

Revelation
A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #51
8/22/2007

**The Explanatory Interlude of Chapter Seventeen: Religious Babylon
Part 3**

The Angel explains “the mystery of the woman and the beast” ...

As was pointed out in Lesson #49, Chapters Seventeen and Eighteen constitute one of the more difficult passages in the entire book of Revelation to understand. This is true because of several reasons. **First**, God used a mixture of symbolism and literalism in these chapters. **Second**, some of the symbols represent more than one reality. **Third**, part of the message is historical and part of it is prophetic. In trying to comprehend God’s message to us we need to identify these various elements. In the midst of the difficulty in attempting to comprehend what God is saying to us we find ourselves in the company of John, the writer, who also was bewildered by the message God gave him in the vision.

Pay close attention to what the angel says as he explains:

7 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.**

8 **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.**

Though in verse seven the angel mentioned “**the woman**” first, he begins with explaining “**the beast.**”

“**The beast**” is identified as carrying “**the woman.**” In verse one the angel told John, “**Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters.**” In verse three the angel showed John “**... a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.**” This is “**the beast**” that the angel is now referring to in verse seven and describes in verses eight through fourteen.

The angel tells John that “**the beast**” — “**was, and is not, and yet is**” — has been active in the past, is not a factor in the present, but has a role to play in the future. Though the explanation of the angel may not seem to help us, it does identify “**the beast**” as one who “**ascends out of the bottomless pit and goes into perdition.**” This characterization only fits one creature — **Anti-Christ** — described in Rev. 13:1. In Rev. 19:20 we read that he “**is cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.**”

“**The dragon**” of Chapter twelve, Satan, brings forth **Anti-Christ** as the “**beast out of the sea**” (13:1) who has “**seven heads and ten**

Revelation 17

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9 And here is the mind which hath wisdom. **The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.**

10 And **there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.**

11 And **the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.**

12 And **the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast.**

13 **These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.**

14 **These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.**

15 And he saith unto me, **The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.**

16 And **the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.**

17 **For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.**

18 **And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.**

Revelation
A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #51
8/22/2007

The Explanatory Interlude of Chapter Seventeen: Religious Babylon
Part 3

The Angel explains “the mystery of the woman and the beast”

horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.” God tells us **“the dragon gave him his power and his seat, and his authority”** (13:2).

The next thing to be considered about “the beast” is the reference to the time of his activity — “was, is not and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit.”

The statements from the following verses must be considered:

Nine — “The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth;”

Ten — “And there are seven kings, five are fallen, and one is and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space;”

Eleven — “And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition;”

Twelve — “And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast;”

The interpretation of this passage is difficult, and, as a result there are a number of viewpoints which can be found. We also recognize that God is using symbolism in these statements. The use of symbolism does not indicate that this **“beast”** is not real. Rather, symbolism is used for two reasons. First, as with much of **The Revelation of Jesus Christ**, God’s message is purposely presented in such a way that an unbeliever could not then, nor today, understand it. Second, it is presented symbolically because the message, at various places, may have both literal and symbolic meanings.

The traditional view is that Rome, the Roman Empire and the Roman church are being described in this chapter.

One variation of the traditional viewpoint, which is held by such Bible scholars as J. Vernon McGee, Nowell and Govett and many others, is that Rome and the Roman Empire is being referenced here. For instance Rome is said to have **“seven mountains.”** Then, from verse ten the **“seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come”** are said to be the following: 1. Julius Caesar; 2. Tiberius; 3. Caligula; 4. Claudius; 5. Nero being the **“five that are fallen.”** Then 6. Domitian, who was living during John’s day, being **“the one is,”** with anti-christ being the one **“not yet come.”**

Revelation 17

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Revelation
A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #51
8/22/2007

The Explanatory Interlude of Chapter Seventeen: Religious Babylon
Part 3

The Angel explains “the mystery of the woman and the beast”

A second variation of the traditional viewpoint, while still seeing this “beast” as referring to Rome, and held by such Bible scholars as Scofield and Walter Scott, says these “seven kings” are the different forms of government through which Rome passed such as: kings, consuls, dictators, decemvirs, and military tribunals. In this view the king who is identified as “one is” refers to the sixth or imperial form of government set up by Julius Caesar and under which John was exiled to the island of Patmos by Domitian where he was when he received this vision. In this view, the seventh and last form of government will be satanic in form when it appears.

Regardless of which one of these two traditional views one holds to, in both the end is the same — the **Anti-Christ** rules over the revived Roman Empire. **In accordance with this traditional view** of “the beast” is the interpretation that the Roman Church is “the whore” of verse one. Though there are some problems with this view to be discussed later, some see support for this traditional viewpoint in both Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of Daniel Chapter Two and Daniel’s vision in Daniel Chapter Seven. In Nebuchadnezzar’s vision there were four images depicting four world kingdoms, beginning with Babylon and ending with Rome. Each of the first three kingdoms was destroyed by the one following it, except the Roman Empire which simply disintegrated because of internal decay. In Daniel’s vision four strange and vicious creatures were seen, each representing one of the kingdoms seen in Nebuchadnezzar’s vision. In Daniel’s vision the last creature, representing the Roman Empire, is shown to be as follows:

After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things. I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. (Daniel 7:7-9).

Revelation 17

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Revelation
A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #51
8/22/2007

**The Explanatory Interlude of Chapter Seventeen: Religious Babylon
Part 3**

The Angel explains “the mystery of the woman and the beast”

In both visions in Daniel God used symbolism to represent historical reality. This use of symbols to represent historical reality is also true in Revelation Seventeen and continues into Chapter Eighteen. It is now appropriate to make some comments about the particulars of what the angel told John in his explanation.

Since, both **“the woman”** and **“the beast”** are presented in symbolic form, it is only consistent to see **“the mountains”** of verse nine as symbolical. Much has been made of Rome being the city of seven hills and thereby identifying Rome as being pictured in verse nine. However, there are some problems with this interpretation. The Scripture is clear. The word used here for **“mountains”** is **oros** and the Greek word for **“hill”** is **bounos**. If God had meant to say **“hills”** instead of **“mountains”** that is what He would have said.

We have already seen that the **“great whore”** represents all false religion and includes all who are left behind when Christ raptures His church, His body. It is simply wrong to identify it as the Roman church. Besides this, with **“the woman”** and **“the beast”** being presented in a symbolic way it would then be inconsistent to interpret **“the mountains”** as literal mountains rather than being used to represent governments or thrones such as is found in Isaiah 2:2 and 14:13.

“The seven mountains” thus represent seven great world empires or kingdoms. Both John McArthur (*The McArthur Study Bible*) and Henry Morris (*The Revelation Record*) list these seven world empires as follows: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. At the time John wrote *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* the first five of these empires no longer existed, but Rome was still the world power. According to Nebuchadnezzar’s vision the part of the image representing Rome had **“ten toes of the feet and were part iron and part clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly broken”** (Dan. 2:42). Different viewpoints have been offered as to what governments are referred to by **“the ten toes,”** but the most common view is that it is referring to the nations of Europe which will constitute the revived Roman Empire under the dictatorship of **Anti-Christ**.

In Rev. 17:10 we are told that **“And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.”** The **“five that are fallen”** refer to the five fallen kingdoms. The **“one is”** refers to Rome and **“the other is not yet come, and when he cometh, he must continue a short space,”** refers to the brief rule allotted to **Anti-Christ** during the **Tribulation Period**.

Revelation 17

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A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #51
8/22/2007

The Explanatory Interlude of Chapter Seventeen: Religious Babylon
Part 3

The Angel explains "the mystery of the woman and the beast"

In both of the visions in Daniel the end of the Roman empire ends when the Lord Jesus Christ comes and destroys it.

Just as we may think we are grasping the angel's explanation to John we read verse eleven:

11 And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.

Having seen "seven heads" on "the beast" representing seven kingdoms, we suddenly read about "the eighth." He is "of the seven," meaning he arises out of the seven or seventh kingdom. This "eighth" king is "the beast" himself, **Anti-Christ**, who arises out of the revived Roman Empire. He is pictured in Daniel 7:8 as the "little horn" and in Daniel 7:24-25 and in Daniel 11:36-39:

"And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings. And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.

And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished: for that that is determined shall be done. Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god: for he shall magnify himself above all. But in his estate shall he honour the God of forces: and a god whom his fathers knew not shall he honour with gold, and silver, and with precious stones, and pleasant things. Thus shall he do in the most strong holds with a strange god, whom he shall acknowledge and increase with glory: and he shall cause them to rule over many, and shall divide the land for gain."

This king "was and is not" because he is **Anti-Christ** who in Revelation thirteen presents a mirage of his death and resurrection.

In verse twelve we are told about the "...ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast" who are ten kings that **Anti-Christ** shall empower to do his will during the **Tribulation Period**. Verse thirteen tells us that these "ten kings have one mind, and shall give their power and strength to the beast" who is **Anti-Christ**.

Revelation 17

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Lesson #51
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The Explanatory Interlude of Chapter Seventeen: Religious Babylon
Part 3

The Angel explains “the mystery of the woman and the beast”

The angel then tells John that **“These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.”** This is not surprising. By serving **Anti-Christ** their minds are so convoluted that they actually think they can fight the Lord Jesus Christ and win. We know how that ends and will read more about it in chapters to come.

After reading verse fifteen which tells us that **“The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues”** meaning that **“the great whore,”** the **“woman”** who was seen sitting upon the beast and energized by the beast has ensnared people from all around the world. However, having sold their soul to the devil and serving **Anti-Christ**, the leaders of false religion are in for a shocking awakening.

What happens next will indeed be a shock to the leaders of false religion. Verse sixteen tells us **“And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.”** Having used the pseudo-religious leaders of the world to dupe the people into following them, **Anti-Christ** does what he has planned all along and what is prophesied in God’s Word. We read about it in Revelation thirteen as the **“false prophet”** does his work: **“And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.”** It is a fitting end to all false religion! It is done in such a way because it is exactly as predetermined by God: **“For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.”** God has a plan and always works His plan according to his sovereign will and purposes.

One last thing remains for us in Chapter Seventeen: **“And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.”** We will read more about the historical and literal identification of **“the woman”** as we move into Chapter Eighteen.

Revelation 17

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