

Lesson # 56 A Description of the Beast & False Prophet - Revelation 17:7-18

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Revelation 17: 7-18 (ESV)

⁷But the angel said to me, "Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. ⁸The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. ⁹ This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; ¹⁰they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. ¹¹As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. ¹²And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. ¹³These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful." ¹⁵And the angel said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. ¹⁶And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, ¹⁷for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. ¹⁸And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth." ①

I. The Seven Mountains vv. 7-10

John was puzzled by the vision (v. 6b), unsure of what he was being shown by the angel. The angel, realizing this, tells John that he will show him what the scene is all about – telling him about the woman and the beast she is riding on. What confuses John is the connection between this religion and the worship of Antichrist, because the beast supporting the woman is undoubtedly Antichrist.

Verse 8a is a reference to the ‘death & resurrection’ of Antichrist (cf. Rev. 13:3,12), which the False Prophet uses to garner worship for Antichrist, and the point at which Satan indwells Antichrist. At the point of this vision, there is no unity or cohesive agreement, but Satan, desiring all the worship for himself, will remarkably begin his attack against the false religion he set up and will ensure that the world will fall at his feet. He can have no rivals, even if that rival is working on his behalf – such is the twisted thinking of an evil brain. Antichrist rises from the Abyss (demonic) and appears for a short time to be invincible, but he is on the path to destruction.

The result of this ‘miraculous’ recovery from a fatal wound will cause the world of unbelievers to marvel at him – to be completely taken in by his ‘greatness’, and captivated by his signs and wonders which accompany his reign. Do you notice the amazing negative disclaimer implanted in v. 8 that shows how the whole world is not deceived? The wording is a bit difficult but note: “⁸The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.” Those whose names are written in the book of life from the foundation of the world then, by implication will not fall for this deception – they will not marvel at the beast. This parallels 13:8, a verse we looked at in some detail when we studied that chapter. These 2 verses are incredible evidence that God chooses whom He saves, and He does so before the foundation of the world!

The angel (v. 9) says that it will take wisdom and discernment to understand this next aspect of the vision, and in fact, John MacArthur believes it is so complex that it will not be obvious until it occurs in future history. The 7 heads are 7 mountains on which the woman is seated. We saw in our last lesson that to say this must be Rome is too shallow, too easy. The angel said it would require wisdom to figure it out, and to see this as Rome so that we can make the easy swing to the RC church’s Pope as the False Prophet is not wisdom but wishful thinking by Protestants with an axe to grind. Many cities are built on 7 hills – Philadelphia, PA or Rio de Janeiro, Brazil for example, so it does not have to be Rome.

This sort of speculation is a waste of time anyway, because the next thing we read is that the 7 mountains are 7 kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other is yet to come, and he is to remain a little while. This is talking about world empires or powers. Five world empires that had been but had fallen when John wrote these words were; Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece. The one that “is” in AD 95 is Rome. All of these were in direct opposition to God, God’s people and had varying degrees of control over the land of Israel, which is the biblical key. After all, there were other world empires in ancient times – the Mayans, the Incas, etc., but they had no contact with Israel or with Israel’s God. The relevant empires are the ones that center around the Mediterranean Sea – the Middle East and Europe. The woman sits on these empires in the sense that historic false religions have always been guided by Satanic direction, often through false gods, pagan idols and corrupt leaders.

II. The Beast

v. 11

The one to come is Antichrist, who is an 8th, but also 1 of the 7. How? He dies and is resurrected to form an even stronger empire for a short time, but his ultimate fate is destruction. God will destroy his empire directly and he will be sent to eternal damnation in the Lake of Fire – Rev. 19:20; 20:10. Notice again, back in v. 10 the word “must”. He “must” remain only a little while. Why? Because that’s the way God decreed it would occur. He has been given limited

authority for a brief period of time – for 42 months, and Satan knows his time is short as well – Rev. 12:12.

III. The Ten Horns

vv. 12-13

These 10 horns are 10 kings, but notice that they have not yet received royal power. This means that when John sees this vision, there is no way to know who these 10 are. It is probable that Antichrist's kingdom will be divided into 10 regions and that these 10 will rule over those areas under Antichrist's authority.

They are to (note again the language of sovereignty here) receive authority for one hour – IOW – a very brief period of time, because the Antichrist's empire only has that 42 month window to operate out of. These 10 kings (v. 13) will give their 100% allegiance to the Beast – completely handing over their considerable authority to him, either out of devotion or coercion. They submit to him so much that they can be said to be of one mind. It is likely that the promise of great wealth and power has been extended like a carrot in front of them.

IV. The Victory of the Lamb

v. 14

The main agenda of Satan, his Antichrist and the 10 henchmen is to make war against the Lamb. They hate Christ, they hate His people and they long for a chance to defeat both. They try it by killing His people, but when that has limited success, their final, foolishly hopeful push at Armageddon will finally result in their complete and utter destruction as recorded in Rev. 19:19-21. ③

Since the details of that battle will come up in chapter 19, for now, John simply states that the Lamb will conquer them. It's inevitable because you cannot compare earthly kings or even demonic superpowers to The King of Kings and Lord of Lords! When Jesus returns, His chosen and faithful will accompany Him – all believers who have been raptured or have died prior to His return. Although we, the believers return to earth with Him, we do not fight. Only He does – vengeance is His alone, and He defeats the greatest army ever assembled with “the breath of His mouth”! (cf. II Thess. 2:8 NKJV)

V. Disunity in the Satanic “Church” vv. 15-16

As often occurs in Revelation, the meaning of the symbolism is supplied for us in the text. In 17:1, we are told that the harlot is seated on many waters, and we looked at this last lesson. Worldwide influence and especially associated with this city of Babylon is in sight here – cf. **Rev. 17:18; 18:2** and compare **18:16**. The waters represent peoples, multitudes, languages and nations, so the influence of this system will be immense, not just local, but worldwide.

But there is a problem (v. 16) and we have already mentioned it. There is severe disunity in the leadership. The 10 kings and the Beast will hate the harlot. “Will hate” indicates that at one point in time, they did not hate her, but

she has outlived her usefulness to Satan's agenda and must be eliminated. Satan is likely jealous because the religious system is getting a bit too much adoration that he thinks should go to him.

Notice how violent the hatred is – “They will make her desolate and naked and will devour her flesh and burn her up with fire.” Antichrist will covet the wealth and adulation being directed to the False Prophet and the system, and apparently, too much glory is going to the religion and so it must be taken out, and this violent language assures us that this is no spat, but a full blown matter of hatred.

VI. God's Sovereignty

vv. 17-18

The rift between Antichrist & the False Prophet – political Babylon and Mystery Babylon is a result of Satanic hatred and sin-blinded thinking. However, from God's perspective, note the word “for” in v. 17, which carries the meaning of “because”. Why does this violent rift occur? “For God has put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose...until the words of God are fulfilled.”!

Once again, biblical compatibilism makes an appearance. God is sovereign, man is responsible for his own actions. Note **Isa. 10:5-19**. Verses 6-7 in this Isaiah passage are keys to this section. God sends Assyria against His then godless nation, Israel. Yet, that is not why the king of Assyria is going up against Israel. Verses 7-11 fill in Assyria's mindset. This is similar to what we have happening here in Revelation 17:17-18. ④

God has put it into the minds of the 10 kings to hand over their power to Antichrist and thus unified, they will do battle against their own religious system that helped bring them to power! God's purpose and the idea of compatibilism is found on virtually every page of Scripture; note: Gen. 50:10; Phil. 2:12-13; Eph. 2:10; Rom. 8:28-30; Acts 2:23-24; 4:26-27; etc.

Antichrist's religious empire is fitted for destruction and the ironic aspect of it is the fact that God uses Satan, Antichrist and their kings to attack and neutralize their own allies!

And now (v. 18) John is told that the woman he saw was the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth, so whatever city this is, it is the world's capital during the Tribulation, and we will see what it is in chapter 18.