

Revelation 17:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.

Analysis

The angel's promise to explain the mystery of the woman and beast indicates that apocalyptic symbols require divine interpretation. Human wisdom cannot decode these visions; God must reveal their meaning. The 'mystery' (Greek 'mystērion') refers not to incomprehensibility but to truth hidden until divinely disclosed. Reformed theology emphasizes that Scripture interprets Scripture—the angel will explain symbols using biblical imagery. The beast carrying the harlot represents political power supporting false religion, while the woman represents apostate religious systems. Understanding requires spiritual discernment, not mere intellectual analysis.

Historical Context

Mystery religions pervaded the Roman world, claiming secret knowledge available only to initiates. John's use of 'mystery' reclaims this term for divine revelation—true understanding comes through God's disclosure, not human initiation rites. The symbolism would resonate with readers familiar with Rome's religious-political fusion and imperial cult.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing that divine mysteries require God's interpretation humble your approach to difficult biblical passages?
2. What does the angel's offer to explain symbolism teach about Scripture's perspicuity—clarity for those whom God enlightens?

Interlinear Text

καὶ εἶπέν μοι τὰ ἄγγελος, Διὰτί ἐθαύμασας; ἐγὼ
And said unto me which the angel Wherefore didst thou marvel I
G2532 G2036 G3427 G3588 G32 G1302 G2296 G1473

σοι ἐρῶ τὰ μυστήριον τὰ γυναικός, καὶ τὰ
thee will tell which the mystery which of the woman And which
G4671 G2046 G3588 G3466 G3588 G1135 G2532 G3588

θηρίου τὰ βαστάζοντος αὐτήν, τὰ ἔχοντος τὰ
of the beast which that carrieth her which hath which
G2342 G3588 G941 G846 G3588 G2192 G3588

ἐπτὰ κεφαλὰς καὶ τὰ δέκα κέρατα.
the seven heads And which ten horns
G2033 G2776 G2532 G3588 G1176 G2768

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 17:8 (Parallel theme): The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.