

LESSON 7A

THE END OF THE MYSTERY

BY RAY C. STEDMAN

In Chapter 10 of Revelation we come face to face with several mysteries that have confused many from time to time. I suppose there are millions of people on earth this morning that struggle with the mystery of a silent heaven. Why doesn't God explain what is going on? It must seem to many that he is unconcerned, and, perhaps, even unable to do anything, about human affairs. Evil seems to run rampant everywhere. Miscarriages of justice, cruelty, viciousness, and increasing crime are on every side. You only have to listen to the news broadcasts to know how rotten things are in many places of the world today. People are asking,

- "Why do we live in a world like this?"
- "Why doesn't God do something about it?"
- "What is wrong with a God who cannot run the world any better than this?"

Those are the questions we face in this chapter.

When we looked at Chapters 8 and 9 we saw certain horrendous disasters that are yet to come upon the world. Perhaps we feel the need of some encouragement at this point. The Spirit of God always anticipates such need and has given us in Chapters 10 and most of Chapter 11 another intermission, a kind of parenthesis that comes in between the judgments of the sixth and seventh trumpets. We have already noted that in these series of judgments (*the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls of the wrath of God*) there is always a break between the sixth and seventh judgment. That is what we have come to in the trumpet series.

Chapter 10 presents three mysterious things. We shall look at:

1. The mystery of the mighty angel whom John sees as the chapter opens;
2. Then the mystery of God which the angel proclaims; and, finally,
3. The mystery of the little scroll that is held in the angel's hand.

Let us give our attention to the first 4 verses of Chapter 10.

Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down." {Rev 10:1-4 NIV}

There are certain clues given in this symbolic book that identify this angel as the "Angel of the Lord," or the "Angel of Yahweh;" the great angel who accompanied Israel through their wilderness wanderings. This Angel always appears when Israel comes to the forefront of God's program. That is an indication here to help us identify where we are and what is happening at this time.

This great Angel comes "robed in a cloud." A cloud is characteristic again of the nation Israel. Remember that when Israel was marching through the desert they were preceded by a cloud by day and followed by a pillar of fire by night. Actually the same cloud came to the rear at night and was lighted

from some kind of fire within so that it appeared as a glowing, brilliant pillar. Later, when the tabernacle was completed, and later still when the temple was built, this same cloud came down and filled the Holy of Holies. It was called the Shekinah, the cloud of glory, an indication of the presence of God. So right from the start we have a clue that identifies this Angel as the Lord himself, Jesus, God the Son, appearing as the Angel of Jehovah.

Then we learn he has a rainbow above his head. We last saw a rainbow in Chapter 4 of this book, around the throne of God. The Angel's face, we are told, was "like the sun," and "his legs [actually, the word is feet] were like fiery pillars." That takes us back to Chapter 1 where John saw the vision of Jesus standing amid the churches. John describes his face as shining like the sun and his feet were like burnished, glowing bronze. Here, as John watched, he saw the Angel plant one foot upon the land and the other upon the sea, so that he stood astride the earth as a giant colossus. This symbolizes, of course, his ownership of the entire earth. Here is the rightful owner of earth, standing like a great colossus, claiming the earth for himself.

The last clue is that he "roared like a lion." This goes back to the scene in Chapter 4 where we saw the slain Lamb who is also the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He roars in triumph over the earth. So once again we have indications that Israel is coming into view again as God's people whom he desires to use in a special way throughout the period of judgment of the last days and to continue on into the establishment of the kingdom after the return of Jesus.

This scene must have been a great encouragement to John. It is also to us because it helps us see that all these cosmic events affecting earth are still under the firm control of the Angel of God. He is working out everything that happens on his own timetable. This mighty Angel should forever remove from our minds the concept we frequently have of angels as rather effeminate creatures who pluck languidly on harps. That is not what an angel is in Scripture. I like the way Eugene Peterson describes them: "Vast, fiery, sea-striding creatures, with hell in their nostrils and heaven in their eyes." That is more like it!

To the roar of this Angel, seven great peals of thunder reply. John heard what they uttered and was about to write it down, he tells us, when there came another voice that said, "Do not write it, but seal it up." By the way, that is the only part of Revelation which still remains sealed. The rest has been unsealed for our benefit, but this utterance is sealed up again. Would you like to know what the seven thunders said? Well, I have been studying this for many hours and days. I have been reading all the commentators. I have even searched through Ron Ritchie's notes (which did not take long), and I want to tell you: It has not been revealed! Only John knows what the seven thunders uttered. But thunder is always a symbol of the judgment of God, so it is something to do with judgment. I do not know why it was sealed. John does not tell us. Perhaps he did not know himself. He simply obeyed what he was told to do.

If you want a possible clue as to what these seven thunders declared I would refer you to Psalm 29. In that Psalm, seven times the voice of the Lord thunders over the earth in judgment. Check it out and you may gain some clue as to what these seven thunders in Revelation said. But for now it is sealed to us. It is not going to happen right away. The Apostle Paul tells us in Second Corinthians 12 that there was a time when he, too, was caught up into heaven, and heard, he says, "things which were unlawful to repeat," {cf, 2 Cor 12:4 KJV}. Thus there is truth from God that he does not want us yet to know. It is not that he will not tell us in time, but not yet. Deuteronomy 29:29 tells us, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever." That is why we are to study carefully the things already revealed in the word of God.

This brings us to the mystery of God himself, found in Verses 5-7:

Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets." {Rev 10:5-7 NIV}

That gives us a glimpse of what is coming in the book of Revelation. This mighty Angel began by raising his right hand to heaven. Have you ever had to do that when you took an oath in a court, and swore to tell the truth? This is where that ritual originated. The raising of the hand looks back to this very scene in Revelation. It is a sign that a solemn oath is about to be taken. The Angel swore by God, the One who created the earth, the heaven, and the sea, and everything in them.

“But,” you say, “I thought this was Christ the Creator himself; would he swear by himself?” Yes, it is Christ. But I remind you that, in the book of Hebrews, when God wanted to swear an oath to Abraham that he would keep his promises to him, we are told that because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself. That is what Jesus is doing here. He is swearing by the triune God - - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- that there will be no longer any delay in explaining the mystery of God. God has apparently delayed for centuries in answering the questions of men.

We read in Acts that the early Christians expected Jesus to return in their day. Paul certainly expected it in his lifetime. There are many places where it is clear that they were looking for his coming two thousand years ago. Every generation of Christians in every century since has been expecting the Lord to return in their time, but he has not come yet. Today we are expecting the Lord to return, probably before this century ends, and yet he may not. But when the seventh angel sounds, the Angel says, “there will be no more delay!” Then that strange, mysterious reluctance of God to carry out what he has so long promised will not only end, but will be explained as well. That is what we may look forward to.

And when it happens, God will begin his reign on the earth. It may surprise some of you to know that God has never reigned on earth up to this point of time. He has been King over heaven and earth and the whole universe, but he has never yet reigned on earth. He has ruled on earth, and he has overruled. He governs human events, bringing them into being and changing things, but he does it, in a sense, remotely. He has never taken his great power and openly reigned upon the earth. But when the seventh angel sounds, then he will begin to reign.

If you want to see that, look ahead into Chapter 11, Verse 17. There we find the twenty-four elders praising God and saying, “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.” That is the day when the prayer we have all been praying for so long, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” will be answered. That is what is to be found in the prophets, John was told, “as he has announced to his servants the prophets.”

Among many other places, in Chapter 36 of Ezekiel there is a vivid description of just how God will begin his kingdom on earth. He will call the nation Israel back into prominence again. He will take out of them the evil heart of flesh and put his Spirit within them and forgive their sins. It is all predicted in the prophets. There are many such passages.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 11 that this truth is important. First he warns Gentile believers not to boast against Israel. There are many Christian teachers today who teach that Israel will not have a future; that all these promises of the Old Testament are to be spiritually applied to the church, and there is no future for Israel as a nation, distinct from any other nation on earth. But, when they say that, they are violating what Paul warns against in Romans 11, “Remember,” he says, “you do not support the root, but the root supports you,” {cf, Rom 11:18b NIV}. These promises belong to Israel; we Gentiles are allowed in on them by the grace of God, but they still belong primarily to Israel. In Verse 25 of that great chapter, Paul says:

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:

“The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.” {Rom 11:25-27 NIV}

That is what the prophets have long been predicting. There are at least a score or more of lengthy, clear passages that describe the return of Israel to their land and their status as the people of God, to fulfill the promises of God. Many passages

describe in lilting beauty the restoration of the earth under the reign of Christ. Listen to these words from Isaiah 35:

**Strengthen the feeble hands,
steady the knees that give way;
say to those with fearful hearts,
“Be strong, do not fear;
your God will come,
he will come with vengeance;
with divine retribution
he will come to save you.”**
**Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the dumb shout for joy.
Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert.
The burning sand will become a pool,
the thirsty ground bubbling springs.
In the haunts where jackals once lay,
grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.**
{Isa 35:3-7 NIV}

No wonder this announcement had a peculiar effect upon John.

Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: “Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.”

So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, “Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.” I took the little scroll from the angel’s hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.” {Rev 11:8-11 NIV}

The symbolism of eating the word is a way of indicating that the truth written on that scroll becomes personal. It is individually assimilated.

That is what happens when you eat food, is it not? It becomes you! It is the way by which corned beef and cabbage on Saturday night becomes Patrick O’Reilly by Sunday afternoon! Doctors call it metabolism. They do not know exactly how it works, but they label it as if they did understand it. No one really knows how it happens. The food you ate this morning, or last night, is now rapidly

becoming you. You are going to wear it soon, and it will become visible on you. (*That is the problem that many of us are facing!*) That is the symbolism here.

When a prophet eats the scroll it is a symbol that he is taking it into himself and becoming personally involved with it.

This imagery comes from the prophet Ezekiel. A very similar thing happened to Ezekiel, as we read in the second and third chapters of his prophecy. Let me read a part of it to you. The prophet says:

Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe.

And he said to me, “Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel.” So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said to me, “Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.” So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth. {Ezek 2:9-3:3 NIV}

Then Ezekiel was sent to deliver the message to Israel, and later in the chapter he says:

The Spirit then lifted me up, and I went in bitterness and in the anger of my spirit with the strong hand of the Lord upon me. {Ezek 3:14 NIV}

That is similar to what John is experiencing here. The prophecy tastes sweet at first. These are promises of God as to exactly how he will work out his purposes on earth, and there is an element of it that is wonderfully sweet. Yet as the prophet takes this in, eats it and assimilates it to become personally involved, it begins to turn sour. He realizes that he has a part of this as well, not only in the final result but in the judgments that lead to it.

Has Scripture ever dealt with you like that? You read a passage that speaks of the destiny of the believer, the wonderful promises that we are to come into a time of glory and great happiness, and you feel excited beyond description with what is waiting when God fulfills his word to you. Yet as you meditate upon it, and read further, you begin to understand

- That God has plans to change you to get you ready for that bright future,

- That you are going to be personally involved in that preparation.

There are certain cherished attitudes and biases and bigotries that you are going to have to lay aside. There are bad habits that you must give up. It is not going to be easy. You will have to “pluck out your eye” {cf, Mark 9:47} and “cut off your right hand” {cf, Mark 9:43} in order to obey what God says. That is the pain of self-involvement. There is to be anguish. There is hurt in obeying the Word of the Lord -- but it is all part of his program. That is to see the whole thing. It is part of the fulfillment of the sweetness of the promises of God.

I have noticed that many read the judgments of Revelation and are virtually unmoved. They say, “That is going to happen to people in the end times, but it does not concern me. I am part of the church. We are going to be raptured before those days, so it does not touch me.” They shrug their shoulders at these predicted judgments. But we are learning from this book that judgment does touch us, that God already has loosed judgments upon the earth and they find us right where we live. They invade our lives whether we like it or not. We flinch when the Word touches us personally, and we discover that we are part of the problem. We must be changed as well as others. The secret places of our heart must be searched out.

Recall that story of King David after his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband in order to take her for himself. He went on for a year after that, still reigning as king. He thought no one knew about it. He felt he had gotten away with it. But God spoke to the old prophet Nathan, and sent him to the king with a story of gross injustice in David’s kingdom {2 Sam 12:1, ff}. He said that he had learned of a rich man who owned a large flock of sheep. This man wanted to entertain some friends one day and he looked next door and saw his neighbor’s one little lamb that he had cherished as a household pet. Instead of taking a sheep from his own flock to feed his guests he stole his neighbor’s lamb and served it instead. When David heard this he was righteously indignant. His sense of justice was aroused. Angrily he said, “Tell me who it is, and I will take care of him.” The old prophet looked at him and said,

“‘Thou art the man!’ {2 Sam 12:7 KJV} That is what you did, David. You could have had as many wives as you chose (*and David already had several*) but you stole another man’s wife. You are the man I’m talking about!” David suddenly was confronted with the fact that God’s judgment had touched him as well.

Scripture occasionally does this to us. When it happened here to John, and he ate the scroll, it was sweet in his mouth but turned sour in his stomach. But only then was he given a new assignment! Verse 11 reports, “Then I was told ‘You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.’” (*By the way, the word is literally, in the Greek, “They said unto me.” Who are they? Not the great Angel. We are not told who it was, but it probably looks back to the four living creatures of Chapter 4 because they are the ones who seem to call forth the action of this book.*)

The principle illustrated here is very instructive. It means that after you have personally entered into the meaning of judgment; God has judged you as well as others; and you have felt the hand of God upon you, then, and then only, are you are prepared to speak to someone else about the program of God. John is given here the privilege of ministering again to nations and peoples and languages and kings. That new ministry covers Chapter 11, 12, 13 and 14. We are going to find a pronounced change of scene in Revelation at this point. John, as it were, is sent back over the terrible scenes of judgment to highlight, zoom in, as it were, on certain characters and personalities, and tell us more detail about them. It will involve, as it says, “peoples and nations and languages and kings.” That is going to be the theme of the next chapters of Revelation. It is all yet to come, but it was only as he entered personally into the searchings of God that he is prepared to speak with impact to others.

The last verse of the great hymn “May the Mind of Christ My Savior” is surely the message for this hour:

*May his beauty rest upon me,
As I seek the lost to win.
And, may they forget the channel,
Seeing only Him.*

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LESSON 7B

THE LAST WARNING

BY RAY C. STEDMAN

Recently I enjoyed seeing the stage production of “Les Miserables” in San Francisco. I had read Victor Hugo’s novel in a somewhat torturous experience of French when I was in college, but I did not remember anything but the main plot. The most memorable thing I learned was that the French do not care what you do as long as you pronounce it properly! But when I saw the play it all came to life. The characters took on real flesh and blood. We were transported back to the stirring days following the French Revolution as the vivid staging of the play recaptured many colorful scenes from that novel.

You may experience something of the same as we come to Revelation 11. Amidst the terrible judgments that are being poured out, the seals that are being opened, the trumpets that are blasting, we now turn to a more intimate scene. We zoom in, as it were, on certain personalities and characters on the stage of the last days which appear in flesh and blood. We learn more about how the program of God is going to be advanced and through whom it will be carried out.

As we have already seen, Chapter 11 is part of the interlude or intermission between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpets. The Apostle John is given a new assignment at this point. Last week we saw that, at the close of Chapter 10, he was given a little scroll of prophecy to eat. John ate the scroll, and that act of eating symbolized his becoming personally involved with God’s program of restoration in the last days. From this point on in Revelation John is no longer a mere observer; now he must become part of the action.

So, in Verses 1-3 of Chapter 11, John says:

I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, “Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count [or measure] the worshipers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles [or, as it is sometimes translated, “nations”]. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months.” {Rev 11:1-3 NIV}

The act of measuring a certain area is clearly a symbolic action. In the prophecies of Ezekiel and Zechariah, and even later on in Revelation, there are instances of measuring that occur. It is, of course, a sign of God’s ownership. He is claiming the measured object as his to use, either for blessing or for judgment. That is the way we use measurement today. If you have a dispute with your neighbor over a property line, what do you do? You hire a surveyor who measures the property and establishes the boundaries. So here God has given the prophet a measuring rod with which he measures the temple and the altar, and even the worshipers who come there. But he is told to exclude the outer court of the temple.

It is clear that this is an earthly temple. Previously in the book we have seen a temple opened in heaven. There is a temple in heaven, the same temple that Moses saw when he was on Mount Sinai and was told to make an exact copy of that temple in building the tabernacle. But even the heavenly temple is symbolic for it pictures the true dwelling-place of God. At the end of this book we are going to see unmistakable evidence that the dwelling-place of God is man! We believers are the temple of God. Paul says so in his First Corinthian letter:

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you?” {cf, 1 Cor 6:19 NIV}. We become the ultimate dwelling-place of God in his universe. That heavenly temple symbolizes the enormous dignity that God has conferred upon our race that we should be ultimately and for all time his dwelling-place.

But that temple in heaven, symbolic as it is of our humanity, is also pictured in the physical temple on earth. It is clear from the mention of “the holy city” here that this is a temple in Jerusalem. At the present moment there is no temple in Jerusalem. The last temple was destroyed when General Titus, the son of the Emperor Vespasian, came in 70 A. D. and surrounded the city with Roman armies, subjecting it to terrible cruelty. The siege was so severe that the people of the city ate their own children in order to survive. At last the Romans broke through the defenses of the Jews and completely demolished the temple. There has never been a temple there since. At the moment there are two buildings on that mountain top (*Mt. Moriah*). One is the Islamic Al-Aksa mosque, and the other, the most prominently visible building, is called the Dome of the Rock. It is the building with the golden dome and the bright blue sides that is the center of interest in almost all pictures of Jerusalem.

These buildings constitute a problem to the rebuilding of the temple. Since 1967, when the Jews recaptured the old city of Jerusalem, the Muslims have been allowed complete control of the worship on the Temple Mount. Neither Jews nor Christians are permitted to worship there now, only Muslims. A couple of years ago, in company with a Jewish friend, I went up on the temple mount and we tried to read the Bible and pray. Immediately we were spotted by Islamic guards who refused to let us continue because the Temple Mount is given over to the Muslims by the Jewish authorities. Islam regards it as the third most sacred site of their faith. Thus it becomes a real obstacle to any effort to construct a temple again on that site.

As a matter of fact, most of the Jews that we have known in the Holy Land (*and many Jews everywhere in the world today*) consider it necessary to destroy somehow the Dome of the Rock in order to rebuild the Jewish temple on that site. But in the last 10

years a godly Jewish engineer (*and a personal friend of some here*), Asher Kauffman, has done exhaustive work in locating exactly where the ancient temple was built. He has discovered and proved to the satisfaction of a great many people that the temple was not built on the spot where the Dome of the Rock stands, but it actually was built just north of the Dome, in what is still an open, uncovered area, occupied only by a small shrine called the “Dome of the Spirits.” If he is right, and there is a great deal of evidence that confirms that he is, it means that it would be possible for the Jewish temple to be rebuilt on Mount Moriah without destroying the Dome of the Rock.

I mention this because it is relevant to the passage before us. If the temple is built north of the Dome again, the outer court of it would include the Dome of the Rock. Some commentators on Revelation are suggesting that Verse 2, where John is told to exclude the outer court because it has been given to the Gentiles (*or the nations*) for 42 months, is a reference to that area where the Dome of the Rock stands. I do not dogmatically assert that is the case, but it is very suggestive. At any rate, according to this passage, there will be some non-Jewish control allowed of part of the temple mount for 42 months.

Now 42 months is 3-1/2 years which, as most of you mathematicians will quickly recognize, is one-half of seven years. Of course, 3-1/2 years leaves two periods possible. Which half is this: the first half of the last week or the last half? From the statements given here in this text, I suggest that it is probably the first half of the week, for that would allow for the construction of a restored Jewish temple on the top of Mount Moriah. The fascinating thing is that there are several Jewish organizations in the Holy Land who are dedicated to an almost fanatical degree to reconstructing the temple on Mount Moriah. I have met them, talked with them, visited some of the preparations they have made for this event, and I personally know this to be true.

They are, for instance, training a great host of young men to be priests in that temple. They are teaching them the ancient rituals and are preparing priestly garments for them to wear. I have seen some of these garments with my own eyes. They are

getting ready, in other words, to put a functioning temple back on the holy mount. Whether it will be done before the church is caught away in the "rapture" I do not know. It does not have to be done before that event, but also it may be rebuilt before that time. But this is why the eyes of the world are constantly focused upon the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. These two verses mark the fact that God himself is focusing upon that. He measures the temple and its altar. He says by that, "This is Mine. I intend to use it." It is a sign of his ownership in those last days.

From Verse 3 through Verse 14 of this chapter we zoom in for a close view of two important personages who move in from the wings almost totally unannounced: The great Angel says,

"I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want. {Rev 11:3-6 NIV}

In one of Paul's great messages, recorded in the book of Acts, he makes the statement that God never leaves himself without a witness. Here, in the midst of the greatest time of apostasy that the world has ever seen, God still preserves a witness. It is manifest in the form of two individuals, two men, dressed in sackcloth (burlap, for you Baby Boomers). It was the traditional garb of a prophet when he was sent to declare some threatened judgment. These two individuals appear dressed in sackcloth because their ministry is to strip away the delusions, lies, and humanistic propaganda masquerading as the truth, which come from the Man of Sin in that day.

Jesus spoke of this temple and the Man of Sin, too. He said that the sign of the last days would be "when you see the abomination that causes desolation" {Matt 24:15, Mark 13:14} standing in the holy place. The holy place is the temple, and the abomination of desolation, which Daniel had predicted, is a description of the ministry and

person of the Man of Sin, the antichrist. Paul tells us in his Second Thessalonian letter that "he will sit in the temple, magnifying himself as God," {cf, 2 Th 2:4}. So the Lord Jesus and the apostle agree that a temple will be built on Mount Moriah, and will be occupied by the one whom John calls "the antichrist" (1 John 2:18). We shall meet him again when we come to Chapter 13 for he is the beast that rises from the earth, as recorded in that chapter.

All of this is set against the dramatic background of the Man of Sin ensconced in the temple, claiming the worship of the earth for himself because, as representative man, he is really God. It is humanism raised to an infinite degree -- man is his own god. We hear a great deal of that today, but then it will be universally applauded. These two witnesses are allowed to witness for 1,260 days, i.e., 42 months, or 3-1/2 years -- half of the seven-year period. If the 42 months that the nations trample down the holy city is the first half of that period, as I think it is, then the change to 1,260 days as a time-designation here probably indicates that the witness of these two men is during the last half of the week, or throughout the great tribulation. The Lord Jesus told us that there is coming a time of trouble "such as has never been on earth before," {cf, Matt 24:21}. Even the Nazi Holocaust cannot compare to it. That will be the last 3-1/2 year period of this seven-year section. So, as these two witnesses come onto the stage, we are at the beginning of the great tribulation.

There are clues given to us now as to their identity:

First, we are told they are "two olive trees and two lampstands which stand before the Lord of the earth." It is easy to recognize the meaning of those symbols because Zechariah uses them as well. In Chapter 4 of his prophecy, we read of two olive trees that drip their oil into two lampstands as a witness to Israel in the prophet's day. In connection with that witness occurs the famous oft-quoted passage, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord," {Zech 4:6}. So here we have two men who symbolically are like lampstands giving light in the midst of the darkness of earth. They are fed by the Spirit of God himself, for olive oil stands for the Spirit; thus their witness cannot be extinguished. They cannot be eliminated until their work is done.

They are especially protected by God for fire comes out of their mouths to destroy anyone who tries to harm them. They are human flame-throwers!

That is strongly suggestive of the ministry of Elijah the prophet. In the book of Second Samuel we are told on two different occasions concerning the ministry of Elijah that the king sent a company of fifty soldiers to take him captive. Each time fire came down from heaven and destroyed them. This suggests therefore that one of these witnesses is Elijah, returned to earth. The book of Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, predicts that very thing. Malachi says, "See, I will send the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes," {Mal 4:5 NIV}. In the gospel of Matthew, at the account of the transfiguration of Jesus, as Peter, James and John came down the mountain after seeing Moses and Elijah there with the Lord, the disciples asked Jesus, "Why do the teachers say that Elijah must come first?" Jesus said in reply, "To be sure, Elijah will come and restore all things" (Matt. 17:11), but he explained that in a sense Elijah had already come, for John the Baptist had anticipated that prediction by his ministry in the spirit and power of Elijah. That does not mean, of course, that Elijah will not yet come. He will come, as the Lord Jesus indicated clearly. So it seems certain that Elijah is one of these two witnesses.

Who is the other? There are yet more clues. These men were given power, first, to suspend all rain upon the earth. That again reminds us of Elijah who had authority from God to withhold the annual rainfall. For 3-1/2 years it did not rain in Israel until he prayed and asked God to restore rain again. The two witnesses also had power to turn the waters into blood, and to bring plagues and diseases among the people. That looks back to the ministry of Moses. When Pharaoh resisted Moses' appeal to let the people of God go, Moses turned the waters into blood and called plagues down upon the Egyptians. That is why many expositors see these two witnesses as Moses and Elijah appearing again. Some say it is Enoch and Elijah, because those are the two men of the Old Testament who never died; they were caught up into heaven without death. In some of the earliest Christian writings there is reference to Enoch and Elijah as the two witnesses. It is not definitely certain, therefore, that it is Moses here,

but for me the matter is settled when I remember that it was Moses and Elijah who appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus. Peter tells us that was a picture of the coming again of Jesus. So now that we are considering here the coming of the Lord it seems most likely that it is Moses and Elijah who are the two witnesses.

We learn more details of their ministry in Verses 7-10:

Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth. {Rev 11:7-10 NIV}

Notice the words, "when they have finished their testimony." No one can interfere until their work is done. But then "the beast from the Abyss" attacks them. That phrase "beast from the Abyss" takes us back to Chapter 9, Verse 11. There we saw the star that fell from heaven who was given a key to open the Abyss and out of it came terrible symbolic locusts. Their king, we are told, was from the Abyss. His name was Abaddon, which means "destruction," and Apollyon, which means "destroyer." It was evident, as we saw then, that this was Satan himself, the king over all the demons.

The Man of Sin, the Apostle Paul tells us, will be possessed of Satan. Just as Satan entered into Judas before his betrayal of the Lord, so Satan possesses the antichrist, this Man of Sin, whom we will learn much more of in this book. It is he who attacks these two witnesses and puts them to death. They have been a constant thorn in his side. They kept telling the truth to the people, pointing out to them what the actual program of God would be. They kept warning them that they were being deceived by the lies that were widespread in that day. This must have angered and enraged this artful propagandist who had all the world under his control except for those who believed the two witnesses. But now at last he is allowed to kill them.

Remarkably, that is the cause of a great celebration on earth. Even today when non-believers accomplish something that delights them they say, "Let's party!" Partying is the only way they know to celebrate -- and a great celebration breaks out in Jerusalem at that time. They refuse to bury these two men but gloat over their death and display their bodies for all the world to see. This seems to foresee the technology of television, for every nation, tribe, language and people gaze upon the dead bodies of these two witnesses. The city is here called "Sodom and Egypt;" Sodom, because of its corruption, and Egypt, because of its persecution. Yet it is clearly identified as the city "where the Lord was crucified." It is ironic that the hatred of the world against the cause of Christ reveals itself in a great party where people actually give gifts to each other, as at Christmas, in celebration of the deaths of these two witnesses who had been such a painful rebuke to their sinful practices.

But God always has the last word, and in Verses 11-14 we learn what that is:

But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on.

At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon. {Rev 11:11-14 NIV}

Like their Lord before them, these two witnesses are privileged to pass through the same experience that he went through, in the same place -- the city of Jerusalem. They are cruelly killed, as he was killed, and are resurrected 3-1/2 days later, and ascend into heaven before the eyes of this startled crowd. Terror shivers through them as they watch. Twice we are told of the shaken fear they experienced. They feel the chill of their own defeat in what they see. Who can oppose a God of resurrection power? The worst anyone can do, Jesus said, is to put you to death, but after that, he declared, there is nothing more they can do. Not even death can hinder the carrying out

of God's program!

The wonderful truth taught us here is that this is the destiny of everyone who believes in Jesus. We shall all die, except those that are caught up at the end, and even they are changed in the twinkling of an eye. If we die we shall be resurrected, and shall ascend into heaven to be with the Lord forever. So this is also the destiny of the two faithful witnesses. We need not be surprised that God takes care of his own this way, for he does this for all those who trust in Christ. It is also not surprising that "these who live on the earth" should feel terror when this happens. Who can defeat a God of resurrection? It brings to mind John Donne's splendid words:

*Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and Dreadful, for thou art not so.*

*For those whom thou dost think to overthrow,
Die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me!*

The hope of believers throughout the ages is that death cannot claim us finally. It must itself feel its own death in the lake of fire to come.

That brings us again to the end of man's last rule on earth. A massive earthquake immediately strikes, just as it did at the crucifixion of Jesus and still again at his resurrection. It is centered now on Jerusalem. A tenth of the city collapses, and 7000 people die. There are other passages in the prophets that predict this same formidable earthquake. In Zechariah 14, the prophet announces that the Messiah will stand upon the Mount of Olives and when his feet touch the mountain it will separate in half. Half will move to the north and half to the south to create a great valley between. One can easily imagine what a massive earthquake like that would do to modern Jerusalem, with its population of almost a million people.

There is little doubt that this is literal since the largest earthquake fault on earth runs just east of Jerusalem, down the valley of the Jordan River. It is called the "Great Rift Valley," and it extends under the Dead Sea into Africa. It is the valley where the great African lakes, Lake Victoria, Lake Nyansa, and others are found. It is the line where the African continent butts up against Asia. We are familiar these days with the theory of continental drift and the movement of tectonic plates upon which the continents rest, so it is quite understandable that

this would take place exactly as described.

Immediately, the seventh angel sounds his trumpet. It brings us to the end of the trumpet series which is also the same end to which the seals and bowls bring us. Let us see what happens:

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.”

And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying:

“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, {Rev 11:15-17a NIV}

Notice the NIV properly omits the usual third phrase “and who is to come” Why? Because he has already come at this point!

“because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry; and your wrath has come.

The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name both small and great -- and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”

Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumbling, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm. {Rev 11:17b-19 NIV}

We have seen these sights and sounds twice before. They mark the end of the tribulation period and the beginning of the millennium. These angelic voices proclaim the beginning of the reign of Christ on earth. They worship him because he has taken his great power and begun to reign, first, upon the earth for a period of a thousand years, as Chapter 20 of this book will tell us plainly. Then there will follow a brief rebellion, and then begins the new heavens and the new earth where Jesus continues his reign forever and ever, as this passage declares.

Verse 18 is a condensed review of the tribulation and the whole millennial period. It begins with the anger and rebellion of the nations: “The nations were angry and your wrath has come.” That looks back to Daniel’s 70th week. Psalm 2 describes the same events.

Why do the nations rage and the peoples imagine a vain thing?

The kings of the earth set themselves and their leaders take counsel together against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, “Let us break their chains asunder and cast their bonds off from us.” {cf, Psa 2:1-3 KJV}

That describes the great rebellion of the last days. How will God answer? “The day of his wrath has come,” but it is also the day of judging the dead and rewarding his servants and the saints, both small and great, who honor the Lord. We learn from other Scriptures that the dead are raised at the beginning of the tribulation period. Paul describes it in First Thessalonians Chapter 4: the rapture of the church. Then at the end of the thousand-year reign of the millennium, there is another raising of the dead -- the wicked dead who stand before the great white throne judgment. We will come to that later in the book.

Throughout this whole period the servants of God are being rewarded. Here is where we must insert the picture of Matthew 25, where Jesus says, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory he will sit on his throne and all the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate the sheep from the goats,” {Matt 25:31-32 NIV}. He is judging the professed believers of that time, those who claim to be Christians. Remember the basis of his judgment? It is how people react to the helpless, the hopeless and the homeless. “Did you feed them?” he will ask. “Did you give them to drink? Did you take them in? Did you clothe them? Did you visit them when they were in prison? Inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these, you have done it unto me,” {cf, Matt 25:33-46}. It is at the beginning of the millennium that this great judgment occurs.

Finally, we are told that God’s temple in heaven is opened and the ark of the covenant is seen there. Don’t look around for Indiana Jones! He was looking for the copy of this ark, but the true ark of the covenant is safely there in heaven as a guarantee that God has not forgotten his people Israel. The ark of the covenant always relates to that nation, so Chapters 12-14 will bring Israel again before us. For the third time we shall retrace these last 3-1/2 years of the tribulation until we come again to the lightnings, the rumblings, the peals of thunder, the

great earthquake and hailstorm when the seven bowls of wrath are poured out in Chapters 15-16.

What a privilege God has given us to be able to read the last chapters of the history of the earth! You can read ahead and see where it is all going to end. The time is coming, this book teaches us, when Jesus shall reign

- All drug traffic will cease,
- All abortion mills will be closed
- Divorce will be unheard of
- Families will live together in beauty, peace and harmony,
- Wars will cease throughout the earth,
- Crime statistics will drop to zero,
- Sex scandals will never be known,
- Truth shall be taught again in the schools, and
- Many politicians and lawyers will have to find honest work!

In the beautiful words of Scripture: "Righteousness will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea!" {cf, Isa 11:9, Hab 2:14}. Let us not lose hope, but encourage one another with the certainty of the glory to come.

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LESSON 7C

WOMAN AND THE SERPENT

BY RAY C. STEDMAN

If any of you are immigrants to this country and you entered through the port of New York, you will remember that the first sight you had of this land was of a great statue of a woman holding a torch in her upheld arm. That was not an advertisement for underarm deodorant! It was the Statue of Liberty, a symbol of the freedom that America enjoys.

Chapter 12 of the book of Revelation also opens with the symbol of a woman. In fact there are three symbols here:

- The woman
- Her son, and
- A great red dragon.

It is our business this morning to try to interpret these and to understand what John was shown in this vision.

A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. {Rev 12:1-6 NIV}

The question that leaps at us from these verses is, “What is meant by these great signs? What or

whom do they symbolize?”

Two of them are relatively easy to identify, and once we find who those two are the third one will be unmistakable. The dragon is the easiest to identify, because later, in Verse 9, we are told exactly who he is. The verse says, “The great dragon was hurled down -- that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.” Here, then, is the devil, appearing as a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns upon his heads. We are also told that he is the ancient serpent, the very one who appeared in the Garden of Eden to Eve, deceived her, and introduced sin into the human race. He appears here as a dragon, which is simply a super-serpent and a symbol of satanic worship in many countries of the world yet today.

His work is described also in Verse 9: The entire career of the devil is engaged in deceiving the whole inhabited earth, i.e. lying to the human race. We will see much more of this as we go on in this book.

The male child that is born to the woman is the next easiest to identify because we are told in Verse 5 that he is the one “who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter,” or “a rod of iron.” Many of you will recognize that the latter phrase is taken from the Second Psalm, which is quoted or referred to four different times in Revelation. In some ways Psalm 2 is the basic Scripture out of which the whole book is expanded and grows. The psalm speaks of God establishing his kingdom on his holy hill of Zion: “I will set my King on my holy hill of Zion” {Psa 2:6 KJV}, and “he will rule the nations with a rod of iron,” {cf, Psa 2:9 KJV}. Clearly that is a reference to our Lord Jesus.

The reference to a rod of iron always indicates a millennial scene, the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. He reigns with a rod of iron (with strict justice), because, though it is a time of worldwide blessing and prosperity and the curse is at least partially removed from nature, it is also a time when sin is still manifest to some degree. Righteousness reigns in the earth, but it has to be enforced. We will see more of that too as we go on in this book. When we come to the new heavens and the new earth, which John will be shown in the closing two chapters of this book, then Christ no longer reigns with a rod of iron because sin has been fully dealt with; nothing evil will enter that scene at all. There he appears as a tender, loving Shepherd, ministering to his people personally and showing great kindness to them.

This brings us to the identity of the woman. Who is this strange woman who appears clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and twelve stars in a crown around her head?

The Roman Catholics say it is Mary, since she was the mother of Jesus, as this account shows the symbolic woman to be. But the problem with that theory is that there is no way you can fit Mary into Verse 6! There we learn that "the woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days." That never happened to Mary, and it never will. This is not a picture of an individual but rather of a group of people.

Some commentators say she symbolizes the church. The church is pictured at the close of Revelation as the bride of Christ, i.e. as a woman. But it is impossible for this woman to represent the church because the church did not produce Jesus. It is quite the other way around. It was the Lord who produced the church -- the church is born out of the wounded side of Jesus. Therefore that symbolism does not fit the picture here.

We must, therefore, look at the clues that are given us to know the identity of this woman. She is clothed with the sun, the moon is under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars around her head. The only other place where those three symbols are used together in this way is in Genesis 37, the story of Joseph as a young boy who has a dream. He dreamt

one night that the sun, the moon and 11 stars came and bowed down before him. He made the mistake of telling his dream to his father and mother and his brothers, and they were very upset by it. His father rightly interpreted it to mean that Joseph was to be exalted in some way, and the whole family would come and bow down before him. We know from subsequent history that this actually did happen. Joseph became the second ruler of Egypt and his father and mother and his 11 brothers all came and bowed down before him.

It is clearly then a description of the nation of Israel. (*Joseph would make the twelfth of the stars.*) The Apostle Paul says of the Jews in Romans 9:5: "To them is traced the human ancestry of Christ." It was Israel that humanly brought forth the Christ. That is why Jesus told the woman at the well of Samaria, "Salvation is from the Jews," {John 4:22 KJV}. It comes to Gentiles by that route. So the woman here is Israel, brought to prominence again. As one commentator well describes it, "Thus she is seen clothed with the glory of the sun -that is of Christ himself as He will presently appear in supreme power as the Son of Righteousness (Mal 4:2); for the sun is the ruler of the day. As a consequence, her glory of old before the day -- dawn, the reflected light of her typical system, is like the moon under her feet. Upon her head the crown of 12 stars speaks naturally of her twelve tribes, planets now around the central sun."

In order to understand this chapter we must remember that we are being shown earthly scenes from heaven's point of view. In Chapter 4 John was caught up to heaven and shown all the things that follow in Chapters 4 to 19. And when you look at earthly events from heaven's standpoint, time is never a factor; it is not a question of sequence or chronology but simply of occurrence. In this chapter there is a telescoping together of events that were widely separated in time. From heaven's point of view we are shown *what* happens, not *when* it happens. If you will remember that, this chapter will make sense.

Along with the woman and her son is the great red dragon, this fantastic, fire-breathing serpent who has seven heads, ten horns and seven crowns. It sounds like a monster movie, does it not? I am

not going to interpret those seven heads, ten horns and seven crowns at this point because in the next chapter this dragon will appear again in a slightly different role which will have significance for us, and I will leave the interpretation for that chapter. It is enough at this point to see this great dragon crouched, watching Israel intently and ready to devour her long-promised Son when he makes his appearance on earth.

In point of time, this takes us back to the birth of Jesus, to the days of the Roman Empire and its subjugation of Israel, and to the time of King Herod the Great and his enmity against this predicted birth. We can easily see that the events of that time are symbolized here for us. Already we are told that the dragon swept a third of the stars from the sky with his tail. Now we have seen already in Revelation that stars, used symbolically, are pictures of prominent leaders among men, specifically here among Israel. In Isaiah 9, that great prophetic chapter, the prophet says specifically, "The prophets who teach lies are the tail" {Isa 9:15b NIV} -- i.e. the means by which Satan exercises his deceiving and destructive work. So in this symbolic action the stars are captured by the tail of the serpent (*lying prophets*) and cast to earth. It is a symbol of the leaders of Israel, deceived by their own teachers and prophets, who fall from their moral position before God. The dragon of world power of that day, the Roman Empire, waits to destroy the Son through its puppet king, Herod the Great, when the child is born. We know how God prevented that from happening. Historically, Joseph and Mary took Jesus on a secret flight to Egypt and thus evaded the enmity of Herod. Here it is reported that the child was "snatched up to God and to his throne." The symbol jumps from the birth of Jesus to his ascension some 30 years later, skipping over his life and ministry, his death and resurrection. John is shown the birth of our Lord and his ascension into heaven, the beginning and ending of his earthly ministry.

But there arises a problem here in understanding this because the ascension of Jesus, as recorded at the end of the Gospels and in the opening of Acts, was not in order that he might escape harm from his enemies on earth. The resurrected Lord was far beyond his enemies' reach by that time -- they could do him no harm. So there is no need for Jesus

to ascend into heaven in order to escape the wrath of the dragon.

But -- and here is where it gets a bit tricky -- there is an aspect of our Lord which found deliverance from danger by being snatched away into heaven. How many of you have guessed what it is? It is the church, of course. All through the New Testament the church and the Lord are regarded as one. Remember when Saul was converted on the Damascus Road Jesus appeared and said to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" {cf, Acts 9:4}. Paul was actually persecuting the church, but Jesus said, "That is me!" In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes, "The body of Christ is a unit. It is made up of many parts but it is one body -," {1 Cor 12:12a NIV}. And then he added this significant phrase: " -- so also is Christ," {1 Cor 12:12b KJV}. The church and the Lord are together the body of Christ. So the whole history of the church is involved here, including the rapture. It is interesting that the term used here for the child is that he was snatched up to God. That is the very term that is used for the rapture of the church. It is the Great Snatch! That is what the young people used to call it in the Body Life times of the '60s -- the Great Snatch, the rapture of the church, to occur before the dragon begins his persecuting work. Verse 6 carries us forward to this time. There is an eclipse of centuries here covering the whole church age. The woman, we are told, fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days, which places this at the beginning of the great tribulation.

Suddenly the scene changes. We are led to look away from earth to heaven, to a scene of conflict, invisible to earth but taking place in heaven.

And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down -- that ancient serpent called the devil [*the accuser*] or Satan, [*the adversary*] who leads the whole world astray. {Rev 12:7-9 NIV}

This is the first reference to Michael in this book. Who is this Michael? We can tell by what he is doing. He is not rowing his boat ashore but he is fighting against the great red dragon. The

prophet Daniel was told, “Michael is the great prince who stands for your people Israel,” {cf, Dan 12:1}. Unmistakably, Israel is in the forefront here, symbolized by the woman -- the believing remnant of Israel.

From this scene we can draw the conclusion that up to these last days of history Satan has access to heaven. In the book of Job he appears before God and requests permission to assault the body of Job. In the book of Zechariah he is also seen accusing the saints of God before God, in heaven. And Paul tells us in Ephesians 6 that we believers today “do not wrestle against flesh and blood” {cf, Eph 6:12 KJV}, i.e. other people are not really our problem. It is what the devil is doing to people that makes them oppose us; it is through wicked spirits which he calls “spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places,” {Eph 6b NIV}. So throughout this present age Satan still has access to heaven.

But at this point of Daniel’s seventieth week, God has had enough of the presence of the devil in heaven. He sends Michael, the great archangel, with his angels, and together they force the devil and his angels out of heaven and hurl him to the earth. We have already seen a description of this in symbol in Chapter 9:1, where we saw a great star fall from heaven onto the earth, and from it emerged one who came from the bottomless pit. Other accounts of this fall of Satan are to be found in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14.

In the next verses the reaction of heaven to this casting out of the devil is recounted.

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

“Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.

They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. [That is a rather awkward translation. It should say, “They did not love their lives unto death.”]

Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.” {Rev 12:10-12 NIV}

This loud voice that the apostle hears seems to come from the martyrs of Chapter 6 who were given white robes, and who are seen under the altar crying out to God, “How long, O Lord, before you avenge our blood upon the earth?” {Rev 6:10 NIV}. They are the ones who now rejoice that the devil has been cast out of heaven. They speak of the “accuser of our brothers who accuses them before our God day and night.” The “brothers” here would be the believing Jews, the remnant of Israel, who are yet on earth during those days. The white-robed saints in heaven announce that the time has come for the Lord to reign over the kingdom long ago promised to Israel.

Verse 11 is very important because it shows how the saints of any age can overcome the wiles of the devil. We too are assaulted by the devil continually. Lies and misleading propaganda pour into our ears from every side today. Philosophies that are wrong and hurtful are widely believed. We are being accused before the presence of God, and in our own hearts we hear these accusations by the devil. We need to know how to answer. There are three steps to take:

First, “they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb.” Have you ever heard the devil accusing you? Did you ever hear in your inner ear a voice saying, “What kind of a Christian are you? Look at the way you have acted. God could never love you! What makes you think you are acceptable in his sight? You are a mess!” How do you handle that? According to this text you ought to admit it. It is true. We mess up all the time. We believe lies, we act selfishly, we are malicious and self-indulgent at times, we hurt others thoughtlessly. It is all true. Admit it! But then, remind the devil of the blood of the Lamb, the cross of Christ. There on that cross Jesus bore our sins so that we are no longer to be judged or even accused before God. That is why Paul can say in Romans 8, “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!” {Rom 8:1 NIV}. Years ago I ran across a wonderful poem written by a dear, godly woman whom I had met. She describes her own experience in these terms:

*I sinned, and straightway, posthaste, Satan flew
Before the presence of the Most High God,
And made a railing accusation there.*

*He said, "This soul, this thing of clay and sod,
Has sinned. 'Tis true that he has named thy Name,
But I demand his death, for Thou hast said,
'The soul that sinneth, it shall die.' Shall not
Thy sentence be fulfilled? Is Justice dead?
Send now this wretched sinner to his doom.
What other thing can righteous ruler do?'
And thus he did accuse me day and night.
And every word he spoke, O God, was true!
Then quickly One rose up from God's right hand
Before whose glory angels veiled their eyes.
He spoke, 'Each jot and tittle of the Law
Must be fulfilled; the guilty sinner dies!
But wait!
Suppose his guilt were all transferred To Me,
and that I paid his penalty.
Behold, my hands, my side, my feet! One day
I was made sin for him, and died that he
Might be presented faultless at Thy throne."
And Satan flew away. Full well he knew
That he could not prevail against such love,
For every word my dear Lord spoke was true!"*

That is the meaning of the blood of the Lamb. There is no way to handle Satan, and avoid the guilt and shame of which he accuses us, without resting upon the work of the Cross, the blood of the Lamb! When Jesus makes you a new creature, Satan can accuse you only of something that is past and gone.

The blood of Christ is sufficient for your own problems with guilt, but how do you help others? There are millions of people today whose lives are lonely, empty and fear-ridden. All around us they are trying to overcome some inner sense of guilt or shame. They seek to lose themselves in pleasure, drugs, alcohol, sex, or whatever. How do you help them? The answer is, "by the word of their testimony." Christians need to share with others the freedom into which Christ has brought them. How many among us here have come to Christ because some person you had been watching told you one day that at the cross he or she found forgiveness of sins, and that you could have that, too? They witnessed of the joy and peace the Lord had brought into their life -- it was "by the word of their testimony" that you came to Christ.

Third, Satan was overcome because "they loved not their lives unto death." They would give up anything but Christ. They cared more for his honor and truth than all their possessions, all their status before men -- even their own lives! It was apparent from their actions that nothing was worth more to them than Christ's presence in their lives. They would rather die than deliberately to bring shame to his name. That is the way to overcome Satan. It means that you have not only exercised faith in the blood of the cross, and love towards others who are bound by Satan's lies, but also you are laying hold of the hope of a Christian -- the fact that death is rendered meaningless because you have been promised an inheritance beyond.

Faith, hope, and love! Have you heard those words before? That is the way to overcome the great enemy!

Now that causes great rejoicing in heaven, as these words reveal -- but increased pressure for those left on earth! The devil is enraged by this resistance. He realizes that his time is short. In just 3-1/2 years he is going to be bound and thrown into a bottomless pit. So he moves quickly and the final events follow immediately. When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time (*one year, plus two years, plus half a year = 3-1/2 years*), out of the serpent's reach. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring -- those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

We must realize that this woman does not represent the whole nation of Israel -- all the Jews on the earth -- but she is really a representation of the remnant, the believing part of Israel in those days. Already there have been judgments upon the Jews, as promised in the prophets. This is "the

time of Jacob's trouble," and the apostates have been eliminated; only the remnant escapes here. Many think they will flee to the city of Petra, south of the Dead Sea, that strange, rock-hewn city that some of you have visited. Perhaps that may be the place. I am not sure.

But the point made here is the care of God over this believing remnant. They are "borne on eagle's wings." That is the very phrase God employs when the nation, led by Moses, comes out of Egypt. God says, "Have I not borne you on eagle's wings and taken care of you in the wilderness?" So it is a picture of God's loving protection and care of the remnant of his people in that day.

A "river of water" is very likely a symbol for the huge host of soldiers that were sent by the Antichrist after Israel. We have seen that symbolism before. But the very earth protects her. It is probably a reference to the natural disasters that occur during these days -- earthquakes, a hailstorm, and such, that we have seen several times before in the book of Revelation. They divert the attention of Satan so that he cannot pursue this woman to destroy her, but instead he turns his attention to what are called here "the rest of her offspring."

That would mean they are also Jews, and are identified as those who "obey God's commandments and hold fast the testimony of Jesus." I believe that to be a reference to the special band of 144,000 Jews that we first met in Chapter 7, and will meet again in Chapter 14. "Christ's commandos" we called them, who move throughout the earth, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom to all the nations. The devil gives his final attention to this group because of their witness to the world.

That brings us to the close of Chapter 12.

Next week we shall come face to face with the two great antichristian powers that the devil will use in that day. I am sure that you have been struck, as I have, with the swiftly moving pace of world events today. Things are happening with breathtaking speed. Even the secular prophets are amazed. It is almost like moving on a river that is approaching a cataract. As we near the cascade the current speeds up. We may well be coming close to the days described here.

The great question that this chapter leaves hanging before us is: "How are you doing in your personal battle with Satan? Have you learned to overcome him, to live as an overcomer in the midst of the declensions and the desperate conditions of this day?"

That is the great question we must each answer. We can overcome him only by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of our testimony, and by loving not our lives unto death. Nothing should be more important to us than the ministry our Lord has given to us in this day, to live within our families and before the world as he enables us to live.

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LESSON 7D

WHEN MEN BECOME BEASTS

BY RAY C. STEDMAN

The thirteenth chapter of Revelation brings before us the most famous number in the world - 666. If you get that number on your license plate or on your credit card it sends shivers of fear down your spine! I learned this morning that a couple from this congregation had that as their house number. They were so disturbed they asked the city to change the number, which they did. Six hundred sixty six has become a sinister number in the eyes of many. Several movies have been based upon the powerful mystery connected with it. In this passage we will learn the secret of that strange number and of the beasts that are identified with it.

In Chapter 12, the Apostle John saw a great red dragon with seven heads, ten horns and seven crowns, which was clearly identified as a manifestation of Satan. Now, in Chapter 13, John sees a further manifestation of that same beast.

And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound; but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?" {Rev 13:1-4 NIV}

John saw this beast rising out of the sea, which, as we have seen several times in Revelation, is a symbol of the Gentile nations of the ancient world.

This appearance is another manifestation of Satan as a worldwide evil power on the earth. In Chapter 12 the beast represented the Roman Empire of the 1st century and was the instrument of the devil to try to destroy the man-child that was born to the woman who symbolized Israel, i.e., Jesus himself. Here we see the same beast arising at a different time of history.

If you will read the seventh chapter of the prophet Daniel, you will find it ties closely to this chapter in Revelation. In that chapter, Daniel, too, saw beasts rising out of the sea, four of them. One was like a lion, another like a bear, and a third was like a leopard, the same symbols we find employed here by John. Along with those three beasts, Daniel saw a fourth beast, powerful but different looking than the other beasts, and with ten horns. In many ways, therefore, it was identical with the beast that John saw here.

We learn in Daniel that the beasts he saw represented the four great world empires of his day and following:

- First was Babylon, like a lion;
- Then Medo-Persia, like a bear; and
- Then Greece, like a leopard with four heads. John picks up these same concepts and sees them incorporated in this beast from the sea that appears as his vision unfolds.
- The strange fourth beast is identifiable in history as the Roman Empire, with its capital in Rome.

All of this is found combined into one beast which has, as it were, the lion-like ferocity of Babylon, the crushing bear-like power of Medo-Persia, and the swiftness of the Grecian leopard, but now appearing in the last days as a restored form of the Roman Empire, as we shall see.

I promised you that in Chapter 13 I would interpret the meaning of the horns, the heads and the crowns of this beast. A great deal more information is given to us about this beast in the 17th chapter of this book. Though I shall not attempt to expound that chapter at this point, yet I do want to turn to it and bring out some of the things that John identifies for us:

In Chapter 17 John sees a woman sitting upon the red beast. I shall not deal with the woman now, but the red beast on which she sits has seven heads and ten horns, and an angel explains to him what these symbols mean. In 17:7, John writes:

Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns. The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. [That ties in with much we have seen already in Revelation.] The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come." {Rev 17:7-8 NIV}

That plainly identifies it with the beast we are looking at in Chapter 13, where, also, the whole world is said to be astonished by what has happened to this beast.

The phrase in Chapter 17, "the beast who once was, now is not, and yet will come," seems to tie in with what we have read in Chapter 13, Verse 3, "One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed." If, as we have suggested, this beast represents the same Roman Empire that John saw before, this is telling us there will come a revived form of the empire in the world during this last seven-year period of the history of civilization. Many scholars have pointed out that the Bible predicts a restoration, what might well be called a Revised Roman Empire, to emerge in Western Europe in those days.

Again in Chapter 17, the angel goes on in Verse 9 to explain further.

"This calls for a mind with wisdom [Each of you has that, of course!]. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits." {Rev 17:9 NIV}

A little later in this chapter the woman is identified as a great city. What city sits upon seven hills? Everyone in the ancient world (*and everyone in the modern world*) knows the answer! It is Rome. Once again we have a clear indication that the city of Rome will come prominently into the picture of these last days.

Now the angel adds:

"They are also seven kings [or kingdoms]. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction." {Rev 17:10-11 NIV}

That is clear, is it not? Clear as mud! But there are some things we can identify out of this revelation. We are told concerning these seven kings, "five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come." The Roman historian, Livy, wrote that there had been five forms of Roman government up to his time.

1. Rome originally began as a loosely-connected series of regional city-states, each one governed by a king.
2. This soon fell apart and instead of kings they elected consuls.
3. As the consuls fell upon difficult times they were succeeded by dictators, leaders from the people who would rise up and take over the government.
4. These in turn were overthrown and replaced by what the Romans called decemvirs, a term that means a council of ten rulers.
5. Eventually that form, too, failed and tribunes were elected by the people to rule the land.

Those were the five forms of government that had fallen.

But John is told "one is." That would be the imperial form, the emperors of Rome, beginning with Julius Caesar, before Christ, and continuing in a long series that history records as stretching well into the 4th century.

Now, says the angel, a seventh is yet to come, and “he must remain for a little while.” Then the beast will appear. He will be one of the seven, revived, and thus constitute an eighth.

Something strange happens to it. It is called back into existence. “Its deadly wound is healed” and, thus, it makes its reappearance in history. No wonder the whole world is astonished at this revival. When we come to expound the 17th chapter in due course we shall learn some very startling things about the imperial form of Roman government.

I shall read but one more verse from Chapter 17 at the moment. In Verse 12, the angel says:

“The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. {Rev 17:12 NIV}

Bible scholars sometimes talk about a revived Roman Empire to be made up of 10 nations who will give their authority to a single individual. This satanically controlled man will rule in the geographic area of the old Roman Empire. That is why many people have been watching what is happening in Europe today, not only the ferment and upheavals of Eastern Europe, but also the changes in Western Europe, the site of the old Roman Empire. There, nations are softening their nationalistic passions and seeking to unite together in a United States of Europe. Some commentators have sought to identify this ten-kingdomed coalition with the European Common Market, or the European Economic Community (EEC). For awhile that organization did have ten members, but it has now increased to twelve or thirteen, so it is evident that it is not the actual revived empire, but it may be a predecessor. What is clear is that the direction of movement is toward the very thing we read of here. There will come a coalition of nations in Western Europe.

Let us now go back to Chapter 13, and look at the activities of this strange beast.

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months [We have seen that time-frame before]. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven [literally “those who tabernacle in heaven”]. {Rev 13:5-6 NIV}

Blasphemy is not cursing. When you hear someone rip off a round oath that is not blasphemy. It is cursing. Blasphemy is to claim godlike powers, to claim to be God, or to identify God with lesser persons or objects. Idolatry, for instance, is blasphemy. That is what this individual becomes guilty of. He blasphemes God by claiming to have the powers of God, as we have seen. It would also involve an attack upon those who do not accept his claims. He ridicules and slanders those who do believe in God and in heaven (*the unseen spiritual realm that exists*), and whose thinking is centered upon and guided by the teaching of the Word of God. Those who thus “tabernacle in heaven” are not people who have died and gone to heaven. They are saints who live on the earth but whose lives are governed by heavenly realities. It is exactly what the apostle says about the church today. “Our citizenship,” he says in Philippians, “is in heaven,” {Phil 3:20 NIV}. We are strangers and sojourners on earth, but our true citizenship is in heaven.

Let us read on.

He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth [literally “all the earth dwellers”] will worship the beast -- all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. {Rev 13:7-8 NIV}

The revived Roman leader is given great power. He is allowed to do fearful things, and thousands will die at his hand because of their faith. This agrees exactly with what we saw in Chapter 7, where the great multitude which no man could number come out of the tribulation from all nations and languages and tribes and people - a group that “washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white” {cf, Rev 7:14} and became martyrs for the cause of Jesus Christ. This is the group that is mentioned here.

This leader’s influence extends throughout the whole earth. It does not mean he actually rules over the whole earth but rather that his influence extends throughout it. It is very much like the Super Powers of our day. The influence of the United States and of Russia affects every nation on earth today because of the power and might these two nations represent.

It will also be the case then.

There will be one class of people who will follow this leader blindly. They are called “those who dwell on the earth.” We have seen this term before. It is a moral class, those who live for this world, who think only of the earth and its advantages, who are materialists and humanists, and who have no use for the things of God or the life beyond.

There is one group that resists this leader, and that is those “who tabernacle in heaven,” whose names are written, we are told here, “in the book of life belonging to the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.” That is an amazing statement. We will say more about the book of life later on where it is mentioned again. I would like now to focus on the phrase, “the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world.” That confirms again how time is not a factor in eternity. The death of the Lamb actually took place in time, on earth, at a specific date on the calendar, but here it is reckoned as an eternal event which has meaning for peoples from the very beginning of time, the creation of the world itself. The Lamb was slain, and the cross has impact upon all creation. Thus the Old Testament saints could be born again by faith because they were saved by the cross even though it had not yet occurred in history.

John now picks up on the phrase that Jesus used frequently and gives a word of encouragement to the saints of that day.

He who has an ear, let him hear. {Rev 13:9 NIV}

Jesus said this many times in his ministry. And, in Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation, in the seven letters to the churches the phrase occurs in each. By this exhortation Jesus is saying, “Listen carefully. Something important is about to be uttered.” So John tell us what it is:

If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go.

If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. {Rev 13:10a NIV}

I am sorry to have to do this, but every now and then I must correct the translation of the New International Version. It is excellent in the Old Testament, but not as accurate in the New. But, since everybody uses it, I must too. If you have an NIV, cross out the words “to go.” “If anyone is to

go into captivity”; and in the next line, “If anyone is to be killed with the sword,” read it, “If anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he will be killed.” The verse means that if anyone takes others captive, he will himself become a captive (*hostage*). If anyone kills with the sword, he must himself be killed with the sword. It is a word of encouragement to the saints of that day. All over the earth people are being taken captive and are being killed. God is simply saying to the others, “Don’t be discouraged, hang in there. Don’t let this slaughter throw you.”

Notice how John puts it.

This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness [or faith] on the part of the saints. {Rev 13:10b NIV}

The law of consequences cannot be endlessly evaded. God has not forgotten. It may look like evil has triumphed, everything has gone wrong, but hang in there. “God cannot be mocked,” {Gal 6:7b NIV}. The law of consequences cannot be canceled. Sooner or later he who kills with the sword must himself be killed. He who takes hostages must himself be taken hostage. Wait for it! I have often quoted the splendid words of James Russell Lowell:

*Though the cause of evil prosper,
Yet 'tis truth alone that's strong,
Truth, forever on the scaffold,
Wrong, forever on the throne.
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadows
Keeping watch above His own!*

Now John sees another beast coming. We read of him in Verses 11-12:

Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. {Rev 13:11-12 NIV}

This beast arises from the earth, used throughout the book as a symbol of Israel. That is why most biblical scholars say this man is probably a Jew. He comes from Israel and has “two horns like a lamb, but he talks like a dragon.” He looks like a lamb, but he talks like a dragon. He is, therefore, a fake lamb, to put it bluntly. This is the Antichrist, the one

who comes instead of Christ, who offers himself as though he were Christ. It is for this reason I believe the term Antichrist is properly applied to this second beast, although both beasts are anti-Christian in character.

Horns speak of power, and this man has two lamb-like powers. Jesus also had these powers: the powers of a priest and of a prophet. This man acts as both. Jesus is a priest who leads men and women all over the world to worship the Father; and this individual is a priest, leading the world to worship the first beast.

Many have pointed out that we have here a kind of Satanic trinity -- the first beast corresponding to the Father, the false prophet corresponding to the Son, and the dragon himself, Satan, playing the role of the invisible Holy Spirit. It is Satan's imitation of the true God.

The false priest accomplishes his aim in getting the world to worship the beast in a very remarkable way, described in 13 through 15.

He performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth [those who dwell on the earth]. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. {Rev 13:13-15 NIV}

Here he acts as a prophet. The prophets of old did miracles to establish their credentials, their God-given authority. Moses and Elijah each did great miracles, and, as the two witnesses of Chapter 11, they call fire down from heaven. So this man must call fire from heaven. Paul tells us that the devil has the power to do miracles too. Thus we must not trust every miracle as though it were done by God. It may be the work of the enemy, the Evil One. This false prophet calls down fire out of heaven, and deceives the world by such means.

Many biblical scholars feel that, because he is a Jew, he has his headquarters in Jerusalem. I think that is highly likely. He is the one whom the prophet Daniel identifies as making a covenant with the

Jews for one week (7 years), and thus solving the centuries-old problem of the Middle East, the enmity between the Arabs and Israelis. During the first half of that week, the temple will be rebuilt on Mount Moriah. We saw that briefly in Chapter 11. For a seven-year period the Jews believe they are allowed to re-establish their worship in the temple. But, Daniel says, this "prince who will come" {cf, Dan 9:26 KJV} shall break that covenant in the middle of the week, i.e. after three and a half years, and entering the temple himself, begin to exalt himself as God, as Paul describes in his letter to the Thessalonians.

Since the political leader of the western coalition is in Rome, this religious leader in Jerusalem seems to feel it necessary to create an image of the Roman leader and put it in the temple for the worship of the world. He is able, we are told, to give breath to that image to make it seem alive.

In one of the exhibits in Disneyland you can find Abraham Lincoln sitting in a chair! He looks very real and while you are standing there he will get up out of the chair and walk over and talk to you! I shall never forget how impressive it was to see and hear Abraham Lincoln when I visited that exhibit!

The technology to make an image of a man that seems to live and speak and walk, is already here. The whole world will doubtless run tour buses to worship it. It is not necessary that they really think it is a living person, but they will worship it because it represents a living person, and they will honor that impressive symbol in that day. By means of that image this false prophet will claim godlike powers for himself and the first beast, and will command the loyalty and obedience of all on the earth.

In Verse 16 we learn this man also rebuilds the world's economic system.

He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.

This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666. {Rev 13:16-18 NIV}

Evidently during these days worldwide commerce will be rigidly controlled from a central headquarters. Again we know that the technology to do this is already in place. If you have a credit card you know that your entire credit information can be imprinted on that little metallic strip on the back so that whenever you present that card everyone will instantly know whether you are a cheapskate or that you pay your bills. You cannot hide. Furthermore, we are told that it can all be actually implanted in a tiny disk in the skin on the back of the hand or on the forehead or wherever desired, so that information about you can be read by passing your hand under a beam of light just as they do now in the supermarkets with the bar codes. The technology is already available. It is remarkable how we are apparently drawing close to these days.

The mark, of course, is Satan's imitation of God's seal on his own people. In Chapter 7 we learned that 144,000 from the tribes of Israel were sealed on their foreheads by God. That indicates they are owned by God, they belong to him. The Apostle Paul says that Christians are sealed today. Every believer in Christ is sealed by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God comes to dwell in us and he will never leave. It is the sign that we belong to God. "You are not your own ... you are bought with a price," {cf, 1 Cor 6:19b-20a}. You cannot live your life for yourself anymore. You belong to God. Christians in the 1st century often had to make a public choice once a year between declaring "Caesar is Lord," or "Jesus is Lord." Many of them died because they would not say "Caesar is Lord." So there comes again a scheme devised by these two leaders to force people to declare whether they belong to the beast or to the Lord. Which will it be, "the Beast is Lord" or "Jesus is Lord?"

The mark that is mentioned is said to be either the name of the beast or the number of his name. It is referring to the first beast, not the second. The second is called later "the false prophet," {Rev 16:3, 19:20, 20:10}. Also the first beast is simply called "the beast." The mark is the name of that beast or its number. His name is unknown. It is never referred to, but the number is given -- 666.

Surely the most foolish thing you can do is to try to identify this person today by using number 666. You know, of course, that the ancient languages

used letters for numbers. If you use Roman numerals today you use letters in place of numbers. The Greek language was similar. The letters have numerical value and many feel that when you add up the numerical value of certain names if it comes out to 666 that person must be the Antichrist. The problem is they try this with English letters. That is simply stupid, because you are working with the wrong language to start with. Also there is another excellent reason to view such a practice as foolish which I will show you in just a moment.

First let me give you a brief list of names that have been identified as the Antichrist by this means:

- Nero, of course, was one of the first. One of his predecessors as emperor was Caligula, the mad emperor, and his name supposedly adds up to 666.
- Then the successor to Nero was Domitian, and his name, with a little manipulation, can be added up in this way.
- So also was Mohammed, Oliver Cromwell, John Knox, Martin Luther, various popes, and, of course, Adolf Hitler.
- Even poor Henry Kissinger had to bear this stigma, and now, of course, it is Gorbachev.

It is really ridiculous to use this method because the clue given here is the important thing. Look what it says, "This calls for wisdom." No Tom, Dick, or Harry with a calculator can figure this out. This calls for wisdom! "If any one has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast."

Now here is the clue: "it is man's number." Not a man's number. It is man's number. It is the number associated with man. It is not an individual in view here at all. It reveals the character of the one who is talking and acting and living. If you see someone acting like God, claiming unusual powers, and teaching people that man is in charge of all things, that he can do anything, you are listening to a man, and his thinking reflects the number of man, 666. It is man's number.

Eugene Peterson says something very helpful on this:

Expose these religious pretensions. This religion has nothing to do with God. Get its number: it is a human number. This is not divine mystery, but a confidence man's patter; it is religion that makes a show, religion that vaunts itself, religion that takes our eyes off of the poor and suffering and holy Christ. In the language of numbers, 666 is a triple failure to be a 777, the three-times perfect, whole, divine number.

So we see that John is showing us how the devil works. He attempts to organize behavior and from that always comes violence. When any government turns totalitarian and seeks to control every deed, every act, of its citizens, it produces a violent reaction. Turn on your television sets and you will see it in every news broadcast today.

The Antichrist tries to organize belief as well as behavior, and when belief is organized it always produces deceit. There is nothing more deceitful than false religion. These are the weapons of Satan: He either intimidates or deceives. He has only two weapons, force and fantasy, lying and brutality, one or the other, or a mixture of both.

What this text is saying is that when he is violent, then wait, endure, be patient! God will work this all out. His rules will never be set aside. Sooner or later Satan's instrument will hang himself, as Judas did; he will be caught up in his own web. And when he lies, "Think," God says, "be critical, evaluate!"

When anyone acts godlike, makes pretentious claims, claims supernatural gifts and demands obedience, that is not God talking. He is not from God. It is just a man, that is all, thinking and acting like a fallen man. It is not the real Lamb -- it is only a fake lamb, so laugh at him and refuse to follow him. But be prepared to hold out even unto death! That is the message of this chapter.

I hope you can see how true this is, how it is confirmed by life around us every day. We are headed for these very things at a greater speed than we have ever seen before in the history of the world.

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