

The Scarlet Woman

Revelation 12:17

Everywhere people are asking the same questions about the modern church. Why does it appear so weak and compromised? Where is the old-time fire and power that marked the church of a generation ago? These are questions which prey on the minds of many Christians as they witness the dwindling influence of religious institutions. Something seems to have gone wrong. Church members spend more time in places of entertainment and amusement than they do in the house of God. There is little firmness of faith, and almost no discipline for those who weakly bend to the indulgent lifestyle of the flesh and the world.

Where can we find courageous pastors who fear not to call sin by its right name? Paul urged the shepherds of his day to "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." Then, he made this astounding prediction: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." 2 Timothy 4:2-4.

These words are being fulfilled before our very eyes. Fables are being taught, doctrinal messages are drying up, and millions are turning from truth to pleasing platitudes. Any sermon that demands obedience or self-denial is rejected out of hand as legalistic and judgmental. The voice of rebuke is seldom heard, and pointed preaching which identifies the biblical antichrist is looked upon as harsh and unloving.

Have we overdrawn the picture? I don't believe any careful observer of the religious scene would contend that we have.

Surely Satan is working harder inside the church than he is on the outside, and his plan is to produce the most clever counterfeit of truth that has ever existed. By creating a diabolical parallel system of doctrinal error within the church itself, he has already led millions into a false worship. The nefarious plot was recognized and exposed by the Holy Spirit shortly before the great deceiver began to implement the major elements of his plan in the post-apostolic church.

But before we turn to John's inspired account of the sordid story in the book of Revelation, let's read another prophetic description of the spiritual state of that turbulent period. Paul warned: "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." Acts 20:29. Again, he wrote, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4.

Paul's words do not reveal the nature of the apostasy nor the identity of the "man of sin" who would assume the prerogatives of God, but the program would clearly begin to unfold in the early church. Shortly after Paul's cryptic caution about an antichrist movement within the church, the beloved John began to record his mysterious apocalyptic visions on the isle of Patmos. As the symbols of those revelations have been more clearly explained through comparative study of the prophecies, it is easy to see that John was simply enlarging upon Paul's earlier oblique references to a developing dichotomy of good and evil within the post-apostolic church.

Without understanding the historical significance of his own enigmatic language, John faithfully described the cosmic controversy between Christ and Satan from its very

inception. The age-old conflict would finally focus upon the emergence of a counterfeit Christ manipulated by Satan himself, who would seek to destroy God's law, His government, and His people. In a climactic clash called the battle of Armageddon, the great adversary would consolidate both secular and religious powers of earth against the minority group of faithful loyalists who would refuse to transgress the commandments of God. The antichrist system, under the control of Satan, would be the major force to suppress truth and to seek the death sentence against those who refused to cooperate with the evil confederation.

In his epistles the beloved John had declared, "And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world." 1 John 4:3. Because he recognized that the "spirit" of that prophesied antichrist was operating in his own day, John cooperated fully with the Holy Spirit by clothing his expo of that power with symbolic language, unrecognizable to enemies who might have sought to exterminate the inspired record altogether.

The Two Sides in Conflict

John used a variety of colorful types and symbols to portray the elements involved in the final controversy between Christ and Satan: for example, a dragon, a lamb, and two fierce wild beasts. But the most prominent representation of the two sides centers in the two striking women described in chapters 12 and 17. No words could be found to identify more vividly the nature of the contending forces in this contest. On one side is the pure woman of Revelation 12, clothed in the glory of the sun, wearing a crown of stars, and standing on the moon. Here is represented the true church, the bride of Christ. The prophets had written, "I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate

woman." Jeremiah 6:2. "Say unto Zion, Thou art my people." Isaiah 51:16.

Later, Paul used the same symbolism of the church when he wrote, "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." 2 Corinthians 11:2.

On the other side, John wrote in Revelation 17 of the activities of a drunken, scarlet-clothed harlot, sitting upon many waters and holding a golden cup of abominations in her hand. Here is the antithesis of the pure woman of chapter 12. The woman still symbolizes a church, but one which has committed spiritual adultery. Her cup is filled with fornications. According to the Bible, this represents a turning away from Christ and unfaithfulness to His Word. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that friendship of the world is enmity with God?" James 4:4. Although married to Christ, this church has been disobedient to His Word, taken the teachings of the world, His enemy, and therefore become a spiritual harlot. The fornications in the cup would constitute false teachings and doctrines that would be contrary to Christ, the true husband.

Just as the book of Revelation classifies all the world's inhabitants as ultimately following Christ or the dragon, obeying truth or error, receiving the mark of the beast or seal of God, so it pictures every individual at the end of time on the side of the symbolic harlot or the side of the pure virgin. What a solemn thought it is that everyone reading these words right now will belong to one category or the other. There will be no middle ground. It will be the camp of the saved or the camp of the lost. The prophet looked on one side and saw the wrath of God falling upon those with the mark of the beast (Revelation 14:10, 11). Then, he looked on the other side and declared, "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Revelation 14:12. A faith experience-a Jesus experience-that produces obedience to

His commandments, is the chief distinction between the followers of Christ and the followers of the beast.

The Harlot System

Since most of our study is to focus upon this false religious system which gradually evolved from an early church apostasy, we should read the full description of the "great whore" as given by John. "And there came one of the seven angels which has the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration." Revelation 17:1-6.

It is no exaggeration to observe that our eternal salvation could well depend upon a proper identification of this corrupt church system. The Revelator declared that "all the world wondered after the beast." Revelation 13:3. There is no time to assemble the persuasive list of Bible characteristics of the beast power in this study, but it has been dealt with fully in the Amazing Facts' book entitled The Beast, the Dragon, and the Woman. Here we will consider the contextual evidence of Revelation 17 to identify the fallen woman and her daughters who are assigned the name of "Babylon."

Let us keep the points in clear, logical perspective as we look at the revealed facts. First, the woman has been shown to represent a religious system, howbeit a false one. Secondly, she is being supported by a dragon-like beast with seven heads and ten horns. Who is this beast holding up the woman? Again, we cannot exhaust the evidence for lack of time, but verse 9 gives us a very strong clue. "The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth."

These words strike a very familiar chord. What city is built on seven hills? The old pagan Roman Empire had its center in the city of Rome, which was sprawled across seven hills by the river Tiber. Even though this mystery beast involves much more than pagan Rome, we have sufficient evidence that Rome was definitely a part of that which gave support to the harlot church system. This leads us to the question, what church received support from the pagan Roman Empire? Only one, of course, and that was the Catholic Church, whose papal head also assumed the title Pontifex Maximus, as the direct successor of the Roman caesars.

The second line of evidence which points to the papacy is found in verse 6. "And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." History reveals only one church which waged such a frenzied warfare against faithful Christians. Over 50 million martyrs fell victim to the terrible inquisitions of the Church of Rome, according to the most conservative estimates. It was indeed a persecuting church. Multiple evidence, including admissions of the church itself, could be presented to support this particular mark of identification.

Another interesting clue is found in verse 4: "And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour." Anyone who has visited the Vatican can confirm that these are the predominant colors which are in evidence around St. Peter's

Square. Scarlet-robed cardinals are among the most frequent visitors to the papal head of state and church.

John observes further that the woman was "decked with gold and precious stones and pearls." What a contrast to the simplicity of the pure woman of Revelation 12 who has no artificial adornment at all—only the glory of her raiment of light. Throughout the Bible, jewelry and articles of adornment are used symbolically as indications of apostasy and unfaithfulness. (With such negative spiritual connotations, the true Christian should avoid the vanities of such fleshly display and pride.)

In passing, we should also note that the beast on which the harlot sits has ten horns. The angel explained them in these words: "The ten horns ... are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: ... these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." Revelation 17:12-16.

This prophetic scenario is very interesting indeed. Since the number ten designates earthly completeness, just as seven indicates divine perfection, we can recognize in this prophecy a universal confederacy of earthly governments giving support to the beast for a certain period of time. Just as pagan Rome was one of the major political powers passing on its strength to the papal system, we now see at the endtimes a joining together of all the kings of earth in support of Catholic aims. John declared that "all the world wondered after the beast." Revelation 13:3.

But a change was to take place just before the judgment of the great whore. The earthly kingdoms, apparently, would recognize that they had been duped by the Babylon system

and would withdraw their support. The prophetic language leads us to believe that at the very end they violently turn against the woman and "make her desolate ... and burn her with fire."

This helps us understand another symbolic account of the woman's experience. Although she was seated on "many waters," those waters were to be "dried up." Revelation 16:12. The angel explained, "The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues." Revelation 17:15.

When those waters, of people and nations, turn away from their support, there is truly a drying up of the waters which held the woman in her position. The details of this future development is impossible to define in detail, but the broad picture stands clearly before us in the language of the prophet.

The Harlot's Golden Cup

Now, we need to give closer attention to the contents of the golden cup in the harlot's hand. We have already established the spiritual nature of those abominable fornications. A church can only commit such infidelities by turning away from the law of her husband, which is Christ. Without question, the cup overflows with unscriptural doctrines and practices. Many of them are easily identifiable because they have been absorbed by other subsequent religious bodies. Of these we will have more to say a bit later.

In the cup can be found sprinkling in place of baptism. Here is a custom never practiced or endorsed by our Lord. When Jesus spoke of baptism, He used a special word that has only one possible definition. It cannot connote sprinkling or a partial effusion of water. It literally means to dip under and totally immerse.

Also included in the cup would be the teaching of Sunday-keeping instead of Sabbath observance. Nowhere in the Bible has God's great hand-written law of Ten Commandments been abrogated or changed. Jesus kept the seventh-day Sabbath, "as his custom was," and knew absolutely nothing about the observance of the first day of the week. Luke 4:12. The pagan "day of the sun" was adopted long after the days of the apostles in order to placate the massive influx of Mithraic sun worshippers and their professedly "converted" pagan emperor Constantine.

A major element in the golden cup would undoubtedly be the Graeco-pagan concept that man's naturally immortal soul flies away at death to either eternal punishment or reward. The truth is that the Bible nowhere speaks of undying souls. Jesus called death a sleep. According to His doctrine, there is an unconscious, dreamless sleep of death in the grave from which all will be awakened in the day of judgment to receive everlasting life or eternal death. "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." John 5:28, 29.

Jesus also contradicted another popular fallacy held in the golden cup of abominations. The doctrine of eternal torment in an endless fiery hell has been responsible for turning multitudes away from the gracious provisions of a loving Saviour. Again, the words of Jesus are clear and unambiguous: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Matthew 10:28.

This text establishes beyond question and on the highest authority that the soul is subject to death. Only the righteous receive the gift of eternal life. "The wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

Ezekiel 18:4. "All that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, ... And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet." Malachi 4:1, 3.

The consistent testimony of Scripture points to a final execution of judgment upon the wicked in the lake of fire. It will be an eternal death from which there can be no survival or resurrection. Since the soul is not immortal by nature, all the wicked will suffer the fate so vividly described by Jesus, "destroy both soul and body in hell."

The Harlot's Name

These and numerous other "isms" and perversions of true doctrine may be identified in the mystery cup of the harlot. Every one of them constitutes disloyalty and infidelity to the spiritual relationship which every true Christian should sustain with Christ. This is why the woman carries the name on her forehead "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of Harlots and abominations of the earth." What a title!

The word "Babylon" denotes confusion. It originated with the Tower of Babel where God confounded their language so that they could not understand each other. We speak of a babbling of voices. God calls this woman Babylon because of her unholy blend of truth and error which causes "the inhabitants of the earth" to be "made drunk with the wine of her fornication." In other words, the whole world will be contaminated and confused by her teachings.

But now, let's look at that emblazoned name more closely. Notice that it is obviously a family name, because she has daughters; and they are designated as harlots, just like their mother. Having established that women symbolize churches in these prophetic writings, we now inquire as to the identity of these daughters. Since they are guilty of infidelity also, we must conclude that they are churches which share some

of the same false doctrines which constitute spiritual fornication. In other words, they would be drinking out of the same golden cup with its unscriptural potion of pseudo-Christian teachings. What churches could be represented by these daughters? Since the mother has been identified as the Catholic Church, we must look for other religious bodies that came forth from the mother church of Rome and carried with them some of the same confused doctrines of that church.

None can escape the conclusion that those daughters are Protestant churches who have inherited many of the empty traditions of their Catholic forebears. Whether we like it or not, we must admit that many of the most popular doctrines of the established Protestant churches are rooted in that quasi-Christian twilight period when the post-apostolic church was being overwhelmed by pagan influences.

We need only look at one example of the moral law to see how seriously the infiltration affected the teachings of the church, both then and now. With the most explicit words of the Ten Commandments before them, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work," those leaders of the early church yielded to the political clamor to take in millions of former sun worshippers who did not want to give up their custom of worshipping on the first day of the week—a day they named and observed in honor of their venerable sun-god.

The Catholic Church hierarchy simply changed the day of worship from the seventh to the first day, under the claim that God bestowed such power upon them. Millions of Protestants continue that altered practice, even though it rests solely upon the illegitimate actions of the apostate Catholic system. No human church leaders, whether bishops, priests, or pope, have been given any authority to change the great moral law of the universe, the Ten Commandments.

Isn't it interesting that the daughters blindly followed the majority practice of the compromised Catholic Church even though they properly identified her as the antichrist power of prophecy? How could this be? Why was it so easy to accept something that was such a flagrant violation of a plain command of God? Perhaps the answer to that question will be more apparent as we ourselves are confronted with a command just as concise and specific. We turn now to the crux of this tremendous prophecy and ask the question: What does God think about this woman and her daughters?

The Call Out of Babylon

The answer is found in the first few verses of Revelation 18. Here also we find the command of God which few are willing to obey in our day. "And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities." Revelation 18:1-5.

A close examination of these verses reveal that a very special message is being proclaimed which will profoundly affect every corner of the planet. Under the symbol of a powerful fourth angel, a warning sounds forth against the counterfeit gospel being communicated through the woman and her daughters. Not only is she spiritually fallen from

favor with God, but her wine of deceptive doctrines have placed her in unholy alliance with the kings of the earth. All nations are represented as committing fornication with her by giving support to her false teachings. They use the illicit relationship to their own political advantage, and "wax rich through the abundance of her delicacies."

But then, suddenly, the call of the fourth angel is cut off by an even more urgent voice which sounds forth from heaven itself. This time there is no doubt about the one whose message rolls from one end of the heavens to the other. God is speaking! And He is speaking to an exclusive group. He addresses Himself to "my people."

Here are the exact words, "And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." Revelation 18:4. Now the picture becomes more distinct. There are sincere people in all of those fallen churches represented by the harlot mother and her daughters. Because they have been faithful to all the light of truth which had been revealed to them, God extends a final invitation of mercy. But what a message! This is undoubtedly the most shocking and revolutionary call to ever fall on human ears.

What does it mean? There is only one answer. Those religious bodies represented by the fallen Babylon system have departed so far from the foundations of Bible truth that God can no longer acknowledge them as His. By choosing the traditions of men over the commandments of God they have disqualified themselves as reliable shepherds of the flock of God. In almost every crusade, members come to me from a variety of churches weeping and asking what they should do about their church or their pastor. Instead of receiving loving counsel and Bible answers, they are being taught to break God's law. "The ten commandments were nailed to the cross. You don't have to keep the Sabbath

today. You can choose any other day of rest and worship," they are told.

Apostasy and betrayal has reached its limits when leaders comfort people in their practice of sin. God says, "This is it, my people. You can no longer remain in fellowship with a church that is so spiritually fallen that it teaches you to break my law. Come out of that confusion." What a fearful and emotional command that is to most people who hear it for the first time, and how easy it is to empathize with their mixed feelings. They love their church. Their fondest memories revolve around its ministry-baptism, marriage, and commitment. And even though they recognize the apostasy and the necessity to separate, it is one of the hardest commands to obey.

How strange it is that the strongest and most condemnatory language in the Bible is used against religious people. Jesus pronounced terrible judgment upon the Pharisees who pretended to be so righteous while violating every principle of truth. Similarly, God speaks again directly from heaven against those who profess His name while willfully transgressing His commandments. His extreme displeasure is revealed toward both religious groups-hypocrites, whited sepulchres, generation of vipers, hold of every foul spirit, habitation of devils, cage of every unclean and hateful bird-these are some of the charges He leveled against them. Are they justified? Why such a scathing reaction against those who were so very religious?

The answer to this question is important. These churches-every one of them-had allowed the popular traditions of men to crowd out the self-denying truths of His Word and His law. Rejecting the Sabbath of the Lord in favor of a pagan substitute, they had been guilty of condoning sin instead of righteousness. Said Jesus, "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Matthew 15:9.

Who then is Babylon and her children? Any contemporary church who teaches contrary to Jesus. Errors and "isms" could be multiplied, but the height of abomination was reached by giving deliberate encouragement to the breaking of God's great moral law. By teaching men to break the Sabbath, the sign and seal of our salvation-rest in Christ, the churches became the spoilers of God's people. Very soon those same churches will be so bitter against the obedient ones that they will lend their influence to force compliance by religious legislation. To such organizations no true child of God can give support. It would be equivalent to subscribing to the erroneous beliefs and actions of those church groups.

No wonder then, that God sounds that radical call, "come out of her, my people. You must leave those churches which have rejected my law." But where should they go when they come out of the fallen churches? Does God want them now to be rootless, with no church, no pastor, and no fellowship? Indeed not. Just as surely as there is a harlot woman of prophecy representing a counterfeit religion, there is also a pure woman who symbolizes the true church of Jesus Christ.

The Woman in White

We only have time for a brief look at Revelation 12 where the exciting history of the true church is recorded. A complete in- depth study is found in the Amazing Facts' booklet entitled The Search For the True Church.

John begins his narrative of the woman in white with this description: "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered." Revelation 12:1, 2.

The remainder of the chapter follows the course of this beautiful pregnant woman and her offspring. Standing in the glorious light of the New Testament age, with the symbols of the 12 apostles on her head, she is about to give birth to a baby. A terrible red dragon stands before her to destroy the child as soon as it is born, but the baby boy eludes the dragon. Later, he is caught up to the throne of God. Who was the baby? John declares that he was to rule all the nations of earth; therefore, we must conclude that it was Jesus. He was also the only one caught up to the throne of God.

Afterward, the woman, the true church, fled into a wilderness hiding place for 1,260 days. Since a prophetic day equals a literal year, the woman had to be hidden away for exactly 1,260 years (Ezekiel 4:6). History confirms that the total period of papal civil rule, during which the true saints were persecuted, was from 538 A.D. until 1798 A.D. During those Dark Ages, the Bible was suppressed, and the true church was not to be seen before the world.

Nevertheless, at the end of the 1,260 years, or sometime after 1798, the truth was to emerge from its hiding place. John provides a dramatic description of the woman as she would appear at the very end of time, and how Satan would still be trying to silence her witness of truth to the world. "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Revelation 12:17.

This verse contains one of the most exciting revelations in the Bible. It reveals that the remnant, or last part, of the true church will be characterized by obedience to the commandments of God. The scarlet woman of Revelation 17 had turned away from God's law, rejected the Sabbath, and spiritually adulterated the doctrines with traditions of men. Now the breach is healed and the original truths are being

restored by the last part of the pure woman's seed, the remnant church.

At last, the prophecy of Isaiah will be fulfilled: "And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in. If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth." Isaiah 58:12-14.

So the whole circle of apostasy has been uncovered. From the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15 to the seed of the woman of Revelation 12:17, the true church pressed its relentless warfare against confusion of doctrine. In the final contest, the scarlet woman seemed at times to prevail with a majority support, but the faithful little remnant of the woman in white which "keep the commandments of God" ultimately triumphs. And out of all the fierce beasts portrayed in the book of Revelation, it is the bleeding Lamb who prevails in the end. Through the blood of that Lamb may we all be gathered to Mount Zion, the place of rest and eternal security.