

The prostitute riding the beast

Revelation 17 is delineated into two parts: (1) the vision (17:1–6a), in which John the revelator observes a woman who is depicted as a prostitute riding the beast; and (2) the audition (17:6b–18), in which the interpreting angel explains to John the meaning of the vision of the prostitute and the beast that carries her.

In the vision, John is invited to witness the judgment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters, seductively deceiving the inhabitants of the earth (vv. 1, 2). This woman is subsequently identified as “ ‘Babylon the great, the mother of harlots’ ” (v. 5). In the Hebrew Scriptures, a prostitute symbolically refers to God’s people in their apostasy (Isa. 1:21; Jer. 3:1; Ezek. 16; 23; Hosea 3; 4). The portrayal of the prostitute in Revelation 17 shows that she represents an entity that was once faithful to God before aligning herself with the end-time opponent of God and His faithful remnant. Babylon is thus a corporate name for an end-time apostate entity.

Note that the prostitute is first referenced to as sitting on “ ‘many waters’ ” (v. 1); however, when John actually sees her, she is seen as sitting on a scarlet beast (v. 3). This should not come as a surprise due to such a literary feature occurring regularly in the book (see Rev. 5:5, 6). Therefore, the waters and the beast are two symbols that represent the same reality. According to Revelation 17:5, the waters upon which the prostitute was seen symbolize the civil, secular, and political powers of the world. Jeremiah 51:13 shows that “many waters” refers to the Euphrates River. Just as the ancient Babylon depended on the Euphrates River for its existence, so will the end-time Babylon depend on the civil, secular, and political powers of the world to enforce its plans and purposes.

Furthermore, the beast stands as a symbol of a political power or system. That the prostitute Babylon sits (or rides) on the beast shows that this religious system will have control over these worldwide political powers at the end of time. Thus, the prophecy shows us that at the end of time, there will be a religious-political union when the political powers of the earth will unite with the end-time apostate religious system named Babylon.

THE THREE PHASES OF THE BEAST

In the second part of the chapter, John is described as greatly astonished when he sees the prostitute. He recognizes in her the woman that had fled into the wilderness in order to escape the persecution of the dragon during the prophetic 1,260-day period of the Middle Ages (Rev. 12:13, 14). In response to John’s astonishment, the interpreting angel promises to disclose the “ ‘mystery’ ” of the prostitute and of the scarlet beast that carries her as well as their function at the time of the end (Rev. 17:7).

John describes the beast as the one that “ ‘was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss’ ” (v. 8). This identification of the beast brings to mind the divine title “ ‘who was and who is and who is to come’ ” (Rev. 4:8). Thus, this title identifies the beast as a parody of God. However, this tripartite formula also shows that the beast has passed through three phases of existence. This, in turn, links the scarlet beast of Revelation 17 with the sea beast of Revelation 13 (cf. Rev. 13:1 with 17:3).

First, the beast “was.” In other words, this beast existed in the past. The “was” phase of the beast refers to its activities during the prophetic period of 1,260 days or years (Rev. 13:5). The year A.D. 538 marked the beginning of this prophetic period when the church of western Europe, led by the Roman papacy, established itself as an ecclesiastical power

and dominated the Western world throughout the Middle Ages. In our time characterized by religious tolerance, such statements can be regarded as harsh and unfair; but the present reality cannot erase the historical facts.

Furthermore, the beast came into its "is not" phase of existence in 1798 when, as a result of the events of the French Revolution, it sustained its deadly wound (Rev. 13:3). This brought an end to the church's oppressive political power. The beast disappeared for some time from the world's scene, yet it survived.

Third, with the healing of the deadly wound, the beast will resurrect to life in full satanic rage against God's faithful people. The prophecy thus shows that the religious-political oppressive system that dominated the world during the Middle Ages will be revived at the time of the end and will dominate the world as it did in the past. This revival of the beast will fill the inhabitants of the world with awe and admiration (Rev. 13:8; 17:8b).

Therefore, Revelation 17 clearly describes the sea beast of Revelation 13 at the time when its deadly wound has been healed. Upon this resurrected beast, John sees the end-time prostitute Babylon sitting. Thus, the end-time religious system that will play a key role in the final conflict is a continuation of the religious-political power that harmed and oppressed God's people during the prophetic 1,260-day period of the Middle Ages.

Revelation thus tells us that religion will once again dominate and control politics as it did in the past, albeit for a short time. However, there is a noticeable difference between its power during the medieval period and the time of the end. While the sea beast, representing the medieval church, was a religious-political power, the scarlet beast is exclusively a political power. These two are distinct at the end of time.

Daniel 1-11 is again summarized in Revelation 17. There, seven kings are brought to view. The identity of these seven kings has been another much-debated subject. But again, if we follow the principle that the events of Daniel are repeated and opened in Revelation, then we will be provided with the key to unlock the identity of these seven kings, especially the seventh. I will attempt to show that the seven kings of Revelation 17 parallel the seven kings of Daniel.

In Revelation 17, we find a description of Mystery Babylon, a woman sitting on a scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns. We are then given this description regarding the beast and the seven heads.

Revelation 17:8 "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 beheld the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

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

v. 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.

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

There are seven mountains and seven kings. Five of these kings have fallen, one is, and the other is not yet come, but when he does come, it will only be for a short space. It is this king that ascends out of an abyss and goes into perdition.

The seven mountains represent seven kingdoms, while the seven kings represent seven rulers of those kingdoms. Only one prophetic chapter in Daniel, chapter 11 deals with multiple kings. What is interesting to note is the number of "kings of the North" in the book of Daniel total seven, with the last three symbolizing different phases of the same king in Revelation 17.

Consider this. The first king of the North in the book of Daniel, as noted previously, is Nebuchadnezzar. Thus, the first mountain is Babylon, where he sat as king. "For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will bring upon Tyrus Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, a king of kings, from the north, with horses, and with chariots, and with horsemen, and companies, and much people" (Ezekiel 26:7).

The second king of the North overthrew Babylon. That king was Cyrus, and the mountain upon which he sat was the kingdom of Medo-Persia. "For, lo, I will raise and cause to come up against Babylon an assembly of great nations from the north country: and they shall set themselves in array against her; from thence she shall be taken: their arrows shall be as of a mighty expert man; none shall return in vain" (Jeremiah 50:9).

After Medo-Persia fell from the scene, Daniel 8 introduces us to the next king of the North, the Seleucian Empire, one of the four that arose out of Greece (v. 8). Seleucis is the third king; the Seleucid Empire under Greece is the third mountain upon which he sits.

The fourth mountain is Rome, and the fourth king (the most prominent king of Rome) would be the one reigning during the time of Christ, Tiberius Caesar. He is the king referred to by whom the Prince of the Covenant was "broken," (you'll recall the Jews crying out, "We have no king but Caesar" in John 19:15). Rome is introduced to us in verse 14: "And in those times there shall many stand up against the king of the South: also the robbers of thy people shall exalt themselves to establish the vision; but they shall fall" (Daniel 11:14).

In verse 23, we are introduced to the fifth king of the North, that is, the Papacy. "And after the league made with him he shall work deceitfully: for he shall come up, and shall become strong with a small people" (Daniel 11:23).

The fifth mountain is the spiritual territory of the Papacy (spiritual Babylon), with the position of the Pope as its "king." This same "king" is spoken of in Daniel 8 in this way: "And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up. And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people" (vs. 23-24).

This takes to verse 40 which describes the deadly wound of the Papacy at the time of the end, 1798. When Revelation tells us that five were fallen, this takes us through the reign of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome and the Papacy post 1798. Then the sixth king must be the king of the North in a wounded state, that is, after 1798, but before the deadly wound is healed. This is the "is" and yet "is not" state described in Revelation 17:10.

We can know this because the beast is described in the next verse as "was, and is not," and "even he is the seventh." In other words, it is king number five who "was" because he

had been wounded, "is not" as the sixth, because he is currently in a wounded state, but shall ascend out of the bottomless pit as the seventh when the deadly wound is healed. Thus, the fifth king is described in three phases: the fifth stage "was;" sixth stage "is, yet is not;" and finally the seventh stage, "shall ascend."

The sixth mountain is the Papacy with a wounded head; the sixth king, Popery without its authority. Under the sixth head, we have the emergence of apostate Protestantism. (Revelation 13:11). We also have the emergence of the sixth church, Philadelphia, which describes the Millerite movement and birth of the Adventist church. Just as literal Babylon continued while Nebuchadnezzar was temporarily dethroned, so the Papacy continues in this state.

King of the North 1: Nebuchadnezzar/Babylon

King of the North 2: Cyrus/Medo-Persia

King of the North 3: Seleucis/Seleucian Empire/Greece

King of the North 4: Cesar/Rome

King of the North 5 Papacy/Babylon (was) from 538-1798

King of the North 6: Papacy Wounded/ Babylon (is, is not) from 1798 to present

King of the North 7: Not yet come/ shall ascend/continue a short space/goeth into perdition. This symbolizes the time period from the healing of the deadly wound to the second coming when Michael stands up.

The emphasis of Revelation 17 is the seventh king and the seventh mountain. He is the last king before Christ returns. It is to this seventh king, the one that "hath not yet come" that the ten horns of verse 12 (the whole word) give their strength. White quoting this verse writes, " 'These have one mind.' There will be a universal bond of union, one great harmony, a confederacy of Satan's forces. 'And shall give their power and strength unto the beast.' Thus is manifested the same arbitrary, oppressive power against religious liberty, freedom to worship God according to the dictates of conscience, as was manifested by the Papacy, when in the past it persecuted those who dared to refuse to conform with the religious rites and ceremonies of Romanists" (Selected Messages, vol. 3, p. 392.4).

"In the warfare to be waged in the last days there will be united, in opposition to God's people, all the corrupt powers that have apostatized from allegiance to the law of Jehovah. In this warfare, the Sabbath of the fourth commandment will be the great point at issue, for in the Sabbath commandment the great Lawgiver identifies Himself as the Creator of the heavens and the earth. . ." (ibid., p. 392.5).

This informs us that it is the seventh king of the North that gathers the whole world. But this gathering does not occur before the wound is healed. The seventh king, the "other" that "hath not yet come" is the same as the unification of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet when the gathering together of the whole world through the three unclean spirits like frogs takes place.

The seventh king "ascends." Regarding Lucifer, we read, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt

my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:13- 14).

The seventh king is Lucifer impersonating Christ. The seventh mountain is the glorious holy mountain, which Lucifer seeks to ascend or sit upon as king upon the sides of the north. This seventh king is to continue only "a short space" because Christ will "finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth" (Romans 9:28).

Compare this "short time" with the following verse: "Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time" (Revelation 12:12).

Note how White uses this verse to show that it not only points to the fall of Lucifer from heaven, and to his fall at the cross but also to his final manifestation, his crowning act of deception in the last days.

The "short space" of the seventh king of the North and the "short time" of Satan are the same, revealing that the final king of the North is indeed Satan himself. John the Revelator described three woes to come. "And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!" (Revelation 8:13).

The first two woes are said to be the fifth and sixth trumpets (See Revelation 8-9). Interestingly, the next time the word "woe" is used after describing the fifth and sixth trumpets is in Revelation 12:12 regarding Satan knowing he has a short time. This signifies that the third woe is synonymous with Daniel 11:40, the manifestation of the seventh and final king of the North who ascends to sit in the glorious holy mountain, the temple of God, over the table of showbread on the sides of the north. That last woe signifies Satan planting his seat in the midst of the seas (masses of people), and claiming to be God on earth. It implies an overwhelming force of demonic spirits appearing to people all over the world verify the claims of the false Messiah.

It is this seventh king that "shall go into perdition," a reference to the 1,000 years when he is bound in chains. And at the end of the 1,000 years, when Satan is loosed he becomes the eighth and final manifestation of rebellion as he gathers the world one last time. He gathers them under the name of "Gog and Magog" (Revelation 20:8). Not surprisingly, the battle of Gog and Magog against God's people is described in Ezekiel 38:

"Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say unto Gog, Thus saith the Lord GOD; In that day when my people of Israel dwelleth safely, shalt thou not know it? And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army: And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes" (Ezekiel 38:14-16).

Satan will rise one last time as the eighth "king of the North (Gog and Magog) when he shall finally and utterly destroyed.