

## **Revelation: Promises for a Dangerous World**

### **Week 8: Revelation 17 and a Checkpoint Discussion**

All handouts will be available at <http://www.nathangilmour.com/hardly/sunschmaterials/>

#### **Gilmour's Four Rules for Reading Revelation**

1. Always look for a reference to the Old Testament. (Footnotes are your friends.)
2. Always ask what a first-century audience would have heard.
3. Always look for a promise, not a threat, from God.
4. Always think of yourself as overhearing God's words to the first-century Christians.

Take a look at Revelation 17:1-6. What signals does the text give as to the identity of this beast, and what stands most striking, visually, about the woman astride the beast? Thinking back to the Old Testament (look at Ezekiel 16 if you're particularly daring or Hosea 2 if you're not in the mood for spicy Bible). Putting on your first-century goggles, what reality does this picture seem to paint?

Revelation 17:7-12 reads like a series of riddles about the beast and its horns. First, from which worship song for the God of Christians does the riddle of the beast seem to borrow its shape? Second, taking a step back from the riddle's details, what's the basic character of the beast's power on earth? Third, what might occur to a first-century reader upon hearing about a world power that still has ten kings (and remember that numbers can be allegorical in the Bible) but ultimately is doomed?

In the closing verses of chapter 17, what is the ultimate fate of the woman who gives her love to all of the gods and all of the cities? Once again thinking of that first-century audience hearing this for the first time, what does this tell them about their place in world history?

With only five chapters left in the book, what's the big picture that Revelation seems to be painting, with its two vision-cycles and strange visual elements, for an audience steeped in Old Testament Scripture? To a first-century audience gathered to worship and probably worried that the Romans might come to them next, what are the main promises that God sends through this book?

Given what this oracle probably meant to the first century, what are some ways in which it can function as Scripture to us? In other words, what does hearing and seeing this oracle to those people, at that time, do for the way that we imagine reality?