

BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson 37 - Chapter 17

We began Revelation 17 this past week, and the primary feature I wanted to show you was how the woman riding on the Beast with 7 heads and 10 horns was essentially the antithesis, the opposite, of the woman of Revelation chapter 12 who was clothed in the sun, had 12 stars as a crown and was pregnant with the Messiah. In chapter 17, the harlot woman is more or less sponsored by Satan and the Beast. In chapter 12, the righteous woman is sponsored by God. So it is a battle of evil against good; the character and nature of the righteous woman versus the character and nature of the evil woman. And indeed, in chapter 12, there was a battle of evil against good that took place in Heaven, and good won out. The result was that Satan was expelled from Heaven and so now he turned all his attention to Earth. Earth was Satan's last chance at having a kingdom for himself. So here in chapter 17, then, Satan mocks and mimics God by bringing forth the evil woman riding on the Beast with 7 heads (one of whom is the Anti-Christ). Her job is to turn the nations of the world against God and against God's people as a prelude to an all-out war for planet Earth; this will be Satan's last stand. It will be the war to end all wars, which in the Western world is called Armageddon.

Revelation 17 is not a long chapter but it is utterly packed with tantalizing information about which countless books and articles have been written, and dozens of opinions have been given. Since we only got through the first few verses let's read it all from the beginning.

RE-READ REVELATION 17 all

As with a number of Prophets before him, John was sent into an ecstatic state by the Spirit, and carried away into a spiritual wilderness for a vision about this woman and the Beast. John was not physically moved; rather it was his spirit that was transported. Why into a visionary wilderness? Because as a living person John could not enter Heaven to receive God's instructions; and the Temple was destroyed at this time so meeting there was not possible (and John wasn't a priest, anyway), and so the wilderness was a traditional place where God would meet with His prophets. And since this is the spiritual sphere John is operating in for the moment, then for us to best understand what is happening we must take it in figurative terms. And the figurative term (the mental picture) that we are given to best understand this spiritual meeting place is "the wilderness"; a place where learning and preparation and protection by God occurs.

There John sees this spectacular woman sitting on a Beast, the Beast being filling with blasphemous names. What does it mean that the Beast was filled with blasphemous names? No doubt we are to take the term "names" within the Hebrew context, which means that the idea is about a person's character and attributes. So, as concerns God, what makes claimed attributes and character traits of the Beast "blasphemous"? In English language and culture, to blaspheme is to hurl an insult for the purpose of causing offense. So in the English sense of

the word to blaspheme God or Christ is essentially to insult Him. That is the sense it is meant in Islam, when the Prophet or Allah is said to have been blasphemed; that is, it is a matter of doing or saying something that the religious authorities believe is offensive and shameful. But that it not the biblical sense of it. In the Bible, the idea of blasphemy as indicating some sort of offense or insult against God's or man's religious sensibilities is not there.

Rather, especially as concerns God, blasphemy is closer in meaning to cursing God, or to condemning Him..... even denouncing or renouncing Him. It is not cursing in the sense of saying bad words to Him. But rather in the Hebrew sense whereby it means to wish something evil to befall someone. In ancient times to issue a curse in a god's name was thought to have power. When you blaspheme God you are questioning or making light of His immense and unapproachable authority and holiness. One familiar example of blaspheming God is idolatry. Why? Because idolatry on its face says that we place a higher value upon, and offer a higher honor to, a god, person or object than we do to the God of Israel. We assign to that god, person or object the characteristics and attributes that rightly belong only to the Lord. Atheism is idolatry and therefore blasphemy because it takes away the worship rightly due to God and gives it to humans.

Thus the 7 headed Beast with the blasphemous names..... the Anti-Christ plus those leaders that prop up his position of authority..... seeks to be worshipped and to be honored in place of God's Son, Messiah Yeshua. He demands that the high place that God alone holds belongs instead to Him. And indeed during the time Anti-Christ reigns, when a human being takes on the mark of the Beast (666), that person is tattooing him or herself to provide visible proof of their allegiance and honor to Satan instead of to God. This is blasphemy.

The vision of the woman being seated upon the Beast denotes an alliance and a common purpose and mindset, including a certain interdependence; the 7 heads and the woman act as a team (but as we'll see later, it doesn't remain that way). The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet; purple is traditionally the color of royalty while scarlet is emblematic of what is worn by harlots. We could spend an awful lot of time on the significance of color in ancient times but suffice it to say that while we moderns might find purple and scarlet worn together as being rather a bold and brassy display, maybe even fun, any Jew in John's time would instantly have zeroed in on the unmistakable symbolic meaning. Those two colors being adorned by the same woman would at best seem ironic; but more likely, since we are dealing with a Jewish cultural backdrop, Jewish Believers would have seen this as an example of an important biblical principle: **sha'atnez**. **Sha'atnez** means illicit mixtures. In the Old Testament there is a law that says that wool and linen must not be woven together to form a cloth other than for some specific exceptions. The same law principle also speaks of not sowing seeds of two different kinds next to one another in a field. These both fall within the principle of **sha'atnez**. So this woman seated on the Beast wearing purple and scarlet is wearing a blatantly rebellious illicit mixture that says while that she may consider herself to be royalty (purple), she is equally an unclean prostitute (scarlet).

Yet, the symbolism of what she is wearing goes on further. She is said to have adorned herself with gold and precious stones. I think because the entire theme of the woman and the Beast is to mimic and mock God, then the gold and precious stones is kind of a perverse display of the

breastplate that the High Priest wore. The High Priest wore precious stones symbolizing God's chosen people: the 12 tribes of Israel. The harlot riding the Beast wears her "breastplate" of precious stones symbolizing the vulgarity and decadence of Satan's chosen people: the gentile nations of the world.

Notice next that she holds a gold cup. This is mocking God's use of gold bowls given to angels to pour out His wrath in judgment. So what is her gold vessel filled with? Obscene and filthy things that have been produced by her whoring. The Young's Literal Translation uses the terms abominations and uncleanness to describe what is in her cup and that is a far better interpretation as the Greek words are ***bdelugma*** that indeed means abomination, and ***akarthartes*** that means ritual impurity. And when we look to the Holy Scriptures we find that God labels the worst of the worst sins as abominations, and ritual impurity is the natural result of sin; point being that the two go together. In keeping with the concept of sacred activity and Satan mocking it, we next read in verse 5 that, like the High Priest, the harlot wore a band on her forehead with a name written on it: Babel the Great, Mother of Whores and the Earth's Obscenities. The High Priest wore a band on his head also with a secret name on it: the name of God..... YHWH. Some commentators want to equate the woman wearing the headband to the requirement of the Beast for all humans to wear the number 666 on their foreheads or hands. While that is certainly some low hanging fruit, I see this as out of context for the scene being depicted. Rather what is written on the forehead of the Harlot is a mocking parody of the divine name written on the forehead of the Israelite High Priest. In each case, what is written describes whom the person wearing the name on his/her forehead identifies with: the woman identifies with Babylon the Great and Satan, the High Priest identifies with the God of Israel.

The final feature of John's description of the harlot is that she is drunk from the blood of God's people, and then further identifies those people as followers of Yeshua. So let's make no mistake: since this woman is symbolic of the wicked world system that opposes God, then we can reasonably surmise that this same system will not tolerate those who refuse to join them. The world's system of the End Times will, like the government system of Orwell's novel 1984, demand absolute conformity. The world system wants to eradicate not so much belief in a god, but rather only those who follow the true God. After all, belief in a god would not serve the Anti-Christ or the False Prophet well as they want themselves to be seen as divine. Pause and think for a moment; is there a system in the world today that believes in a god, seeks world domination, is violent and uncompromising, and hates Jews and Christians and wants them exterminated at all costs? Of course: Islam. Could the world system of the Anti-Christ use the Muslims' homicidal hatred of Jews and Christians to its advantage? It certainly seems feasible and I think the biblical descriptions of the nations that try to annihilate Israel along with the circumstances of the End Times that involves never ending wars centered on the existence of Israel (that today are entirely under the influence and cause of Islam), makes that false religion a prime suspect as the leader in the persecution of Christians and Jews as history comes to a close.

John is said to have greatly wondered about this woman. The Greek word translated as wondered or astounded is ***thauma***. It does not mean puzzling or confusing or even worried. It is actually a term that is normally used in a positive sense, even indicating a kind of admiration; we today might say "wonderful". I think it is safe to say that John was impressed as opposed to

disgusted. He was as bedazzled by the amazing splendor of this woman riding upon the Beast, as Josephus said that gentiles were when coming to Jerusalem just to visit the city were bedazzled when, from a distance, they first saw Herod's breathtaking Temple rise into the clouds looking like a snow-capped mountain. So when most of our Bibles read that the angel asks John why he's so astounded or amazed, and then goes on to explain who this woman is to John, it is not because John is confused and frightened and so the angel wants to unconfuse him. Rather the real substance of the angel's question is more like: so what about this woman impresses you so much that you are enchanted, if not delighted, in child-like awe of her beauty and magnificence? Don't be. She's not what you think.

Rather, says the angel, I'll tell you the hidden meaning of the woman that sits upon the beast with the 7 heads and 10 horns. John is told that the Beast she's consorting with has come up out of the Abyss and is on its way to being destroyed. In other words, that Beast and rider are of Satanic origin and power and are soon enough going to be snuffed out by God. What the angel actually tells John has brought on all sorts of speculation from the theological world and indeed is one mind-bending mystery that I'm sure we'd all like to know the answer to. The angel says: "The Beast you saw once was, now is not, and will come from the Abyss". Don't let this simple description fly by you. What is Messiah (and God) called in the Bible; a description sometimes used in Christian songs? "The One is who is, and who was, and who is to come". And now what is the Beast that arises from the Abyss described as? The one who was, now is not, and will come...." So while the true Messiah will descend from Heaven onto the earth to assume His throne, the Anti-Messiah will also ascend from the Abyss, the place of imprisoned demons, onto earth to confront Yeshua in the war to claim the planet once and for all.

Notice how in verse 8 that, just as John was awe struck and overwhelmed by the splendor of the Harlot, so now all the people living on earth whose names are NOT written in the Book of Life (non-Believers, those who are lost forever) are awe struck and overwhelmed by the splendor of the Beast. Let me pause to remind you: the Beast with 7 heads and 10 horns (or just The Beast for short) is not just one person or thing. Those 7 heads are 7 different people, and in Revelation 13 one of the 7 was said to have overcome a fatal head wound (the one that will go on to be the Anti-Christ). If the Apostle John sees the most incredible, beautiful, incomparable sight he has ever witnessed in the Harlot, and he had to be brought back to reality by that angel, how much more will non-Believers be pleasantly flabbergasted and impressed and welcoming at the sight of the Beast. And while John had an angel to tell him who this woman was in reality, the earth-dwellers in these days will have no such advantage. They will be thoroughly taken in, with every level of human leadership and authority agreeing that the Beast is the most wonderful, needed thing ever to appear before human kind. The Beast's abilities, charisma, intelligence, likeability and leadership have never been matched and people will gladly do the will of the Beast believing that if he thinks something is best, then it cannot be challenged. But now more information is given, with the caveat (in verse 9) that wisdom will be needed to understand. We must always remember that wisdom, by definition, is from God. Knowledge can be acquired by anyone of reasonable intelligence; but only they who have the Lord can have wisdom. So now here is the riddle of the ages.

The Beast and its description are, of course, symbolic. The angel says that the 7 heads are symbolic of 7 mountains, upon which the woman (the Harlot of Babylon) is said to be

established. Further the 7 heads are also 7 kings. 5 of them have fallen, 1 is in existence (in John's era apparently), and the 7th is yet to come (it has yet to appear). But, when that 7th king does appear, he will only be in power for a short time. To add to the mystery, there will be an eighth and he belongs to the 7th one, and he will go on to perdition. Let's clear up one thing right away: the Greek word that is in some English Bibles (including the influential KJV) that is translated to perdition is **apoleia**, and it means utter destruction. If we take the word perdition to merely indicate complete destruction, that's correct; but often as not Perdition is seen either as a kind of mid-way stop over between earth and Heaven for departed souls, or it is but another word for Hell. The word **apoleia** is a description and not a place. So this verse confirms that this 8th king or kingdom will finally and utterly be destroyed. Then the passage turns its attention to the symbolism of the 10 horns; but we have enough to chew on for the moment with the 7 heads and kings.

The appearance of the phrase "7 mountains" (or hills), especially in John's day, makes it awfully tempting to say that these 7 heads of the Beast represent Rome; or perhaps the Roman Empire with Rome as its capital. Rome has for time immemorial been known as the city built on 7 hills. Thus to say that the woman is established upon the 7 mountains (or hills) means that the institution of Babylon the Great is based in Rome. And it is believed within many Christian circles that this can only mean one thing; that the Catholic Church, located in Rome, with a Pope as its "king", is the Harlot, Babylon the Great.

Since the word mountains or hills is regularly used in Old Testament prophecy to symbolize governments, then another line of thought is that the 7 mountains represent 7 Roman kings (emperors), and there is always a debate of which 7 these might be. Some theologians who think this is the solution begin with Julius Caesar, others with Augustus, some even with Galba. One of the more accepted listings of the 7 kings of Rome that must begin with the first 5 being fallen, are Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero. Therefore the 6th king (the one verse 10 says "who is", must be Vespasian who ruled from 69 - 79 A.D. Pausing for a moment, that means that Vespasian was in power when the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., but it also means that the latest date that John could have written Revelation is early 79 A.D. (or, for John, Vespasian couldn't have been the "one who is"). Since few any longer believe that John wrote Revelation that early (I think it was around 90 A.D.), then of course Vespasian as the 6th king of Rome doesn't work. But, if Vespasian were the 6th king then Titus would be the 7th (the "one who is not yet come"). Titus ruled Rome from 79 -81, barely 2 years (thus satisfying verse 10 that says he must remain only a little while).

Other scholars calculate the 1st of the 7 Roman kings was Nero, and the 7th was Domitian, mostly because of the assertion that John wrote in the early 90's A.D. and Domitian was the emperor at that time.

If indeed any of these systems of counting Roman kings is correct, then the name of the Kingdom over which any of these emperor kings reigned, was the Roman Kingdom. Thus, with the words that the 8th kingdom had to come out of the 7th (in some undefined way) then we have the theory (that is perhaps the most accepted identity of the 8th kingdom in modern Christianity) that the 8th kingdom will be a revived Roman Empire, and so the 8th king will be the Anti-Christ. And, as we've discussed in previous lessons, it is also equally accepted in

modern times that the European Union represents at least the beginnings of the revived Roman Empire.

Now let's look at yet another possibility. Because in the OT mountains often symbolize human kings or kingdoms, and at other times the term mountains signifies strength, then it is probably a better approach to stick with the historical and typical use of those terms rather than regard these 7 mountains as indicating an actual named location. I've heard some commentators say that we need to take into account what the New Testament says about the use of the term mountains (such as referring to the Mount of Olives). To that I respond that I don't agree. For all Jews of John's day, Believer or otherwise, they would have looked to the Holy Scriptures as their reference. The only Holy Scriptures in existence at that time were what we call the Old Testament. There would be no authorized and canonized New Testament until very early in the 3rd century A.D. So whatever documents written by the Gospel writers or Paul or John that were being passed around to the various Believing congregations, while certainly considered authoritative, were in no way considered as God inspired and thus not on par with the **Tanakh**. These letters were truth, and they were important, and they gave direction from the Apostles for how to run Believing congregations and on how to understand Yeshua's purpose and ministry; but they were not considered as holy nor were they considered as Scripture and would not be for more than 100 years after John's time. So John would of course have looked to Holy Scripture for direction and terminology and not to some letters floating around.

If we go to Daniel whose writings have great influence upon John's Apocalypse, then we understand that 7 is the total number of heads of the four beasts of his visions and we must assume a connection to the Beast with the Harlot on board. And Daniel's 4 beasts correspond to the statue of Nebuchadnezzar's dream that had a head of gold, shoulders of silver, torso of bronze, and legs of iron. Thus those 4 beasts and the 4 parts of the statue represent 4 Kingdoms, with the legs of iron being the 4th kingdom. These Kingdoms are typically said to start with Babylon, then the Media-Persian, then the Greek, and finally the Roman. The feet of the statue are said to be a mixture of iron and clay, to some meaning that a 5th kingdom will arise out of the 4th, but since clay is weak in structure, then the mixture of clay with iron says that this 5th Roman Kingdom will not be as strong as the former Roman Kingdom.

The upshot of this is that some commentators such as Beale say that since the kingdoms of Daniel's beasts and the Nebuchadnezzar statue each span centuries, then so does the Beast of Revelation. That is, the sea-beast image of Revelation, which also appears in the Old Testament, signifies different wicked kingdoms over the ages but none in particular. And even the number 7 is not literal but it rather means fullness. I disagree with this conclusion because then it makes a mockery of the rather intricately laid out vision of Revelation 17:10 that explains how many kingdoms have come and gone, that one is current, then another has yet to arise later, and then an 8th one will come that has something to do with the 7th. None of that sounds very general or indefinite. Do we know the answer to this riddle of the kingdoms and kings, yet? I don't believe we do, otherwise there wouldn't be so many different opinions about them, each with their own fan club.

At this point I'd like to throw out another possibility for the lists of Empires and Kings, including the all important 7th and 8th. First, I want to set some parameters. We must remember that the

Bible is always focused on the Middle East, with Jerusalem at its center. The known world even in New Testament times did not extend beyond the European, Asian, and African continents. Thus the Lord did not reference other as yet unknown places in the world such as Australia, or North America, or Greenland, etc. So when we read about End Times prophecies, do not suppose that any reference to any person or place or event is outside of the Middle East, Asia, Europe, and Africa. When we begin superimposing America into these prophecies, we are chasing ghosts.

Next: as we read about the Beast with 7 heads and 10 horns, we are told that the 7 heads represents governments (or better, kingdoms or empires), but then in verse 9 we are told that the 7 heads also represent kings (humans). But, does this mean that we have to match 1 particular Kingdom to 1 particular King? After all, most of the ancient kingdoms lasted for centuries so that they had multiple kings. So we have to be careful to differentiate between a geopolitical kingdom and any specific king over a kingdom, and verses 7 -9 essentially tell us that the 7 heads represent both. This greatly adds to the complexity of our task of untangling the meaning of this prophecy.

And finally, the Beast is said to have 7 heads and 10 horns. In Revelation 13 we're told that ONE of the heads received what appeared to be a fatal wound, but he survived. In other words, had that one head died, the other 6 would have (theoretically) lived on. This head that was wounded we conclude is the Anti-Christ. But just as the 7 heads are said to represent both kingdoms and kings, so it is that clearly the 7 heads of the Beast CAN be of 7 unique individuals; that is, only ONE of them is the coming Anti-Christ and the other 6 represent other people. However, the 7 heads along with the 10 horns together form but one single Beast. And so at times the Beast is spoken of as single unified entity, and at other times the focus is on the various parts of the Beast (its 7 heads and 10 horns) and so each of those parts represents unique individuals or entities. Confusing? Yes; but let's remember that we are able to do approximately the same thing when we discuss God. We can speak of Him in His various parts that the Trinity Doctrine declares is the Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit. We can speak about each of those parts separately and to a point understand their various purposes and functions. And yet, we can also speak of God as a single unified entity. So we need to sort of visualize this discussion in Revelation 17 about the Beast the same way; he is, in the end, a single unified entity that at the same time is made up of various parts that operate somewhat separately (the 7 heads and 10 horns), but yet they are single minded in purpose and mission and together form all that the Anti-Christ is.

The difficult part of figuring out who these 8 kingdoms are that John speaks about is identifying the 7th and 8th kingdoms. The first 5 and then the 6th aren't too tough. The first five.....the ones that are fallen (and this is assuming that we should be looking for kingdoms and not kings).....are the Egyptian Kingdom, the Assyrian, then the Babylonian, then the Media-Persian, and then the Greek Kingdom. The 6th kingdom John says is the one that exists now. In John's time that can only be Rome. But what about the 7th kingdom, the one that is "yet to come"? The 7th empire is critical to identify because the 8th empire will come from it, or be very much like it, in some way. So then who is the 7th?

One of the keys to understanding the nature of this succession of empires (and kings) is that

each empire that conquered the current one absorbed the one that was conquered. So essentially the bulk of the specific territory of each of these empires remained the same throughout history; only after each change of hands the overall size of the empire or kingdom grew as additional territories were added.

So the question we need to ask is this: since Rome was the 6th Empire (the one that existed during John's lifetime), then who conquered the Roman Empire and absorbed its territory (that would therefore identify the 7th kingdom)? A sort of two step process took place. In the 3rd century the Roman Empire was divided into 2 as it had grown so large as to be unwieldy to operate. Then later, the Western Roman Empire fell but the Eastern part continued on. The Eastern part was, for a while, called the Byzantine Empire, with its capital in Byzantium, today called Istanbul, Turkey. Finally in the mid 1400's the Eastern Roman Empire lost its grip and was taken over by the Turks and Islam. This was the beginning of the Ottoman Empire.

So, as usual, the Ottoman Empire absorbed much of what the earlier empires controlled and of course that was primarily the Middle East and the areas that surrounded the Mediterranean Sea. But what is of prime importance for us to understand is that this was a purely Islamic Empire, and it lasted until the early 1900's. So today when we hear Muslims claiming territory in Europe and all around the Mediterranean and in the Middle East, it stems from their belief that they have the right to reclaim land controlled during the Ottoman Empire, and that includes present day Israel and especially Jerusalem.

So from my viewpoint, the 7th kingdom or empire is the Ottoman Empire. I readily admit that statement of verse 10 that this empire (or king) will remain only "a little while" is problematic, but I can't decipher how long "a little while" is. And if the 7th kingdom is the Islamic Ottoman Empire, then it says that we can expect the 8th (the kingdom of the Anti-Christ) to be have a commonality with the Ottoman Empire. When we look at the world around us today, and now that Islam has re-entered the consciousness of the Western world after a long of time of forgetting about them, we are better able to understand all this talk from Islamic leaders about establishing a world-wide Caliphate; that is, Islam wants to establish a one-world government, ruled by an Islamic Theocracy.

I've spoken to you before that Islam is as much (if not more) a political organization than a religious one. The many wars we see today among nations in the Middle East are wars by and between various factions of Muslims in order to determine which sect of Islam, and therefore which leaders of Islam, will be the ones to create and rule over this one-world Islamic government they envision. And yet, they all agree on one thing: all Jews and Christians must either convert to Islam or die. How does that fit with what we are learning in Revelation about the End Times and the coming Anti-Christ and his kingdom? Hand in glove.

Let me caution you that by no means am I stating that this is for certain how it is, and absolutely how it is all going to go down in the last days. I'm saying that from the vantage point of 2019 and all the history before now, this seems to me the most likely possibility. This is my opinion and my speculation. And every day that passes makes the more popularly held belief among Christians that the 7th kingdom and thus also the 8th will be a revived Roman Empire less and less likely. And, this was a theory that was always full of holes anyway.

I think this is enough to munch on for today; next week we'll be dealing with the 10 horns on the head of the Beast.