

UNDERSTANDING THAT WEIRD BOOK OF REVELATION - Part twenty-one

Sunday, April 8th, 2018 - 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #2042

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THE MYSTERY AND DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON (continued)

Revelation 17:1-18 - "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, [2] with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk." [3] And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. [4] The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. [5] And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." [6] And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her, I marveled greatly. [7] But 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. [8] The 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; [10] they 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. [11] As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. [12] And 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. [13] These are of one mind and hand over their power and authority to the beast. [14] They 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. [15] And the angel said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. [16] And 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, [17] for 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. [18] And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth."

We studied two points about *Babylon* as pictured in this woman in chapter 17 last week:

First, she is broadly accepted by the people's of the earth. And secondly she is empowered by antichrist -The *many waters* are explained to be "**peoples and multitudes, and nations and languages**"(15). In other words, however we end up identifying Babylon, it is not one mere city. It represents the influence of godlessness and immorality that sweeps over the whole earth.

Then, **second**, the **scarlet beast** is mentioned. But, in a very important explanation, John repeats some details about this beast that we've already seen - "**....And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns**"(17:3)

This immediately takes us back to the description of the same beast in **Revelation 13:1** - "**And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads.**" In other words, what John is seeing in this picture of the woman sitting on the beast is the **reason** for the power and influence she holds over the peoples and nations and tongues of the earth. She is empowered by the antichrist, who is, in turn, empowered by the dragon, Satan himself.

These are two important details. This woman is shown on the waters to show her relationship to the **nations of the earth**. She is then pictured on the beast to show her **relationship to antichrist** and the Devil.

There are two more points we need to consider from this great chapter:

- 3) **THE LIFE OF THE BEAST IN SEVEN KINGDOMS - Revelation 17:9-13** - "This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; [10] they 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. [11] As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. [12] And 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. [13] These are of one mind and

hand over their power and authority to the beast.”

Obviously there is a lot of work in interpreting these difficult verses. But there seem to be at least some key points to hold on to:

The seven heads of the beast aren't literal human heads. John says they represent seven *hills* and then seven *kings*. Probably John has in mind seven *empires* or *kingdoms* rather than seven individual kingly rulers. We know this from the way John has already described the manifestations of antichrist in previous periods of history in **Revelation 13:1-2** - **“And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. [2] And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.”**

These verses, describing the beast's heads, are almost a direct quotation from **Daniel 7:6**, where Daniel describes the empires that were yet to come. Daniel identifies some of them. So the seven heads are seven *kingdoms*. To know the exact identity of each nation (many think they *do* know) isn't that important a point. The important point for John's vision is that, just as antichrist *has* manifested himself in the past, and just as he *disappeared* for a season, he will *arise again* in his most obvious and satanic manifestation.

This fits in precisely with the apostle John's comments in **1 John 2:18** - **“Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.”** So there is antichrist in these same different tenses. There is antichrist *present* and there is antichrist still to *come*.

Here's what I think we are to take from this very involved passage:

The great harlot - Babylon - seduces and captures the nations with the help of a succession of *empires*, all of which have been, to greater and lesser degrees, manifestations of antichrist. ***Five kingdoms*** have come and gone. One, a ***sixth***, was present when John recorded his revelation (no doubt, this was the ***Roman empire*** with it's persecution of the church, even as John was on Patmos).

While ***all*** of these were manifestations of antichrist, and while the church to whom John first wrote would have, without any doubt, seen ***Rome*** as the fulfillment of most of the prophecies John wrote, there was another empire yet to come. This ***seventh*** kingdom or empire will be the most ***specific and direct manifestation of antichrist yet***. It will be like his resurrection from the dead. And it will only last a very short time.

Very difficult is the exact meaning of **verse 11** - **“As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction.”** John portrays the coming kingdom of antichrist as ***both*** an ***eighth*** kingdom, and yet still one of the original ***seven***. But perhaps this isn't as much a riddle as it seems at first. I think it finds its simplest interpretation when we remember the vision John is seeing:

Remember, there are ***seven heads*** on this beast, but there is still the ***beast itself wearing these seven heads***. In other words, the final seventh kingdom - the one yet to come - will be the seventh in succession, but it will so manifest the life of the beast in a more direct way, that it will not be like the previous empires. The life of the beast itself - the beast under and behind all seven heads - will also reveal itself with a power and life of its own. So there are truly both seven and yet an eighth satanic empire manifested at the very same time.

Again, this is quite similar to Daniel's vision of the antichrist and the coming role of various nations on the earth in Daniel chapter 2. Each of the different portions of this great statue or image represent specific empires yet to come. But they are all a part of the ***one great image itself***.

In **verses 12-13** John also sees that many of the kingdoms of the earth (Literally ten? Does it really matter?) will align themselves with the beast and his empire of evil - **“And 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. [13] These are of one mind and hand over their power and authority to the beast.”**

John saw the ***sixth plague*** opening up the way for this coalition in **Revelation 16:12** - **“The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east.”** Again, we see the whole world setting the stage for what C.S. Lewis called the ***final battle***.

4) **GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE NATIONS AND THE SELF-DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON**

Revelation 17:14-18 - "They 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." [15] And the angel said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. [16] And 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, [17] for 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. [18] And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth."

Up to this point, John must have been surprised to hear more of a description of the **beast** than the judgment of **Babylon**. Now the vision returns to the promised topic - the judgment of Babylon herself. But there is nothing in the whole vision to prepare us for what John is about to describe. It comes as a total shock. Babylon falls more from the inside out. Her own coalition destroys her in such violent imagery:

Revelation 17:16-17 - "And 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, [17] for 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."

What a wonderful way to end those verses - "**....until the words of God are fulfilled!**" (17). Nothing in all the combined forces of the empires of the earth can stop the power of even the mere **words** of God Almighty! Such is the power of His decree! Every word is absolutely unstoppable.

Revelation 17:14 - "They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, (why?) for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

What a perfect way to end a difficult chapter!