

- Two main points

There are two main points in these verses: (1) some people in this world will be deceived; others will be preserved from deception; (2) pagan powers will rise but they are destined to be defeated.

1. Some people in this world will be deceived; others will be preserved from deception

- The book of life

(i) The list of the predestined

(ii) A list of those who qualify for reward

1. **Some people in this world will be deceived; others will be preserved from deception.** *'The inhabitants of the earth, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will be amazed when they see the beast, when they see the beast who was, and who is not, and who is to come.'* Those in the book of life will not be deceived. But what is the 'book of life'? There are two answers to this question: (i) It is the list of **the predestined**. It is quite mistaken to say to a new convert, 'Your name has just been written in the Lamb's book of life.' The fact is: the elect were written in God's book before the world was even created. What happens when a person is converted to Christ is that he finds out that his name is written in 'the Lamb's book of life' – but it was there all along, ever since before creation. After we have come to salvation we discover God had us in mind all the time! We look back over our lives and we can see it! Also (ii) the 'book of life' is a list of **those who qualify for reward**. I emphasize the word 'qualify'. When you first come to salvation you 'qualify' for reward. You are delivered from the power of darkness, and are transferred to the kingdom of God's Son¹. By that act of God you are 'qualified', 'got ready', to become partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

¹ Colossians 1:13

You qualify for reward¹. Biblical usage elsewhere shows that the 'book of life' has two aspects to it: it is the list of the predestined – 'those written for life'² (Hebrew) – and therefore it is those who are **candidates** for reward. Those who are guilty of persistent rebellion are removed from God's list of those who will receive his rewards.

¹ Colossians 1:12; 3:24
² Isaiah 4:3

- Removal from the Lamb's book of life is not loss of salvation; it is loss of reward

Esther 6:1–6 shows how in the ancient world there would be a list of citizens, and alongside the names would be the record of what they had done – with a view to reward. If they have done nothing worthy of reward or have forfeited reward they are destined to be unrewarded; so their name can be removed. Removal from the Lamb's book of life (and it is a possibility) is not loss of salvation; it is loss of reward. The reward is that your name becomes publicly honoured. We shall return to this topic in connection with Revelation 20:11–15.

- Only those whose names are in the book of life stay free from Satan's deception

The point here in Revelation 17:8 is that those who are not God's people inevitably go astray. Only those whose names are in the book of life stay free from Satan's deception. Satan is almost – but not quite – able to deceive God's elect. He certainly deceives those who are not God's elect.

2. God's people will be preserved from pagan idolatry

2. **God's people will be preserved from pagan idolatry.** The angel speaking to John continues with some more mysterious 'explanation': ⁹*This calls for a mind that has wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills, on which the woman is seated.* ¹⁰*And they are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is here now; the other has*

not yet come. When he comes he must continue for a little while.
¹¹And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also an eighth king. He belongs to the seven kings, but he will go away into destruction.'

The total vision represents pagan power, which in John's day was embodied in the idolatry and wild living of the Roman Empire. The seven kings are **symbols** of pagan kingship; we must not try to identify them with any particular kings ancient or modern. The same 'one, two, three – plus an eternal destiny' structure that I have mentioned is visible here also. There is a first stage (kings one-to-five). Then there is a second stage (king six who is present in John's day). Then there will come a specially powerful king in the future. The five kings-of-the-past are pagan empires of days that have gone by. (We might think of the Babylonians, Medes, Persians, Greeks and past Roman emperors – but it would be a mistake to try to identify the five too precisely; John is using symbolism adding up to the number seven.) Then there is one king who is powerful in John's own day. No doubt it was Domitian – but the identity is not important. The vision is making the point that 'beastly' kingdoms come and go. They have times of power and times of weakness.

The 'seventh king' is John's way of speaking of 'antichrist' – or whatever name one wants to give to a powerful enemy of God and his people who arises in the last days. The predictions of this period often make the point that it will not last long.

Back behind all of this paganism is 'the beast' – the spirit of pagan persecution and loose-living that is in all the kingdoms of this world. He may be given a distinct number – but he belongs to the seven. He – the beastly spirit in all paganism – is behind every persecution, every loosely living immoral regime.

John has a promise for us: this entire system will be destroyed. Babylon, Rome, the woman on the beast, everything that represents paganism is destined to end. Jesus will overcome it. Meanwhile we are to overcome it too. Then our names stay in the book of life.

• The same structure

• The five kings-of-the-past are pagan empires of days that have gone by



• One king who was powerful in John's own day (Domitian)

• 'Seventh king' – the antichrist

• Behind all of this paganism is 'the beast'

• This entire system will be destroyed

• Meanwhile we are to overcome it too

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