

Armageddon at the Door

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Chapter Nine

The Final Movements (Winners and Losers)

It was a howling, blustery, winter day. I was an earliteen living in a suburb of New York City. Nearly a foot of snow covered the yard and more was coming by the minute. There weren't a lot of things one could do in the midst of the gale. But I was in a creative mood. I took a football to the yard at the side of the house and invented my own football game. I was both the quarterback and the receiver. I would toss the ball high down the field and lumber after it in the heavy snow. I would always catch the ball while falling down in the snow, which often jarred it loose. It was great to have the feeling of being tackled without potential harm to life and limb.

Then a friend called up and asked if I wanted to come over and watch a football game with him. It was being broadcast from Buffalo, NY. When New York City gets a foot of snow, Buffalo gets six feet! So giant tractors had moved much of the snow to the edges of the field and players were slipping and sliding on the icy field. It looked a lot like the impromptu game I had made up earlier.

It was one of the strangest games ever played. I don't remember which was which, but one of the teams (either Buffalo or its opponent, whose name I don't remember) seemed vastly superior to the other. They were pushing them around on the icy snow, moving up and down the field. The other team couldn't get anything going. At halftime the score was 35-3! It was as if the one team had traction in the ice and snow, and the other team didn't.

At halftime the losing team decided to try something different. The players took off the cleats they had been wearing and replaced them with sneakers. This didn't make sense to me at the time, I would have thought cleats would dig in to the ice and snow better than sneakers would. But it made a huge difference. The tables were turned. The losing team suddenly was pushing the winners around. The 35-3 lead diminished throughout the second half, until the score was 35-31 and the sneaker-wearers had the ball on the one-yard line with a minute to play. With hopeless resignation the leaders dug in to try and stop the inevitable. But it was no use. The sneaker-wearers pushed into the end zone and won the game 38-35. It was one of the greatest turn-arounds in history.

Something similar will happen at the end of this world's history.

From Vision to Interpretation

Let's return now to the text we are studying, Revelation 17. It is one of the most difficult in all the Bible. But there is a principle of interpretation that will help us here. Before we get to that principle, however, we need to look at verse 6.

In verse 6 the vision ends and a confusing series of interpretations begins. Revelation 17

has opened with an “audition” in which John is told about the great prostitute and the kings of the earth (Rev 17:1-2). In the narrative of Revelation John never actually sees the great prostitute (although he is addressed as if he did in verse 15), he is told about her. When he actually looks he sees the woman Babylon sitting on a scarlet beast (Rev 17:3-5).

This pattern of hearing and seeing is a common one in the Book of Revelation. In chapter 1 John hears the sound of a trumpet, but when he looks, he sees Jesus speaking with him (Rev 1:10-12). In Revelation 5 John hears about the Lion of the tribe of Judah, but when he looks to see the Lion, he sees a slain Lamb instead (Rev 5:5-6). In Revelation 7 John hears the number of the 144,000, but he never sees them. When he looks he sees a great multitude that no one can number (Rev 7:4, 9). In each of these cases, what John hears and what he sees are quite different, even opposites (the 144,000 are Jews, the unnumbered multitude are from every nation), yet they are two different ways of saying the same thing (like the Lion and the Lamb of Revelation 5).

So in Revelation 17 John moves from hearing to seeing in verse 3. This is the point at which the vision begins. It is a short vision, ending in the middle of verse 6. John sees a new reality, almost in the form of a photograph, rather than a moving picture. The woman is sitting on a scarlet beast. That is as far as the action of the vision goes. Everything else in the vision fills out the picture. It is somewhat similar to the vision of Rev 1:13-16, where Jesus is described as something of a still picture. In Rev 17:6, however, the vision ends and an angel arrives to offer John his interpretations, challenging and difficult though they have proven to be.

“But the angel said to me, ‘Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the

woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her.”
Revelation 17:7, ESV.

Keep in mind that it is the sixth bowl angel (Rev 16:12; 17:1) who now explains the short vision of Rev 17:3-6. So this difficult explanation is just as much a part of the Battle of Armageddon as Rev 16:12-16. One additional dimension of the vision is added in this verse. The woman is not just sitting on a stationary beast like the photographic picture in verse 3. The angel explains clearly that the beast “carries her.” Here is the implication of riding, of going somewhere to accomplish a task. In fact, the Greek verb for “carry” (basta,zw) has strong implications of “support” or “sustenance.” Just as ancient Babylon was supported by her resources, so end-time Babylon is supported by the scarlet beast. She “rides” the beast and controls its actions for a time.

In ancient Babylon religious issues were enforced with death decrees. Bow down to this image or be thrown into the fiery furnace (Daniel 3). Worship only the king or get thrown into a cage of hungry lions (Daniel 6). During much of the Middle Ages, papal Rome enforced its religious dominance of Europe with torture and burning at the stake. In similar fashion, end-time Babylon will utilize the power of the state to enforce its religious agenda across the entire world. This will include economic boycotts and a death decree (Rev 13:15-17). In fact, the death decree of Revelation 13 is modeled on that of Daniel 3! Those who do not bow down to the image of the beast will be killed (Rev 13:15).

The relationship between the woman and the beast is stated in plain language in Rev 17:18, NIV: “The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.” The

woman that has been featured throughout this chapter is clearly identified as ruling over the “kings of the earth.” That is what sitting on the waters and riding the beast are all about. The woman, who represents a worldwide religious confederacy, assumes rule over the kings of the world for a short time at the very end of history. But here the metaphor changes from a woman/prostitute to a great city. Prostitute Babylon and city Babylon are the one and the same; a religious confederacy at the end of time. Her destruction can be described both in terms of the execution of a prostitute (Rev 17:16) and, from Rev 17:18 on, as the destruction of a city (see also chapter 18).

This shift from vision to interpretation is very important. God always meets people where they are. In a vision, the prophet can travel anywhere in the universe and to any point of time, all the way to the end of the world. But when the vision is explained to the prophet afterward, the explanation must make sense in the time, place and circumstances of the prophet. An explanation is not an explanation unless it makes sense to the one receiving it.

This is the principle of interpretation referred to at the beginning of this section. Whenever God, an angel or another prophet interprets a vision for the prophet who received it, that interpretation is grounded in the prophet’s place in geography and history. If the interpreter says, “After you will come. . . ,” he means after the time of the prophet, not after a particular time in the vision. This principle is especially important for the Appendix and is explained in more detail there. But it also affects what we will cover in this chapter. Let’s continue with the

angel's explanation to John.

Interpreting the Seven-Headed, Ten-Horned Beast

The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.

Rev 17:8, ESV

As we have seen, the beast represents the worldwide confederacy of civil and secular power. But this end-time political alliance is described with an interesting twist, it “was, and is not, and is about to rise.” This has remarkable similarity to the description of God in Rev 1:4 and 4:8. God is the one who “is and was and is to come.” So this political beast completely serves religious ends when it allows itself to carry the great prostitute. In the explanation to John, the beast “is not.” In John’s day this particular manifestation of the beast did not exist, it would arise and operate only at the very end of time.

Such political unions have happened before. There were a series of four secular empires who ruled over the ancient world and were described in the book of Daniel. These were Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. In succession they dominated the world politically for more than a thousand years. The fourth of these, Rome, was in a dominant position in John’s day. The angel was essentially telling John that the beast of worldwide political opposition to God would come back at the very end, just before its final destruction (Revelation 19-20).

John was astonished (or “marveled”) when he saw the prostitute (Rev 17:6-7). But

according to verse 8, the inhabitants of the earth are astonished (same Greek word) when they see the beast. If what Revelation describes here takes place in our life-times, we will truly be astonished. In today's world, political unity is not a reality (or even close to it). We can hardly get the Democrats and the Republicans to talk to each other in a civil manner, much less work with the French, the Russians, the Chinese, the Iranians, and the like, to bring about world-wide political unity. Many political leaders through history have dreamed of dominating the whole world, but it will truly happen only once, in the final stages of the Battle of Armageddon, just before the End.

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 come, he must remain for a little while.

Rev 17:9-10, NIV

The last part of verse 10 is not critical to our understanding of the Battle of Armageddon, nevertheless, it has intrigued interpreters for many centuries and I would be remiss if I didn't address it at all in this book. So I have written an appendix chapter on Rev 17:10-11. For right now, I want to focus on the first half of the above passage.

In the original Greek, the word translated "hills" (o;rh) could just as easily have been translated "mountains," as is the case in the King James and the English Standard Versions. No doubt the translator of the New International Version had the city of Rome in mind; already in ancient times it was known as the "city of seven hills." But I suspect that John was not thinking of Rome after all, since in this explanation the seven mountains are consecutive in time rather than all present at the same time (Rev 17:10).

The distinction between hills and mountains is important. In the Old Testament the term “mountains” can be used to represent political powers, as is the case here in Revelation 17. For example, in Daniel 2, the great mountain that fills the whole earth represents the kingdom of God, which replaces the four kingdoms of gold, silver, bronze and iron (Dan 2:35, 44). In Jer 51:24-25 Babylon is called a destroying mountain that would one day be burned over according to God’s judgment. Since the seven mountains of this text are clearly defined as “seven kings,” they represent the same secular, political powers as the earlier images of Euphrates, the beast, and the kings of the earth. Since they all form a foundation upon which the woman sits, they provide the resources that give her strength in the affairs of the world.

Just as the pedigree of the sea beast in Revelation 13 went back to the ancient kingdoms of Daniel 7, here we find the pedigree of the end-time beast. The waters, the hills, and the kings are all consecutive in this text. They represent a series of world-wide political powers throughout history. The “fallen kings” of verse 10 simply provide the pedigree of a world-wide, end-time, political power that functions much as the seven previous political powers functioned in the course of earth’s history.

There is reason to believe that John lives in the period of the sixth kingdom and looks forward to the seventh at some point in his future. But the final manifestation of this beast, the one featured in this vision, is the eighth, rather than the seventh. “As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction.” Rev 17:11.

Revelation 17 and Armageddon

Before we move on to the slightly simpler material at the end of this chapter (Rev 17:12-17), I'd like to move back to chapter 16 again briefly. The same three confederacies we have identified in Revelation 17 are also present there. The dynamic between the religious and the political confederacies is spelled out in chapter 16 also:

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for ***the kings from the east***. And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.

Rev 16:12-14, ESV

The highlighted term "kings from the east" represents the confederacy of the saints in this passage. The term has essentially the same meaning as remnant, the 144,000, the great multitude and the saints. The confederacy of secular/political power is also represented here:

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on ***the great river Euphrates***, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to ***the kings of the whole world***, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.

Rev 16:12-14, ESV

As we have seen earlier, the highlighted terms in this text represent the political powers of the world; the great River Euphrates and the kings of the whole world. The confederacy of religion is also represented in this passage:

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. And I saw, coming out of

the mouth of ***the dragon*** and out of the mouth of ***the beast*** and out of the mouth of ***the false prophet***, three unclean spirits like frogs. For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.

Rev 16:12-14, ESV

The confederacy of religion is represented by the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. As we will see in a moment, these three together become Babylon, the great end-time religious confederacy. They send out the three frogs, demonic spirits, to assemble the kings of the earth for the final battle. This would appear to be an earlier stage of the final events than what we saw in Rev 17:1-10. There the woman dominates the beast and uses it for her own purposes. Here the political powers of the world have not yet been brought under her dominion, but her agents are moving into action with that end in mind.

We addressed the three frogs briefly in an earlier chapter, but there are a few more things to say about them. In this passage the three frogs come “out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet” (Rev 16:13). The dragon, the beast and the false prophet are the same three characters we encountered in Revelation 13. In Revelation 13 only the sea beast’s mouth was in view, but now all three mouths are in view. In this verse the focus is not on the actions of these beasts but on their message. Their message turns people away from God’s message in the final crisis. Historically (in the Middle Ages particularly), the sea beast did the dragon’s blasphemy (Rev 13:5-7). At an earlier stage of the final conflict, the land beast acted in behalf of the sea beast (Rev 13:12). Now in the final battle all three members act to bring the whole world under their dominion

(Rev 16:13-14).

The three frogs are the agents or messengers of this evil trinity. They are defined in verse 14 as the “spirits of demons.” To the Greeks, demons were superior to humans but inferior to the gods. For the Hebrews, angels played this role. In the New Testament, demons are subordinates of Satan, serving his purposes in the same way the holy angels serve the purposes of God. In the gospels terms like “demons,” “unclean spirits,” and “evil spirits,” are interchangeable (Mark 3:7-30).

These unclean spirits play two roles in the Battle of Armageddon, persuasion and miraculous signs. In Revelation 13:13-14 the miraculous signs were performed by the land beast but now all three beasts are performing them. They use miracles to persuade the whole world to worship themselves rather than the true God. So the three frogs are the evil counterpart of God’s three angels (Rev 14:6-12). They present a counterfeit gospel to the whole inhabited world.

There are, therefore, two “trinities” and two sets of messengers (three angels and three frogs) being presented to the world in the final battle. The stakes are as high as they have ever been. To the degree that God’s three angels (Rev 14:6-12) reach the world, the forces of evil will have a more difficult time. On the other hand, if the demonic trinity succeeds in uniting all the nations of the earth under their leadership, the final struggle of the saints will be all the more difficult. When the civil and secular powers of the world lend their powers to the demonic trinity, the stage is set for the final battle.

So End-time Babylon is made up of multiple entities working together. Each of these characters has a separate history and pedigree, but they unite to bring the rulers of the world under their control for the last battle of earth's history. The counterfeit gospel of the three frogs unifies the two evil confederacies: 1) religious Babylon and 2) the secular-political unity of the nations. This "axis of evil" must be in place before the final movements occur. So in Rev 16:12-14, all the characters we have identified in Revelation 17 are present, the three great worldwide confederacies and the agents of Babylon seeking to bring the political powers of the world under her dominion.

There is an abrupt change of pace in the midst of this evil activity. "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." Rev 16:15, NIV. As we have seen previously, in this single verse John ties together all the New Testament passages that focus on readiness for the final crisis (Matt 24:42-44; Mark 13:37; Luke 12:37-39; 21:34-36; 1 Thess 5:1-8). This text highlights the role of the righteous in the final battle. This verse even alludes to Jesus' message to the church at Laodicea (Revelation 3:17-18). In the middle of the Battle of Armageddon, therefore, is a call to the church of Laodicea! In terms of its background and context, this is the last call of God to His end-time confederacy of saints. God's people need to be ready for Jesus' return when the final events take place. In the final battle of earth's history, the spiritual task is to keep watch over our attitudes, thoughts, and behavior, and to remain faithful no matter what the deception or coercion. Armageddon is a battle for the mind.

Here's the most confusing thing about the sixth bowl-plague. The plague itself is the drying up of the Euphrates (Rev 16:12). That represents Babylon's loss of political, economic and military support at the close of the battle of Armageddon. The political powers of the world change their mind. So the events of verses 13-15 must be prior in time to the events of verse 12. In verses 13-14 Babylon is gathering its political support for the battle, in order to attack the saints. In verse 15 comes the final call to the saints. Armageddon (Rev 16:16) is the climax of the two gospels going to the world. Only after the end-time axis of evil is in place can the drying up of the Euphrates occur. So while the seven last plagues are after the close of probation, verses 13-16 of Revelation 16 present events that are earlier than the sixth plague, even before the close of probation. The events of Revelation 16-17 are all related to Armageddon, but they are not presented in chronological order.

There is one final text I want you to look at before we summarize the climax of the battle of Armageddon; Rev 16:19 (ESV): "The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath." This is part of the seventh bowl-plague of Revelation 16. The key plague of the sixth bowl is the drying up of the Euphrates River. The key plague of the seventh bowl is the destruction of Babylon as well as of the forces that had supported and protected her. That event is clearly outlined in verse 19.

As we have seen, the "great city" is Babylon (see also Rev 17:18 and 18:10). In this verse, we see the disintegration of the axis of evil that was achieved under the sixth plague. God not

only separates Babylon from the political and military powers that gave her strength (Rev 16:12), He splits Babylon back into her constituent parts. What are the three parts of Babylon? The dragon, the beast, and the false prophet of verse 13 (and chapter 13)!

So Babylon is not just a single entity, the way the sea beast operated in the Middle Ages. While the religious confederacy will no doubt turn to the Pope of that time for leadership, the religious confederacy of the very End will be bigger than the papacy or any other single religion. It will be a worldwide coalition with a Christian face. In order to deceive the world regarding the claims of Jesus, it will be necessary for end-time Babylon to appear to the world as Jesus' best friend. Others will join the coalition as the deceptions of the end-time unfold.

Note also in this verse the contrast between the "great city" and the "cities of the nations." In verse 19 the "great city" falls, and then the "cities of the nations" also collapse. As we have seen, the great city is the same thing as the great prostitute (Rev 17:18). She is the religious alliance that dominates world affairs at the end of time. In this verse the "cities of the nations" represent the rest of the fallen world, the civil and secular powers that serve Babylon. This verse indicates that the political powers of this world will be split off from Babylon and will be destroyed separately. How this happens becomes clearer at the end of chapter 17 (verses 12-17).

Revelation 16:19 says, "God remembered Babylon." Chapter 18 continues the theme. "For her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes." Revelation 18:5, NIV. God makes her drink the cup of His wrath. "Give back to her as she has given; pay her back

double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup.” Rev 18:6, NIV.

When God “remembers” Babylon, He carries out the final execution of judgment on Babylon and everyone who chooses to identify with her. In a nutshell summary, Rev 16:19 summarizes God’s final action on those who have been frustrating His work on the earth.

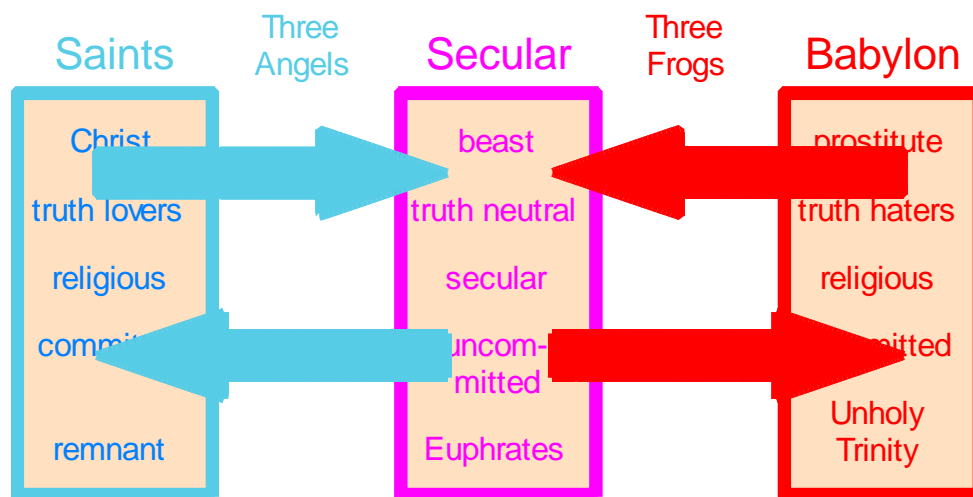
Summarizing once more: The portion of Revelation dedicated to the Battle of Armageddon portrays three worldwide confederacies at the end of time. All three are named by many names in Revelation. We have illustrated these three confederacies as follows:

Saints	Political	Babylon
Remnant 144,000 Great Crowd Kings of East Watchful Clothed Called Chosen Faithful	Euphrates Kings of World Many Waters Kings of Earth Earth Dwellers Beast 10 Horns Cities of the Nations 7 Mountains 7 Kings	Babylon The Great City The Great Prostitute The Unholy Trinity Woman

But the vision of Revelation 17 does not portray two opponents of God and His people at the End. There is simply one composite picture; the woman riding on the beast. How did things get to this place?

In Rev 16:13-14 we saw the three frogs (demonic angels) going out to the world with a counterfeit gospel. This action mirrors the three angels of Revelation 14 who present the true

gospel to the entire world. The end result is that those who enter the final events uncommitted or secular are forced “off the fence” into a commitment one way or the other (see 2 Thess 2:9-12) . Those who accept the true gospel join with the saints in a confederacy of kindred spirits. Those who don’t accept the gospel join in with the religious confederacy, some by conviction, the rest out of a desire to preserve life or income (Rev 13:15-17). I illustrate the impact of the two contradictory gospels on the three confederacies as follows:

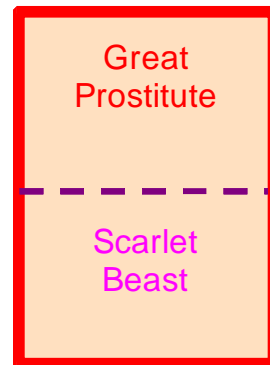


The end result is two groupings for a short time, represented by the dragon and the remnant in Rev 12:17. The battle lines are fully drawn and the stakes are high. The saints are made up of everyone who has the seal of God on their foreheads. Everyone else is marked by the beast, either on the forehead (Babylon) or on the hand (the secular/political people). This outcome can be illustrated in the following two ways:

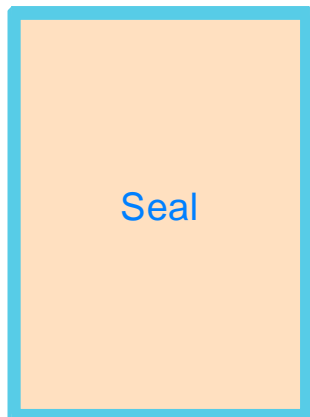
Confederacy of
the Saints



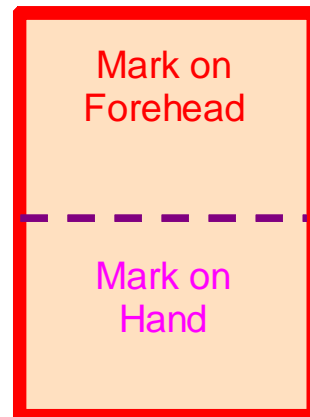
Confederacy of
Evil



Confederacy of
the Saints



Confederacy of
Evil



We now come to the decisive conclusion of Revelation 17, a startling reversal that begins with more detail on how the end-time confederacy of evil comes about:

"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."

Rev 17:12, NIV

The beast which John saw in the vision of Rev 17:3-6 had seven heads and ten horns, but there were no crowns on either the heads or the horns. This may be because the political confederacy is not ruling the world in its own right. At the point in time of the vision the beast is crownless. In this verse the interpreting angel focuses on a different portion of the beast than previously, the ten horns (the explanation in Rev 17:7-11 focused on the seven heads).

There are a lot of kings mentioned in the Battle of Armageddon, so it is easy for interpreters to get confused. There have been the kings of the east (Rev 16:12), the kings of the whole inhabited world (Rev 16:14), the kings of the earth (Rev 17:2), the seven kings (Rev 17:10), and now the ten kings (Rev 17:12– not to mention the “king of kings” in Rev 17:14)!

These ten kings are an end-time “character” without a pedigree. Unlike most new characters in Revelation there is no introductory description that gives some sense of their previous history. Evidently this grouping only comes into existence at the very end of time. Their “kingdom” is very short– one hour. They come into existence at the time of the eighth head (Rev 17:11), the very last manifestation of the beast (see appendix for further information on this eighth head).

“[The ten kings] have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast.” Rev 17:13, NIV. If the beast represents the combined political and economic powers of the world, the ten horns represent a significant subgroup of the world’s nations. In order for a worldwide political unity to happen, this powerful subgroup has to sign on. Only time will reveal the identity of these ten kings. Those who observe this prophecy with care will watch for a

move toward world unity by a major sub-grouping of the world's nations, possibly in the context of the United Nations or some similar organization.

If this action should occur in the reasonably near future, there are two major candidates in today's world for the role described in this passage; N.A.T.O. and the G8 nations. N.A.T.O. is a military alliance made up of the United States, Canada and 24 European countries (including Turkey, which is partly in Europe). It was the outgrowth of the North Atlantic Treaty which was signed on April 4, 1949. The treaty's initial purpose was to provide a political and military counterbalance to Soviet power in Europe. With the collapse of Soviet communism, NATO has become the chief military and political power in the world. Worldwide union is inconceivable without its support.

The G8 nations, on the other hand, are more of an economic group than a political or military one. Since 1975, the leaders of the major industrial democracies have been meeting annually to deal with economic and political issues. The six countries at the first summit were France, the United States, Britain, Germany, Japan and Italy. They were joined by Canada in 1976 and by Russia in 1998. While N.A.T.O. is the more powerful organization on paper, the G8 countries together are capable of dominating even N.A.T.O.

Only the passage of time will give us the exact identity of the ten kings who offer their allegiance to the end-time political confederacy. When they give their power and authority to the beast, the beast hands it over to Babylon. The end result is open and final warfare with the Lamb and those who are allied with Him. The ten kings together with the beast make war with

the Lamb.

These (the ten horns together with the beast) will make war with the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them, because he is Lord of lords and King of kings– and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.

Rev 17:14, author's translation

Whatever the makeup of the ten kings, the giving of their authority to the beast results in direct war with the Lamb in the person of His people (Rev 17:14). The good news is that the end is not in doubt and the outcome is clear. The Lamb and those with Him win and the powers of the world lose. While the narrative of Armageddon continues for a few more verses, verse 14 jumps right to the conclusion, to assure the reader of the outcome before the final events are detailed.

This is not the first time this type of thing has happened in the Book of Revelation. The final battle was summarized in a nutshell in Rev 12:17). There it becomes clear that the two sides in the final battle are good and evil, represented by the dragon and the remnant. But the outcome of the battle is not given in that verse. In Revelation 13 there is a focus on the dragon's side of the final battle, his allies, his strategy. But again, the final outcome is not given. In Revelation 14 the remnant's side of the final conflict is described and here the author takes us all the way to the climax at the second coming of Jesus. But then in Revelation 16 we are back to the events before the End, as we explore the various players and their actions. Revelation 16 seems to bring us close to the conclusion, at least, in the seventh bowl. But then Revelation 17 goes back to an elaboration of the sixth bowl, which covers most of Revelation 17. The only reference to the ultimate end in chapter 17 is in verse 14.

So the Book of Revelation exhibits a pattern of recycling, recapitulation or flashbacks, however one wants to say it. A big picture is stated, sometimes the outcome is mentioned, then the text goes back to an earlier point in the series of events, to elaborate on this or that detail. Revelation is certainly not a linear text. It bounces back and forth in its portrayal of the future. Probation closes in chapter 15 (5-8) yet people are still making decisions in Rev 16:14-15. The sixth bowl separates Babylon from its political support (Rev 16:12), yet verses 13 and 14 portray the gathering of that support. Revelation moves back and forth in terms of time and one must be very attentive to the text to keep track of these movements.

So in Rev 17:14, the end is not in doubt and the outcome is clear. The Lamb wins and the powers of the world lose. The war of Rev 17:14 destroys the political confederacy, yet that confederacy is mentioned at the height of its power again in verse 16! And the destruction of the political confederacy is brought out in much greater detail in Rev 19:11-21. But in verse 15 the text moves back to the fate of the prostitute, who rides the beast in the vision of Rev 17:3-6.

Then the angel said to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages."

Rev 17:15, NIV

The angel in this verse is the angel of the sixth bowl. The waters here are the Euphrates River, which represents the secular-political powers of the world. These powers move into action in a surprising way in verse 16:

"The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire."

Rev 17:16

The beast and the ten horns together represent the unity of political power who saw benefit in committing adultery with the prostitute (Rev 17:2). They let her control them for a time, but now they apparently change their minds. The Euphrates River dries up and the political powers bring her to ruin, destroying the religious confederacy with which they had been allied. This passage seems to echo Ezek 16:35-41, NIV:

“Therefore, you prostitute, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Because you poured out your wealth and exposed your nakedness in your promiscuity with your lovers, and because of all your detestable idols, and because you gave them your children’s blood, therefore I am going to gather all your lovers, with whom you found pleasure, those you loved as well as those you hated. I will gather them against you from all around and will strip you in front of them, and they will see all your nakedness. I will sentence you to the punishment of women who commit adultery and who shed blood; I will bring upon you the blood vengeance of my wrath and jealous anger. Then I will hand you over to your lovers, and they will tear down your mounds and destroy your lofty shrines. They will strip you of your clothes and take your fine jewelry and leave you naked and bare. They will bring a mob against you, who will stone you and hack you to pieces with their swords. They will burn down your houses and inflict punishment on you in the sight of many women. I will put a stop to your prostitution, and you will no longer pay your lovers.”

Judah attempts to gain favor with the nations but they turn on her. Note that the prostitute of Ezekiel 16 is stoned rather than burned. So Revelation does not follow its source text in every detail. Babylon is burned in the story because she is the daughter of a priest (Lev 21:9). And the agents of her destruction are the very powers that gave Babylon support earlier in the chapter.

This text seems to build somewhat on the psychology of lust. Often after lust is fulfilled, whether in rape or in “consensual sex,” there is a changing of the mind. A case in point is the

story of Amnon and Tamar in 2 Samuel 13:1-19. Amnon and Tamar were both children of David, but by different mothers. Amnon “falls in love” with Tamar to such a degree that he is described as truly love-sick over her.

Upon the advice of a friend, he tricks the king into sending her to his house to nurse him in his “illness.” When she comes, he sends everyone else out, grabs hold of her and rapes her, regardless of her protests. When this outrageous act is completed the text says, “The hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her.” 2 Sam 13:15, ESV. In Rev 17:16 we see the reaction of the kings of the earth when they come to see Babylon as the perpetrator of their defeat at the hands of the Lamb. The confederacy of political and military power destroys the religious confederacy that it had only recently supported with enthusiasm.

This “changing of the minds” is the literal counterpart of the drying up of the Euphrates River. In ancient times when the river dried up, Babylon fell. So Rev 17:16 is the final explanation of the sixth plague of Revelation 16. The drying up of the Euphrates once more signals Babylon’s fall. When the political and military resources that had enabled Babylon to dominate the world are withdrawn from her use, she ends up plundered by the very powers that had supported her. With Rev 17:16 our study of the Battle of Armageddon has come full circle and completes what we began in our examination of Rev 16:12.

There is one further element here. For those who are familiar with the scenario of *The Great Controversy*, there is a great deal of similarity between that account of the end-time and

the one in Revelation. But there is also one significant difference. Revelation 17 describes the final events from a global perspective. Ellen White describes the final events from a local perspective.

In Revelation, a worldwide political confederacy operates in behalf of a worldwide religious confederacy. But at some point in the story, the political confederacy has a change of heart and turns on the religious confederacy and destroys it. All of this is seen in the global perspective.

By way of contrast, *Great Controversy* describes the same events from a local perspective. The worldwide death decree of Rev 13:15 is about to be implemented in a small town setting. The faithful people of God leave town and hide in the remotest places available. The local police, at the behest of the local religious leaders, move out at the appointed time to find and destroy the people of God, who are perceived to be the source of all trouble in the world. The police move out and find groups of people praying in their hideouts. But as they approach and raise their weapons, the police are confronted with a "rainbow of light" that surrounds each praying company. The evident approval of God convinces the police that they have been deceived by their local ministers and religious leaders. Instead of carrying out the death decree, they return to town and attack the ministers who have deceived them. At that moment the great end-time deception is unmasked.

The people see that they have been deluded. They accuse one another of having led them to destruction; but all unite in heaping their bitterest condemnation upon the ministers. . . . "We are lost!" they cry, "and you are the cause of our ruin;" and they turn upon the false shepherds. The very ones that once admired them most will pronounce

the most dreadful curses upon them. The very hands that once crowned them with laurels will be raised for their destruction. The swords which were to slay God's people are now employed to destroy their enemies.

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The basic scenario is the same, but the respective venues of Revelation and *The Great Controversy* are different. The interplay of the people and their religious leaders is familiar from our study of Revelation, but the scene is localized. The scenario of *Great Controversy* is in complete harmony with the scenario of Rev 16 and 17, rightly understood.

Let's finish with one last verse from Revelation 17. Still speaking of the ten horns/kings, the text continues:

For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled.

Rev 17:17, NIV

The amazing truth at the end of the Battle of Armageddon is that God is in full control of all events, even of the Satanic deceptions (see also 2 Thess 2:11). While events on earth certainly help precipitate the worldwide confederacies, God's hand is in the shadows behind it all. The testimony of Revelation is that the temporary unity of the world's political and religious powers accomplishes God's purposes even while Satan is using the same events for his own purposes.

This makes a lot of sense, in a way. The principle of selfishness, of "every man for himself," is the fundamental principle of Satan's kingdom. Such a principle does not lead to unity but rather to chaos and anarchy. One of the hardest things Satan will ever try to do is to bring about a worldwide unity of all of his followers, whether secular or religious, whether

committed or simply going along for the ride. Getting along and working together are not the kinds of things Satan has promoted over the centuries. It is his “strange work” (cf. Isa 28:21). And in the end such a unity will not be accomplished without some intervention on the part of God. Even then the unity lasts only as long as it accomplishes God’s purposes. The deception at the end is used by God to precipitate decisions in relation to the final proclamation of the gospel (2 Thess 2:11).

We will conclude this book on the Battle of Armageddon with some further reflections on current events and some spiritual lessons that we can draw from the battle for everyday living. You will find that material in chapter twelve. But before we do that I would like to review everything we have learned from Revelation and put it into an organized sequence of events. My goal is that the outline in the next couple of chapters will put all the pieces together in a manner that is coherent and easy to remember.