

Who Is The Beast Of Revelation? (#8)

Ezra 7:11-12

Revelation 19:19-20

Revelation 17:9-11

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Sometimes in seeking to interpret prophetic symbols (like that of the first Beast of Revelation), one does not end up embracing the interpretation that the first Beast is the Revived Roman Empire over the interpretation that the first Beast is the Roman Papacy simply because the Revived Roman Empire interpretation has no objections against it, but the Roman Papacy interpretation has a number of objections against it. No, in fact, both of these interpretations have plausible objections brought against them, and both of these interpretations have plausible arguments supporting them. That being the case, how is a Christian supposed to discern what is the most likely interpretation to embrace between two such plausible interpretations? I have three responses to that question: Scripture, Scripture, and Scripture.

If we would have a warranted confidence in our interpretation of complex prophetic symbols, we must begin with accurately handling the Scriptural testimony (as it relates to the prophetic symbol), and then seek to find the realization of that prophetic symbol in history. In other words, the text of Scripture should lead us to the prophetic fulfillment in history, rather than first looking for the fulfillment in history and then going back to Scripture. Our human nature is very prone to adjust the Scriptural text to our historical findings and to our own preferences, if we begin with history in seeking to interpret prophetic symbols (and, dear ones, we must always be careful of such tendencies). Therefore, let us hold the text of prophetic Scripture always before our eyes (first and foremost) in our interpretation of prophetic symbols, and let our confidence be rooted there. Let us first wrestle with our understanding of what the Scripture is

teaching about a prophetic symbol, and once the prophetic symbol has been rightly interpreted by a careful study of Scripture, then let us apply our textual study to history to find the most likely historical fulfillment. That, I submit to you, is the right order which we should pursue in identifying who the first Beast of Revelation is: Whether the Revived Western Roman Empire, or the Roman Papacy. I'll come back to the matter of Scripture and history at the conclusion of the sermon.

Dear ones, I pray through this series of sermons on matters of prophetic significance that you are learning not only who the Beast is, but also how to properly use Scriptural principles in arriving at the right conclusion. In other words, one of the reasons that there are different interpretations of who the Beast of Revelation is, is not necessarily because one group of interpreters uses the Bible and another group of interpreters does not use the Bible. But rather different interpretations of who the Beast of Revelation is (or any other prophetic symbol is), is due to the interpretive principles that guide the respective interpreters. Yes, I desire as your Pastor that you come to the right conclusions about doctrine, worship, church government, and prophetic symbols, but I also desire that you grow in being able to learn how to interpret Scripture. Thus, if these sermons at times seem detailed in wrestling with various portions of Scripture, remember that the faithful exposition of Scriptural texts ought not only to lead you to the right conclusions, but also ought to teach you how to interpret Scriptural texts in order to arrive at the right conclusions.

In the most recent sermons, we have been considering the arguments of fellow Historicists who believe the first Beast of Revelation is the Roman Papacy (and not the Revived Roman Empire), and then we have been providing responses to these arguments. We come this Lord's Day to the fourth argument of fellow Historicists who support the position that the

first Beast of Revelation is the Papacy: The Papacy Is The Eighth Head Of The Beast (Revelation 17:9-11).

IV. The Fourth Argument In Favor Of The First Beast Being The Papacy: The Papacy Is The Eighth Head Of The Beast (Revelation 17:9-11).

A. First, let us briefly consider what is said in Revelation 17 in the verses leading up to our text.

1. In Revelation 17, the Holy Spirit first gives to us some significant interpretive keys in identifying the symbol of the Harlot and the symbol of the Beast. We will consider the Harlot more closely in a future sermon, but I submit at this point that this Harlot is also identified under other symbols in the Book of Revelation: namely, as the second Beast of Revelation 13:11, and as the False Prophet in Revelation 16:13 and Revelation 19:20.

a. Dear ones, a pagan religion (like the Emperor worship of Pagan Rome) that has never professed to be a Church of Christ or to be the Bride of Christ cannot be this Harlot, but rather a Church that has the name of Christian, and professes to be Christ's Bride (but has committed spiritual harlotry by way of all of her idolatry, heresy, and superstition), that Church has become a Harlot. Thus, this Harlot is not the Emperor worship of Pagan Rome (as some interpreters have proposed).

b. Now consider these questions. Which Church that professes to be the Bride of Christ is in fact a Harlot due to its abominations of idolatry, heresy, and blasphemy (Revelation 17:5)? Which Church through history has notably been drunk with the blood of the faithful witnesses of Christ (Revelation 17:6)? Which Church has her headquarters in Rome (Revelation 17:9,18)? Which Church extends her rule over peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues (Revelation 17:15)? Dear ones, I submit there is only one Church that fulfills in history

these and other characteristics of this Harlot found in Revelation 17: The Roman Catholic Church.

2. Secondly, in Revelation 17, carefully note that this Harlot Church of Rome is said to sit upon and to be carried by a Beast that has seven heads and ten horns (Revelation 17:3,7). This is the same Beast as the first Beast that comes out of the sea in Revelation 13:1-3 (which also has seven heads and ten horns and is identified with the fourth Beast of Daniel, i.e. the Roman Empire). That first Beast was also said to have one head that was mortally wounded, but was healed (Revelation 13:3). The Holy Spirit now gives us further information about this wounded head of the first Beast that was healed (as we consider Revelation 17:9-11).

3. Just as heavenly wisdom was required in understanding the number of this same first Beast (back in Revelation 13:18), so now we are called again to have a mind of wisdom (Revelation 17:9), in order that we might apply that heavenly wisdom which comes from the Spirit of God as a grace and which comes from a study and application of Scripture. This heavenly wisdom which we all need so desperately in our lives does not simply fall out of heaven, but is a grace which increases as we grow in our knowledge and application of God's Word to every area of life. "In thy light shall we see light" (Psalm 36:9). As we walk in the light of God's Word in loving it and in obeying it, the Lord will give us more light.

4. The Holy Spirit interprets the seven heads of the first Beast as having a two-fold reference.

a. First, the seven heads represent seven mountains (or hills) upon which the Harlot sits (Revelation 17:9). This is a clear reference to the city of Rome from which the Harlot extends her rule over the nations of the world (Revelation 17:18).

b. Second, the seven heads of the first Beast represent seven "kings" or seven forms of government that ruled over the Beast, i.e. over the Roman Empire (Revelation 17:10).

(1) Most Historicists are in agreement that the five heads that are fallen are Kings, Consuls, Dictators, the Council of Ten, and Military Tribunes, which ruled over the Roman Empire at earlier periods of history (this is also confirmed by ancient Roman writers as well). Most Historicists are also in agreement that the sixth head is that form of government that was presently reigning over the Roman Empire: namely, Emperors (which began with Caesar Augustus in 27 b.c.). Thus, on the identity of the six heads, there is substantial agreement.

(2) Our text goes on to state concerning the seventh head (or form of government) that it had not yet come, but when it does come, it would continue for a short time (Revelation 17:10). There is more diversity of opinion on the identity of the seventh head among Historicists. Since I have already addressed the seventh head (i.e. the seventh form of civil government) of the Roman Beast in previous sermons, I will simply state at this point that I believe seventh head (i.e. the seventh form of civil government) of the Roman Beast to be the Patricians of Rome (under Pepin and Charlemagne) beginning in 754 and continuing to 800 (a short period of 46 years). Now let us move to a consideration of the eighth head in Revelation 17:11.

B. Having given a brief overview of Revelation 17:1-10, we now turn to Revelation 17:11, where the eighth head of the Roman Beast is described. If it can be soundly and accurately demonstrated that the eighth head of the Roman Beast is the Roman Papacy, then I would join with fellow Historicists in declaring that the first Beast of Revelation is the Papacy (and not the Revived Western Roman Empire). For each head of the Roman Beast rules over the Roman Beast at that particular period of history. For example, when the first head of Kings was the form of civil government ruling over the Roman Beast, that head of Kings was the Roman Beast at that period in history. And when the sixth head of Emperors was the form of civil government ruling over the Roman Beast,

that head of Emperors was the Roman Beast from Caesar Augustus (27 b.c.) to Romulus Augustus (476 a.d.). And likewise, if it can be demonstrated from Scripture that the eighth head of the Roman Beast is the Roman Papacy, then I would agree with my fellow Historicists that the Beast of Revelation (i.e. the first Beast that comes from the sea) is the Roman Papacy. Let us now turn to the four primary arguments (or variations thereof) used by fellow Historicists who believe the eighth head of the Roman Beast is the Roman Papacy. I will only be covering the first argument (from Revelation 17:9-11) this Lord's Day. After each argument, I will give a response.

1. **The first argument in favor of the eighth head being the Roman Papacy** is that the eighth head is a revived or healed head of the Roman Empire that arises from the seven heads of the Roman Empire (each head being a form of government that ruled over the Roman Empire) as we see in Revelation 13:1-3. It is concluded by fellow Historicists that at that point when the Western Roman Empire was in complete disarray, in great division, and utter confusion (even near desolation), it was the Roman Papacy that arose as the eighth head (after the seventh head) to restore the Western Roman Empire and to exercise dominion over the Western Roman Empire (as a side note, I do agree that the Roman Papacy arose to bring order out of confusion in the Western Roman Empire, and that after Romulus Augustus was deposed as the last Emperor in the Western Roman Empire that the Roman Papacy filled that void in extending its authority over the Western Roman Empire). It is alleged by fellow Historicists that when Revelation 17:11 states that the eighth head "is of the seven", that phrase is interpreted to mean that the Roman Papacy, as the eighth head (or eighth form of government), arises from the general and collective group of seven previous heads (or forms of government) that ruled over the Roman Empire. And yet the Roman Papacy is identified as a separate and distinguishable head from the other seven heads, because it is identified as an eighth head. Thus, there

is a CONNECTION and a DISTINCTION to be understood here in Revelation 17:11. The CONNECTION is that the Roman Papacy is “of the seven” (i.e. the eighth head of the Roman Papacy is connected to the group of seven previous forms of government) by way of its dominion over the Roman Empire. The DISTINCTION in Revelation 17:11 is found in the Roman Papacy being a separate eighth head, essentially a religious/ecclesiastical head (or form of government), different from the previous seven heads, which were essentially civil/political heads (or forms of government).

a. **I respond to this first argument** by noting that the Roman Papacy (contrary to my fellow Historicists) is not truly “of the seven” heads of the Beast of Revelation (i.e. it is not truly connected to the seven heads of the Beast of Rome in the sense in which the Holy Spirit intended in Revelation 17:11). I don’t deny at all that the eighth head “is of the seven”. I simply deny that the eighth head is of the seven in the sense in which certain of my fellow Historicists have interpreted it. I submit that the very real connection that the Spirit of God intended is not a connection of the eighth head with the whole group of seven heads (as a collective whole), but the connection that the eighth head has is a connection with one of the seven heads in particular. Thus when we read that the eighth head “is of the seven”, I submit that this means that the eighth head is “one single or particular head out of the seven heads”. Let me explain why I believe this is the case.

b. Turn with me to Revelation 13:3. There we see that one single head (or form of civil government) out of the seven heads receives a mortal wound, and that the mortal wound of that single head (or form of civil government) is healed and revived. Where do we find this healed or revived head in the Book of Revelation? I submit we find it in the eighth head of the Roman Beast. For it is only in regard to the eighth head that we find language used that could in any way be construed to refer to a healing or reviving of a previous head (or form of civil government). This is deduced from the words found in Revelation

17:11, wherein the Roman Beast is described by way of its heads (or forms of civil government) as “was” (because it lived), “and was not” (because it was mortally wounded), “and is the eighth head” (because it is healed or revived). Compare the language used in Revelation 17:8. In other words, it seems clear that the healed and revived head of the Roman Beast is the eighth head of Revelation 17:11. But if the eighth head is the healed head of the one wounded head out of the seven heads, then when the eighth head is said to be “of the seven” (Revelation 17:11), it does not mean that the eighth head is of the seven heads as a collective group, but rather that the eighth head is one of the seven heads in particular. Which means, if we can identify which of the seven heads received the mortal wound, then we can also identify who the eighth head is, because the eighth head is the healing of that one head (from among the seven heads) that received the mortal wound. So which of the seven heads (or forms of civil government) was mortally wounded?

c. Revelation 17:10 tells us that five of the heads (or forms of civil government) were fallen at the time that John received this vision (i.e. Kings, Consuls, Dictators, Council of Ten, and Military Tribunes. There is no distinction made between these five heads (or forms of government): All five heads were fallen or ended. What was true of one was true of them all. Thus, one of the five could not be mortally wounded, if all five heads were fallen and ended. Therefore, I submit that we will not find the wounded head among the five heads that were fallen.

d. That leaves the sixth head and the seventh head as possible candidates for the head (or form of civil government) that received the mortal wound. Interestingly, nothing is said at all about the demise of the sixth head (in Revelation 17:10), but simply that it was the head (or form of government) that was ruling over the Roman Empire at the time that John received this vision (“one is”). Concerning the seventh head, we are told that “the other [i.e. the seventh head—GLP] has not

yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue [or remain—GLP] a short space” (Revelation 17:10). Because we are told that the seventh head (or form of civil government) will remain for a little while, I submit that it may be inferred that after that little while, it will remain no longer, but will fall like the first five heads, not to be restored again. Therefore, it does not seem reasonable that it is the seventh head that receives the mortal wound.

e. Thus, the only head (or form of civil government) concerning which we have no information at all as to its final end is the sixth head (that of the Roman Emperors). I submit that we have no information about the final fall or end of the sixth head, for the very reason that it is the sixth head (or form of civil government) that receives the mortal wound (and so does not fall to a permanent end like the other six heads or forms of civil government). The sixth head of Emperors may appear to have fallen to a final end, but it is really only a mortal wound that will be eventually healed upon the head of Emperors of the Roman Empire. I submit that mortal wound to the sixth head of the Roman Beast (namely, Emperors in the Western Roman Empire) was sustained when Romulus Augustus was deposed as Emperor by Odoacer in 476 a.d. And that mortal wound to the sixth head of Emperors over the Western Roman Empire continued for 324 years, until that wounded sixth head of Emperor was healed and became the eighth head of Emperor. Moreover, I submit that this amazing fulfillment of prophecy occurred December 25, 800 in Rome, when Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne Emperor of the Roman Empire. Charlemagne’s official title was “most serene Augustus, crowned by God, great and pacific [peaceful—GLP] emperor, governing the Roman Empire.” Thus, it was the sixth head of Emperor of the Roman Beast that was mortally wounded, and it was the eighth head of Emperor of the Roman Beast that was the healed and revived head.

f. In support of this conclusion, I ask the question, why is it that in the visions of the Beast in the Book of Revelation, the Beast is

always (without exception) seen as a Beast with seven heads, rather than a Beast with eight heads (Revelation 13:1; Revelation 17:3,7,9)? It is because the eighth head is actually the revived and healed continuation of the sixth head (that was mortally wounded). In other words, because the eighth head is the healed sixth head, it is not counted as a separate and distinct head upon the first Beast of Revelation. However, if one maintains the position that the Roman Papacy is the eighth head, I submit that the Beast would not be seen in vision with seven heads, but would rather be seen in vision with eight distinct heads, since none of the previous seven heads (or forms of government) are identified as the Roman Papacy.

Thus, I hope you see that a faithful interpretation of prophetic symbols (like the Beast of Revelation, or like the eighth head of the Roman Beast) begins first and foremost with the right understanding of the relevant Scriptural texts that relate to that prophetic symbol. History is important in confirming what the Scripture states, but it is Scripture which interprets the symbol and it is history that applies the symbol.

In conclusion, I want you to see that this principle not only applies in prophecy, but applies in all of Scripture. Where do we rightly learn of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Do we not learn in Scripture that ungodly sinners are justified and declared righteous by God on the basis of Christ's imputed righteousness alone, and that this free gift is received by faith alone? It is not nature or mere history (apart from Scripture) that teaches us about the redeeming, incomprehensible love of God for guilty, depraved, and vile sinners (like you and me). It is in Scripture that the Gospel is revealed. We would not know the Gospel if there was not Scripture and only history. But at the same time, dear ones, it is in history that the Gospel revealed in Scripture is applied and must be applied. It is in your life and mine that the Gospel must be applied in faith and

obedience. You see, dear ones, it is not enough to rightly interpret what the Scripture teaches about the Gospel. The Gospel must be applied in history (in your life and mine, in your family and mine, in Christ's Church, and in the nations of this world). For God's end in giving to us the Gospel in Scripture is to glorify God by seeing His holy nature reproduced in our lives (Romans 8:29; Romans 12:2). This ought to be applied corporately as well as individually.

And where there is a faithful interpretation of Scripture, but no faithful application of Scripture to our lives, families, church, or nation in history, there is where hypocrisy blooms and grows. Yes, the faithful interpretation of Scripture is pre-eminent. However, the faithful application of Scripture to history is absolutely necessary. Otherwise, we shall have the mere form of godliness, but deny the power thereof in history. Dear ones, let us pray that our eyes may be illuminated by the Holy Spirit to rightly interpret Scripture, but let us also pray that the Holy Spirit would grant us the grace to believe Scripture, to love Scripture, and to practice Scripture in history.

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