

Sermon – 06/01/2008 pm

Beast's Deception and Defeat

Study Text: Revelation 17:7–14

The great prostitute, labelled on her forehead as Babylon the great, was sitting on a beast with seven heads and ten horns. This was the beast of the sea seen in an earlier vision. Daniel also saw such a beast in one of his visions – the fourth beast *had ten horns* (Daniel 7:7). This fourth beast Daniel was told is a fourth kingdom on earth and the ten horns are ten kings who will arise from this kingdom. Many understand this fourth beast to symbolize the Roman Empire.

John was living at the time of the Roman Empire when he wrote this letter. He was in exile for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Christians were being severely persecuted at this time. The Romans killed Christians for sport. When would this suffering end? Would the church survive? The Lord gave visions to John revealing what would happen in the end, the end that was near.

One of the seven angels showed John the great prostitute sitting on the beast. He went on to tell John what this vision meant. We have seen that the great prostitute represents economic-religious systems of this world that align themselves with state powers. The beast is antichristian government, government that opposes God and his people, government that seeks to destroy the true church.

Wily Beast

The woman, the great prostitute, is supremely seductive. John marvelled; he was awestruck by her beauty, yet perplexed by the blood which she drank. 'Do not marvel' the angel told John. Millions look upon her and are seduced. Do not be taken in by her beauty or her many promises.

The woman is closely associated with the beast at this stage – she is sitting on his back. What is the mystery of the beast? As in a previous vision (ch. 13), Satan gave this beast great authority and power. He is a 'clever devil' of a beast. Seven heads point to great knowledge and ten horns to great power. He is not a candidate for the Darwin awards! He is a wily old beast, able to deceive as well as dominate human beings numbering millions.

The beast that you saw was and is not, and will ascend out of the abyss and go to destruction (17: 8). Earth dwellers will marvel when they see the beast *was and is not and yet is present*. What is significant about this time line? Firstly, it is a parody, a mimicking of the way God and Jesus are described (1:8, 4:8). The beast thinks he is God and portrays himself as such. Remember the mortal wound that was healed on one of his heads.

Secondly the beast was very powerful until Jesus came. Jesus came across lots of people who were demon possessed and he cast out these demons, angering the devil. Then at the Cross Jesus outsmarted the devil. He thought that by killing Jesus he would defeat him, but Jesus rose again from the dead. But still he tries to trick people into thinking he is great – he also *was and is not and yet is*, as if he has come back from the dead. We still see people claiming

to be reincarnations and to have come back from the dead. Beware of any making such claims. Jesus is the firstborn from the dead and the only one to be resurrected before he comes again.

The truth about the beast is that he was defeated at the Cross – and that he is now bound – in effect on a leash. But he will be released to bring greater havoc on the earth for a short period at the end. He will come out of the pit before being assigned eternally to destruction of the lake of fire (19:20).

Not all will be taken in by this blaspheming, boastful beast. He will be particularly enraged in the end when he finds that some people will not bow down and worship him. Those whose names are written in *the Book of Life from the foundation of the world* (17:8), those who are called and chosen will be faithful to the very end. They will stand firm in the word of God and worship only God and the Lamb upon the throne.

A professor of medicine was very upset to discover that a number of his students did not believe in Darwinian evolution. He could not accept that educated young people would believe in ‘old hat’ creation. He was determined to change their beliefs. But as he derided creation and vigorously promoted evolution he found even more students believing in creation.

Seven Heads and Ten Horns

Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits (17:9). The woman or prostitute symbolises Babylon, which in John’s day was a term used when referring to Rome, at least by Christians. Rome was the capital city of the greatest empire the world had seen, the centre of government, commerce, arts and science. Rome was also known in the ancient world as the ‘city of seven hills’ because of its geography. Is this the mystery of the seven horns?

John is next told that they are also seven kings (17:10). It is easy to be led into thinking of seven literal kings in the Roman Empire. But which kings. When do we start counting – at Julius Caesar or Augustus? What about those who ruled for a short time? Domitian, the king who we agreed was ruling at the time John was on Patmos was historically the 12th emperor.

The king *who is* after five have fallen would be the one who was ruling in John’s day. Nero was the sixth ruler after Julius Caesar – some do date this letter in Nero’s time. But then others think Domitian is the one who *must rule for a short time* (17:10). They point to a contemporary rumour that Nero would one day reappear. Nero was the greatest persecutor of Christians but Domitian was a close second. Was he in some way Nero reincarnate? (17:11 – note the eighth is of the seven not **one** of the seven).

Going back to the seven mountains; mountains are often used figuratively to refer to strength and to kingdoms. Seven kings can also refer to kingdoms rather than kings. Therefore Hendriksen and others identify the seven kings with world empires – Ancient Babylon, Assyria, New Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. The seventh is yet to come – it is a collective title for antichristian government between the fall of Rome and the final empire of antichrist.

‘It is possible’ writes Beale ‘that just as the seven churches represented seven actual churches but also symbolized the church universal, so these seven heads and mountains could represent seven historical empires, or seven Roman emperors, figuratively representing all Roman emperors themselves symbolizing all empires throughout history’. In other words Rome did sit on seven literal hills and there may be seven literal kings or empires but that that does not exhaust the meaning of the vision. We do not however agree with the pre-millennial interpretation that the Roman Empire will be literally revived directly before the return of Christ and that the ten horns refer to ten European rulers.

What about the ten horns? These are also kings but without a kingdom (17:12). They were given authority for a very short time. Horns are symbolic of power as seen in the seven horns of the Lamb (5:6). These kings may be more like local rulers given power within the larger kingdom. Local rulers were able to get Daniel thrown into the lion’s den. They serve the beast without question and are ready to worship him (17:13).

These ten kings may represent things like art, education, industry and science. Such aspects of a culture are often brought under the authority of the king. Did not Hitler use such institutions for his known evil purposes? Darwinian evolution served Hitler well. How much are art, education and science today directly controlled by governments. Schools are used for social engineering. Who is driving the climate change crusade today? Where is the mind which has wisdom?

War with the Lamb

As the beast assumes greater and greater power in this world he comes to think of himself as invincible – and this is his downfall. He is just like some rich people, politicians and lawyers in the world today – or rather they are like him. They think they are above the law – Conrad Black and Justice Einfield face prison sentences.

Daniel saw the beast prevailing against the saints (Daniel 7:21) and John also saw the beast make war against the two witnesses and overcome them (11:7). The beast has such success in persecuting the people of God he decides to take on their leader, Jesus Christ. *He will make war with the Lamb* (17:14). In doing so he oversteps the mark. His head gets too big, or in this case he runs out of heads. He has doggedly gone on attacking the people of God proving to be like a cat with nine lives. John saw him coming up out of the sea, one head after another. But in the end he oversteps the mark.

Making war with the Lamb of God who is on the throne in heaven is not wise. *Jesus is Lord of lords and King of kings* (17:14). He tried to overcome Jesus when he was on the earth, first tempting Jesus and then having him crucified. But Christ rose from the dead victorious over death and the devil. So when the beast and his evil followers launch this final attack the Lamb will overcome them. Jesus will expose as false the divine claims of emperors and others like them. He will defeat them with the breath of his mouth (Isaiah 11:4).

Remember the end is near. Remember the outcome of the war between Satan and Jesus is already decided in favour of Jesus. Blessed are those who are in Jesus, the *called, the chosen and the faithful*.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon