

**Rev. 17b, The Vision Interpreted**  
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**Overview**

1. Outline of ch. 17
  - a) 1-3, John is summoned to see. Introduces all of 17-19.
  - b) 3-6, the vision of the harlot.
  - c) 7-18, interpretation of the vision.
2. Outline of 7-18, The Interpretation  
v.7 is an outline that introduces the sequel chiastically. Two main topics, one further divided.
  - a) The woman (vv. 15-18)
  - b) The beast that carries her (8-14)
    - 1) his seven heads (9-11)
    - 2) his ten horns (12-14)

**A. 8: The Beast**

This verse is an expansion of 13:3, and identifies the beast ridden by the woman with the beast out of the sea, the one in the image of Satan, the Antichrist.

1. 13:3 focuses on one of the seven heads, which was killed, yet the beast lived. Here also the beast "was, and is not, and shall ascend...." He mimics the slain and yet living Lamb of ch. 5.
2. From 13:3, we see that the wounding is associated in particular with one of the seven heads. This verse shows us that it is one of the heads PRIOR to the time that John writes ("is not"). Thus it must be one of the first five (v.10), which are already fallen. Not the sixth or seventh.
3. When he returns, it is from "the bottomless pit,"
  - a) the source of the locust-demons of 9:1,2,11;
  - b) the prison in which Satan is held captive in 20:1,3;
  - c) the place where the demons from the Gadarene demoniac didn't want to be sent (Luke 8:31).
4. Suggests that the Beast is a demoniac whose familiar spirit previously motivated a historical character associated with one of the first five heads. Cf. 1 John 4:3, "the spirit of Antichrist." Daniel, the Olivet Discourse, and the Rev. each describe the Antichrist in terms of historical leaders:
  - a) Daniel: Antiochus (under the fifth head, Greece)
  - b) Olivet: Titus (under the sixth, Rome)
  - c) Rev: Pharaoh (under the first)

Because of the time (John is currently under the sixth), probably either Antiochus or Pharaoh, and in fact Antiochus had designs on Egypt. Might well be the same demon in all of them. A revived Egyptian empire would certainly fit the bill,

and in the light of middle eastern tensions could be credible, but we cannot be certain. It does seem clear that when Antichrist appears, he will be identified with a ruler of one of the great pre-Roman empires. Cf. Saddam Hussein's claim to be a new Nebuchadnezzar, restoring Babylon to its former greatness!

5. The grammar closely links his destiny with his ascent out of the pit: "he is about to ascend ... and to go away." Reminds us that his dominion is short, and his doom is sure.
6. As in 13:3, his restoration from previous death provokes great wonder among those who are not believers. Those who are believers will not be deceived.

#### B. 9-11: His Heads

Note the introductory warning, "Here is the mind which has wisdom," very similar to that in 13:18, associated with the number "666." Here as well as there, we must be very cautious. Some suggestions:

1. The heads represent both mountains on which the harlot sits, and kings (which often stand for kingdoms, cf. Dan. 2).
2. "Seven mountains" is commonly taken to describe Rome, built upon seven hills on the left bank of the Tiber: the Viminal, Quirinal, Palatine, Esquiline, Aventine, Coelian, and Capitol. Would situate the harlot's capital in Rome. In fact, Rome is the seat of the court where NAFTA disputes are to be judged; and the RCC is the most dominant example of the corruption of spiritual teaching that 11:8 identifies with Antichrist.

*Alternative interpretation: "Mountain" is a common OT metaphor for a kingdom. Cf. Jer. 51:25, where Babylon is thus described, and Dan. 2:35,44, where a mountain is the image for the Lord's kingdom. This approach makes the two interpretations of the seven heads easier to link; but then how can the harlot be said to "sit on" (i.e., rule over) them all, since*

- a) she is a city (18);
- b) the king[dom]s most likely extend back to Egypt;
- c) no one city dominates all these kingdoms.

3. Seven kings, following one another. NOT all at the same time. Attempts to identify these with the (11) Roman emperors all stumble. Better to go back to Daniel's image of successive kingdoms, recognizing (Dan. 2) that a "king" often stands for his "kingdom."

- a) Daniel started with Neb., for political reasons, and outlined (Dan. 2:32)
  - 1) Head of Gold: Neb.
  - 2) Breast/arms of silver: Media-Persia
  - 3) Belly/thighs of brass: Greece
  - 4) Legs of Iron: Rome
  - 5) Feet of mingled iron and clay: break-up of Rome; probably

modern Europe.

- b) The rest of the OT shows two great empires before these: Egypt and Assyria. All together there are then seven, of which the sixth is Rome, under which John is living, per v.10, "one is."
- c) Then the seventh is western civilization, the feet of iron and clay.

How can this kingdom be said to continue a short space," when it has lasted 2000 years, longer than any of the others?

- 1) Perhaps in terms of Daniel's 70 weeks, by which reckoning this entire period is missing, so in prophetic time the church age is a blip.
  - 2) Alternative rendering: "He must remain small, insignificant, weak," the same point made by the iron and clay in Daniel's vision. Western civilization has never attained the unified strength of the earlier empires, and in fact has been a history of breaking up such incipient empires.
- d) 11, The beast's relation to these seven:
- 1) He is an eighth king. Antichrist picks up the fallen reins of empire.
  - 2) Compare the last two clauses with 8a.
    - a> His origin:
      - 1> 8a, from the pit.
      - 2> 11, He is "of the seven," arises out of them. His spirit has motivated them; he is the latest incarnation of the Pharaohs, Nebuchadnezzars, Antiochuses, Tituses, Hitlers, Stalins, Maos of the world.
      - 3> Points to a demon-controlled person.
    - b> His destiny: same words in both verses. The Spirit of God encourages those believers alive at this time by describing his ultimate doom.

### C. 12-14: His Horns

These, like the heads, stand for kings, but while the head-kings were sequential, the horn-kings are concurrent.

- 1. 12, Their time: not yet in place in John's day, but rule for a short time ("one hour") with the beast.
- 2. 13, Their alliance: they all have a common purpose, and join with the beast to resist the Lamb. Note v.17 for the surprising source of this common resolve.

3. 14, Their combat: looks forward to ch. 19, where we learn more about the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (19:16) and his armies (19:14,19). Amazing that he should share with us the honor of defeating his enemies! Note the three titles that are given to us:
  - a) "Called": summoned to his side; drafted into his army. The work of the HS drawing us to Christ. The next two items give God's part and man's part in this transaction.
  - b) "Chosen," lit. "elect." He only calls those whom he has previously chosen for himself, Rom. 8:30 (contrast Matt. 22:14, which seems to be a different sense).
  - c) "Faithful," "believing." Our response to God's call.

With the entire triad, compare 2 Pet. 1:10, "make your calling and election sure." No one of the three is sufficient by itself.

#### **D. 15-18: The Whore**

1. 15, Her Subjects: many different nations. An international dominion.
2. 16, Her Opposition: the same unity of mind that drives the horn-kings against the Lamb (v.14) also drives them against the harlot! They turn against her; they will brook no authority, either of hell or of heaven. Yet in all that they do they are fulfilling the words of God.
3. 18, Her Identity: the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.

#### **Summary:**

1. The beast is the satanic antichrist of ch. 13. He permits himself to be ridden by the harlot, who represents a great commercial city, caught up in the fornication and idolatry of covetousness and materialism.
2. He is the last in the series of world rulers, and assembles ten kings into an alliance. Their unity of mind is given them by God, to fulfill his word!
3. These ten kings, together with the beast, turn on the harlot and destroy her, and also fight against the lamb. They will tolerate no authority, no control.