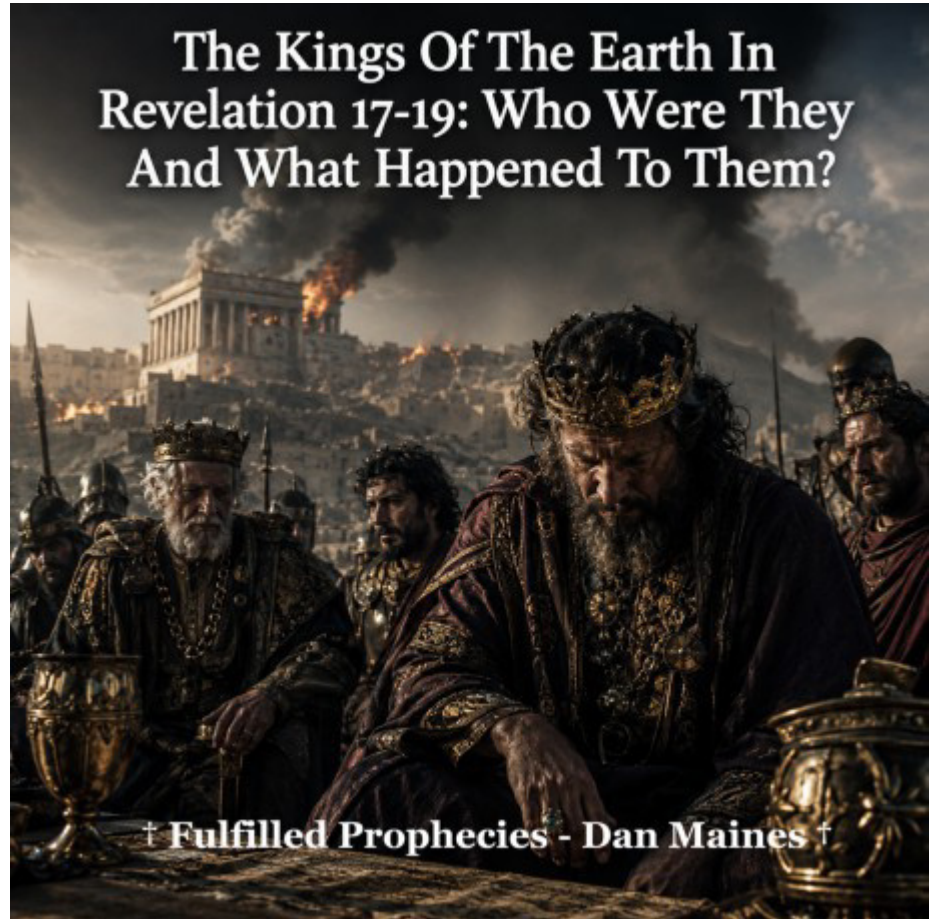


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The Kings Of The Earth In Revelation 17-19: Who Were They And What Happened To Them?



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† The "kings of the earth" in Revelation 17-19 weren't mysterious rulers thousands of years removed from John's original audience. Revelation places these kings inside the first-century conflict surrounding the beast, the harlot, and the judgment that John was told was near (Revelation 1:1-3; 22:6, 10).

† Revelation 17 identifies kings who were already part of the

political world known to John. Some had already fallen, one was reigning when John wrote, and others were connected with the beast. That language gives us a historical setting, not an unlimited timeline stretching thousands of years into the future.

† Revelation 18 shows the kings participating with the harlot and mourning when her judgment arrives. Revelation 19 then shows the kings gathered with the beast against Christ and being defeated. Chapters 17, 18, and 19 belong together.

† The phrase "kings of the earth" also has an important biblical background. Psalm 2 describes kings and rulers opposing the Lord and His Anointed, and Acts 4 applies that language directly to the rulers involved in the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus (Psalm 2:2; Acts 4:25-28).

† This means we shouldn't automatically read modern presidents, prime ministers, governments, or future world leaders into Revelation. We need to begin with John's world, John's audience, and the rulers involved in the first-century conflict. Note: In this lesson, the word "harlot" is used instead of the P-word because Facebook doesn't allow that word.

Revelation 17:1-2

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of sexual immorality, and those who live on the earth became drunk with the wine of her sexual immorality."

† The kings are introduced in connection with the great harlot who was about to be judged. They aren't introduced as rulers living thousands of years later.

† The harlot's relationship with these kings is described as spiritual and political unfaithfulness. She had joined herself to earthly power rather than remaining faithful to God (Isaiah 1:21; Ezekiel 16:26-29).

† Revelation later identifies the great city in ways that connect its guilt with the blood of God's servants, a theme Jesus had already placed upon first-century Jerusalem (Matthew 23:34-36;

Luke 13:33-35).

† Therefore, the kings must be understood within the same historical judgment setting as the woman with whom they committed fornication.

Revelation 17:9-11

Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains upon which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. The beast which was, and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction.

† This is one of the strongest time indicators in the chapter. John wasn't told that all seven kings were future. He was told that five had fallen and one was presently reigning.

† The words "the one is" anchor the vision to John's own historical world. Whatever interpretation we give the individual kings, John's language requires us to take his present tense seriously.

† The seven mountains naturally called Rome to mind for ancient readers because Rome was famously associated with seven hills. The political beast in Revelation is therefore connected with the Roman imperial world.

† The passage doesn't invite us to begin counting rulers in the twenty-first century. John gives his audience a political framework they could recognize.

Revelation 17:12-14

The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast. These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them because He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful.

† The ten horns are specifically interpreted as kings. Their authority is tied directly to the beast, and their period of

authority is described as brief.

† These kings share their authority with the beast. This fits the Roman imperial system, in which subordinate and client rulers operated under Rome's greater political and military authority.

† Their war against the Lamb doesn't require Jesus to be physically standing on a battlefield fighting with a sword.

Governments warred against Christ by persecuting His people and resisting His kingdom (Acts 9:4-5; 1 Corinthians 15:9).

† Yet the outcome was never in doubt. The Lamb overcame because He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Rome, its allied rulers, and every earthly authority remained beneath the authority of Christ (Ephesians 1:20-22; Colossians 2:15).

Revelation 17:16-18

And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled. The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.

† Here the relationship changes dramatically. The same political powers associated with the beast turn against the harlot and destroy her.

† This is extremely important to the fulfilled interpretation. God used political and military powers to accomplish His judgment, even though those powers weren't righteous themselves (Isaiah 10:5-7; Habakkuk 1:6).

† Jerusalem had relied upon political alliances and had rejected her Messiah, but Rome eventually became the instrument that devastated the city and destroyed the temple in AD 70 (Luke 19:41-44; 21:20-22).

† Notice that God remained sovereign over the entire event. The kings and the beast acted according to their own political interests, but God's judicial purpose was accomplished.

Revelation 18:3

For all the nations have fallen because of the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of sexual immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich from the excessive wealth of her luxury.

† Revelation again connects the kings with the harlot. This wasn't simply military cooperation. The imagery describes a corrupt relationship involving political power, wealth, influence, and spiritual unfaithfulness.

† Jerusalem wasn't an insignificant city in the first century. It was the center of the Jewish religious world, filled with pilgrims, sacrifices, commerce, wealth, priestly influence, and international connections (Acts 2:5-11).

† Revelation isn't giving us a prediction about some future global economic system. John is describing the corrupt world surrounding the city whose judgment was approaching in his own generation.

Revelation 18:9-10

And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of sexual immorality and lived luxuriously with her, will weep and mourn over her when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'

† The kings who benefited from their relationship with the city mourn when they see her destruction. Her judgment is sudden, devastating, and irreversible.

† Jesus had already predicted Jerusalem's destruction and said that her enemies would surround her, crush her, and leave no stone upon another because she didn't recognize the time of her visitation (Luke 19:41-44).

† Jesus also placed the judgment of accumulated covenant blood upon His own generation (Matthew 23:35-36).

Revelation's judgment imagery follows the same covenant lawsuit.

† The burning city isn't a warning that modern Christians should watch today's political leaders for fulfillment. It belongs to the judgment drama that Revelation said would soon take place.

Revelation 19:19-21

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies, assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse, and against His army. And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire, which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

† Revelation 19 brings the conflict to its climax. The beast, the kings, and their armies stand against the victorious Christ.

† The sword comes from Christ's mouth. That detail tells us immediately that Revelation is using prophetic symbolism. Christ conquers through His authoritative word and judicial decree (Isaiah 11:4; Hebrews 4:12).

† The imagery of birds consuming the defeated comes from Old Testament judgment language, especially Ezekiel's description of God's judgment against hostile powers (Ezekiel 39:17-20).

† Revelation isn't describing modern military technology or a future battlefield where Jesus uses a literal sword from His mouth. It's apocalyptic language announcing the complete victory of Christ over the powers opposing Him.

† By the end of the story, the harlot has fallen, the beast is defeated, the hostile kings are defeated, and Christ remains victorious. The kingdom belongs to the Lamb.

Acts 4:26-28

The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the Lord and against His Christ. For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius

Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and purpose predestined to occur.

† Acts gives us an inspired interpretation of the phrase "kings of the earth." The apostles quote Psalm 2 and apply it to actual first-century rulers who opposed Jesus.

† They specifically identify Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel as participants in that opposition. The language of kings and rulers opposing God's Anointed was already being fulfilled in their generation.

† This doesn't prove that every occurrence of "kings of the earth" must refer to exactly the same individuals. It does prove that the phrase was already meaningful in the first-century conflict between earthly rulers and Christ.

† Revelation continues that biblical theme. Earthly powers oppose the Lamb, but the Lamb wins.

Historical References

† Josephus describes the Roman war against Jerusalem in great detail in *The Wars of the Jews*, especially Books 5-7. His account records the siege, famine, internal violence, burning of the temple, destruction of Jerusalem, and enormous loss of life.

† Josephus also records rulers and forces cooperating within the Roman political and military world surrounding the Jewish War. This provides important historical background for Revelation's picture of kings giving their authority to the beast.

† Tacitus records that King Agrippa and King Sohaemus joined Titus, while Antiochus sent additional forces for the campaign. This gives us direct historical evidence that kings allied with Roman power were involved in the events surrounding the war against Judea and Jerusalem (Tacitus, *Histories* 5.1).

† Tacitus also describes Jerusalem, its temple, and the Roman campaign against the city, providing a Roman historical witness independent of Josephus (Tacitus, *Histories* 5.8-13).

† Eusebius later preserved the Christian tradition that believers in Jerusalem escaped to Pella before the war overwhelmed the city, connecting the first-century Christian community with the approaching judgment Jesus had warned about (Eusebius,

Ecclesiastical History 3.5).

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't need to fear the "kings of the earth" as though Revelation is predicting a future coalition of modern rulers that Christians must identify.

† We don't need to turn every war, political alliance, election, treaty, or international organization into another attempt to fulfill Revelation 17-19.

† Christ already demonstrated that earthly rulers can't overthrow His kingdom. Kings rise and fall, nations rise and fall, governments change, but Jesus remains King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 1:5).

† Our confidence isn't in earthly political power. Our confidence is in Christ, who reigns over every authority and has transferred His people into His kingdom (Colossians 1:13; 2:10).

† Revelation was written to encourage persecuted believers, not terrify Christians thousands of years later. Its message is victory. The Lamb wins, His enemies are judged, His bride is vindicated, and His kingdom remains.

† We aren't waiting for Jesus to become King. He is King now. We aren't waiting for His kingdom to begin. We have already been transferred into it.

† The fulfilled message of Revelation isn't "Be afraid, the kings are coming." It's "Be faithful, the Lamb has overcome."

Q & A Appendix

Q: Who were the "kings of the earth" in Revelation 17-19?

A: They were first-century rulers connected with the political world of the beast and the events surrounding the judgment described in Revelation. The text itself places kings within John's own historical setting, including a king who was reigning when John wrote (Revelation 17:10-14).

Q: Does "kings of the earth" mean modern world leaders?

A: Revelation never tells John's readers to look thousands of years into the future for modern presidents or prime ministers.

Acts had already applied the language of the "kings of the earth" to first-century rulers such as Herod and Pontius Pilate (Acts 4:26-28).

Q: Who are the seven kings in Revelation 17?

A: They belong to the Roman political setting represented by the beast. Five had already fallen, one was presently reigning, and another was still to come. The phrase "the one is" is especially important because it anchors the prophecy in John's historical world (Revelation 17:9-11).

Q: Who were the ten kings?

A: Revelation describes them as rulers who received authority with the beast and gave their authority to the beast. Rome operated through subordinate and allied rulers, and historical records confirm that client kings supported Rome during the Jewish War (Revelation 17:12-14; Tacitus, Histories 5.1).

Q: Why did the beast and the kings turn against the harlot?

A: Revelation says God used them to accomplish His purpose. The political power with which the harlot had been associated eventually became the instrument of her destruction (Revelation 17:16-17; Luke 21:20-22).

Q: Is Revelation 19 describing a future world war?

A: The passage uses prophetic and apocalyptic imagery. The sword comes from Christ's mouth, and the imagery of birds consuming the defeated comes from earlier prophetic judgment language. The emphasis is Christ's judicial victory over His enemies, not modern military warfare (Isaiah 11:4; Ezekiel 39:17-20).

Q: What should Christians do when modern wars and political crises happen?

A: We should respond with wisdom, prayer, faithfulness, and compassion, but we shouldn't automatically turn current events into fulfillment of Revelation. Christ already reigns above every

earthly authority (Ephesians 1:20-22; Colossians 1:13).

Q: What is the main message of the kings of the earth in Revelation?

A: No earthly ruler can defeat Christ. Political powers may oppose Him and persecute His people, but the Lamb overcomes because He is Lord of lords and King of kings (Revelation 17:14).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Revelation 17:1-2; Revelation 17:9-11; Revelation 17:12-14; Revelation 17:16-18; Revelation 18:3; Revelation 18:9-10; Revelation 19:19-21; Acts 4:26-28

† Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, Books 5-7; Tacitus, Histories 5.1, 5.8-13; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.5

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