

## CHAPTER 3

# The Flood from the Abyss

The Book of Revelation not only unveils Christ, it also un-masks the devil. It shows us who he really is. It shows us his devices. The apostle Paul could say to the church that they were not ignorant of satan's devices (see 2 Cor. 2:11). Unfortunately, we could probably not say that about the church today.

### *We Are in a Battle*

We are living in the days when Paul says that there will be those who "*follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons*" (1 Tim. 4:1). Although we know that Christ is triumphant, that all things are under his feet, and that he has crushed the serpent's head, there is still satanic and demonic activity going on in our world. I say that not to alarm us, but just to make us

aware of the kind of world that we live in. We are called to battle, and “*our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*” (Eph. 6:12). Now the outcome of the battle has already been confirmed and established, but it is a battle.

The Book of Judges is a very important book because it instructs us about taking the world for the Kingdom. God called the Israelites to take the land. He calls us to take the world. He promised them that every place that the soles of their feet would tread he would give to them (see Deut. 11:24; Josh. 1:3). A promise like that could make them believe that the taking of the land would literally be a walkover. But it was not. There were battles to win, cities to take, and armies to put to flight. The same thing is true today. It is an unequal battle, of course, and one could almost feel that it is unfair to be part of a side that cannot lose confronting a side that cannot win. But that is how it is, and we should all be glad of it!

### *The Restless Sea*

When you read the Bible you will discover that God seems, at times, to have a problem with the sea, with the oceans. One significant Scripture that underlines that we find towards the end of Revelation, when the perfection of beauty has come, when the city has descended out of Heaven in all its splendor and glory and when God removes the curse from our world. There is a simple statement that tells us “*there was no longer any sea*” (Rev. 21:1). There is a river but no sea. There is no more sea because the sea is often used in Scripture as a picture of that which restlessly resists the will of God. Let us consider



some Scriptures to confirm this. Here is God speaking to Job, rebuking him and challenging him as to where he was in the midst of all God's creative activity.

*Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, "This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt"?* (Job 38:8-11)

God is speaking to a restless ocean that seems to have energy that wants to break the bounds that God has set. And God stands beside the ocean and says, "I have set your doors, I have fixed your bars, I have put limits on you. You can come this far and no further." It is almost as if, at times, the ocean is in antagonism against God. That is why Jesus rebuked the sea and commanded it to be still. He is taking authority over that which, at that particular time, appears to be seeking to destroy him. He demonstrates his authority over the restless sea by walking on it to show that even this great rebellious mass is under His feet, just as the angel set His foot upon the ocean.

Listen to what the writer of Proverbs surprisingly says about this. It is wisdom speaking, saying how she was there at every stage of God's creative power, "*when He gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep His command, and when He marked out the foundations of the earth*" (Prov. 8:29).

God has put a boundary on the oceans. He has put a limit on the activity of the seas.

God speaks through Jeremiah to rebuke his people because they do not submit to His authority or obey His word:

*I made the sand a boundary for the sea, an everlasting barrier it cannot cross. The waves may roll, but they cannot prevail; they may roar, but they cannot cross it (Jeremiah 5:22).*

There are many other Scriptures that seem to portray this apparent antagonism between God and the ocean, between the Lord and the sea. It is as if the sea is seeking to burst out, to overcome the barrier, to roll, with its waves, across the limits that God has set upon it. There is a fight going on.

We are perhaps given a clue as to why this is when we consider the words of Isaiah:

*But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud (Isaiah 57:20).*

In Scripture the rebellious nations of the world are often pictured as the sea. That is why the prostitute in the Book of Revelation is described as being seated on many waters. The many waters that she sits upon are peoples and nations and tongues. They are the nations of the world, and they are represented as the many waters that cover the face of our earth.

We can recognize, then, that the sea somehow contains some unpleasant concepts. It is the very place where, when God was looking for somewhere to cast our sin, he threw it. And another name for the sea, or the deep, is the abyss. Abyss is a very interesting word in Revelation. We are dealing with rebellious nations, with the wicked who are like the tossing sea, always wanting to go over the limits, to push back the boundaries of their immorality, wickedness and violence. This is not just an Old Testament concept. Jesus described people approaching the end times:



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*On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea (Luke 21:25).*

There is a disturbance among the nations. There is a perplexity and confusion, and it is described as the tossing of the sea. Jesus once came to a place where the Gadarenes lived, and He met a man with demons. When Jesus asked the name of the demon, the response was "*Legion, for we are many*" (Mark 5:9). The man was possessed with a legion of demons, and the demons began to implore Jesus that He would not send them back to the abyss. So Jesus cast out the demons from the man into a herd of pigs, and the pigs ran headlong down the slope and drowned in the sea, because that is where all unclean things belong. It is the abode of evil. It is the depository of sin. Fortunately for our world, it is a deep pit that is sealed and locked. Having said that, we need to consider some of the things that come up out of the abyss.

### *The Beasts*

When we were looking at God's prophetic people in chapter 11 of the Book of Revelation, we suddenly had this word dropped on us that seemed to come out of the blue, but it actually came out of the pit. It was the word that told us that the beast from the abyss would fight against God's prophetic people and would kill them. There is no more said about him. It is just like a throwaway line, but then we turn to chapter 13; this is why we cannot see the book chronologically, as this is a flashback to tell us what actually happened.

It was just a single line in chapter 11 that told us that it happened; the whole explanation is given in chapter 13. John says, "*And I saw a beast coming out of the sea*" (Rev. 13:1). This is

the beast from the abyss. Now remember that the sea also represents the restless wickedness of Gentile nations, and so the beast that comes up out of the sea is actually a representation of anti-Christian political power. It is bestial in its hatred of the things of God, in its agendas, and in its oppression. In the first century, the beast that came out of the sea was the Roman Empire, and for Israel, of course, it literally came out of the sea: it came from across the ocean.

When we look at the description of this beast, we discover that it is a composite picture of the four beasts that Daniel saw coming up out of the sea. If you refer back to the Book of Daniel, you will find that he saw four beasts coming up out of the ocean. Daniel speaks of four empires yet to come, the last of which will be the most oppressive, the most violent, and the most destructive. He sees first the Babylonian Empire, then the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greek Empire, and finally the Roman Empire.

The Roman Empire was worse than everything that had been before it. When I was at school, we used to get taught about things like the Pax Romana, all the good things that the Romans did, all the rule and peace that they established. But it was a most cruel and oppressive empire, given to violence and bloodshed, and at this time it was epitomized by a hedonistic emperor called Nero. Nero became emperor at the age of 17 and later had his mother murdered. An ex-wife and countless officials were also similarly dispatched. He pursued “sexual activities of great and indeed unlimited versatility” and instituted the youth games that attracted “every sort of immorality” (Tacitus, quoted in Michael Grant, *The Roman Emperors* [New York: Barnes and Noble, 1985]). In A.D. 64 vast



tracts of Rome were destroyed by fire, which many believed was ordered by the Emperor himself in order to create space for the building of a huge golden house for the indulgence of his pleasures. He then went on to use the Christian community in Rome as scapegoats for the conflagration.

The historian Seneca recorded, "Dressed in wild animal skins they were torn to pieces by dogs or made into torches to be ignited after dark" (quoted in Grant, *op. cit.*). This Neronian persecution formed the prototype of others in later reigns. After his death a legend arose that a risen Nero would return, making him a certain candidate for the beast.

One of the great conflicts we have in Revelation is between the beast and the Lamb. Later on, in chapter 13, there is another beast, but he does not come out of the sea; he comes out of the land and represents religious power yoked with political power. When you get religious power and political power together, you have a nightmare scenario. You only have to look at nations whose government is fundamentalist Islam to know that those combinations spell murder. This is true of any coalition of religion and politics.

The antagonism of Rome towards Christianity was provoked by believers' refusal to sacrifice to Caesar. This is a theme all the way down through history: God is at war with the beast from the sea and the beast from the land, with political and religious powers. If you want a little bit of background on the beast from the land and the beast from the sea, read the last two chapters of the Book of Job. Here there are two beasts. There is a land beast called "Behemoth" and a sea beast called "Leviathan." Modern commentators tell us that they are an

elephant and a crocodile but, as I read it, I think that I have never seen either an elephant or a crocodile like what is described there! They are actually much more akin to dinosaurs, and one must wonder if the remnants of dinosaurs still walked the earth in the days of Job.

How do these beasts relate to the political and religious powers? Well, consider what the psalmist says in Psalm 74. He is talking about God delivering his people from Egypt and crushing Leviathan, who is identified as Rahab (see Ps. 89), the meaning of which implies "a tempestuous and arrogant attitude." There is a very real sense in which the first political and religious conflict for Israel was in Egypt, because the pressure there was both economic and moral. It was political because Israel was an asset to the Egyptian economy. One of the things that Pharaoh was worried about was that the people were getting so big that they would leave the land, and he did not want them to do that because they were good for his economy. He did not want them to stay, either, because he was afraid they would fight him (see Exod. 1:10).

That is a dilemma that the world always has with the Church. It is the dilemma that, for example, a company may have with its Christian worker. They want him there because he's the best worker in the place. But they do not want him there because he is a provocation to their loose morals. He does not fit in with everybody else, and there is this love/hate relationship. They think, "We don't want to get rid of him because he makes us money; we would like to get rid of him because he embarrasses us." Israel was like that in Egypt. They loved them, and they hated them. They wanted them, and they did not want them. But God delivered them



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and, according to the psalmist, God delivered them from the beast from the ocean.

*It was You who split open the sea by Your power; You broke the heads of the monster in the waters. It was You who crushed the heads of Leviathan and gave him as food to the creatures of the desert (Psalm 74:13-14).*

God demonstrates his deliverance of Israel out of Egypt as a crushing of the head of the sea monster.

*You crushed Rahab like one of the slain; with Your strong arm You scattered Your enemies (Psalm 89:10).*

This is how Isaiah puts it:

*Was it not You who cut Rahab to pieces, who pierced that monster through? Was it not You who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made a road in the depths of the sea so that the redeemed might cross over? (Isaiah 51:9-10)*

When He moved in judgment and delivered his people out of Egypt, God crushed the sea monster, Pharaoh, Rahab, in order to bring his people through. He overcame the political oppression, for as slaves they had been vital to the Egyptian economy. He overcame the religious oppression, for He brought judgment not just on Egypt, but on the gods of Egypt (see Exod. 12:12).

There is a war going on, then, but our God gives us victory and brings us through in deliverance. The beast from the abyss might come and roar, but he will be defeated.

### *True Spiritual Warfare*

In order for me to communicate something about what we are facing by way of spiritual warfare, we are going to turn to chapter 9 of the Book of Revelation. Here we begin to get into some of the nightmare scenarios.

*The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth (Revelation 9:1a).*

Now that is exactly how the prophets describe the fall of satan (see Isa. 14:12-14). John continues to write:

*The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss (Revelation 9:1b).*

We should note that he does not have the key; he does not possess the key and has no right to the key. He cannot use the key until the key is given to him, because every key that opens every purpose is on Jesus' belt. He has the keys of death and hell. He has the keys of David. Nothing can be unlocked without Jesus' approval. So, then, this angel is given the key to the Abyss.

*When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were not given power to kill them, but only torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a man. During those days men will seek death,*



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*but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them. The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon. The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come (Revelation 9:2-12).*

Now this is the happy hunting ground for the sensational and the bizarre and those who want to interpret the Scripture by the morning's newspaper. The first thing we need to understand about these locusts is that they are not, as some have foolishly suggested, helicopters! They are demons. They have come up out of the Abyss. They have been released, but they have only been released for a short while. Now remember that the sea is the Abyss. They are synonymous. This, then, is a tidal wave of evil breaking out in the world, first fulfilled in the awful things that happened in Jerusalem before it fell. That was its first fulfillment: a tidal wave of evil, sweeping all men before it.

These demons have the ability to torment men for five months. It is interesting that the flood, by which God removed all life from the earth except the life of the eight saved in the Ark, prevailed over the earth for five months. What we are seeing here is a flood of evil that comes into the land and

submerges all people for five months. It is another flood. It came from the abyss, just as in Noah's day the fountains of the deep were opened in order to bring the flood upon the ground. Here there is not a literal flood of water but a flood of evil. It flows out of the abyss to cover the land where God's covenant-breaking people are currently abiding.

I do not think for a moment that we are supposed to analyze these creatures too much. I think that the description is just meant to fill us with horror and repulsion. It is so bizarre, so ugly, and so contrary to anything that is pleasant and acceptable that these horrible creatures are supposed simply to fill us with absolute abhorrence. Having said that, I am going to suggest some of the things they could represent.

The image is taken from the prophet Joel. In the first two chapters of Joel, the prophet is speaking about what he calls the army of the Lord, but it is actually an invasion of the land by an unprecedented swarm of locusts. Joel speaks of that as a godly judgment on the nation, and much of Joel's imagery is repeated throughout the Book of Revelation. In fact, things that, in Joel, are regarded as demonstrations of judgment are sometimes taken in the New Testament as pictures of God's blessing, for example, the signs in the sky, blood, vapor of smoke, and signs in the heavens.

In the New Testament, rather than being a sign of utter disaster and total condemnation, these are the signs that accompany the coming of the Holy Spirit and the anointing of the people of God. So signs can be both: to the perishing they are portents of disaster, and to the righteous they are promises of blessing.



Let me just highlight this point again by taking you back to the flood and to Noah. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Noah, being warned by God of things not yet seen, moved with reverent fear and built an ark for the salvation of his family. The whole purpose of the ark was to save. It had no other purpose. It was the means of God's salvation. Just as baptism is, for us, a demonstration of our salvation, it is also a picture of us going through the flood. The writer to the Hebrews says that the sole reason Noah built the ark was to save, but then he goes on to say that by building the ark, Noah condemned the world (see Heb. 11:7). That was not his aim. His aim was to save, but the by-product was condemnation. So the Ark, which was for Noah and his family a wonderful picture of salvation, was for the unbeliever a sign of condemnation.

Equally, the cross for us is a wonderful sign of redemption; to the world it is the very thing that condemns them. For not only did salvation come into the world by the cross, but Jesus says that now, in other words through his death on the cross, judgment comes into the world. By the cross we are saved, and by the cross the prince of this world is driven out (see John 12:31). So one thing can have radically different effects on different people.

Therefore, we are seeing things that will not harm *us*, things that should not cause us to fear. The whole purpose of locusts is to eat everything green. It eats every leaf, strips every bush bare, and takes the grass away so that a desert is left behind. In fact, the Book of Joel describes it like this: "*Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste—nothing escapes them*" (Joel 2:3). But these locusts do not eat the trees or the grass. Clearly they are not natural locusts but spirit beings

who are only fulfilling the purpose of God. In fact, as you read it, you will find that they are restricted in what people they can touch. They can only touch those who do not have the mark of God. That means those who carry the mark of God are untouched in this satanic epidemic. The locusts are restricted as to the people they can affect. They are also restricted in their power: they are not allowed to kill anybody. And they are restricted in the period of their operation: it can only last five months. We need to understand and appreciate that whatever satan seeks to do, whatever demon powers seek to accomplish in our world, they are on a leash that Jesus holds in his hand. There are restrictions on them, like there are on the restless ocean. He says that they are to go "*this far...and no farther*" (Job 38:11).

Let us just have a look at them, not because there is anything desirable about them, but to consider why John describes them as he does. It is possible that he cannot find any other words and he uses the best dynamic equivalent he has got in his language to communicate what his eye sees. But maybe he uses this imagery for a specific purpose.

The first thing that happens when the abyss opens is that there are billows of impenetrably *dark smoke*, so much so, actually, that John describes it as darkening the sun and the sky. That is how the locust swarm is described in the Book of Joel. They come with such density that they block out light. These creatures produce darkness. They produce an atmosphere in which you cannot see, in which you are uncertain and confused. They come to *darken* the minds and the understandings of those who are outside of Christ. They bring confusion into the thinking of men and women. This darkness is the great locust cloud that fills the sky.



But they are also described as those who are like *scorpions*. What is more, these scorpions sting people and torture and torment them to such an extent that men will seek to die, but will not find death as a way out of their torment because these creatures have come to produce *despair* in the hearts of people.

They are then described as *horses*, and horses in the Scriptures were the equivalent of weapons of mass destruction in our day. Israel was forbidden to multiply horses, but powerful nations had horses and chariots. Israel was forbidden to have them because that is what Egypt had. That is what Egypt boasted in, and a nation with horses was a nation that could dominate its neighbors. A nation with horses was a nation with an equipped army that could subdue all those around it. And so these locusts are like horses because they have come to *dominate* the lives of all those to whom they carry their influence and their power.

They are described as having *human faces*. That is because all demon power works through humanity. A human person demonized is the means of mass deception. They perpetuate doctrines of demons that lock people up, that *deceive*, that *captivate*. I am only speculating, but when we set it in the context of imagery and concepts used throughout Scripture, these are distinct possibilities.

They had *women's hair* because these creatures create carnal *desires* in the hearts of people. A woman's hair is her glory. It is a display of her femininity and a demonstration of her beauty. In the Song of Solomon the king says that the tresses of his lover captivate him. While that is legitimate in true love, it is destructive when it produces lust.

They have got *lion's teeth* because they have come to *devour* everything that is good in the lives of those whom they are seeking to oppress.

In summary, these demons are producing a society that is in the dark, that is in despair, that feels it is being dominated by powers outside of itself, that has been deceived by humanism behind which is demonic powers. They produce a society with inordinate desires to fulfill growing longings and a society that is being devoured, chewed up, and spat out. I sometimes feel that I live in a society just like that, and I find this far scarier than helicopters! I find this more challenging because I cannot do anything to stop the helicopter, but I can seek to change my society.

Do you remember when Jesus sent out the 72, instructing them to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, preach the good news to the poor, and cast out demons? When they come back, they exclaimed, "*Lord, even the demons submit to us in Your name*" (Luke 10:17). Jesus then declares, "*I saw Satan fall like lightning from Heaven*" (Luke 10:18). They must have thought to themselves, "We didn't see that!" They saw the leper cleansed, but they did not see satan fall. They were looking where the problem and the need were because that was their area of responsibility and ministry. But Jesus saw satan fall out of the sky.

Christians can get into all kinds of things about spiritual warfare and territorial mapping and such. But that is not our responsibility. Our responsibility, our challenge and privilege, is to reach the world. We have to preach the Gospel, heal the sick, and deliver the possessed. I have not got time to deal with satan. But the good news is that when I do my job, he



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falls out of the sky! I do not have to pull him down. He falls down. We do not need to make a ministry out of something that Jesus has already done. Then Jesus says to them, "*I give you authority over all the power of the enemy to tread on serpents and scorpions*" (Luke 10:19).

Those things just get out of the pit for us to tread on. They are awful, foul, evil, and wicked, and they have come to corrupt our society. It was part of God's judgment on covenant-breaking Israel, but they are still out there. Demon powers are still operating in our world, and our strategy is simple. We preach the Gospel. We cast out demons by the Spirit of God, and then we know that the Kingdom has come.

We ended the last chapter with the demons that came up from the abyss. And we saw that we can chase them all the way back down to the pit because they cannot touch us—we have been given authority to tread on snakes and scorpions. It reveals something about them, too, which is told us that "in their heads they wore some crowns like crowns of gold" (Rev. 18) and that "they had breastplates like breastplates of iron" (Rev. 18:9). If we apply that to the world in which we live, it speaks of people who are emperors, people who are their own kings and who think only of themselves. They do not have real authority. They only have what look like crowns. But it's a lie and a power. They say "I am in charge. I am all that matters. I am king of my own life. I am lord of my own destiny. I make my own decisions. I rule." Of course, that is the ultimate rebellion against God.