

Revelation

LESSON

17

■ A Study of Revelation 17

DAY ONE

Dragon Woman

Read Revelation 17, concentrating on verses 1-5.

Chapters 17 and 18 of Revelation are extensions to the seventh bowl. Chronologically, these chapters are out of order; Revelation 19 should follow 16. But as often is the case in this book, an aside is made to John's vision and another theme is addressed.

Commentators agree that chapter 17 is one of the most difficult chapters of Revelation to interpret. There is general agreement that the main themes are political (discussing the world system that will usher in the end of the world) and religious (revealing a false church that will look very much like Christ's Church).

We will concentrate on the symbolism and spiritual lessons that Revelation 17 teaches. Background information will be given, but political interpretation will be left to the theologians. In the following questions, much of the information is gleaned from Ray C. Stedman's sermon on "The Dragon Lady."¹

1. What is the character of the Dragon Woman, the great harlot sitting on the red beast?
2. Many clues are given concerning the symbolism of the Dragon Woman and her character. Let's begin examining these by looking at what a harlot is in Scripture. Summarize the following scriptures:

Ezekiel 16:25-30

Nahum 3:4

3. A second clue regarding the Dragon Woman is that she has universal influence. What does *sits on many waters* mean? Summarize Revelation 17:15.
4. If the Dragon Woman is seated on the beast, what must be their relationship?
5. Another clue concerning our harlot is her dress and adornment. Summarize this and write what this represents financially.
6. Describe the cup the Dragon Woman holds. Then contrast this with the bowl in Revelation 5:8.

MEMORY CHALLENGE

Psalms 103:17

But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children.

7. As the last clue to symbolism of the Dragon Woman, give her name and what the country in her name represents. If you cannot remember, look back to past lessons.

8. In reading about the Dragon Woman, does the Holy Spirit bring any spiritual lesson to your mind?

In Revelation 17:1, John is told that he will be shown the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters. Her influence is worldwide, meaning whatever she represents is everywhere. She has peddled it with nations and kings and common people. Her fare is immorality.

She is a liar, a cheat, and an unfaithful, deceitful woman who sold her soul to the devil and began to sell evil. She has been unfaithful to God by running after other gods including lust, greed, power, influence, and idolatry. As we have studied in past lessons, when a people or nation are unfaithful to God, they are compared to prostitutes. Hosea, a minor prophet of Israel and Judah, prophesied to the people about immorality. *When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry, and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD"* (Hosea 1:2). What did this mean? God's chosen people were worshiping other gods. They were not following His law and were committing all sorts of immoralities and sin. They were to be the children of God and the future bride of the Lamb of God. They were to be pure and keep themselves from immorality so they would be worthy to be wed to the Lamb. What righteous man wants to be wed to a prostitute? One of pure character wants to be partnered with another of holy character. But the Dragon Woman represents those who choose sin instead.

Eugene Peterson states that "whoredom is sex connected with money. Worship under the aspect of the great Whore is the commercialization of our great need and deep desire for meaning, love, and salvation. The promise of success, ecstasy, and meaning that we can get for a price is Whore-worship. It is the diabolical inversion of 'You are bought with a price,' to 'I can get it for you wholesale.'"²

The Dragon Woman is the mother of all prostitutes. She is the top of her class; the villain of all villains. Her name is written on her forehead, for in the brothels of ancient Rome, this was how prostitutes were identified. Outwardly she is beautiful. She wears the colors of the wealthy in the ancient world and is adorned with jewels. Her seduction of men is very tempting. The Dragon Woman has charm galore. Only the steadfast will avoid her immorality.

So she [a prostitute] seduced him with her pretty speech,

her coaxing and her wheedling, until he yielded to her. He couldn't resist her flattery. He followed her as an ox going to the butcher, or as a stag that is trapped, waiting to be killed with an arrow through its heart. He was as a bird flying into a snare, not knowing the fate awaiting it there.

Listen to me, young men, and not only listen but obey; don't let your desires get out of hand; don't let yourself think about her. Don't go near her; stay away from where she walks, lest she tempt you and seduce you. For she has been the ruin of multitudes—a vast host of men have been her victims. If you want to find the road to hell, look for her house (Proverbs 7:21-27, TLB).

The Dragon Woman has only prepared the outside of her cup. She is beautiful outside, but evil through and through. Jesus said in Luke 11:39-41, *I know you Pharisees burnish the surface of your cups and plates so they sparkle in the sun, but I also know your insides are maggoty with greed and secret evil. Stupid Pharisees! Didn't the One who made the outside also make the inside? Turn both your pockets and your hearts inside out* (TM). Outward appearance means nothing if the inside of our being is corrupt. This behavior of the religious leaders of His day, the Pharisees, so infuriated Christ that He followed these words with the seven woes He pronounced on them.

The Dragon Woman represents the corporate evil of all times—the love of what physically, emotionally, and sexually satisfies instead of purity and holiness to our Creator. We understand the Dragon Woman because she is evident everywhere in our culture. We worship money, status, power, fame, sex, image, materialism, entertainment, and pleasures of all sorts, thinking this is the key to happiness. Maybe we worship all this in the name of happiness itself. But we know the end of the story and that all this will never truly satisfy. Just as the Dragon Woman is doomed, so are we if we turn our eyes from the Author and Finisher of our Faith.

There is great warning here, for anything that resembles the Dragon Woman is a danger to us. Anything that causes us to love anything more than God is immorality and idolatry. Remember, it all looks good on the outside and is very tempting, but there is no substance to it. It is like eating marshmallows and whipped cream for supper. Nothing there will sustain.

The rest of the warning is that evil looks so good we often do not recognize it for what it is. We may say we love God and put Him first, but in reality be following the Dragon Woman. This is why it is vital to daily spend time in the Word and prayer and humbling ourselves before the convicting Holy Spirit. This aids us in staying aware of our sin and keeping free of the evil pull of our culture. It keeps us alert, for the Dragon Woman warns us she will even be present in the church.

Beware of the Dragon Woman, for her end is destruction and her doom is sealed.