

Revelation 17:9–18

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

Here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. 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. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition. 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. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. 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. 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. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and to give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.

Here Is the Mind That Has Wisdom

Verse 9 begins with a call: *here is the mind that has wisdom*. The book of Revelation is full of symbols — and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Those who throw up their hands at the symbols and pronounce the book too hard to understand are in a poor position if they would ever have the wisdom that verse 9 offers. The symbols are given to be understood, not to defeat the reader. And God opens them to those who come in the fear of the Lord and with a

heart subject to what He says.

The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. Rome was famously built on seven hills — that was known throughout the ancient world. The seven mountains point to Rome as the seat of this system. But mountains in Scripture are also symbols of earthly power — and both the literal and the symbolic are present here without contradiction. The over-rigid rule that a symbol may not be explained by another symbol leads to absurdity when applied mechanically. The seven lamps of fire in chapter 4 are said to be the seven spirits of God — that is a symbol explained by another symbol — and no sound interpretation can refuse to treat it as such.

Seven Kings — Five Fallen, One Is, One Not Yet Come

The seven heads also represent seven kings — or seven forms of government. Some have seen here the successive constitutional forms of Roman government: kings, consuls, dictators, decimators, military tribunes, and emperors — with the emperor (number six) being the form current when John was writing. The seventh has not yet come — and at the time of writing still has not. When the seventh arrives, he must continue a short space.

Then the beast that was and is not is the eighth — and is of the seven. He is both seventh and eighth. The seventh is the coming Roman prince who confirms the covenant for a seven-year period in Daniel 9. But in the middle of the week, that power receives a mortal wound. By satanic power it is resuscitated — and in that resuscitation it becomes the eighth, a new beginning (eight being the resurrection number), something that has never existed before: a government receiving its power directly from Satan himself, not from the delegated authority given at Noah. That is what makes it genuinely new and makes the whole earth wonder. And he goes into perdition — that is the end that is appointed for him.

The Ten Horns — Ten Kings with One Mind

The ten horns are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom when John writes — just as the seventh head had not yet appeared. They receive power as kings one hour with the beast. They have one mind — something remarkably rare among rulers — and they give their power and authority to the beast. What unites them is their common hatred of the woman: *these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire*. The very power that the woman has been riding will turn on her and destroy her. God has put it in their hearts to fulfil His will — they act as God's instrument of judgment on the apostate system, unknowing servants of a purpose they do not acknowledge.

The form the ten kings will take — whether ten nations, ten districts, some other arrangement — is not specified with exactness. What is certain is the number ten and the union of purpose. The little horn of Daniel 7 plucks three of them up by the roots — not destroying them, but removing their independence — and the seven that remain continue. Whatever arrangement of western power fulfils these numbers is what God will bring about. Present political structures may be rearranged entirely; what God has written will be fulfilled to the last detail.

The Lamb Shall Overcome — Called and Chosen and Faithful

Verse 14 gives the outcome of the war that the ten kings and the beast make against the Lamb — and states it with magnificent brevity: *the Lamb shall overcome them*. He who was led as a lamb to the slaughter; he who opened not his mouth — he overcomes. Through weakness, through death, through apparent defeat, he won the day. And those with him in that day of His coming are called, and chosen, and faithful. They have come out of heaven with Him — the caught-up saints, present in heaven throughout the tribulation, returning with Him when He comes as the rider on the white horse of Revelation 19.

Some resist the plainest implication of this description because they do not wish to place the saints in heaven prior to the Lord's return — since that would imply a prior rapture. But the description is clear: called, chosen, faithful — these are people, not angels, though angels also accompany the Lord. And they are with Him because they were taken to be with Him beforehand. And note: they are *chosen* — not an Arminian company assembled by their own free decision, but those to whom all the glory belongs to God.

The Destruction of the Harlot — God's Instrument

Verses 16 and 17 show how the harlot comes to her end. The beast and the ten kings hate her — the system she represents, however corrupt, still carried the name of Christianity, still stood for something. When they destroy her, they intend to be rid of all of that. Psalm 2 catches the spirit of it: *let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us*. No God, no religion — that is what lies behind the act.

But God has put it in their hearts to fulfil His will. They are His instrument for the judgment of the apostate system — as Nebuchadnezzar was His servant in judgment on Israel, and as He used the Assyrian as the rod of His anger. When the instrument has served its purpose, the instrument is itself judged. God uses what He will and throws away the rod when He is done. The destruction of religious Babylon makes way for the revelation of the man of sin — the religious vacuum is filled by the Antichrist himself, who sits in the temple of God. God allows each successive thing, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.

The Woman Is That Great City

The chapter closes with the confirmation that the two figures — the woman and the city — are the same: *the woman which thou sawest is that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth*. This is the key that locks together chapters

17 and 18. The woman in her harlotry and idolatries is chapter 17. The great city Babylon in its worldliness and commerce is chapter 18. Same system, two aspects, two presentations. And just as the bride is also a city — the holy city, New Jerusalem, the bride the Lamb's wife — so this anti-bride is also a city. The parallel is deliberate: two women, two cities, two destinies.

The practical application has not changed: *Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.* The system is already in development. The mystery of iniquity was already at work when Paul wrote. The call to come out is present wherever the principles of Babylon are found operative — wherever profession courts the world's protection, wherever the harlot's character is seen. Separation from evil is not a cause of the problems of the saints — it is their preservation from what God is about to judge.

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