

CHAPTER 17

This chapter contains another representation of those things that had been revealed before concerning the wickedness and ruin of antichrist. This antichrist had been before represented as a beast, and is now described as a great whore. And here,

- I. The apostle is invited to see this vile woman (v. 1, 2).
- II. He tells us what an appearance she made (v. 3-6).
- III. The mystery of it is explained to him (v. 7-12). And,
- IV. Her ruin foretold (v. 13, etc.).

⌘ REVELATION 17:1-6

THE FALL OF BABYLON

Here we have a new vision, not as to the matter of it, for that is contemporary with what came under the three last vials; but as to the manner of description, etc. Observe,

1. The invitation given to the apostle to take a view of what was here to be represented: *Come hither, and I will show thee the judgment of the great whore*, etc., v. 1. This is a name of great infamy. A whore [in this passage] is one that is married, and has been false to her husband's bed, has forsaken the guide of her youth, and broken the covenant of God. She had been a prostitute to the kings of the earth, whom she had intoxicated *with the wine of her fornication*.
2. The appearance she made: it was gay and gaudy, like such sort of creatures: *She was arrayed in purple, and scarlet colour, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls*, v. 4. Here were all the allurements of worldly honour and riches, pomp and pride, suited to sensual and worldly minds.
3. Her principal seat and residence — *upon the beast that had seven heads and ten horns*; that is to say, Rome, the city on seven hills, infamous for idolatry, tyranny, and blasphemy.

4. Her name, which *was written on her forehead*. It was the custom of impudent harlots to hang out signs, with their names, that all might know what they were. Now in this observe,

(1.) She is named from her place of residence — *Babylon the great*. But, that we might not take it for the old Babylon literally so called, we are told there is a mystery in the name; it is some other great city resembling the old Babylon.

(2.) She is named from her infamous way and practice; not only a harlot, but a mother of harlots, breeding up harlots, and nursing and training them up to idolatry, and all sorts of lewdness and wickedness — the parent and nurse of all false religion and filthy conversation.

5. Her diet: she satiated herself with *the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus*. She drank their blood with such greediness that she intoxicated herself with it; it was so pleasant to her that she could not tell when she had had enough of it: she was satiated, but never satisfied.

⌘ REVELATION 17:7-13

THE FALL OF BABYLON

Here we have the mystery of this vision explained. The apostle wonders at the sight of this woman: the angel undertakes to open this vision to him, it being the key of the former visions; and he tells the apostle what was meant by the beast on which the woman sat; but it is so explained as still to need further explanation.

1. This beast *was, and is not, and yet is*; that is, it *was* a seat of idolatry and persecution; *and is not*, that is, not in the ancient form, which was pagan; *and yet it is*, it is truly the seat of idolatry and tyranny, though of another sort and form. *It ascends out of the bottomless pit* (idolatry and cruelty are the issue and product of hell), and it shall return thither and go into perdition.

2. *This beast has seven heads*, which have a double signification.

(1.) *Seven mountains* — the seven hills on which Rome stands; and

(2.) *Seven kings* — seven sorts of government. Rome was governed by kings, consuls, tribunes, decemviri, dictators, emperors who were pagan, and emperors who were Christian. Five of these were extinct when this prophecy was written; one was then in being, that is, the pagan emperor; and the other, that is, the Christian emperor, was yet to come, v. 10. This beast, the papacy, makes an eighth governor, and sets up idolatry again.

3. This beast had ten horns; which are said to be *ten kings which have as yet received no kingdoms; as yet*, that is, as some, shall not rise up till the Roman empire be broken in pieces; or, as others, shall not rise up till near the end of antichrist's reign, and so shall reign but as it were *one hour with her*, but shall for that time be very unanimous and very zealous in that interest, and entirely devoted to it, divesting themselves of their prerogatives and revenues (things so dear to princes), out of an unaccountable fondness for the papacy.

◀67▶ REVELATION 17:14-18

THE FALL OF BABYLON

Here we have some account of the downfall of Babylon, to be more fully described in the following chapter.

I. Here is a war begun between the beast and his followers, and the Lamb and his followers. The beast and his army, to an eye of sense, appear much stronger than the Lamb and his army: one would think an army with a lamb at the head of them could not stand before *the great red dragon*. But,

II. Here is a victory gained by the Lamb: *The Lamb shall overcome*. Christ must reign till all enemies *be put under his feet*; he will be sure to meet with many enemies, and much opposition, but he will also be sure to gain the victory.

III. Here is the ground or reason of the victory assigned; and this is taken,

1. From the character of the Lamb: *He is King of kings and Lord of lords*. He has, both by nature and by office, supreme dominion and power over all things; all the powers of earth and hell are subject to his check and control.

2. From the character of his followers: *They are called, and chosen, and faithful.* They are called out by commission to this warfare; they are chosen and fitted for it, and they will be faithful in it. Such an army, under such a commander, will at length carry all the world before them.

IV. The victory is justly aggrandized.

1. By the vast multitude who paid obedience and subjection to the beast and to the whore. She sat upon (that is, presided over) many waters; and these waters were so many multitudes of people, and nations, of all languages; yea, she reigned not only over kingdoms, but over the kings, and they were her tributaries and vassals, v. 15, 18.

2. By the powerful influence which God hereby showed he had over the minds of great men. Their hearts were in his hand, and he turned them as he pleased; for,

(1.) It was of God, and to fulfil his will, that these kings *agreed to give their kingdom unto the beast*; they were judicially blinded and hardened to do so. And,

(2.) It was of God that afterwards their hearts were turned against the whore, to hate her, and to *make her desolate and naked, and to eat her flesh, and burn her with fire*; they shall at length see their folly, and how they have been bewitched and enslaved by the papacy, and, out of a just resentment, shall not only fall off from Rome, but shall be made the instruments of God's providence in her destruction.