

Mystery: Beauty and the Beast Who Kills Her

Revelation 17:1-18

Here's a different kind of Pearly Gates Story. A man dies and goes to Heaven. St. Peter meets him at the pearly gates and explains, "OK. Here's how it works. To get into Heaven, you need 100 points. So, tell me all the good things you've done, and I'll give you a certain number of points for each item, depending on how good it was. When you reach 100 points, you're in!

"OK," the man says. "I was married to the same woman for 50 years and never cheated on her, even in my heart." St. Peter says, "That's good and certainly worth 3 points." The man says, "3 points? Well, I also attended church all my life and supported its ministry with my time and tithes." "Great!" Peter replies, "That's worth another point!" "Only 1 point!" the man says. "Well, how about this. I started a soup kitchen and worked in a shelter for homeless veterans." "Terrific! That's good for 2 more points!" Peter says. "2 points!" the man cries. "At this rate, the only way I'll get into Heaven is by the grace of God!" "Right answer." Peter says, "Come on in!"

There are several theological problems with that story. First, Jesus is the Judge of who will join Him in Heaven, not Peter. More importantly, the decision as to who gets into Heaven is made in this life, not afterwards. Finally, there is no point system for getting into Heaven. And yet, that's the problem with every false religion. It is based on self-righteousness and works, rather than faith in the work Jesus did for us by His death and resurrection.

I begin with that reminder because our last case focused on false religion. We came across the mystery of a great prostitute who sits on many waters, which turned out to be a symbol of false religion and its power to deceive the kings and peoples of the world. For more details about that, please review the first part of our study of Revelation chapter 17.

But now, having cracked the puzzle of the prostitute, it is time to unravel the second mystery that John encounters in Revelation 17:7-14. Here John gives us an explanation of the beast on which "Beauty" rides. This isn't intended to shift our attention away from the harlot, but to emphasize how great her influence is and how she will meet her end.

1. HER INFLUENCE

The angel says to John in verse 7, "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns." Verse 9 then goes on to explain the heads: "This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does, he must remain for a little while."

The wisdom needed for understanding this verse comes from God's Word, and when you study God's Word—Isaiah, Daniel, and the other prophets—you find that mountains are symbols of kings and kingdoms. In this case, seven world empires ruled by seven dictators. Let's remember to interpret this from John's perspective. In John's day, five kingdoms had arisen and

fallen—Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece. The angel also says that “one is,” referring to Rome and its evil emperor, Nero. Rome finally fell from within due to its decadence. Since then, no ruler has been able to solidify a kingdom that controls all the peoples of the world. Many have tried—Charlemagne, Napoleon, Hitler, etc.—but none have succeeded. The final world dictator is described by the angel as “the other” which is yet to come.

To whom does this refer? The wisdom to answer this comes from the Old Testament prophet Daniel, where in chapter 7:24 he is told that in the last days a union of ten nations will emerge in the same general area as the old Roman Empire. Out of this union the Antichrist will build his kingdom. That’s why verse 11 says of him, “The beast who was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.” In other words, just as this new European union is solidified, Antichrist (who is one of its kings) will seize control of the government and set up the most brutal dictatorship the world has ever seen.

How he will do this is explained in verse 12. John continues, “The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast.” The ten horns symbolize ten kings who initially band together with Antichrist to form a revived Roman Empire. Many think they see the stage being set for this in the current European Union. The EU is a fact we have grown used to. But remember, prior to 1945, the nations of Europe went to war with each other not once but twice, drawing the rest of the planet into two world wars in 30 years. But no longer. Now there is a large confederation of European nations who have banded together based primarily on the profit motive. Some come and some go, depending on their individual interests. The United Kingdom, for example, voted last year that they would withdraw their membership in the EU by April 2019.

So, the situation is in flux. But one day soon, Jesus will return for His Church, remove the restraining power of the Holy Spirit who keeps evil in check on earth, at which point the harlot will draw the nations of Europe together with two beguiling forces. She will inspire love for the beast. Verse 13 says they will “have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast.” Second, she will inspire hatred for the Lamb. Verse 14 adds, “They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings.”

Just as false religion has influenced all of earth’s rulers, so she will serve as the unifying force behind Antichrist’s kingdom—until he tires of her and gives the order for her execution.

2. HER EXECUTION

Verses 16 to 17 describe the end of the love affair between “Beauty and the Beast.” Though she has been courted by countless kings, she is now judged as a common whore.

First, notice who executes her. Verse 16 says, “The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin.” In other words, the very ones she rode on will become her assassins—the beast and his horns! Why will the beast turn on her like this? Two reasons: first, he was simply “using her” to gain power and approval. But now that he no longer

needs her, he orders his henchmen to kill her; more importantly, John reveals in verse 17 that God will “put it into their hearts” to destroy this false religious system. No matter how it looks the surface, God is behind everything that happens on earth! He rules and overrules to accomplish His will, using even the wrath of man to praise Him. (Psalm 76:10)

When will this murder take place? The passage does not say. Some think it will happen at the midpoint of the Tribulation, when the beast demands the world’s worship. That sounds logical to me. But the fact that this vision is given by an angel with one of the bowl judgments may mean that it occurs at the end of the Tribulation as the final plagues fall upon the earth.

What is clear is how she will be executed. According to the Law of Moses, the penalty for immorality was burning. Leviticus 20:14 says, “If a man marries a woman and her mother, it is wickedness. They shall be burned with fire...that there may be wickedness among you.” So, it will be with the prostitute! Verse 16 says they will leave her naked, eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. In fact, when we study the extended description of her judgment in chapter 18, it sounds like a nuclear strike. Perhaps the kings of Europe will agree to drop “the bomb” on this mecca of false religion, destroying both the city and the false religion she has inspired.

There is only one conclusion to make as we conclude this study: God hates false religion regardless of the form it takes. In our day and age, the feeling is that one religion is as good as another, if we’re sincere and loving people. So, we watch our neighbors play with horoscopes, practice Transcendental Meditation, talk about reincarnation, consult psychics, and chant New Age slogans about global unity and our unlimited human potential.

We have a friend like this—a dear lady who attends a mainline church with her family on Sundays, but consults a New Age medium every few months to have her fortune told. Asked about this inconsistency, she was very defensive. “After all, God is love. He wouldn’t judge me for these things.” She is right and wrong. God is supremely loving. That is why He sent His Son to die on the Cross for our sins. But He is also perfectly holy, and will one day judge this ancient Babylonian occultism and those who engage in it. Not because He takes pleasure in judgment. But because He deserves to have us worship Him with all our minds, souls, and strength. He is a jealous Creator who will not share our love with anyone.

Let God’s Spirit search your heart as we finish. Has any spiritual compromise crept into your worship? Remember, it isn’t your job to kill the prostitute. That’s something God will do in His own time and way. What He’s calling you to do is to “‘Come out from among them and be separate,’ says the Lord, ‘and do not touch the unclean thing.’” 1 John 2 adds, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life—is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away and all its lusts, but the one who does the will of God lives forever.”

3. YOUR COMMITMENT

One of the first lessons I learned as a pastor was how important the church nursery is. Young parents want a safe place where children are lovingly cared for while they worship. This includes reliable furniture, background checks of nursery workers, a way of contacting mom or dad if their children need them, and a certain method of matching the right child with the right parent when worship ends. However, the most common complaint I heard, after many conflicts between parents was the need for proper sanitation. To be specific, parents don't want to leave their lambs in a nursery with children sick with colds, the flu, and other illnesses. So, finally we had to ask parents to keep their children home if there was a danger of infecting others.

Did you know that God feels the same way about His children? He wants His Forever Family safe from sin and every form of evil. For that reason, no one who practices evil will be admitted to His Heavenly City, the New Jerusalem. He says in Revelation 21:27, "And nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."

Take time right now to examine yourself and see if there are any ways in which the great prostitute of false religion and immorality has infected you. If so, repent! For Jesus, our Heavenly Bridegroom is coming soon and we need to be ready— "a radiant Church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:27) in love.