

# Lesson 41

Last week we looked the ten horns in Revelation 17:12-18. We considered a first possible view as to their identity — that the ten kings are the first ten emperors of Rome.

Under this view, the seven heads and the ten horns are looking at the same Roman emperors, the difference being that the ten horns includes the three civil war kings while the seven heads excluded those three emperors.

We spent a lot of time looking at verse 12, which says that the 10 horns are ten kings which have received no kingdom as yet. On the surface that verse might suggest that these ten heads could not be the former kings of Rome, but we looked at two possible explanations for that verse.

First, verse 12 could be directing us to view the ten heads from Daniel's perspective six hundred years earlier, at which time none of them were yet kings. Second, verse 12 could be telling us that these kings had lost their kingship but would be given it back for a short time so that they could, together with Domitian, witness the judgment of Rome. That second option tied in nicely with a similar description of ancient Babylon in Isaiah 14.

Today, we will say a few more things about this first possible view of the 10 heads, and then we will look at a few other possibilities as to their identity.

The handout this week (available at [www.ThyWordIsTruth.com](http://www.ThyWordIsTruth.com)) shows the convoluted family tree for the first Roman dynasty: the Julio-Claudian Dynasty. The first five emperors of Rome came from that dynasty, and they are highlighted in yellow on the handout: Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero. The dynasty came to an end with the death of Nero in AD 68. Its namesake, Julius Caesar, is highlighted by the red box at the top. He was not an emperor, but he wanted to be, which is why he was assassinated.

This chart came from Wikipedia, and as with all things from the Internet in general and from Wikipedia specifically, it may have some errors. I spotted one — Claudius was not Agrippina's second husband; he was her third husband.

And speaking of Agrippina, she is the person who is highlighted by the red box at the bottom. She provides a very good example of what this family was like. And although I'm sure we would all agree that every family has its prob-

lems, I don't know any families that have problems like this one did! For example, here are some facts about Agrippina.

- She was the daughter of Germanicus, who was all set to be emperor himself until he was (most likely) murdered by his uncle Tiberius.
- She was a distant niece of Julius Caesar.
- She was the great-granddaughter of Marc Antony.
- She was the great-granddaughter of the emperor Augustus.
- She was the granddaughter of the emperor Tiberius.
- She was the sister of the emperor Caligula.
- She was the mother of the emperor Nero.
- She was the wife of the emperor Claudius.
- She was also the niece of the emperor Claudius.
- She was the mother-in-law of Nero's wife, Octavia.
- She was also Octavia's step-mother.
- She was exiled by her brother Caligula.
- She was murdered by her son Nero.

As they say, every family has its ups and downs! And these were the people in charge of Rome! And these were the people that Daniel wrote about six centuries before they were born. And, as we discussed over the last two weeks, I think these emperors, along with the others who ruled later in the first century are the seven heads and the ten horns of Revelation 17.

Under that first view of the ten horns, the ten kings are the first ten emperors of Rome. What that means is that the number ten has a *literal* meaning. Does the number ten also have a *symbolic* meaning under that first view? Absolutely, and it is the same symbolic meaning that we have been seeing all throughout this book — completeness.

Yes, God brings back these ten kings to see what is about to happen to Rome — but I think the message is that God brings back ALL of the prior rulers of the earth to witness this event. I think that is what Daniel 7:12 is telling us. Babylon, Persia, and Greece — they were prolonged so that they could see what becomes of earthly kingdoms. God wanted them all around to witness the truth of Daniel 2:44 and the fulfillment of Daniel 2:44.

As I said last week, in my opinion, this first view is the correct view. The ten horns in Revelation are the same as the ten horns in Daniel — they are the first ten emperors of Rome. And God brings them back onto the stage so that they along with Domitian can witness the judgment of the great harlot.

What are some other possible views?

### **View 2: The ten kings are the kings from the east.**

Earlier, we talked about the false rumor that was spread after Nero's death that Nero had not really died at all, but had instead fled to Parthia so he could raise an army to return and destroy Rome. Or, more precisely, return and **finish** destroying Rome since he had already managed to burn down a large part of it. This rumor was something that caused great fear and anxiety in the average Roman.

We have already seen several times in this book the Parthians used as part of a figurative image intended to frighten Rome. In Revelation 16:12, the Euphrates river was dried up so that these kings from the east could have easy access for their invasion. Historians tell us that the Parthian satraps were practically independent rulers, so they could accurately be referred to as kings. It is possible that the ten horns represents these kings from the east.

#### **What evidence supports this view?**

1. We saw these kings from the east in the previous chapter, so there is some contextual support.
2. The frightening image in verse 16 fits what we have seen previously about this force from the east. Plus, the reference to fire in verse 16 could be a reference to the false rumor that Nero himself would lead this army from the east back to finish what he starting in burning Rome to the ground.

#### **What evidence is against this view?**

1. It is very hard to see how these kings from the east could be said to “give their power and strength unto the beast” as we see in verse 13.
2. Likewise, their war with the Lamb in verse 14 seems to come from left field. So far, God has been using them as a tool to frighten Rome, but we have not seen them waging war against God.
3. And it is hard to see how they have given their kingdom unto the beast as described in verse 17.

4. Under this view, the number ten is purely symbolic. Unlike the seven mountains and the seven kings, there would not be a separate literal understanding of ten under this view. Why? Because we are told by historians that there were fourteen Parthian satraps.

In my opinion, the negatives far outweigh the positives for this view. I do **not** think that the ten horns represent the kings from the east.

### **View 3: The ten kings are the client kingdoms and federates of Rome.**

This is the third and final option we will consider for the ten heads. In my opinion, this view comes in second place, with the first view we looked at being I think the best explanation.

Under this third view, the ten horns represent the client kingdoms and federates of Rome. Who were they? Michael Grant in his book *History of Rome* (page 196) gives us this description of the Roman client king system:

The client kings were tied to the service of Rome in order to defend its frontiers and serve as listening posts to the outside world. In return, they were supported by the Romans against internal subversive movements and allowed a free hand inside their own countries. Thus Rome was spared the trouble and expense of administering these territories; and the formula worked well.

Herod the Great was a client king. He was named “king” by the Romans in 42 BC, and his sons Archelaus, Antipas, and Philip tried to retain that title after his death, but none of them was allowed to do so. Only his grandson Agrippa I (AD 37) and great-grandson Agrippa II (AD 49) were named kings.

Once again, depending on how we interpret the word “yet” in verse 12, that verse may suggest that **later** client kings are in view here. As we will discuss in a moment, verse 16 also suggests that client kings later than the time of Herod are in view here.

That explains the client kingdoms of Rome. What were the federates of Rome? Michael Grant describes the rise of the federates in another of his many books, *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (pages 8 and 125):

In 382 Theodosius I took the revolutionary step of allowing whole German tribes to reside in Imperial territory as separate,

autonomous, allied or federate units, committed to serving in the Roman army, though under the command of their own chieftains. Thereafter the practice continued and increased, until such federates became a regular and widespread feature of the life of the Empire.

The Visigoths were the first such group to receive “federate” status and were allowed to live under their own laws and ruled on the condition that they provide soldiers and agricultural workers for the Romans.

Those descriptions explain how they received power as kings one hour with the beast (verse 12), how they give their power and strength to the beast (verse 13), and how they give their kingdom unto the beast (verse 17). Also, by fighting with Rome, we see how they could be said to have made war against the Lamb (verse 14).

But what about verse 16? Did these client kingdoms and federates hate the harlot, and make her desolate and naked, and eat her flesh, and burn her with fire? Yes. In fact it was these groups that eventually caused the fall of Rome.

The city of Rome was sacked in AD 410 by Alaric, a Visigoth. It was the first time in eight hundred years that the city had been taken by a foreign invader. Rome fell in AD 476.

That seems to fit pretty well. Are there any downsides to this view? Yes.

The first downside is that this view stretches our time frame a bit. Under the first view, our time frame remains in the first century, but under this view we have to go to the fifth century to explain verse 16.

This problem is not insurmountable. Yes, Rome fell in the fifth century, but Rome’s judgment and fate were determined the first century. As far as God was concerned, Rome fell when Domitian fell. Didn’t we see something similar in our study of Daniel? In Daniel 8 and 11, Daniel breaks off his consideration of the Seleucid kingdom with the fall of Antiochus Epiphanes who came to power long before that kingdom ended in 64 BC. As far as God was concerned, the Seleucid kingdom fell when Antiochus fell.

The second downside with this third view is that, as with the second view, the number ten under this view is purely symbolic and (unlike the seven heads) does not have a literal component. Under this view, the ten horns likely represents *all* of the client kingdoms and federates. It may also refer to the fact that these ten kings, in a sense, drove the final nail into Rome’s coffin—they *completed* the judgment.

As I said, this view comes in second place in my opinion. I think the best view of the ten horns is the first view we considered: they are the first ten emperors of Rome brought back by God to witness the judgment of their empire. That view fits well with the parallel prophecy in Daniel, it fits well the Isaiah's description of the king of ancient Babylon, and it maintains the dual symbolic/literal understanding of 10 that we saw earlier with seven.

The only hurdle for the first view is verse 12, but we looked at two different ways in which we can clear that hurdle. But if you don't like that first view, then this third view is a very good alternative.

Whatever the ten horns represent, verse 14 tells us something very important about them: "the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful."

Verse 14 tells us that Jesus would overcome those 10 kings, and when Jesus did that the church would be with him to watch it happen. Whether the ten kings are the ten emperors or the client kingdoms of Rome, verse 14 is just restating what Daniel said six centuries earlier.

*Daniel 2:44 — And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.*

Verse 14 tells us that Jesus is Lord of lords and King of kings. The Roman emperors thought that is what they were, but they were very badly mistaken. They thought they had no Lord or King above them, but they were wrong: Jesus was their Lord and their King.

Now here is a question: Did Jesus' victory over these ten horns **make** Jesus Lord of lords and King of kings? No. We are told in verse 14 that Jesus conquered them **because** he is Lord of lords and King of kings. Jesus' victory over Rome and Rome's minions did not make Jesus king. Jesus was already king!

And there is a lesson in that for us. How often do we hear denominational preachers tell people that they need to make Jesus Lord of their life? How often do we sing songs in which we say that we are crowing Jesus king? ("King of my life, I crown thee now" comes to mind. When I sing that song, I say "King of my life, to thee I bow.") There is not a shred of support in the Bible for such a notion.

When Peter was asked “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” in Acts 2:37, Peter did not tell them they needed to make Jesus Lord of their life. In fact, that would have made absolutely no sense. Why? Because Peter had just told them in Acts 2:36 that “God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Jesus was already their Lord. Instead, Peter told them that they needed to obey their Lord; they needed to “repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).

Jesus is Lord of lords, which means that Jesus is everyone’s Lord. Jesus is King of kings, which means that Jesus is everyone’s King. We do not obey the gospel to make Jesus Lord and King — we obey the gospel because Jesus is already Lord and King! When we obey the gospel, we do not make Jesus anything. Instead, we recognize what Jesus already is, and we become his faithful subject. Jesus is the fixed point (Hebrews 13:8), not us. The movement and change are on our side, not on his.

And we should remember this principle as proceed toward the closing chapters of this book. **Nowhere in Revelation does Jesus begin to rule over something new.** Jesus has all authority when the book begins, and Jesus has all authority when the book ends. Jesus reigns over the entire universe when the book begins, and Jesus reigns over the entire universe when the book ends. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords when the book begins, and Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords when the book ends.

Do we see new expressions of Jesus’ reign in this book? Yes. But do we see in this book Jesus reigning over something or over someone that he did not previously reign over? No.

There is a great deal of misunderstanding about the reign of Christ, and much of it comes from misunderstandings about the book of Revelation.

Sadly, many denominational interpretations of this book belittle the church and belittle Christ. To them, the church is just a mistake and just an afterthought. They tell us that Jesus failed to set up his kingdom during the first century, and that he is not ruling now. Here is how the *Wycliffe Dictionary of Theology* describes that view:

It is held that the Old Testament prophets predicted the re-establishment of David’s kingdom and that Christ himself intended to bring this about. It is alleged however, that because the Jews refused his person and work he postponed the estab-

lishment of his kingdom until the time of his return. Meanwhile, it is argued, the Lord gathered together ‘the church’ as a kind of interim measure.

**How anyone could read the Bible and believe that Jesus failed in anything he intended to do is inconceivable! How anyone can read the Bible and conclude that the church is a mistake or an afterthought or “a kind of interim measure” is just as inconceivable!**

We’ll have more to say about this terrible and dangerous heresy when we get to Chapter 20.

### **Verses 15 and 18**

We have talked about verses 12-14 and 16-17 in studying the ten horns. What about verses 15 and 18?

Earlier we looked at verse 18 and we saw how that verse can only be a description of Rome. In John’s day, there was no other great city that reigned over the kings of the earth.

The same can be said about verse 15. “The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.”

First, we should note that the angel’s explanation in verse 15 fits what we said earlier about the beast from the sea. That sea represents the restless nations of this world, from which Rome came and over which Rome ruled. And there was no other city in John’s day about which that could be said.

Second, as we have seen before, Rome is being described here using Old Testament descriptions of ancient Babylon.

***Jeremiah 51:12-13** — Set up the standard upon the walls of Babylon, make the watch strong, set up the watchmen, prepare the ambushes: for the Lord hath both devised and done that which he spake against the inhabitants of Babylon. **O thou that dwellest upon many waters, abundant in treasures, thine end is come, and the measure of thy covetousness.***

In fact, that description was both figuratively and literally true of ancient Babylon. The river Euphrates ran through the city, and it had irrigation canals extending out in every direction.

But verse 18 says that this great city would reign over the kings **of the earth**. Rome didn't rule over the entire earth. So doesn't that mean that verse 18 is looking toward the end of the world when there will be one world power? Not at all, and once again the solution is to just let the Bible interpret itself.

No, Rome did not literally rule the entire world. But Rome's dominion was so large that it was commonly described in such terms. In fact, that is how the inspired word of God describes it.

***Luke 2:1** — And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that **all the world** should be taxed.*

***Acts 11:28** — And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth **throughout all the world**: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.*

***Romans 1:8** — First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of **throughout the whole world**.*

So, yes, Rome did reign over the kings of the earth.

Before we finish Chapter 17, let's pause to address a potential problem with our interpretation of this book. Throughout our study, when we have seen a number, we have looked for the symbolic significance of that number. And yet here, when the angel explains this part of the vision, the angel does not say that seven mean perfection and ten means completeness. Instead, the angel seems to say that seven means seven and ten means ten. How do we explain that?

We **know** that number in this book are used figuratively. We have seen it all throughout our study. How else can we explain the use of 144,000 to describe a people that we know from elsewhere in the Bible must be the church? How else can we explain how this entire book is structured around the number seven, depicting perfection? How else can we explain the repeated use of the number twelve to describe God's people? And we could go on and on.

The use of symbolic numbers in this book is so clear and so evident that it did not need to be mentioned by this angel. John was not confused about what the number seven or the number twelve or the number ten was depicting. Believe me, if we can figure it out in AD 2018, John could figure it out in AD 79!

Numbers in this book are figurative. If on occasion we find a number in this book that also has a literal meaning, then that is the exception; it is not the rule.

Well, how do we know when that exception applies? Simple. An angel from God tells us, as just happened right here in Chapter 17.

And you know what? Maybe that explains why this angel appeared in Chapter 17. Maybe that explains why these verses received a divine explanation while other verses did not. Perhaps God wanted to let us know that here these two numbers *also* have a literal meaning. Elsewhere seven means perfection, but here seven also just means seven.

## Chapter 18

In our introductory classes we said that the Old Testament is one of our very best guides in understanding the book of Revelation. And we have seen that statement demonstrated over and over in our study of the book so far. Several times when we might have been tempted to say that certain language can only be describing the end of the world, we have found the same language in the Old Testament describing something other than the end of the world.

The Old Testament has kept us grounded. Commentators that start talking about Chinese armies and atomic weapons are not grounded — they have left the word far behind in the flights of fancy. The Old Testament keeps us from doing that.

Perhaps nowhere is that link between the Old Testament and Revelation more clear than it is here in Chapter 18. Chapter 18 is a type of prophetic language called a “doom song.” And doom songs are a common feature in the Old Testament. Isaiah gives us a doom song for Babylon.

*Isaiah 13:19-22 — And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful crea-*

*tures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged.*

Isaiah also gives us a doom song for Edom.

**Isaiah 34:11-15** — *But the cormorant and the bittern shall possess it; the owl also and the raven shall dwell in it: and he shall stretch out upon it the line of confusion, and the stones of emptiness. They shall call the nobles thereof to the kingdom, but none shall be there, and all her princes shall be nothing. And thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof: and it shall be an habitation of dragons, and a court for owls. The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; the screech owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest. There shall the great owl make her nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow: there shall the vultures also be gathered, every one with her mate.*

Zephaniah gives us a doom song for Nineveh.

**Zephaniah 2:13-15** — *And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness. And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations: both the cormorant and the bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it; their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation shall be in the thresholds: for he shall uncover the cedar work. This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand.*

In each case, the ruin of a great city is described in vivid, poetic language interspersed with apocalyptic speech. Here in Chapter 18 we have a doom song for Rome.

And for students of the Old Testament, this doom song for Rome comes as no surprise. In fact, all that we have been seeing in the book of Revelation about this great enemy of God's people has been modeled after Old Testament judgments against previous enemies of God's people. Chapter 18 is no exception. Let's study this doom song for Rome.

### **Revelation 18:1**

**1 And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.**

Verse 1 reconfirms that the judgment we have seen and the message of doom we are about to see are from God. Daniel told us that Rome would not die a natural death, and we have now seen the truth of that prophecy. God judged Rome, and God is why Rome fell. But Rome is not alone. Daniel told us that such a fate is in store for all the kingdoms of this earth.

Verse 1 also reminds us of a prophecy from Ezekiel.

*Ezekiel 43:1-2 — Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looketh toward the east: And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory.*

I like what Swete said about this verse. He said that this angel in verse 1 has "so recently ... come from the presence [of God] that in passing he brings a broad belt of light across the dark earth."

The servants of God spread light across the earth. The servants of Satan spread darkness.

**Revelation 18:2**

**2 And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.**

Verse 2 is the beginning of the doom song, and it starts just the way we would suspect it would start — by mentioning birds! It seems that birds are a common feature of these doom songs.

Each of the “doom song” examples we looked at a moment ago referred to birds. Isaiah 13 talked about owls. Isaiah 34 talked about the cormorant and the bittern, screech owls, great owls, and vultures. Zephaniah 2 talked about the cormorant and the bittern. Here in verse 2 we see a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

Why the focus on birds? They seem to be all that remains after the judgment, and all that can be heard is their screeching. It paints a very desolate picture.

Back in Revelation 14:8, an angel proclaimed, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.” Here in verse 2 that message is repeated, and once again the past tense is used to stress the certainty of that event.

Again, that is something else we see in the Old Testament. Over one hundred years before the actual fall of ancient Babylon, Isaiah also used the past tense to describe its fall.

*Isaiah 21:9 — Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.*

We have seen that Revelation is a book of contrasts. It is a book of choices. Christ or Caesar? The city of God or the city of Rome? The kingdom of God or the kingdom of Rome? The power of God or the power of Rome?

Which should we choose? Revelation answers that question, but it does so by giving us very detailed descriptions of the two options.

What is the church like? You will not find a book in the Bible that tells us more about the church than this one, and we will see wonderful descriptions of the church as we proceed through the final chapters of this book.

What is Rome like? We're reading about it right here. It has "become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit."

God is not asking us to make this choice blindly. God is telling us all about the two options. This book is called what? Revelation! Perhaps we could also call it "Full Disclosure!" God is revealing to us the choices we all have to make, and God is describing in great detail what those choices are. We don't have to grope around blindly wondering which path to choose. God has turned on the light!

But this choice is easy, right? Rome is where all of the happy people are, right? Rome is where the powerful live, right? The actors, the singers, the artists, the politicians, the movers and the shakers — all in Rome, right? And the other option, the church? Just persecution and misery, right? Just slaves, right? Just the poor, right? Rome or the church? Sounds like an easy decision!

But wait! It seems like we said earlier that to truly see something, we need to see that thing as God sees it. So maybe this earthly view of Rome and of the church has everything backwards. Maybe things are not what they seem!

Yes, and there's no maybe about it. That is what this book is telling us. That is why this book was written. God wanted us to see Rome as He sees Rome, and God wanted us to see the church as He sees the church.

You want power and permanence and beauty? Then you had better choose the church. Rome has none of that to offer.

Didn't Paul tell us the same thing?

**1 Corinthians 1:26-29** — *For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.*

Did you hear that, Rome? Did you hear that, Domitian? “That no flesh should glory in his presence.”

**God has chosen things which are not to bring to nought things that are.** That sounds to me like a battle between the seen and the unseen.

***2 Corinthians 4:18** — While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

You mean that unseen eternal will bring to nought the seen temporal? Yes, and it was happening to Rome just as Daniel has fortold.

***Daniel 2:44** — And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, **but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms**, and it shall stand for ever.*

It shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms. That is the things which are not bringing to nought the things that are. And that is still happening today! Daniel 2:44 did not come with an expiration date!