

Introduction

Last week we looked at [Revelation 17:1–6](#). We saw the woman on the scarlet beast. We saw her dressed in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold and jewels and pearls. We saw the golden cup in her hand, full of abominations. We saw the name on her forehead: "Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes and of the Abominations of the Earth."

We talked about seduction. About how the world's system looks beautiful on the outside but is corrupt on the inside. We talked about how Babylon intoxicates the nations with her immorality and how she's drunk with the blood of the saints.

Tonight we're moving into the second half of the chapter. Verses 7–18. And the focus shifts. We're not going to spend more time identifying Babylon. You know who she is. Instead, we're going to focus on what the angel tells John about the beast, the heads, the horns, and the woman's fall.

This section is about power. Political power. Military power. The kind of power that looks unstoppable. The kind that makes Christians feel small and afraid. The kind that makes you wonder if faithfulness is worth it.

But this passage also tells us something the world doesn't know: the Lamb wins. The beast is headed for destruction. And God is sovereign over every king, every empire, every power that rises against Him.

Read the Text: [Revelation 17:7–18](#) (BSB)

Revelation 17:7–18 BSB

⁷ “Why are you so amazed?” said the angel. “I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and ten horns.

⁸ The beast that you saw—it was, and now is no more, but is about to come up out of the Abyss and go to its destruction. And those who dwell on the earth whose names were not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world will marvel when they see the

beast that was, and is not, and yet will be.

⁹ This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits.

¹⁰ There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for only a little while.

¹¹ The beast that was, and now is not, is an eighth king, who belongs to the other seven and is going into destruction.

¹² The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but will receive one hour of authority as kings, along with the beast.

¹³ These kings have one purpose: to yield their power and authority to the beast.

¹⁴ They will make war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will triumph over them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and He will be accompanied by His called and chosen and faithful ones.”

¹⁵ Then the angel said to me, “The waters you saw, where the prostitute was seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.

¹⁶ And the ten horns and the beast that you saw will hate the prostitute. They will leave her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.

¹⁷ For God has put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose by uniting to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.

¹⁸ And the woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.”

Walking Through the Explanation

1. The Angel's Response to John's Astonishment (v. 7)

Revelation 17:7 BSB

⁷ “Why are you so amazed?” said the angel. “I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and ten horns.

John marveled when he saw the woman. He was stunned. Shocked. The angel notices and responds with a question: "Why are you so amazed?"

It's not a rebuke. It's an invitation. The angel is about to explain what John saw. He's going to unpack the mystery.

The word "mystery" in the New Testament doesn't mean something impossible to understand. It means something that was hidden but is now being revealed. It's something you can't figure out on your own, but God explains it.

The angel is going to tell John the mystery of the woman and the beast. He's going to explain the seven heads and the ten horns. He's going to show John what's really going on behind the scenes.

And that's what we need. We need God to explain what we see. We need revelation. Because the world's power looks one way from the outside. But God sees it differently.

2. The Beast (v. 8)

Revelation 17:8 BSB

⁸ The beast that you saw—it was, and now is no more, but is about to come up out of the Abyss and go to its destruction. And those who dwell on the earth whose names were not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world will marvel when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet will be.

This verse is strange. But it's packed with meaning.

"It was, and now is no more, but is about to come up"

This is a parody. A counterfeit. A dark imitation.

In [Revelation 1:4](#) and 1:8, God is described as "Him who is and who was and who is to come." That's the eternal, unchanging, sovereign God. He always has been. He always is. He always will be.

But the beast "was, and is not, and yet will be." It's a twisted version of God's eternal nature. The beast is trying to mimic resurrection. It's trying to look like it came back from death. It's trying to appear invincible.

Revelation 13:3 says one of the beast's heads "appeared to be mortally wounded, but the mortal wound was healed. And the whole world marveled and followed the beast."

The beast has a counterfeit resurrection. It looks like it died and came back. And the world is impressed.

But notice the difference. God is eternal. The beast is temporary. God truly rose from the dead. The beast fakes it. God's power is real. The beast's power is an illusion.

"Out of the Abyss and go to its destruction"

The beast comes from the Abyss. That's the place of demonic confinement. It's the pit. It's the realm of evil spirits. Revelation 9:1-11 describes demons coming out of the Abyss to torment the earth.

The beast's origin is demonic. It's not just a human government or empire. It's energized by Satan. It's a manifestation of spiritual evil in political and military form.

But the beast's destiny is destruction. It's not going to win. It's not going to last. It's headed for the lake of fire. Revelation 19:20 and 20:10 make that clear.

The beast may look powerful now. But its end is fixed.

"Those who dwell on the earth will marvel"

Who marvels at the beast? "Those who dwell on the earth whose names were not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world."

In Revelation, "those who dwell on the earth" are people whose hope and home is entirely in this world. They are not citizens of heaven. They worship the creature instead of the Creator. They are not written in the Book of Life.

And they marvel at the beast. They are impressed. They think it's unstoppable. They think it's invincible. They give it their allegiance and worship.

But the saints don't marvel. The saints see through it. They recognize it as a counterfeit. They know its power is temporary and its destiny is destruction.

This is why John is writing. To help believers see clearly. To help them not be deceived. To help them stay faithful even when the beast looks unbeatable.

3. The Seven Heads and Seven Kings (vv. 9-11)

Revelation 17:9-11 BSB

⁹ This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits.

¹⁰ There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for only a little while.

¹¹ The beast that was, and now is not, is an eighth king, who belongs to the other seven and is going into destruction.

This is a highly debated passage in Revelation. Scholars have different views on how to interpret it. I'm going to give you the main options and then tell you what I think the pastoral point is.

"Seven mountains"

Mountains in the Bible often represent kingdoms or powers. [Daniel 2:35](#) and 2:44–45 describe God's kingdom as a mountain that fills the whole earth.

But the immediate reference here is probably to Rome. Rome was famously known as "the city of seven hills." Ancient writers like Virgil, Ovid, and Cicero referred to Rome this way. The seven hills were Palatine, Aventine, Caelian, Esquiline, Viminal, Quirinal, and Capitoline.

For John's original readers, the seven mountains would have pointed them to Rome. The woman sits on Rome. She rules from Rome. She uses Rome's power.

But the number seven is also symbolic. It represents completeness. The woman sits on the fullness of worldly power. She's supported by the totality of human empire.

"Seven kings"

The seven heads are also seven kings. "Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come."

Scholars debate whether this refers to individual Roman emperors or to a sequence of world empires.

Option 1: Roman emperors

Some think the seven kings are seven specific Roman emperors. The problem is figuring out which ones. Do you start with Julius Caesar or Augustus? Do you count emperors who reigned only briefly?

If you start with Augustus (the first official emperor), the list might be:

1. Augustus
2. Tiberius
3. Caligula
4. Claudius
5. Nero (fallen)
6. Vespasian (one is)
7. Titus (not yet come)

But there are other ways to count. And different scholars come up with different lists. The challenge is that ancient lists of emperors vary, and short-lived rulers (such as Galba, Otho, and Vitellius during the civil war of AD 68–69) complicate the count.

Option 2: World empires

Others think the seven kings represent a sequence of world empires that have opposed God's people. The list might be:

1. Egypt
2. Assyria
3. Babylon
4. Medo-Persia
5. Greece (fallen)
6. Rome (one is)
7. A future empire (not yet come)

This view sees Revelation as looking at the whole sweep of history, not just the Roman period.

Option 3: A symbolic pattern

A third view says the seven kings represent the totality of anti-God empires throughout history. Five have fallen means most of history has already passed. One is means the current power (Rome in John's day, or whatever empire is oppressing God's people in any given era).

The other has not yet come means there's a final, climactic manifestation of beastly power at the end.

The number seven, in this view, is about completeness. It's the full cycle of human rebellion organized into political power.

"The beast is an eighth king"

Verse 11 says the beast "is an eighth king, who belongs to the other seven and is going into destruction."

The beast is like the culmination. The final form. The ultimate expression of all the previous beastly powers. It's an eighth, but it belongs to the seven. It's the same spirit, the same system, the same rebellion, but in its most intense form.

And it's going into destruction.

What's the pastoral point?

Here's what I think the passage is teaching, regardless of which interpretive option you prefer:

1. World empires rise and fall. Five have fallen. One is. One is yet to come. They don't last. They look permanent, but they're not.
2. They all belong to the same pattern. They all oppose God. They all demand worship. They all persecute God's people. They are all part of the beastly system.
3. There will be a final, intense manifestation. The beast is an eighth. It's the climax. The end-times will see the fullest, most powerful expression of anti-God political power.
4. But it's destined for destruction. No matter how powerful it looks, it's headed for the lake of fire.

The point is not to figure out every detail. The point is to recognize the pattern and to trust that God is in control and that every beast ends in judgment.

4. The Ten Horns and the War on the Lamb (vv. 12–14)

Revelation 17:12–14 BSB

¹² The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but will receive one hour of authority as kings, along with the beast.

¹³ These kings have one purpose: to yield their power and authority to the beast.

¹⁴ They will make war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will triumph over them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and He will be accompanied by His called and chosen and faithful ones.”

"Ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom"

The ten horns represent ten kings. In [Daniel 7:24](#), the ten horns on the fourth beast represent ten kings who arise from that kingdom.

In Revelation, the ten kings have not yet received a kingdom, but they will receive authority with the beast "for one hour."

"One hour" is symbolic. It means a brief time. A limited period. Their power is real, but it's short-lived.

"One purpose: to yield their power and authority to the beast"

These ten kings are united. They have "one purpose." They give their power and authority to the beast.

This is a picture of global political unity under the beast. Nations that might otherwise compete or fight each other come together. They pool their resources. They submit to a central authority. They hand over their sovereignty to the beast.

This has never happened fully in history. But Revelation says it will. At the end, there will be a brief period when the nations of the world unite under the beast's leadership.

And what will they do?

"They will make war against the Lamb"

The beast and the ten kings will make war against the Lamb.

This is not a war against Christians only. This is a war against Christ Himself.

Psalm 2:1-3 BSB

¹ Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?

² The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together, against the LORD and against His Anointed One:

³ “Let us break Their chains and cast away Their cords.”

This is the rebellion of the nations. The kings of the earth unite in defiance of God and His Christ. They think they can win. They think they can throw off God's rule.

But they can't.

"The Lamb will triumph over them"

The outcome is not in doubt. The Lamb will triumph.

Not might. Not maybe. Will.

The Lamb conquers. He defeats the beast and the ten kings. He wins the war.

And why?

"Because He is Lord of lords and King of kings."

Jesus has the highest authority. He has the ultimate power. He is sovereign over every king, every ruler, every empire, every government, every army.

No earthly power can stand against Him.

"His called and chosen and faithful ones"

And those with Him are "called and chosen and faithful."

This is us. This is the church. This is every believer who has been called by God, chosen by God, and remains faithful to God.

We don't fight this war with swords and guns. We fight it with faithfulness. With obedience. With worship. With witness. With endurance.

And we win. Not because we're strong, but because we're with the Lamb.

Verse 14 is the center of this chapter. It's the anchor. It's the truth that holds everything else together.

When the world looks unstoppable, remember verse 14 “The Lamb will triumph”. When persecution is real and faithfulness is costly, remember The Lamb will triumph. When the beast looks invincible, remember The Lamb will triumph.

The Lamb will triumph. He is Lord of lords and King of kings. And you are called, chosen, and faithful.

5. The Waters and the Turning of the Beast (vv. 15–17)

Revelation 17:15–17 BSB

¹⁵ Then the angel said to me, “The waters you saw, where the prostitute was seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.

¹⁶ And the ten horns and the beast that you saw will hate the prostitute. They will leave her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.

¹⁷ For God has put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose by uniting to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.

"The waters are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues"

Back in verse 1, the angel said the prostitute "sits on many waters." Now he explains what that means.

The waters represent peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. This is global. Universal. The woman's influence reaches everywhere. She sits on top of the nations. She shapes them. She controls them.

But that control is not permanent.

"The ten horns and the beast will hate the prostitute"

Here's the shocking twist. The beast and the ten kings turn on the woman. They hate her. They destroy her.

They "leave her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and burn her with fire."

This is violent. Graphic. Total destruction.

The very powers that carried her, that supported her, that partnered with her, now destroy her.

Why?

Because evil is self-destructive. Evil doesn't just destroy what is good. It eventually destroys itself.

The woman and the beast were allies. But they were never really united. They used each other. And when the time comes, the beast turns on her.

This is the pattern of history. Corrupt systems implode. Alliances based on power and greed fall apart.

Babylon will fall. And the beast will be the instrument of her fall.

"God has put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose"

But here's the key: this is not random. This is not chaos. This is God at work behind the scenes.

"God has put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose."

The beast and the ten kings think they're acting on their own. They think they're making their own decisions. They hate the woman and they destroy her.

But God is sovereign. God is working through their hatred, their rebellion, their violence to accomplish His own purposes.

This is one of the most important theological truths in Revelation. God is in control. Even when evil powers act, even when they rebel, even when they do terrible things, God is working through it all to fulfill His word.

This doesn't mean God causes evil. It doesn't mean He approves of it. It doesn't mean the beast and the kings are not responsible for their actions.

But it does mean God is sovereign. He's not surprised. He's not scrambling. He's not losing control. He can take the hatred and violence of His enemies and turn it into an instrument of judgment that fulfills His purposes.

"Until the words of God are fulfilled."

God spoke. God decreed. And it will happen. The words of God will be fulfilled. Babylon will fall. The beast will be destroyed. The Lamb will reign.

6. The Woman Identified (v. 18)

"And the woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

The angel ends with a clear identification. The woman is "the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

For John's original readers, this would have pointed to Rome. Rome was the great city. Rome ruled over the kings of the earth. Rome was the center of political, economic, and military power.

But Rome is long gone. And Revelation is still relevant. Because Babylon is bigger than one city. Babylon is a pattern. Babylon is any "great city" or system that rules over the nations, demands allegiance, seduces with wealth and power, and persecutes God's people.

Babylon is the archetype of human civilization organized in rebellion against God.

And she will fall.

Application

Let's pull together what this passage teaches us and how it should shape the way we live.

1. Don't Be Overawed by Beastly Power

The beast comes up out of the Abyss. It has demonic power. It looks like it died and came back. It unites the nations under its authority. The world marvels at it.

But the beast's power is real and temporary. It's headed for destruction. Its time is short ("one hour"). Its destiny is fixed.

The world's powers look impressive. They look unstoppable. They look like they're here to stay. Governments, ideologies, economic systems, cultural movements. They look permanent.

But they're not. Every empire falls. Every regime ends. Every beastly power is destined for judgment.

Where are you tempted to think, "This system is just too big to fail"? Where are you tempted to fear worldly power more than you trust God's power?

Psalm 2:4 BSB

⁴ The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord taunts them.

God laughs at the rebellious kings. Not because He's cruel, but because their rebellion is futile. They can't win.

Don't be intimidated. Don't be overawed. Don't give the beast more credit than it deserves. It's a counterfeit. It's temporary. And it's going to the lake of fire.

2. Anchor Yourself in the Lamb's Certain Victory (v. 14)

Verse 14 is the center of this chapter. It's the anchor. It's the truth that holds everything else together.

"They will make war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will triumph over them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and He will be accompanied by His called and chosen and faithful ones."

The outcome is not in doubt. The Lamb wins. Jesus wins. The church wins.

Not because we're strong. Not because we're wise. Not because we're many. But because the Lamb is Lord of lords and King of kings.

When the world looks dark, when persecution is real, when faithfulness is costly, go back to verse 14. Read it. Memorize it. Write it down. Put it somewhere you'll see it.

The Lamb will triumph. You are called, chosen, and faithful. You are with Him. And He wins.

This is not wishful thinking. This is not religious optimism. This is the revealed truth of God. The war has already been decided. Christ has already won at the cross and the empty tomb. Revelation 17:14 is describing what will be made visible to the whole world.

Romans 8:37 BSB

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

We're not just conquerors. We're more than conquerors. Because Christ has already conquered.

3. Be Faithful, Not Powerful

Those with the Lamb are "called and chosen and faithful."

We're not called to be powerful. We're not called to be popular. We're not called to dominate. We're not called to win by the world's standards.

We're called to be faithful. Faithful to Christ. Faithful in witness. Faithful in worship. Faithful in obedience. Faithful to the end.

The church is not called to seize political power. We're not called to fight the beast with the beast's weapons. We're not called to play by Babylon's rules.

Jesus said in John 18:36

John 18:36 BSB

³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world; if it were, My servants would fight to prevent My arrest by the Jews. But now My kingdom is not of this realm."

Our weapon is faithfulness. Our strategy is endurance. Our victory is tied to the Lamb, not to our own strength or cleverness.

This is hard. Faithfulness often looks like weakness. It often means loss. It often means suffering.

But Revelation says faithfulness is enough. Because the Lamb wins, and we're with Him.

2 Timothy 2:11-13 BSB

¹¹ This is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him;

¹² if we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He will also deny us;

¹³ if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

4. Recognize That Evil is Self-Destructive

The beast and the ten kings turn on the woman. They hate her. They strip her, devour her flesh, and burn her with fire.

The very powers that carried her, that partnered with her, that benefited from her, now destroy her.

Evil is self-destructive. It doesn't just destroy what is good. It eventually destroys itself.

Sin promises pleasure but delivers bondage. It promises life but delivers death. It promises freedom but delivers slavery.

And the same is true of evil systems. Corrupt governments collapse. Oppressive regimes implode. Totalitarian alliances fall apart. Babylon falls.

You see this throughout history. Nazi Germany turned on itself. The Soviet Union collapsed from within. Every empire that rises in pride and rebellion eventually crumbles.

This should give us patience. You don't have to panic when evil seems to be winning. You don't have to despair when the wicked seem to prosper.

Evil carries the seeds of its own destruction. Babylon will fall. The beast will destroy her. And then the beast itself will be thrown into the lake of fire.

Galatians 6:7–8 BSB

⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not to be mocked. Whatever a man sows, he will reap in return.

⁸ The one who sows to please his flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; but the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

5. Trust God's Sovereignty Over All Things (v. 17)

"For God has put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose by uniting to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled."

God is sovereign. Even when the beast and the kings rebel, even when they act in hatred and violence, God is working through it all to fulfill His word.

The beast and the ten kings think they're acting on their own. They think they're in control. But God has put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose.

This doesn't mean God causes evil. It doesn't mean He approves of sin. It doesn't mean the beast and the kings are not responsible for their actions.

But it does mean God is sovereign. He's not surprised. He's not scrambling. He's not losing control. He's using even the worst things to accomplish His purposes.

Isaiah 46:10 BSB

¹⁰ I declare the end from the beginning, and ancient times from what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and all My good pleasure I will accomplish.'

God's purposes will stand. His word will be fulfilled. Babylon will fall. The beast will be destroyed. The Lamb will reign.

And you can trust Him. You can rest in His control. You can be faithful even when the world looks like it's spinning out of control.

Because it's not. God is on the throne.

6. Come Out of Babylon

Revelation 18:4 BSB

⁴ Then I heard another voice from heaven say: “Come out of her, My people, so that you will not share in her sins or contract any of her plagues.

You can't serve two masters. You can't have one foot in Babylon and one foot in the kingdom of God.

Babylon seduces. Babylon intoxicates. Babylon promises fulfillment. She offers wealth, pleasure, power, status, security.

But Babylon is headed for destruction. And if you're in her, you'll share her judgment.

Coming out doesn't mean moving to a different country. It doesn't mean withdrawing from society. It doesn't mean you stop working, stop engaging, stop living in the world.

It means rejecting her values. Refusing her priorities. Turning away from her gods. Giving your allegiance to Christ alone.

It means you stop drinking from her cup. You stop being intoxicated by her promises. You stop measuring success by her standards.

It means you live as a citizen of heaven, not a citizen of Babylon.

Philippians 3:20 BSB

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,

1 John 2:15–17 BSB

¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not from the Father but from the world.

¹⁷ The world is passing away, along with its desires; but whoever does the will of God remains forever.

Conclusion

Tonight we've heard the angel's explanation. We've learned about the beast's rise and fall. We've seen the ten kings unite and then turn on the woman. We've heard the most important verse in the chapter: "They will make war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will triumph."

The world's powers look impressive. But they're temporary. They're headed for destruction.

The Lamb looks weak. But He's victorious. He's Lord of lords and King of kings.

And we are called, chosen, and faithful. We're with Him. And He wins.

Don't be deceived by the beast. Don't be intoxicated by Babylon. Don't be intimidated by the world's power.

Be faithful. Trust the Lamb. And wait for His victory.