

The Apocalypse of St. John Chapter 17

Ignatius Catholic Bible Study (ICBS): The visions that follow are directly related to the seventh bowl of wrath in 16:17-21, giving a more in-depth look at this final calamity

Read 17:1-2

Orthodox Study Bible Note 17:1

**Orthodox Bible Study (OBS) excerpts:
After the outpouring of God's judgment upon the world, one the seven angels now reveals how God's judgment will finally fall upon Babylon (i.e. Rome).**

OBS: She is now referred to descriptively as the "great harlot [who] sits upon many waters."

OBS: This women "sits" (v.1) indicating she is royalty (i.e., she is a queen) and yet St. John calls this queen a "harlot" to indicate her true debased identity as great source of the world's corruption.

ADD: On "many waters" (v. 1), again, refers to Rome's international imperial power over the nations.

Note 17:2

OBS: "With whom the kings of the earth committed fornication" (v.2) This "great harlot" is in direct contrast with "the woman clothed with the sun"

(v.12:1) which is the Church. Whereas the Church is depicted as un-defiled and pure, the harlot (Rome) is depicted as thoroughly immoral -the very image of decadence and sinfulness. P.178

ICBS: Sinful cities are sometimes described as harlots in the Bible. This is said of Tyre (Is 23:17) & Nineveh (Nahum 3:4).

OBS: Rome is shown as surpassing the ancient kingdoms of Nineveh and Tyre in wickedness because Rome has seduced all the nations with her spiritual fornication, causing them to fall into idolatry, immorality and the worship of the beast.

Read 17:3-4

OBS: St. John is again carried away in the Spirit (v. 3; cf. 1:10) which indicates he is again in a mystical state of prophetic reception of God's Revelation.

OBS: He is led by the angel (v. 3) to the wilderness. In the Scriptures, the wilderness is a place free of worldly distractions where one can better hear the voice of God and it was the special place of receiving God's revelation (Ex. 3:1f, 1 Kings 19:4f). P. 178

OBS: What is revealed to John is a revolting image of a woman on a scarlet beast. This great harlot is the city of Rome. She sits on the scarlet beast just as Rome is seated & centered upon the Roman Empire. The beast is scarlet because of Rome's bloodthirsty and murderous nature.

ICBS: The scarlet beast (v. 3) resembles the dragon (which in 12:3 was Satan) both in color (red) and in appearance (seven heads & ten horns). St. John clearly identifies Rome with Satan.

Note 17:3

ADD: "... and their claims to divinity."

Note 17:4a

OBS: Besides the freakish beast, the woman (v.4) is equally appalling. Here rich clothing represents the amassed wealth she pillaged from the nations.

Note 17:4b

OBS: Her cup is not filled with delights but rather full of the abominations and filthiness of her fornication. In other words, the contents of her chalice were sickening and brought corruption and impurity. P.178

Read 17:5-6

Note 17:5

OBS: In other words, her sins are plain to see as if written in bold letters on her forehead. All the world can see her for what she is: The great mystery of iniquity, long hidden but now revealed - a great dispenser of immorality, impurity & idolatry throughout the world.

Read 17:6

ADD: The harlot (Rome) is drunk with the blood of the saints & the martyrs of Jesus. Q. What is a martyr? A. A witness.

OBS: The image of drinking literal blood (v. 6) is revolting enough but she is drunk after drinking cup after cup of the blood of Christians who were willing to shed their blood for their Lord. St. John looks on this terrifying sight, "marveling with great amazement."

Read 17:7

OBS: The angel asks (v. 7) why St. John marvels since he is about to tell him the mystery of the woman and of the beast.

Read 17:8-11

Note 17:8-11a

OBS: (V. 8) The beast is described as both past and future: it "was" (i.e. it existed in the past, persecuting the Church under Nero), and now "is not" (i.e. is not now actively persecuting the Church with the zeal of Nero), and is about to come up from the abyss (i.e. it will arise in persecuting zeal [as if] from the pit of hell itself). In other words the persecution of Nero had passed but this lull was only for a short while. It was about to begin as the beast arose again. When this happens, those whose names are not in "the book in

life" will marvel and there will be a great capitulation to the power of the beast. P.180

Note 17:8-11b

OBS: (V. 9) St. John is called to apply his mind to wisdom to solve the puzzle of the seven heads. Recall at this time of the writing of the Apocalypse there was a serious need for discretion and secrecy (like the encoded number of the beast, cf. 13:18).

OBS: (V. 10) John is given the numbers and expected to work out the answer for himself. Five kings have fallen: these would be Augustus (27 BC to AD 14), Tiberius (14-37), Caligula (37-41), Claudius (41-54), and Nero (54-68). One king "who is" -Vespasian, whose reign was from 69-79. Then there is another "who has not yet come." This would be Titus, who ruled from 79-81. Finally the beast who would come to persecute -is an eighth. This would be Domitian, the very emperor under whom St. John was exiled and who severely enforced the emperor cult.

OBS: Even though Domitian is the eighth, he is also "of the seven" (v. 11) because he is an emperor like them (cut from the same cloth). He continues their self-glorifying work which leads ultimately to perdition.

Read 17:12-18

OBS: The ten horns represent ten lesser kings/kingdoms or all the nations that make up the

Roman empire (10 nations were also associated with the fourth and final beast of Daniel, 7:24). (V. 13) These kings/kingdoms connive together and resolve to give away their power and authority to the beast to support Rome in its policy, waging war against the Church.

Note: 17:12

OBS: In persecuting the Church and spreading immorality and idolatry, the nations under Rome make war ultimately against the Lamb Himself.

ADD: Here (v. 14) we have a powerful return to the central theme of the Apocalypse: IC XC NIKA.

Remember our Lord said:

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” -Jn 16:33

[St. Paul writes: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Rom 12:21)]

St. John writes in his 1st Epistle: "For whatever is begotten of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world -your faith. (1 Jn 5:4)

In the Apocalypse we read seven times promises to those who overcome the world and conquer in Christ ending with:

“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (3:21).

The Apocalypse then ends with this powerful reminder: “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son” (21:7).

Jesus Christ has conquered death. He trampled down death by His death and He bestows life on those of His who are in the tombs. Therefore all those who are united to Christ are likewise conquers in Him. The Lamb will overcome the nations and Satan because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and Jesus Christ Conquers (IC XC NIKA)!

As this passage states (v. 14): Christ's Church shares in His invincibility because they are "called," "chosen" and "faithful."

Called = κλητός klētós, klay-tos'; from the same as [G2821](#); invited (especially to a banquet); invited by God to obtain eternal salvation; divinely selected or appointed to discharge some office.

But Christians are not just "called" we are "chosen"

Chosen = ἐκλεκτός eklektós, ek-lek-tos'; from [G1586](#); picked out or selected by God; (by implication, favorite):—chosen, elect.

Add: This is the root word from which we get the word "Church" - which means a gathering of the called out & chosen people of God.

Christians are not just "chosen," we are to be "faithful"

Faithful = πιστός pistós, pis-tos'; from [G3982](#); objectively, trustworthy; subjectively, trustful:—believe(-ing, -r), faithful(-ly), sure, true.

ADD: So we as Christians have to remain in Christ. As Jesus said, "Remain in Me, as I also remain in you" (Jn 15:4).

Read 17:15-18

Note 17:15-18

OBS: The message here is that God's ultimate plan will be fulfilled in the world. Even though the nations agree to give over their kingdoms to the beast to do the beast's will (v. 15) their power to persecute the Church will last only until the words of God are finished and fulfilled. After this, they will turn on the harlot and she will be exposed (made naked), left defenseless and desolate. They will devour her (eat her flesh) and will burn her with fire (cf. Ez. 23:25-29). Note: Btw, both Jerusalem and Rome were over-run by armies and destroyed by enormous fires.

OBS: And finally (in v. 18), just in case anyone still has somehow missed the identity of the woman, she

is identified clearly (in v. 18) as Rome, in that she is called "the great city which reigns over the kings of the earth." It is over her and the world that ultimately Christ and His faithful Church will triumph.