 19:2+) and was the source of harlots and abominations, not one of the recipients. Her daughters were polluted by her: "But come here, you sons of the sorceress, you offspring of the adulterer and the harlot!" (Isa. 57:3). Once again we see the impossibility of taking the Harlot to be Jerusalem. Speaking of the harlotry of Jerusalem, Ezekiel relates:

Thus says the LORD God to Jerusalem, . . . "Indeed everyone who quotes proverbs will use this proverb against you: 'Like mother, like daughter!' **You are your mother's daughter**, loathing husband and children; and you are the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and children; your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite.' " (Eze. 16:3, 44-45) [emphasis added]

Jerusalem is said to have the Hittites as a mother and the Amorites as a father. She herself is *adaughter*. Since Israel did not even exist as a nation until the time of Jacob, it is obvious that she cannot be the *mother* or *originator* of harlots and of the abominations of the earth. This dubious distinction must go to an older empire: Babylon in the sense of its origination under Nimrod as Babel (Gen. 10:8-10). See [Babylon is Jerusalem?](#) See [Babylon of Old](#). Neither does the ever-popular interpretation of the Harlot as Roman Catholicism meet the description of this verse:

The name was the name, not of a woman, but of a city, "that great city," even Babylon. But it signified not merely the material city as such, but the vast system of idolatry connected with it. That is why the explanation of the secret sign follows "the mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth." Not merely of Rome, or even Babylon (as a city), but "of the earth" : *i.e.*, the mother, or fountain head of all the systems of idolatry which have since flooded "the earth" from that one great source; and of which Romanism is only a part. This is the *secret* or "mystery of iniquity" referred to in 2 Thessalonians 2:7. Babylon was the fountain-head of all idolatry.¹⁷

To say that [the Harlot] is either Rome or the Roman Catholic Church is to grossly underestimate the age-long global impact of this great mystery. Babylon the Great. Babylon is the mother of all harlots and abominations of the earth. From her have come ancient paganism, Chinese Confucianism, Asian Buddhism, Indian Hinduism, Shamanism, Taoism, Shintoism, animism, astrology, witchcraft, spiritism, Sikhism, and all the world's vast complex of "gods many, and lords many" (1 Corinthians 8:5). Of more direct concern in twentieth-century America is the direct descent of modern scientism and evolutionary humanism from this ancient mother of harlots. As noted before, modern evolutionism is in no way scientific, being contradicted by all true facts of science, but is merely a revival of ancient Greek (and ultimately Babylonian) evolutionary pantheism.¹⁸

See [The Great Harlot](#)

Revelation 17:6

drunk

Drunk is [μεθύουσαν](#) [methyousan], present tense participle. The woman was drunk while John saw her.

with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus

When Babylon is destroyed, the holy apostles and prophets are said to have been avenged (Rev. 18:19+). Thus, the [Harlot](#) is not some other entity, but is to be identified with the city. See [Mystery Babylon?](#) This also explains the close association between the Harlot and the [Beast](#) upon which she rides. For the Beast is given authority to overcome the saints (Rev. 13:7+), and his image commands that those who refuse to worship the image be put to death (Rev. 13:15+). Since the woman sits upon peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues, all the world at the time of the end participates in the destruction of the godly. The earth dwellers are given blood to drink because "they have shed the blood of saints and prophets" (Rev. 16:6+). Throughout the book of Revelation, John is shown numerous martyrs of Jesus. Antipas in the church of Pergamos was a faithful martyr (Rev. 2:13+). At the opening of the fifth seal, John sees "the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held" (Rev. 6:9+). God's two witnesses, empowered to prophesy, are martyred as a witness (Rev. 11:7+). John sees those who had overcome the Beast and his mark—probably martyrs—standing on the sea of glass (Rev. 15:2+ cf. Rev. 12:11+). At the initiation of the Millennial Kingdom, John sees "the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands" (Rev. 20:4+). Her blood-guiltiness extends throughout history, for "in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth" (Rev. 18:24+). See [#20 - Saints](#). Being drunk with *blood* would be particularly offensive to John who, being a Jew, had a keen appreciation for the prohibition against eating blood (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 3:17; 7:26; 17:10-13).¹⁹

when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement

At the end of Daniel's vision of the four beasts and the Son of Man, his thoughts greatly troubled him (Dan. 7:28). Subsequent to Daniel's vision concerning Antiochus Epiphanes IV, and aspects of the time of the end, he fainted and was sick for days and continued to be astonished by the vision (Dan. 8:27). John is similarly affected by the magnitude of what he is being shown: her support by the hideous beast, her great wealth, her extreme sinfulness, and her scope both historically and geographically.

Revelation 17:7

I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast

The angel provides revelation concerning aspects of the woman (Rev. 17:15-18⁺) and the beast with the seven heads and ten horns (Rev. 17:8-14⁺, Rev 17:16-17⁺). The remainder of the chapter is devoted to these two topics.

carries her

Carries is βασιτάζοντος [bastazontos], indicating that the beast *supports* or *bears* her, used "of animals used for riding,"²⁰ but also used figuratively: "Of anything burdensome or difficult *bear, endure, put up with* (Mat. 20:12)."²¹ Although the [Beast](#) carries her for a season, ultimately he and his ten kings turn upon her and consume her (Rev. 17:16-17⁺) bringing about God's judgment upon her. Perhaps her ride upon the Beast is eventually seen to be too burdensome so he throws her off. She may ultimately prove to be a liability and a competition in his eventual bid for all attention and worship (2Th. 2:4).

seven heads and ten horns

See commentary on [Revelation 17:3](#).

Revelation 17:8

The beast that you saw

In the explanation which follows, it is important to remember that the [Beast](#) is both a *king* and a *kingdom*. This characteristic is evident from a study of various passages concerning the Beast, for example: "I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn [an *individual*] was speaking; I watched till the beast [the fourth terrible *kingdom*] was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame" (Dan. 7:11). See commentary on [Revelation 13:1](#). See [The Beast](#). See [#16 - Beast](#).

was and is not and will ascend . . . go to perdition

This is an important verse because it gives us information concerning the four phases of the life of [The Beast](#) who eventually rules the seventh head at the time of the end:

1. **was** - His original political appearance and rise (Dan. 9:26-27).
2. **is not** - His death by a mortal wound (Zec. 11:17?; Rev. 13:3⁺).
3. **will ascend** - His miraculous recovery (Rev. 13:3⁺).
4. **to perdition** - His destruction at the hands of Christ at the Second Coming (Dan. 7:11; 11:45; Rev. 19:19⁺).

At his ascent, he overthrows the two witnesses (Rev. 11:7⁺). His victory over them and his miraculous restoration result in his global worship (Rev. 13:3-4⁺). This occurs at the midpoint of [The 70th Week of Daniel](#). See [Events of the 70th Week of Daniel](#). See [The Timing of His Ascent](#).

out of the bottomless pit

Bottomless pit is βύσσου [abyssou], the *abyss*, a compartment deep within the earth which serves as a holding place for demons. See commentary on [Revelation 9:1](#). His ascent from the abyss is yet future to the time of John's vision and denotes his revival from the dead and possibly his demonic possession (cf. Luke 22:3; John 13:27). See [Supernatural Origin?](#) When the Beast ascends out of the abyss, he will overcome the two witnesses (Rev. 11:7⁺). The destruction of these two powerful prophets together with his return from the dead will seal his worship by the earth dwellers. This probably occurs at the midpoint of [The 70th Week of Daniel](#) when he proclaims himself as God. See [Events of the 70th Week of Daniel](#).

Roughly speaking the *mortal* stage [before his deadly wound] would fill the first half of the last of "these seventy weeks" (*i.e.*, the first 3 1/2 years of Dan. 9:27); and the *superhuman* stage [after his revival and ascent from the abyss] would occupy the last half. But there is nothing to show us what length of time will run between his *rise* and his *assassination*. Neither can we say exactly how long the time will be between his death-stroke and his reappearance.²²

See commentary on [Revelation 11:7](#). See commentary on [Revelation 13:3](#).

go to perdition

Perdition is [πώλειον](#) [apōleian]: “*destruction . . . annihilation . . . ruin . . . of eternal destruction as punishment for the wicked* (Mat. 7:13).”²³ The [Antichrist](#) is said to be “the son of perdition ([ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας](#) [ho huios tēs apōleias])” (2Th. 2:3). His title reflects his final destiny: “into destruction ([εἰς πώλειον](#) [eis apōleian])” (Rev. 17:11⁺). His destruction follows upon his origin, death, and revival. See commentary on [Revelation 17:11](#). In Daniel’s vision of the [four beasts](#) and the [little horn](#), the fourth beast “was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame” (Dan. 7:11). “He shall come to his end, and no one will help him” (Dan. 11:45b). He is destroyed (cast into the Lake of Fire, but not annihilated) at the Second Coming of Christ (Rev. 19:20⁺). Because his destiny is destruction, he is “the son of perdition” (2Th. 2:3). Both the Beast and the [False Prophet](#) are denied judgment at the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11-15⁺). Unlike other nonbelievers who die (or are killed, Rev. 19:21⁺) and subsequently resurrected to stand judgment before being cast into the Lake of Fire, these two are “cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone” (Rev. 19:20⁺). Their destruction is unique in that they are the *first inhabitants* of the Lake of Fire—spending one thousand years there before being joined by Satan (Rev. 20:10⁺). Thus, the “antitrinity” are the first to suffer in hell. The rest of the ungodly dead are in *Hades* until their time of judgment (Rev. 20:12-13⁺).

those who dwell on the earth will marvel

Will marvel is [θαυμασθήσονται](#) [thaumasthēsontai], future passive indicative, *they will be marvelling*. This is the same Beast which John saw earlier which “all the world marveled and followed” (Rev. 13:4⁺). There, he was shown the future rise of Antichrist. Now, the angel shows him his place of origin (from the abyss) and his relationship to the woman. Those who marvel are the earth dwellers. They marvel over his recovery from his deadly wound (Rev. 13:3⁺, Rev. 13:14⁺; Rev. 17:11⁺). See commentary on [Revelation 13:3](#).

whose names are not written in the Book of Life

names are not written is [οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα](#) [ou gegraptai to onoma], perfect tense passive verb, *not it has been written, the name*. The text is not saying that their names are not *presently* found in the book, as if they were at one time but were later blotted out. In the foreknowledge and election of God, their names were *never* recorded there (Rev. 13:8⁺). Since their names have not been written in the [Book of Life](#), they are guaranteed eventually to be cast into the Lake of Fire because “anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:12⁺). Only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life find entry into the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:27⁺). See [Book of Life](#). See [Beast Worshipers are Unique](#). Previously, John wrote that their names had not been written in the *Book of Life of the Lamb* (Rev. 13:8⁺). Here, the same book is referred to as simply *the Book of Life*. See commentary on [Revelation 13:8](#).

from the foundation of the world

From the foundation ([καταβολῆς](#) [katabolēs], *throwing down*) of the world, their names have been absent from the book. In the foreknowledge and election of God, it was known that the Beast worshipers would reject God. Even before their death, they are irredeemable once they worship the Beast and take his mark (Rev. 14:9-11⁺). See [From the Foundation of the World](#).

when they see

[βλεπόντων](#) [blepontōn], present tense participle, *while presently seeing*. They will marvel at the time they see the beast. His *appearance* results in their response. This speaks of his deadly wound which was healed which causes the earth dwellers to worship him (Rev. 13:3⁺). It is the miraculous death and recovery of a *person* witnessed by people who have seen both the wounding and the healing, not the ages-long restoration of a historical kingdom or country such as Rome. The wounding and miraculous recovery of the Beast is a part of the deceptive testing during this unique hour of testing which is to come upon the world (Rev. 3:10⁺). Their response is to believe the deception (2Th. 2:11-12) which results in their worship of the beast (Rev. 13:4⁺) and in their taking his mark which seals their doom (Rev. 14:9-11⁺). The deception is not the miraculous revival, but the falsehood which it points to. See commentary on [Revelation 13:13](#).

that was, and is not, and yet is

[Τί ν, καὶ οὐκ ἐστὶ, καὶ περὶ ἐστίν](#) [Ti ēn, kai ouk esti, kaiper estin], *who he was, and not he is, and although he is* (TR text). [τί ν καὶ οὐκ ἐστίν καὶ παρῆσται](#) [Hoti ēn kai ouk estin kai parestai], *that he was and not he is, and he will be present* (MT, NU text). This phrase describes the initial appearance, death, and subsequent ascent of the Beast from the abyss (Rev. 11:7⁺). The point of reference for the phrases *was*, *is not*, and *yet is*, is the period in which the earth dwellers live—all of which is yet future to John. Thus, the fact that the Beast *was* should not be taken as an indication that the Beast had already walked the planet and perished prior to John’s day. The phrase found here alludes to the similar phrase which describes Jesus’ eternal nature and true victory over death: “I *am* He

who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore” (Rev. 1:18⁺). In his return from the dead, the Beast, as Antichrist, mimics the true Christ who forever achieved victory over death. See [Master Imitator](#). See [Supernatural Origin?](#) See commentary on [Revelation 1:18](#). Some believe John’s statement reflects his inclusion of a myth which developed some time after the death of the Roman emperor [Nero](#) that he would return from the dead. This is extremely unlikely. See [Revival Myth](#).

Revelation 17:9

([SEE ALSO ADDENDUM COMMENTS](#))

Here *is* the mind which has wisdom

As was the case for calculating the number of the [Beast](#) (Rev. 13:18⁺), wisdom is required to understand the next portion of the mystery revealed by the angel.

the seven heads are seven mountains

As Woods observes, if the seven mountains are to be taken as the seven hills of Rome, then it is difficult to see why special wisdom is said to be required in order to understand the revelation provided by the angel:

It seems odd that the seven hills should be equated with the well-known topography of Rome because Revelation 17⁺ indicates that the identification of the hills calls for special wisdom. Why should such a well-known geographical locale to John’s first century audience require special theological and symbolic insight for proper identification?²⁴

As we shall see in the next verse, the [seven heads](#) are seven kings. Here they are said to be seven mountains. The relationship between kings and mountains is well-established in Scripture—mountains represent the power of kingdoms and their individual kings (Jer. 51:25; Dan. 2:35; Zec. 4:7). These seven mountains, together with the eighth (Rev. 17:11⁺), will eventually be destroyed by the stone which is Christ, the Messianic King (Rev. 20:4⁺). His kingdom is destined to become “a great mountain” and fill the whole earth (Dan. 2:35).

This symbolic understanding of the seven mountains seems buttressed by the fact that the harlot sits on or beside seven mountains (Rev. 17:9⁺) just as she sits on or beside the many waters (Rev. 17:1⁺). Since the waters are symbolic of peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues (Rev. 17:15⁺), consistency seems to dictate that the seven mountains are symbolic as well.²⁵

See [#4 - Seven Heads/Kings](#).

on which the woman sits

That which she sits upon supports her and she controls it. It is difficult to know which side of this symbiotic relationship is more important, although Scripture seems to indicate her corrupting influence is what God especially opposes. Some interpret her *sitting* as denoting her *location*. That she is located upon seven hills which are then said to be the hills of Rome. But this is not the predominant meaning of her sitting which speaks more of support and control than locale:

The reference to the seven mountains (Rev. 17:9⁺) which are seven heads (Rev. 17:8⁺) actually belong to the beast (Rev. 17:3⁺, Rev 13:7⁺; Rev 13:1⁺) and not the woman named Babylon. Thus, these seven heads or mountains really have nothing to do with the entity Babylon at all. It is possible to argue that the woman is still associated with the seven hills because she is sitting on them. However, it is better to see this as referring to the woman’s control rather than her location. The other references to the woman sitting also refer to her control. Revelation 17:1⁺ portrays the woman sitting on many waters. Revelation 17:15⁺ explains that the waters represent peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. Thus, Revelation 17:1⁺, Rev 17:15⁺ show the harlot’s control over the entire world. Furthermore, Revelation 17:3⁺ depicts the woman as sitting on the beast, which again indicates control rather than location. Thus, if the harlot’s sitting indicates control rather than location twice in Revelation 17⁺, then consistency would seem to dictate that the harlot sitting on the seven hills in Revelation 17:9⁺ would also indicate control rather than location.²⁶

See [Babylon is Rome?](#).

Revelation 17:10

There are also seven kings

This phrase should read “And they are seven kings” (NASU). The KJV and NKJV translations are misleading here. The KJV begins the verse with, “And there are seven kings.” The NKJV says, “There are also seven kings.” All the Greek texts, although differing in word order, include the following words, [Κα βασιλες εσιν πτα](#) [Kai basileis eisin hepta], *and kings they are seven*.²⁷ The words “there” and “also” in the KJV and NKJV translations are questionable. The first is inaccurate: [εσιν](#) [eisin] is 3rd-person plural of [ειμι](#)

[eimi], *I am*, which should be rendered, *they are*. The second: *also*, is not the best rendering of [κα](#) [kai] here in that it implies the seven kings are an *additional* subject. These translations give the incorrect impression that the kings are different from the heads and mountains upon which the woman sits. When describing the ten horns a few verses later, a similar phrase occurs: [δέκα βασιλεῖς εἰσιν](#) [deka basileis eisin]: “ten kings they are” (Rev. 17:12⁺). There, the KJV and NKJV translate the phrase correctly, without substituting *there* for *they* as is done here. We need not conjecture upon the significance of the seven mountains for the angel has pierced this aspect of the mystery for us:

This at once disposes of the popular interpretation which regards these seven mountains as referring to the seven hills on which the city of Rome was built. The Holy Spirit expressly tells us that the seven mountains are (represent) seven kings.²⁸

The punctuation of the AV. in this verse is very faulty. Rev 17:9 should end with the word “wisdom,” and the remainder of the verse should form part of the tenth verse. The explanation of the angel would not then have been cut in two, and interpreted separately as is commonly the case; and the “seven mountains” would not have been treated independently of the clause which goes on to further explain what they signify. The “seven mountains” are, according to this, “seven kings.” It does not say that “there are seven kings” over and above, and beside the “seven mountains;” but that the “seven mountains are (*i.e.*, represent) seven kings.” . . . These mountains, then, are no mere heaps of earth or rocks, but “kings.” . . . For interpreters to take these *literally* as “mountains,” in the midst of a context which the same interpreters take to be *symbolic*; and in the face of the *interpretation* actually given by the angel that “they are seven kings,” is to play fast and loose with the word of prophecy.²⁹

Rather than identifying these seven kings (which are seven heads) with [seven historic kingdoms](#), some aspire to find fulfillment of John’s vision in the events of first-century Rome. Most frequently, [preterist interpreters](#) attempt to pick kings in such a way that [Nero](#) can be said to fulfill the predictions concerning [The Beast](#). In doing so, they overlook inconsistencies in counting kings:

To be sure there have been many attempts to fit the date of Revelation . . . into the emperor lists of the first century. . . . But immediately there are admitted problems. Where do we begin—with Julius Caesar or Caesar Augustus? Are we to exclude Galba, Otho, and Vitellius who had short, rival reigns? If so, how can they be excluded except on a completely arbitrary basis? A careful examination of the historic materials yields no satisfactory solution. If Revelation were written under Nero, there would be too few emperors; if under Domitian, too many. The original readers would have had no more information on these emperor successions than we do, and possibly even less. How many Americans can immediately name the last seven presidents? Furthermore, how could the eighth emperor who is identified as the beast also be one of the seven (Rev. 17:11⁺)?³⁰

For a more in-depth discussion of the problems of correlating these kings with early Rome, see Beale.³¹

five have fallen

Fallen is [πεσόν](#) [epesan], “The word is always used of violent death, when speaking of individuals, or violence when referring to kingdoms. Jdg. 3:25. 5:27. 2S. 1:19, 25. Isa. 21:9. Jer. 50:15. 51:8. Eze. 29:5. 30:6.”³² The angel is no longer discussing the [Beast](#) (who was, is, and is to come) and is now describing the seven heads which are seven mountains and seven kings. Most [futurist interpreters](#) take these to be five world empires of greatest significance to Israel in the plan of God. These are five which fell *before* the time of John. See [#5 - Five Fallen Kings](#). Johnson complains of the seemingly arbitrary nature of the futurist identification of kingdoms:

Seiss (followed recently by Ladd and Walvoord) has suggested an interpretation that takes the five-one-one to refer to successive world kingdoms that have oppressed the people of God: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece (five fallen), Rome (one is), and a future world kingdom. While this solves some of the emperor succession problems and fits nicely, it too must admit arbitrary omissions, such as the devastating persecution of the people of God under the Seleucids of Syria, especially Antiochus IV, Epiphanes.³³

However, it is not the *futurist* who is arbitrarily neglecting the Seleucids, but the *night vision of Daniel* (Dan. 7) which guides the identification of these kingdoms. Daniel’s four beasts are widely held to be Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Since the initial stage of the fourth beast, Rome, is already underway (“one is,” see below) at the time of John, this provides identification of the previous three: Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece. It is apparent that the Seleucid empire—an outgrowth of the disintegration of the Greek empire under Alexander, is largely subsumed into the third [leopard beast](#). Although it is probably recognized in the four heads on the leopard beast (Dan. 7:6) and the four notable horns on the he-goat in another of Daniel’s visions (Dan. 8:8), it is not given the same prominence as the other kingdoms. This is not an arbitrary decision by the futurist, but the plan and purpose of the Holy Spirit Who provided Daniel with the visions. Since only three of Daniel’s four kingdoms have fallen by the time of John, another two kingdoms must be found to form a total of five. The only arbitrariness attributable to the futurist is in the identification of these previous two kingdoms: whether they be Egypt and Assyria or extend further back to include Babel. It is our view that the historic scope of the seven-headed beast ridden by the [Harlot](#) and her identification with Babylon points in the direction of Babel as the first

kingdom. But there is still the problem of knowing whether to include Egypt or Assyria as the second. If the issue is to be decided by volume of passages pertaining to either kingdom, it would seem that Egypt would garner the most votes resulting in the five fallen kingdoms of: Babel, Egypt, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece.

one is

Although five kings (mountains representing their kingdoms) have fallen by the time of John, one is currently reigning. This would seem most naturally to be Rome—the initial stage of Daniel's [terrible beast](#). [Preterists](#) who desire to find fulfillment in [Nero](#) attempt to make him the king which "is," but they can only do so by ignoring inconsistencies in the line up of "kings":

[Gentry's] conclusion that Nero is the sixth or "the one [who] is" also faces serious obstacles. The greatest obstacle is his need to begin counting "kings" with Julius Caesar. He tries to defend this by citing several ancient sources, but the fact is that Rome was a Republic, ruled by the First Triumvirate, in the days of Julius Caesar and became a Principate under Augustus and the emperors that followed him. Neither does Gentry attempt to explain the thirteen-year gap between Julius Caesar's death and the beginning of Augustus' reign. They were not consecutive rulers as he makes them out to be.³⁴

and the other has not yet come

This is the kingdom which follows upon Rome in John's day. Here we enter upon a conundrum with at least two aspects:

1. **Daniel's Night Vision** - The fall of Rome after John's day did not fulfill the prediction of the rapid and dramatic destruction of the [terrible beast](#) which Daniel saw in his night vision (Dan. 7). Nor did its fall usher in the [Messianic Kingdom](#) as the vision predicted. Therefore, the fall of Rome after John's time does not fulfill aspects of Daniel's night vision which remain yet future.
2. **Nebuchadnezzar's Dream** - The fall of Rome after John's day is depicted by the image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream concerning the "feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron" (Dan. 2:41) which speak of a period of division and lack of cohesiveness prior to the Messianic Kingdom (Dan. 2:44). The break up of Rome and subsequent history of the westernized nations has more similarity to Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

This forces the interpreter to the conclusion that the Roman empire at the time of John constituted the first phase of a two-phase participation in the prophecies of the time of the end. This same two-stage division can be seen in the key passage concerning [the 70 weeks of Daniel](#) (Dan. 9:24-27). In that passage, Messiah is cut off after the 69th week and prior to the 70th week. He is cut off when Rome is in power. It is also said that after the 69th week and before the 70th week "the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary" (Dan. 9:26). This we know to be fulfilled in the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem and the [Second Temple](#) by Rome. Thus, Gabriel leaves hanging a yet future "prince" associated with Rome who follows upon the destruction of the city in A.D. 70—and who, by means of a covenant, initiates the final week (Dan. 9:27). Scripture records two phases to Roman participation in the prophecies concerning the end. In its first phase, historic Rome existed in the era of the crucifixion, the destruction of the [Temple](#), and John's writing from Patmos. But now the angel tells John of its second, future phase which "has not yet come." This is the phase represented by the ten horns of Daniel's night vision (Dan. 7:7, 20) and the ten toes of the image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan. 2:42). See [Nebuchadnezzar's Dream and Daniel's Vision](#). See [#12 - Terrible Beast](#).

and when he comes, he must continue a short time

Grammatically, "he" refers to the seventh head-mountain-king which represents the seventh kingdom. The reign of the last kingdom is said to be relatively short. A few verses later, we are told that the ten horns, all on the last head, "receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast" (Rev. 17:12+ cf. Dan. 7:24). So the primary reference is to the *duration of the last kingdom prior to the rise of the beast* who's rise eventually eclipses the seventh kingdom. The seventh kingdom is connected with the "beast that was" who is counted as an eighth king, but also said to be "of the seven"—he is the historic culmination of all the previous heads and his political origin is out of the seventh kingdom. We also know that his reign will be short-lived. The angel tells John that the Beast to arise in the future (Rev. 13:1+) will have a relatively short (and terrible) reign. He is prominent for only a very short time on the stage of world history—for at least seven years. He becomes prominent sometime before [The 70th Week of Daniel](#) so that he is a key participant in the covenant with Israel which initiates the final seven years. Thereafter, he only rules for another seven years during which only the last half he prevails over the saints (Rev. 13:5+). In historical terms, this is indeed a "short time." Unlike the initial phase of Rome, when his reign ends it will usher in the Messianic Kingdom on earth. See [Events of the 70th Week of Daniel](#)

Revelation 17:11

The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth

Now the angel is speaking of the individual who will be the ruler of the kingdom yet to come. This phrase refers to the period of the reign of the [Beast](#) following his revival from his deadly wound. If his revival occurs near the midpoint of [The 70th Week of Daniel](#)

then this would refer to the last half of the week, the three and one-half years during which he is given authority: “he was given authority to continue for forty-two months” (Rev. 13:5⁺). This period is one of great turmoil since the Beast receives his power, throne, and authority from the dragon (Rev. 13:2⁺) and the dragon has great wrath “because he knows that he has a short time” (Rev. 12:12⁺). See [Prophetic Year](#). See [Events of the 70th Week of Daniel](#). See commentary on [Revelation 17:8](#). He is an eighth kingdom in the sense that the seventh kingdom originally arrives as a global empire which shall “devour the whole earth.” Out of this seventh kingdom “ten horns . . . shall arise” (Dan. 7:23-24). The Beast himself “shall rise after them” (Dan. 7:25). After his revival, the ten horns give their authority to the Beast (Rev. 17:12-13⁺) and he reigns supreme and uncontested (Rev. 13:3⁺). In the final form of Gentile dominion, the self-rule of the Beast, he is an eighth king, but only hinted at as an eighth head here.³⁵

If we look upon the Roman dictator as being the seventh, he becomes the eighth, the Antichrist at the time of the Satanic incarnation, and thereby becomes an eighth, who is thus out of the seven, since Satan is the cause of all of the others.³⁶

In his *mortal* stage he is the *seventh* head; but in his *superhuman* stage he is the *eighth* king.³⁷

See [#16 - Beast](#).

he is of the seven

He is “of the seven” in that his origin, both as a *head* and a *horn* (see below) is from among the other heads and horns: “He is an eighth contemporary king ruling over the other seven kings who have submitted to his authority. Yet he is *of the seven*, for he is the seventh head of the chronological ruling governments. The term “seven” refers to the *heads*, while the term ‘eight’ refers to the *horns*.”³⁸ “And though he is ‘an eighth’ king, there are not really eight, but only seven, for the *seventh* and the *eighth* are the same personage; therefore, it is said that the eighth is ‘of the seven.’ ”³⁹ See [#13 - Seventh King](#).

is going to perdition

See commentary on [Revelation 17:8](#).

Revelation 17:12

the ten horns which you saw are ten kings

These are the same [ten horns](#) which Daniel saw in his night vision (Dan. 7:7-8, 20, 24). The ten horns correspond to the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar’s image (Dan. 2:40-43). See [Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream and Daniel’s Vision](#).

who have received no kingdom as yet

These [ten horns](#) are all on the [seventh head](#) which corresponds to the final historic stage of the [terrible beast](#) which Daniel saw (Dan. 7:7, 19-20). Like the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar’s image, which extend forth from the feet during the final kingdom, these horns from the seventh head do not arise until the time of the end. An angel gave Daniel the same interpretation: “The ten horns *are* ten kings *who* shall arise from this [terrible beastly] kingdom” (Dan. 7:24).

they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast

The association between the ten horns and the seventh head is made explicit. Unlike the kingdom of God which cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:28), the ten kings will only have authority for a short period of time, and then only to direct it toward the [Beast](#) when he rises in ultimate prominence. The Beast rises up as an eleventh horn (Dan. 7:20) and eventually overthrows [three horns](#) leaving [eight horns](#), seven plus himself. The phrase *one hour* indicates a historically short period of time. The Tribulation period (lasting seven years) is called “the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world” (Rev. 3:10⁺). When Babylon is destroyed, her judgment comes in “one hour” (Rev. 18:10⁺, Rev 18:17⁺, Rev 18:19⁺). The phrase differs in meaning from “the hour” which indicates the time when a pending action has finally come (Rev. 14:7⁺, Rev 14:15⁺).

Revelation 17:13

These are of one mind, and they give their power and authority to the beast.

In the time of the end, amidst much turmoil and political upheaval, such unity of thought and purpose would be unexpected if it were not for their ultimate control by God. “For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled” (Rev. 17:17⁺). They give their power and authority to the beast so that he can become “all in all,” being the sole focus both in political and religious realms. Because the [Beast](#) accepted the offer from Satan which Jesus refused (Luke 4:6), he is given ultimate authority above all else on earth—even claiming to be God (2Th. 2:4⁺). For this

to occur requires that all other authorities submit to his rule. Although all ten give their power and authority to the beast, for some unspecified reason the Beast eventually destroys [three of the ten horns](#) (Dan. 7:20).

Revelation 17:14

these will make war

[Πολεμήσουσιν](#) [Polemēsousin], which indicates a protracted engagement rather than a single battle. The same word is translated, somewhat misleadingly, as “battle” in Revelation 16:14⁺. See commentary on [Revelation 16:14](#).

with the Lamb

This is not speaking of the ages-long opposition between the spiritual forces of darkness and the spiritual forces of the Lamb (although such ongoing opposition is a fact of Scripture), but speaks of the final *physical* conflict of the armies of the world as they attempt to thwart the installation of Messiah upon the throne of David in His Millennial Reign. The [Beast](#), his kings, and kings from all around the world (Rev. 16:14⁺) will eventually gather to war against God at the [Campaign of Armageddon](#). See commentary on [Revelation 16:16](#). See commentary on [Revelation 19:20](#). The Lamb which they fight with is Jesus Christ, the “Lamb as though it had been slain” which took the scroll from the right hand of God before initiating the first seven judgments by opening the seven seals (Rev. 5:6-7⁺). They war against the Lamb in a doomed attempt to forestall His taking back that which is rightfully His, as documented by the scroll. See commentary on [Revelation 5:1](#). In the previous chapter, the war was described with reference to God the Father: “The battle of that great day of God Almighty.” Here, we are told they will make war with *the Lamb*. Later, the same conflict will be described as a gathering to “make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army” (Rev. 19:19⁺). The text provides another indication of the deity of Christ and the essential identity of the Lamb and the Father.

the Lamb will overcome them

He shall overcome is [νικῆσει](#) [nikēsei]: the Lamb is The Overcomer. From the perspective of earth, the Beast is the overcomer (Rev. 6:2⁺). But he only overcomes while he is temporarily given authority to do so (Rev. 13:7⁺). Ultimately, it is the Lamb Who is the true overcomer (John 16:33; 1Jn. 4:4; Rev. 3:21⁺). See [Who is the Overcomer?](#) In a vision of Daniel which many believe is not entirely fulfilled in the events of Antiochus Epiphanes IV, Daniel sees a fierce king who “shall even rise against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without *human* means” (Dan. 8:25). If the *Prince of princes* refers to the Lamb, then Daniel’s vision prophesied this same conflict.⁴⁰ The kings participate in the ultimate fulfillment of Psalm 2: “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed [Messiah = Christ], *saying*, ‘Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.’ ” (Ps. 2:2-3). At that time, the long wait of the Son at the right hand of the Father will come to an end:

The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.” The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Your people *shall be* volunteers in the day of Your power; in the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth. The LORD has sworn and will not relent, “You *are* a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” The Lord *is* at Your right hand; **He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath**. He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill *the places* with dead bodies, **He shall execute the heads of many countries**. He shall drink of the brook by the wayside; therefore He shall lift up the head. (Ps. 110:1-7) [emphasis added]

Isaiah spoke of this time:

Behold, the LORD makes the earth empty and makes it waste . . . The earth mourns *and* fades away . . . Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned and few men *are* left. . . . And the foundations of the earth are shaken. . . . The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall totter like a hut; . . . It shall come to pass in that day *that* the LORD will punish on high the host of exalted ones, and on the earth the kings of the earth. They will be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and will be shut up in the prison; after many days they will be punished. (Isa. 24:1-23)

The context is [The Day of the Lord](#) where conditions are so extreme that relatively few are left alive. The kings who rebelled (Psalm 2) will be gathered together and shut up in the prison and then punished—possibly a reference to their entry into *Hades* after being killed by the Lamb (Rev. 19:21⁺) followed by their ultimate punishment upon being subsequently cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:15⁺).

for He is Lord of lords and King of kings

He will overcome them *because* He is Lord over all other lords. He is “the ruler over the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5⁺), even though at present most kings do not recognize His rule. At His Second Coming, His legal status as King of kings and the factual reality of earthly rule will be united for His kingdom will then be on earth where He physically rules over lords. The Lamb is given a title which is uniquely that of the Father in the [OT](#). “For the LORD your God *is* God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and

awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe” (Deu. 10:7). Ascribing the title *Lord of lords* to the Lamb is no small matter . . . *unless* He is God! And indeed He is. Paul describes Jesus in similar divine terms: “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see” (1Ti. 6:15-16). See commentary on [Revelation 1:18](#).

those who are with Him

Although all the saints are with Christ in the sense of their spiritual unity and membership in His Kingdom, the reference here is primarily to those who are with Him *at the time of His Second Coming*. In the same way that the angels accompanied the Father in His descent upon Mount Sinai (Deu. 33:2), so too shall Jesus bring “the armies in heaven” with Him (Rev. 19:14+, Rev 19:19+):

Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men [the dreamers who reject authority] also, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes **with ten thousands of His saints**, to execute judgment on all.” (Jude 1:14-15a) [emphasis added]

Proclaim this among the nations: “Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, ‘I am strong.’ ” Assemble and come, all you nations, and gather together all around. **Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O LORD**. Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow—For their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. (Joel 3:9-14+) [emphasis added]

And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, *making* a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south. Then you shall flee *through* My mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Thus the LORD my God will come, **And all the saints with You**. (Zec. 14:4-5) [emphasis added]

The saints ([ἁγίοις](#) [hagiais]) which attend Jesus’ return are “holy ones.” They are set apart for the service of God. This term is used of both the faithful (e.g., Ps. 16:3; 34:9 ; Acts 9:13) and angels (e.g., Dan. 8:13). We know from other passages that angels will come with Him:

For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father **with His angels**, and then He will reward each according to His works. (Mat. 16:27) [emphasis added]

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and **all the holy angels with Him**, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. (Mat. 25:31) [emphasis added]

Since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven **with His mighty angels**, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2Th. 1:6-8) [emphasis added]

are called, chosen, and faithful

Called is [κλητο](#) [klētoi], *chosen* is [εκλεκτο](#) [eklektōi]. The same terms are used when Jesus says, “Many are called ([κλητοί](#) [klētoi]), but few are chosen ([εκλεκτοί](#) [eklektōi])” (Mat. 20:16; 22:14). Peter uses the same terms when writing to predominantly Jewish believers. “But you are a **chosen** generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who **called** you out of darkness into His marvelous light” [emphasis added] (1Pe. 2:9 cf. 1Pe. 1:1). The angels which did not follow Satan in his rebellion (Rev. 12:4+) are also said to be “chosen”: “The elect angels” is [τῶν ἐκλεκτῶν ἁγγέλων](#) [tōn eklektōn angelōn]. But being *called* speaks of a time prior to having come to the faith—something the elect angels do not experience for they have never been lost, but remained continually faithful. Calling is unique to those saints who at one time were not saints, that is, *human beings* rather than angels (Rom. 1:6; Rom. 8:28-30; 2Ti. 2:9).⁴¹ “These epithets called, chosen, and faithful, can only strictly apply to saints [not angels].”⁴² Those who are both *called* and *chosen* are “His own elect who cry out day and night to Him” (Luke 18:7). They did not choose Him, but He chose them (John 15:16). This speaks of human beings, not just angels, who will return with Christ at His Second Coming. They do not remain in heaven, but return to participate in the [Millennial Kingdom](#) which follows (Rev. 20:4-6+). They are said to be *faithful* because they are human beings, born among those who were fallen, but who then exercised faith to salvation. At the time of Christ’s Second Coming, there are three categories of believers in heaven:

1. **Pre-Church Saints** - Believers who died prior to the formation of the Church on the Day of Pentecost. Since the Spirit did not begin baptizing believers into the body of Christ until then (John 7:38-39; Acts 2; 1Cor. 12:13), they were never part of the body of Christ. At death, their souls and spirits entered paradise in Abraham’s bosom (Luke 16:22) until they ascended when paradise relocated to heaven following the crucifixion (Luke 23:43).

2. **Church Saints** - Believers who lived after the giving of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (John 7:38-39; Acts 2) and were baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit (1Cor. 12:13). The spirit and soul of those who died prior to the [Rapture](#) ascended to heaven at death (2Cor. 5:6; Php. 1:23) Being *in Christ*, they were physically resurrected (or translated if alive) at the [Rapture](#) of the Church prior to the Tribulation (John 14:1-3; 1Th. 4:13-18).
3. **Post-Church Saints** - Believers who come to faith after the [Rapture](#) of the Church—the removal of the body of Christ. They died a natural death or were martyred (Rev. 2:10⁺; Rev 2:13⁺; Rev 12:11⁺; Rev 15:2⁺) and their spirit and soul ascended to heaven at death (2Cor. 5:6; Php. 1:23; Rev. 7:14⁺).

Only one of these three categories of saints is resurrected prior to the Second Coming: the Church Saints—those who were baptized by the Holy Spirit into the Church: the body of Christ in His absence. When Christ returns at the Second Coming, His spiritual body (the Church) returns with Him. During the Second Coming, Christ's army will include both angels (Joel 3:11; Mat. 25:31) and Church saints (Col. 3:4). Saints who have not yet been resurrected seem unlikely to participate in the Second Coming (Rev. 19:14⁺). They receive their resurrected bodies after the Second Coming, prior to the Millennial Kingdom (Dan. 12:2; Rev. 20:4⁺). See commentary on [Revelation 20:4](#).

Revelation 17:15

The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits

Having described the mystery of the beast with the seven heads and ten horns, the angel now tells John the mystery of the woman (Rev. 17:7⁺). Earlier, the angel identified the woman as “the great harlot who sits on many waters” (Rev. 17:1⁺). See commentary on [Revelation 17:1](#). See [The Great Harlot](#). These same waters form the sea out of which the first [Beast](#) arose (Rev. 13:1⁺). See commentary on [Revelation 13:1](#).

are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues

The common fourfold designation within the book of Revelation denoting a worldwide population (Rev. 7:9⁺). In some instances, *tribes* or *kings* appears for *multitudes* (Rev. 5:9⁺; Rev 10:11⁺; Rev 11:9⁺; Rev 14:6⁺). See [Four: the Entire World, the Earth](#). These are the peoples, nations, tongues, and kings about which John was told he must prophesy (Rev. 10:11⁺). He is now fulfilling that assignment. Although the woman is said to be a “city” (Rev. 17:18⁺), her influence—and possibly her support—is global in scope. Her influence was scattered worldwide with the introduction of languages in the judgment of Babel when all mankind dispersed from a central location having already imbibed of her corrupting wine (Gen. 11:9). We believe she spans both geography *and* history, for the Beast with [seven heads](#) is empowered by the dragon (Rev. 13:1⁺ cf. Rev. 12:3⁺) who is Satan and assumed dominion over the world as early as the Fall of Adam and Eve (Mat. 4:8; Luke 4:6; John 12:31; 14:30; 2Cor. 4:4; 1Jn. 5:19). If these seven heads represent seven world kingdoms of special significance in the plan of God, then the woman's global influence extends from the earliest of those empires through the time of the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of the [Millennial Kingdom](#). See [#4 - Seven Heads/Kings](#). See [Babylon of Old](#).

Revelation 17:16

the ten horns which you saw on the beast

The [TR](#) stands alone in having the ten horns *on* the beast. Both [MT](#) and [NU](#) texts say “the ten horns which you saw **and** ([κα](#) [kai]) the beast.” [emphasis added]

hate the harlot

Many expositors seem to downplay or overlook the angel's identification of [The Great Harlot](#) with the city of Babylon (Rev. 17:18⁺) and interpret her as denoting a separate ecclesiastical system. Thus, they see *two* separate destructions set forth in chapters 17 and 18. This destruction they relate to the [Harlot](#), whereas the destruction in the next chapter they relate to the literal city: “These graphic words clearly portray the downfall of the apostate world church of the future.”⁴³ We disagree with interpretations which divide the unity of the larger passage at the chapter boundary. The Harlot is said to be a city (Rev. 17:18⁺) and the city is said to be the Harlot (Rev. 18:21⁺-19:2⁺). She is the object of destruction both here and in the next chapter. See [Mystery Babylon?](#) Because the city Babylon involves both spiritual and commercial aspects (both aspects are seen in Revelation 17⁺ and Revelation 18⁺), there is no reason to separate the Harlot from the city as an independent ecclesiastical system of the end. The motivation of the [Beast](#) to destroy the city could simply be to throw off her control (or the need to support her) which has become burdensome. Or, it could involve his belief that her idolatrous system ultimately provides an unwanted alternative to his own global worship (2Th. 2:4⁺; Rev. 13:15⁺). However, *it is important to recognize that Scripture does not give the specific reason why the kings hate her and destroy her*. It could just as easily be commercial, political, or religious. Scripture doesn't say. In any event, she experiences what Jeremiah

described long before: regardless of her ornaments and attraction, her lovers eventually despise her and seek her life (Jer. 4:30). Fruchtenbaum believes the Beast is the king of Babylon who is away at war and reacts with alarm to the news of her destruction (Jer. 50:43; 51:31-32).⁴⁴ If the king of Babylon is the Beast and he reacts with alarm to the destruction of his capital, how could it be said that the Beast (along with the ten kings) hates the city and participates in its destruction? There are several possible solutions to this puzzle:⁴⁵

1. The TR text is correct and the Beast is not to be included among those who hate the Harlot and come against her. Perhaps the ten kings, although allied with the Beast for a season, eventually betray him and attack the seat of his throne during an opportune moment when he is distracted elsewhere.⁴⁶
2. The Beast may not be the king of Babylon at the time of its destruction. "He shall plant the tents of his palace between the seas and the glorious holy mountain" (Dan. 11:45a). Perhaps he relocates his seat of authority to the Holy Land to be near his image in the [Temple](#) (Mat. 24:15; 2Th. 2:4+; Rev 13:14-15+) after which he and his kings turn against Babylon.
3. The Harlot is a separate entity from the city of Babylon. The Harlot is destroyed by the Beast and his kings, but the city is destroyed by God directly. Although this view is held by many, it minimizes or overlooks passages which identify the Harlot as the city (e.g., Rev. 17:18+).⁴⁷

See [One or Two Babylons?](#) We believe a separate ecclesiastical system is neither called for nor explicitly warranted from a simple reading of both Revelation 17+ and 18+ which relates a single city with both commercial and spiritual aspects opposed to God. See [An End-Time Religious System?](#)

make her ... eat her ... burn her

The repetition of the pronoun "her" provides emphasis. Her destruction is determined, violent, and comprehensive.

make her desolate

Desolate is [ρημωμένῃ](#) [rēmōmenē], used "of a kingdom be brought to ruin, become desolate, be desolated (Mat. 12:25)."⁴⁸ At its destruction, Babylon comes "to nothing ([ρημώθη](#) [rēmōthē])" (Rev. 18:17+), for "in one hour she is made desolate [ρημώθη](#) [rēmōthē]" (Rev. 18:19+).

and naked

Originally clothed in expensive finery (Rev. 17:4+), she will be stripped of her commercial splendor: "Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! For in one hour such great riches came to nothing." (Rev. 18:16-17a+). In her destruction and the stripping of her riches, onlookers will recognize her nakedness (cf. Eze. 16:37-39; 23:29).

eat her flesh

They shall eat is [φάγονται](#) [phagontai]: "Figuratively . . . *consume, destroy* as if by rust or fire (Heb. 10:27)."⁴⁹ Similar phrases describe the intended harm of an enemy (Ps. 27:1-3; Jer. 51:35; Mic. 3:1-3) or the conquest of a kingdom (Dan. 7:5). The destruction of Babylon's flesh will fulfill the desire of the inhabitants of Zion: "Let the violence *done* to me and my flesh *be* upon Babylon," the inhabitant of Zion will say" (Jer. 51:35).

burn her with fire

They shall burn her is [κατακαύσουσιν](#) [katakausousin], to "Destroy by fire, burn (up), consume by fire,"⁵⁰ used of "being burned at the stake as a martyr."⁵¹ Used to describe the burning of the third of the earth with its trees and grass (Rev. 8:7+). This provides further evidence of the identity of the woman as Babylon (Rev. 17:18+), for what is said of the Harlot is said of Babylon. Babylon is to be "utterly burned with fire" (Rev. 18:8+). The "smoke of her burning" is visible from a great distance (Rev. 18:17-18+).

Thus says the Lord of hosts: "The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall be burned with fire; the people will labor in vain, and the nations, because of the fire; and they shall be weary." (Jer. 51:58)

Although Babylon fell to Persia in 539 B.C., it was never destroyed as predicted by Scripture. See [The Destruction of Babylon](#).

Revelation 17:17

For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose

God's sovereign control of the affairs of history is a constant theme behind the events of the book of Revelation. *Everything* that

transpires occurs by His sovereign permission. From the riding forth of the first horsemen who was *given* a crown, to rising of the [Beast](#) from the sea who is *given* authority to continue forty-two months (Rev. 13:5+) and who was previously restrained (2Th. 2:6-8), God is ultimately in full control. God turns the hearts of kings according to His purposes—whether they know Him or not (Deu. 2:30; Ezra 7:27; Ps. 105:25; Pr. 21:1; Isa. 10:5-7; 14:27; 66:4; Acts 4:28). God determined that Pharaoh would not heed Moses so that Egypt might be judged (Ex. 7:4). He named and brought forth Cyrus to rebuild Jerusalem, although Cyrus did not know Him (Isa. 44:26-45:4; 46:11). It was God who gave Nebuchadnezzar his kingdom and power, although for much of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar did not know God (Dan. 2:37).

Remember the former things of old, for *I am* God, and *there is* no other; *I am* God, and *there is* none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *things* that are not *yet* done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure,’ Calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken *it*; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed *it*; I will also do it. (Isa. 46:9-11)

The tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility runs throughout Scripture and is impossible to escape. Emphasizing either one at the expense of the other results in a distortion of Scripture. Although it was God’s “determined purpose and foreknowledge” to deliver Jesus to the cross, those who crucified Him are fully responsible for their “lawless hands” (Acts 2:23-24 cf. Rom. 9:19-22; Jas. 1:13-17). “But behold, the hand of My betrayer is with Me on the table. And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!” (Luke 22:21-22) See commentary on [Revelation 6:2](#). See commentary on [Revelation 16:14](#).

until the words of God are fulfilled

Fulfilled is [τελεσθήσονται](#) [telesthēsontai], *they shall be completed*. The word includes more than just the idea of *fulfillment*, but also bringing to an end, finishing, completing.⁵²

For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it. (Isa. 55:10-11)

His word is already settled in heaven (Ps. 119:89), but has yet to work out on the earth below. Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35) because God stands ever ready to perform His word (Jer. 1:12). The words of God in relation to the Beast, the ten horns, and the [Harlot](#), will be fulfilled when the “mystery of God would be finished” in the judgments associated with the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Rev. 10:7+). When the seven bowls of God’s wrath are completed, “It is done!” (Rev. 16:17+). The next several chapters provide additional detail concerning the fulfillment of God’s words which eventually result in the return of the King and the establishment of the [Millennial Kingdom](#) (Rev. 20:4+).

Revelation 17:18

that great city

Although this phrase is also used of Jerusalem (Rev. 11:8+) and of the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21:10+), here it is to be identified with Babylon (Rev. 14:8+; Rev 17:18+; Rev 18:10+, Rev 18:16+, Rev 18:18+, Rev 18:21+). This is evident from numerous close parallels between what is said of the [Harlot](#) in this chapter and the city Babylon in the next chapter. The primary piece of evidence that “the great city,” in this instance, is to be taken to describe Babylon is the earlier name which was seen written upon the Harlot and clearly associates her with *Babylon* (Rev. 17:5+). Some argue for identifying the phrase “that great city” here with Jerusalem:

One of the stronger arguments used by Jerusalem proponents involves the identification of the phrase “the great city” as used in Revelation 17:18+. Jerusalem advocates contend that the only way to properly identify this city is to observe how the phrase “the great city” appears earlier in Revelation. There are only two references to “the great city” prior to Revelation 17:18+. These references include Revelation 11:8+ and Revelation 16:19+. Jerusalem advocates believe that both are unmistakable references to Jerusalem. Thus, Revelation 17:18+ must refer to Jerusalem as well.⁵³

But such an identification ignores extensive and close ties between the woman and the city of Babylon. When one considers that chapter divisions are not part of the original [inspired](#) text and takes chapters 17 and 18 as one unified passage, the similarities between the woman and the city are compelling. Add to this the fact that Jerusalem is destined to be restored (Isa. 62) and serve as the capital of the Millennial Kingdom, whereas Babylon is never to be inhabited again, and the idea that the phrase “that great city” describes Jerusalem is untenable. See [Babylon is Jerusalem?](#) The Great Harlot is identified as the “great city” Babylon much as the Lamb’s wife is identified as the “holy Jerusalem”:

The Chaste Woman of the Apocalypse is also indissolubly united to a city. In Rev. 21:9+ we read that one of the seven angels said to John, ‘Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb’s Wife.’ And immediately following we read, ‘And he carried me away in

the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God:⁵⁴

reigns over the kings

[Βασιλείαν π Βασιλέων](#) [Basileian epi Basileōn]. She exercises royal power or rule over the kings. Again, we see the impossibility of assigning Jerusalem as the Harlot. How can Jerusalem, of all cities the most trampled and occupied, with the least political influence and material resources, be said to have historically reigned over the kings of the earth? Others suggest Rome as a candidate for “the great city.” Although we recognize the unmatched influence over kings of the earth that Rome has had in more recent history, she provides neither the necessary historic scope nor proper fulfillment for the many [OT](#) passages which speak literally to Babylon. As old as we may consider Rome to be, she is a relative upstart on the stage of biblical history which spans back to the tower of Babel (Gen. 10, 11). Rome is merely one of Babylon’s most prominent daughters. See [Babylon is Rome?](#) Some may object that it is difficult to see how literal Babylon could be considered as reigning over the kings of the earth when she is so insignificant in our time. Yet, as we have seen, the woman is identified with a specific historical city of prominence in the past, and we believe will be of prominence again in the future. Between her initial rebellion as Babel and her final flowering of godless humanism as the rebuilt Babylon, the site of her former splendour lies largely forgotten. But her influence, as the mother of harlotry and abomination, is as active today upon the *peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues* as ever. Her humanism, idolatry, and fornication are alive and well, having been disseminated among the kingdoms of the earth. We believe a time is coming when “Wickedness!” will be carried back to the place of its original manifestation after the flood “to build a house for it in the land of Shinar; when it is ready, *the basket* will be set there on its base” (Zec. 5:11). See [Back to Shinar](#).

3.17.18.1 - Babylon and the New Jerusalem

Two of the women who play key roles in the Book of Revelation are *cities*: Babylon and the New Jerusalem. This is no accident as one is the *city of man* whereas the other is the *city of God*.

City of Man vs. City of God

| Babylon | New Jerusalem |
|--|---|
| Built by Man (Gen. 10:10; 11:4; Rev. 17:18 ⁺ ; Rev 18:23 ⁺). | Built by God (Ps. 46:4; Ps. 87:3; Isa. 60:14; Gal. 4:26; Heb. 11:10; 12:22; 13:14; Rev. 3:12 ⁺ ; Rev 21:2 ⁺ , Rev 21:10 ⁺). |
| Shown by Angel with Bowl (Rev. 17:1 ⁺). | Shown by Angel with Bowl (Rev. 21:9 ⁺). |
| Seen from wilderness (Rev. 17:3 ⁺). | Seen from high mountain (Rev. 21:10 ⁺). |
| Great City (Rev. 17:1 ⁺). | Great City (Rev. 21:10 ⁺) ⁵⁵ . |
| Fornicator (Rev. 17:2 ⁺). | Holy (Rev. 21:2 ⁺ , Rev 21:10 ⁺). |
| A harlot (Rev. 17:1 ⁺). | A bride, wife (Rev. 21:2 ⁺ , Rev 21:9 ⁺). |
| Adorned with precious stones (Rev. 17:4 ⁺). | Adorned with precious stones (Rev. 21:18-20 ⁺). |
| Adorned with pearls (Rev. 17:4 ⁺). | Adorned with pearls (Rev. 21:21 ⁺). |
| Clothed with purple and scarlet (Rev. 17:4 ⁺ ; Rev 18:16 ⁺). | Clothed with light (Rev. 21:11 ⁺ , Rev 21:18 ⁺ , Rev 21:23-24 ⁺). |
| Believer's blood in her (Rev. 17:6 ⁺ ; Rev 18:24 ⁺ ; Rev 19:2 ⁺). | Believers in her (Rev. 3:12 ⁺ ; Rev 14:2 ⁺ ; Rev 21:24 ⁺ , Rev 21:27 ⁺). |
| Demons in her (Rev. 18:2 ⁺). | Saints in her (Rev. 3:12 ⁺ ; Rev 14:2 ⁺ ; Rev 21:24 ⁺ , Rev 21:27 ⁺). |
| Foundation has names of blasphemy (Rev. 17:3 ⁺). | Foundation has names of apostles (Rev. 21:14 ⁺). |
| Contains abominations (Rev. 17:4 ⁺ ; Rev 18:2 ⁺). | Contains no abomination (Rev. 21:27 ⁺). |
| King's fornicate with (Rev. 17:2 ⁺ ; Rev 18:3 ⁺). | King's honor (Rev. 18:3 ⁺). |
| Destroyed (Rev. 14:8 ⁺ ; Rev 16:19 ⁺ ; Rev 17:16 ⁺ ; Rev 18:17 ⁺ , Rev 18:19 ⁺). | Eternal (Heb. 13:14; Rev. 22:5 ⁺). |

- ¹Merrill F. Unger, [*Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*](#) (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2002), Jer. 51:13.
- ²Michael Levy, ed., [*Britannica 2012 Deluxe Edition CDRom*](#), s.v. "Babylon."
- ³Frederick William Danker and Walter Bauer, [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 693.
- ⁴Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, [*The Footsteps of Messiah*](#), rev ed (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 236-237.
- ⁵Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, [*Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 233.
- ⁶Arthur Walkington Pink, [*The Antichrist*](#) (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1999, 1923), s.v. "Antichrist and Babylon."
- ⁷John F. Walvoord, [*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1966), Rev. 17:3-4.
- ⁸Albrecht Durer (1471 - 1528). Image courtesy of the [Connecticut College Wetmore Print Collection](#).
- ⁹Friberg, [*Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*](#), 94.
- ¹⁰Andy Woods, [*What is the Identity of Babylon In Revelation 17-18?*](#)
- ¹¹Danker, [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) 137.
- ¹²Friberg, [*Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*](#), 89.
- ¹³Although some point to mention of Melchizedek asking of *Salem*.
- ¹⁴Danker, [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) 29.
- ¹⁵Friberg, [*Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*](#), 39.
- ¹⁶Pink, [*The Antichrist*](#), s.v. "Antichrist and Babylon."
- ¹⁷E. W. Bullinger, [*Commentary On Revelation*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1984, 1935), Rev. 17:5.
- ¹⁸Henry Morris, [*The Revelation Record*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1983), Rev. 17:5.
- ¹⁹Regarding Mat. 23:24, the Pharisees would force themselves to vomit if they accidentally swallowed a gnat which was seen as a violation of the prohibition against eating blood.
- ²⁰Danker, [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) 137.
- ²¹Friberg, [*Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*](#), 89.
- ²²Bullinger, [*Commentary On Revelation*](#), Rev. 17:12.
- ²³Danker, [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) 103.
- ²⁴Woods, [*What is the Identity of Babylon In Revelation 17-18?*](#)
- ²⁵Woods, [*What is the Identity of Babylon In Revelation 17-18?*](#)
- ²⁶Woods, [*What is the Identity of Babylon In Revelation 17-18?*](#)
- ²⁷The NU text associates this phrase with the end of the previous verse.
- ²⁸Pink, [*The Antichrist*](#), s.v. "Antichrist and Babylon."
- ²⁹Bullinger, [*Commentary On Revelation*](#), Rev. 17:10.
- ³⁰Alan F. Johnson, [*Revelation: The Expositor's Bible Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), Rev. 17:10.

³¹Gregory K. Beale, [*The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 21-24.

³²Jerome Smith, [*The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*](#) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), Rev. 17:10.

³³Johnson, [*Revelation: The Expositor's Bible Commentary*](#), Rev. 17:10.

³⁴Robert L. Thomas, "[Theonomy and the Dating of Revelation](#)," in Richard L. Mayhue, ed., [*The Master's Seminary Journal*](#), vol. 5 (Sun Valley, CA: The Master's Seminary, 1994), 194-195.

³⁵Fruchtenbaum sees mention of his eighth as pertaining to his relationship among the *horns*: "In what way is he an eighth? . . . The ten horns represent the ten kingdoms that come out of the One World Government [Dan. 7:23]. . . . These ten kings are contemporary and rule together. But as was seen from Daniel seven, when the Antichrist begins to take control, he uproots three of the ten horns. He kills three of the ten kings, leaving seven for the remainder of the Tribulation period. The Antichrist is contemporary with these seven, making him an *eighth*."—Fruchtenbaum, [*The Footsteps of Messiah*](#), 43. While he is indeed an eighth horn, the context of Revelation 17:11⁺ is discussing *heads* which are *mountains* which are *kings*. The ten horns do not yet enter the context until the next verse.

³⁶Donald Grey Barnhouse, [*Revelation*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 330.

³⁷Bullinger, [*Commentary On Revelation*](#), Rev. 17:8.

³⁸Fruchtenbaum, [*The Footsteps of Messiah*](#), 43.

³⁹Bullinger, [*Commentary On Revelation*](#), Rev. 17:11.

⁴⁰"It may be concluded that this difficult passage apparently goes beyond that which is historically fulfilled in Antiochus Epiphanes to foreshadow a future personage often identified as the world ruler of the end time. . . . He indeed will be 'broken without hand' at the time of the second advent of Jesus Christ."—John F. Walvoord, [*Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation*](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Bible Institute, 1971), Dan. 8:26.

⁴¹Concerning the choosing or election of believers: Ps. 65:4; Eze. 3:17; Mat. 24:24, 31; Mark 13:20; Luke 18:7; John 1:13; 6:37, 44, 65; 13:18; 15:16, 19; 17:2-11, 24; Acts 13:48; Rom. 1:7; 8:28-31, 33; Rom. 9:15-16, 23; 10:20; 11:5, 7; 1Cor. 1:2, 21, 26, 30; Eph. 1:4; 4:1; 1Th. 1:4; 2Th. 2:13; 1Ti. 6:12; 2Ti. 1:9; 2Ti. 2:10; Tit. 1:1; Heb. 9:15; 1Pe. 1:2; 2:9; 5:13; 2Pe. 1:3; Jude 1:1; Rev. 17:14⁺.

⁴²Walter Scott, [*Exposition of The Revelation*](#) (London, England: Pickering & Inglis, n.d.), Rev. 17:14.

⁴³Walvoord, [*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*](#), Rev. 17:16.

⁴⁴Fruchtenbaum, [*The Footsteps of Messiah*](#), 327.

⁴⁵Bullinger suggests an additional solution: the city is burned by the ten kings in a preliminary judgment which is followed later by the final judgment by God. [Bullinger, [*Commentary On Revelation*](#), Rev. 18:3]

⁴⁶Two weaknesses of this view are: (1) The TR text stands alone in having the ten hornson (instead of *and*) the beast in Revelation 17:16⁺; (2) The ten kings are found in alliance with the Beast against the Lamb at the Second Coming of Christ (Rev. 17:14⁺). The second weakness could possibly be explained as the unified response of all the kings of the earth, regardless of political intrigue, when faced with their ultimate enemy: Christ.

⁴⁷"The distinction between the two chapters is that between two systems or networks that have the same geographical headquarters. In chapter 17 it is a religious system that operates independently of and in opposition to the true God, but in chapter 18 it is an economic system that does the same. . . . The two chapters tell how two aspects of the city's function will come to a dramatic end and how this will affect other world entities at the time. Whether they fall simultaneously or consecutively is yet to be determined, but they both will mark the internal deterioration of the beast's empire prior to the defeat of his political structure by the returning warrior-king (Rev. 19:11-21⁺)."—Robert L. Thomas, [*Revelation 8-22*](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995), Rev. 18:1.

⁴⁸Friberg, [*Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*](#), 172.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 174.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 218.

⁵¹Danker, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) 411.

⁵²Ibid., 810.

⁵³Woods, [What is the Identity of Babylon In Revelation 17-18?](#)

⁵⁴Pink, [The Antichrist](#), s.v. "Antichrist and Babylon."

⁵⁵*Great* is in the TR, but not the NU or MT text.

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(Content generated on Thu Apr 30 16:37:48 2020)

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EDITORIAL ADDITION - Bruce Hurt

Revelation 17:9 - "Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits,

Note that out of [61 translations on Biblegateway](#), 38 translate this verse as "seven mountains" and 23 as "seven hills". Most of the versions that translate "oros" as hills are paraphrases. One modern paraphrase "[The Expanded Version](#)" (2011) even has the following note included in the so-called translation -- "[or hills; cRome was built on seven hills]" which clearly illustrates the **interpretative bias** of the translation committee! One other point is that even some of the versions like the Amplified which translates oros as "hills" follow with the phrase "and **they** are seven kings" translating the verb eimi which is third person plural. The nearest antecedent which identifies "**they**" is clearly "**seven hills/mountains.**" **They** is traditionally a **third-person plural** pronoun, used to refer to groups of two or more people or things. [Wikipedia](#) adds **they** is "The form of a verb used (in English and other languages) with plural nouns and with the pronoun [they](#) (or its equivalents in other languages)." While one might [posit](#) another "nearest antecedent" (thus skipping the literal, actual nearest antecedent "seven hills/mountains"), the plain sense of the normal reading of the text is that **they** corresponds to the "**seven hills/mountains.**" One paraphrase, [CEV](#) which translates "seven mountains" as "**seven hills**" goes on to follow "seven hills" with the statement that "**These heads are also seven kings**" So even the [CEV](#) translators recognize that the "**they**" clearly refers to the "**seven hills!**" Why am I making such a fuss about the pronoun **they**? Well, if **they** refers to the **seven mountains**, then it is difficult to see how one city can then be described as plural. In short, even the evaluation of this pronoun would seem to undermine the interpretation of "seven mountains" as the city of Rome (see also [note by Arnold Fruchtenbaum](#))

There are many writers who quickly assume John's statement of **seven heads** is a reference to the city of Rome which was well known as the "city on seven hills," (note: not the "city built on seven mountains" - see also [list of cities that claimed to be built on seven hills!](#)). Below are a number of expositors who do not agree with the interpretation of seven hills being a clear designation of the city of Rome.

First is comment by **Robert Thomas** on interpretation of **7 heads** -

"The view that finds a geographical significance in the seven hills relating them to Rome, the city of seven hills, has had a wide appeal. Seven hills were the nucleus of the city on the left bank of the river Tiber (Walvoord) (**ED: [SEE PICTURE](#)**). Roman coinage and literature has made much of this feature of the city's topography (Alford, Swete, Hailey) (**ED: [SEE PICTURE OF COIN](#)**). An annual festival, [Septimontium](#), received its name because of this (Beasley-Murray). Hence, it is easy to see how the mention of seven hills could suggest Rome in the minds of John's readers (Mounce, Hailey). (**ED: NOTE HOW THEY ARE INTERPRETING THE BIBLE WITH EXTRA-BIBLICAL INFORMATION, EVEN WITH WOMEN SITTING ON COINS, ETC, A PRACTICE I GENERALLY TRY TO AVOID AND INSTEAD SEEKING TO INTERPRET SCRIPTURE WITH SCRIPTURE AS THE SAFEST APPROACH**). An apparent failure of this view, however, is its inability to show how an identification of geographical features of a city could call for the special theological and symbolic insight invited as a preface to this explanation (Lee, Johnson)..... The view is implausible because it gives the heads a double meaning, one geographical and the other political, but its most obvious flaw is its failure to maintain a distinction between the beast and the woman, "Babylon the Great." The seven heads connect with the secular anti-Christian power, not with the religious anti-Christian power (Alford, Johnson). ([An Exegetical Commentary](#))

MY COMMENT - Note also since the [Septimontium](#) is often used as support of the geographical interpretation of **'Seven Heads'** in

Rev 17:9, it should be pointed out that this festival actually refers to other hills ([see map](#) compare with the [map of the "seven hills of Rome."](#) Wikipedia states "Separate also are the seven hills associated with the [Septimontium](#), a proto-urban festival celebrated by the residents of the seven communities associated with the hills or peaks of Rome. These were the [Oppius](#), [Palatium](#), [Velia](#), [Fagutal](#), Cermalus, [Caelius](#), and [Cispus](#).^[2] **These are sometimes confused with the traditional seven hills**" It is also noteworthy that there are a number of [cities that have claimed to be built on seven hills](#)

Here is a discussion by **James Allen** in John Ritchie's excellent conservative series [What the Bible Teaches: Revelation](#)". Allen writes...

The mention of "seven mountains" has led many commentators to see nothing beyond the literal city of Rome. W. Scott puts it clearly when he writes, "The seven-hilled city of Rome is here indicated as the seat and centre of the woman's almost universal authority and influence. It is where the papacy has been located and has flourished, more or less for 1500 years" (p. 351). J. B. Smith puts the corroborative evidence: "The city intended is undoubtedly Rome on the following evidence: as many as a dozen of the old Roman authors speak of Rome as the city of seven hills; Roman coins (still preserved) bear the imprint of Rome as built on seven hills; Victorinus, the first commentator on Revelation, in his notes on the present verse, says 'that is, the city of Rome' ". All this is interesting but irrelevant and a serious misinterpretation. It should be noted:

1. that the seven mountains are not given as the identifying mark of any city. This is an interpretative interpolation by commentators which only serves to distort the picture.

2. if this expression was meant to describe Rome the wrong word is used. Rome was spoken of as *urbs septicolis*. The Latin word *collis* means "hill" or "slope" an appropriate term for the ten hills identified in Rome (historians have great problems selecting seven out of the ten named by various authorities). The highest of these hills was the Janiculum which at 275 feet was scarcely a mountain, while all the others varied between 150–250 feet. The Greek equivalent for the Latin *collis* would be *bounos* while the word used here is *oros* the normal word for mountain.

3. the word "mountain" is used metaphorically and is interpreted in the text. The seven mountains symbolise seven kings. To interpret them as literal hills is to misunderstand the angelic message.

4. when the woman sits on the "many waters" (v. 1) this must be taken as metaphorical since it is interpreted in v. 15; when the woman sits upon "a scarlet coloured beast" this again is symbolic; thus when she sits upon the "seven mountains" this too must be figurative. In none of these cases is there any justification for taking the location as literal.

The angelic interpretation is plain: "The seven heads (symbolic) are seven mountains (metaphorical) ... and they are (RV) seven kings (historical)". The word "mountain" is a normal scriptural metaphor for a kingdom. Such kingdoms stand out in the historical landscape as mountains do in the physical landscape. David uses such a picture poetically to describe Israel (Ps 30:7) and Jeremiah uses it pictorially of Babylon (Jer 51:25). The Messianic kingdom is described as a "stone which became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Dan 2:35).

[Dr Andy Woods](#) has an interesting 6 point analysis discussing why interpreting the "SEVEN MOUNTAINS" as a geographic reference to Rome is not the best interpretation....

Even if Revelation was intended to be understood by John's original audience, it is doubtful whether the seven hills of Revelation 17:9 are descriptive of the topography of Rome. Several reasons call this interpretation into question.

First, this interpretation is suspect because those who employ it frequently employ a dual hermeneutic resulting in hermeneutical vacillation. For example, Aune takes the seven hills (Rev 17:9) literally,⁽¹⁷¹⁾ the seven kings (Rev 17:10) symbolically,⁽¹⁷²⁾ and the ten kings (Rev 17:12) literally. ⁽¹⁷³⁾ Such an inconsistent approach leaves the impression that Aune arbitrarily vacillates back and forth between hermeneutical approaches based upon what fits his preconceived system.

Second, it seems odd that the seven hills should be equated with the well-known topography of Rome because Rev. 17:9 indicates that the identification of the hills calls for special **wisdom**. Why should such a well-known geographical locale to John's first century audience require special theological and symbolic insight for proper identification? ⁽¹⁷⁴⁾

Third, it is unclear that John's audience would have automatically understood the reference in Rev 17:9 to the seven hills of Rome. Although Rome was known as the city on the seven hills, it is interesting to note that eight and possibly nine hills could be counted for Rome.⁽¹⁷⁵⁾ Moreover, because every other

occurrence to oros in Revelation refers to a mountain rather than a “hill,” (176) Ewing advises caution before automatically viewing 17:9 as a reference to the seven “hills” of Rome. (177) Furthermore, the evidence to which we have access only places the “seven hills” language in the Western Mediterranean area. There is no record to indicate whether this usage was familiar in the East. Thus, it may be unwarranted to automatically presume that Rome as the city of the seven hills reference would be the shared understanding in Asia Minor. (178) In addition, Russell enumerates the seven hills of Jerusalem and then observes that Jerusalem has as good a claim as Rome to sit upon seven mountains. (179)

Fourth, if the reference to the city on the seven hills was universally well-known in John’s day as a reference to Rome, how would the use of this reference insulate John or his readers from Roman persecution? Those found with a copy of the document within their possession would be immediately suspected of advocating the overthrow of the capital of the Roman Empire. Thus, there is no security to be gained by using the phrase “seven hills.” (180)

Fifth, the reference to the seven mountains (17:9) which are seven heads actually belong to the beast (17:3, 7; 13:1) and not the woman named Babylon. Thus, these seven heads or mountains really have nothing to do with the entity Babylon at all. It is possible to argue that the woman is still associated with the seven hills because she is sitting on them. However, it is better to see this as referring to the woman’s control rather than her location. The other references to the woman sitting also refer to her control. Revelation 17:1 portrays the woman sitting on many waters. Rev. 17:15 explains that the waters represent peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. Thus, Revelation 17:1, 15 show the harlot’s control over the entire world. Furthermore, Revelation 17:3 depicts the woman as sitting on the beast, which again indicates control rather than location. Thus, if the harlot’s sitting indicates control rather than location twice in chapter 17, then consistency would seem to dictate that the harlot sitting on the seven hills in 17:9 would also indicate control rather than location. (181)

Sixth, the reference to the seven hills is better understood as referring to seven kingdoms. In order to correctly understand the symbolism of the seven mountains, it is necessary to look beyond the immediate culture of John’s day and instead to look to John’s Jewish heritage. Thus, Revelation must be interpreted in light of the Old Testament. (182) Such an approach makes sense because 278 of Revelation’s 404 verses allude to the Old Testament. (183) Jenkins explains:

The book of Revelation is the most thoroughly Jewish in its language and imagery of any New Testament book. The book speaks not the language of Paul, but of the Old Testament prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. (184)

The Old Testament frequently uses the term “mountain” to refer to a kingdom or empire (Ps 30:7; 68:15-16; Isa 2:2; 41:15; Jer 51:25; Dan 2:35, 45; Hab 3:6, 10; Zech 4:7). (185)

This type of imagery seems to be employed in Revelation 17:9 because verse 10 explains that the seven mountains are a metaphor for seven kings. This symbolic understanding of the seven mountains seems buttressed by the fact that the harlot sits on or beside seven mountains (17:9) just as she sits on or beside the many waters (17:1). Since the waters are symbolic of peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues (17:15), consistency seems to dictate that the seven mountains are symbolic as well. (186) This non-literal interpretation of the seven hills is also strengthened by the fact that the other references to oros in Revelation are sometimes to be understood non-literally as well (Rev 8:8).

Dr Charles Dyer in [VITAL NEW TESTAMENT ISSUES - Examining New Testament Passages and Problems](#) (bolding added for emphasis) has an excellent discussion on the Seven mountains/hills in Revelation 17:9.

THE LOCATION OF BABYLON ON SEVEN HILLS The beast on which the woman is sitting is described as having **seven heads**. When the angel interpreted this part of the vision to John he said, “**Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while**” (Rev 17:9–10). What are the seven hills on which the woman is sitting? The traditional understanding of the seven hills is that they refer to the city of Rome, known in John’s day as the seven-hilled city.

The seven heads of the beast are first identified as seven mountains upon which the harlot is sitting. There is little doubt that a first-century reader would understand this reference in any way other than as a reference to Rome, the city built upon seven hills. Rome began as a network of seven hill settlements on the left bank of the Tiber, and was from the time of Servius Tullius (her sixth king) an urbs septicolis.

This view that the seven hills refer to Rome has some serious flaws.

The first flaw is the assumed relationship between the woman and the hills. The seven heads are associated with the beast, not the woman. There is a distinction between the woman and the beast; and it is the beast that has the seven heads. The angel said, **“I shall tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads”** (Rev 17:7). If the seven hills are Rome, then the most that can be determined is that the Antichrist’s empire will be centered in the city of Rome. It does not identify the location of the harlot because she is not part of the beast.

Some might argue that the harlot is still to be associated with the city of seven hills because they are described in Rev 17:9 as “seven mountains on which the woman sits.” However, the harlot’s sitting on the seven hills is a reference to her control, not her location. In Rev 17:1 the woman is sitting on “many waters.” These are interpreted in Rev 17:15 as “peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.” The purpose of this part of the vision is not to show Babylon’s location or else the city would have to be parceled out throughout the world. Rather, the harlot sitting on the waters is a reference to her control over all the nations of the world. The woman is also said to sit on the entire beast (Rev 17:3). This would go beyond just the seven heads to include the Antichrist and the kings allied with him. Again the reference is to her control, not her location. **If the harlot’s sitting clearly indicates control twice in the chapter, is it not inconsistent to give that same figure a different meaning when it occurs for a third time?** It is far more consistent to view the harlot’s sitting as indicative of her control over the seven mountains, rather than having it point to her physical location.

Even if the seven hills are taken as a reference to Rome, that identification cannot be used to associate the harlot with Rome. The woman and the seven heads are distinct; and as stated, the position of the woman indicates control, not location. However, there is evidence to believe that the seven hills could refer to something other than the city of Rome.

The identification of the seven hills as Rome is based on the assumption that John’s prophecy was written exclusively for and understood by the people of John’s day. This idea is open to question. **Walvoord** noted this problem.

One of the common assumptions of those who reject the futurist position is that the Apocalypse is the creation of John’s thinking and was understandable by him in his generation.... The difficulty with this point of view is twofold: (1) Prophecy, as given in the Scripture, was not necessarily understandable by the writer or his generation, as illustrated in the case of Daniel (Da 12:4, 9). It is questionable whether the great prophets of the Old Testament always understood what they were writing (cf. 1 Peter 1:10–12). (2) It is of the nature of prophecy that often it cannot be understood until the time of the generation which achieves fulfillment. The assumption, therefore, that the book of Revelation was understandable in the first generation or that it was intended to be understood by that generation is without real basis. (SEE Walvoord, [The Revelation of Jesus Christ, pp. 22–23](#))

To understand properly the symbolism of the seven mountains one must go beyond the Greco-Roman society in which John wrote to the Jewish heritage in which he was raised. John was a Jew, and the Book of Revelation must be interpreted in light of the Old Testament. As Jenkins has said, “The book of Revelation is the most thoroughly Jewish in its language and imagery of any New Testament book. This book speaks not the language of Paul, but of the Old Testament prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.” (BORROW Ferrell Jenkins, [The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation \(Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976\), p. 22](#))

To understand the seven mountains one must go to the Old Testament to see how this symbol was used. The word **“mountain”** was often a symbolic reference to a kingdom or national power. The following are some examples of this usage of “mountain.”

“Now it will come about that in the last days, the **mountain** of the house of the Lord will be established as the **chief of the mountains**, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it” (Isa. 2:2).

“Behold, I have made you [Israel] a new, sharp threshing sledge with double edges; you will thresh the **mountains**, and pulverize them, and will make the hills like chaff” (Isa. 41:15).

“Behold, I am against you, **O destroying mountain**, who destroy the whole earth,’ declares the Lord, ‘and I will stretch out My hand against you, and roll you down from the crags, and I will make you a burnt out mountain’ ” (Jer. 51:25). (**The Lord is here speaking to the nation of Babylon**; see Jer. 50:1.

These chapters are quoted extensively in Revelation 17–18.)

“But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.... And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed” (Dan. 2:35, 44). **(God identified the mountain as the everlasting kingdom He will set up)**

The figure of a mountain is used in the Old Testament to refer to a kingdom.

However, there is yet another reason for identifying the seven mountains in Revelation 17 as a reference to seven kingdoms. This interpretation is to be preferred because it best explains the dual identification of the seven heads as both mountains and kings.

If the seven mountains are applied to Rome, then there is some difficulty in relating the seven kings to the vision. Most expositors must leave out three Roman emperors (Galba, Otho, and Vitellius) to have the history of Rome fit John’s chronology. **However, this is not sound interpretation**, for as Ladd points out, “Such a procedure is arbitrary, for Galba, Otho and Vitellius, unimportant as they may have been, were bona fide emperors and were recognized as such by ancient historians.” (BORROW Ladd, [A Commentary on the Revelation of John, p. 229.](#))

The divine interpretation associates each head with both a mountain and a king. This can best be explained by viewing the “mountain” as a figure of speech that refers to a kingdom and the king who was ruling it. This relationship is most clearly illustrated in Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 2. “You [Nebuchadnezzar] are the head of gold. And after you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you” (Dan. 2:38b–39). Daniel wrote that the head of gold was a king, but that the breast and arms of silver were another kingdom. Daniel was obviously viewing the kingdom of Babylon as personified in the king that stood before him. Thus he could switch from the king to the kingdom with no inconsistency. In light of this evidence it is best to say that this key refers to seven empires and their kings rather than to the city of Rome.

The four interpretive keys within the chapters provide vital information on the identity of Babylon. Babylon is first and foremost a literal city that will dominate the world. It will be characterized as a harlot that prostitutes her moral values for material luxury. The entire city is viewed as a mystery in that her future position, relationship to the Antichrist, and ultimate destruction had not been known before John’s vision. Evidently she will obtain control over seven nations, the Antichrist’s growing empire, and eventually the entire earth. These keys do not unlock some mystical system of religion that will infiltrate the world. Rather, they open the door of prophecy on a brick-and-mortar city intoxicated with power and luxury. The Babylon in these chapters is one that will exist geographically and politically.

Alan Johnson’s comments on Revelation 17:9 -

This and the following verses form the heart of the Roman emperor view of the Apocalypse. The woman not only sits on many waters (Rev 17:1, 15) and on the beast (Rev 17:3), but she also sits on seven hills. As previously stated, most scholars have no doubt that the seven hills refer to the seven hills of Rome, and the seven kings to seven successive emperors of that nation. Mounce, 315, states,

“There is little doubt that a first-century reader would understand this reference in any way other than as a reference to Rome, the city built upon seven hills.”

Yet there is very good reason to doubt that this interpretation in its various forms is the meaning John intended. The following dissenting view is drawn largely from Minear, 237.

In the first place, the seven hills belong to the monster, not the woman It is the woman (i.e., the city [Rev 17:18]) who sits on (i.e., has mastery over) the seven heads (or seven hills) of the monster. If the woman is the city of Rome, it is obvious that she did not exercise mastery over seven successive Roman emperors that are also seven traditional hills of Rome. This introduces an unwarranted twisting of the symbolism to fit a **preconceived interpretation**.

Also, how could the seven hills of Rome have any real importance to the diabolical nature of the beast or the woman? Nor does it help to make the prostitute the Roman Empire and the hills the city of Rome (so Kiddle), since the woman is explicitly identified in Rev 17:18 not as the empire but as the city. In fact, nowhere in the NT is Rome described as the enemy of the church.

If it is argued that what is really important in the mention of the seven hills is the identification with Rome, how then does this require any special divine wisdom (“this calls for a mind with wisdom” [Rev 17:9])? Caird notes that any Roman soldier who knew Greek could figure out that the seven hills referred to Rome. But whenever

divine wisdom is called for, the description requires theological and symbolical discernment, not mere geographical or numerical insight (cf. comments at Rev 13:18). Those who follow Charles and argue for a fusing of sources or images to explain the dual reference to the hills and kings simply evade the implications of the incongruity they have created.

In the seven other instances of the word **orē** in Revelation, it is always rendered “**mountain**,” except here in Rev 17:9, where it is translated “hills” (see Notes). Is this a case where previous exegesis has influenced even the best translations (KJV has “mountains”)? On the other hand, in the Prophets **mountains** allegorically refer to world powers (Isa 2:2; Jer 51:25; Da 2:35; Zec 4:7). It seems better, then, to interpret the **seven mountains** as a reference to the seven heads or kings, which describe not the city but the beast. **The expression “they are also seven kings” (Rev 17:10) seems to require strict identification of the seven mountains with seven kings rather than with a geographic location.**

John’s use of numbers elsewhere in the book likewise argues against the Roman Empire identification. He has already shown a strong disposition for their symbolic significance (e.g., seven churches, seals, trumpets, bowls, and thunders; twenty-four elders; 144,000 sealed, etc.). By his use of seven he indicates completeness or wholeness. The seven heads of the beast symbolize fullness of blasphemy and evil. It is much like our English idiom “the seven seas,” i.e., all the seas of the world. Caird, 218–19, recognizes the patent absurdity of trying to take the symbolic number seven and make it refer to exactly seven Roman emperors; yet he goes on to explain the seven kings as a reference to an indefinite number of emperors, including [Nero redivivus](#). While Caird’s view is much more in keeping with John’s symbolism, it still labors under the unacceptable assumption that John is identifying the beast with Rome and alludes to the [Nero redivivus myth](#). ([Expositor’s Bible Commentary](#)) (Bolding Added)

[John Walvoord](#) on Revelation 17:9 -

The explanation of the beast introduced by the unusual phrase “here is the mind which hath wisdom” anticipates the difficulty and complexity of the revelation to follow. The reader is warned that spiritual wisdom is required to understand that which is unfolded. The first key to the revelation is in the statement “**The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sitteth.**” Many expositors refer this to Rome. Seven hills formed the nucleus of the ancient city on the left bank of the Tiber. These hills received the names of Palatine, Aventine, Caelian, Esquiline, Viminal, Quirinal, and Capitoline. (William Smith, Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography, II, 719–21.) As Rome grew, however, the hill Janiculum on the other side of the river Tiber was often included among the seven, as Alford does, omitting the Capitoline. Later the hill Pincian to the north of the ancient city was also included in the hills of Rome as the city developed and moved north. This passage in Revelation is taken, therefore, to indicate that the seat of the ecclesiastical power will be in Rome geographically rather than in Babylon. Throughout its history Rome has been described as **the city of seven hills** as indicated in coins which refer to it in this way and in countless allusions in Roman literature. Victorinus, one of the first to write a commentary on the book of Revelation, identified the seven mountains as the city of Rome.

The **seven heads** of the beast, however, are said to be symbolic of **seven kings** described in verse 10. Five of these are said to have fallen, one is in contemporary existence, that is, in John’s lifetime, the seventh is yet to come and will be followed by another described as the eighth, which is the beast itself. In the Greek there is no word for “there,” thus translated literally, the phrase is “and are seven kings.” The seven heads are best explained as referring to seven kings who represent seven successive forms of the kingdom. Because the seven heads are identified with kings in verse 10, some prefer to divorce the meaning from the city of Rome entirely and center the ultimate fulfillment in a rebuilt Babylon on the site of ancient Babylon.

Seiss ([see original writing](#)) marshals a convincing array of evidence that the seven mountains of Rev 17:9 refer not to the seven hills of Rome but rather to successive imperial governments. An extensive quotation of Seiss on this important point is necessary to present the matter fully:

John further saw this Woman sitting upon a scarlet Beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. This Beast is the same described in chapter 13. He is referred to here, not so much to make us better acquainted with him, as to give us a full understanding of the Great Harlot and her relationships. The “wisdom” or inner sense and meaning of the presentation is, that “the seven heads are seven mountains, where the Woman sitteth upon them, and are seven kings.” These are the words which are supposed to fix the application of the picture to the city of Rome, as Rome is called a city of seven hills. But a flimsier basis for such a controlling and all-conditioning conclusion is perhaps nowhere to be

found. The seven hills of the city of Rome, to begin with, are not mountains, as every one who has been there can testify; and if they were, they are more characteristic of the situation of Rome than the seven hills are characteristic of Jerusalem. But the taking of them as literal hills or mountains at all is founded upon a total misreading of the angel's words.

A mountain, or prominent elevation on the surface of the earth, is one of the common scriptural images, or representatives of a kingdom, regal dominion, empire, or established authority. So David, speaking of the vicissitudes which he experienced as the king of Israel, says: "Lord, by Thy favour Thou didst make my mountain to stand strong" —margin, "settled strength for my mountain," meaning his kingdom and dominion. (Ps. 30:7.) So the Lord in His threat against the throne and power of Babylon said: "I am against thee, O destroying mountain, which destroyest all the earth; and I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and will roll thee down from the rocks, and will make thee a burnt mountain." (Jer. 51:25.) So the kingdom of the Messiah is likened to "a stone, which became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." (Dan. 2:35.) And this is exactly the sense in which the angel uses the word here, as he himself tells us. He does not say, "the seven heads are seven mountains, where the Woman sitteth upon them," and there leave off; but he adds immediately, "and they are seven kings," or personified kingdoms. The mountains, then, are not piles of material rocks and earth at all, but royal or imperial powers, declared to be such by the angel himself. The description, therefore, so far from fixing the application to the Papacy, or to the city of Rome, decisively settles that it cannot possibly apply to either, for neither has seven such mountains. The late Albert Barnes has written in his Notes that "all respectable interpreters agree that it refers to Rome; either Pagan, Christian, or Papal." Of course he is one of the "respectable interpreters," but then he should be able to tell which of the objects he names it is, for it cannot be all three. Most people assign Dr. E. W. Hengstenberg, the great Berlin professor, a place among "respectable interpreters," but Hengstenberg says Rome cannot possibly be meant by these seven heads. The angel says they are seven regal mountains, seven kings, seven great ruling powers. Rome Papal cannot be meant, for Rome Papal has no such count of seven regal powers. Rome Christian cannot be meant, for Rome Christian, as distinguished from Rome Papal, never supported and carried the great Harlot in any possible sense, and could not without ceasing to be Christian. Rome Pagan cannot be meant, for Rome Pagan ceased with the conversion of the throne, and no count of emperors or kings can be found in it to "respectably" fill out the angel's description. The succession of the forms of administration, enumerated as Kings, Consuls, Dictators, Decemvirs, Military Tribunes, and Emperors, were not seven kings or regal mountains. Prior to the empire most of these administrations were less than anthills in the history of the world, and furnished rather slender ponies for the great purple-clad and pearl-decked mother of harlots to ride on in her majesty. Rome surely comes into the count of these seven mountains of empire; but to make Rome the whole seven, including also the eighth, requires a good deal more "respectability" of interpretation in that line than has thus far appeared. Barnes is sure the whole thing applies to Rome because this Woman "hath rule or kingdom upon the kings of the earth, and there was no other empire on the earth to which this could be properly applied." But this assumes that the Woman is an empire, for which there is not a particle of evidence. The Woman is not an empire any more than the Church of Christ is an empire. She rides upon empires, kings, and powers of the world, and inspires, leads, and controls them; but she herself is not one of them, and is above all of them so that they court her, and are bewitched and governed by her— governed, not with the reins of empire, but with the lure of her fornication. This Woman is longer-lived than any one empire. We have seen that she bears the name of Babylon, and is not destroyed until the day of judgment. The seven imperial mountains on which she rides must therefore fill up the whole interval; or there was a time, and the most of her history, when she did not ride at all, which is not the fact. Seven is itself the number of fulness, which includes the whole of its kind. The reference here is to kings, to mountains of temporal dominion, to empires. It must therefore take in all of them. And when men once get over their "respectability," and rise to the height of range of the interpreting angel's view of things, they will have no difficulty in identifying the mountains, or the times to which they belong.

Of these seven regal mountains, John was told "the five are fatten," dead, passed away, their day over; "the one is," that is, was standing, at that moment, was then in sway and power; "the other is not yet come, and when he shall come, he must continue a little time." What regal mountain, then, was in power at the time John wrote? There can be no question on that point; it was the Roman empire. Thus, then, we ascertain and identify the sixth in the list, which shows what sort of kings the angel meant. Of the same class with this, and belonging to the same category, there are five others—five which had then already run their course and passed away. But what five imperial mountains like Rome had been and gone, up to that

time? Is history so obscure as not to tell us with unmistakable certainty? Preceding Rome the world had but five great names or nationalities answering to imperial Rome, and those scarce a schoolboy ought to miss. They are Greece, Persia, Babylon, Assyria, and Egypt; no more, and no less. And these all were imperial powers like Rome. Here, then, are six of these regal mountains; the seventh is not yet come. When it comes it is to endure but a short time. This implies that each of the others continues a long time; and so, again, could not mean the dictators, decemvirs, and military tribunes of the early history of Rome, for some of them lasted but a year or two. Thus, then, by the clearest, most direct, and most natural signification of the words of the record, we are brought to the identification of these seven mountain kings as the seven great world-powers, which stretch from the beginning of our present world to the end of it. Daniel makes the number less; but he started with his own times, and looked only down the stream. Here the account looks backward as well as forward. That which is first in Daniel is the third here, and that which is the sixth here is the fourth in Daniel. Only in the commencing point is there any difference. The visions of Daniel and the visions of John are from the same Divine Mind, and they perfectly harmonize, only that the latest are the amplest.

By these seven great powers then, filling up the whole interval of this world's history, this great Harlot is said to be carried. On these she rides, according to the vision. It is not upon one alone, nor upon any particular number of them, but upon all of them, the whole seven-headed Beast, that she sits. These seven powers, each and all, support the Woman as their joy and pride; and she accepts and uses them, and sways their administrations, and rides in glory by means of them. They are her devotees, lovers, and most humble servants; and she is their patronizing and most noble lady, with a mutuality of favours and inter-communion belonging to her designation. This is the picture as explained by the angel. But, to say that the Romish Papacy was thus carried, nurtured, and sustained by the ancient empires of Greece, Persia, Babylon, Assyria, and Egypt, would be a great lie on history. It was not so. In the nature of things it could not be so. By no means then can this Harlot be the Papacy alone, as maintained by all "respectable interpreters." Furthermore, it is a matter of fact, that as surely as Rome in John's day, and Greece, Persia, Babylon, Assyria, and Egypt, before Rome, existed and bore sway on earth as regal mountains, so surely and conspicuously were they each and all ridden by this great Harlot. They were each and all the lovers, supporters, and defenders of organized falsehood in religion, the patrons of idolatry, the foster friends of all manner of spiritual harlotry. Nimrod, the hunter of the sons of men and author of despotic government, established his idolatrous inventions as the crown and dory of his empire, and intertwined the worship of idols with the standards of his power. It was the same with Egypt, whose colossal remains, unfading paintings, and mummy scrolls confirm the Scripture portraiture of her disgusting devotions, and tell how the priests of these abominations were honoured by the throne, of which they were the chief advisers. It was so with Assyria, as the recent exhumations of Nineveh abundantly attest. It was so with the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar, as Daniel, who lived amid it all, has written. It was so with Persia, as her various records all declare. It was so with Greece, as her own most cherished poets sung, her mightiest orators proclaimed, and all her venerated artists and historians have set forth. It was so with Rome, as all her widespread monuments still show, and all the Christian testimonies, with her own, render clear and manifest as the sun. And it will be so with the last, which is yet to come, as declared in the apocalyptic foreshowings, and in all the prophecies in the Book of God upon the subject. It requires but a glance at history to see that spiritual harlotry has ever been the particular pet and delight of all the Beast-powers of time. If ever the worship and requirements of the true God won their respect and patronage, they soon corrupted it to their own selfish and ambitious ends, or never were easy until freed from the felt restraint.⁸

The final form of world government, symbolized by the eighth beast itself, is the world empire of the great tribulation time. The revived Roman Empire which will be in sway immediately after the rapture of the church is apparently indicated by the seventh head, while the beast, described in verse 11 as the eighth, is the world empire, which is destroyed by Jesus Christ at His second coming. In summation, what is described in verses 8 through 11 is the final form of Gentile world power in alliance with apostate religion symbolized by the harlot.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum -

Footsteps of the Messiah on Revelation 17:9 - Then verses 9–10 explain the meaning of the **seven heads**. Verse nine states that the seven heads are **seven mountains**. Unfortunately, too many Bible teachers have stopped here, ignored the following verse, and consequently concluded that the **seven mountains** represent Rome, for Rome is a city sitting upon seven hills. However, a number of cities in the Middle East claim to sit upon seven hills or mountains. So this is not enough to pinpoint Rome as the place to which this passage

refers. But the identification with Rome becomes totally unwarranted if the verse is seen in its complete context. The fact that the **seven heads** are said to be **seven mountains** shows that these mountains are to be taken symbolically. As mentioned previously, whenever the word **mountain** is used symbolically, it is always a symbol of a king, kingdom, or throne. This is the case here. In fact, the very next verse, verse ten, actually interprets the meaning of the **seven mountains**. Verse nine does not end the sentence, since the sentence continues into verse ten. Having stated that the **seven heads are seven mountains** in verse nine, he clearly states in verse ten that these **seven mountains** represent something other than real **mountains**: and they are **seven kings**. The meaning of **mountains** here is quite consistent with its symbolic usage everywhere else in the Scriptures.

In verse nine, the **seven heads are seven mountains**, and in verse ten the pronoun **they** clearly indicates that these **seven mountains** are to be viewed as **seven kings**. It is not Rome the city that is meant, but seven kings. Verse ten further states that of these seven heads-mountains-kings, five were fallen by John's day, one was present at that time, and one more was yet to come. If this refers to Rome the city, then five hills should no longer be in existence, only one should be there now, with another to arise in the future! **Contextually then, this is an impossible interpretation.**

Henry Morris - The seven heads of the beast are said to represent seven mountains on which the woman sits. This has been widely interpreted as the "seven-hilled city of Rome," with the woman correspondingly identified as the Roman Catholic Church. Such an identification is wrong, however, for several reasons. The Roman Catholic Church does not sit on the seven hills of Rome. Its churches are all over the world and its headquarters only in Vatican City. Furthermore, many cities have seven hills, and Rome itself has more than seven. Besides that, a "hill" (Greek *bounos*) such as in Rome is not a "mountain" (Greek *oros*), and it is the latter word that is used here. The clearest interpretation is shown in the very next verse, which identifies the seven mountains as seven kings, with one being the beast mentioned in this chapter. The latter we have already seen to represent a Satan-controlled kingdom, the first (and last) in a series of similar kingdoms, all comprising political Babylon. Thus the scarlet-arrayed harlot is seen as supported through the ages by seven kingdoms..... The seven heads of the beast on which the harlot rides are thus interpreted as **seven mountains**, but these in turn are interpreted as **seven kings**. The equating of mountains with kings requires yet another link in the chain to conform to scriptural example elsewhere. That is, **mountains** often represent kingdoms, and each kingdom is usually equated with some prominent king at its head. For example, prophesying of the messianic kingdom coming in the millennium, Isaiah says "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the **mountain** of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the **mountains**, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it" (Isaiah 2:2). Speaking of the same kingdom, the prophet Daniel said: "... and the stone that smote the image became a great **mountain**, and filled the whole earth" (Daniel 2:35). The interpretation of this **mountain**, which (in the emperor Nebuchadnezzar's vision) had destroyed the great image representing the age-long succession of great world kingdoms, was as follows: "... the God of heaven [shall] set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: ... and the kingdom ... shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Daniel 2:44). (Revelation Record)

John MacArthur - The first aspect of the vision that needs to be understood is that the **seven heads** of the beast (v. 3) are **seven mountains** or hills on which the woman sits. Some commentators associate the seven mountains with Rome, famous for being built on seven hills, and identify the woman as the Roman Catholic Church. But such an interpretation is too narrow; something more than just Rome must be in view, because Antichrist's empire is worldwide. Nor can the woman be the Roman Catholic Church, since, as noted above, verse 18 identifies her as the city of Babylon. Also "when the woman sits on the 'many waters' (v. 1) this must be taken as metaphorical since it is interpreted in Rev 17:15; when the woman sits upon 'a scarlet coloured beast' this again is symbolic; thus when she sits upon the '**seven mountains**' this too must be figurative" (James Allen, What the Bible Teaches: Revelation [Kilmarnock, Scotland: John Ritchie Ltd., 1997], 424). **Finally, the angel's call for spiritual discernment would have been pointless if the seven mountains were an obvious geographical reference to Rome.** (Revelation Commentary) (Bolding Added)

Hampton Keathley on Revelation 17:9 - This system of the beast also has "**seven heads**. This is explained for us in 17:9-10. "The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits and they are seven kings..." The seven heads are seven mountains and seven kings. Some see this as a reference first to the seven hill city of Rome, and then to seven dynasties or rulers of the old Roman empire, as kings, consuls, dictators, decemvirs, military tribunes and emperors, or as seven successive emperors of Imperial Rome, as Nero (A.D. 54-68), Galba (A.D. 68), Otho (A.D. 69), Vitellius (A.D. 69), Vespasian (A.D. 69-79), Titus (A.D. 79-81), and Domitian (A.D. 81-91) under whom great persecution of the church occurred. So it would thus refer to the city and to those who ruled in Rome. Quite clearly the beast is not only a kingdom or an empire, but also a man (cf. 2 Thess. 2:8-9; Dan. 9:27; 11:36; 7:24-25). But another and I believe a better interpretation of the seven heads is that the **seven heads** represent seven phases of Gentile powers or nations which find their culmination in the beast. The ten horns look at the future history of the beast and the seven heads, the past history. The **seven heads are mountains**, seven successive historic Gentile kingdoms, who are represented

by seven kings or rulers. This is supported by the following:

- (1) Revelation 17:10 tells us the **seven mountains** are **kings**. This could indicate that the mountains are symbolical for the kingdoms these seven kings represent.
- (2) Rome is known as the city of seven **hills**, but the hills of Rome are not **mountains**.
- (3) The term **mountain** is commonly used in Scripture as an image of a kingdom (Psalm 30:7; Isaiah 2:3; Dan. 2:35, 45; Jer. 51:5).
- (4) But more importantly, chapter 17 deals with the harlot system of Babylon which goes all the way back to the time of Nimrod and all these Gentile world powers have been her lovers and supporters, not Rome alone (cf. 17:1–2, 15). It is more likely that the **seven mountains** refer to seven successive Gentile kingdoms which go way back, far beyond Rome.

Preacher's Outline Study Bible (POSB) on Revelation 17:9 - the **seven mountains** or seven heads are said by many to refer to Rome. That is, in the end time religious Babylon or false religion will sit in Rome. This is because Rome was known in ancient times as the city on seven hills. **But note: this is not what John says.** He clearly says that the **seven heads** represent seven kings or governments (Rev 17:10). By **seven mountains** he means that false religion sits upon seven kingdoms or empires that have complete and full rule and power. Note that the seven mountains and seven heads mean seven kings of kingdoms and empires. Note that this is what Scripture says.

Rod Mattoon - The seven heads of the beast's kingdom are seven mountains. Some scholars have concluded that the seven mountains represent Rome because it is a city built on seven hills. They also believe the woman referred to here is the Roman Catholic Church. Technically speaking, Rome was built upon nine hills along the Tiber River: Palatine, Aventine, Caelian, Equiline, Viminal, Quirinal, Capitoline, and later, Janiculum, and Pincian. I believe there is a better interpretation to this passage.

John states that the seven mountains are seven kings or kingdoms. Mountains in the Bible can be a symbol for kingdoms.

Isaiah 2:2—And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

Jeremiah 51:25—Behold, I am against thee, O destroying mountain, saith the Lord, which destroyest all the earth: and I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and will make thee a burnt mountain.

Daniel 2:35—Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.

When John wrote the Revelation, five world empires or kingdoms had already fallen in history: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece. Rome was the major power in John's time. The seventh kingdom was yet to come which I believe will be the Revived Roman Empire. The eighth kingdom is possibly a reference to the AntiChrist himself and his own kingdom in which he demands the worship of the world.

Others feel that the reference to the seven heads refer to the Roman emperors. When John had recorded the Revelation, five emperors were already dead: Julius Caesar, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero. The Emperor of John's day was Domitian. The seventh emperor was believed to be the AntiChrist. I don't hold to this position, but it is one that is being presented.

Warren Wiersbe - The seven mountains (Rev. 17:9) probably symbolize the city of Rome, built on seven hills. Certainly in John's day, the Roman Empire was living in luxury, spreading false religion, polluting the nations with its idolatry and sin, and persecuting the church.....But the woman must not be separated from "the beast" that carries her. "The beast" has seven heads and ten horns. The seven heads symbolize seven mountains (Rev. 17:9) and also seven kings or kingdoms (Rev. 17:10), in keeping with Old Testament imagery (Ps. 30:7; Dan. 2:35). I have already suggested that the seven mountains can be interpreted geographically as the seven hills of Rome, but they may also be interpreted historically as seven kingdoms.

Daniel Akin on Revelation 17:9 - There is no unanimity among Bible interpreters on verses 9–12. Godly men and women understand the details differently. The fact that we need wisdom is an understatement! Now, most agree that the phrase "**the seven heads are seven mountains**" is a reference to Rome in the first-century context. The city was known as "the city on seven hills." Seven would also communicate great power and authority, something that is true of every coming of the beast.

Adrian Rogers - Notice the power with which the beast comes. Revelation 17:9 says, "Here is the mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated." What city is built on seven hills? Rome. Will this power be concentrated in Rome?

Robert Mounce is very dogmatic - The **seven heads** of the beast are first identified as **seven hills** upon which the prostitute is sitting. There is little doubt that a first-century reader would understand this reference in any way other than as a reference to Rome, the city built upon seven hills. Rome began as a network of seven hill settlements on the left bank of the Tiber, and was from the time of Servius Tullius (her sixth king) an urbs septicollis. The reference is commonplace among Roman authors.³³ Some writers point out that in OT usage the hill may be a symbol of power (cf. Dan 2:35; Jer 51:25), and interpret the seven hills as successive

kingdoms or empires.³⁴ Others take the number symbolically.³⁵ Whatever the overtones may be, the immediate reference is to the city of Rome. In John's day Rome epitomized all the antagonism and opposition to the Christian faith. The beast is about to come from the Abyss and become incarnate in this hostile world order of which the city on seven hills is the governing center.

Grant Osborne - The angel identifies the seven heads with "seven hills or mountains," often used as a euphemism for Rome because it was built on seven hills. In Domitian's time a festival called the Septimontium celebrated this fact. In 17:1 the woman was said to sit on "many waters" (= the inhabitants, 17:15), meaning she ruled over them. Here she sits on the seven hills, meaning she is enthroned on Rome.² (Revelation Verse by Verse)

John Phillips - The next thing we are told is where the beast comes. We are now told exactly where the beast concentrates his power at first. It is at Rome. John says, And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. This pinpoints the seat of imperial power. Rome is the city of seven hills and has been known as such from the earliest times. Rome, as a center of political power, is not of much importance today, but it will be. The headquarters of the United States of Europe, federated under the Beast, will be there, at least until the Beast builds his new city of Babylon. (Exploring Revelation)

M S Mills - The woman sits on mountains, not hills, so the theory that she is the city on seven hills (Rome) is not necessarily valid. (This distinction between 'mountains' and 'hills' should not be pressed too far, however, as no Johannine book uses the word for 'hill' ['oreinos' (hills) is only found in Luke 1:39,65], though the other uses of 'oros' in Revelation are more likely to represent mountains than hills.)

Leon Morris - The seven heads are explained as seven hills on which the woman sits. This identifies her with Rome, for the seven hills of that city are often mentioned in ancient literature. (Ladd sees a reference to seven empires and their rulers, but most agree that Rome is meant.) But Rome does not exhaust the meaning of the symbol. As we have seen, the great city is every city and no city. It is civilized man, mankind organized apart from God. It has its embodiment in every age. 'Babylon, then, is the world as the centre of seduction at any moment of history, particularly during this entire present dispensation. The harlot, Babylon, always opposes the bride, new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:9ff.)' (Hendriksen). In the first century, Rome was a striking embodiment of what John means by Babylon. In Rome, as nowhere else, people could see the city of mankind bent on its own blasphemous way, opposing with all its might the things of God. The heads are also seven kings. They symbolize both hills and kings. Attention moves now to the city's rulers.

Nelson Study Bible note on Revelation 17:9-10 - The **seven heads** of the beast (v. 3) symbolize both **seven mountains** and **seven kings**. Since the word **mountains** also means "hills" in Revelation (Rev 14:1), most interpreters understand this as referring to the seven hills along the Tiber River, a well-known designation of the city of Rome. However, **seven mountains** may also refer to successive world empires, since **mountains** are typically symbols of earthly kingdoms or empires (see Ps. 30:7; Jer. 51:25; Dan. 2:44, 45). According to this view, five would be past kingdoms (perhaps Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece), with sixth being the Roman Empire and seventh another which has not yet come. Perhaps it is to be a revived Rome Empire.

Defender's Study Bible - seven mountains. Many commentators have alleged the "seven heads" to be the "seven-hilled city" of Rome, hence deducing the great harlot to be the Roman Catholic Church. Such identification is impossible, however. Many cities have seven hills, and Rome actually has more. Besides, the Catholic Church does not sit on the hills of Rome, for its churches are all over the world and its headquarters are in Vatican City. Furthermore, a "hill" (Greek bounos) is not a "mountain" (Greek oros). The seven "mountains" are quite clearly expounded in the next verse as seven kings and/or kingdoms.

MacArthur Study Bible - 17:9 seven mountains. The Gr. word is often used of hills (Mt 5:1; 15:29; Jn 6:15; 8:1). Many commentators interpret this expression to mean Rome, which sits on 7 hills. It is true that the final worldwide system of false religion includes, but is not necessarily limited to, Rome; but specifically, the **7 mountains** in context likely symbolize the 7 kingdoms and their **kings** of v. 10.

Faithlife Study Bible on Revelation 17:9 flatly stated "seven mountains on which the woman sits. The city of Rome was well-known for being built upon seven hills.

ESV Study Bible on Revelation 17:9 - Rome, which then had "dominion over the kings of the earth" (v. 18), rests on **seven mountains** (or **seven hills**; cf. Introduction to Romans: The Ancient City of Rome). In prophetic imagery, **mountains** symbolize the seat of power (Jer. 51:24-25; Da 2:35, 44-45). The beast's **seven heads**, symbolizing both **mountains** and **kings**, show its power over earth-dwellers whose names are not in the book of life. Efforts to identify in history the five ... fallen kings (or kingdoms), the sixth (current) king, a seventh (future) king who would reign briefly, and the eighth that belongs to the seven have yielded conflicting conclusions (proposals include several Roman emperors, several world empires, or simply numerical symbols standing for all worldly kingdoms that culminate in the beast).

NIV Study Bible (Revised) - 17:9 seven hills. It is perhaps significant that Rome began as a network of seven hill settlements on the east bank of the Tiber River (see map, p. 1962). Its designation as the city on seven hills is commonplace among Roman writers (e.g., Virgil, Martial, Cicero).

Ryrie Study Bible - 17:9 seven mountains. Though Rome is built on more than seven hills, it has been known as the legendary city on seven hills, indicating that the center of Antichrist's power will be Rome.

New Oxford Annotated Bible - 17:9 This calls for a mind that has wisdom, like the formula in 13:18, this expression introduces the interpretation of the symbolism of the preceding verses. The seven mountains are the seven hills of Rome. The seven kings are Roman emperors (cf. Dan 11:2; 2 Esd 12:22–26), which interpreters have sought to identify with emperors from Julius Caesar to Domitian.

David Guzik - The seven heads are seven mountains: Many quickly associate the seven mountains with Rome and the Papacy, because Rome is well known as the city on seven hills. Yet literally, the Greek word means mountains, not hills. Many commentators - especially those who see all of Revelation fulfilled in history - regard the seven mountains as an irrefutable connection with Rome. Clarke is a good example of this when he writes, "This verse has been almost universally considered to allude to the seven hills upon which Rome originally stood." But in the Bible mountains are sometimes a figure of governments (such as in Daniel 2:35) and the city of Rome is built on hills, not mountains.

Tony Evans Study Bible - Key to understanding this scene is John's description of the beast's seven heads [as] seven mountains on which the woman is seated (17:9). Historically, the Roman Empire has been described as a nation built on seven hills or seven mountains. Accordingly, John seems to be saying the antichrist will lead a renewed Roman Empire. Worldliness and rebellion against God will spread across it, personified by the unfaithful woman seated on it.

Reformation Study Bible - 17:9 seven mountains. Rome was built on seven mountains, or hills.

KJV Study Bible on Revelation 17:9 - The **seven heads** of the Beast represent **seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth**. The city of Rome was known throughout the ancient world as a city built on seven hills or mountains. John notes that the wise mind will make the proper identification. The woman apparently represents idolatrous, anti-God civilization, centered at Rome but with worldwide influence (cf. v. 15). The identification of the seven heads as Rome shows that the Beast will have his major base of operations at Rome also (cf. Dan. 9:26—the "people of the prince that shall come" are the Romans in A.D. 70).