



## YES, NO AND MAYBE

1. As a child, I probably received more punishments than the people sitting next to me!

2. God explains Himself so that we don't misunderstand what He's doing.

3. God can be insulted by name-calling.

4. The devil has set up his own religions, and not just the church of Satan.

5. The devil wants to tear down his own church.

### THE MYSTERIOUS WOMAN RIDING ON THE BEAST

➤ READ Revelation 17 (NIV)

» **Vs. 1: I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute** - The angel now shows why God is punishing evil.

« Why do you think it is important to God that He explains why He is destroying people?

• **Who sits by many waters** - Said of Babylon, Jer. 51:13; the wealth of Babylon being caused both by the Euphrates and by a vast system of canals. The symbol is interpreted by some commentators as signifying Babylon, by others pagan Rome, Papal Rome, Jerusalem.

» **Vs. 3: A woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns** - This beast is the first beast, the one that came up out of the sea (13:1). The surprising twist in the chapter is that most of the content describes the beast, who has already received extensive treatment (11:7; 13:1-10). Perhaps the point is: to understand the prostitute, observe the beast. The prostitute is the outward manifestation of the world, and the beast is the spiritual reality behind her worldliness.

« How is the devil behind all of our worldliness today? What are some of the things he has done to God's church?

• **Covered with blasphemous names** - As in 13:1, these are words and titles that should be used only of God. Here it is not said that these names are on the beast's heads. The translation can say "it had all over it (or, over its body) names that are insulting to God."

« Why would God be insulted by names that are written on a beast's heads? What does that say about God?

» **Vs. 4: The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet** - The cloth used to make such robes was expensive and was a mark of luxury or of royalty.

• **She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries** - Genesis 2 speaks of a pure bride in a lovely Garden; but by the Bible's end, civilization has degenerated to an impure harlot in a wilderness! That is what sin does to the world. Another source for the great prostitute image may be found in the Roman culture. Temple prostitutes were a common religious temptation in the culture of John's day. More specifically, Messalina, the wife of Emperor Claudius, who lived as an empress by day and a common prostitute by night.

» **Vs. 5: The name written on her forehead** - Harlots customarily had their names inscribed on a ticket hanging from a headband, or on the headband itself. This name is a mystery. He has used the name "Babylon" before (14:8; 16:19), but now he explains that it is a figurative or symbolic name, like "Sodom and Egypt" applied earlier to the city where the two witnesses died (11:8). The vision's real target is the woman's deception of the earth (v. 2), and above all her violence against the people of God (v. 6).

« In what ways has the devil set up a counterfeit to the bride of Christ?

» **Vs. 6: Was drunk with the blood of God's holy people** - A common phrase used among Roman writers to describe their emperors (Suet., Tiberius 59; Pliny, Nat. Hist. 14:28; see also Jos., War 5.344). Isaiah employs it to refer to Israel's oppressors (1 Kings 16:31). That the

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persecutors were drunk indicates they reveled in their tortures; that the saints shed their blood indicates they refused to deny Christ even under persecution (11:7-10; 12:17; 14:12; 20:4; see also 13:7, 10; 16:6; 18:24; 19:2).

• **Vs. 7: “Why are you astonished?”** - The angel’s question is virtually equivalent to “Snap out of it!”

» **Vs. 8: Once was, now is not, and yet will come up out of the Abyss and go to its destruction** - This contains a note of humor or parody at the beast’s expense! The beast once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction (v. 8). This of course parodies the designation of God as the one “who was, and is, and is to come” (4:8; compare 1:4, 8), in such a way as to make the beast sound ridiculous. The “Lord God Almighty” is from eternity to eternity, while the beast moves from being to non being to being again, and finally to destruction. God is the one who deserves astonishment, admiration and worship. But foolish people will be astonished when they see the beast. What ought to evoke ridicule evokes admiration and wonder instead.

« What is the devil doing now that has people caught under his mesmerizing spell?

» **Vs. 8: Written in the book of life from the creation of the world** - How is this not predestination? First, the names of sinners are blotted out of the book of life (Exod. 32:32-33; Rev. 22:19), but those of the faithful are not (Rev. 3:5). Hence, to see God’s choice at creation as irrevocable is out of keeping with clear biblical teaching. Second, the emphasis in the New Testament is not on predestination but on the offer of salvation to all by repentance and forgiveness of sin through the Lamb (John 1:29; 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:1-7; Rev. 2:5).

« What does it say about God that all people’s names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life until they ask for it to be blotted out and turn their back on Him?

» **Vs. 10: He must remain for only a little while-** There is little agreement regarding the identification of the specific emperors intended in the passage. Yet the overall meaning of the complex symbol is clear: the present ruler, who persecutes the faithful, will endure for only a little while before being supplanted by the eternal kingdom of God (Dan. 7:13-14). The imagery may be confusing, but the meaning is clear and comforting to the faithful. In other words, the end is near.

» **Vs. 11: An eighth king** - The phrase “is not” may be explained in terms of the persecutions of the first century: in the early 60s, Nero killed Christians in the arenas; in the early 70s, Titus destroyed Jerusalem and its temple; in the 80s, there had been no significant persecution (is not), but the 90s brought the expectation of its renewal under Domitian. The wording “eighth but it belongs to the seven” seems to refer to *Nero redivivus*, the expectation that emperor Nero, one of the seven, would return perhaps in the person of Domitian.

» **Vs. 12: For one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast-** The short period of time that will in the next chapter designate the duration of the judgment of Babylon (18:10, 17, 19).

« What does it say about God that His great concern is for us to know that this will end as soon as He can end the war between good and evil?

» **Vs. 16: The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute** - in the days when John’s prophecy will be fulfilled, an amazing thing will happen: “the harlot” will be made desolate by the very system that carried her! It is important to note that “the beast” carries “the harlot.” Satan (and Antichrist) will use the apostate religious system to accomplish his own ends (i.e., attain world power); but then he will do away with “the harlot” and establish his own religious system. And all of this will be the fulfillment of God’s Word (Rev. 17:17).

« In what ways has the devil set up false religions in order to tear it all down? Why would he want to do that?

» **Vs. 18: The woman you saw is the great city-** John’s readers would not be surprised when he used an evil harlot to symbolize a wicked city or political system. God even called Jerusalem a harlot (Isa. 1:21). Isaiah said that Tyre was a harlot (Isa. 23:16-17), and Nahum used this same designation for Nineveh (Nahum 3:4). (Read Jer. 50-51 for further historical parallels to John’s prophetic message.)

« How is “Babylon” or the harlot ruling over our world’s kingdoms today? Why would God want us to know this?

## MY PRAYER...

1. How might I be influenced by the great harlot today?
2. What am I doing to shield myself with God’s protection for these last days?
3. What new aspect of God’s character does He want me to know?



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