

- Conflict with and victory over paganism

1. The vision predicts the intensification of persecuting paganism

- Horns represent future kings and kingdoms

- Future European kingdoms based on Roman traditions

- Entire westernized world based on Greek intellectualism and Roman government

- The 'beast' – found in all 'civilization'

- Pagan authority and worldly wickedness will come together to persecute the people of God

- 'One hour' – a short period of time

2. The vision predicts the victory of God's people

The major section in this part of our book is Revelation 17:1– 19:10. Within that large section, John is first shown the woman on the beast^{□1}. Secondly, we have a mysterious 'explanation' of the vision^{□2}. The whole section (we recall) is dealing with the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ over paganism.

1. The vision predicts the intensification of persecuting paganism.

¹²'And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings. They have not yet received a kingdom, but with the beast they receive authority as kings for one hour.' The angel turns from interpreting the heads to interpreting the horns. If the heads symbolize various pagan empires past and present and future, what do the horns represent? The answer is: they also speak of kings and kingdoms! But this time the kingdoms are entirely future from John's standpoint. 'They have not yet received a kingdom'.

After the situation of John's own time (in the Roman Empire) there will come all sorts of kingdoms that get their inspiration from the Roman civilization. This is precisely what happened after the fall of the Roman Empire during the period AD 378 to 511. The early north-European tribes became small kingdoms and eventually became strong nations, but these young European nations owed a lot to Roman ways and Roman traditions. They sometimes thought of themselves as the continuation of the Roman Empire. For a thousand years educated people spoke Latin – the language of Rome. Then in the sixteenth century various 'western' nations began to dominate the world with their western languages. Today, for better or for worse, the whole world (including Africa and Asia and South America and wherever!) is rather westernized. Think of cars and computer networks and stock markets! But the entire system goes back to Greek intellectualism and Roman methods of government! These surely are the 'ten kingdoms' (a symbolic round number) that John sees as destined to come up out of the Roman Empire. The 'ten kingdoms' are, I believe, all the systems of government for the rest of world history.

In all of this 'civilization' there is to be found 'the beast'! Every one of these empires that have arisen has been somewhat pagan in their way of doing things. Every time there is a new invention it is only a few years before it is used to promote sin and crime. The same computer network that can be used to spread the gospel can also be used to spread wickedness and immorality. Worldly expertise grows, but the beast grows at the same time! The prediction of the book of Revelation is that all of this will rise to a point where pagan authority and worldly wickedness come together for a little while to persecute the people of God. 'They receive authority as kings for one hour'^{□1}. 'One hour' (compare Daniel 4:17) refers to a short period of history. ¹³'These kings have one mind, and they give their power and authority to the beast.' For a short period of history pagan empires rise to the point where they use their authority to persecute the people of God more than ever before.

2. The vision predicts the victory of God's people. ¹⁴'These kings will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them, for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings.' The Greek goes on to say, 'And those who are with him, called and chosen and full of faith.' This last phrase assumes the 'will overcome them'. We must translate: ¹⁴'And those who are with him, called and chosen and full of faith, will overcome them' – agreeing with the New Century Version, the Revised Version of 1881, the American Standard Version of 1901 and the Good News Bible.

□1 17:1-6a
□2 17:6b-18

□1 17:12

• *There will come a time of great opposition against God's people*

• *The seas and oceans often used as a picture of the wickedness of people when large numbers are gathered together*

• *Eventually the forces of wickedness will disagree among themselves*

• *God allows wicked forces to agree temporarily with each other*

• *The woman – Babylon – Rome – is civilization in its wickedness*

3. Amidst great opposition John has been shown a threefold secret of victory

*The victors are
(i) Called
(ii) Chosen
(iii) Full of faith*

This is a prediction of the 'days of antichrist' (to use a common phrase, although the word 'antichrist' is not found in the book of Revelation). There will come a time of great opposition against God's people. I believe it will **follow** a time of success in the church (see my remarks in chapter 58 of this book), and this period of great rebellion will not itself succeed. The Lamb – the Lord Jesus Christ – will triumph, and the followers of the Lamb will triumph also!

The interpreting angel continues: ¹⁵*And he said to me, 'The waters which you saw, where the harlot is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.'* The centres of civilization are often close to water supplies. At the same time the seas and oceans are often used as a picture of the wickedness of men and women when large numbers are gathered together.

¹⁶*'The beast and the ten horns which you saw will hate the prostitute and will make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and shall burn her utterly with fire.'* Eventually the forces of wickedness will disagree among themselves.

Verse 17 looks back over the previous sixteen verses and explains why it is that this mighty rebellion against God should ever be allowed: *'For God has put a plan into their minds, a plan that will carry out his purposes.'* God allows wicked forces to agree temporarily with each other. *'They will come to one mind in agreeing to give their authority to the beast. They will continue this way until the words of God are accomplished.'* Verse 18 looks back over the previous seventeen verses and winds up this sub-section. The angel explains again: *'The woman you saw is the great city that reigns over the kings of the earth.'* The woman is Babylon. The woman is Rome. The woman is civilization in its wickedness.

3. Amidst great opposition John has been shown a threefold secret of victory. A great apostasy will arise in the church. A great rebellion will arise in the world. But the Lamb of God and the people of God will triumph. Three things lead to their victory, as we learn when we look back at verse 14. (i) The victors are called. God's gospel comes to them. (ii) The victors are chosen. Many are called but not so many are chosen. Many hear the invitation of the gospel, but fewer respond to what they hear. (iii) The victors are faith-ful, full-of-faith. They respond to the gospel in faith. They persist in faith. And so they triumph over the beast. It is persistent faith that overcomes the world.



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