

Conspirators Are Not Invincible

Revelation 17:2-7

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2018-04-15

Conspirators Are Not Invincible

Revelation 17:2-7

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2018-04-15

Text

7 So the angel said to me: “Why are you impressed? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast, having the seven heads and the ten horns, that carries her. 8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the Abyss and to go into perdition. And those who dwell upon the earth will be amazed, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not and will be present. 9 Here is the mind that has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. 10 They are also seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not come yet. And whenever he comes he must continue a short time. 11 And the beast that was and is not; he is also the eighth, yet he is of the seven, and he is going into perdition. 12 And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the Beast for one hour. 13 These are of one mind and give their power and authority to the Beast. 14 They will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called and chosen and faithful.” 15 Then he says to me: “The waters that you saw, where the whore sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. 16 And the ten horns that you saw, also the beast, these will hate the whore and will lay her waste and strip her and eat her flesh and burn her with fire. 17 Because God put it into their hearts to perform His purpose, even to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the Beast, until the words of God should be fulfilled. 18 Now the woman whom you saw is the great city that holds rulership over the kings of the earth.

Introduction - review of the fluid movement in Revelation between the demon-beast and the ruler and empire named after him

Gary North wrote a fascinating book called, *Conspiracy: A Biblical View*. It's a super-interesting look at the history of the theories of conspiracy (both legitimate and bogus), as well as the actual conspiracies themselves (and how they worked and didn't work), and what the Bible says about them. And it is not what you might expect. Unlike most conspiracy theory books, he is not pessimistic about the outcome; he believes that humanism of every sort will eventually crumble of its own weight and that Christ's kingdom must win. Unlike most conspiracy books, he beautifully roots his theology in Psalm 2. Psalm 2 gives us the ultimate theory of conspiracies. “Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing (or conspire a vain conspiracy?)” That Psalm stands as part of the background to our chapter. Anyway, let me begin by reading from his book. Gary North says,

The biblical view of conspiracy neither overestimates the power of conspiracies nor underestimates it. There is one conspiracy, Satan's, and ultimately it must fail. Satan's supernatural conspiracy is the conspiracy; all other visible conspiracies are merely

outworkings of this supernatural conspiracy. This is the testimony of the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. The Bible's account of the Tower of Babel records one unsuccessful effort of the conspiracy, and it ended in the defeat of the conspirators. The cross of Calvary is the ultimate example: satanically successful on the surface, but it led within three days to the definitive defeat in principle of Satan and his host. Christ's resurrection definitively smashed in principle the satanic conspiracy. History since Calvary is simply the outworking of that definitive victory.

The one overarching conspiracy is therefore in principle disunited. "He that is not with me is against me," Jesus said, "and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matthew 12:30). (pp. 15-16)

And this chapter will demonstrate how conspirators turn against one another, and why it is that they are not invincible. If you can come away from this message with three things, I will consider myself to have succeeded. First, I want you to realize that demons, though powerful, are limited in their power to conspire. They are not as all-powerful as some books make them out to be. Second, humans frequently mess up their conspiracies too - largely because of their competing sin natures. Third, God is sovereign over even conspiracies. They can't do a thing unless He permits them to do it. In fact, verse 17 goes further by saying that those conspiracies actually fulfill His will. That's an astonishing verse! Verse 17 says, "Because God put it into their hearts to perform His purpose, even to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the Beast, until the words of God should be fulfilled." That is saying that these conspirators who think that they are successfully fighting against Christ are actually fulfilling His will the whole time. So let's dive into the passage. I do want to review verses 7-8, which we have looked at in the past:

I. A summary of material we have already covered (vv. 7-8)

"So the angel said to me: "Why are you impressed?" We saw last time that the angel did not want John being impressed with the powerful conspiracy that the international bankers, or the first century secret societies, or the power that Rome had engaged in. Don't be impressed and don't be depressed. God is in control.

A. *The harlot = Israel's leadership under demonic control (v. 7b)*

Next, he says, "I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast..." We saw that the woman was clearly identified on many levels as the political leadership of Jerusalem, with a special focus upon the Sadducees, who were the international bankers. We looked at the internal clues that ruled out all

other theories.

B. The beast = Rome as empire under demonic control (v. 7c)

But we previously saw three facts that John clearly outlines about the beast. And I want to review those. The first fact is that the beast came up out of the Abyss. Chapter 11:7 clearly identified the beast as a demon. And we will be reminded of that fact again in verse 8 of chapter 17 because the beast was said to be “about to come up out of the Abyss.” Why was that fallen angel called a beast? I believe that it had previously been a good beast like the good beasts around the throne of God in chapter 4. Those were very scary and powerful beings. But this was one of the beasts that fell in Lucifer’s rebellion. And in a previous sermon I examined those kinds of demons in depth.

The second thing that we saw is that the emperors that this demon possessed took on the demon’s bestial character and took on his name. The last three emperors that he possessed were Nero, Vespasian, and Titus, all of whom had names that added up to 666. In fact, Titus’ adds up to 666 in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. And while those emperors were possessed, those three men were hideous in their demonic actions. I can’t even tell you in public some of the things that they did, but just as a hint, Nero loved to dress up in wild animal skins and look like a beast while he was biting, raping, and torturing his victims. And many Romans spoke of him as the beast. For example, Nero’s contemporary, Appolonius of Tyana, called him a “beast” who was worse than any wild beast. The Sibylline Oracles call him “the great beast.” Lactantius speaks of him as a “noxious wild beast.” Three authors call him “the Monster” or “a monster.” So, when Nero was possessed by this demon, he instantly took on the characteristics of a vicious beast of prey. But so did Vespasian and Titus. And we will be seeing that Titus is particularly in focus here and in chapter 18.

But the third thing that we have already seen is that the book of Revelation fluidly moves between the demon, the emperor possessed by the demon, and the empire controlled by the demon, and all three are called the Beast. Most commentaries of every school of thought have noticed this moving back and forth between calling the emperor and the empire the Beast. If you read it in the Greek you can see the movement because words will have a different gender. But the reason it can move fluidly from demon to emperor and empire is that the demon controls them and speaks or acts through them.

C. The seven heads are the seven demon-controlled emperors from Julius Caesar to Vespasian (v. 7d)

The next phrase says, “having the seven heads and the ten horns...” We previously saw that the seven heads were the seven demon-controlled emperors from Julius Caesar to Vespasian.

D. The ten horns are ten demons who ruled the ten provinces of Rome (v. 7e)

The ten horns were the ten demons who ruled the ten provinces of Rome¹ when the empire fell apart. Basically they possessed the ten provincial human kings. According to the book of Daniel, they had been at work prior to this time (and we looked at that in chapter 13), but during this time they were waiting for the empire of Rome to be reestablished under Vespasian and Titus.

E. “The beast that you saw was” (i.e., was until AD 68), “and is not” (when Nero died the demon beast was bound in the pit and the empire beast fell apart for 1.5 years), “and is about to come up out of the Abyss” (the demon-beast is unleashed to possess Titus in AD 69) “and to go into perdition” (the demon-beast is bound in the pit in AD 70) (v. 8a)

Verse 8 clarifies the time period that we are looking at. When I preached on the beast in chapter 13 we looked at each phrase of this verse, so I won’t spend a lot of time on it. It says, “The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the Abyss and to go into perdition.” Under Nero and the previous emperors the beast “was.” In other words, he still was on the earth ruling, and that was past tense. He possessed Nero but we saw that he was cast into the Abyss when Nero died.

So the next phrase says, “and is not.” For a year and a half the beast was not able to work in this world. He was bound in the Abyss. In fact, his empire no longer existed. So all three things that are called the beast (the demon, Nero, and the empire) no longer existed. So the present tense “is not” pinpoints the timing of these events to sometime between July of AD 68 and December of 69 - a year and a half period.

Well, that makes sense of the next phrase which says, “and is about to come up out of the Abyss and to go into perdition.” He is released from the Abyss

¹ The ten provinces were Italy, Achaia, Asia, Syria, Egypt, Africa, Spain, Gaul, Britain, and Germany. See F. W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity* (Chicago: Belford, Clark & Co., 1882), p. 532 for more details.

in AD 69 to possess Vespasian and especially Titus. And in the histories you see an immediate change in their personalities and their abilities to do miracles as soon as they were possessed.

But he is sent to perdition in AD 70. And we saw from various passages that God does this at various times in history. God releases demons to do a work and then binds them again. But those demonic princes are pawns in His hand. They are not all-powerful.

F. Citizens marvel at the restoration of this demonic ruler and his kingdom (v. 8b)

The second half of verse 8 says, “And those who dwell upon the earth will be amazed, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not and will be present.” There was much to make people amazed during this period. The demonic miracles performed by Nero, Vespasian, and Titus were indeed amazing (I would say, astounding), and we looked at some of those miracles before.

But the death of the empire was also amazing. Many Romans had thought that Rome would last forever. In fact, they called the capital “the eternal city.” So when it was overrun by revolutionary forces and when the empire disintegrated overnight after the death of Nero, many Romans were stunned. This was unthinkable. They thought that their statist party would last forever. They were not prepared for the entire empire to be plunged into civil war and into absolute chaos. Empires are not invincible. We cannot even count on America lasting forever. That is to divinize the state.

But after millions had died in the year and a half that followed, they were so thoroughly hopeless that when Vespasian succeeded in pulling the empire back together again, they were once again amazed. So the last three words of verse 8 seem to indicate that the amazement also relates to the fact that the Beast will once again be present. By the end of the civil war, the restoration of Rome seemed impossible. Josephus speaks of how utterly unexpected the revival of Rome was.² So there was a lot to make the pagans amazed. And since this is especially a reference to the Jews in the land marveling, Josephus points out that they thought that Rome’s fall was God’s vindication of Israel. Rome’s armies had left to deal with the civil war, and the Jews thought that they had easily won the war. That was amazing. And they were equally amazed at how quickly the Beast was revived.

² Josephus records the surprise of all by the “unexpected deliverance of the public affairs of the Romans from ruin” by Vespasian. (Wars, Book 4:11: 5)

But this verse implies that Christians were not (or at least should not be) amazed. I find that interesting. Note that the only ones amazed here are “those ... whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world.” Christians were not taken by surprise. They had good theology of human depravity, so they were not surprised by the conspiracy, the persecution, and the infighting. Given man’s depravity and the demons behind them, what else would you expect? But neither were Christians surprised by the overthrow of the empire. They knew God was sovereign. He could have made it a permanent overthrow if He wanted to, but He has prophesied differently. And because they were not surprised, they were able to weather the storms.

In the same way, we need not be surprised by even the most astonishing turns of events in America for the same reason. If we end up this week in a world war, we should not be surprised. If America underwent a third Great Awakening and got converted, we should not be surprised. If it ceased to exist because it was taken over by the United Nations, we should not be surprised. God’s mercies are sufficient for a Great Awakening (if the church would only humble itself and pray), and His justice shows that we deserve the first and third scenarios. But Psalm 37 calls us to dwell in the land, do good, and feast on His faithfulness throughout it all. This book gives us a philosophy of history that enables us to dwell in the land no matter what comes, to continue to take dominion and do good, and to feast on His faithfulness. OK, enough by way of review.

II. The angel’s interpretation of the symbols

Now in verses 9-18 we have the angel’s interpretation of the vision that we just described. Verse 9 begins by pointing to the fact that Christians must put their thinking caps on if they are to succeed in navigating the difficult waters ahead. This is not a time for being spoon fed; this is a time for mature thinking; disciplined thinking; Spirit-led thinking. So he says, “Here is the mind that has wisdom:” And where do we get the wisdom? Obviously we go to Scripture. May every one of us desire to have this mind of wisdom. The church of all places should be a place where meat is dished out along with the milk. And every service has both.

A. The seven heads refer to the seat of rule in Rome

The angel then goes on to refer to two things that the heads of the beast are identified with. Both of those are just two different ways of describing the same thing - the seat of rule in Rome.

Illustrated by the seven mountains in the capital of the empire (v. 9b)

The angel says, “The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits.” First century readers would have instantly known what that was referring to. In your outlines I have a picture of a Roman coin that was very common. It has a woman sitting on seven hills. Everyone knew that these were the seven hills of the capital of the empire. Because of literature of the day, they might have even known the names of the seven hills just like we do today.³ Rome is called the city of seven mountains by Virgil, Martial, Cicero, and others. But all they had to do was look at their money to know the demonic conspiracy. And by the way, there are symbols of conspiracy are on our money as well. Just pull out a dollar bill and examine the symbols and you will see it.

3 The seven hills of Rome are the Palatine, Aventine, Caelian, Esquiline, Viminal, Quirinal, Capitoline



Anyway, if you take a look at the picture of the coin in your outlines, I want to point out that the Romans said that the woman sitting on the seven hills or mountains was a goddess. We would call her a demon; but they called her a goddess. So this is yet another clue that just as the beast and horns of Rome are demons, the harlot of this chapter is first and foremost a demon, and secondarily, the leaders and the city that she controls.

In previous sermons we've already looked at numerous proofs that the the harlot was a symbol for the leadership of Jerusalem. So the shocking message is that the goddess Roma was controlling the Sadducees and the Sadducees were controlling Rome. And if you study what the Bible says about demons behind rulers, you will see that demons often congregate behind where the money is - the international bankers. But either way that you take it, first century Jews who had seen this money would have

immediately caught the implication - the Sadducees were demonic just like Jesus said they were. They were controlled by this goddess, Roma.

But the main point is that the seven heads are tied to the seven mountains in Rome. That is the place of rule. John doesn't want us to miss the fact that though the woman is Jerusalem (and there numerous proofs of that identity), the seven hills are the seat of power in Rome. So money controls power back then as it does now.

Illustrated by the seven emperors who ruled in the capital (v. 10a)

The text goes on to say, "They are also seven kings." That is just another way of saying the same thing. The seven heads are the emperors of Rome; the seven hills were put on the coins of the emperors to represent those same emperors up through Vespasian. I probably should have put the reverse of that coin on there.

B. The mysterious description of heads and horns

But then comes the mysterious description of the seven heads and the ten horns. Because I dealt with these verses under chapter 13, this won't be any surprise to you. Verse 10 goes on to say, "five have fallen, one is, the other has not come yet. And whenever he comes he must continue a short time."

Note that while John was writing, five had fallen (v. 10b)

It's really rather simple. While John was writing (and this is not the present tense within the vision but the present tense while the angel is describing the vision to John; in other words, while John was writing. So while John was writing, five emperors had already fallen. The first emperor was Julius Caesar. The next four were Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius.

Note that the sixth king was currently ruling (v. 10c)

John received his visions in early AD 66, and everyone agrees that Nero was emperor or king in AD 66. So Nero is the sixth head. So the text says, "one is" (present tense). That's Nero.

Note that the seventh (Vespasian) had not yet been put into headship when John wrote (v. 10d)

The next phrase says, "the other has not come yet." That refers to Vespasian. Some say that this refers to Galba, but Galba never ruled the empire. We've got to interpret this image consistently with chapter 13. The empire fell apart

in AD 68 when Nero died, and chapter 13 spoke of that as being the beast having a fatal wound to the head - the head being Nero, and then later reviving. So the beast was dead during those one and a half years. It only revived under Vespasian. You can't have an emperor over a non-empire. So this verse is only counting what the Romans considered to be the true emperors of Rome.

Note that when the seventh head (Vespasian) is made king, he must continue in his previous role for a short time (he has wars that he must fight before sitting on the throne)

But the next clause says, "And whenever he comes he must continue a short time." Those who say that the heads are kingdoms instead of kings have a major problem with this reference to a "short time." Both premils and amils frequently do that. If instead of kings (as I see it) there are eight kingdoms being mentioned in these verses, the sixth kingdom would be the one when John was writing - Rome - because it was in the present tense. They place the eighth kingdom just before Christ's second coming. So what is the seventh kingdom that continues for a short time? That makes no sense. Since Rome fell in the fifth century, that would make a minimum of 1500 years for the seventh kingdom. That is definitely not a short time. And secondly there was no unified kingdom that lasted that long.

So William Hendriksen tries to solve the problem by saying that the seventh head is unique; it's not one kingdom, but many. He says it represents "all antichristian governments between the fall of Rome and the final empire of antichrist."⁴ But that would make the seventh head of a totally different nature from the first five or the eighth. And again, it isn't a short time. McKenzie says, "To try to make the short reign of the seventh king into the very long reign of a number of kingdoms shows the desperate extremes to which some will go to escape the time frame Revelation clearly gives us."⁵ And the time frame is AD first century.

So what is meant by the short time? There are three possibilities. It could refer to the fact that Vespasian continued to reign even while the eighth head, his son Titus, was also reigning. They were both declared emperor at the same time. Everybody knows that they had a co-regency. But the short time could refer to the fact that he had less and less power until only Titus was reigning. The histories tell us that Vespasian gradually took the back

4 William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (London: Tyndale, 1962), p. 171.

5 Duncan McKenzie. *The Antichrist and the Second Coming: Volume II: The Book of Revelation* (Xulon Press, 2012), p. 235.

seat until almost nothing is heard of Vespasian during the last part of his life. He just spent his time in parties and orgies and it was Titus who ruled. So on this interpretation, he continues (that is, he continues to reign) for a short number of years. That's not my view, but it is possible.

If "continue" does not refer to the reign of Vespasian but rather to the fact that he will continue to live even after the eighth is in power, then this would be a remarkable thing worth mentioning. And it ties in with the previous kings falling; meaning they died before the next head came. All previous emperors died before the next emperor took over, but not with Vespasian. So this is a slightly stronger interpretation. It indicates that he must continue to live even after the eighth is in power. In other words, the seventh doesn't fall before the eighth rules. He continues. I think it is a very credible interpretation.

The third interpretation is that Vespasian had to continue in his role as general for a short period after being declared emperor and before he could sit on the throne in Rome. That definitely fits the evidence. He was declared emperor in Palestine on July 1 of AD 69 and six months later, on December 20, Vitellius was finally defeated, and the following day Vespasian was declared emperor by the Senate. During that six month period he fought the other generals of the civil war and had to continue as general of the armies before he could sit in Rome - on those seven hills. I think on anyone's books, six months is a short time. That's the way I tentatively take it, but any of those three interpretations fits the evidence.

Note that the demonic beast (i.e., the one that was, is not) is tied up with all seven and is also identified with the eighth (Titus) (v. 11)

And verse 11 perfectly fits the evidence of that time period. If you read the commentators you will see that many scratch their heads on this verse; they wonder what on earth it is saying. But if we keep in mind that the beast is a demon who came up out of the Abyss, and is also the king and the empire that the demon speaks through, it all falls together. It's too bad you can't see it in the Greek, because the Greek alternates between neuter and masculine. Beast is neuter, king is masculine. So one commentary says, ...and the beast (neuter, θηρίον) that was and is not, he himself is also an eighth (masculine), and is of (ἐκ, out of) the seven, etc. We may note ...that "eighth" refers to "king" in ver. 10, being masculine gender...⁶

⁶ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., Revelation, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 417.

Without getting technical it simply means that the demon-beast was previously present in Rome, but at the time specified here in AD 68-69 he is not; in other words, he is temporarily bound in the pit. Yet this demon-beast is also the eighth emperor because he possesses the eighth emperor. So unlike McKenzie, who sees each head as representing a different demon, this says that the same demon that possessed the eighth emperor was also of the seven. I believe he possessed all seven.

And this demon's destiny was not victory, but perdition - hell. Though he has had a powerful past, he has no future. So again, it is showing limits of this demonic conspiracy.

Note that the demon-horns that used to be involved with every sequential ruler in Rome (see Daniel 7:7-8) are now without a kingdom and rule for a short time with the beast through the ten contemporaneous kings (v. 12)

And in the remaining verses we see that the conspiracy that Satan has tried to use among nations to cast off the bonds of Christ is not so invincible after all. Verse 12 shows that God can take power away from demons and men any time he wants and when conspiracies seem to work, it is only because God allows them to work - perhaps as discipline or for some other reason. Verse 12 says, "And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the Beast for one hour." Or I translate it "in one hour." There is no 'for' in the Greek.

Unlike chapter 13, where each horn had a crown, these horns are uncrowned. They are the same demons who previously had authority under each emperor, but who have now lost control. Even demonic conspiracies are not invincible. The demons lost their crowns. They are waiting for the empire to be restored. So, whether you think of the horns as the demons, or the kings possessed by the demons, they represent the ten provinces of Rome that are hoping for restored power. McKenzie says, "Thus, the ten horns in this chapter do not have crowns and probably represent the allied authorities and client kings that assisted Titus in his destruction of the Jewish nation."⁷ Wellesley's book, *The Year of the Four Emperors*, documents the plans that were made by these ten kings in Beirut in the year AD 69.⁸ They had a meeting. Was it a one hour long meeting? We aren't told, but I will describe that meeting in a couple of minutes, and a one hour meeting makes sense.

7 Duncan McKenzie. *The Antichrist and the Second Coming: Volume II: The Book of Revelation* (Xulon Press, 2012), p. 236.

8 Kenneth Wellesley, *The Year of Four Emperors*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 123-125.

So there were ten kings over ten provinces in Rome at this time. The number of provinces changed radically in Rome's history, so this too helps to date when this was fulfilled. There was a short period of time when the ten kings of the former empire were so fed up with the civil war, that they gathered together for a meeting with Titus and pledged their loyalty. It was the only way they could think of to regain the influence that they used to have. And I don't see any reason why we can't take it literally that this decision was made in one hour.

These horns conspire to give power to Titus (v. 13)

And verse 13 describes this conspiracy that Titus and the ten had against Vitellius. Remember that Vitellius had proclaimed himself king and was trying to become emperor. He was utterly unsuccessful; Very few followed him. He just happened to take over the city. Well, these kings conspired against the one that the Senate permitted to be king. So it is Titus' conspiracy against Vitellius' conspiracy.

So verse 13 says, "These are of one mind and give their power and authority to the Beast." Tacitus documents that this meeting went rather well. And as to the power they give, Vespasian could not have won without their help and without his son Titus' help. Wellesley documents the enormous power of all the nations of the empire somehow coming together behind Titus.⁹ Vitellius considered this treason, but the winners get to write history, right? But how do successful conspiracies of this magnitude happen? Scripture indicates it is because of the demonic organization that happens behind the scenes. There is always an invisible world that we must contend with.

These horns conspire to overthrow Christ and His people (v. 14)

And that is why there is such hostility to Christ and to Christians. When you are so nice to authorities, why are they so mean to you? It is because we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and power and forces of darkness.

Verse 14 says, "They will make war with the Lamb." But here is the encouraging part: "and the Lamb will conquer them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called and chosen and faithful." This echoes the language of Psalm 2, which says, "The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Christ." (Ps. 2:2; Acts 2:26). This was a conspiracy; a conspiracy against Christ. And just as Psalm 2 promises that the Messiah

⁹ Ibid., p. 125.

will win against all conspirators, this says that the Lamb will win. Why? Because Psalm 2 says that with His ascension to heaven He was given all authority over heaven and earth. He is King of kings and Lord of lords.

Usually conspiracies are fomented in the name of liberty for the people, but instead of liberty they bring bondage and murder. And Titus continued the policies of Nero before him by persecuting Christians. His brother Domitian continued the persecution of Titus. Demonic states will always eventually persecute Christians. Why? Because demons hate Christians. It is inevitable unless the Lord puts a stop to it or unless the nation is converted and the demons are bound.

This verse also says that His people are called, and chosen, and faithful. Conspiracies don't happen because God has forgotten His people. Quite the reverse. We are called, and chosen, and hopefully we will be faithful just as the saints back then were faithful. And that is a clause to hold onto during times of persecution and conspiracy. God loves us, has chosen us, and can enable us to remain faithful during the most difficult of times. But certainly these kings would not be ultimately successful. Christ was guaranteed in this verse to conquer the empire of Rome and to make it Christian. Did that happen? Yes it did. Province after province got converted over the next two hundred years and eventually the entire empire was Christianized. This verse was fulfilled to a t over the next 300 years.

Now, let me address one objection that some have made to this interpretation. Some have claimed that Titus did not persecute Christians, and did not war against Christ, and therefore this could not refer to that time period. But we have already seen in previous sermons that Titus blasphemed Christ and declared war against Christ while in the temple and when traveling back to Rome. He dared Christ to fight against him. He was very explicit in naming Jesus as His enemy. We also documented Christians being tortured to death under his authority. This common assertion simply is not true. He was most definitely a horrible persecutor of the church.

And this verse shows that the idea of persecution of Christians was already uppermost in Titus' mind and in the minds of these demon-possessed kings right from the hour they first conspired together. We have a fragment of Tacitus that has survived that records a part of that meeting. Tacitus was a Roman senator who lived during this time and who wrote a history of this war. Here is the summary of the meeting Titus had. He said,

Titus is said to have first summoned a council and deliberated whether or not he should destroy such a mighty temple, for some thought that a consecrated shrine, which was

famous beyond all other works of men, ought not to be razed to the ground. Their argument was that to preserve it would bear witness to the moderation of Rome, while its destruction would forever brand her as cruel. Others, however, including Titus himself, opposed this view and said that the destruction of the Temple was a prime necessity in order to wipe out more completely the religion of the Jews and the Christians; for they urged that these religions, although hostile to each other, nevertheless sprang from the same sources; the Christians had grown out of the Jews: if the root were destroyed, the stock would easily perish.¹⁰

So that is a conspiracy against Christ and Christians. It was behind closed doors, and it was premeditated genocide. Peter Hammond has documented the premeditated genocides in Rwanda and in many other countries that were backed up by and covered up by the United Nations. It's demonic; it's horrible. Demons continue to work in the same way they worked in ancient Rome, and almost every United Nations peace keeping expedition has worked against Christians and in favor of statist. Christians are foolish to trust the United Nations or any other statist organization. We shouldn't be surprised by the atrocities that have happened against Christians in the last one hundred years. Demons have had a long history of doing such things. And yet most seminaries love Ronald Sider who teaches Christians to trust socialism, a big state, and the United Nations. It is scandalous.

But a united nations is made up of not-so-united nationalities (v. 15)

But verse 15 gives yet another weakness inherent in all one-world governments. Verse 15 says that they are made up of not-so-united nationalities. "Then he says to me: "The waters that you saw, where the whore sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages." Is it a good thing that there are different ethnicities, cultures, and languages? Yes. It's a fantastic thing. While ethnic differences can often be used as excuses for prejudice, those same ethnic differences have also been used by God to serve His purposes. Ever since the tower of Babel, these natural differences in mankind have hampered and frustrated tyrants. Why? Because ethnic groups tend to have far more loyalty to their own ethnic group than to the tyrannical one-world-government. That's a good thing. They prefer their own language to the imposed language. They prefer their own customs to the imposed customs. They prefer their own foods. God made it that way to keep the tower of Babel from succeeding.

But ethnic preferences is a far cry from saying it is sin to inter-marry. Some of you have been following the recent debates on Facebook over Peter Hammond's belief that inter-ethnic marriage is a sin. I strongly disagree with

¹⁰ Severus' Chronica 2.30.6 and 2.30.7

Peter, and think that his position is a slander against Moses, who married an Ethiopian. But I am not about to treat Peter as an unbeliever, as McDurmon and Marinov insist that we must. I don't think they have the authority to be acting as a court like they have been doing on Facebook or to give moral commands to join the boycott lest we ourselves be shunned. I see Peter as a man of God with some blind spots. Many of the heroes of the Reformation had the same blind spot. Just substitute Martin Luther for Peter Hammond and you would see that Luther would be excommunicated by that Facebook group because his positions were far worse than Peter's. Now, I've spoken to Peter about his error, but I'm not about to break the bond of fellowship simply because cyber bullies command me to do so. And by the way, there is a lot of factual error flying around in that debate. And I believe their concept of boycott is grossly unbiblical. About ten years ago Martin Selbrede wrote an article for the Chalcedon Foundation on why boycotts cannot be treated as a biblical imperative like they are doing. They want everyone to boycott the MARS conference because MARS won't boycott Peter. It is third degree separation. So even though I love people on both sides of that debate, there is error on both sides. As a pastor I would urge you to keep that in mind. And both sides have a lot of wonderful things to contribute. One last thing I will mention is that Scripture indicates there will be ethnic differences till the end of history that we should love and value. Inter-ethnic marriage illustrates the grace of Christ, but so does diversity in unity.

Well, enough on this rabbit trail. The key point here is that God uses national, ethnic, and language differences as a frustration to centralizing tyrants. And certainly that became the case with Israel, which is the next point.

And God uses persecutors to fight against each other (v. 16)

It was nationalism that made the hotheaded Zealots fight Rome and force Rome to war, much to the chagrin of the Sadducees who profited from Rome's rule. They were conspirators who manipulated Rome. But look at how Rome turned on Israel in verse 16. "And the ten horns that you saw, also the beast, these will hate the whore and will lay her waste and strip her and eat her flesh and burn her with fire."

This is a reference to the war against Jerusalem and the burning of Jerusalem and its temple. Tacitus spoke of the hatred these allied troops had for Israel.¹¹

¹¹ "Waiting for him [Titus] in Judea were the three legions that had long served under Vespasian—the Fifth, Tenth, and Fifteenth. To this force he added the Twelfth from Syria and the drafts from the Twenty-Second and the Third brought up from Alexandria. He was attended by twenty cohorts of allied infantry and eight regiments of cavalry, as well as by the two kings Agrippa and Sohaemus and the supporting

And you might wonder, why would they hate the Jews so intensely? Well, I think there were probably a lot of reasons. They were already possessed by demons, and demons could produce antisemitism. So there were probably racist reasons, and we should never tolerate racism. However much we might disagree with a people, race should not be a part of that equation. Tacitus mentions historical rivalries - the kind that get feuds going, and we should never tolerate feuds. Historians tell us that the Gentile nations envied Jerusalem's wealth. Envy is not a good thing. They envied her tax advantages that no other nation got. They envied the fact that Israel got to impose their own laws rather than Roman law. They envied the fact that Israel seemed to have more influence over the emperors than other nationalities had. They were angered by the racism of the Jews. The racism went both ways. And (like modern third world countries) they were extremely resentful of the manipulation and control that the Sadducean international bankers had exerted over their countries after borrowing money. The debtor is slave to the lender, and it doesn't feel good. But perhaps the freshest thing in their memory that would have made them angry was that the Zealots had just recently almost annihilated an entire Legion of the empire's soldiers under Cestius.

And when it speaks of stripping her, they did indeed strip her of her wealth. All the treasurers of Jerusalem and the temple were stripped away from her. You can see the temple treasures being hauled off on the carvings of the arch of Titus. I've given you a picture of one little section of that arch. It was all fulfilled. The Sadducees had made the temple into a den of robbers, and God had the Romans rob the robbers. And by the way, the Sadducees were wiped out in this war. We don't hear much about them after that. Only the Pharisees were left, and their rabbinic Talmudism is what we have in Orthodox Judaism today.

forces offered by King Antiochus. Then there were strong levies of Arabs, who felt for the Jews the hatred common between neighbors." The Histories Book 5.1, "The Jews," p. 271.



And not one of God's purposes has failed (v. 17)

But note that this was all divinely planned and executed. Though every one of these soldiers thought they were exercising their free will and doing their own desires (and in a sense they were), verse 17 says, “Because God put it into their hearts to perform His purpose, even to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the Beast, until the words of God should be fulfilled.”

That is astonishing - God controls even hearts, and wars, pillaging, revolutions, and dictatorships, yet He is not the author of sin. He is sovereign over those sins, yet the sinners alone are guilty for the sins that they want to do. They are not forced to do them. They are not robots. Thus Psalm 105:17 says that God sent Joseph to Egypt, while Genesis says that his wicked brothers sent him there. Both are true: God is sovereign but men are still responsible for their actions. That's why Joseph told his brothers, “you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good” (Gen. 50:20). Well, in the same way, God was going to bring good out of the evil that Rome and Israel were engaged in.

And not one thing prophesied about Jerusalem's demise would be unfulfilled. It says that God put it into their hearts to do these things “until the words of God should be fulfilled.” How does God do this? I believe through secondary means. He allows the demons to move them. Even demons can only do God's will. There is nothing outside of God's sovereign control. And we should take comfort in that. This is why we say conspiracies are not something to get depressed over. Conspiracies come because of

God's will and conspiracies fail because of God's will. And they do fail; they have repeatedly failed in history. God alone is sovereign. And this verse powerfully points to that sovereignty.

So what conspiracy theorists might find as an invincible conspiracy (v. 18) turns out to be not so invincible after all (18:1ff)

And that despite the fact that the last verse says that Jerusalem controlled the puppet strings of the Roman empire. We've already seen the ways that the Sadducees controlled Rome, but it repeated here for effect. "Now the woman whom you saw is the great city that holds rulership over the kings of the earth." And the word "earth" there is γῆς, which we have been seeing in the book of Revelation refers to the land of Israel. But the kings of Israel served Rome. And in previous sermons I documented how the Sadducees manipulated Rome to get kings appointed and disposed of. Through multi-million dollar bribes the Sadducees controlled these kings just as easily as money seems to control many modern rulers today.

There's an interesting new book out by Peter Schweizer, called, *Secret Empires: How the American Political Class Hides Corruption and Enriches Family and Friends*. He alleges that China has bribed Biden, McConnell and other politicians and even think tanks like the Heritage Foundation with hundreds of millions of dollars. He names names and documents exactly where the money flowed.

He who has the money seems to rule the world to some degree. Well, that was true of the Sadducees of Jerusalem, whose individual net wealth (according to some experts who have studied the copper scroll), was greater than that of any other king or individual. They had plenty of money to throw around. I've included in your outline a picture of just one section of the copper scroll which is a secretly coded book of where the Sadducees' buried treasures are. Scholars say that there are 64 locations, 63 of which are vast treasures of gold and silver. For example, one location has 868,000 troy ounces of gold. And people have said that the treasures are greater than any other hoard in world history. But based on history, it seems that there was far more money than what is described in the copper scroll. That was probably just one of the records of their wealth. These guys were fabulously rich. That's why they were international bankers. They weren't bankers because they needed more money; they were bankers because they wanted to control the empire.



So as I mentioned before they filled the emperor's cabinet with Jewish advisors, put conditions on loans that they made, hired assassins to destroy people who were slow to cooperate, and through sex and other means controlled at least the Roman rulers in the region of Palestine, but also controlled kings throughout the empire (as we will see in chapter 18). Eventually those kings had had enough, and the conspiracy all fell apart. The conspirators were crushed by another conspiracy of the ten horns & Titus. So this chapter illustrates three competing conspiracies. And it makes us realize that even modern conspiracies can sometimes undo other conspiracies. Humanism fights against humanism.

So that's the story of this chapter. And if you have been encouraged by this chapter not to get paralyzed or feel helpless because of the conspiracies of our own day, and if you want more reading, I would encourage you to read Gary North's book, *Conspiracy: A Biblical View*.¹² It will give you even more reasons to be encouraged. God is working out His purposes even through the Illuminati, Free Masons, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Bilderbergers, Skull & Bones, Bohemians, and other organizations have been trying to work together to enslave the world. If you study their history you will see that it is a history filled with frustrations, setbacks, and infighting side-by-side of course with many demonic successes. Conspirators are not invincible, even if they succeed in temporarily controlling the world. We should not be naive about the power that conspiracies have had in the United States and other nations, but neither should we treat them as all-powerful. Only Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth. Rest in that truth. Amen.

¹² https://smile.amazon.com/Conspiracy-Biblical-View-North-Gary/dp/0891074104/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1523742961&sr=8-1&keywords=Conspiracy+Gary+North