

May 26, 2013

The Harlot and the Bride

By Bryan Hodge

Two very different women are portrayed in the book of Revelation. Let's notice...

The Harlot (Revelation 17)

Dress: "The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones" (17:4). The woman is wearing the same color as the beast (cf. 17:3), the same color used to describe sin (Isa. 1:18). The garments and jewelry may represent wealth, or it may represent the attire of a harlot.

Position: She sat on many waters (17:1). That is, she had dominion over many people, nations, and tongues (17:15, 18). She sat on a scarlet beast (17:3). This beast had seven heads and ten horns (17:3 cf. 13:1). The seven heads represent seven mountains (17:9). Rome was built upon seven mountains: Palatine, Aventine, Caelian, Esquiline, Viminal, Quirinal, and Capitoline. She had dominion in this city.

Deeds: Her cup was full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication (17:4). Harlotry, fornication, and adultery are sometimes used symbolically of spiritual unfaithfulness (Isa. 1:21; Jer. 2:20; 3:9; Ezek. 16:15-16, 25-26; Hos. 2:2; 4:15-18; Nah. 3:4, etc.).

She seduced the kings of the earth, and the earth's inhabitants to partake in her fornication (17:2).

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Name: She wore on her head a name identifying her with Babylon (17:5). Rome has already been cross-referenced with Babylon [The four beasts of Daniel 7 became one beast in Revelation 13. This beast was on seven mountains (13:1 cf. 17:9)]. Babylon served as a cryptic way of referring to a world power, and that world power was Rome.

Location: She was in the wilderness (17:3). This is where the persecuted church was seen (12:6). Depending on the position taken – this either refers to the church becoming corrupt, or this refers to this harlot appearing to tempt the church.

Persecution: This woman was involved in the persecution of the saints (17:6). Remember that the same was true of the beast of the earth (13:15-18).

Identity: She was associated with Rome (17:3 cf. 17:9). She was over nations (17:1 cf. 17:15, 18). (1) Some understand the harlot to be emperor worship. (2) Others understand this to be speaking of the Roman church. Either way, remember that one of the greatest opponents of God's faithful was false religion (13:11-17 cf. 19:20; 20:10). It seems to me that the harlot is just another description on the beast of the earth (13:11-18).

Methods: "The three instruments of destruction that Satan employs against the people of God are persecution, deception, and seduction" (Hodwin, *The Overcomers*, p. 175). The E.S.V. Study Bible makes the following observation: The beast=intimidating violence; The false prophet=deceptive heresy; The prostitute=beguiling affluence. It seems to me that these three are one. However, they are described under different figures to describe different means of opposing truth.

THE BRIDE

Dress: "To her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright (19:8). Those who overcame were to be dressed in white (3:4-5). The ones spoken of had overcome the wicked one (1 Jn. 2:13-14), the dragon (12:7-12), and the temptations and trials of this life (1 Jn. 5:4 cf. 2:15-17). "They overcame him (the dragon) by the blood of the lamb, and by the Word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death" (12:11).

Position: She "has made herself ready" (19:7).

Deeds: "The fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (19:8).

Identity: This is the church. We are currently espoused to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2). He wants to receive his bride, "not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but... holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27). May we keep ourselves "unspotted from this world" (James 1:27).

The garments were white, representing purity (Isa. 1:18). The garments had been cleansed with blood. "Those are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb" (7:14). They maintained purity despite the great tribulation with which they were attacked. "The fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (19:8). May we be so clothed when He comes.