

The Book Of Revelation Study 85

Revelation 17:7-14 (NASB)

⁷ *And the angel said to me, "Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.*

⁸ *"The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.*

⁹ *"Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits,*

¹⁰ *and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while.*

¹¹ *"The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction.*

¹² *"The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour.*

¹³ *"These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast.*

¹⁴ *"These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful."*

Revelation 17:18 (NASB)

¹⁸ *"The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth."*

In response to John's confusion and amazement, the angel said to him rhetorically, "why do you wonder?" there was no need for John to remain puzzled by the relation of the beast to this beautiful yet bloody woman in the vision; The angel was about to explain to him **the mystery of the woman (V. 18) and of the beast that carries her (vv. 8-17)**

The Apostle understood that **the woman** represented a false religious system and that **the beast** was the Antichrist, as the reference to his **seven heads and ten horns** indicates (v. 3; 13:1)

What he did not understand was the connection between the two figures.

It had been revealed to John in a previous vision that the whole world would worship Antichrist (13:4, 8, 12).

That may have been what raised the question in John's mind as to how **the woman** fits into the picture, particularly how it is that **the beast carries her**.

Skipping for a moment the angel's digression in verses 8-14 describing the beast, verse 18 identifies **the woman whom John saw as the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth**.

Some commentators deny that **the great city** is a literal city, preferring to see it as a symbol of the religious aspect of Antichrist's empire.

Some who view the city as an actual city identify it as Rome, others as Jerusalem.

But the angel quite clearly and repeatedly refers to Babylon on the Euphrates throughout chapters 17-18.

Those allusions can be seen by comparing 17:1 with Jeremiah 51:13; and 17:2, 4 with Jeremiah 51:7; and 18:7 and with Isaiah 47:5; and 18:2 with Isaiah 13:21 and Jeremiah 51:8, and 18:4 with Jeremiah 50:8 and 51:6, 45; and 18:5 with Jeremiah 51:9; and 18:6 with Jeremiah 50:15 and 51:24; then 18:21 with Jeremiah 51:63-64.

The description of Babylon's destruction also suggests that an actual city is in view. (18:10, 18, 21)

Thus a rebuilt city of Babylon will be closely identified with Antichrist's world empire, perhaps as its capital city. That city will be the center of his kingdom, the extent of which will be the whole earth.

The Old Testament predictions of Babylon's total destruction (Isa 13:1-14:27; Jer. 50-51 also favors identifying **the great city** with Babylon on the Euphrates.

The detailed description those passages give of Babylon's destruction was only partially fulfilled when the Medes and Persians sack the ancient city of Babylon.

As in the case of many Old Testament prophecies, those predictions had both a near and a far fulfillment.

Henry Morris noted that, Babylon, indeed, will be permanently destroyed, as recorded in the very next chapter (18:21), but this has not happened yet. The prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah also refer to this future destruction, not merely to Babylon's present day condition, as is evident from the following considerations, among others:

1. *The destruction will take place in a time that the stars and sun are darkened (Isaiah 13:1, 9, 10).*
2. *The city will become desolate as Sodom and Gomorrah, burned completely, with no remains whatever (Isaiah 13:19; Jeremiah 50:40).*
3. *It shall become desolate forever, with neither man nor beast entering it anymore (Isaiah 13:20; Jeremiah 51:62).*
4. *It will be a time of judgment not only for Babylon, but for all nations (Isaiah 13:11-13; Jeremiah 51:49).*
5. *Its destruction will be followed by universal rest and peace (Isaiah 14:7, 8).*
6. *Its destruction is directly associated also with the casting of Lucifer into Sheol (Isaiah 14:12-15).*
7. *Babylon's stones will never be used in future construction elsewhere, whereas the present day ruins of Babylon have been frequently plundered and reused in later constructions (Jeremiah 51:26. (The Revelation record [Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1983], 348)*

The site of modern Babylon is strategically located at the crossroads of Asia, Europe, and Africa and is not far from the Persian Gulf.

It is also near the world's richest oil fields and has a virtually unlimited water supply from the Euphrates.

Those considerations led the famed historian Arnold Toynbee to proclaim that Babylon would be an ideal site for an important political and cultural center (Morris, *Revelation Record* 349).

In verses 8-14 the angel gives John a lengthy description of the beast.

He is explaining to John the relationship between the harlot and the beast, which had mystified the apostle (vv. 6-7).

But for John to grasp that connection, the angel needed first to give him further details about the beast.

This further describes the nature of the beast and his kingdom. Enhancing the description of him in chapter 13.

As previously noted, the **beast that John saw** is Antichrist, the satanic ruler of the last and most powerful empire in human history, who will serve as Satan's instrument to attack Israel, persecute believers, conquer the world for Satan, and oppose Christ.

Scripture portrays him as an intellectual genius;

Daniel 7:8 (NASB)

⁸ *"While I was contemplating the horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts.*

As an outstanding orator;

Daniel 7:20 (NASB)

²⁰ *and the meaning of the ten horns that were on its head and the other horn which came up, and before which three of them fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great boasts and which was larger in appearance than its associates.*

As a military leader without parallel in human history;

Daniel 7:23 (NASB)

²³ *"Thus he said: 'The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it.*

A shrewd, calculating, manipulating politician,

Daniel 8:25 (NASB)

²⁵ *"And through his shrewdness He will cause deceit to succeed by his influence; And he will magnify himself in his heart, And he will destroy many while they are at ease. He will even oppose the Prince of princes, But he will be broken without human agency.*

Daniel 11:21 (NASB)

²¹ *"In his place a despicable person will arise, on whom the honor of kingship has not been conferred, but he will come in a time of tranquility and seize the kingdom by intrigue.*

And the ultimate religious charlatan;

2 Thessalonians 2:4 (NASB)

⁴ *who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.*

The angel briefly reviews the detailed description of him given in 13:1-10.

The beast is described as one who was, and is not, and is about to come again.

This refers to a subject we talked about earlier, the faked death and resurrection of Antichrist.

The false prophet will use that alleged miracle to deceive the entire world into worshiping Antichrist.

Revelation 13:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ *And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who *had the wound of the sword and has come to life.*

Up until this point in time, Antichrist's political and economic empire will coexist with the false religious system headed by the false prophet.

But after his staged, "resurrection" Antichrist, then indwelt by a powerful demon **out of the abyss**, will turn on the false religious system and destroy it. He will tolerate only one religion, the worship of himself.

Antichrist's faked resurrection and his destruction of the false religious system will take place approximately halfway through the Tribulation period.

At that point, he will be the undisputed ruler of the world, with unilateral power.

He will appear to have reached the apex of his sovereignty, and be ready to thwart the coming of Christ and His Kingdom.

Yet, in reality, Antichrist will be about to be crushed and sent to **destruction**, eternal damnation in the lake of fire

Revelation 19:20 (NASB)

²⁰ *And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone.*

Revelation 20:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ *And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

That will be appropriate punishment for the "son of destructions" (2Thess. 2:3) who dared in his insolent pride to copy the sin of Lucifer and challenge the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Now the phrase **here is the mind which has wisdom**, invites John and his listeners to pay close attention to what follows.

This unusual expression introduces a difficult and complex aspect of this vision.

It will take much wisdom and spiritual insight to understand it, and perhaps only those alive at the time will fully comprehend it.

The first aspect of the vision that needs to be understood is that **the seven heads** of the beast are seven mountains or hills **on which the woman sits**.

The word goes on to explain that the seven mountains are seven kings.

Mountains are sometimes used metaphorically in the Old Testament to represent rule, or power;

Psalms 30:7a (NASB)

⁷ *O LORD, by Your favor You have made my mountain to stand strong;*

Isaiah 2:2 (NASB)

² *Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it.*

Here the mountains represent seven world empires embodied in their rulers.

The angel tells John that **five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come**.

The five Gentile world empires that had fallen by the time of John's vision are Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece.

The one that existed at that time was obviously Rome.

The other one that **has not yet come** is Antichrist's final world empire.

Commenting on the significance of the first six empires, Henry Morris writes,

Though none of these empires ever actually ruled the whole world, each was the greatest kingdom of its own time, particularly in reference to the land and people of Israel and these kingdoms' opposition to the proclamation of God's Word and the accomplishment of His purposes in the world.

These, of course, have not been the only kingdoms that have been at enmity with God and His purposes. In this category could also be placed such kingdoms as Syria, Edom, Moab, Midian, and many others, but none of these were empires of great size and influence.

On the other hand, there were other great and powerful empires in the ancient world, china, India, and the Incas, for example, but these had only peripheral contact with the Word of God and the chosen people.

There were only six kingdoms that met both criteria up to the time of Christ and the apostles

Furthermore, all six of these were not only legitimate heirs of political Babel but also of religious Babel as well. Babylonia, Egypt, Assyria, Persia, Greece, and Rome were all strongholds of the world religion of evolutionary pantheism and idolatrous polytheism.

Thus, they appropriately are represented as six heads on the great beast that supports the harlot. (Morris, Revelation Record, 337. Italics in the original.)

The angel further explains that **when Antichrist comes, he must remain a little while** (12:12)

His empire will be short-lived; he will be given authority to act for forty-two months (13:5; the second half of the Tribulation).

Then the angel offered the enigmatic comment that **the beast which was and is not, is himself also the eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction.**

How to explain this, the key phrase is **the beast was and is not.**

Antichrist will be one of the seven kings before his supposed demise and resurrection and **an eighth king** afterwards during the second phase of his rule.

Unlike the first six empires, Antichrist will be destroyed by a direct act of God.

The angel further explained that **the ten horns which John saw are ten kings.**

They cannot be known to any earlier generation because they **have not yet received a kingdom.**, since they are part of Antichrist's future empire.

They will receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. Perhaps Antichrist's empire will be divided into ten administrative regions, which these **ten kings** will rule under him.

The reference to **one hour** is figure of speech that emphasizes the brevity of their rule: their rule will be short-lived because their master's empire itself will be short-lived.

During their brief reign, they will be unanimously devoted to Antichrist:

They will have one purpose, and will give their power and authority to the beast.
They will do his will, and his will alone.

The agenda of the ten kings, like that of Satan and Antichrist, will be to wage war against the Lamb at the Battle of Armageddon.

Three exceptionally deceitful and powerful demons will be the agents to gather them for that battle:

Revelation 16:13-14 (NASB)

¹³ *And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs;*

¹⁴ *for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.*

John will describe this ill-fated battle in detail in chapter 19, so here he merely notes that the Lamb will overcome them. The battle will in reality be a slaughter; the Lord Jesus Christ will utterly destroy the forces gathered against Him at His second coming.

The reason all the forces of hell cannot defeat the Lamb is because He is Lord of lords and King of kings.

Revelation 19:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ *And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.*

Deuteronomy 10:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ *"For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe.*

1 Timothy 6:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ *which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,*

With Christ when He returns will be the called and chosen and faithful, a reference that can only apply to believers.

The terms are rich in their definition of believers as the eternally elect, chosen in the Son before the foundation of the world;

Ephesians 1:3-4 (NASB)

³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,*

⁴ *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love*

The called, summoned in time by the Father to repentance and faith that saves

John 6:44 (NASB)

⁴⁴ *"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.*

The faithful, demonstrating the true saving faith, the genuine eternal life that endures by the power of the Spirit;

Romans 8:9 (NASB)

⁹ However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

The Lord Jesus Christ will effortlessly crush the greatest armed force ever assembled when He returns with His elect and the holy angels

Matthew 24:30-31 (NASB)

³⁰ "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.

³¹ "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 (NASB)

⁷ and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,

⁸ dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

⁹ These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

¹⁰ when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.