

by Christ. The separation of church and state was like a death blow to the woman riding on the beast. It took the beast out from under the woman and diminished her power. The beast “is not,” which means is not able to aid the church, to enforce the church’s dogma upon the inhabitants of the earth.

The Sixth Head

Finally, we are told by the angel that this power “shall ascend out of the bottomless pit,” that it “is to come” (Revelation 17:8, RSV). The bottomless pit is used in Revelation 20 to represent the restriction of Satan during the thousand years. It is called his “prison” (Revelation 20:7, 1-3). This is a fitting description of what has happened to the power of the papacy since 1798. The beast “is not” with the woman. It has been restricted, imprisoned for a time. Yet it will ascend out of this restriction, symbolized by the bottomless pit. It “is to come” again into union with the woman (see Revelation 17:8, RSV). The church and the state will unite once more to enforce upon the conscience of the inhabitants of the world the doctrines of the Roman church. How could this happen when America presently upholds church-state separation?

Remember our study in Revelation 13? The lamb-like power of the United States, which has for over 200 years embodied the principles of religious freedom for all faiths, would someday speak “as a dragon” (Revelation 13:11). It will say 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” (Revelation 13:14). In this way the United States is the sixth head of the beast, because the beast supports the woman and its heads represent powers that are part of that support.

Prophecy predicts that although the U.S. has embodied church-state separation for over 200 years, it will someday speak as a dragon, giving support to the woman of Revelation 17.

The Seventh Head

The seventh head of the beast will be the final phase of the manifestation of its power yet to come (see Revelation 17:10). The beast “shall ascend out of the bottomless pit” (Revelation 17:8). The restriction that the principles of church-state separation have imposed upon this power will be torn down. America will make an image to the beast (see Revelation 13:12-14). Church and state, the woman and the beast, will be reunited. The seventh head represents the papal power in its revived or “healed” state, having the complete support of the United States and the world (see Revelation 13:3, 7; 17:12-13, 17).

The Eighth

What about “the eighth” that is mentioned in Revelation 17:11? Is this another head? The Bible says that there are “seven heads” not eight. So why an eighth? (See verses 3, 7.) John is told that “the eighth, is of the seven” (Revelation 17:11). That is, the eighth is the sum and total of all the previous powers combined together. How can this be when the previous five kingdoms no longer exist?

The book of Daniel tells us that though the dominion of the powers of Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and pagan Rome were taken away, “their lives were prolonged for a season and a time” (Daniel 7:12). The eighth is therefore the sum total of the characteristics of these four previous kingdoms, plus the characteristics of old papal Rome, the characteristics of the lamb-like power that speaks like a dragon, and the characteristics of the revived papal power. These seven powers through the influence of their culture, customs, religion, and/or present influence make up one sum and total power which is “the eighth.”

What about the rest of the nations and powers of the world today? Let’s read on in Revelation 17.

The Ten Horns

The angel spends the last part of this chapter dealing with the ten horns that are part of the beast. These are identified as “ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast” (Revelation 17:12). Notice

that these are ten kings which have received no “kingdom” (singular), yet. They are promised power for one hour or a short time with the beast. The angel also tells John that these ten horns, “have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast” (Revelation 17:13). Follow these points carefully:

- 1) They are a kingdom, singular, a unity of one universal power (see Matthew 24:9).
- 2) They have no kingdom, singular, as yet. They have not yet established the kingdom of which they all will have a part.
- 3) They give their kingdom unto the beast. They look to the beast and support it (see Revelation 13:7).
- 4) They rule for one hour, a short time, with the beast.
- 5) They have one mind or purpose. They are all in agreement in establishing this universal kingdom.

Here, in symbolic language, Bible prophecy unfolds an attempt by the powers of the earth in unison with the United States and papal Rome to establish a universal power, a one world order. In doing this, they “make war with the Lamb” (Revelation 17:14). This is “the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:14). The “kings of the earth” and the “whole world” have been gathered together by this church-state power to oppose the authority of God as revealed in His Word. They have established a kingdom and have given it “unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled” (Revelation 17:17).

War With the Lamb

What does it mean that they “shall make war with the Lamb?” (Revelation 17:14). At first this mighty universal power is arrayed against the faithful people of God. Those who refuse to drink the wine of fornication, the false doctrines from the cup of Babylon, are “afflicted” and “hated of all nations” (Matthew 24:9). Earthly powers make war against the Lamb by persecuting His followers (see Acts 9:5). But soon Jesus Himself steps in. Revelation 19 captures the scene in verses 11-21.

It must be this manifestation of Christ’s conquering power, as well as the realization that they have been deceived by the religious aspect of their world order, that these kings turn upon the woman. The angel tells John that they “shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire” (Revelation 17:16).

A Closing Thought

The main message of Revelation 17 is the “judgment,” *krima*, of this great universal church that has worked in unholy alliance with the powers of the earth. Her sins—past, present, and future—are opened up in the language of symbolism that all can measure her guilt for themselves. The history and activities recorded in Revelation 17 will stand as evidence against the woman called Babylon and all who have lent their support to her when the judgment of God is executed upon her. The justice of her sentence will be understood as we consider the lives of those she has deceived and the death of those whom she persecuted.

Revelation points to the consummation of that great battle now taking place between truth and error. Though all the forces of the earth will gather together to establish a new world order; though they persecute those who remain faithful to God; Christ will eventually intervene in behalf of His people and conquer the forces of evil. To God’s faithful people will come the voice of the angel recorded in Revelation 19:1-9.

We are blessed to be called to the marriage supper of the Lamb (see Revelation 22:17). May we each one respond to that call and accept Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin. Amen.

The Woman and the Beast



Unlocking Revelation

The seven last plagues, the most horrific judgments ever to come upon this earth, have just been described in the previous chapter. Now, in Revelation 17, one of the angels involved in pouring out these judgments explains to John why they have been allowed by a God of love. The heavenly messenger takes John “away in the spirit” where he sees “a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast” (Revelation 17:3). The next few verses contain a description of the activities of this woman as she is united with this beast.

When John comes out of vision, he “ marvels,” or is astounded, at what he has been shown. The angel promises to explain the vision to John (see Revelation 17:7). In the next ten verses the angel explains the activities of the the beast in history past, present, and future (see Revelation 17:10). Revelation 17 can be divided into these two basic parts:

- 1) The first six verses which focus primarily on the woman and her activities when united with the beast.
- 2) The next twelve verses where the angel explains to John about the woman by focusing primarily on the past, present, and future activities of the beast.

The description of this woman, the beast she rides, and the activities in which the two of them engage will give ample understanding as to why God has judged them so severely. Let’s begin with verse 1.

The Judgment of the Great Harlot

As Revelation 17 opens, John is told to “come” and see “the judgment of the great whore” (Revelation 17:1). The word for judgment here is *krima* in the Greek. It means “a decision,” or the process of going to law or the function of the law. It infers making a decision based on evidence rather than the actual execution of justice. The same word is found in Revelation 20:4 where thrones

are seen and “judgment,” *krima* (the function of making a decision based on evidence), is given to those who sit upon them.

Revelation 17 presents before the universe incriminating evidence against the woman and the beast she rides. It reveals their sins against kings and leaders, against multitudes and nations, against God’s faithful people. And it uncovers her desperate war against the Lamb.

The Woman

We have seen that in the Bible a woman represents a church (see Jeremiah 6:2; 2 Corinthians 11:2). The woman described in Revelation 17 is an unfaithful church, described by the angel as “the great harlot” and “the mother of harlots” (Revelation 17:1, 5, RSV).

When the Bible identifies this church as the mother, it implies that this church has existed for a long period of time, as far as Christian churches are concerned.

The fact that this church sits upon many waters indicates that she is a popular church. She has a large following of various “peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues” (Revelation 17:15). Therefore, this church is a universal church.

According to the angel, this church is “arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls” (Revelation 17:4). In other words, this is a wealthy power.

In the second verse of this chapter, we are told that “the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication” (Revelation 17:2). When used in a symbolic sense, wine in the Bible represents doctrine (see Luke 5:37-39). This church has a cupful of doctrines that cause the inhabitants of the earth to be made drunk with spiritual fornication or spiritual unfaithfulness to God’s Word. She is teaching false doctrines which are an abomination to God (see Revelation 17:4).

Finally, John sees “the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (Revelation 17:6). The meaning here is obvious. This church is a persecuting power. In every age God has had His faithful people who have stood firm against the inroads of error. Many have paid for their faithfulness to God’s Word with their lives (see Revelation 6:9; 20:4; Hebrews 11:37).

The Beast

When John is taken “in the spirit into the wilderness” where he sees this woman, she is also sitting “upon a scarlet coloured beast” (Revelation 17:3). A beast in prophecy is symbolic of a kingdom or power (see Daniel 7:17, 23). The fact that this woman has a beast supporting her shows that this church is more than just religious; it is political. The picture here represents a religio-political power. The woman and the beast represent two aspects of the same power. One is the ecclesiastical or religious element; the other, represented by the beast, is the political side of this same power. While they work as one, they are described separately in this chapter to underscore the two different aspects of this power.

This point is amplified as John is also shown that the woman or church of Revelation 17 has “committed fornication” with “the kings of the earth” (Revelation 17:2). Fornication in the literal sense of the word is an unholy alliance (see 1 Corinthians 6:15-20). It is a union that the Word of God does not sanction. In the spiritual sense, the Bible here speaks of an unrighteous union between this church and the kings or leaders of the earth, a union of this church with the state. This Christ forbade when He said, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21).

The reasons for prohibition are obvious both from a historical standpoint and from the context of verse two. Historically speaking, the union of the church with the state breeds intolerance, persecution and undermines the very spirit of true worship (see John 4:23-24). In the context of the verse, the inhabitants of the earth are “made drunk with the wine of her fornication” (Revelation 17:2). In the Bible wine represents doctrine or teaching. The implication here is that the state forms an unholy alliance with this woman and makes people drink her false doctrine.

A Blaspheming Power

This religio-political power is described as “full of names of blasphemy” (Revelation 17:3). In the Bible, blasphemy is identified as claiming the right to do that which is the prerogative of God alone (see Mark 2:7; Luke 5:21). For example, it is the prerogative of God alone, through our only Mediator, Jesus Christ, to forgive our sins in the salvational sense (see Ephesians 4:32; 1 Timothy 2:5). This does not mean that we should not confess and forgive personal faults against one another (see James 5:16). Neither does it ignore the power invested in the church body to make a judgment for or against sins and errors committed in its midst (see John 20:21-23; Matthew 18:17-20). Yet no church or individual has been invested with the power to determine eternal destinies in relation to mediating the blood of Christ for humanity. Christ alone has the position as “advocate with the Father” (1 John 2:1). Any religious power claiming that it can forgive sins in this capacity would be committing blasphemy.

The Mystery of the Vision

After John sees the vision of this woman, he wonders “with great admiration” (Revelation 17:6). Then the angel who had shown John the vision assures him, “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” (Revelation 17:7). We now come to the second section of this chapter. In this section the angel focuses primarily upon the activities of the beast, even though he told John he would tell him more about the woman. This is because the beast and the woman are one in the same power, a religio-political union.

The angel begins this second section by describing “the beast” that John saw, explaining that it “was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition” (Revelation 17:8). The idea of the past, present, and future reign of the beast in this phrase is stated a total of four times in verses 8-11. Notice the three other occurrences: 1) “The beast that was, and is not, and shall be present” or “is to come” (Revelation 17:8, NKJV, margin, or RSV). 2) “Five are fallen, one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh he must continue a short space” (Revelation 17:10). 3) “The beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth” (Revelation 17:11).

This description of the Revelation 17 beast, that it “was, is not, and is to come,” is similar to that of Revelation 13. There we see a kingdom that had great authority, was wounded to death, losing its authority, but will regain great authority when the wound is healed (see Revelation 13:3). Let’s look at a few other parallels between these two chapters before we continue our study of Revelation 17.

Parallelism:

- 1) Revelation 13 and 17 both reveal a kingdom that the inhabitants of the earth shall wonder after (see Revelation 13:3; 17:8).
- 2) This power is described in both chapters as being worshiped by those who are not written in “the book of life” (Revelation 13:8; 17:8).
- 3) This religio-political power is described as “full of names of blasphemy” (Revelation 17:3; Revelation 13:1, 5).
- 4) It persecutes and makes war with the saints (see Revelation 17: 6, 14; 13:7, 15, 17).
- 5) Another characteristic of this power is its wealth (see Revelation 17:4). This characteristic is also implied of the power in Revelation 13 when it says that “no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name” (Revelation 13:17). This power so controls the monetary system that even the “great” and “rich” must acquiesce to its authority (see Revelation 13:16).

The major difference between Revelation 13 and 17 is the direct mention of the unfaithful woman. But this woman, though not specifically mentioned in Revelation 13 or 14, is definitely implicated there. For instance, in Revelation 14 a warning is given to come out of Babylon and not to receive the mark of the beast (see Revelation 14:8-9). Part of this warning reads, “*she* made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication” (Revelation 14:8). The “*she*” here is the same woman

of Revelation 17, “Babylon,” the “mother of harlots” (see Revelation 14:8; 17:2, 5). In chapter 17, John is shown the woman and the beast as separate entities for two reasons:

- 1) To show that the woman and the beast represent a church power and a political power united together.
- 2) To reveal a period of time in history when the woman and the beast would be separated.

To understand all that this beast represents, we will need to consider each part of its history—past, present, and future. In this way we can also locate the time frame of the prophecy and its future application. Let’s begin with its past.

The First Five Heads

Three times John is told about the beast that “was” (see Revelation 17:8, 11). John is also told by the angel that this beast has “seven heads and ten horns” (Revelation 17:7) and that the seven heads represent two different things:

- 1) “The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sitteth” (Revelation 17:9). Or some translations read, “are seven hills” (Revelation 17:9).
- 2) “There are seven kings, five are fallen” (Revelation 17:10).

A church (woman) that sits on seven hills? In the last verse of chapter 17, the woman is said to be “that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth” (Revelation 17:18). What church, sitting on seven hills, has political influence over the rulers of the earth? There is only one. It is the Vatican, which is headquartered in Rome, known historically as the city on seven hills.

Remember, though, that there is a second meaning to the seven heads. “They are also seven kings” (Revelation 17:10, RSV). Five of the seven kings are fallen, representing previous kingdoms (see Daniel 7:17, 23). But there are many past kingdoms. How can we identify which ones these five represent? A clear explanation of who they are is found in Revelation 13, our parallel chapter. Here John is also shown a beast “having seven heads and ten horns” (Revelation 13:1). He is told that the beast was like “a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power and his seat, and great authority” (Revelation 13:2). According to the Bible these animals represent four kingdoms:

- 1) Lion = Babylon (see Daniel 2:38; 7:4; 17).
- 2) Bear = Media-Persia (see Daniel 2:39; 7:5, 17; 8:20).
- 3) Leopard = Grecia (see Daniel 2:39; 7:6, 17; 8:21).
- 4) Dragon = Pagan Rome (see Daniel 2:40; 7:7; Revelation 12:4; Matthew 2:16).

The fifth kingdom that is fallen is the one described in Revelation 13:2 as “him.” It is papal Rome, the kingdom that followed pagan Rome and received from it “his power, and his seat, and great authority” (Revelation 13:2). Each one of these kingdoms was succeeded by the next until we come to the fifth kingdom. Revelation 13 says that the fifth head of the beast was “as it were wounded to death.” This happened in 1798 when Pope Pius VI was imprisoned and a republic was established in Italy abolishing the political authority of the papacy (see Study Number 14 on the sea-beast).

This brings us to the “is not” period.

The Beast Is Not

What does the prophecy mean when it says three times that this beast “is not”? Remember that the context of these verses is the vision of the woman sitting atop this beast. She represents a church that is united to the state or political power. The previous kingdoms represent different times in history past when religion and the state were united as one. But in 1798 one of the heads of the beast receives this deadly wound. Its union with the state was taken away. Therefore, the beast “is not” now united with the woman or church.

Revelation 13 speaks of another beast or kingdom “coming up out of the earth” as this power of papal Rome was wounded. This lamb-like power is the United States. This power would embody the principle of church-state separation as taught