

# Revelation

*Part Fifty-Seven*  
A Tale of Two Women  
(Revelation 21:9-14)

*With Study Questions*

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*Part Fifty-Seven*

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*(Revelation 21:9-14)*

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." <sup>10</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, <sup>11</sup> having the glory of God. Her light *was* like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. <sup>12</sup> Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: <sup>13</sup> three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. <sup>14</sup> Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Revelation 21:9-14).

## Introduction

Standing in line at the grocery store, there was a group of young men in front of me. In front of them was a lady who looked to be in her forties. In front of her was a young, attractive girl dressed very provocatively. I couldn't hear what the young men were saying, but the lady in front of them must have. When the young girl checked out and started for the door, the lady turned and engaged the young men. "Is that the kind of girl you're looking to marry?"

Admittedly, she was a bit karen-esque in her delivery. But that happened about twenty years ago, and I still remember it vividly. I'm guessing these young men, who aren't that young any longer, probably remember it as well.

I didn't know any of these people and don't pretend to know their hearts. And there are all sorts of possible angles and motivations. But here is the way I translated this. The young girl probably just wanted to look nice and dressed in such a way as to get attention. The level of intention she had to present herself as a sexual object, I couldn't say. Maybe she

didn't have a mom to tell her about guys. She may have heard the guys talking about her and she might have liked it or hated it.

The guys saw something that got their attention and reacted. Based upon what the older lady said, they probably expressed some sort of desire. What the older lady was pointing out was that if they were able to win this young lady's affection, the very thing they liked about her is not something they would want to continue to happen since it would garner attention from other young men and that could be problematic.

I'm thinking this sounds kind of confusing. If so, I've accomplished my task. What do men want? What do women want? Is it possible that the very things that attracted you in the first place have become things you now find irritating? The Bible often speaks about the church as a woman or a bride. A woman is also often used to describe the battle between wisdom and folly.

**Say to wisdom, "You *are* my sister," And call understanding  
*your* nearest kin, <sup>5</sup> That they may keep you from the immoral  
woman, From the seductress *who* flatters with her words  
(Proverbs 7:4, 5).**

Revelation presents a tale of two women. Do we have the wisdom to know the virtuous one from the other?

**Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." <sup>10</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, <sup>11</sup> having the glory of God. Her light *was* like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal (Revelation 21:9-11).**

## **A Tale of Two Women**

We see here the same "angel" designed for wrath (having had bowls of plagues) is also designed for glory. God's purposes for both wrath and glory mercy are one.

**Surely the wrath of man shall praise you (Psalm 76:10).**

It is generally conceded that what we're reading here is a juxtaposition of what we have read in Revelation 17 where the angel shows John the judgment of the great prostitute. The immediate application to the original readers of the Revelation would likely be the city of Rome against the city of God, **"the holy Jerusalem."**

But this same contest rages throughout the course of history. It is weaved within the hearts of the **"nations"** to **"rage"** and to seek to **"cast away their cords"** from the wisdom and glory of God (Psalm 2). We are unwise if we do not see this battle within our own culture and within our own hearts. Our Lord has not given us the wisdom of His word in this book that we might be a rivetted audience, but wise and informed warriors in a battle for souls.

We would do well to understand that both cities, the one of glory and the one of defilement, are presented as beautiful women.

**The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup (Revelation 17:4a).**

So far so good. Until one looks more closely into the cup. It is...

**...full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. <sup>5</sup> And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations" (Revelation 17:4b, 5).**

And against the idea that these two cities, or kingdoms, can peacefully and mutually coexist-forming some type of common kingdom, we read of the worldly kingdom's disposition toward those who would serve the true King of kings.

**And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus (Revelation 17:6).**

There is always a trajectory. Either the world will be won over by the **“sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17)** or the world will bear the sword of violence. Many Christians, I fear, have lost the discernment to tell one woman from the other. But they are very different women. One is a bride. The other a prostitute.

The virtuous prostitute has almost become a proverb in modern literature and media. I don't wish to be insensitive to the plight of women who find themselves in that condition. But the current theme of blaming abusive Christian households, or some twisted Victorian, anti-sexual passion-cloistering, for the choice of this career has become so predictable and repetitive that it has lost its originality.

It is difficult to overstate the damaging effects of prostitution. But it is evil enough to be used in Scripture as a metaphor for the epitome of unfaithfulness. How many have believed the lie that ‘what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas’? Whether it is the disease of the body or the disease of the soul, it goes with you.

I may appear to be getting off the track, but if we live in a culture that extols prostitution (as well as other sexual immoralities-so pervasive now with the ease of the internet), the Bible will make little sense and we will have a difficult time understanding the boundaries between the one city and the other.

## **The Church of the Firstborn**

It was so critical that John grasp the difference between the one and the other that he was carried away in the Spirit **“to a great and high mountain”** to be shown. And, as discussed previously, this holy Jerusalem is both a city and a bride. This militates against being too literal in our interpretation. Streets of gold and pearly gates may, at some level, be a description of the beauty and glory of heaven. But it also is describing the bride, the church, in its most pristine and glorious state.

The author of Hebrews tells Christians that they have come to...

**...Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, <sup>23</sup> to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of**

**just men made perfect, <sup>24</sup> to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of Abel* (Hebrews 12:22-24).**

In this passage we are told that she (the church) is **“descending out of heaven from God.”** The picture is a bit different. The Christian faith teaches that man lacked the ability to make it to God (by tower, righteousness wisdom, or any other means), so God, in Christ made it to man. No Christian will ever find a perfect church, but a perfect church has found us.

Though we currently battle as the church militant, if you attend a church that preaches the **“blood”** of Christ, the Mediator **“of the new covenant”** then Christ has come to you. And He has brought with Him **“the glory of God.”** John may be appealing to Isaiah 60 with these words.

**Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. <sup>2</sup> For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. <sup>3</sup> And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising (Isaiah 60:1-3).**

Let this be included in the Great Commission. Let us pray that the church provide the light and glory of Christ.

**Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).**

**Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: <sup>13</sup> three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. <sup>14</sup> Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Revelation 21:12-14).**

**The Foundation**

After the fall, angels guarded the entrance to Eden, the **“way to the tree of life”** (Genesis 3:24). But now, life has come in Christ and the angels are guarding the people of God in that life. Gates in every direction speak of the universal call of the Gospel. And the **“twelve foundations”** with the names of the **“twelve apostles”** speak of the foundation of the church.

**Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,<sup>20</sup> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,<sup>21</sup> in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,<sup>22</sup> in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).**

The significant difference between the two women can be summed up in this passage. One has Christ as the cornerstone and the other does not. Of course, many claim God (even Christ) as their own. He is in every politician's speech and thanked at every award ceremony. But is it the Christ who we know by the testimony of the **“apostles and prophets”** i.e., the word of God?

## Questions for Study

1. Is it possible that the very thing you find attractive in another person can become a point of irritation? Explain (pages 2, 3)?
2. Explain the similarities and dissimilarities between the woman in Revelation 21 and the woman in Revelation 17 (pages 3-5)?
3. What is our current relationship with the heavenly Jerusalem (pages 5, 6)?
4. How can the church (Christians) bring the glory of God (page 6)?
5. What is the foundation of the true church? What is the cornerstone (pages 6, 7)?