



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Revelation 17: 1-8

"The Great Harlot"

Revelation

TRANSCRIPT

Good morning, and I'd like to wish you a happy Mother's Day. If you're visiting, we are in a series in the Book of Revelation, and as is typical with our studies, we go through books of the Bible chapter by chapter. And we happen to be in chapter 17 this Sunday. Next week, we'll be in chapter 18, Lord willing. And I mention that because I want you to know: this is not a Mother's Day sermon. I guess you saw the title. I can't think of a worse title for Mother's Day than the one I chose for this sermon. But, that's where we are. Anyway, it occurred to me yesterday what had happened, and I thought, "Oh no." It's a good chapter for any Sunday. So chapter 17. We're going to read the whole text:

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality." And He carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality, and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth." And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly. And the angel said to me,

"Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

"The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.' Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, He must remain a little while. The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction. The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast.

"These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of Lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful."

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

May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for this time together and this opportunity we have to be here and sing hymns of praise, read the texts of Scripture, consider its meaning together. And do what we're doing at this moment: come before you, come to the throne of grace to seek help in time of need. Father, we're always in a time of need. We may not realize it. We may enjoy good health. We may have employment. We may be surrounded with family and friends. All of that is a gift from you.

And what we need to always remember is at all times, we are completely dependent on you. When times are pleasant and when times are distressful, we are

equally dependent upon you. Every good and perfect gift that we have comes down from you. And so, we give you the praise for that. We thank you for the pleasant times that we may be experience, and we pray for those who are going through distressful times at this time, who are experiencing poor health or difficult financial circumstances, stressful situations within the home or at work. The list of difficulties is endless, Father, and we know some of them from our prayer request list, but you know our needs thoroughly and completely better than any of us do or even those who are undergoing the difficulties. We look to you, Father, to bless in a perfect way, because only you can do that.

We pray that you give healing where it's needed. We pray that you'd give relief from all of the difficulties, and give guidance and reassurance to those that are suffering affliction of whatever kind. Help them to recall the great promises we have. We've come to an unusual text of Scripture this morning, but one thing that undergirds the whole text that we should notice and recall is that you are a sovereign God in control of all of those future events. And you determine the end of the great enemy that will come on the scene of history in that latter day, and you have determined destruction for it and triumph for your people. And it's no different today than it will be then. We are moving toward triumph in Christ. We cannot fail. He has overcome the world as He told His disciples, and we're in Him. And therefore, we've overcome all of the difficulties and trials of this life.

So, help those that are going through difficulty to remember that. And those of us who are not at this time experiencing affliction, we pray that you'd make us grateful for the good times you give us, and for the future that's ours. It's in Christ, and we thank you for Him, and it's in His name we pray. Amen.

[Message] One of the best known and probably most notorious statements that Karl Marx made is that religion is the opium of the people. That's generally regarded as an infamous statement coming from an atheist and the father of communism. But it is true. Religion deludes people and has been the enemy of Christianity. The problem with Marx is he couldn't distinguish between Christianity and religion. They are opposites. Christianity is about grace; religion is about works. Christianity is about receiving salvation; religion is about achieving salvation. Christianity gives glory to God; religion gives glory to man. They are opposites. Light and darkness.

And because of that, religion in all of its forms has tried to destroy the church. John sees it in Revelation 17 with the vision of a woman drunk on the blood of the saints. That is religion in the last days. It will become a unified powerful organization identified as the great harlot.

John is appalled at the sight of her. Then he sees her destroyed, burned up with fire. That's the ultimate end of world religion. It will be destroyed and the true faith and the saints with Christ will triumph. That's what John sees and that's what John describes in Revelation 17.

It is a passage that divides into three parts. Verses 1 through 6 give a vision of the harlot sitting on a beast. Verses 7 through 14 give the interpretation of the vision. And then verses 15 through 18 describe the harlot's destruction, the end of world religion. The Bible begins, rather, the chapter begins with one of the angels who had poured out the bowls. And you remember from the previous study in chapter 16 that the bowl judgments, the seven bowls were poured out in judgment, and many of them poured out on the city of Babylon.

Well, one of the angels that poured out one of the bowls says to John, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters." The word "harlot" helps us define the meaning of what John sees. Because throughout the Old Testament, words like harlotry, fornication, and adultery are used of idolatry. They depict false worship. So here, the great harlot is false religion. It is seductive, like a harlot. It is attractive. It is flattering. It draws men in with its promises, just like a prostitute.

This great harlot made the kings of the earth drunk with the blood, or rather with the wine of her immorality, meaning her idolatry, her false worship. They're all taken in by this religion, because religion is strong opium.

John gets a careful look at all of this. He gets a careful look at the harlot when his angelic guide leads him into the wilderness. There in verse 3, John is described as being "in the Spirit." Now, He was in the Spirit back in chapter 1 when he had his glorious vision of Christ standing among the seven candlesticks. He was in the Spirit in chapter 4 when he was taken up into heaven. So, being in the Spirit has been described as a state of prophetic ecstasy. I don't really like that description of it; I don't think that we're to understand by this some kind of euphoria that John is it, some kind of mystical experience that He's having. But rather, in the Spirit is a way of

saying that John is in a unique situation in which the Holy Spirit is giving him special spiritual insight into things.

And here, in a wilderness, he is given a vivid, colorful, disturbing vision. He sees a harlot dressed in scarlet and purple sitting on a scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns. Her name is written on her forehead, which fits a custom in ancient Rome where harlots would wear headbands with their names written on them.

This great harlot's name is given in verse 5: "Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth." So she's a city. She is Babylon. And verse 18, the angel explains that the woman is "the great city which reigns over the kings of the earth." That may explain why John was taken into a wilderness. The geography around ancient Babylon, which is near modern-day Baghdad, area of the world we're very familiar with today, that area is barren. It's a wilderness around there. But also, spiritual Babylon, this Babylon of the future will be a wasteland, spiritually a wasteland. So, the geography fits perhaps the physical location of this future city, this capital of the beast. But also, it is appropriate for the spiritual condition.

In the Old Testament, the desert was associated with demons and with the curse and that's what this place will be associated with. Well, the harlot then is both the city and a system. It is the place where the future world religion will have its capital and from which it will extend its power and its influence over the world. It will be not just a city and a location, but it will be an influence, a system that goes worldwide. It's called the mother of harlots, meaning she is the source of false worship. All spiritual harlotry goes back to this place, a place which goes back to very ancient times, really. Her origin is given as early as Genesis chapters 10 and 11 when the human race joined in a collective religious rebellion against God on the plains of Shinar and built a great tower.

In Genesis 11 and verse 4, men said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city and a tower whose top will reach to heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name. And the name represents the people, and if you read through the Old Testament very frequently, we're studying Ezekiel, and we see this in Ezekiel quite a bit: God's jealous for His name, His reputation, His honor and His glory. And what they're saying is, "We're going to build a name for ourselves. We're going to glorify ourselves." That was their object.

It was man's response to God's earlier command to fill the earth. To go out and fill the whole earth. But they said no, we're not going to do that. And they decided to seek security by living together, joining together in a community. And in so doing, get glory for themselves by building an empire. So man declared his independence from God by building the city of Babel, and a great tower, probably a ziggurat, one of the great step pyramids, as a temple, a kind of stairway up to heaven.

It was the beginning of the city of man, and the beginning of the religion of man. But man can never win a rebellion against God or ever in any way frustrate God's purpose. God came down, confused their language and scattered them across the face of the earth.

But, the city of Babel remained. It was Nimrod's kingdom, who was a mighty hunter before the Lord. He is described that way in Genesis chapter 10 and verse 9. It's a way of saying he was a mighty man, a man of charisma and power. You often see reliefs, stone reliefs, pictures of the ancient kings from Egypt to Assyria in their chariots with their bows and arrows killing lions. Great hunters. They're depicted as men of great physical prowess and leadership. They are hunters, and that's how Nimrod is described. He's the first great world conqueror, first great emperor, and He's the first antichrist.

Throughout the Bible, we see men like Him, and throughout the Bible we see this city, Babel, or Babylon appearing as the enemy of God. Under Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, burned the temple, and took the people into exile to Babylon. And in doing so, brought them into a city of idols and temples. It was notorious for its idols and its temples. The city came to represent both a political and a religious system that was opposed to God and His people. It is the spirit of rebellion manifested in the politics and the religions of the world. And in the future, it will all come together in a unified religion, an apostate church in a city called the great city, from which it will oppose God and persecute His people. That's the great harlot.

Now, John sees her sitting on a scarlet beast. This is the same beast that we saw earlier in chapter 13 that came out of the sea. It's the antichrist and his kingdom. It is the color of the red dragon showing its intimate connection with Satan. He, the antichrist, controls the Babylonian system politically; the harlot represents the Babylonian system spiritually. So, the religion and the government work in concert,

will work in concert in the future. The religion gives a spiritual cohesion or unity to the world system; it's that which will bind all these kings together. They'll be united in their worship, in their spiritual thinking. That will be what binds them together. And the government, the political government, will give power and wealth to this world religion. So, they work together in concert, as I say.

Well, that all is suggested by the harlot's clothing. She is dressed in purple and scarlet, colors that suggest opulence and luxury. These were very expensive garments in the ancient world, so the harlot has a beautiful appearance. Now, that's part of its seductive appeal. And it has always been that way with the religion of man. It's concerned with externals. It's concerned with outward glory.

You don't have to be a student of history to see that. The things that largely remain from the ancient civilizations are their temples. They were built to last, and to be magnificent. It's the same today. You've seen that if you've been to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. It is a colossal structure and it's full of art, and treasure, and all of that is, I think to say, this is so big, and this is so grand, and this is so magnificent that it must be true.

Well, that's true of Protestants as well. They have their own cathedrals. Big places. Opulent places, to say the same thing. But what a contrast all that is to the early church, which met in houses, very simple, small congregations. Just a handful of people, and these people would come together in simple places and observe the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper, and the preaching of God's word. That was all. That's what they did. They had little, but their worship was worship in spirit and truth, and they did mighty things. It changed the world. Those little groups went out and they spread the gospel across the globe, and are still doing that.

Apostate Christendom and religion in general looks impressive and promises much, but gives nothing that is real. It's a sham. And that will be true of this final great manifestation of manmade religion. She is clothed in purple and scarlet, adorned with jewels, and we're told in verse 4, will have in her hand a gold cup.

Now, from its appearance, the cup promises a pure refreshing drink. What would you think would be offered to you if you were offered a gold cup? You'd think whatever's in that cup must be the best there is. And you'd look forward to drinking it. But what's in this cup is abominations and unclean things. It's full of poison, and it gives death. That's what human religion delivers. It's all show and empty of spiritual

reality and truth. It is a great lie. It offers life, it gives death. The harlot offers poison to drink while she drinks blood. That's what John writes in verse 6. "And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints.

This future union of church and state, of politics and religion, will enrich the religion and empower it to enforce its will widely throughout the world. That's a deadly combination. The founding fathers of our nation understood that. They'd experienced some of that in England, and they determined that there should be this separation of church and state. When there is not that separation and the state can become the arm of religion, and enforce itself on people, that's a dangerous thing.

We saw that earlier in the book, in the seven churches of Asia. They experienced that in John's day very acutely with the persecution that occurred when the state enforced emperor worship. Not much later in history, persecution took on a Christian face when the apostate church used the arm of government to destroy the believing church. And it's true today. State churches oppose evangelical movements. In fact, in Romania, I've been told that the Greek Orthodox Church was more hostile to evangelicals than the communists were. The apostate church has often used government to crush its rivals, to crush, in particular, the true people of God. And in that future day, it will be even more widespread. It will be universal. It will be worldwide. Nothing as broad in its scope has ever occurred to the people of God as this future worldwide persecution of believers.

When John saw this, he was appalled. He says, "I wondered greatly." He had expected to see the harlot's destruction. That's what the angel promised to show him. Instead, he sees the harlot riding the beast, prospering in the world, and devouring the saints. It was a shocking, revolting sight to John. But, the end is coming, and in the remaining verses the angel shows John how the harlot will be judged, and explains the nature and the end of the beast on which she rides.

In verses 8 through 13, he speaks of the beast. He states its destiny, which is destruction. More accurately, we could define that as perdition. And it explains the meaning of its anatomy. That is, the angel goes on to explain the meaning of its anatomy. Its end is perdition, and then he explains the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast that you saw, he says, was and is not and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction, or go to perdition, go into damnation.



Later, we see that in chapter 19 and verse 20 when the beast and the false prophet are cast into the lake of fire. That's a sin. Now, this description identifies it with the beast in chapter 13, who was mortally wounded and healed. Both there and here, those who dwell on the earth are amazed at the beast, as you can imagine they would be. They believe that this person has been slain and raised up from the dead. So, the beast is a man, an individual. And verse 11, he is identified as an eighth king. He is who we would identify as the antichrist.

But, the beast is more than that. In verses 9 and 10, its seven heads are explained. They are seven mountains. That's where the harlot sits, on these seven mountains. Some have identified this as Rome, because Rome is known as the city built on seven hills. In fact, it was known as the city of the seven hills in John's day. Those who have taken an historical approach to interpreting the Book of Revelation, that is, those who have seen all of these events as historical events, things that happened. The rise of Islam, or the rise of the Reformation, if it's a Catholic interpreter. Those who interpret these things have interpreted this city as the papacy. Now, the Catholic interpreters haven't done that, but those of a protestant stripe have often interpreted this city of the seven hills as Rome, and its purple and scarlet clothing representing the robes of the bishops and the cardinals.

You can understand why they would do that, but the Catholic church, while it may figure in all of this, as will the apostate protestant church, and all religions, because they all are essentially the same. And because this will be a worldwide religion, nevertheless, having said that, I don't think that this is the Catholic Church, this being described here. Now, there are many facts that don't correspond with Rome being the city and being the system of the harlot. In verse 1, the great harlot sits on many waters. Rome is on the Tiber, but not many waters. Historically, Babylon was on many waters. It was on the Euphrates and had many canals that came off the Euphrates. In fact, in Jeremiah chapter 51 and 13, Babylon is described as dwelling by many waters. In verse 15, the waters are defined as peoples and nations being influenced by the religion.

Still, it suggests, I think, having said all that, that the many waters are probably not geography but peoples and nations as defined here. Nevertheless, that description of this city on many waters suggests that the location which is described here will not be that of Rome. But also, the seven mountains are immediately identified in verse 10

not as literal hills, not as mountains, but as seven kings. And as you read through the Bible, you see that mountains represent places of power. Seats of government. And kings as well.

We see that, for example, in Daniel chapter 7 and verses 17 and verse 23. There, he speaks of kingdoms, and then later describes him as king. So, the kingdoms and the kings are spoken of together, and they're described as mountains or hills in various parts of the Bible.

So, what are described here, as I say, are not literal hills, but a system of seven successive Gentile empires which John divides into three groups. He speaks of "five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come." And as we read through the Bible, we find these world empires which all oppose God, and persecuted His people. The first six are Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Those are six empires that throughout the history of biblical history, there are other empires in the world; but within the purview of biblical history, those are the empires that came on the scene.

In John's day, five of those kingdoms had fallen. One was. One was in existence, as is described here. It was the sixth. It's Rome. In John's day, it was in its zenith. And in John's day, it was the beast. It was at that time, the manifestation of Babylon, that whole system of religion. Its emperor was the antichrist. John tells us in 1 John that antichrist is coming. Then he says, "But many antichrists have already arisen." There are antichrists in every age, those who oppose God. The emperors of Rome which opposed Christ and the gospel and the church; they were antichrists. And so, in his day, the one that stood was Babylon in its day, and the antichrist in its day. Not the future antichrist, not the full manifestation, but of the same spirit and nature of that.

So, the beast with its heads or mountains has existed throughout the history of Gentile world empires. But it's not finished. There is a seventh and a final empire that is yet to come. It is still future. It is the kingdom of the antichrist, and John says when he comes, he must remain a little while. He is the beast. And he is the embodiment of his empire, which is also called the beast. According to Daniel chapter 9 verse 26, he is the prince from the people who destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. So, he is a Roman, or at least in some way connected with the Roman empire, and his kingdom will be a revised Roman empire.

So, it is possible that the capital of this collective religious and political rebellion against God will be on the seven hills of Rome. It may be located there. But, I tend to think that it's more likely to be rebuilt along the Euphrates and be a rebuilt Babylon. It doesn't really matter where it is. Wherever the beast establishes his capital, his reign will be short, he must reign a little while, John says. Still, short though it will be, his reign will be worldwide and it will be terrible.

In verse 11, he is called an eighth, and is one of the seven. The eighth king, but He's one of the seven kings. Now, what that probably means is his empire is the seventh and final one. He is the seventh king. But, there will be two stages to his reign. He will come to power as the seventh king. He will suffer a fatal wound to his head. He will be healed as we have seen earlier in chapter 13. And the world will be amazed at the beast. That seems to divide his reign between what happens before that even and what happens after. When he is raised up, probably through a sham of some kind, he will then begin a new stage of his reign, a supernatural one in which he is worshipped as a god, as a false religion will be given its most vile and violent expression under him.

We find this in other places, by the way. We find this in 2 Thessalonians chapter two and verse 4 where Paul talks about the man of sin setting himself up in the temple of God and being worshipped as God. That's what will happen. All of these world empires were religious. They were idolatrous. The harlot, idolatry, has always ridden upon these empires. She has influenced them without governing them. But it will be even more prominent in this seventh kingdom to come, the kingdom of the beast. She will be drunk on the blood of the saints and make the kings of the earth drunk with the wine of her immorality.

The other kings in the beast's empire are described in verses 12 through 13. They will be confederates of the antichrist. They'll join with him. What's significant about them is their complete allegiance to him. Kings normally want to keep their autonomy; they want to keep their own domain. But these share their power with him. They're in complete allegiance to him. In verse 13, John writes, " These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast."

Someday the nations will come together. We live in a very divided world, but the day is coming when they will unite in one purpose, just as they were united originally at the Tower of Babel. It will be unity in their opposition to God, just as it

was in that day. And we read in verse 14, " These will wage war against the Lamb." That is the future. That's what's going to happen in the future day. There'll be this great battle at the end of history where the kings of the earth will fight against the Lamb, against Christ. But it's also the present. Just as it was the past. This is true throughout history. People are separated by many things. By geography, language, taste, politics, religion. But the world is united in its opposition to Christ. It is united in its opposition to the Christ of the gospel of the New Testament. Jews and Muslims can tolerate their differences. Their differences really aren't that great. Maybe different kinds of ceremonies they have, and different views on the book that they call holy, but the modern religious Jew and the Muslim today don't have really great differences in their religion. Catholics and Protestants can tolerate their difference. But none can tolerate Christians and the gospel of Christ, the gospel of the one way. And the world is united in its opposition to that.

There's no better example of that than Christ Himself. Christ's trial and the crucifixion. It brought natural enemies together. Men that hated each other came together, became united together in that event. The Jews and the Romans, Pilate and Herod. They all agreed in crucifying Christ. And all that in fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm chapter 2. Psalm 2, which prophesied it, prophesied that the kings of the earth would stand against the Lord and His anointed, His Christ, saying, "Let us tear their fetters apart and cast their cords from us." That was man in rebellion against Christ at His trial.

The Lord gave words and a motive to their rebellion in His parable in Luke 19 and verse 14 where the citizens said, "We will not have this man to reign over us." That's the natural man. That is what man is today, what he was in the past, what he will be in the future. He is continually declaring hisin dependence from God and will fight God to maintain it. Did at the Tower of Babel, he does it today, He'll do it in the future. That fight will have its final expression in the future at the end of history when the kings unite with the beast, the antichrist, to wage war against the Lamb. Isn't that interesting the way he describes Christ? The Lamb.

Why the Lamb? He also describes Him as the king of kings, but he prefaces that with the Lamb. Well, because the Lamb recalls the sacrifice of Christ, and that's the essence of His ministry in this world. He did not come to be a great teacher. Did not come to be a great example. He's all of that, of course; the greatest teacher that

ever was, and the purest example. But He came to be a sacrifice, came to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

That's what they hate, essentially. That's what men oppose, and that's what they will oppose in this great day. They'll fight, they'll wage war against the Lamb, the Savior who was sacrificed for sinners. But it is doomed to fail, just as man's building project at Babel failed, they will fight against the Lamb and the Lamb will overcome them because He is, as John says, Lord of Lords and king of kings. Who can defeat Him? He is the sovereign over the world and history. He is very God of very God. He's the second person of the Trinity. No one can defeat God Almighty.

This is the great battle described in chapter 1. There, it's elaborated; here, it's referred to. But it's when the beast and the false prophet and the kings of the earth gather together and assert their power against the king to come against Christ. And in a moment, He destroys them. I guess we could say before a shot is fired, they're done away with. I don't know what kind of weapons they'll have in that day, but He will utterly defeat them.

But before that happens, the harlot will meet her end. The angel promised to show John the judgment of the great harlot, and he does that in verse 16. The beast and the ten horns, the kings who are his allies will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.

Now, no motive is given for this action against the harlot, why they turn on the harlot. We're not told. It may be due to rivalry, or jealousy; the harlot will have lots of power and wealth. She's described in that way, which men want for themselves. That may be motive enough. I think what it underscores is a general truth, and that is that unity among men is always tenuous. It's very fragile. Conspiracies never hold together for very long, because men are always looking out for themselves, and they end up conspiring against each other.

And so, as one of the commentators pointed out, there is a law of political history that revolutions always have within them the seeds of self-destruction. That's because the heart of man is selfish and men cannot be united together. They fight against each other. We see that here.

But this is not due only to a weakness of human nature. It is due to that in part, but there's something beyond that. It's due to the power of God. He is ultimately behind the destruction of false religion. Verse 17, here's the explanation for why they

turn on this false religion, why they destroy He harlot: "For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled."

Proverbs 21:1 says that the king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord. He turns it wherever He wishes. He will turn the hearts of these kings against the harlot. They will think that they are carrying out their own plan for their own purpose, but they will be only undermining themselves and doing God's will. The Bible is filled with examples of this, of God using the forces of evil, the very forces that oppose Him to achieve His very purpose. There are examples of Him turning the enemy's swords against themselves. And don't think that He can't do that for you today. He can. We are to trust Him in everything. We are to walk by faith, be obedient, and He will deliver in His time and in His way.

Someday, He will end all idolatry and false worship, all religion of man. It is opium. It is a spiritual narcotic, a hallucinogenic, spiritually. It plays to people's pride. It deceives them into thinking that they are okay and prevents them or deludes them from seeking salvation in the only Savior, Jesus Christ. So, He will cause its followers to destroy it. Then they themselves will be destroyed, ending both the religious and the political system of Babylon, and the beast. We see that in chapter 18, the final destruction.

How do you fight against that? How do you fight against the Almighty, who not only controls the events of history, the events of life, but controls even the thoughts of His enemy? It's foolish to try. Nevertheless, men do. Men think that they will find security in their own strength and in their own numbers, and their great numbers, and in their wealth. That was the thinking at Babel, at the dawn of history. They thought their great tower would give them security and glory. But security is only in the Lord. It's in submission to Him.

Proverbs 18:10 says, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous runs into it and is safe." Only those who trust in Christ have life forever. They will triumph with Him. That's the picture John gives in verse 14: Christ returning victorious with His elect. That's the positive lesson here. This is the future for the church, the true church. Not defeat, but victory. The warning is: beware of false hope, reject religion. It offers a gold cup, but that cup is full of poison. We're not saved by ceremonies. We're not saved by works. There are ceremonies. There's

baptism. There's the Lord's supper. Those are our ordinances. And there are works. We are to live a godly life, a life of obedience. But that's a work of grace that God produces in us having brought us into His family and put us in Christ.

We're not saved, though, by those things. We're not saved by the externals, by big cathedrals. There's no security in that. The Lord alone is our strong tower. He alone is the one in whom we must trust. That's the gospel. Man is lost, guilty, and helpless to save himself. He needs a Savior, and Christ is that Savior. Salvation is come through His death. He died as a substitute for sinners. He paid the penalty of sin. And all who believe in Him are saved. They are saved at the very moment of faith, and they are saved forever.

So if you're here without Christ, if you are trusting in your religion, stop. Look to Christ alone. Confess yourself to be a sinner and trust in Him. That's the way to eternal life. May God help you to believe in it, and help all of us to rest in that and live for Him. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank you for this text of Scripture which is detailed and maybe a little confusing in some ways. But what we do see here is that there are two systems: there's a system of works and there's a system of grace. There's salvation by works and there's salvation by the sacrifice of Christ. And only one is true. That's Christ. That's His sacrifice. Your grace, which brings us to a saving knowledge of Him, which offered Him up in our place. And what we're reminded of here is though the day is coming when all of the opposition that has gone on from the beginning and is going on today and will go on in the future, this opposition to the gospel that's found in religion and in the heart of man, it will all come together collectively in a great expression of rebellion, and it will fail against you, and Christ will return triumphant, and His people will be triumphant. We look to you with the praise for that. You have made us triumphant. Your Son told His disciples to take courage. He said, "I have overcome the world." That final overcoming of the world will occur in the future. That's our future. We give you the praise and the thanks for that. Thank you for Christ and His death for us, and it's in His name we pray. Amen.