

The Destruction of the Final World Religion, Part 3

Scripture: Revelation 17:7-8

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Revelation 17 is our text tonight in our ongoing study of this great apocalypse. I feel like I need to make a brief apology to those of you who have not been with us in our study of Revelation because you're going to get dropped right in the middle here and you may feel a little bit suspended because you don't know what has gone before for several weeks, many months and even into the years that we've been studying this great, great book.

We turn again to this marvelous chapter and we will pick up where we left off last time as we concluded the first six verses. Some introductory comments, I think, are appropriate as we set the context.

We have learned repeatedly through all of the months of our study of Revelation, the apocalypse, the unveiling of Jesus Christ, that the theme of this book is Christ Himself. And that the truth of this book is not to be avoided but it is to be understood and it is to be incorporated into life. The life of every Christian exposed to this book will be dramatically altered, dramatically changed. And so it should be. The promise of our Lord Himself in chapter 1 verse 3 is, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and heed the things which are written in it, for the time is near." That is a beatitude, that is a blessing. We have indeed been blessed as we have studied, as we have read, as we have heard, as we have heeded the great truths of this book.

We have seen its three major divisions...the visions of the exalted Christ in the glory of His resurrection life as He ministers in His church in chapters 1 to 3. And the vision of the glorious and exalted Christ as He appears in heaven in chapters 4 and 5. The visions of the exalted and glorified Christ as He unleashes judgment on the earth, punishing those who are ungodly and reject the gospel, at the same time preserving unto eternal life those who believe and belong to Him. And that in chapter 6 and right on through chapter 18. So that's the section we're in, we're in the section of the unfolding of the judgment of Christ as He takes back the universe which is in the hands of the usurper, Satan himself.

We are already now coming to the end of this period of judgment. It ends in chapter 18. And then in chapter 19 the climactic return of Jesus Christ and that ushers us into the final part of this book which is the glorious vision of the returning, conquering Lord as He comes with His saints to destroy the

ungodly, to rescue His own, to establish His Kingdom which will usher in the eternal new heavens and the new earth...all the way on right out to the very end of chapter 22.

And throughout the months that we have been studying this great book we have learned so much. We know where history is going and why it's going there and how it will get there. We know how man's final years on earth will be lived out. We have seen previews of holocausts of judgment that make any other earthly catastrophe a small and insignificant thing. We know that the universe will fly apart into unregulated chaos and the sky itself will fold up. We know about earthquakes and pestilences and famine. We know about the destruction of all of the seas and the death of everything that is in them, the destruction of the fresh water and the death of everything is in them. We know about hailstones of a hundred pounds that will hit the earth. We know about fire.

We know about signs and wonders. We know about miraculous resurrections. We know about preachers in the end time, great powerful witnesses. We know that there will be angels like satellites flying across the mid-heaven in the latter days, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ so that all the world may hear and no one will have an excuse. We know with exact information the future deaths of millions of people and how they will occur.

We know how the career of Satan will transpire and how his millions of demons will operate, and how they will be released systematically at the end time. Some belched up out of the pit itself, others released from their captivity somewhere near the river Euphrates. We know about the future of Israel and its redemption. We know also about the deadly persecution of the Jews. We know about the anticipated joys of the church, the bride of Christ and what awaits them. There is so much we know, so much applicable to life, so much that brings us joy and gives us responsibility. We know the ultimate price of sin and we know the ultimate reward of holiness.

We know that the rejected Jesus is coming again, not to be rejected, but to be exalted. We know the One who came in humility will come in glory, and the One who came and left will come never to leave again. We know the people of God who belong to Christ will triumph over all persecution, all disaster, all death and all judgment. We know where our eternal state is, it's up. How far up, we're not sure. We know what it is like. It is marvelously described to us and we'll get more into that description as we march on through the remaining chapters.

We know where the universe, the world, and everything that is in it and everyone who is in it is headed, where it's going, how it will end. And that's just a little bit of what we know. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could go into every history class and every philosophy class in the world and tell them all that we know?

One specific truth that we know which we are addressing in chapter 17 is that there is coming a time on earth just before the return of Jesus Christ when there will be a worldwide religious system.

Everybody will, in a sense, be bowing down to the same shrine. A time when there will be given to Satan a greater control of the world than he has ever had, certainly than he even has now. A time when Satan and all of his demons in the heavens will be cast down to earth, when a certain number of temporarily bound demons in the pit will be released, when two hundred million demons bound at the Euphrates River will overrun the earth. We know there is coming a time when Satan's domain on the earth will reach its apex, its high point.

In the midst of that overrunning of Satan and demons in the world, there will be the collecting together of a one-world empire, ruled by the Antichrist. At the same time there will be a final form of world religion. The final empire of Satan, as we have seen, which will be directed on earth by his demon-possessed leader called the Antichrist, the son of perdition, the man of sin, the little horn, the willful king, whatever of the prophetic terms you want to use, will be the expression of Satan's greatest impact as he makes a final attempt to wrest the world from God and to prevent Christ from establishing His Kingdom and receiving His proper glory.

Now this final satanic world empire ruled by Antichrist, the man of sin, is called here in the book of Revelation by the name Babylon...Babylon the great. That is the name given to this empire, both in chapter 17 and in chapter 18.

Chapter 17 and 18, however, though they both deal with this great empire of Antichrist called Babylon do differ. Chapter 17 looks particularly at the religious side, the spiritual side of Babylon whereas chapter 18 looks at the economic and political side of Babylon. So as we engage ourselves in the study of chapter 17, we are studying the religious side of Satan's final world empire. As I told you last time, the world is not going to become more and more irreligious, it is going to become more and more religious. People are going to become more and more involved in religion...not the true religion, but the false religion of Satan himself. The closer we get to the end, the more religious they will become.

Satan's empire, then, has two sides initially. We'll talk more about how those two sides resolve into one, but two sides initially...a religious side and a political side, a spiritual side and an economic side.

Looking down at verse 5 in chapter 17 we get the name of the worldwide form of religion. The name of it is "MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." Now that's quite a name for a religion. I don't mean by the name of the religion that someday someone will say to you that I go to the First Mystery Babylon the Great, Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth church. I don't think you'll see it on the marquee and I question whether it will ever show up on the stationery.

But that is really what it is. It will have a much more subtle and deceptive name. But what it is, is, first of all, mystery, that is it is more than physical, it is more than geographical, it is more than a human

organization. There's something deep and demonic and supernatural and even as yet hidden about it. It is Babylon. Why? Because it is the final form of religion when all the world's religions roll into one. And in so doing it is appropriate to call it Babylon because Babel is where all the world religions really began. They were all spawned out of a tower of Babel, that is why Babylon the Great is the Mother of all Harlots. Harlotry in the Bible always refers, when not referring to an actual harlot, to idolatry. Every form of idolatry and false religion was spawned out of that original false religion that developed at Babel. And when God scattered the people all over the globe in different languages, He scattered their cult, their Babylonish cult as well. And so Babylon was the originating place and all the harlot children of Mother Babylon will come home to mother in the end. And the same Satan who spawned them all will regather them all into one final form of world religion under the name BABYLON THE GREAT.

The term "mother of harlots" because all false religion and idolatry is characterized in Scripture as prostitution and harlotry. And then this is called also "the mother of the abominations of the earth" because nothing so offends God as false religion, nothing is so abominable. It is the supreme blasphemy.

So, a supremely blasphemous kind of idolatry will come to pass that has deep demonic and hidden concepts involved in it and that demonic kind of religion will reform itself around its Babylonish origins. The system will be the spiritual side of Satan's world empire. Jesus, of course, warned about this all the way back in the wonderful sermon that He preached on His own return, the Olivet Discourse. In Matthew chapter 24 and verse 21, "There will be a great tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall." Jesus predicted this time called the Great Tribulation. "A time that unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved, but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short. Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold here is the Christ, or there He is.' Do not believe him, for false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders so as to mislead if possible even the elect. Behold I have told you in advance." They're going to be so powerful, these satanic deceptions, these satanic seductions, the harlot the whore is going to seduce people into her bed to catch her fatal disease and die there with her, they're going to be able to do that because of massive worldwide deceptions based upon demonic signs and wonders that will deceive the whole world. And so well-orchestrated are they that were it possible they would even deceive the elect.

Now, this is a very essential element of Satan's final form of world rule because it is only religion that can unite the world. Politics, economics can't do it. Culture is too diverse. It has to be something transcending the physical, the geographical, the historical. It has to be something in the realm of the supernatural. Satan, who gave birth to all the counterfeits from one source, certainly has the power with all of his minions to pull them all back. That one who is disguised as an angel of light and whose ministers are as well angels of light, that one who originally deceived Adam and Eve and deceived the people at Babel will again deceive the world and collect them together.

To show you the deceptive power, only go back to chapter 16 and here's an illustration of it. Here we find a most amazing thing described. In the last days the Euphrates River is dried up in verse 12 in order to prepare the way for the kings from the east. The great empires of the eastern part of the world, that is east of Israel, east of the Middle East are going to come. And in order to cross the plain of Babylon and come to Megiddo for the battle of Armageddon, the place is going to have to be dried up. You say why? Because it will be flooded. It will be flooded like never in history because previous to what happens in verse 13, go back to verse 9. Men were scorched with fierce heat. Why? Because verse 8, "An angel poured his bowl on the sun and it was given to it to scorch men with fire." What happens there obviously is going to be the earth becomes hotter and hotter, it melts the icecaps at Ararat and the mountains north of the Babylonian plain, the water comes rushing down, floods the plain and then comes an angel in verse 12, that angel pours out a bowl of judgment, the water is dried up in order that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.

"And I saw...verse 13...coming out of the mouth of the dragon," that is Satan, "out of the mouth of the beast," that's Antichrist, "out of the mouth of the False Prophet three unclean spirits like frogs, spirits of demons performing signs which go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty."

Do you ever ask the question...why would all the world show up at Armageddon? Why would the kings of the east even come? Why do they care? Why would all the rest of the kings of the world gather into the plain of Megiddo and stretch all the way for two hundred miles down to the south, including through the city of Jerusalem? Why would there be this massive gathering of the forces of the world?

They are being gathered for the war of the great day of God. They are being gathered together to fight God and to fight the returning Christ. And who gathers them? Demons performing signs. It is a worldwide massive powerful seduction that gathers all these remaining armies who haven't been devastated by the prior bowl judgments, who aren't dead, to fight against the returning Christ.

Verse 16 says, "They are all gathered together to the place which in the Hebrew is called Har Magedon. Now that kind of deception that gathers all of those armies into Megiddo so that when Jesus comes He can destroy them all and the blood will splatter to the horses' bridles for two hundred miles, as the Scripture tells us. That same kind of deceptive power is the very deceptive power that is going to pull the world together on the basis of a common religion.

So as you approach 17, you approach the discussion of this religion, not its flourishing, but in fact its destruction. Verse 1 begins the discussion, "One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me saying, 'Come here, I shall show you the judgment of the great whore, or the great harlot, who sits on many waters.'"

Now we have three things, the harlot is the false religion, Mystery Babylon, the mother of all other harlots and of all the abominations of the earth. You have three aspects of her described here. You have the exposure of the harlot in verses 1 to 6. Then you have the explanation of the harlot following. And then finally down in verses 16 and 17, as we shall see, if not tonight at a later time, you have the extermination of the harlot...the exposure, the explanation and the extermination.

One of the angels who had been involved in pouring out the final bowl judgments, remember, they're sequential...first the seals, followed by the trumpets, followed by the bowls. The bowls rapid-fire, coming in just a matter of days and weeks with a fury at the end, bringing about worldwide unimaginable devastation described there in chapter 16. One of the angels involved in that then speaks with John. First he speaks of the authority of the harlot. This great harlot sits on many waters. Waters representing nations. Cities were always built by water. And water then became the means of people coming there to trade. And this is a great power that is involved with many waters. It is to say that it is involved with many, many nations. In case you might question that interpretation, look at verse 15 and you can stop questioning it. "He said to me, `The waters which you saw where the harlot sits are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.'" I told you so.

Secondly...secondly, not only do you see the authority of the harlot but you see the alliances of the harlot. First of all, the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality with her. Those who dwell on the earth...that's not the leaders, that's the whole population of the earth, made drunk with the wine of her immorality. She has an alliance with the leaders of the world. She has an alliance with the people of the world. That is, both leaders and people are engulfed in this false form of religion.

And then the third aspect of the alliance, "He carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness and I saw the woman sitting on a scarlet beast." She has an alliance with the Antichrist himself. She is supported by the Antichrist. She is seated on the scarlet beast. The beast then described is full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns.

So this false religious system coexists with the political economic system. They coexist. I really believe that the devil knows that the only way to build this world empire is through religion. The Antichrist then allows this religion to flourish because it is the very power that unites the world. It is religion that makes the unity of the world possible.

Then we see something of the apparel of the harlot. In verse 4, "Clothed in purple, scarlet, adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls and in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality." And here we come to see the wealth, the royalty, the prosperity, but the filth of this system. And I told you over the last two weeks that all of history, all of biblical insight that comes from the prophets points to the fact that this system is going to be involving the church at Rome, that today we know as the Roman Catholic system. There is no way around that. And we've

gone into that for two weeks, I won't go into it again. The apparel of the harlot is purple, scarlet. She is wealthy with gold and precious stones and pearls and the gold cup, however, she holds is full of abominations and the filth of her immorality.

The abominations of the harlot are described. The unclean things of verse 4, and the abominations and harlotries in the name in verse 5. And then in verse 6 comes the accusation. This is a brief review. The accusation against the harlot is that she is drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. False religion born at Babylon and flourishing through all the world has martyred the true saints throughout all of human history. False religion has always been the killer of the true and it will be so in the end. So we see the exposure of the harlot.

Now let's tonight come to verse 7 and the explanation of the harlot...the explanation of the harlot. I'm quite confident we can't get through this whole chapter. I want you to stay with me. This must be understood because of the blessing attached to it and because God has gone to these lengths to get this word to us. We must understand it. I'll do the best I can to make comprehensible what is perhaps at first apparently incomprehensible.

Let's start with verse 7. "And the angel said to me, `Why do you wonder?'" Well that seems a rather silly question, doesn't it? At the end of verse 6, John's writing, "And when I saw her I wondered greatly," and we don't argue with that, we wouldn't question that. If you saw something like that you'd wonder too. But the question is not supposed to attach itself to that kind of understanding. What the angel is really saying is...why are you so worried about what this means, I'm going to tell you. I shall tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

Again we note verse 7, the angel is speaking. This incredible section here goes between what John hears in his conversation with the angel and what he sees in his vision. It goes back and forth from the seeing to the hearing. This angel, who is identified in verse 1 as one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, is here by God's dispatch to describe to John the meaning of this harlot, to fill in what John really doesn't understand. The angel is saying you don't need to wonder, you don't need to be left in the dark, I'm here and I'm going to explain it. I'll take care of your confused amazement, your confusion at this point. I'll tell you the mystery. I'll explain it to you.

Now let's go a little more into this. The mystery to John is surely not that this is a religious system. That's not the mystery. But the mystery to John is how does this system relate to this scarlet beast? By now John knows about the beast because he was introduced in chapter 13 and very, very clearly defined as the world ruler whom all the world worships. Do you remember that? Back in chapter 13, the whole world worships the beast.

Now when a new component is introduced on the religious side, a harlot who is pulling together a worldwide system of false religion, the question comes into John's mind...Wait a minute here. If the whole world is worshipping the beast, how does this thing fit in? How is the woman connected to the beast? Who is the beast? How does this all work together? And then perhaps this question...How...how can they have such a vast influence over the world?

It may well be that the key idea is implied when the angel says, "I shall tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her." That little phrase "that carries her" to explain to you their relationship because that is essentially what the rest of this section explains.

Now would you please notice that this beast, this one who is really the ultimate and final Antichrist, though there are many antichrists, John says, there is an ultimate and final form, which is the most heinous and powerful of all. This one is defined as having seven heads and ten horns in the vision. By the way, that is also stated in verse 3 where the scarlet beast full of the blasphemous names has seven heads and ten horns.

Now before we look at this beast and the description of the beast that starts immediately in verse 8, let me rearrange these verses because I think it might help you a little bit, okay? The question in John's mind is, how does this harlot religious system work together with this beast that the whole world is worshipping? How can there be two if there's one world religion?

Now let's...let's look first at the harlot. Since in verse 7 John is told, "I'll tell you the mystery of the woman, the harlot," let's look first at the harlot, okay? To do that we go to verse 18, all the way to the end...all the way to the end. And verse 18 says, "And the woman whom you saw is the great city which reigns over the kings of the earth." Now keep this in mind, he's explaining who this woman is, who this harlot is. First was the exposure, verses 1 to 6, now from verse 7 on is the explanation. I'll tell you about this woman and the beast...and when he says that he digresses for all those verses in the middle to discuss the beast, but let's go right to the woman because I think it's easier to grasp.

Who is this harlot? Who is this woman? Well, this woman, this religious system is the great city which reigns over the kings of the earth. Is this actually a geographical city? Well all I can say is it says "city." Now you can get real exotic and make it mean anything you want, but that's pure speculation. Apparently, safest, literal, grammatical, historical interpretation of the text would tell us that apparently in the final form of world religion connected to the Antichrist, Babylonish, political, economic, spiritual, religious empire, the ancient city of Babylon will play a role. It has been fascinating to us in the last few years to recognize that Saddam Hussein has been rebuilding Babylon. How interesting.

Babylon then may well here refer to a city, but not just a city. There are many students of prophecy and Scripture who would strongly hold to a literal rebuilding of Babylon, and I'll show you why in a moment. But it can't be limited to that, it is Babylon, perhaps, as a city, a capital city for the

Antichrist's empire. But it is also Babylon as a name for a worldwide system of satanic rule. It is also Babylon to describe a worldwide cult and false religion.

Now remember, as a system the Babylonian mystery religions which were the spawning ground, who is the mother of all false religion began in a city, a city called Babel, a real city. And from that real city it permeated the world, all along maintaining its unique character in every different culture. Through all the succession of nations in world history, that religion has moved but it still has some of the same component parts, as we have pointed out to you in weeks past. And I believe that it will go back to that same city as kind of a capital city in the end. I do not believe this is a reference to the city of Rome. This text of 17 and 18 clearly refers to the city of Babylon.

The evil religious system will come home to the place where it started, as well as to the ideology that it started with. It will apparently reach its zenith in the kingdom of Antichrist where there will be a rebuilt capital city, a rebuilt Babylon. Just to affirm that, go to chapter 18 for a moment, verse 10. "Woe, woe, the great city Babylon, the strong city for in one hour your judgment has come...verse 18...what city is like the great city?" It seems to be a literal city. Verse 21, "Thus will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, will not be found any longer." Now again I think there is a real city, what role it plays I'm not sure, it may be a ceremonial city, it may be a capital city, whatever. But I think it is also emblematic of an entire world empire. Through and including the city of Babylon, the empire of Babylon, the harlot mother will reign over the kings of the earth by her seductions.

Let me just give you some thoughts on the literal character of Babylon. And don't look these up, we don't have time. In Isaiah 13 and Isaiah 14, in Jeremiah 50 and Jeremiah 51, you can jot those down...Isaiah 13 and 14, Jeremiah 50 and 51. The Old Testament prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah spoke about the final destruction of Babylon. They gave a very detailed description of how Babylon ultimately would be destroyed as a city. And when they were talking, they were talking about the literal city of Babylon. What they predicted only partially happened in history past to this day. Some of what they predicted took place to Babylon when the Medo-Persians conquered the Babylonian Empire. Some of what they predicted took place in the gradual slow decline of Babylon in the centuries that followed. But by no means have all the aspects of the prophecy against the city of Babylon ever been fulfilled. And because of that, there is reason to assume that it will exist again in order that the final predictions stated specifically about that place may come to pass.

Like any Old Testament prophecies, the judgment predicted for ancient Babylon had a near fulfillment, and then a far fulfillment. Let me read you the words of one historian. "Babylon indeed will be permanently destroyed as recorded in the very next chapter, but this has not happened yet. The prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah also refer to the future destruction, not merely to Babylon's present day condition, as is evident from the following considerations...among others. One, the destruction will take place in the time that the stars and the sun are darkened, it says in Isaiah. Two, the city will be become as desolate as Sodom and Gomorrah, burned completely with no remains

whatever, according to Isaiah and Jeremiah. Three, it shall become desolate forever with neither man nor beast entering it anymore, so say the two prophets. Four, it will be a time of judgment not only for Babylon but for all the nations of the world. Five, its destruction will be followed by universal rest and permanent peace. Six, its destruction is directly associated with the casting of Lucifer into Sheol, Isaiah 14. And seventh, Babylon's stones will never be used in future construction elsewhere, whereas the present-day ruins of Babylon have been frequently plundered and reused in later constructions," end quote.

In order for all of those components of the prophecies against Babylon to be fulfilled, Babylon has to be there and destroyed finally in the end. So there's prophetic reason for a rebuilt and then finally destroyed Babylon. It is more than a simple curiosity, is it not, that Babylon is being rebuilt? Would you remind yourself that Babylon is a very great place to build a city from which to rule the world, if indeed that is to be its use. It is near the world's richest oil fields. I don't know that you know this, but it is near the geographic center of all the earth's land masses, located strategically at the crossroads of Asia, Europe and Africa and it has an immense water supply. In fact, the historian Arnold Toynbee used to stress to his students that Babylon would be the best place in the world to build a future world cultural metropolis.

So, the world religious system will somehow be connected with the great city of Babylon which will be, in a sense, the capital city of the whole Antichrist Empire. Now go back to verse 15. "And he said to me, the waters which you saw where the harlot sits are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues." As I said earlier, remember now that cities were built by water, Babylon by the Tigris and the Euphrates, a great water supply coming from Mount Ararat and the other mountains to the north and flowing right down through the Babylonian plain down to the Gulf. The waters in the imagery and the harlot sitting beside represent this great Babylonish world religious economic system with its capital city as being the focal point for nations to come. The water that is alongside the harlot city represents the worldwide influence just as the waters make access for people to come to cities. The waters represent the people and multitudes and nations and tongues. By the way, that common expression is repeated...one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, maybe eight, nine times in Revelation and it always is just a common expression meaning the nations of the whole world.

So there will be a city in which there is a system and that city and that system will become the mecca for the worldwide religion as well as in chapter 18 we will see the worldwide economy. The city then becomes the place, the system becomes the place in which the whole world traffics. It is the capital city of the world empire of Satan, Babylon the city, Babylon the great. We'll see more about the economic side of it when we get into chapter 18.

So the harlot then is exposed in verses 1 to 6 and now explained in verses 18 and verse 15. A worldwide religious part of the empire of Satan.

Now we go back please to verse 8, and the angel chooses to give to John a rather lengthy explanation of the beast that runs from verse 8 all the way to verse 14. Why does he do this? I believe he does this because this is where John's question lies. He's going to explain the significance of the harlot, but in order to understand the significance of the harlot, you have to understand her relationship to the beast. That's what's in John's mind, that's the query that distresses him. So here is the explanation of the therion, the Greek word for the wild beast that she is riding on. She's sitting on this scarlet beast, verse 3 says.

Verse 8, "The beast that you saw was and is not and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go to destruction." Now we've got to take this in small bites, folks.

The beast that you saw, that is the world ruler that rises in the last days, Satan's man embodying all the powers of human genius and leadership and then eventually energized by hell itself, this one who is portrayed in the book of Daniel. In chapter 7 of Daniel, Daniel portrays him as an intellectual genius, as an outstanding orator, as a master politician Daniel says in chapter 11. In chapter 8 he draws him up as a commercial wizard. Back in chapter 7 he portrays him as a military mastermind, as a man of unequalled power. In the New Testament he is described by the Apostle Paul as a religiously oriented man, as a king of royal blasphemers against God. He is a...he is a thousand Napoleons, he is a thousand Adolph Hitlers, he is a thousand Joseph Stalins, and that doesn't tell a tenth of the tale. He is the most incredible human leader ever in terms of his human powers, his human genius. He is Satan's supreme human instrument to destroy Israel, to prevent her salvation and her kingdom, to kill believers, to conquer the world for Satan, to defeat Christ. Quite a task, quite a man. That's who the beast is, he is the beast portrayed in chapter 13 in the first ten verses, which we covered in detail.

Now let's learn something about him. He is the beast that was and is not and is about to come. He was, he is not and yet he is again. Go back to chapter 13, let's see what this means. When the beast is first introduced here, one of his heads, verse 3, had been slain and his fatal wound was healed. There was a wound against him that was apparently fatal. And this healing of a fatal wound caused the whole earth to be amazed and to follow after the beast and worship the dragon and then worship the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast?"

Down in verse 12 comes along the false prophet, exercising all the authority of that first beast. He makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, here again, whose fatal wound was healed. And he, the false prophet, performs great signs so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men, he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given to him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life.

Now what have we got here? We've got a beast who was, who is not and who comes. What does that mean? That's speaking about that death wound and then coming back to life. I told you at that time as we studied that rather carefully and in detail, I believe that is a satanically faked counterfeit resurrection that somehow when the Antichrist reaches a certain level of great power, he has to be catapulted to the next level. For the first period of the Tribulation time, the religious system of Babylon exists, all the world is being gathered into one great world religion. The economic system exists over here, the false prophet runs the religious system. The Antichrist, a political, economic military power runs the economic side, and they coexist.

But the moment is coming for the Antichrist to take over everything. And in order to catapult him out of just the human realm of greatness into the supernatural realm, a fabricated resurrection is played out. And when that happens, the Antichrist who was apparently dies and comes back, but when he comes back something is very different about him. He is intolerant of the religious system that coexisted. He wants to destroy it, as we shall see.

Notice verse 8 again. The beast you saw was, is not and is about to come up out of the abyss, abussos. That is a reference to the same thing as the sea in chapter 13 verse 1. The abyss is the abode of demons. The abyss is hell, the dark place, the underworld of Satan. And what happens in this fake resurrection is that I believe when the Antichrist supposedly is resuscitated and comes back, he is no longer purely human but he has now become the dwelling place of some great demon out of the pit. He is then catapulted to another level of operation, the false prophet then coming alongside doing signs and wonders. The abyss is the abode of the dead, the abode of the demons. We have noted that, chapter 9, chapter 11, of Revelation.

Both chapters 13 and 17 tell us that this fake resurrection amazes the whole world. The beast then is the Antichrist. Let me just go a little further. I need to stretch that and say also, anytime you see the term beast, though it refers to the Antichrist in its individual interpretation, it also embodies his kingdom. So there is a sense in which he comes and goes and comes again in the fullness of his rule all over the world.

Let me give it to you in a series of simple, hopefully, statements. A man whom we will call Antichrist rises as a world ruler at the beginning of a period called the Tribulation. He conquers the world without war. Chapter 6, he rides on a white horse conquering and to conquer, he has a bow but no arrows. How does he conquer peacefully? He conquers by allying himself, I believe, with a religious system that has come together and gathered the entire world. And so he takes advantage of the collecting of humanity under this one religious banner. He then leads the world politically and economically and militarily. He is a powerfully gifted man. And he leads the world on the economic side and the Antichrist...and the False Prophet leads the religious side and they do fine together, and that's what it means when it says the harlot rides the beast, they coexist. In fact, he even supports

her.

His death is then fabricated. He supposedly comes to life. Then, however, he is infused by a demon from hell itself. He is energized into the final form of his satanic enterprise. He thinks he's now at the apex, he's now going to take over the world. Now is the moment to capture the world and to defeat Christ. However, verse 8 says, "He was not...or, he was, he is not, he's about to come up out of the abyss and to go to...what?...destruction." He misunderstands where he's going. He's going to...that's the word for perdition, that's the word for eternal damnation. For him it means the lake of fire that burneth forever with fire and brimstone, and that is stated explicitly in Revelation 19 and verse 20.

But most likely the scenario unfolds that in the first three and a half years of that seven-year period, the seventieth week of Daniel, Daniel 9, the first half of that period he is coexisting with the harlot. Everything is going fine. At the mid point he wants to ascend to the rule. He wants to rule with demonic deception and he takes over everything. And we'll see what he does to the harlot. You can take a preview of it by looking at verse 16. He hates her, makes her desolate, naked, eats her flesh, burns her with fire.

What does that mean? He ends the coexisting religious system. You say, "No more religion?" No, there's religion, it's a new religion, it is the worship of...guess who? Antichrist. That's where it ultimately goes.

Back to verse 8. This is such a powerful thing that he has done, such a seduction, such a deception. It says, "And those who dwell on the earth will wonder." They will be amazed. Those who dwell on the earth is that common term for the ungodly used over and over again in the book of Revelation. You can look in your lexicon, in your concordance and find it repeatedly. Those who are enamored with the beast, who do not understand that he is on his way to hell, he's on his way to the lake of fire, he's on his way to perdition, they do not understand from whence his power has come, that it has come from the pit. And so they are deceived and they identify themselves with him.

And who are they? Listen to this, "They are those whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world." What an incredible way to back into a description of who they are. It is a rare negative regarding the elect. What it is saying here is that the people who follow the beast are the non-elect. The people whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world which was when God wrote the names of the elect in the book of life. It's a reverse way of saying that only the believers will escape the deception.

And we're right back to Matthew 24, right? That the deception will be so great that if it were possible he would even deceive...what?...the elect. But it's not possible. Don't let anybody tell you it is. I've heard the wind of some theory that it will be possible, this verse makes it abundantly clear that it is not. The only people who are going to be traumatized, who are going to be marveling, who are going

to be trapped in the deception are the people who do not fit into the category of those whose names were written in the Lamb's book of life from before the foundation of the world. It's the Christ rejecters. It's those people who amazingly have already been suffering all the judgments of the first part of the Tribulation time, who have been experiencing the seal judgments, starting into the trumpet judgments and you're still just at the midpoint and the trumpets are already starting. And they're feeling all of these judgments and yet they will not respond. The trumpet judgments run their course. The bowl judgments come and still people are added to those who are deceived. Back in chapter 13 we read it a moment ago in verse 4, it says they worshiped the beast saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to wage war with him?"

It seems so ridiculous to me, they ought to be looking around and seeing whose got the real power. The whole world is collapsing all around them under the power of God. But they are amazed and because their names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that he was and he is not and he will come, they marvel. His supposed resurrection captures them along with all the other stuff. Back in chapter 13 verse 13, as we read, the great signs. Back in chapter 2 of 2 Thessalonians verse 9, this one who is coming in accord with the activity of Satan with all power and signs and false wonders and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish...here's the other side...because they didn't receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

Listen, they don't perish just because they weren't elect. They perish because they refused the love of the truth so as to be saved.

So, the world will be deceived by this massive power. And as I said, at the midpoint, according to verse 16, the beast will consume the harlot. And I think the False Prophet will be his ally in the consumption of that false system because in chapter 13 the False Prophet then builds an image to the beast and demands that the whole world worship him. That's the point at which I think the harlot is consumed. The whole Romish system is consumed. The whole Babylonish cult is consumed and there's nothing left in the world but direct worship of Satan and his demon-possessed leader. That's where the world is going.

Now, there is so much more, as you can tell, in this chapter. But we're going to have to wait for two weeks to find out about it. Let's bow in prayer.

We are reminded, our Father, of the words of the Apostle Peter who said, "Seeing that you know all these things shall come to pass, what manner of persons ought you to be in all godliness and holy living?" We remember the words of Paul who said, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." Father, just to know how the world is going, just to know where it's going is a frightening reality. Lord, it should certainly call us to holy living and purity in order that we might be a testimony. You've told us that we are to call men to repentance. We are to call them to escape the fire

of judgment. Like John the Baptist, who cried out to those Jews so early in the New Testament to escape the fire. We must cry out to men and women to put their faith in Jesus Christ and to escape the horrifying worldwide deception of the end. Satan is an angel of light and we might well know that he would be the supreme religionist who would invent the supreme religion that would capture the whole world. He did it once at Babel and he'll pull it all together again and deceive the whole world.

Lord, we now live in a world where there is so much of that Babylonish heresy and apostasy floating all over, so much of it. So much false religion, so many lies, the world is certainly fertile for unifying all of it. We thank You, our God, that You have led us to the knowledge of the truth in Christ, we who are not many noble, and not many mighty, You have chosen the common things, the base things, the humble things to confound the mighty. We thank You for the simple trust in Christ that redeems. We thank you for the simple truth of the gospel that one incarnate came into the world, God in human flesh, to die as a substitute in a sacrifice for sinners. We thank You for the great reality that that death was the satisfaction of Your wrath and Your justice in order that You might forgive believing sinners. We thank You that this is so clear to us that even a child can understand, in fact, and except one become as a little child, he cannot enter the kingdom.

O Father, help us to rejoice in the fact that we will not experience the wrath to come. The elect cannot be misled and deceived no more than any charge can be laid against us, neither can any abandonment of the faith. We thank You that You have saved us and You will keep us to the end. We thank You for the words of Jesus who said, "All that the Father gives to Me shall come to Me and I have lost none of them but shall raise him up at the last day." We thank You, Father, that no matter what deceitfulness may come, Your people know You and You said, "My sheep hear My voice and they know Me and they follow Me." Lord, it's not because of us but because of You. We thank You that You've saved us from this that is to come, but, Lord, there are so many who need to hear the message. We don't understand how the ultimate decision of Your eternal sovereignty connects up with the responsibility of the sinner, but we do understand one thing very clearly, and that is we're to go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature and to call men to faith. And we also understand that whoever comes to You will not be cast out.

And may You bring many sinners to repentance. May many escape the final wrath, the final deception, the damning deception of all those who will be plunged by the returning Christ into the lake of fire. And make us ever faithful and hopeful for His glorious return. We feel like John who in knowing this felt both the bitterness and the sweet, bitterness over the death of sinners, sweetness over the return of the Savior. And so as we close tonight, it is with sweetness that we anticipate the coming of our Christ. And we ask these things, petitions for faithfulness and joy and hope in the name of our coming King. Amen.

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