

Babylon and the beast

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[0:00] Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute who sits by many waters.! With her, the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated! Then the angel carried me away in the spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet and was glittering with gold, precious stones, and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. The name written on her forehead was a mystery. Babylon the Great, the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth. I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God's holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.

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 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. 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. This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They're also seven kings.

Five had 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.

The seven, I think. The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who have for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose, and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will wage war against the lamb, but the lamb will triumph over them, because he is lord of lords and king of kings, and with him will be his court, chosen, and faithful followers.

Then the angel said to me, the waters you saw where the prostitute sits are peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages. The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to the run and leave her naked. They will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to hand over to the beast their royal authority until God's words are fulfilled. The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.

[3:47] Thank you very much indeed. So let's pray again. Please, Lord, help us to understand and have the mind of wisdom that this passage calls for in our day and age. Amen. Amen. I'll go straight on to this.

So last time we sort of introduced this chapter by looking at Babylon in the rest of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, and I introduced it by saying, how do I function in a society with very different outlook and morality and worldview to my own? So let's talk to think about the world of commerce or the world of social services and NHS and the things that you would have to perhaps go along with or encounter in terms of, I suppose particularly in terms of trans issues. The world of law and lawyering.

Do you go along with everything that your colleagues do and that your business values? Or do you separate from it and say, I'm not going to have anything to do with those things? I'm not going to have anything to do with the world? Go into a monastery or live in the desert? Or what this passage

seems to say is you need wisdom. So there isn't a sort of cut and dried answer, but there is the need for wisdom. And that's perhaps where we'll end up this evening. So my standard introduction, just for people who might have come in and not know where we're going, it is a book in the Bible. It is for our edification, that means our upbuilding, our survival and our progress as Christians. It is in its nature, it says it's an unveiling to show the spiritual reality behind the obvious appearance. It is in the form of a letter which means that it must have some relevance to the original hearers. And I think we perhaps see that particularly this evening. It's to a certain number of churches, seven, yeah, and in the nature of it, letters of relevance to hearers. And it's in the form of a prophecy. It tells them, it says, what is shortly going to happen. And it gives the behavioral implications of that. And it will give what's shortly going to happen, but it's in the context of the big picture from when Jesus ascended to when he returns. The horizon is from the time of writing to the end of the world. And there's the letter. And I've also said we need to listen to his accent, his way of speaking, and among other things, he uses a lot of signs and symbols which point to another reality than themselves. He uses images and symbols, most of them from scripture, but not all of them from scripture. Symbolic names, symbolic numbers, symbolic time periods, symbolic places, symbolic themes. So a theme would be, for example, the plagues, which is neither a number, a time, nor a place, but it's a thing from scripture.

And in terms of places, what we're looking at this evening is Babylon, which is a place. So it's used symbolically. And the symbols are theological. They have spiritual meaning.

And you have to look and see how they're originally used and what the meaning was there. And John is using that symbol because it's appropriate to the point that he wants to make. We've also seen that he sees things that contradict things that he hears and various other points like that, which we'll come back to when they become crucial. So, so far, we looked at, this is where we've been, the seven churches, the lamb upon the throne, the seven seals of world history, the seven trumpets repentance, the war between the dragon and the woman and her seed, and the agents of the war, the beast and the false prophet, the image of the beast. We've looked at chapters depicting the final judgment as harvest and now we're looking at, we've sort of backtracked a bit to look at the prostitute Babylon.

[8:15] And before we go any further, let's sing a song about a different city, which is going to Zion. It's not in the book, it's just on the screen. Yep.

So, one city is Babylon, where we don't want to go, and we want to escape from Babylon and go to Zion.

Yes? Do we know this one? Do you remember this one? Do you remember this one? I think the way to approach this chapter, I thought about it a lot actually, been thinking about it the last couple of weeks, is probably to think of its particular relevance to its first hearers.

How could the churches in Asia be warned and encouraged at the time of writing, which I don't know exactly, it doesn't say, does it? But we think about AD 70, AD 80, that sort of time.

There, Rome is all around them. You don't have any choice. Rome just is everywhere. It's hugely powerful. It is involved in everything.

[9:50] Around us is polytheism, the worship of many, many gods, many man-made gods, and emperor worship, and that's rising.

The idea that the emperor is divine, and if you're going to be a Roman citizen or in a Roman empire, you have got to begin to accept this, that Caesar is Lord, whereas if you're a Christian, you're thinking, well, actually, Jesus is Lord, and that becomes increasingly political.

I couldn't find the reference, but I'm pretty sure I've seen a Roman coin, and the inscription of it is, the emperor says, I am the saviour of the world.

This morning, the Roman legal system protected Paul, Saul, Paul, Apostle Paul, from persecution by the Jews.

That was what we had this morning, wasn't it? But this is going to change, and the Roman state is no longer going to be protecting Christians, but persecuting Christians.

[11:06] Around us is all the wealth of the Pax Romana, the peace of Rome. Trade, international treaties, imports, exports, all sorts of wonderful things brought to us from the far reaches of the world, thanks to the Roman Empire.

But what's the cost of it? What actually is happening in the empire? And the sexual ethics of Rome were appalling, in terms of homosexuality, in terms of marital unfaithfulness, in terms of what was just normal in that society.

And that's all around us. And when people become Christians, how much do they have to unlearn, and how quickly do they learn anything different? So there's all these pressures on them.

And the church will move, we presume, from being marginalised to being persecuted. And what do you say to the church to prepare them for that?

What is the deepest insight about their context? And just thinking about our own world, we here in the West face various pressures. We don't particularly face persecution, but if you went into other countries, you would be thinking very actively, how do I encourage my persecuted brothers and sisters?

[12:32] How do I encourage the church where it has to be an underground church? Etc. And what wisdom would you offer them?

In a place where it had become illegal to be a Christian. So from last time, and I don't want to go over everything again, all over again, but we looked at the story of Babylon in the Old Testament. I'm pretty sure at the time of writing it was a ruined city. There was no active Babylon. But if we look in the Bible, it has had various roles at different times.

And we saw in Genesis 11, was it? The Tower of Babel. It is there the place of human pride. And people want to build up to heaven and become as gods through their new technology of bricks and bitumen.

And they want to do this without the Lord. And Babylon is sort of an icon of human pride, technology reaching to divinity without God.

[13:47] Later on, Babylon becomes the agent of punishment. She is the enemy sent to take Israel, unbelieving, disobedient Israel into exile, as God had long warned and promised.

It's the agent of punishment. It's the people who invade. And it's the place of exile. And during the course of the 70 years of exile, it has yet another face.

It is a place of survival. And it is a safe-ish place. You remember the Jeremiah where it says, I have plans to build you up. Don't become terrorists.

Don't try and bomb Babylon. But pray for the peace of the city. And keep your faith. Let your daughters marry believing people.

But do marry. Do settle down. Do prosper. Because if the city prospers, you will prosper.

[14:53] But, and here's a big but, but remember this place is not your home. And when you get the opportunity to go home, come out of her and be separate, my people.

Touch not the unclean thing. Move out of Babylon as soon as you have the opportunity. Be ready and keen to leave it at moment's notice. And Babylon, with one gracious exception, is always depicted as the implacable enemy of God's people.

You know, these are the people who in their nature are under God's wrath. Okay, so that's what we did last time. Okay, I mean, I'm just trying to do that fairly quickly. That's what we did last time.

So, let's look in particular detail now at the chapter. What's in the chapter?

Now, looking at it just very quickly. Verses 1 to 2. One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls said to me, Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute who sits by many waters.

[16:01] With her, the kings of the earth committed adultery. And the inhabitants of the earth were drunk, intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries. So, the first thing is that the angel, one of the seven plague angels, says he will show the punishment of the prostitute.

Now, the punishment doesn't actually happen until chapter 18. But that's what it's going to be. Next thing, the angel carries me away in the spirit into a desert.

There are three places in the book of Revelation where he's said to be in the spirit. I was in the spirit on the Lord's Day at the beginning. This one.

And I think it took me to a high mountain in the spirit and showed me the bride. So, presumably these are three crucial events. And then he, in the desert, he sees a woman sitting on a scarlet beast.

And we'll look in detail at this in a moment. But his reaction is that, in end of verse 6, I was greatly astonished at what it says. I marveled with a great marvel.

[17:10] And one wonders, what sort of marvel was it? Was it, wow, she looks so beautiful? Or, wow, what's going on here? A marveling could be various sorts of things.

There's the woman sitting on the beast. And there are many waters, which I should have said in chapter 17, verse 1. She's sitting on the beast.

She's also sitting upon many waters. This is said to be a mystery. And the angel says, Why are you astonished? I will explain the mystery.

That's what it says in verse 7. So we're hoping for an explanation of the mystery of the woman-beast combination. And the last paragraph, so that all continues down to verse 15.

And the angel said to me, The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. So he explains the waters, and he explains God's purpose, and he also explains the identity of the woman in verse 18.

[18:15] The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth. So that's just a sort of outline of what's going to happen in the chapter, those sections.

And the actual fall is in verse, is in chapter 18. Okay, so far? Yep. So let's take that at a slower pace and go through it bit by bit.

So the angel says that he will show the punishment of the prostitute. She sits on many waters, and the kings of the earth commit adultery with her. So I put hearts for adultery, but that's not really quite right, is it?

Hearts mean love, but this is a much more, what would you say, corrupt type of relationship, exploitative relationship, insincere relationship.

The kings of the earth commit adultery with her, and the dwellers of the earth, now these people crop up in a number of places, the inhabitants of the earth, are drunk with her wine.

[19:23] So that's an introductory summary in those few verses. And there's the dwellers on the earth being drunk with her wine. There it is.

Okay, that's the first bit. I did that in a little bit more detail. Let's do the second bit. The angel carried me away in the spirit. Where? Into the desert.

In the spirit, in the desert. The next in the spirit. Let's look at it. 21.10. Am I right in saying that this is not the desert?

21.10. And he carried me away in the spirit to a mountain great and high and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

Do you think there's any significance in the different places of these visions? One is in the desert, one is on a high mountain. Any thoughts on that? I'm looking for all the help I can get on this.

[20:25] Moses meant with God on a high mountain. Yes. The desert is where the generation perished. Well, that's true. Yeah. So the desert could be a place of sort of death and need.

And the high mountain is sort of getting nearer to God, isn't it? So John the Baptist was in the desert. Well, he was, wasn't he? So desert can mean very different things, can't it?

I will allure you in the desert, it says, doesn't it? Jesus was tempted in the desert. Yeah. So I'm not quite clear. I don't think it's particularly obvious why he went into the desert to see this woman, but that's what it says.

Yeah. Well, he was in the desert to be tempted, wasn't he? And the 40 days. Is that what you meant? And then the Israelites were in the desert 40 days being tempted.

I don't know. It doesn't say any more, does it? It just says, in the spirit into a desert. Was it a place of punishment? Is it a place of punishment?

[21:30] Exile is the place of punishment. Various things happen in the desert. What do you think, David? Is it a home by the wilderness? Yeah. The wilderness. Yeah. Church and Catholics and the desert.

Yeah. Crossing the desert, which is what we sang about, really, isn't it? Coming back from exile.

No, it's not a nice place to be, is it?

No. Okay. I mean, I don't know whether there's an answer to this, but there seem to be two different places where he sees these two different women. And sitting on this time.

Yes, a beast. What colour's the beast? Scarlet. I don't think it's the same colour as the dragon. I think the dragon was red. But if you look at...

Colours tend to mean luxurious items. So what was the luxurious colour for kings? Purple.

[22:35] Yeah. And if you look in 18, verse 12, he's going to refer to the export-import business and talk about cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth.

So we've got purple there is part of the list and the scarlet is part of the list as well. So even though it's not purple, it's not red, it's actually a luxurious colour.

And how many heads and horns has this beast got? Ten of which? Ten horns.

Ten horns and seven heads. I can't draw that, obviously. It's like the dragon. The dragon... Let's just check that. 12-3. The dragon had seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its head.

So this is dragon-like. Although this beast is not a dragon. It is a beast. It's different. But it's dragon-like. And the fact that she's sitting on the beast...

[23:51] What do you think? I wondered, does that mean that she's supported by the beast? Or does it mean that she's controlling the beast and riding the beast like you would ride a horse?

Except I wouldn't ride a horse. You might ride a horse. I think it's controlling. You think she's controlling it. Okay. I think she's a place of authority. A place of authority.

What do you think, David? I wonder if she's not that she's being supported by... I know she gets her power from. Thank you. So David says that she's being supported by...

That's where she gets her power from. And it's a bit thought-provoking, actually. All these relationships of power in this chapter are rather thought-provoking.

Some of them are two-way. Some of them are quite difficult to describe. But anyway, she's either supported by or controlling or getting her power from this beast.

[24:49] And what is the appearance of the woman, please, in verse 4? She's clothed in purple and scarlet.

So that's a very luxurious colours. And she glitters with gold precious stones and pearls.

And if you didn't read any further, you would think, what a beautiful lady. Look at her. The wonderful way she's dressed. You know, she's on the red carpet at Cannes or the Oscars or something like that.

And everybody's... The paparazzi are taking pictures of her jewellery. And they think, what a wonderful person she is. Except, when you look at the golden cup, what's it got in it?

Nasty things. Nasty things. Yes, this is in verse 4, isn't it? She had a golden cup in her hand filled with abominable things and the filth of her adultery.

[25:54] So she'd be impressive. Except for, well, various things. I'll just stop on the word prostitute and adultery.

And actually, this word is used multiple times. The Greek is pornea, porne, porneo, depending on whether it's a noun or a verb, from which we get our word in English, pornography.

The fact that you get a word from English doesn't always mean that they're exactly equivalent. But this is significant. It meant sexual immorality, prostitution, and it comes over into our English language in exactly the same realm of meaning.

Yep? Maybe, sorry, backtracking a bit. This business about the woman sitting on the beast, does the woman control the beast or is she supported by the beast?

Maybe it's a bit of both. She thinks she's controlling the beast. But, of course, the beast is going to turn on her.

[27:11] Yes, that's right. It works out in a certain way, doesn't it? Yes, she might think she's controlling the beast, but the beast is going to turn on her.

And the synergy of the woman and the beast is an unstable one. But I'm going to get ahead of myself if I go down that road.

But just thinking of the adultery and things like that. So in verse 1 we have prostitute. In verse 2 we have adultery. In verse 5 we have the mother of prostitutes.

In verse 16 we have... In verse 15 we have prostitute. In verse 16 we have prostitute. And to commit adultery, pornevo, was in 1702.

It's also in 1803. The nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. And, you know, I won't go through all these, but the porneia word is used in multiple places.

[28:23] So... I think he means more than this. But let's assume he doesn't mean less than this. He's picking on the Roman sexual ethics and saying, you know, this is abominable.

This is... Let's call it what it is. It's adultery. It's impurity. And if you look back into chapter 2...

Chapter 2. The churches are told to look out for this. And in chapter 2, verse 14...

In Pergamum he says, I have a few things against you. There are some amongst you who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin, so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality.

In the time of Balaam and Balak, you know, remember the story? It was a link between idol worship and sexual immorality, and those things both happened at that incident in the Old Testament.

[29:40] And he's saying, that happens in the culture around you, but it shouldn't be happening in the church. And, you know, that's a point to make, isn't it?

That all the porn that lives in the world around us should be rejected within the church. And that's a battle, isn't it?

And a battle that has to be fought. So, just thinking about the threat posed by the woman, or by Satan through her, Satan doesn't only persecute and intimidate, but he can substitute and seduce and promise pleasure illicitly, and that's one of the faces of Babylon as the prostitute.

Does that make sense? I just thought it's made her rich in this world's material stuff, hasn't it? Made her rich. Yeah.

She's seducing other people as well. Yeah. Yes. So the kings of the earth committed adultery with her. And, yeah, I'm probably getting ahead of myself here.

[31:03] Yes. She's tarted up, isn't she, in the strict sense of the word. Yes. Yeah, that's true. And we got it. So we were just thinking about the adultery, and then let's think about her name.

So the Christian people have the name of God on their foreheads in some sense, and she's got a name on her forehead, which says, if I can click it up, Babylon the Great.

Make Babylon great again. Babylon the Great, the mother of prostitutes and the abominations of the earth. So she's got a label attached to her.

The idea that she's the mother of prostitutes, does it mean that she's the number one prostitute?

Does it mean all other prostitution follows from her? I don't know, but it's, that's what the label says. And she has a cup, and she is drunk, and what is she drunk with, verse 6? Yes, the blood of God's holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

[32:21] I don't think it's two separate groups of people. It's the blood of the saints, stroke martyrs. Martyrs meaning those who bear testimony.

It doesn't yet mean those who died to bear testimony, but those who bore testimony. And this bit I found rather strange, because I don't think that the woman Babylon always kills Christians.

I think sometimes Babylon just seduces Christians, or just wants to do that, or just wants to deceive Christians, or take them off track.

But it says here that in this particular incarnation of Babylon, or in this particular time and place, Babylon was actually killing Christians.

Does that make sense? I found that a difficult verse to deal with. Now, what is the reaction of John in verse, end of verse 6 and verse 7?

[33:29] Which we've already said, so. He's astonished, yes. He marvels with a great marvel. Oh, there he is being astonished. And the angel says, why are you astonished?

I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and the beast. Now, mystery doesn't usually mean conundrum. It means something that's been hidden and is now revealed.

And if that's the case, what John is saying is, now look, Christian folk, you're in the Roman Empire, and you probably think, you probably used to think, the Roman Empire is the greatest empire that has ever been.

You know, make Rome great again. We've already done it, because Rome is great, is fantastic, does everything so well. But I'm going to reveal something to you. That's not the case.

There's more to the Roman Empire than that. In fact, if you just think it's wonderful and great, you have mistaken the truth behind the apparent reality. I'll again explain the mystery of the woman and the beast.

[34:31] Right. So let's spend a little while looking at the beast, which I'm not sure whether we've done this before, but let's go back to Daniel, because he's picking up on theological vocabulary that has already been established.

In Daniel, so that's it, Daniel was in the time of the exile, wasn't he? He was in Babylon, and he was shown visions of four beasts, or four stages, or four kingdoms that were going to follow, and the four beasts fairly clearly, and I'm not sure whether it's actually said, but they're fairly clearly, there's four of them, they're all different colours, the Babylonian Empire, then the Medo-Persian Empire, which succeeded Babylon, then the Greek Empire, then the Roman Empire, and in the time of the Roman Empire, that's when Jesus was born, in the days of Caesar Augustus, he issued a decree, and people had to go to the place, the home place to be taxed.

Remember that story? Yeah. Yeah. So that happened in the time of the Roman Empire, and in chapter seven, I don't know whether I put references, in chapter seven of Daniel, he says, in my vision at night, this is verse two, I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea, four great beasts, each different from the others, came out of the sea. The first was like a lion, verse five, the second like a bear, verse six, another beast like a leopard, verse seven, a fourth beast, very terrifying, large iron teeth, it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left.

It was different from the former beasts, it had ten horns, notice. While I was thinking about the horns, before me came another horn, a little horn, which came up among them, and the three of the first horns were uprooted before it.

[36:40] This horn had eyes like the eyes of a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully, and as I looked, thrones were set in place, the ancient of days took his seat, his clothing was white as snow, the hair of his head was white like wool, his throne was flaming with fire, its wheels were all ablaze, a river of fire was flowing and coming out from him, thousands upon thousands attended him, ten thousand times, ten thousand stood before him, the court was seated, the books were opened, and then the beasts are destroyed, and verse 12, the other beasts have been stripped of their authority but were allowed to live for a period of time, and in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven.

He approached the ancient of days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power. All nations and peoples of every language worshipped him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. And I ask this question each time, where did he come to?

It says in verse 13, he came with the clouds of heaven. Where did he come to? Thank you. The throne of the ancient of days.

So this is not a description of Jesus coming to earth, it's a description of Jesus coming into heavenly power. He comes to the throne, which in Christian language we would call his ascension and his enthronement.

[38:14] And you notice that that comes at the end of the sequence of four, the four kingdoms, and then at that point all the events of Jesus Christ occur and he's taken into heaven and he can say, all authority is given to me in heaven and on earth.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, et cetera. Does that make sense, that sequence? And I think I have put it in, I think this is also in chapter two.

Yeah, if you look into chapter two of Daniel, again it's four, but it's not four animals, it's four parts of a statue. And in chapter two, verse 34, on that fourth section of the statue, while you are watching, a rock was cut out, not made by human hands.

It struck the statue on this fourth section, the feet of iron and clay and smashed them. The iron, clay, the bronze, the silver and gold were all broken to pieces and became like chaff on the threshing floor in the summer.

The wind swept them away without leaving a trace, but the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth. So at the end of those four empires, another kingdom, not made with hands, because this is a rock, is supreme and fills the whole earth.

[39:48] So does that make sense? The same idea of the four empires and then the kingdom of Christ is set up, which outlasts all the other empires and fills the whole earth, although not in a military sense, but, you know, there are citizens of this kingdom all over the world now.

So that, I am saying, is leading to the ascension of Christ, the enthronement of Christ. And rather than look at that, because it does take us a bit off track, I will just leave that with that.

And the prophecies lead us up to the coming of Christ in quite a bit of detail. And in fact, if we go, if you look at other bits of Daniel, you'll find, if you haven't ever, already come across this, it gets very complicated.

And it zooms in on the intertestamental period, that's between return from the exile and the coming of the Christ.

So there's, am I saying the right thing? After the last book of the Bible was written, there's a long period, it's about 400 years before Christ comes, where there's no further revelation.

[41:08] Although Daniel speaks about this, and we could get extremely confused. There's a ram and a goat, there's the little horn, the abomination of desolation, which most commentators would say referred to that time before the coming of Christ, where the Romans, was it Romans?

Antiochus Epiphanes, desecrated the temple, and just appallingly, and there were battles and wars. And Daniel deals with that in confusing detail. And remember, Jesus himself talked about the abomination that causes desolation, and he said, this is going to be reenacted in the fall of Jerusalem.

So there's loads of stuff, and Teotihuacan, anybody like to know what? Teotihuacan?

The end of the world as we know it. The end of the world as we know it. And the end of the world as we know it in the Old Testament would have been the destruction of Jerusalem.

[42:25] But we look forward to another the end of the world as we know it, don't we? And there's similarities between them. Anyway, if Jerusalem fell, that city, how much more will Rome fall?

If we'd been living in the Roman Empire and seen one of the deacons carted off and executed in Churchill Square, we would say, how long can we put up with this?

And one of the messages is not forever. This empire has a sell-by date, and it won't go on forever. But it will fall.

And of course, I'll just raise this question, which city do we belong to? Do we belong to the Babylon city that we've just been thinking about?

Or do we belong to the Zion city? Would it be true that whatever we sung, that we, the redeemed of the Lord, will return and come with singing to Zion, and everlasting joy will be on their heads?

[43:42] That's the song that we're singing and the home that we're heading for. Let's get back to the beast. So it is described in ways that are very similar to Daniel's beasts.

One way of understanding Revelation is the climax of prophecy. All the things that are prophesied sort of head towards their ultimate fulfillment in the book of Revelation. Fulfillment of all the spiritual and theological patterns and themes.

So the beasts that Daniel described and all the turmoil leading up to the coming of Christ. John seems to take all that without trying to digest it in detail, but just say, that's what's going on now.

You're facing a beast. It's like the beast in Daniel, seven horns, ten heads, doing all sorts of complicated things. That's the reality of where you're living now.

And of course, he's now pinning this on Rome, isn't he? Because the beast, verse 9, the seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. The seven hills would have been understood to be Rome.

[44:58] Found it on seven hills, is that right? So what he's actually doing is at least this, it's at least a very stinging political critique, spiritual and political critique of the place that they were living.

You may think Rome's great, but actually it's a beast. It's like those beasts in prophecy. And the heads and horns are leaders of destruction. And it's a beast that was and now is not and it will go to destruction.

So it's almost like God who is and was and is to come, but he'd like you to think he's God, but actually there's something vacuous about his present existence.

He is not and will go to destruction. Rome will not last forever. and did not last forever.

Now let's go a little bit further. Now what was the effect of the beast on the inhabitants of the earth? And that is, where is that?

[46:12] In verse eight, what's the effect of the beast on the inhabitants of the earth? Or what is their reaction?

They're astonished. Now what their astonishment is, whether they say, wow, Rome is great. Wow. Whether it's an astonishment or sort of praise. What's the reaction of those, of the, there's two reactions actually, aren't there?

There's the inhabitants of the earth and by, there's another group of people mentioned. No, I'm just thinking of reaction to the beast in verse eight.

Yeah. Verse eight. Yeah. Yeah. Yes.

[47:30] Yeah. It seems to divide along the names of those who, names written in the Lamb's Book of Life from before the creation of the world and those whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life from before the creation of the world and the ones whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life think, wow, this is great.

Sorry? Yeah. That's right. And, and they, they worship the beast. The inhabitants of the earth, it says they're astonished, but their astonishment is of the nature of appreciation and praise and actually worship.

In 13.8, they worship the beast. So that's the reaction of those whose names have not been written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

But those whose names have been written in the Lamb's Book of Life have got a different take.

They don't worship the beast. They see that there's something evil about the beast and they don't worship, even though they might be pressured or seduced or deceived.

They don't give in to that. Does that make sense? And as, as Maria said, the, the action point is a call for wisdom.

[48:57] You know, what should our reaction be to this particular display of the beast where, where and when we happen to be? That's what it says.

You've really got to think. And thank you to Steve, because Steve, those members will remember that he put in his deacon's report the idea of assessing the culture, seeing what's happening, seeing where it's going, and having wisdom to respond appropriately to whatever time and place we're at. to see the world for what it is, to turn away from spiritual adultery and to respond in faith and obedience. That's the wisdom that we're called to do. Now, it does go into detail here in verse 12. Ten horns, and I don't think we have to sort of get into great detail about this, but we had seven kings in verse 10. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come.

When he does, he must remain for only a little while. The beast who once was and is not now is an eighth king. Oh, he belongs to the seven, so the eighth is part of the seven, and is going to his destruction.

[50:12] The ten horns, you see, are ten kings which have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast.

So I think that's quite confusing. And I've put what he's describing is a flux and churn of power. Any other thoughts that come from that passage, that little bit that you could say describes any of this flux and churn?

Is there any relation between the seven kings and the ten kings that they all are intertwined?

Yeah, well, where I was trying to go with this, and it probably would take too long to demonstrate it satisfactorily, is that in Daniel, it probably does refer to specific kings in that intertestamental period. But when it comes to Revelation, he's just taking that theological model of churn, rivalry, conflict, and just saying, I'll use the same numbers, just to say that that sort of thing is going to go on in the

Roman Empire.

[51:41] Does that answer your question? You can ask the question again if I didn't. Yeah, I suppose it's just another different way of explaining the same thing, so you get confused because the one stage is the seven, and the other stage is the ten.

Yeah, yeah. It's just another way of explaining what's going to be. That's what I would go for. I think rather than looking at the detail and trying to say, oh, there were seven kings, so that was Nero, Domitian, so and so and so and so, to say, he's just taking this complex language to say there's churn, rivalry, conflict, without trying to identify specific tens and sevens.

That's the way I would do it. Steve? He says just for one hour, doesn't he? I mean, he can't literally be an hour. Correct. So what he's saying is that, he's saying there will be wars and rumors of wars, that there will be constant conflict.

Yeah. One king will be around for a bit, and then another one will take power. Yes. Thank you.

That's right. That's for an hour, and then it says for a little while.

I put that time scale. It's a current and it's a last word. Yeah. And yes, and something will come up and you will think, oh, this is awful, and then it will just disappear again. Yeah.

[53:10] Well, it's in fairly recent history, haven't you? Elon Musk. It was quite a bit, and then you think of the I-Fred. Yes. So all the lives of China's power.

Yes. Maybe the United States weakening. Yeah. I mean, that's right. I mean, one thing it says, none of these empires last forever.

And Western, democratic, post-Christianity is not immune from that. And so, at one point here, there's something about unity, verse 13.

What unity is there? Verse 13. Verse 13. Yep. Yep.

And does it say? Yes, that's right. They combine together, it would, with, I think it actually says, with one mind, to give their power and authority to the beast.

[54:18] So again, there's this flux of power, and they will wage war against the lamb. And it struck me that, we see that, don't we? So in, in the time of the betrayal of Jesus, truly the kings and rulers have conspired together against the Lord and his anointed, Psalm 2.

And in their prayer meeting, the apostles applied that to the trial of Jesus. Herod, and the, I shouldn't have put that, I should have put, Herod and Pontius Pilate agreed together.

So two things that would otherwise have been very different, they agreed together against Christ.

So would you say that Marxists are against Christ and the liberals against Christ, two very opposite things, but they both find problems with Christianity.

Roman Catholics and Orthodox churches can persecute Evangelicals along with Hindu fundamentalists. I mean, two very different things, but they agree together on this.

The New Age people and the Dawkins atheists, very different, but they both agree that they're against Christianity. It's a funny thing, isn't it?

[55:39] But that's what it's describing here. We're in the firing line in all directions against the Lamb. And in verse 14, what are the descriptions of the people that are along with the Lamb?

Yeah, chosen, called, chosen, and faithful. We've got a song, haven't we? Chosen, called, and faithful. To our captain's band.

Well, that didn't work, did it? Chosen, called, and faithful. And what's the result of this conflict ganging up on the Lamb and his followers?

What does it say? The Lamb will triumph over them. Yeah? Because he is Lord of lords and King of kings.

Verse 14. And with him will be his called, chosen, faithful followers. You know, as I was thinking about this, I wonder whether we could say that our period of history at this moment, at this time and place, is different to what it was in Imperial Rome because the Lamb has in some degree triumphed over them.

[57:05] Because Roman Empire became Christian, didn't it? in some sense. Would we say that historically the Lamb triumphed? I mean, the war isn't over yet, but there's times when the Lamb wins quite a bit and then

perhaps other times when Satan seems to be having the upper hand.

The Lamb will triumph over them. So I think, is he saying that the Lamb will generally triumph, the Lamb will ultimately triumph, the Lamb will intermittently triumph, or the Lamb will be triumphing in different degrees at different times and places.

And I rather think that latter is right, isn't it? Because certainly in Western church history, there are times when the cause of the Lamb has seemed to prevail and then times when it's receded and then times when it's advanced, you know, perhaps revival or reformation and then receded again. So maybe that's what he's saying, that the Lamb will triumph. Ultimately, he will completely triumph. But in this warfare, sometimes he wins victories and other times the church seems to be in a weaker position.

Does that make sense? There was a survey about the adherence of people to various religions and they're saying it's moving roughly to a third movement, a third Christian, a third people that have no religion.

[58:33] And the chapter speaking said that in the West, the number of Christians is definitely reducing, but we see, especially in Africa, that it's going up.

so Christ's kingdom will not just work in the West, but his kingdom is around the whole world.

So it's quite an interesting survey. Yeah, we tend to, well here, we're very Anglo-centric, aren't we? We don't have any thoughts about what's happening in many other parts of the world, but we ought to.

And yeah, that's right. Thank you. Would you say that this verse is probably the most pivotal verse in the whole revelation? I wasn't thinking of saying that.

I might say it, now you've suggested it, but, so, Peter was saying, is this the most pivotal verse in the book? They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and with him will be his called, chosen, and faithful followers.

[59:54] It's certainly a significant verse, isn't it? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, let me come to that.

Let's just, let's go on. So, there's power in unity in verse 13, and then in verse 16, there's power and instability, because the beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute.

They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked. They will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to hand over to the beast their royal authority until God's words are fulfilled.

world. So, do you want to say that again, Steve, into the microphone or it will get recorded if you say it into the microphone. Yeah, well, I mean, I don't care what I say if it gets recorded, but I mean, it's happening all around us, isn't it, that the liberal consensus is unravelling because not succeeded in emanating the church, they turn on each other.

Yes, yeah, so there's the sort of fault lines in all the initials, isn't it, L, B, T, L, B, G, T, Q, so that's not, they don't all agree with each other.

[61:27] Why don't put in all the letters? Yeah, well, that's, yeah, I mean, the whole thing is unravelling in a sense.

Yeah, yeah. Thank you. So, yeah, unravelling would be a good way to put it here in the verses 16 to 17, that there's an unravelling or an instability and the beast and the horns hate or reject the prostitute and let me ask you, whose purpose actually presides over all this?

It does say. Yeah, could you be a bit more specific? put it in the hearts and the people's purpose to give their kingdom to the beast.

Yeah, if you could set it into the mic, people, people listening will be able to hear it. Yeah, which one are you on? Which verse are you on? 17.

So, this is 17, 17. For God has put into their hearts to fulfill his purpose, to be of one mind and to give their kingdom to the beast until the words of God are fulfilled.

[62:37] Thank you very much. So, it's his purpose and his words are fulfilled. Which is very comforting, isn't it? If you were living in North Korea or Imperial Rome to hear that at the end of the day with all this churn and complexity of power being shared and bargained and negotiated and usurped and everything else, that God's words will be fulfilled and in the end his purpose is being accomplished.

I think that's tremendously encouraging, isn't it? And I was reminded we shall sing this song in just one moment where it says a word will swiftly slay him God's word for all their craft and power one moment will not linger.

I can't remember how it goes after that. It is written by his finger. A safe stronghold we have in God. And just to conclude, so just in case you were asleep and now is the time to wake up, the beast, I think, is empire and kingdom using force.

The prostitute is the world city, the complexity of civilization and trade and technology. And there's a complex relationship between them.

and they combine and interact in a complex and varying way. So that's why does the woman control the beast or does the beast control the woman? It's rather complex, isn't it?

[64:14] And it varies. But none of these will last forever. And I suppose we ask ourselves, you know, where are we in this?

what's the beast that we should be aware of and what's the woman that we should be aware of?

And which city do we belong to? Important to settle that question. What's the wisdom we need?

And, come on, click. God's word presides over all. Amen. Amen. Okay, let's sing 888.

I think it was 888. Our God stands like a fortress rock with walls that will not fail us.

He helps us brace against the shock of fears which now assail us. The enemy of old in wickedness is bold. This seems his victory hour. He fears no earthly power.

[65:18] He arms himself with cunning. And it says, we win no 888. We win no battles through our might. We fall at once dejected.

The righteous one will lead the fight by God himself directed. You ask, who can this be? Christ Jesus it is he, eternal King and Lord, God's true and living word.

No one can stand against him. Yep, 888. And please could Ray close in prayer when we've sung this.

Time's gone on, so we'll just do this. Thank you.