

THE APOCALYPSE

The Wise Shall Understand

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Rev. Desmond Allen, Ph.D., M.Div.

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Dedication

As in days of old, I was fortunate to study in my home church at the feet of one of God's great saints—the Reverend Pastor Wilmer Bruner. He would laugh, perhaps even be embarrassed, if he read that statement. Fully aware of his responsibility as the leader of the Lord's flock, he held his position as pastor with high regard; but he seemed to quietly chuckle at his title, Reverend. For he revered no one but God, and he certainly expected no one to revere him. Under his tutelage I trained for the ministry, served as his assistant, was ordained and, upon his retirement, appointed to fill the role of pastor.

My mentor is dead now. He died a blessed, gray haired old man, well into his eighties. He served our Lord with a singularity of heart and an unmatched devotion that rivals any biblical character. Undoubtedly, he met our Master with a bagful of good works in tow.

Even before I studied it formally, exegetically, and even before I studied the original language in Bible college and seminary, I knew and loved the book of The Revelation. I owe that to Pastor Bruner. Perhaps in our lifetime, there has not been a more passionate or more eloquent preacher of The Revelation of Jesus Christ, than the Reverend Pastor Wilmer Bruner.

Acknowledgments

I am compelled to extend a special thank you to Mrs. Marlene Rose Frey, for her painstaking work on this manuscript. Marlene's editorial corrections and suggestions were invaluable. Her attention to detail is simply unsurpassed.

Forward

My Purpose

The intent of this work is by no means meant to replace or supersede the many excellent commentaries that have gone before. My objective is to view this prophetic book in the light of both the current world stage and those events which have transpired since The Revelation was received. As such, the seven letters to select churches in Asia-Minor (which prophetically depict the advancing Church Age) as well as those passages pertaining to the powerful world empire during the tribulation, are given considerable attention. While it is not my aim to answer every cryptic passage found in The Revelation, many of these difficult passages seem less pressing once we understand the theme and purpose of the book; which is: ΑΠΟΚΑΛΥΨΙΣ ΙΗΣΟΥ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ (*APOKALYPSIS IĒSOU CHRISTOU*), the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ. Here, the term apocalypse is not the modern, popular meaning of disaster or catastrophe, which has come about due to the general misunderstanding of this book. We use the term apocalypse in its original sense—to unveil or reveal; thus, The Revelation.

I had three persons in mind while writing this commentary: the Christian who assumes The Revelation cannot be understood, the preacher who refrains from preaching through this most important book, and perhaps most importantly, the one left behind after the rapture of the Church—the one who must witness firsthand the terror of the tribulation. For these reasons the reader will find the commentary to be both homiletical and critical in nature.

I pray this modest work might excite Christians as to the time in which we live; that it might encourage preachers to preach and teach The Revelation. Lastly (for those left behind, suddenly thrust into the midst of tribulation), I pray it might open their eyes

to the truth, and that they might place their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ rather than the evil, charismatic impostor, who, by now, is attempting to win their confidence.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, is the only book in the Bible to promise a blessing for those who read, hear, and obey it. Consequently, this book is meant to be studied. It is meant to be taken seriously. It is specifically meant to be understood with clarity in the last days. Indeed, God provided this book so the servants of Jesus would know “*those things that must occur*” in the last days (1:1).

Although certain OT prophets addressed many of these same events, none of them revealed the whole picture, thereby leaving many details hidden. When the prophet Daniel asked the Lord for further clarification and to know how it would all end, the Lord commanded him to go his way, “*for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. . . . None of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand*” (Dan. 12:4, 10). It is now the end time and The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ, The Revelation, has been given that the wise should understand. The current state of the world has many in distress. The persistent political instability in the Middle East, threats of nuclear war, a failing global economy with a strong push for a one-world government, the collective decay of morals, social unrest and rebellious peoples in many countries, as well as increased natural catastrophes have many people, worldwide, in great consternation, concerned for the world’s future. But these are all expected scenarios to those who understand.

There is another important promise associated with this book; the somber, sobering promise of damnation to anyone who adds to or subtracts from The Revelation.

For I testify unto every man that hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (22:18-20).

As such, it is with great reverence that I approach this work.

Point of View

There are basically four views from which the interpretation of The Revelation is built. *The Preterist* view (in which predictions are not deemed possible) believes the visions describe past events that took place in the 1st Century and primarily apply to the history of Israel and pagan Rome. This view is held largely by Roman Catholic commentators, although by some Protestants as well. *The Historic* view sees in The Revelation a sequence of events which, although future at the time of the writing, are now past history. This view sees a panorama of events from the first coming of Christ until the second. For the most part this is the position of the reformed theologians. In the *Spiritual* view The Revelation presents an abstract conflict of good and evil in which good is the victor. This is the primary view of modernist theologians. *The Futurist or Pre-millennialist* view sees the consummation of our present world system. These events are seen as prophetic, many speaking of an as yet future climax. For the most part, this is the position held by fundamental, evangelical theologians, and this is the view represented in this work.

The Revelation is largely chronological in content, and (except where the text demands otherwise), it is to be taken literally. Yet even here it is a literal-figurative, which itself is a form of literal speech, for literal speaks of plain meaning. The author or speaker has a singular understanding in mind when he writes or speaks. This is to have a meaning with a single sense. It is, therefore, the interpreter's goal to understand the author's plain, singular meaning.

It is the nature of language, both written and verbal, for writers and speakers to express themselves in various ways. The authors of Scripture were no different. All of us have favorite words and idioms we employ frequently. We may have a certain style of expression such as short choppy sentences, or long drawn out sentences connecting one parenthetical idea to another; but always, there is a plain singular meaning in mind.

Words often have figurative or metaphorical uses as well as concrete uses. Each usage is considered literal. One is figurative-literal, the other is concrete-literal. Therefore, the concept of literal refers to the author's contextual meaning for the term. This is true in both the figurative or concrete sense.

When we use the idiom, “It’s raining cats and dogs,” everyone understands this to be a euphemism for “It’s raining hard.” And when we say, “It’s raining hard,” everyone understands we are using “hard” in the figurative sense. The concrete-literal meaning of hard is, “not easily penetrated, firm, solid.”¹ But this concept does not fit our context. There is nothing solid about rain drops. But there are several figurative meanings for hard. In this phrase “hard” is a reference to the inclement weather. This is the speaker’s obvious meaning and to understand it as such is to understand it literally. It is a legitimate, figurative-literal use of the term.

Likewise, when James said, “*the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity*” (*Jm. 3:6*), he did not mean fire in a concrete-literal sense; as Luke meant it when he said Paul “*shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm*” (*Act 28:5*). Nor did James mean “*world*” in the concrete-literal sense. His use for both terms is plainly in the figurative-literal sense. Thus, “*the tongue is destructive, the sum total of iniquity.*” But we must take it still another step to arrive at the literal-meaning. Even James’ use of the generally concrete term “*tongue*” is a euphemism for the thoughts and intents of the mind, which control the tongue. This is the plain meaning of James’ figurative speech. This is literal interpretation.

The Translation

Just as this commentary is not designed to replace any of the others, neither is my personal translation of The Revelation, herein provided, meant to replace or supersede any of the established versions we have been reading for years, even centuries. As much as possible, I have made it a discipline to teach and preach from the original Greek NT; thereby, necessarily, providing my own translation. I do this for my own clarity. I reject any notion that one translation is inherently better than all others. Such an argument is (and I am not sure how to say this gently) obtuse. At the very least such a notion is the product of ignorance: ignorance as to the importance of the original language, ignorance as to the importance of the many extant

¹ Robert A. Traina, Methodical Bible Study, Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1985 reprint, p. 69.

Greek manuscripts, and, primarily, ignorance as to the actual translation process.

By its very nature, a translation, any translation, necessarily loses something in transmission; if for no other reasons than that the two languages are separated culturally and grammatically, thus having different idioms as well as grammatical structures. In the case of the New Testament our translations are also separated historically by nearly two thousand years. Enter the discipline of hermeneutics—the science and art of interpreting ancient literature. Hermeneutics demands a solid grasp of certain things: the original language in which the texts were written, the culture in which the original texts (the autographs) were written, and the theological concerns the texts addressed. It is for this reason that doctrine and theology should always be based upon the text in its original language rather than a translation . . . any translation.

Furthermore, each of our popular translations is, relatively speaking, not very old; the oldest being less than a 400 years. What, we might ask, do we suppose believers read before any of these popular versions existed? The answer is quite simple. Some read text from the original languages, while others read versions translated into a language they understand: Aramaic, Latin, Gothic, Armenian, Syriac, Coptic, Old, Nubian, Ethiopic, Georgian, or perhaps from Origen's Hexapla. Each of these second language versions were translated from texts in the original languages: NT Greek and OT Hebrew/Chaldaen. It is from these same texts which we now make our modern translations.

While some English translations such as the KJV and NASB attempt a literal translation, others, like the NIV and NLT are based on the concept of dynamic equivalence. Both systems have their strengths and their weaknesses. For example, the system of dynamic equivalence reads smoothly and interprets the idioms for the reader. However the reader must rely upon the translator's understanding of the idioms. The reader must trust that these idioms have been understood correctly; for there are passages in which bias or historical ignorance can influence the understanding of a certain idiom. This, at times, effectively makes these translations approach that of a commentary.

On the other hand, the literal, word-for-word translation is often awkward and sometimes fails to convey the historic idiom, leaving the discovery of certain important cultural details to the reader. But few readers have the means or the desire to research these historic details.

Furthermore, while the word-for-word translations are generally so, they are not completely so. This is due to the differing grammatical structures of each language, which would make a true word-for-word translation most wearisome to read. Greek, like most languages, has an extensive grammatical system for the declension of nouns and the conjugation of verbs. Although ancient English had some of this grammatical phrasing, little of it survives today. A few remaining examples are the declension of the third person, plural, personal pronoun, and the conjugation of the verb “to be.” When the third person plural, personal pronoun is the subject of the sentence, we say “they.” When it is the object of the sentence we say “them.” To express possession we say “their.” Likewise, the verb “to be” is still conjugated in modern English. We say “I am, you are, he is,” etc. But these are rare exceptions. Today we largely rely upon context to signify noun declension, and helping words such as “has, have been, shall” to signify verb conjugations. Then there is contextual meaning. In all languages, context also dictates the actual meaning of a word.

All of this makes a literal, word-for-word translation quite cumbersome; at least grammatically speaking. This is especially noticeable when translating participles, especially participles that are not in the present tense and active voice. For example, the identification of the rider on the white horse in 6:2 ὁ καθήμενος (*ho kathēmenos*) is translated in both the KJV and the ASV as “*he that sat*”, the NASV has “*he who sat*”. However, this present, middle/passive participle indicates the subject is both the cause and the recipient of the action taking place; thus, “*the one sitting*,” or more precisely, “*the one making himself to sit*”.

The perfect tense passive voice participle is often simply translated “*was burned*” or “*was clothed*”; but literally, it is “*having been burned*” or “*having been clothed*”, thereby making it clear that someone other than the subject did the action. It is a subtle nuance, but it is a subtle nuance the writer deliberately

meant to express. And it is often difficult to convey these nuances in another language.

The KJV translates ἐσφραγισμένων (*esphragismenon*) sealed, in 7:4, as “I heard the number of them which were sealed”; however, a more accurate word-for-word translation, which does not read well in English, would be, “I heard the number of those having been sealed”. The grammatical structure of this genitive, perfect, passive, participle in the original makes it clear that at some point in the past, these individuals had been sealed by something or someone else. To make it read smoothly in English we forfeit some of the information provided in the original language.

Then there is the important issue of textual criticism. Of the many Greek manuscripts, which do we use? Each is slightly different from the other. Do we use the older manuscripts such as Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Vaticanus, or the later manuscripts of Bazaе, Cantabrigienis, and Basel? Or should we use the scholarly works of Nestle, Bover, Merk, Vogels, Westcott and Hort, or the Textus Receptus?

Although there is not a great difference between any of the variations, still this is a matter for consideration. In the end, the relatively minute number of variations highlights how God has kept His Word intact for thousands of years, through generation after generation of hand transcriptions. It is nothing short of miraculous. Nothing in the history of literature compares. For example, consider these few examples of ancient non-biblical literature:

- The earliest complete copy of Homer (the famed Greek poet of the 8th Century BC) only dates back to the 13th Century AD.
- No manuscript of Herodotus (known as the father of history, who wrote in the 5th Century BC), dates beyond the 10th Century AD.
- One copy of the great Roman poet Virgil (from the 1st Century BC), dates back to the 4th Century AD.
- Only a fraction of the works of Cicero (the Roman orator of the 1st Century BC), date back to the 4th Century AD.

Furthermore, all of these historic works have multiple and significant variations due to copies of copies of copies being made over hundreds and hundreds of years. Inadvertent spelling errors, duplication errors, omissions and other mistakes common to such work were inevitable. The variants in the works of William Shakespeare alone are incredible. Although his works date only to the 17th century there is variation after variation, with whole sections of the original text missing from each edition.

Holy Scripture is not so. The eminent Greek scholar and textual critic, Dr. Hort, calculated that substantial variations among the some 5,300 partial or complete extant New Testament Greek manuscripts to be so rare that only one word in a thousand summoned a critic's attention. Rather than being the cause of distress, there is something very reassuring about the textual variations (or the comparative lack of them), in these many manuscripts. Furthermore, if we simply neglected to read all the variant passages, neither the gospel message nor our theology is affected. Therefore, to squabble over benign variant passages is both unwarranted and unwise; and to do so over subsequent translations in a second language is quite juvenile.

That being said, the translation I have provided attempts, as much as possible, a literal, word-for-word translation based on the third edition of the Greek New Testament, edited by Kurt Aland, et al, and the twenty-first edition of Eberhard Nestle's *Novum Testamentum Graece*. Because I have not sacrificed clarity for smooth reading, at times the translation I have provided may read a little . . . well, strange. Thus, the reader is welcome to have his/her favorite translation handy. The reader will notice many helping words to more accurately express the mood and tense of the verbal and participial phrases. However, as discussed earlier, the act of translating from one language into another necessarily requires interpretation. Each language has idioms peculiar to its culture and historical setting. These are often difficult to translate into a second language—especially in a literal, word-for-word manner. For example, what we generally translate "*for ever and ever*" in the Greek is literally "*unto the ages of the ages.*" But such is the nature of the discipline.

Therefore, other than mere familiarity, I strongly encourage the reader to refrain from being overly attached to any one

translation; for none is worthy of building doctrine. I do not mention this to diminish our translations, but to emphasize that all worthy critical commentary and all doctrinal issues must address the original languages.

So then, while translations are wonderful and perfectly capable of conveying God's Word to our hearts, the finer points of doctrine must be settled from texts in the original languages. It is not proper to make doctrine, or even to strongly espouse practical theological concepts, based merely on a second or third generation translation.

Desmond Allen
Opelika, AL 2012

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Introduction

It is often said there is no book read less and misunderstood more than the book of The Revelation. I find much truth in this statement. Yet, there is no book more appropriate or of greater depth and vision for today than The Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Several commentators have observed that Genesis and The Revelation serve as the capstones, or book ends, of God's Word. Many themes and subjects that begin in Genesis come to fruition in The Revelation. God created the heavens and the earth in Genesis; in The Revelation they are destroyed. Sin and death are introduced in Genesis; they too meet their doom in The Revelation. The same is true of man, Satan, pain, murder, redemption and so forth.

Gregory of Nyssa called The Revelation the last book of grace. Others have referred to it as the seal of the whole Bible. Indeed, the Canon of Scripture would be incomplete without it. For the defense of the faith and the inerrancy of Scripture, it could be argued there are no sections of the Bible more important than Genesis and The Revelation. It therefore comes as no surprise that these are the first books attacked by the unregenerate mind. Both the infidels of secular humanism and the apostates of modern theology have done their best to discredit them. Such are the schemes of our adversary.

It is, however, not only the infidels and apostates that have trouble with The Revelation. Even Luther and Zwingli gave it little credence. While Luther merely relegated it to a separate list (along with the books of James, Jude, 2nd Peter and Hebrews), Zwingli boldly declared that it was not a biblical book.

But since the earliest of the Church fathers, The Revelation has been recognized as authentic. Upon returning from banishment to the isle of Patmos, John spent his final years as the Bishop of Ephesus. Here, the sole surviving Apostle served as a stabilizing force to the young, growing Church. He also served as

the final authority concerning doctrine and the authenticity of various writings.

The bishops of Asia (some of the same leaders addressed in the letters to the seven churches in chapter 2 and 3) visited John to ask his opinion of the Gospels attributed to Matthew, Mark, and Luke. He received them as authentic. The bishops then asked John to provide his own Gospel, which subsequently completed our fourfold account. Thus was it ordained that John should survive to place Apostolic approval on the Canon of the Gospels.

As such, in this role, he categorically denied another work circulating among the churches about this time. Although some claimed to be the work of Paul, John steadfastly refuted it, condemning it as an illegitimate document penned by a spurious elder at Ephesus. It was during this period that The Revelation also began to circulate throughout the Church. Certainly, if the book of The Revelation was not authentic John would have refuted it as well. But he did not; and neither did subsequent Church Fathers. Papias and Polycarp (both disciples of John), and Irenæus (a disciple of Polycarp) adamantly attributed The Revelation to the Apostle John.

Perhaps just as important (in that it reveals the mindset of the 2nd Century Church) is the acceptance of The Revelation in the Muratorian Canon, AD 170. It was only in later centuries that certain Church leaders began to doubt the authenticity of The Revelation; and this was largely due to their inability, or unwillingness, to accept the grandiose visions and cryptic language. The Early Church, from the disciples of John to the leaders of the 2nd Century, clearly considered The Revelation authentic. As the last chapter of God's Word, and thereby completing the works of inspiration, it seems appropriate that The Revelation was written by the last living Apostle, and the only one not to die a martyr's death.

An Overview

Before delving into the details of The Revelation, which (aside from spanning some 4,000 years of prophecy) is filled with symbolism and mystery, let us consider an overview of the scenes that unfold as we progress through John's Vision. The book is largely chronological in order, but for one parenthetical interlude,

which pauses to discuss certain important issues that transpire a various times.

The book begins with John seeing Jesus in all his glory as the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. John immediately falls before him in worship, terrified at the awesome sight of his Savior, his God, before him. Jesus gently places his hand on him and tells him to write the things he is about to see.

Jesus then dictates seven letters to seven churches in Asia-Minor. While these were actual historic churches, at the same time, the letters provide a prophetic chronological view of the advancing Church Age, from its beginning on the Day of Pentecost till its culmination at the rapture. In the next scene, John is caught up into heaven from which he watches the events of the tribulation begin to unfold on earth.

Then the parenthetical interlude takes place. Here, the primary topic of discussion is the “times of the Gentiles,” which is portrayed as a great beast with seven heads, six of which represent one of the great kingdoms of antiquity, and the seventh the fierce kingdom that is yet to come during the tribulation. Atop the beast, controlling the reins is the harlot, Mystery Babylon. She has been behind the scenes, manipulating every historic world empire and she will control the final one as well.

In the future, ten nations will unite to form the final kingdom of the “times of the Gentiles.” It will be ruled by a powerful, charismatic leader. But his promises turn to tyranny as the state soon controls every aspect of life. Those who oppose him and the state are executed. Once the interlude is complete and the chronological view continues, Christ returns to earth. He deposes the evil empire, its leader and its followers. Then he sets up his own kingdom. He will reign for 1,000 years before creating a new heaven and earth.

The Time is Near

The Church has always considered the return of Christ to be imminent; and rightly so, as per the many instructions to watch and be ready. Although we do not know exactly when it will happen, many prophecies vividly depict the climate of the world stage immediately prior to his return. The Revelation was specifically written for those living in the last days that they might

understand “*the time is near.*” Thus, those informed inhabitants living when the time comes should have no difficulty discerning the signs of the time.

We are those informed inhabitants. Clearly, the predicted world stage has taken shape; the props are in place and the curtain ready to open. Because The Revelation is given that we might recognize the staging when it presents itself, before proceeding with the commentary let us take a few minutes to peek backstage and see the preparations taking place.

Although many well-publicized prophecies describe the world in these last days, a seemingly insignificant and often overlooked passage in Daniel has enormous implication for discerning the times. It is the simple statement that in the last days “*many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased*” (*Dan. 12:4*). Daniel wrote this more than 2,500 years ago. From our immediate, myopic perspective we might think little of this comment; but if we step back to consider the whole picture, to view the several thousand years of man’s recorded history, the importance is immediately apparent.

Our present knowledge and ability for rapid, mass travel by trains, planes and automobiles is dumbfounding when compared to the limited knowledge and cumbersome means for travel available throughout the greater part of history. Comparatively speaking, our vast knowledge and modes of transportation have a very short existence in the scheme of things. Little more than a hundred years ago the primary means of transportation was still a beast of burden; and knowledge was such that surgeons had no idea of bacteria. They did not even know to wash their hands between surgeries. Today we have traveled to space and mapped human DNA.

The rate at which our vast knowledge and advanced transportation has increased in recent years is amazing. A bar graph of either is most telling—a prolonged, gradual and nearly insignificant increase for thousands of years. Then suddenly, in the space of but few hundred years, the graph begins an upward climb, rapidly increasing until spiraling to near vertical proportions. It is interesting to note that a similar graph depicting world population would closely resemble this graph.

Perhaps the most telling indication of these last days is the arsenal of mass destruction and our very real potential for global devastation. A graph cataloging the count and potency of these weapons might be similar. Without even considering biological and chemical weapons, the collective arsenal of nuclear warheads already possessed by but a few nations is more than sufficient to destroy all conscious life on earth, if not the entire ecosystem. Thus, it is no small issue that the seventh trumpet of The Revelation is a judgment given “*to destroy those destroying the earth*” (11:18). Clearly, if left to ourselves, destroying the earth is exactly what we will do; and we will do so in short order. Destroying the earth is a modern event. It was not happening when John wrote The Revelation. It was not happening one hundred years ago. But it is certainly happening today, and with great abandon.

Numerous passages from both the Old and New Testaments tell us of these last days. Like pieces of a puzzle, when considered in context and cross-referenced to other similar passages, the grand picture begins to unfold. However, despite being given many specifics pertaining to the social, political and economic climate of the last days, as Jesus foretold, it largely falls on deaf ears. Just as in the days of Noah, people will be preoccupied with themselves and the niceties of life, having no desire or need for God in their hearts.

They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all, . . . after the same manner shall it be in the day that the Son of man is revealed (Lk. 17:26-30).

Beyond our current population’s unwillingness to heed these warnings, there are other similarities with those living before the flood. Paul paints a very dismal picture of the Antediluvians. In general theirs was an immoral, hedonistic society, indifferent to reprimand and driven by a self-serving agenda that consciously excluded God from its thinking.

These men deliberately forfeited the truth of God and accepted a lie, paying homage and giving service to the creature instead of to the Creator, who alone is worthy to be

worshipped for ever and ever, amen. God therefore handed them over to disgraceful passions. Their women exchanged the normal practices of sexual intercourse for something which is abnormal and unnatural. Similarly the men, turning from natural intercourse with women, were swept into lustful passions for one another. Men with men performed these shameful horrors, receiving, of course, in their own personalities the consequences of sexual perversity.

Moreover, since they considered themselves too high and mighty to acknowledge God, he allowed them to become the slaves of their degenerate minds, and to perform unmentionable deeds. They became filled with wickedness, rottenness, greed and malice; their minds became steeped in envy, murder, quarrelsomeness, deceitfulness and spite. They became whisperers-behind-doors, stabbers-in-the-back, God-haters; they overflowed with insolent pride and boastfulness, and their minds teemed with diabolical invention. They scoffed at duty to parents, they mocked at learning, recognized no obligations of honor, lost all natural affection, and had no use for mercy. More than this—being well aware of God’s pronouncement that all who do these things deserve to die, they not only continued their own practices, but did not hesitate to give their thorough approval to others who did the same. (Ro. 1:25-32, Philips).

The similarities with today cannot be overlooked. Indeed, this list of negative, base characteristics could easily have been written about the present human condition. Inventors of evil devices, disrespect of elders, self-serving, arrogant, belligerent and boastful sociopaths. Also, as then, sexual immorality in general is accepted as normal behavior. Even homosexuality (which only accounts for about 3% of the population) is welcomed as an alternative lifestyle by the majority of heterosexuals.

The religious underpinnings are in place as well, as people, worldwide, worship and serve the creation more than the Creator. While much of the world fundamentally adheres to various false religions (all of which glorify man while denying his sinful nature

and thus his need for redemption through the Lord Jesus Christ), the Western world largely wishes to discount even the thought of God, as it satiates itself with delusional, spurious hypotheses such as insisting upon the impossible, preposterous notion that our material universe exploded into existence from nonexistence, and that it did so by its own nonexistent energy. Then primitive, organic life organized itself from these self-created inorganic materials. In need of nutrients (as are all organic life forms), somehow this primitive, self-created life form sustained itself on other nonexistent, organic nutrients. Not only did it sustain itself, it reproduced and evolved upward into ever more complex life forms. Certain advanced physical life forms became animated. Then yet another giant leap occurred. Evolving beyond the mere physical, certain advanced life forms developed the metaphysical ability for cognitive thought processes. Then, collectively, they realized a universal ethic. They also came to understand that each of them possessed a metaphysical life force contained somehow within their physical forms. All of this, of course, they attributed to the grand explosion of theretofore nonexistent material.

Can there be anything more ludicrous? But, logic can never convince passion; and those who hold to this idiocy are passionately opposed to the very idea of a Creator. Therefore they cling to anything that might appear to give them legitimacy.

The political alignment of nations in this final world stage is also as we would expect. European nations are uniting, even as the Western World, at large, pushes for a one world government. The world economy is in jeopardy. Governments are being toppled. Nation is rising against nation. Increasingly, we are on the brink of a world war that threatens total destruction. Israel is back in their Holy Land with the Middle Eastern nations, as well as many others, bitterly pitted against them.

This return of the Jews to Jerusalem is of great significance. God said in the last days He would cause His people to return to their land. They would reestablish Jerusalem, which, until recently, they have not controlled since their 6th Century BC Babylonian captivity, nor occupied since their dispersion in AD 70.

Although the actual captivity in Babylon was only 70 years, even after returning home the Jews continued to suffer Gentile

domination. The Babylonian Empire was followed by the Media-Persian Empire, then finally the Greco-Roman Empire, and all of them ruled over Jerusalem. Then in AD 70, the Roman general, Titus, drove the Israelites from their homeland. Since that day they have been scattered over the face of the earth. However, God promised that in the last days He would gather His people, bringing them once again to their promised land.

I will bring them from the North Country, and gather them from the uttermost parts of the earth . . . (Jer. 31:8).

I will gather them out of all the countries, where I have driven them in mine anger, and in my wrath, and in great indignation; and I will bring them again unto this place . . . (Jer. 32:37).

Thus says the Lord Jehovah: Whereas I have removed them far off among the nations, and whereas I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them a sanctuary for a little while in the countries where they are come, . . . I will gather you from the peoples, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel (Eze. 11:16-17).

In 1917 (nearly two thousand years after the Jewish dispersion at the hands of the Roman government) British Field Marshall, Edmund Allenby won Palestine and Syria from the Turks. The British issued the Balfour Declaration, designating Palestine the national home of the Jews. A few decades later (after the appalling treatment of the Jews during WWII), a widespread, albeit fleeting, support began for a Jewish homeland. In 1944, a small group of underground Zionist lead by Menachem Begin attempted to force the British troops from Palestine. Then, in 1948, the United Nation's proposed, and the Jews accepted, the division of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab.

The Jews named their state Israel. The Arabs, however, refused to accept the division and continue to fight against it to this day. But this too was prophesied.

I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the peoples round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. And it shall come to

pass in that day, that I will make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all the peoples; all that burden themselves with it shall be sore wounded; and all the nations of the earth shall be gathered together against it (Zech. 12:2-3).

Today, Jews from all around the world are moving to Israel and, as predicted, this continues to be a source of tension for the surrounding Arab nations. For the last several decades world leaders have been trying to orchestrate peace in the Middle East; specifically between the Israelis and the Palestinians. It has been a major agenda for each American president. But this peace will not happen until the antichrist—the charismatic leader of the final world empire—arrives. It is he who “*will make a firm covenant with many for one week*” (Dan. 9:27). Here, *one week* is a reference to the Jewish week of years; thus a seven-year peace treaty. But the current efforts and the global obsession for peace in the Middle East do have meaning; they set the stage for this coming treaty. The orchestration of this treaty will likely be the antichrist’s trump card—his claim to fame that will catapult him to world dominance.

In light of the current Middle Eastern situation, it seems plausible that a key factor to this covenant could be the rebuilding of the Jewish temple on the coveted site of the Dome of the Rock, which is presently under Palestinian authority. Perhaps this charismatic and persuasive figure will orchestrate a deal in which the Palestinians exchange this site for land to establish their own sovereign state.

Whatever the details may be, one way or another, the antichrist will arrange a seven-year treaty between Israel and the surrounding nations. During the first half of the covenant he will have a near hypnotic affect upon the masses (Dan. 11:21-45). No doubt, many will hail him as the world’s Savior.

The push for a one-world government is significant. We know that in these last days remnants of the ancient Greco-Roman world, though seemingly dead, will rise again to world dominance. A modern and powerful union of ten nations will rise from the dust of the dormant empire. I say dormant because even though we speak of the Roman Empire as having fallen, upon close scrutiny fallen is hardly the correct term. True, the imperial

authority of the ancient empire crumbled and divided into several smaller kingdoms and fiefdoms which eventually formed the nations we know today. But in many respects the ruling powers merely shifted to the religious-political authority of the papacy, while the wealth largely remained in the hands of certain families of aristocracy. To this day the religious, as well as political and financial interests of these splintered nations have far-reaching tentacles that influence much of the world-trade market.

In time, ten nations from this fallen empire will unite. From them, a dynamic, blasphemous leader will rise swiftly to power (17:8-13). He will orchestrate a seven-year peace treaty between Israel and the Arab nations. However, some nations will not look favorably upon this new leader. Likely in an attempt to thwart his authority, Israel will be attacked by several collaborating armies. The Lord told Ezekiel:

Prophecy, and say to Gog, 'Thus says the Lord God: On that day when my people Israel are dwelling securely, you will bestir yourself and come from your place out of the uttermost parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great host, a mighty army; you will come up against my people Israel, like a cloud covering the land (Ezek. 38:14-16).

As the prophecy is expounded, many nations are mentioned by name: Persia (the ancient name for Iran), Ethiopia, Libya, as well as Meshech, Tubal, and Togarmah (each in modern Turkey); and Northern armies of Gomer,² Gog, and Magog.³ I might note that the current influx of Muslims into these northern countries is not by happenstance. When the invasion occurs, God will protect Israel by immediately destroying 5/6 of these invading armies. Nationally, Israel will be converted, at once realizing Jesus is indeed their Messiah.

Although we are not told the exact time of this invasion, we are given several details from which we may deduce that it will occur immediately after the peace treaty. Here is what we know (Eze. 38-39):

² Currently known as southern Russia.

³ European Scythians, dominant in the region between the Caucasus and Mesopotamia for from 630 to 600 B.C.

The attack on Israel is during a time of peace.

God will immediately destroy the attacking armies.

At the defeat of these armies, Israel will be converted, having realized Jesus is the Messiah.

Israel will burn the enemy's weapons as firewood for seven-years.

These details seem to reveal its chronology. Israel is converted immediately upon the destruction of the invading armies. This places it after the seven-year peace treaty is signed, in that if it were before, the converted Israelites would be translated with the Church. The invasion takes place during the time of peace. This narrows it to the first half of the tribulation; for in the middle of the seven-year peace treaty the antichrist, the "*prince that is to come*" will break the treaty and the time of peace will end (Dan. 9:27). And lastly, Israel will burn the enemies' weapons as firewood for seven-years. If this took place well into the tribulation, the burning of the weapons would extend into the millennial reign of Christ.

All these clues together seem to place this attack at the very beginning of the seven-year tribulation. It is possible, even probable, that the attack upon Israel will be an immediate and direct rebellion against the new leader and his treaty. Although the antichrist will probably lay claim to the victory over these invaders, Israel will have none of it. The Jews will know it was God who saved them. This will spark a national conversion, for at last they will realize that Jesus is, indeed, their Messiah.

In the latter days I will bring you against my land, that the nations may know me, when through you, Oh Gog, I vindicate my holiness before their eyes, . . . And my holy name I will make known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not let my holy name be profaned any more; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel, . . . The house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God, from that day forward (Ezek. 38:16; 39:7, 22).

I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication; and they shall look unto me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born (Zech. 12:10).

As this dynamic, charismatic antichrist grows in power and popularity, I suspect Islamic terrorism will continue. Three and one-half years after the peace treaty is signed, this leader will enter the Jewish temple and demand obedience. This is the abomination of desolation of which Daniel and Jesus spoke (Dan. 12:11; Mat. 24:15). The antichrist will claim to be their Messiah. However, having already realized Jesus is their Messiah, Israel will reject this impostor. What follows is a terrible onslaught against the Jews and anyone else who rejects his authority.

Citizens around the world will receive an identification number to signify their capitulation to his rule. No financial transactions will take place without this identification. Those who refuse the identification number will be exterminated. No doubt, they will be considered terrorists. I suspect popular world opinion will rapidly turn against Israel, with the same warped logic of current political figures who point to Israel as being the cause of terrorism today. I suspect this twisted logic will continue. They will reason that if only Israel would leave Palestine, we could have world peace.

Given the current and growing state of global terrorism, which is generated by hatred for Israel, it is easy to envision a generally well-received personal, global identification number designed to isolate and apprehend the perceived terrorists, the enemies of the State—the Jews and all others who come to believe in Jesus during this time; for it is their belief in the Lord that prevents them from submitting to this false Christ.

After another 3½ years many people will have grown weary of his tyranny and his false promises. Rebellion will brew and armies from around the world will converge upon the Valley of Megiddo (or Armageddon) for war. It is then that the Lord returns in power and glory to establish his reign upon the earth.⁴

⁴ See, Isa. 43; Jer. 30-33; Zech. 12; Dan. 2, 7, 9, 11; Mt. 24; Rev. 13, 17, 19.

Jesus warned his listeners not to let anyone deceive them, for there would be many signs clearly signifying the end of the Age. Paul reassured the Thessalonians in the same manner.⁵ Admittedly, Jesus spoke to a Jewish audience (the Church had not yet been founded) and the specific signs to which he referred were to occur during the coming tribulation; however, as the address to the Thessalonians makes clear, there is a certain world stage that must be set before these events occur.

Today that stage is set. Multitudes travel about the world from nation to nation every day. Knowledge has increased exponentially. Worldwide, people are rising up against authorities. Wars continue to increase. A one world government is anticipated. Immorality is celebrated. The Israelites are at home and the world hates them for it. Certainly, the foretold final state of affairs is but a heartbeat away, ready to be unleashed as soon as the restraining power permits.

As never before, the time is clearly at hand. For this reason, the study of The Revelation is especially germane to our time. It provides a vivid portrayal—from both the earthly and the heavenly perspective—of the final days before the Lord's return. And once these events begin, they will progress quickly. Jesus said, *"when you see all these things, know that it is near, at the doors . . . (Mt. 24:33. And "by no means will this generation pass away until all these things happen" (Mt. 24:34). Therefore he warned, "when these things begin to happen, stand up and lift your heads, for your redemption draws near (Luke 21:28). Paul told the Thessalonians, "Don't let anyone deceive you by any means . . . Don't you remember when I was with you, I told you these things?" (2 Th. 2:3,5).*

⁵ See, Mt. 24; 1 Th. 4-5; 2 Th. 2.

PART ONE

JOHN'S VISION

John's Introduction

The Revelation 1:1-3

(¹)The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him to show his servants those things that must occur with swiftness; and he signified by sending his angel to his servant John, (²)who, bore witness of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, as to what things he saw. (³)Blessed is the one reading and those hearing the words of the prophecy and keeping the things that have been written therein, for the time is near.

Although the earliest manuscripts were titled *The Apocalypse of John*,⁶ as many as sixty different titles are found in subsequent manuscripts. Today, we generally refer to this book by its first phrase: ΑΠΟΚΑΛΥΨΙΣ ΙΗΣΟΥ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ (*APOKALYPSIS IĒSOU CHRISTOU*), The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ. Here, the term apocalypse is not the modern, popular usage (which denotes disaster or catastrophe—a meaning that came about due to the general misunderstanding of this book), but the original meaning: to unveil or reveal. Thus, The Revelation of Jesus Christ; or simply The Apocalypse, The Revelation.

The Key That Unlocks the Book

The key that unlocks the entire book is found in this first phrase, “*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*” (1:1). It is imperative to understand this phrase in both the subjective and the objective genitive. Although, grammatically speaking, such a phrase would

⁶ Sinaiticus - IV Century and Ephraemi Rescriptus Cambridge V Century.

generally be one or the other depending upon the context (for, as in all matters of hermeneutics, the controlling feature is the context), here, the context signifies both.

In the subjective sense, this is the revelation that God gave to Jesus. In the objective sense, it is the revelation of Jesus himself. When we consider the phrase, “*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*” only in the subjective genitive, we see Jesus merely as the sender of The Revelation, the messenger. This would make the various forthcoming characters and events to be the major theme of the book; in which case we are soon bogged down with dragons, beasts, angels, nations, thunders, judgments and a seemingly endless list of creatures and proceedings. While these subjects are very real and very pertinent to the book, they are not the theme of the book.

When the phrase is also understood in the objective genitive, it becomes a reference to the unveiling of Jesus Christ; thereby making him the theme of the book. In this sense, it is the revelation of himself to us, “*The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ.*” Herein, we see exactly who he is. While of earth, he was veiled in a robe of flesh, but now we see him in all his glory; and we see him in many different aspects and with many different names—all of which portray various characteristics of his person. To neglect the objective genitive is to miss the entire theme of the book—the apocalypses of Jesus Christ.

It is interesting to note that the earliest known manuscripts titled this book The Apocalypse of John. Perhaps they understood this as “The Revelation of John” in the subjective sense and “The Revelation of Jesus” in the objective sense.

In the subjective sense this is “*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him*” (1:1). One’s first thought might be that this seems very peculiar. Could this mean that God revealed things to Jesus that he did not know? Our immediate reaction might be, “Absurd! Impossible! It cannot be!” But after the moment of passion wears off, remember there is precedent for this thought. Do not forget that our Lord is both divine and human.

As deity he knew the thoughts of man, as illustrated in his conversation with the scribes and Pharisees concerning his ability to forgive sins. He “*perceived their thoughts*” and the reasoning

of their hearts (Lk. 5:22). This is illustrated again when he perceived the thoughts of the disciples concerning who should be greatest among them (Lk. 9:47). He also demonstrated Deity when he exercised his omniscience, telling Nathaniel "*when you were under the fig tree, I saw you*" (Jn. 1:48).

Conversely, in his humanity he was a student who "*increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man*" (Lk. 2:52). Years later, when a particular woman seeking to be healed touched his garment, he felt the power go out from him, and he asked, "*Who touched my clothes?*" He kept looking around to see who had done it until at last the woman came forward (Mk. 5:25-34). In the middle of the Olivet discourse, speaking of the days that would precede his return to earth, he insisted "*that no man knows the day and hour, neither the angels in heaven or the Son, but only the Father*" (Mt. 24:36).

However, that being said, I do not think it applies to this circumstance. That is, the content of the message is not information to which Jesus is no longer privy. On earth, while "*being found in fashion as a man*" (Phil. 2:8), he was somehow limited from accessing certain of his divine attributes, such as omniscience. But now he is glorified; no longer veiled in humanity, no longer deprived of his divine attributes. Rather, the context simply indicates that the Godhead conveyed this message about Jesus (in the subjective genitive sense) to John via the person of Jesus (in the subjective sense). It does not necessitate or imply his prior ignorance of the message.

There is a mystical union between his deity and his humanity that you and I will never understand until at last, we see him as he is. But we may rest assured that whatever might have been concealed to Jesus in the past, during his time in the flesh, is revealed to him now; for he said "*all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth*" (Mt. 28:18). That Jesus (when in his human state) was unknowledgeable of certain things is very complex. That the glorified Jesus is a knowledgeable messenger is not complex.

The Purpose

There is yet another important topic to consider in this introductory passage. That is, the purpose of The Revelation. It is

designed “*to show his servants those things that must occur*” (1:1). Unlike Daniel, who was told to seal up the words of his prophecy until the end (Dan. 12:4), John is commanded to “*seal not the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand*” (22:10). God expects this book to be read. Furthermore, he expects it to be understood. This is not the Apocrypha—the hidden, it is the Apocalypse—the revelation.

But there is a qualifying point to understanding The Revelation. It was given “*to show his servants*”. The term δούλοις (*doulois*) speaks of the yielded bondservant. Every seven-years the Israelites’ debts were canceled; and every fiftieth year, the year of Jubilee, all slaves were set free. If, however, a servant returned to his master on his own volition after being set free in the Jubilee freedom, the master would pierce the servant’s ear to indicate that this servant was now his servant for life, his yielded bondservant (Deut. 15:17). Here, the meaning is plain. God has limited the understanding of The Revelation to those who have willingly placed themselves under his authority. To all others this is but a confusing allegory, a fable.

The abject ignorance our politicians have concerning the significance of world events never ceases to amaze me. It is all so clear that even a child could understand it, yet our world leaders are clueless. What makes it even more amazing is that although so many of them have been informed by those in the know about these prophecies; they not only refuse to believe them but they simply cannot see their possible fulfillment. Thus, Daniel was told that during the in the last days, “*none of the wicked would understand, but the wise will understand*” (Dan. 12:10).

It is Imminent

Spectacular, cataclysmic events, a demonic world power and a time of great trouble for the whole world are predicted. So too is the advancing Church Age, and the imminent return of Jesus. As such, understanding the chronology of this book is very important.

Jesus provided a few key words to help us understand when the events in The Revelation will take place. He told John, “*the time is near*” (1:3), for which he used the term ἐγγύς (*eggus*, pronounced *engus*), meaning imminent. He also stated they

“must occur with swiftness” (1:1). The significance here is the term *τάχει (tachei)*, which denotes quick, speedy or swiftly. This is the word from which we derive our English term tachy; from which we make words like tachycardia and tachometer. Luke used this term when speaking of God's vindication of his people, *“and shall not God avenge his own elect . . . I tell you that he shall avenge them swiftly” (Lk.18:7-8).*

Because Paul used different terms to express the swiftness at which these dreaded events will occur, his phrasing gives additional insight. He said, *“the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night . . . when they shall cry peace and safety, suddenly destruction will come on them as the labor pains of a pregnant woman” (1 Th. 5:2-4).* The writer of Hebrews phrased it as such: *“for yet, a very little while, the one who is coming will come and will not delay” (Hb. 10:37).* Here, we have *χρονιῆϊ (chronisei)* in the future active indicative, used to denote duration or a definite period of lapsed time, to delay or tarry.

Jesus has told us two things about the timing of these events: they are imminent and when they begin they will happen quickly.

The Blessings

Therefore, he declares three things: blessed, blessed, blessed. The term *μακάριος (makarios)* *blessed* simply means happy. There are no sanctifying powers connected to the word. It merely describes the sentiment of those who meet the qualifying terms of its invocation, as in the beatitudes (Mt. 5:3-12).

“Blessed is the one reading and those hearing the words of the prophecy and keeping the things that have been written therein”(1:3). This is the first of seven blessings mentioned in The Revelation (14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). Modern Christian literature sports numerous sermons and books discussing the various promises of Scripture. Too often (as aptly illustrated in the currently popular prosperity gospel), these promises are taken out of context and forced to make application in ill-suited circumstances. Although these are promises everyone can claim, so few desire to do so.

It takes little reflection to realize why these promises are given. The public reading of Scripture during common assembly

was a practice the Early Church acquired from Judaism.⁷ This is a clear reference to such congregational readings of the Word; and this, The Revelation of Jesus, was especially meant to be read, taught, and preached from the pulpit. What a shame that so many ignore it.

Blessed Just to Think of It

The first reason for the blessing or happiness encountered by the reading, hearing, and keeping of The Revelation is that it is the manifestation of Jesus in all of his glory. He is our life, our hope, and our theology. Pastor Bruner used to speak of this as a love story. The Church is the bride waiting for her husband to return from a distant city where he has gone to prepare their new home. He has been away for a very long time and her young heart yearns for his return. He has sent her a picture of their new home, which she has placed on her nightstand next to their family portrait. Every night as she goes to sleep and every morning after awakening, she ponders the two photos. Her thoughts bring buoyancy, flaming feelings of hopefulness and anticipation.

Because the picture of their new home is only a one-dimensional view of the front side of the house, many details are unknown, but it sparks imagination and she treasures the thought of it in her heart. She anticipates living there with her husband: lounging on the sofa, sharing meals at the dinner table, having tea on the veranda, holding hands and gently swinging under the maple tree, sharing all the comforts of their new home. Thus, blessed are those who contemplate and keep the words of this book.

Blessed Because of Future Glorification

The second reason for the happiness derived from reading, hearing and keeping the things in this book is the promise of glorification. Jesus will not be glorified alone; for “*when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*” (1 Jn. 3:1-3). Then it will all become clear. Although later we are given specific details concerning this glorification, in our current sinful state we can scarcely envision it, even with this information. But

⁷ The public reading of Scripture: Neh. 8:2; Lk. 4:16; Acts 13:15; Col. 4:16; 1 Th. 5:27.

it will be a blessing, the likes of which none has known since Adam and Eve.

Blessed to Understand

The third reason for the happiness has a special significance for today. As the time draws near, perplexity, confusion and global unrest in general will grow. Yet, in the midst of these troubles will be a people able to discern the signs of the times. They will understand. Daniel spoke of this very thing.

I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, Oh my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go your way Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified and made white and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly, and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand (Dan. 12:8-10).

In his discourse on the Mount of Olives, Jesus also spoke of those who would have understanding of these things in the last days. Of course, he spoke specifically of Israel and of their future time of trouble, warning them that when they see the abomination of desolation, of which Daniel spoke, “*let the one reading understand*” (Mt. 24:15). However, the condition and events that must lead up to this abomination of desolation cannot occur in secret; for they are global in nature. Therefore, by knowing what to expect in the last days, those who read, hear, and keep the things in this book will not be frightened by the growing unrest that shall seize the final generation. In contrast, those with this knowledge will be happy, content, even excited to be living in the midst of such troublesome times. Their contentment comes from knowing their Lord is at hand.

John's Greeting 1:4-8

(⁴)John, to the seven churches that are in Asia: grace to you and peace, from the one who is and who was and who is coming, and from the seven spirits that are before his throne, (⁵)and from Jesus Christ—the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Unto the one who loves us and loosed us from our sins by his blood, ⁽⁶⁾and made us a kingdom, priests to God and his Father. To him be the glory and the might unto the ages of the ages. Amen.

⁽⁷⁾Behold, he comes with the clouds and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him. And all the nations of the earth will mourn over him. Even so, Amen.

⁽⁸⁾“I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, the one who is and who was and who is coming, the Almighty.”

YHWH

This characterization as “*the one who is and who was and who is coming*” (1:4,8)⁸ is a direct reference to the Hebrew tetragrammaton יהוה (YHWH), which occurs some 6,828 times in the Old Testament. It is the most frequently used term to reference God. The Jews considered it so sacred they had stopped even pronouncing it. Instead, they would substitute אדון (*adonai*), which we translate as LORD, and the Greek translates as κυριος (*kurios*).

YHWH, the only proper name for God, is the name by which He called himself when Moses asked, who shall I say sent me? יהוה YHWH, was the answer. We translate this as *I AM*. “*I AM THAT I AM . . . thus, you shall say to the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you*” (Ex. 3:14). The Septuagint (the 3rd Century BC Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) translates the tetragrammaton, יהוה, with the phrase εγω εμι (*ego eimi*), which we also translate as “*I AM*.”

The Septuagint was in common use during Jesus’ ministry, and the Jews were well aware of the phrase *ego eimi* to reference the tetragrammaton in Exodus 3:14. While debating with the Pharisees, twice Jesus made an obvious reference to the tetragrammaton when he claimed *ego eimi* for himself. First he warned them, “*you will die in your sins, because you do not believe that I AM*”(Jn. 8:24). Later, in the same conversation, he

⁸ The preposition ἀπό (*apo*), *from*, usually precedes a genitive noun; however, here it precedes a noun that cannot be declined: ἀπὸ τοῦ ὁ ὄν, thereby providing further support for the tetragrammaton.

pressed the issue even further: “*before Abraham was, I AM*” (Jn. 8:24, 58). That the Pharisees clearly understood his claim to deity is evident from the text; “*therefore, they took up stones to cast at him*” (Jn. 8:59). Ultimately, they formally charged him with blasphemy and it was this *ego eimi*, his claim of *YHWH*, for which they hanged him on the cross.

It is of great significance, and therefore worth noting, that all Christian cults have one thing in common. They deny the gospel. Specifically, they deny three things: (1) They deny that man is separated from God by his inherent sinful nature; (2) They deny the deity of Jesus Christ; and (3) they deny his physical resurrection from the dead. Curiously, many of these same folks generally claim to accept the Bible as God's Word. However, this first chapter of The Revelation is a considerable stumbling block to their heresy; especially when confronted with the speaker's claim to be “*the firstborn of the dead*” (1:5), and his declaration that “*I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, the one who is and who was and who is coming, the Almighty*” (1:8).

Although these false teachers will try to deny this is Jesus speaking, a continued reading of the passage through verse 18 will cause them great consternation; for it is an overt claim to deity. John's response is to worship him.

And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last and the living; and I was dead and behold, I am living unto the ages of the ages; and I have the keys of death and of Hades (1:17-18).

Nevertheless, because these heretics' beliefs are based on emotion rather than logic, they are not likely to admit their errors. Driven by passion and bent upon destruction, they have no thirst for truth. The final blow leaves them dumbfounded when Jesus claims deity so clearly they cannot, in good conscience, deny it. So that while some of these heretics might accept the truth of our Lord, most will run for cover, scurrying back to their like-minded, passionate dissenters.

Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me to render to each man as his work is. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. . .

. I Jesus have sent my angel to give you this testimony (22:12-16).

When discussing the gospel with one of these heretics there is but one objective: the person of Jesus Christ—his deity and his physical resurrection. Do not be diverted from this topic. The heretic will attempt to introduce numerous other issues—red herring arguments, deflections designed to turn us away from our goal. But stay on topic, the deity and the person of our Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the gospel; all other issues pale in comparison.

Prophet, Priest, King

And from Jesus Christ—the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth. Unto the one who loves us and loosed us from our sins by his blood (1:5).

We see Jesus in various roles throughout The Revelation. Here, we see his three-fold capacity of Prophet, Priest and King. As Prophet, he is the “*faithful witness*” to the eternal Godhead. As Priest, he is “*the firstborn of the dead.*” He is the first resurrected, and the only one to resurrect by his own power; the same power by which he will resurrect the elect. As King, he is “*the ruler of the kings of the earth.*” Soon, he will rule the greatest kingdom the world has ever known—the promised kingdom of David, the Messiah’s 1,000 year reign over the entire earth.

Christ’s role as the King of kings has yet another significance, one often overlooked by modern, Western Christianity. Although Jesus is not currently, physically reigning on earth as King of kings, still, he holds this position even now, for it is not a time sensitive post. Therefore, all governments, all rulers on earth have their power only because the Lord has permitted it to be so. There is no power granted to any ruler on earth without the Lord’s permission. He is “*the head of all principality and power*” (Col. 2:10). This emphatically includes the evil rulers as well. All things, including evil governments, work ultimately for the glory of God. Paul explains that,

By him all things in heaven and on earth were created, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or

principalities, or powers, all things were created by him, and for him (Col. 1:16).

This is mentioned again in The Revelation.

You are worthy, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power, for you created all things and because of your will they are and were created (4:11).

The often overlooked significance of this is that governments, even evil governments, are in place for a purpose and it is not the role of the Church to challenge their authority. Conversely, Peter clearly charged believers to be subject to such authorities.

Submit yourselves to every human ordinance for the Lord's sake; whether to a king, as being supreme, or unto governors, as being sent by him for punishment of those doing evil and for praise of those doing good. For so is the purpose of God, doing good to silence the ignorance of foolish men (1 Pet. 2:13-15).

Peter used the term θέλημα (*theleema*), which I have translated *purpose* and the KJV translates *pleasure*. It speaks to *will, design, intent, or choice*. The term is used many times in the NT, such as to speak of God's desire: "*Thy kingdom come, they will be done*" (Mt. 6:10); and to reference the election of God's chosen: "*In whom we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the will of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will*" (Eph. 1:11). It is used of man's personal choices as well: "*Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as other*" (Eph. 2:3). As such, it is unmistakable; God has a purpose, a plan for the course of humanity. Thus, all things, even evil governments exist by God's design. As Peter makes very clear, it is God's desire that believers submit to these earthly authorities. Civil rebellion is not an option to the Christian, for there is a larger objective in view than mere temporal justification.

But this idea of civil submission does not sit well with many of us in the America. We are a country born in rebellion. And this is the conundrum; for we are also a country that prides itself

for its Christian heritage. The argument, of course, seems to justify our behavior. Our rebellion was to procure freedom, social justice and to fight against tyranny. Admittedly, all of these may be just causes for social revolt, but none is a just cause for the Christian to rebel. For although we are in this world we are not of it; our home lies yonder (Jn. 15:19, 17:11-16; Rom. 12:2). As if anticipating our objection, Peter warns against justifying unrighteous civil rebellion by hiding it under the cloak of Christian piety: “*As free and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness*” (1 Pet. 2:16).

I submit that it is a mistake for the Church to promote or participate in civil unrest against the government. Any supposed righteous cause is a cloak for the malicious discontent of temporal-minded soldiers. While the temporal case for freedom and justice may be advanced for a time, the eternal cause is offended. Therefore, Peter’s conclusion is that we should act like “*the servants of God*” (1 Pet. 2:16).

Although many believers have trouble with this concept, it must be remembered that all things work for God’s purpose (Eph. 1:11). For example, if God had not allowed evil to manifest itself, if He had never allowed it to reveal its ugly head, several aspects of God’s character would remain unknown. We would know nothing of His justice or His ability to forgive. We would not know of His grace and mercy. The idea of a good God would be meaningless; there would be nothing to which we could compare His goodness. Even our knowledge of His love would be incomplete. The list continues, but the point is made. The very presence of evil in those whom God loves, whom He made after His own image, unveiled certain, theretofore, unknown attributes of His character; thereby providing all creation with a clear understanding of exactly who God is. The holy angels did not know of these attributes, and even Satan’s rebellion did not bring them forth. But man’s rebellion did. Oh, how He loves us.

Unto Him be Glory

It takes little imagination to get a feel for John’s excitement as he cries out, “*Unto the one who loves us*” (1:5). He used ἀγαπήσαντι (*agapēsanti*) in the present tense to signify the one who “*keeps on loving us.*” John then continued, “*and loosed us*

from our sins by his blood" (1:5). Here, he used λούσαντι (*lusanti*) in the aorist; thus, "having loosed us" once and for all.

As the vision moves forward, so too does John's sense of adoration. At first there are but two exclamations: "to him be the glory and the might" (1:6). Then there are three: "You are worthy, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power" (4:11). Then four: "Unto the one sitting on the throne, and unto the Lamb, the blessing, and the honor, and the glory, and the strength" (5:13). Finally, seemingly unable to contain himself any longer, John cries out with seven adjectives; which, of course, is the number of perfection: "The blessing, and the glory, and the wisdom, and the thanksgiving, and the honor, and the power, and the strength, to our God unto the ages of the ages. Amen" (7:12).⁹

John was not the only apostle unable to contain himself as he pondered the wonders of God. While addressing the Ephesians, Paul suddenly bursts into a beautiful doxology; then, quite naturally, returned to the subject (Eph. 3:20-21). He did the same thing when writing to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:17). Similarly, the Apostle Jude brings his letter to an end with such an outburst: "Now unto him . . . to the only wise God, our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen" (Jd. 1:25).

Priests

Not only did Christ willingly purchase, pardon and sanctify believers, by freely shedding his blood as the sacrifice for our sin, he took it a step further. He "made us a kingdom, priests to God and his Father" (1:6). Believers have been granted the power of kings by which we overcome the world and will eventually sit in judgment of it. As priests we have been granted access to the throne of God.

The Master Poet

The term ἐποίησεν (*epoisen*) *made* is used several times in Scripture. It is the root from which our word poem is derived.

⁹ The phrase "unto the ages of ages", τους αἰῶνας των αἰῶνων (*tous aionas aionon*) is an idiom for the concept of eternity, often interpreted as *forever and ever*.

This is the term Paul used when he explained, “*we are his ποίημα (poiēma) workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them*” (Eph. 2:10). The Septuagint used this term in Gen. 1:1, “*In the beginning God ἐποίησεν (epoiesen) created.*” We might say all of creation is the poetry of God, and that mankind (whom He made in His own image) is the subject of His verse.

As many others have pointed out, each author has his own style. Steinbeck sounds like Steinbeck. Hawthorn sounds like Hawthorn. Twain sounds like Twain. Nee, Lewis, Bunyan, each has his own flare, his own voice. Likewise, God has His own style of authorship, His own style of poetry. The poetry of His orderly mind is found in the laws of mathematics. Both of God’s great works, of which we are aware (creation and his revealed Word), are precisely structured, filled with, and ordered by, the principles of mathematics.

The mathematical precision of the universe is glorious, clearly revealing the necessity of an intelligent Creator. Creation is so precisely ordered that in the Day of Judgment no one will be able to offer an excuse for his or her disbelief.

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handiwork (Ps. 19:1).

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shown it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:19-20).

The irony is that the more science discovers about the universe the more clearly it dictates an intelligent Creator; yet unbelievers adamantly ignores this reality, thereby heaping even more judgment upon themselves.

Numbers are also important in Scripture. They seem to further reflect God’s order. Having both a literal and a symbolic meaning, throughout Scripture specific numbers represent certain themes:

- #1 unity, independence

- #2 increase
- #3 divinity, indivisibility
- #4 earthly
- #5 secular
- #6 man, failure
- #7 perfection, completion
- #8 new beginning
- #9 judgment
- #10 testimony, responsibility
- #12 election, eternity
- #3½ incomplete, imperfect
- Any number multiplied by ten is the personification of that digit.

The first chapter of The Revelation provides an apt illustration of the mathematical themes in Scripture. There are seven churches, seven spirits,¹⁰ three persons of the godhead, three things said about each of them and a three-fold progression of salvation. There are seven lampstands and seven stars. These numbers are not coincidental. The threes are symbolic of divinity and indivisibility. The sevens speak of perfection and completeness. A failure to understand the significance of these numbers results in a failure to understand many nuances in The Revelation as well as many nuances of Scripture at large.

An amazing discovery was made a few decades ago by the mathematician, Dr. Eliyahu Rips. He found that by applying a mathematical skip code to the contiguous letters of the Hebrew text of Genesis, key words concerning related information came forth in a fashion similar to a crossword puzzle. He discovered specific details about several historical events and persons, each contained in single Old Testament passages. He tested the process on other Hebrew literature but none produced similar results.

¹⁰ Seven spirits of God might speak of the seven-fold administration and activities of the Holy Spirit, i.e. Isa. 11:2.

When other mathematicians attempted to disprove his findings they unexpectedly confirmed them. Although, Dr. Rips had calculated such a pairing of related words concerning a given topic should be one in a million, nevertheless, when applied to Genesis he found them time and again.

This skip code implies a very specific order to Scripture. But if Dr. Rips is indeed onto something, I suspect he has only scratched the surface. I suspect the coding to be far more in-depth. Perhaps the text is to be cubed or triangulated versus the mere contiguous linear format. Can we imagine the detailed information that such a three dimensional design could contain? The possibilities would be phenomenal. Perhaps, when the books are opened for judgment, everything about everyone's life will be contained in coded format in Scripture itself. Of course this is just a thought . . . my imagination of the possible mysteries God might have in store for us. For who knows the depth and breadth of the mind of God?

Every Eye Shall See Him

There is nothing in the annals of antiquity to parallel the majestic scene of the seventh verse. Moses saw the burning bush. Israel witnessed the thunders above Mount Sinai. Isaiah had a vision that made him declare, *“Woe is me! For I am a man of unclean lips.”* The disciples saw the Lord transfigured, shining as the sun; and Paul was blinded by the glory of the Lord as he traveled the Damascus road. But none of these compare to the scene of Christ returning to the mount of his humiliation in power and glory with the host of heaven in tow.¹¹ *“Behold, he comes with the clouds and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him. And all the nations of the earth will mourn over him. Even so, Amen” (1:7).*

“Even so, Amen.” If there is one thing the world can be sure of, it is Jesus Christ's triumphant return to the mount of his humiliation. All hell cannot stop him. It is a recurring theme throughout the whole of Scripture; from the first promise of a redeemer, *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; it shall bruise you head, and you*

¹¹ Cf: Zech. 14:4; Jd. 14; Rev. 19:11.

shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15), to God’s last and tender plea to mankind, “the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And the one hearing let him say, Come. And the one thirsting let him come; the one wishing let him take the water of life freely” (22:17).

The promise is assured by the use of a double affirmation: “*Even so, Amen*”, ναὶ ἀμήν (*nai amen*) Yes, so be it. The term *nai* itself is a strong affirmative, meaning even so, yes, of a truth, surely, verily. When coupled with the Hebrew idiom *amen* (so be it or it is true) it seems to provide added assurance. Then he makes certain that we know exactly who is speaking, who this is giving this promise: “*I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending . . . who is, who was, and who is to come. The Almighty*” (1:8).

Our Glorified Redeemer 1:9-20

⁽⁹⁾*I John, your brother and companion in the affliction and kingdom and patience in Jesus, came to be in the island called Patmos on account of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus.* ⁽¹⁰⁾*I came to be in the spirit on the Lord’s day and I heard a voice behind me, loud like of a trumpet ⁽¹¹⁾saying, “Write what you see in a scroll and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, and to Smyrna, and to Pergamum, and to Thyatira, and to Sardis, and to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.”*

⁽¹²⁾*And as I turned around to see the voice that spoke with me; and as I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ⁽¹³⁾and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, who had been clothed with a garment down to the feet and girdled about at the breasts with a golden girdle. ⁽¹⁴⁾And his head and his hair were white as wool, white as snow; and his eyes were like a flame of fire; ⁽¹⁵⁾and his feet were like polished brass, as if being fired in a furnace; and his voice was like the sound of many waters. ⁽¹⁶⁾And he had seven stars in his right hand and proceeding from his mouth was a sharp two-edged sword, and his countenance was like the sun shines in its power.*

⁽¹⁷⁾*And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me saying, “Fear not; I am the*

first and the last ⁽¹⁸⁾and the living; and I was dead and behold, I am living unto the ages of the ages; and I have the keys of death and of Hades. ⁽¹⁹⁾Write therefore, the things that you saw, and the things that are, and the things that are about to occur after these things. ⁽²⁰⁾The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands. The seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are seven churches.”

Simple Security

Other than the glorious vision of our Lord, one of the most noteworthy aspects of this passage is the casual reference John makes to himself. He is simply, “*John*” (1:9). No lofty title, no demand of Apostolic respect; simply, John. It is a prime example of leadership. Those with confidence, secure in their position, can afford informality. On the contrary, those unsure of themselves almost always demand titles: Doctor, Counselor, Reverend, Sir, Bishop, or something of the like. It is a sign of their insecurity, which they mask by demanding the respect they perceive is garnered in their title; as if the title itself gives them value. But God alone can demand respect. Those leaders, who understand the nature of man and know their own place before the Lord, realize they cannot demand respect. They know respect is something that must be earned. It is immature to demand it, and foolish to expect it merely based upon some title or appointment.

We might take this yet a step further. There are negative repercussions to any leader who demands respect versus earning it. The coveted title will be granted nominally at best. Aside from stroking the ego it will merely create divisiveness, further separating the leader from those whom he or she desires respect. Soon such leaders face rebellion and generally lose any respect they might have achieved. Even in the military, it is the officer’s rank that soldiers must respect. Still, the officer donning the uniform must earn the personal respect of the troops—that is, if the officer expects to be an effective leader.

Peter spoke to this when he urged the elders to operate by example,

Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, not by compulsion, but willingly, according to God; nor for greedy gain, but eagerly; nor as being lords over the masses, but becoming examples of the flock (1 Pet. 5:2-3).

Paul demonstrated this same spirit in Philemon 8, *“though I could be very bold in Christ to order you to do that which is fitting, because of love, rather I beseech you.”*

Persecuted for the Gospel

Another remark worthy of note is John's reference to himself as *“your brother and companion in the affliction and kingdom and patience in Jesus” (1: 9)*. God has continued to use adversities to his advantage. From the centurion's confession at the cross in which he declared *“Truly this was the Son of God” (Mat. 27:54)*, to the jailer's conversion at Paul's imprisonment and the first persecution in Jerusalem, which subsequently scattered believers throughout the empire, to the deaths of the early reformers, which set the stage for even greater leaders and theologians. It is often said that *“the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”*

In light of our present Western Christian climate, confused and floundering in the midst of socio-political activism, and the heretical health-and-wealth gospel made famous by fast-talking, slick-looking televangelists, this is a most sobering statement, *“your brother and companion in the affliction.”* John was a righteous man and *“the disciple whom Jesus loved”*; yet he suffered dearly for it. Perhaps he would not have fit well into our modern Christian Era, which seems to believe that because of our righteousness God has blessed us with abundance. Those of us who are really righteous (as evidenced by our gifts to the televangelist) are blessed with untold wealth—closets filled with shoes, name brand garments, nice vehicles in the garage, and all the gadgets our hearts desire.

Diametrically opposed to this popular, erroneous, prosperity theology is another passage that states, *“if any man shall live godly in Christ Jesus, he will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 2:13)*. Somehow, this falls more in line with John's thought. Believers are not of this world. Our home and our wealth are laid up in our future, glorified life. For the last two thousand years, the

persecution of the Church of God has been consistent, in one form or another, for the god of this world system is our enemy.¹² But all things, even persecution, work to the good for our God and for His purposes. Despite our adversary's brutal offensives, persuasive seductions, and best laid strategies, his devices have always furthered rather than hindered the spread of the gospel.

During the latter part of Emperor Domitian's reign (AD 81-96), John was banished, imprisoned for a time on the desolate island of Patmos, located in the southern part of the Aegean Sea nearly forty miles west-southwest of Miletus. It was here he received The Revelation. This small undesirable island, not visited by merchant ships and seldom visited by any ship at all, featured three rocky masses joined by isthmuses, barren mountain peaks and bleak valleys with little to no bottomland. Of course, John was not the only Christian to suffer under the idolatrous rule of the Roman emperors. Though imperial worship had long been the custom, Domitian was the first to openly encourage it, and Trajan (AD 98-117), the first to demand it. Consequently, the Early Church was severely persecuted for its refusal to participate.

Antipas of Pergamos, like many pastors, lost his life. Polycarp of Smyrna was burned at the stake, while Ignatious of Antioch was one of the first to be clawed by the wild beasts in the coliseums as the crowd roared approval. And this persecution did not end with the leadership. All Christians were considered fair game. Indeed, their slaughter under some rulers was more than encouraged, it was demanded.

Paul, himself a martyr at the hand of Rome, encouraged the Corinthians explaining that believers are

pursued, yet not forsaken; smitten down, yet not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death works in us, but life in you. (2 Cor. 4:9-12).

¹² See, 2 Corinthians chapters 4 and 5.

Of course, the Jews had also suffered many persecutions: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and now Rome. Thus, the psalmist had offered his comfort as well.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, . . . Be still and know that I am God. Jehovah of hosts is with us . . . Jehovah of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge (Ps. 46:1, 10,11).

Reality

John said "*I came to be in the spirit on the Lord's Day*"¹³ (1:10). There is a vast difference between a divine vision and a mere dream. Nightly dreams are natural events, common to most of the population, believer and non-believer alike. Dreams are a part of our present world, our present consciousness; perhaps our subconscious, as many believe, but a natural part of our existence just the same. Divine visions are not. They are not part of our everyday experience. Indeed, they were rare even for the prophets, much less the average saint. Therefore, those in our present dispensation who claim to have such visions must be viewed with skepticism. John warned the young Church, "*believe not every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world*" (1 Jn. 4:1). Later in The Revelation, John commends the church at Ephesus for testing "*those calling themselves apostles, but they are not*" and having found "*them liars*" (2:2). There will always be charlatans, false preachers and teachers making grandiose claims of visions and God's speaking to them; but here we witness one of the few true experiences of man catching a glimpse of heaven.

John used the aorist middle indicative form of the verb ἐγενόμην (*egenomen*), when he said "*I came to be*" (1:10). He uses the same form of the word later, when he is beckoned before the throne, "*Immediately I came to be in the spirit and behold, a throne was set in heaven and someone was sitting upon*

¹³ ἐν πνεύματι ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ (*en tē kuriakē heemera*) on the Lord's day - whether this is a reference to the day of the week or to the still future "Day of the Lord," in which much of John's vision takes place, is debated. The Early Church fathers used a similar term; however their use is not conclusive either.

the throne” (4:2). The indicative mood signifies this was more than a mere dream. This was an actuality, an event that took place. It was an interactive reality into which John was transported, albeit in another dimension. The experience was similar to Paul’s, when he was caught up into the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2). The aorist tense in this indicative mood indicates a punctiliar action, like a snapshot. The middle voice is reflective. We do not have a middle voice in English. It speaks of both the subject’s initiation and participation in the verb’s action upon itself, the subject. For example; “He patted himself on the back” would reflect the middle voice concept. Here, the middle voice implies that John had something to do with this vision and the subsequent transportation; be it meditation or prayer, somehow John was an active participant.

Behold, Your Judge

As John “*turned around to see the voice that spoke*” (1:12), the glorious sight instantly filled his vision even as he was turning. He said “*and as I turned I saw*”; using the aorist, active participle ἐπιστρέψας (*epistrephas*) to express the urgency of the moment. One can only imagine the wonder, the excitement, the fear John must have experienced as the adrenaline surged through his veins; his heart pounding, eyes wide open, his respirations sometimes rapid and sometimes held altogether. But this a different scene from that which he will witness later, in chapter 19, wherein the Lord is a warrior prepared for battle and coming to execute judgment upon the nations. Here, Jesus appears in a much gentler role, although awesome nonetheless. What follows is a beautiful word picture depicting the glory of God manifest in the flesh.

Here, we see Jesus as he will appear at the *bema seat*,¹⁴ when each believer will be critiqued and rewarded for his works of righteousness in this life (1 Cor. 3:14-15). Nine is the number of judgment; as such, Jesus is depicted in a nine-fold characterization as the Judge of the Church.

¹⁴ τῷ βήματι τοῦ χριστοῦ (*tō bēmati tou Christou*), *the tribunal of Christ* (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10).

- ✓ His "*garment down to the feet*" speaks of his character, judicial authority, and kingly presence (Isa. 6:1, 64:6, Ps. 104:2).
- ✓ The "*golden girdle*" girdled about at the breasts is an emblem of righteousness and faithfulness (Isa. 11:5).
- ✓ His head and his hair being "*white as wool, white as snow,*" reveal him as "*the Ancient of Days*" (Dan. 7:9).
- ✓ His "*eyes were like a flame of fire*" symbolizing omniscience. All things are naked before him (Heb. 4:13).
- ✓ His "*feet were like polished brass, as if being fired in a furnace*" refers to the outer court as a place of judgment (Ex. 27:9-19).
- ✓ His "*voice was like the sound of many waters*" speaking to the majesty and glory of God (Eze. 33:2).
- ✓ The "*seven stars in his right hand*" are explained in verse 20; they are the seven messengers. They are in Jesus' right hand, the hand of power and strength. This speaks to their security (and thus the security of all believers) in Christ (Jn. 10:27-29). All the power of hell cannot move the elect.
- ✓ The "*sharp two-edged sword*" proceeding from his mouth is the Word of God. It is "*sharp and powerful piercing asunder even the soul and spirit*" (Heb. 4:12).
- ✓ Finally, his "*countenance was like the sun shines in its power,*" speaking of his glory, his righteousness (Ps. 84:11; Mal. 4:2).

The "*golden lampstands*" (1:12) speak of the light of the Lord shining through the Church. The Church is not the origin of the light, but simply the bearer of it. The Lord is the origin of the light; when on earth Jesus himself was the bearer of it (Jn. 1:9-10). Now that he has returned to the Father, the Church has been given the responsibility to hold the light forth (Phil. 2:15-16).

Worship

John's response is nothing less than expected; "*when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead*" (1:17). This is not unlike other

saints of God, who had similar encounters. Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, Peter, James and Paul all fell prostrate before the Lord in the sudden, overwhelming realization of their iniquity and personal insignificance. This is worship: the humble, prostrate demeanor before the awesome and glorious God.

Our modern Western Christian culture has done a great disservice to the Church by casually referring to the song service as worship. Singing, in and of itself, is not worship. The act of worship begins with the humble, prostrate demeanor that necessarily develops when we contemplate just how pitiful we are and how glorious God is. Singing may follow; indeed it likely must follow, but it is not the sum of worship; neither is it the beginning of worship. I say this as a musician and a songwriter; song is a by-product or, at best, a final phase of worship.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia explains the principal Old Testament concept of worship *שָׁחָה* (*shachah*), *to depress, to bow down, to prostrate*, as the reverential attitude of mind and body, combined with the more generic notions of adoration, obedience, and service. Worship evokes humble prostration, a reality check as it were. Praise will follow, perhaps even song; then it is time to take action, to serve. The words of the Apostle Paul come to mind, “*Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men*” (2 Cor. 5:11). It is during worship that Paul considers the terror of the Lord and his response is to persuade men of the gospel. Thus, it bears repeating; worship does not begin or end with song; song is merely a step, an optional step at that, in the process. Perhaps more accurately, we might say song is a joyous by-product of worship.

The popular method of using a charismatic and talented worship leader to manufacture “the spirit of worship” is futile. Even worse, it is misleading. The sad thing is that so many churches are so preoccupied with manufactured worship that they have neglected to teach true worship to their members. Few believers know what it is to lie face down in fear before our awesome God. Few believers know worship; we are too preoccupied, clapping to the beat of the manufactured jubilation. Yet is it not the fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom? (Ps. 111:10). It is because of our fear and subsequent humility before our awesome God that we do not have the spirit of fear

toward the world. Thus, Jesus admonish his disciples just before sending them to minister: "fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mat. 10:28).

His Tender Touch

"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me saying, Fear not; . . ." (1:17). This tender scene of Jesus reaching out to gently place his hand upon this smitten servant is a clear sign of acceptance and favor. For as the psalmist has said, the Lord *"knows our frame; He remembers that we are but dust"* (Ps. 103:14).

Many have noted that this is so much like our Lord's character. Jesus often reached out and laid his hands on the afflicted. He reached out to the blind, the deaf, the sick and the outcast. The folks in the community would not even pass a leper on the same side of the street, yet Jesus reached out and laid his hands on them. He reached out to the fragile hearted as well. The children seemed to be in everyone's way but his. The harlot spoiled everyone's dinner but his. The woman caught in adultery was justly sentenced to death in everyone's eyes but his.

He has not changed. *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever"* (Heb. 13:8). He is still tenderly reaching out to those to whom he ministers.

For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:15,16).

Living as yet sinners, among other sinners, in the midst of this harsh world, it is only natural that we let this tender heartedness (as displayed by our Lord) slip from our grasp. Sometimes it is hard to exhibit tenderness and love toward the unlovely. Is this difficulty not covered in Paul's woeful realization of his miserable yet glorious position?

I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the

inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members (Rom. 7:21-23).

It is their sinful nature that makes the obnoxious and unattractive unlovable. At the same time, it is this same sinful nature (possessed by those who would dare to love the unlovable) that hinders them from doing so. It is a lose-lose situation, so that even when we want to do the right thing, the good thing, to exhibit tenderness toward the contemptible, our nature forbids it. But there is hope. It is possible to do as our master did, to love even as he loved, to be Christ like. To this end, Paul continued his discourse.

O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin (Rom. 7:24-25).

It is the new birth, through Jesus Christ, that empowers the believer to overcome this sinful nature; that empowers the believer to be Christ like; to exhibit true compassion. Jesus laid his right hand upon his frightened servant to strengthen him and give him comfort and hope.

Fear not; I am the first and the last and the living; and I was dead and behold, I am living unto the ages of the ages; and I have the keys of death and of Hades (1:17-18).

His Deity

As mentioned earlier, “*the first and the last*” (1:17), is a significant reference to Jesus’ deity. He used a comparable term for himself in verses 1:8, 21:6, and 22:13, “*I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end . . . the first and the last.*” Should we not recall and compare the Lord’s challenge to the prophet Isaiah?

Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts, I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no God. Who is like me? Let him proclaim it, let him declare and set it forth before me. Who has

announced from of old the things to come? Let them tell us what is yet to be. Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any (Isa. 44:6-8).

“Who is like me? Let him proclaim it, let him declare and set it forth before me.” Proclaim it is exactly what Jesus did. There simply is no denying that Jesus claims to be God. Thus, it cannot be denied that Jesus is God manifest in the flesh. Jesus is indeed, YHWH, the I AM, the God of Israel. In Jesus *“the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col. 2:9).*

Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the [nations], believed on in the world, received up into glory (1 Tim. 3:16).

As if to make certain there is no confusion as to the identity of this speaker, this *“first and last,”* he concludes, *“I was dead and behold, I am living unto the ages of the ages” (1:18).*

The Keys of Death

All believers should find great assurance in the Lord's next statement, for it seals our redemption and our future glorification: *“I am living unto the ages of the ages; and I have the keys of death and of Hades” (1:19).* If Jesus had not risen from the dead then we *“of all men are most miserable and our faith is in vain” (1 Cor. 15:12-19).* But he did rise and now he holds the power over death and of Hades. At his command graves must give up the bodies of dust that have been committed to them, and Hades cannot hold onto the souls of the just made perfect in Christ. At the appointed time the body and soul of every believer will be reunited, raised by the power of God and changed into his likeness (1 Th. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:51).

Hades is the region of the unseen dead. The Jews believed there were two separate abodes, one for the righteous and another for unrighteous. Jesus spoke of the deaths of the beggar Lazarus and the rich man. Lazarus was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom, while the rich man was buried only to find himself in hell, tormented by fire (Lk. 16:19-31). When the rich man looked

across the divide, he saw Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. Then he asked Father Abraham to supply him a small relief with but a wet finger on his tongue. To which Abraham responded, no one can pass across the great gulf that is fixed between us.

Enoch also spoke of these abodes. He explained there are four dwellings. Three are the dark and foreboding; they are for the unjust and the various fallen angels. The fourth is bright and joyous; it is the dwelling of the righteous (Enoch 22). This is where Jesus descended to proclaim His victory and to lead the souls of the righteous to heaven (Ps. 16:10; 1 Pet. 3:19; Eph. 4:7-10), so that now, when the righteous depart they go to be with the Lord (Phil. 1:23).

Chronological Division

John is commanded to write three things (1:19). It is very important on our part to pause and take note of them, for herein we find the chronological key to this book. He was told to write of:

- ✓ “*the things that you saw,*” that is, the vision of chapter one.
- ✓ “*the things that are,*” which is a reference to the time in which John lived, the present Church Age.
- ✓ and “*the things that are about to occur after these things,*” speaking of what will follow the present Church dispensation.

The phrase “*after these things*” μετὰ ταῦτα (*meta tauta*) is significant; “*these things*” refers to the advancing Church Age, to which the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3 provide a detailed prophetic view. Immediately, upon the completion of these messages to the churches (and thus the prophetic end of the Church Age), John continues the chronological progression with the same phrase, “*after these things*” (4:1). John sees a door open in heaven and hears a voice beckoning him to enter. The scene is a wonderful representation of the rapture of the Church. In heaven John sees that which comes to pass after the Church Age, that which is “*after these things*”.

Seven Stars and Lampstands

It seems likely that the prophetic aspect of the seven churches is referenced when Jesus spoke of the mystery of the seven stars and of the seven lampstands.¹⁵

The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands. The seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are seven churches (1:20).

That the seven stars reference the messengers and the seven lampstands speak of the churches is not the mystery. It is plainly explained in the text. The mystery seems to be their prophetic portrayal of the Church dispensation from the day of Pentecost to the future rapture of the Church.

As we shall see, each of the seven messages, which we study in the next section, has a three-fold application: the direct application to the historic, local church body to which it was addressed; a broader application for believers in general; and a prophetic purpose. In that The Revelation is a book of prophecy (1:3, 22:19), this aspect of these letters must not be overlooked. In them resides an accurate and detailed pre-written history of the advancing Church Age. A close study of Church history reveals a chronological progression that coincides perfectly with the order and specific concerns of these seven churches. As such these

¹⁵ *λαχνίαι (luchniai) lampstand* - refers to the wick and oil lamps of the Jewish tabernacle. It is not a candlestick. The seven-branched lampstand lighted the interior of the tabernacle perhaps to symbolize new life and the knowledge of God's purpose for his people (Ex. 25:31-40).

seven churches represent the complete Church dispensation. Thus seven churches. Not five, or six or eight or three, but seven. If we recall, the number seven speaks to perfection and completion.¹⁶

¹⁶ See page 53.

PART TWO
THE CHURCH

The Prophetic, Historic Church

The Seven Churches

The letters to the seven churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea, speak to seven historical congregations in Asia Minor (present day Turkey). Geographically, they formed a semi-circle around Ephesus. But of the many possible churches to address, why were these chosen? Others could have been addressed; some, far more prominent than a few of these. What of Antioch, Colossae, Derbe, Iconium, Lystria and Miletus? Certainly they had issues as well. Why were they not mentioned? And what if any, is the significance in the order in which these letters appear?

A close comparison of these seven churches, the order of their sequence, and subsequent Church history, answers these questions. While they were specific messages to seven historical churches, clearly they represent something far more comprehensive. Neither their choice, nor the order in which they were addressed, from Ephesus to Laodicea, was random. Collectively, they depict the course of the entire Church Age. They are the pre-written history of the Church dispensation, from the day of Pentecost to its future gathering to meet the Lord in the air. As explained in the previous chapter, this prophetic portrait is the mystery of the seven stars (the messengers) and seven lampstands (the churches), which Jesus is holding in his right hand.

His Person and His Pledges

As we read these letters, we must not fail to take note of two specific details concerning our Lord: the characterizations by which he identifies himself and the promises he makes to the victorious. He describes himself differently and makes diverse promises to each. His self-described characteristics are

specifically chosen to identify with the particular historic community and the particular spiritual environment of the prophetic era being addressed. Similarly, his promises hold an interesting progression as they symbolically restore the victorious in each church to the original intention God had in store for humanity before the fall.

His Self Description

Reminiscent of Paul's seeking common ground with everyone he encountered that he might persuade them with the gospel (1 Cor. 9:22), here Jesus describes himself differently to each church in a manner specific to their particular community.

- To Ephesus, who had lost their first love, he is "*the one holding the seven stars in his right hand, the one walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands*" (2:1). This is an obvious inference to their security in him, even despite their lack of zeal for him.
- To Smyrna, which in times past had been an important city that had died out but then returned to life and was now the home of Christian martyrs, he is the one "*who became dead and lived again.*" To this same city, which proudly supported municipal rivalries and whose citizens aspired to be in the "who's who" of local society, the Lord said he is, "*the first and the last*" (2:8). He is the ultimate "who's who;" all others seem to pale in comparison.
- To the church of Pergamum, who tolerated an immoral heresy, he is "*the one who has the sharp two-edged sword*" (2:12). Since they will not separate truth from error, he will; and it will be painful.
- To Thyatira, who allowed itself to be seduced by Jezebel, he is the one "*who has his eyes like a flame of fire and his feet are like polished brass*" (2:18). Judgment is soon coming.
- To the church at Sardis, who once had a name but was now dead, he is "*the one having the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars*" (3:1). Although they fall short in

their work, the Lord does not. The work of the Spirit is complete.

- To the Philadelphians, those who were faithful even though they had little strength, he is *“the holy one, the true one, the one having the key of David, the one opening and no one shall shut and shuts and no one shall open” (3:7)*. It is a pleasant reminder that their true strength is in him.
- And finally, to the church at Laodicea, those who had backslidden into a lukewarm testimony, he is *“the faithful and true witness, the ruler of the creation of God” (3:14)*. A proclamation designed both to convict them and to show himself as an example in service and life.

His Promises

The Lord makes different and specific promises to those individuals in each church who are victorious over the erroneous teachings and temptations to which they were subjected. The successive progression in these promises seems to restore the original intention planned for man before the fall.

- The first, Ephesus, is promised, *“to eat of the tree of life that is in the Paradise of God” (2:7)*. After man’s disobedience, God placed the Cherubim to guard this tree.
- It is promised to the second, Smyrna, that he *“shall not be hurt of the second death” (2:11)*. Because of sin, death has passed upon all men.
- The Lord promised each victor in the third church, Pergamum, that he would *“give to him of the hidden manna and I will give him a white stone and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knows but he that receives it” (2:17)*. The judgment passed upon man after the fall was that *“by the sweat of his face shall he eat bread, for the land would be accursed for him with thorns and thistles.”*
- The fourth victor, in Thyatira, is promised to have *“authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as the pottery vessels are broken to pieces”*

(2:26-27). Adam was to subdue and have dominion over God's creation.

- The fifth victor, in Sardis, is promised to *“be clothed in white garments and I will by no means blot his name out of the book of life. And I will confess his name before my Father and before His angels”* (3:5-6). Only those so clothed in the righteousness of Christ will escape, having their names blotted out of the book of life.
- Jesus promised the sixth victor in Philadelphia that he would make him *“a pillar in the temple of my God . . . And I will write upon him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God”* (3:12). Adam was expelled from the garden and given the task of tilling the ground from which he was taken.
- To the seventh victor, Laodicea, Jesus promised to *“give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also was victorious and sat down with my Father in his throne* (3:21). Adam had been a co-ruler and shared a deep intimate fellowship with the Lord.

Of the seven, only Smyrna and Philadelphia receive praise without rebuke, while Sardis and Laodicea are almost entirely censured. Ephesus, Pergmum and Thyatira are praised for some things and condemned for others.

The Church of Ephesus 2:1-7

⁽¹⁾*“To the messenger of the church in Ephesus write: These things says the one holding the seven stars in his right hand, the one walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: ⁽²⁾I know your works and your toil and patience, and that you cannot bear those who are wicked, also that you tested those calling themselves apostles, but they are not and you found them liars. ⁽³⁾Also, you have forbearance and have endured for my name's sake and have not grown weary.*

⁽⁴⁾*“But I have this against you, that thou have left your first love. ⁽⁵⁾Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen and repent and do the first works. Otherwise, I am*

coming to you and I will move your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent.

(6) "But this you have, that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (7) The one having an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him that is victorious, I will give to him to eat of the tree of life that is in the Paradise of God."

Ephesus, the Historic City

Just as numbers are important to biblical interpretation, so too are names. This is especially true when the name is chosen or singled out by God, such as Abraham, Sarah, John the Baptist, and of course, Jesus himself (*e.g. Gen. 17:5, 15; Lk. 1:13; Mt. 1:25*). Each was chosen for a specific meaning, a specific connotation it conveys. As such, Ephesus means "the Desirable One." At the time of The Revelation, Ephesus was the wealthiest and greatest city in the province. Often referred to as the Light of Asia, it was a flourishing commercial seaport, the home of famed annual gaming events, and the geographical center of the Roman Empire.

The famous geographer Strabo, referred to Ephesus as the Market of Asia. Dr. Godbey said it was the New York of its time. Although Pergamum was the official government seat for the province, Ephesus was the unofficial capital. Located on the banks of the Cayster River along the Aegean Sea, Roman governors often held court at Ephesus, and, by statute, a new proconsul had to enter his new domain through this, the Gateway to Asia. As such, Ephesus held the political distinction of being a self-governing, free city, and thereby excused from the usual oppressive garrison of troops. For all travelers, Ephesus was the highway to Rome. Years later, when Christians were being taken from Asia to serve as lion fodder in the coliseums, Ignatius called Ephesus the Highway of the Martyrs.

Ephesus was also the center for magic arts and the worship of the Greek goddess Artemis or the Roman goddess Diana, the same deity with two names. Although it was home to several famous temples erected in honor of various Roman Emperors, the Temple of Artemis or Diana was its pride. The temple was nearly 10,000 square feet with 120 columns climbing 60 feet to the ceiling, 36 of them elaborately gilded and inlaid. It was one of the most sacred

shrines in the empire and considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Curiously, this goddess of the moon, fertility, life and the outdoors (who they believed had fallen from heaven), was represented by an unattractive, squat, black, many-breasted figure that, nevertheless, was held precious and revered throughout this stronghold of pagan superstition.

Furthermore, this pagan religion played a vital part in the local economy. Travelers came from all over the world to buy Ephesian Letters, amulets, and charms, which they believed could cure sickness, make fruitless wombs give birth and generally bring success to any venture. It was this economy Paul had disrupted with his preaching (Acts 19:23-41). He had attracted so many converts that local merchants, sellers of religious trinkets, were losing a considerable portion of their income. Thus, a ruckus erupted. Although the city no longer exists, archaeologists have discovered the ruins of the great theater that housed the merchant's riot mentioned in Acts.

Similar to the cities of refuge for accused or guilty Israelites, the Temple of Diana was considered a safe heaven for all criminals. Once a criminal reached the temple compound he could claim the right of asylum. Also housed within the temple were hundreds of prostitutes, considered sacred temple priestesses. As one can imagine, being the center of this pagan cult, as well as a haven for criminals and prostitutes, Ephesus was a notoriously evil place known for its crime and immorality. Later generations would think of Ephesus as the Vanity Fair of the ancient world.

Many have supposed Ephesus to be a most unpromising soil for sowing the seed of Christianity, yet it was here that Christianity had some of its greatest triumphs. Paul had founded the local church. Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos had labored here (Acts 18:19, 24, 26; 19). Timothy had served as a bishop, and later even John himself, after returning from exile, spent the last years of his life as its bishop. Ephesus had become a popular center of Christianity as well as Diana worship.

An old ploy of Satan is to infiltrate and seduce. He tried it time and again with Israel and continued to utilize this strategy with the Church. This tactic was exercised in Ephesus as well;

however, doubtless due to their strong theological foundation, the church remained unscathed. Thus, Jesus commends them:

I know your works and your toil and patience, and that you cannot bear those who are wicked, also that you tested those calling themselves apostles, but they are not and you found them liars (1:2).

Paul had warned these same Ephesians that after he departed grievous wolves would enter among them, not sparing the flock (Ac.20:29). Centuries later, Tertullian and Jerome spoke of a work written by a presbyter of Ephesus, which claimed to be a canonical history of the acts of Paul. John had condemned this work and accused its author of heresy. Other wolves came as well, and in various sorts. Some were envoys of the Jews who had followed Paul about, hoping to entangle Christians in the Law. Some taught that Christians could turn their liberty into a license for licentious behavior. Some were professional beggars, taking advantage of Christian charity. Being located in the center of crime and immorality, the church at Ephesus was especially prone to such deceivers.

Jesus praised them for their discernment and condemnation of the Nicolaitans: *“But this you have, that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”* Some believe the Nicolaitans¹⁷ were followers of Nicholas—one of the seven deacons to serve tables in Jerusalem. Hippolytus assumed Nicholas had departed from correct doctrine, but others said this sect merely took his name to associate themselves with apostolic authority. Clement defended Nicholas, arguing that his followers had perverted his teaching that “the flesh must be abused.” By this Nicholas meant the body must be kept under control. But the heretics, Clement explained, had distorted this to mean the flesh can be used as shamelessly as a man wishes.

Irenaeus described the Nicolaitans as living lives of unrestrained indulgence. Others spoke of them as shameless in their uncleanness. Clement said they “abandon themselves to pleasure like goats . . . leading a life of self-indulgence.” Regardless of their origin, the Nicolaitans were an early sect of

¹⁷ See comments on the church of Pergamum.

licentious heretics who claimed to be Christians, yet led ungodly, immoral lives.

The Ephesian believers condemned the Nicolaitans, as well as all other false teachings. However, despite their sound doctrine, the Ephesians had a significant problem. They had lost their zeal for the Lord. They were well versed in the Scriptures, doctrinally sound, and had all the appearance of holiness. They hated immorality and fought against the heresy of seditious teachers, diligently scrutinizing every one of them. But their hearts had grown cold. It had been a long time since they had earnestly thanked the Lord for His blessings. It had been even longer since they had fallen prostrate before Him, broken from the awesome reality of their own sinful nature in the face of His righteousness. Therefore, to them Jesus said,

Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen and repent and do the first works. Otherwise, I am coming to you and I will move your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent (2:5).

Evidently, the historical Ephesus failed to heed this warning, for neither the city nor the church continues to exist. Perhaps the ancient proverb of the hard hearted is applicable: *“He that, being often reprov’d, hardens his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy” (Prov. 29:1).*

The Prophetic Portrait of the Church of Ephesus

As for the prophetic view of Church history; as the years passed, Ephesus proved to represent the Church during the first and early second centuries. Even after the death of the apostles, the pristine 1st Century Church continued to preserve the sound doctrine they had learned. But throughout the empire, the Church had slowly lost its enthusiasm, had grown lackluster, had simply lost its fervor. In time, this doctrinally pure but evangelistically complacent early Church transformed into the persecuted and martyred Church of the next few centuries, which is represented by the church at Smyrna.

To the Church in Smyrna 2:8-11

⁽⁸⁾ *“And to the messenger of the church in Smyrna write: These things says the first and the last— who became dead*

and lived again: ⁽⁹⁾I know your affliction and your poverty, yet you are rich; and the blasphemy of those saying they are Jews and they are not, but they are a synagogue of Satan. ⁽¹⁰⁾Fear not, the things that you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison that you may be tried, and you shall have affliction for ten days. You be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life. ⁽¹¹⁾The one having an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The victorious one shall not be hurt of the second death.”

Smyrna, the Historic City

Also a city of distinction, even rivaling Ephesus in politics, religion and culture, Smyrna was a famed seaport located north of Ephesus on a gulf of the Aegean Sea. While Ephesus may have been the Market of Asia, Smyrna was considered the Ornament, the Flower of Asia. Ramsay called it the City of Life, and Lucian said it was the fairest of the cities of Ionia. This city of culture, boasting a large public library, a theater, and a stadium for games, prided itself as the birthplace of Homer.

The heart of the city cuddled the end of a long, narrow bay providing a naturally safe harbor for war and merchant ships alike. Thus, Smyrna was the primary site of trade for the Hermus Valley. The broad, paved streets of the beautiful metropolis sprawled through the foothills to the Pagos—a summit sporting several temples, each dedicated to a different god: Cybele, Zeus, Apollo, Nemesis, Tiberius, Aphrodite, and Asclepius. Leading across the Pagos, from the Temple of Zeus to the Temple of Cybele like a necklace around the crown, was the celebrated street of gold, which inspired many to call Smyrna, the Crown of Asia.

Like Ephesus, Smyrna was a free city-state. In 195 BC, it became the first city in the world to build a temple to the goddess Roma. This had led to a longstanding friendship with Rome, so that, in AD 26, the city was granted the honor of erecting a temple to the Roman deity, Caesar Tiberius. Although the Temple of Tiberius made this a chief location for emperor worship, as long as citizens paid homage to the emperor they were allowed to worship their own particular deity, something every group and

working class had, and each of which the city honored with a different holiday and feast.

If only the Christians had simply participated, even nominally, in emperor worship they would have been free to build a temple to their own deity and would have easily blended in with the rest of the activities. No one in the city would have paid them any mind. However, and to their glory, this was not the case. The church at Smyrna refused to compromise. They would not participate in any of the feast days. They would not burn incense and they would not bow their knee to the Emperor as a deity. Thus, they were persecuted.

The Jewish society of Smyrna was hostile toward the Christians as well. In AD 155, the Jews willfully participated in the martyrdom of Polycarp—the bishop of Smyrna, John’s former student and the angel,¹⁸ or messenger, to whom Jesus addressed this letter. One early account of the event explains that during the public games, a cry went up from the crowd, “Away with the atheists” (for this is what they called Christians who refused to worship the Roman deity), “let Polycarp be searched for.”

The troops found him in the upper room of a building from which he could have easily escaped. But having already told his disciples of a dream in which he was burned alive, he calmly went with his captors. Before leaving he requested an hour alone for prayer. His captors gave him two, marveling at the composure, piety, and obvious innocence of this gray haired old man. Tradition tells us that some of these guards evidently converted to the faith.

On the way back to the city, the captain of the guard pleaded with Polycarp, asking him “What harm can there be to say Caesar is lord, and to offer a sacrifice to save your own life?”

Polycarp responded, “For me, only Jesus Christ is the Lord.”

Tradition has it that upon entering the stadium, Polycarp heard a voice from heaven telling him to “Be strong and play the man.”

¹⁸ The term ἀγγέλω (aggelō, pronounced angelō) angel speaks of a messenger, an envoy, one who is sent as a messenger from God, whether a human or a heavenly being. It is our modern culture that has restricted the popular meaning of angel to that of a heavenly being.

The governor offered him a choice: “Curse the name of Christ and make sacrifice to Caesar, or death.”

“I have served him eighty-six years and he has done me no wrong.” Polycarp answered, “How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”

When the governor threatened to burn him alive, Polycarp replied: “You threaten me with the fire that burns for a time and is quickly quenched, for you do not know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come and in everlasting punishment. Why are you waiting? Come, do what you will.”

As they tied him to the stake he said, “Leave me as I am, for he who gives me power to endure the fire, will grant me to remain in the flames unmoved even without the security you will give by the nails.”

At this the crowd pressed in, tossing their sticks into the flame. It is then that Polycarp offered his now famous prayer.

O Lord God Almighty, Father of your beloved and blessed Child, Jesus Christ, through whom we have received full knowledge of you; God of angels and powers, and of all creation, and of the whole family of the righteous, who live before you, I bless you that you have granted unto me this day and hour, that I may share, among the number of the martyrs, in the cup of your Christ, for the resurrection to eternal life, both of soul and body in the immortality of the Holy Spirit. And may I today be received among them before you, as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as you, the God without falsehood and of truth, have prepared beforehand and shown forth and fulfilled. For this reason I also praise you for all things. I bless you, I glorify you through the eternal and heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, your beloved Child, through whom be glory to you with Him and the Holy Spirit, both now and for the ages that are to come. Amen.

The flames rose, but as they gathered intensity they began to flare out, arching about him so that he was not harmed. Seeing that he would not burn, at last the executioner reached up and stabbed him with his spear. In this account of the event, the volume of blood spewing from the wound quenched the fire,

causing the crowd to marvel at the difference between them and the Christians.

Polycarp was not alone in his refusal to bow to Caesar as lord. The entire church of Smyrna denied his deity. Their failure to worship Caesar made it difficult for them to acquire even the small supply of daily necessities, for they were unable to find work with the idolatrous employers (each of whom demanded participation in pagan rituals). They were also subject to sudden and unprovoked attacks by the pagan mobs. During such attacks it was not unusual for believers to lose their possessions, their homes, and their businesses. It is for this reason the Lord encouraged them,

I know your affliction and your poverty, yet you are rich; and the blasphemy of those saying they are Jews and they are not, but they are a synagogue of Satan (2:9).

The term Smyrna is the equivalent of myrrh, a bitter sap used as an anesthetic, a holy ointment, an embalming element and a perfume. When crushed, its aroma becomes stronger and even more pungent. As a desirable aroma its typical significance is referenced three times in connection with our Lord: at his birth (Mt. 2:11), at the cross (Mk. 15:23), and at his burial (Jn. 19:39). This, no doubt, speaks of the pleasing aroma of the entire body of our Lord's work and his suffering to complete it (Eph. 5:2; Ps. 45:8). Here too it has typological significance, speaking to the pleasing aroma of this suffering church, toward which the Lord has not one complaint.

The Prophetic Portrait of the Church of Smyrna

Having comforted them with his knowledge of their plight, he then warned them of an even greater trouble they were about to incur,

Fear not, the things that you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison that you may be tried, and you shall have affliction for ten days (2:10).

Prophetically, this message to Smyrna represents the Church Age from the turn of the 1st Century through the early part of the 4th Century. During this time the Church suffered ten great

persecutions at the hands of ten successive, deviant Roman emperors. In AD 64, the Church suffered severe persecution at the hand of Nero; but by the time of this writing, 95 - 100, Nero's reign had ended. Ten other Roman Emperors followed with similar practices: Domitian 96, Trajan 98-117, Hadrian 117-138, Antoninus Pius 138-161, Marcus Aurelius 161-180, Septimius Severus 193-211, Maximin 235-238, Decius 249-251, Valerian 253-260, and Diocletian 284-305. To justify these persecutions, six different charges were typically brought against the Christians.

Cannibalism, because the sacrament of communion referenced the body and blood of Christ.

Orgies of lust, because the common meal was called the love feast.

Tampering with family relationships, because conversions often caused families to split.

Atheism, because they would not worship the images of the various gods.

Politically unpatriotic, because they would not say Caesar was lord.

Incendiaries, because they foretold of the end of the world in flames.

To the Church in Pergamum 2:12-17

⁽¹²⁾“*And to the messenger of the church in Pergamum write: These things says the one who has the sharp two-edged sword: ⁽¹³⁾I know where you live—where Satan has his throne, yet you hold fast my name and did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my witness—my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*

⁽¹⁴⁾“*But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who are holding the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication. ⁽¹⁵⁾You also have some who are holding the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner. ⁽¹⁶⁾Repent*

therefore, or else I am coming to you quickly and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth.

(17) “The one having an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him that is victorious, I will give to him of the hidden manna and I will give him a white stone and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knows but he that receives it.”

Pergamum, the Historic City

Pergamum, the northernmost of the seven cities, sat overlooking the valley of the River Caicus. Although not located on any major trade route, still it was a great and flourishing metropolis. Strabo described it as the most illustrious of the Asian cities. Pliny said it was the most famous; and it certainly was, at least historically speaking, the greatest of them all. In 282 BC, Pergamum became the capital of the Seleucid kingdom—a portion of the fractured empire of Alexander the Great. During 197 to 159 BC, Pergamum had grown under the rule of Eumenes II, who built a number of large buildings, including a library boasting some 200,000 volumes, second only to the library in Alexandria. Upon his death, in 133 BC, Attalus III willed this territory to Rome, from which Rome formed the Asian province of Pergamum with this, the city Pergamum, remaining as its capital.

The word parchment comes from the name Pergamum (*pergamene charta*, the pergamene sheet). For many centuries scribes had used papyrus, made of the pith of a very large bulrush that grows beside the Nile. In the 3rd Century BC, the Pergamene king, Eumeses, persuaded Aristophanes, the librarian at Alexandria, to come to Pergamum. Ptolemy, of Egypt, was enraged. He imprisoned Aristophanes and put an embargo on the export of papyrus to Pergamum. Thus, the scholars of Pergamum invented parchment or vellum, made from the polished skins of animals—a superior medium, in time it overtook papyrus as the preferred writing material.

Its rich history, the voluminous library, and its many temples made Pergamum another important cultural center. Its citizens regarded themselves as the custodians of the Greek way of life and worship. Somewhere around 240 BC, Pergamum had been victorious over the savage invasion of the Gauls. To

commemorate the victory they had built an altar to Zeus in front of the Temple of Athena. Like Ephesus and Smyrna, Pergamum was littered with temples to their chosen gods.

Not far from the great grove of Nicephorium was the grove and Temple of Asklepios—the god of healing, who was also called the god of Pergamum. Here was a school for medical studies in honor of this, their favorite god. The symbol of Asklepios,¹⁹ a serpent, the emblem of paganism, was etched into the rock alongside the great throne and altar to Zeus. It is a symbol with which we are still familiar today, for it is still the emblem of medicine. Galen—second only to Hippocrates as far as the medical history of the ancient world—was born in Pergamum. Speaking of his favorite oaths, he observed that people often swore by Artemis of Ephesus, or by Apollo of Delphi, or by Asklepios of Pergamum.

Appropriately, the Lord said of Pergamum that this is, “*where Satan has his throne*” (2:13). It was to this city that the Babylonian priests had nested after the destruction of Babylon (Isa. 13:17-22). Although they assimilated to, and adapted their practices for, the local culture, Pergamum had become the center for the old Babylonian Mysteries. It was the headquarters for the Imperial cult of Emperor Worship. In 29 BC, they built a temple in honor of Augustus Caesar Octavian. By the end of the 1st century AD, all Roman subjects were required to offer prayers and sacrifices in the name of the emperor, whom they regarded as divine.

Some members of the Pergamum church had refused to comply with this idolatry. For Antipas, Agathonice, Attalus, Carpus, Polybus and others who kept the faith, even to the point of death, there is praise, “*you hold fast my name and did not deny my faith*” (2:13). But for the rest of the church—those who had tolerated the teachings of Balaam and the teachings of the Nicolaitans—there was condemnation.

The doctrine of Balaam goes back to the Midianites (descendants of Abraham through Katurah), who worshiped Baal

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with the practice of fertility rites (Num. 25:1-17). They believed their god died and arose each year in conjunction with the changing seasons, which resulted in the cycle of fertility for their crops and their flocks. Balaam's doctrine was to corrupt the people of the Lord. Balaam told Balak to have their young women infiltrate and seduce the Israelites. Their specific mission was to persuade the Israelites to disobey God's command for separation. The ultimate objective was to cause Israel to forsake the Lord altogether. Quite fittingly, the name Pergamum means the "objectionable marriage."

The Nicolaitans brought great shame to the Church.²⁰ Although they professed Christianity, they lived lives steeped in immorality and vice. They abused the doctrine of grace by exercising Christian liberty as a license to partake in sensual pleasures, while yet professing the faith; and they were the first to divide the clergy from the laity. Unlike the believers in Smyrna, the Nicolaitans were willing to compromise with the imperial religion by permitting Christians to participate in worship at the pagan temples. This practice seems quite similar to the present day confessional of Roman Catholicism, or the popular Armenian "saved and lost" doctrine, held by many Protestants. In Roman Catholicism, parishioners are basically permitted to openly partake in a licentious lifestyle as long as they show up from time to time to confess their sins and be absolved of all wrongdoing. In the case of the modern Armenian Protestants, they show up to be saved again.

Jesus warned them, "*Repent therefore, or else I am coming to you quickly and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth*" (2:16). This is a clear reference to the Roman proconsul's power of the sword. Roman governors were divided into two classes—those who had the right of the sword, and those who did not. Those who had the right of the sword had the power of life and death. On their word a man could be executed on the spot. The proconsul, headquartered at Pergamum, had the right of the sword and at any moment he could use it against the Christian.

²⁰ See comments of the church of Ephesus.

The Prophetic Portrait of the Church of Pergamum

Prophetically, the message to Pergamum represents the early part of the 4th through the 5th and into the 6th Century. After suffering persecution under ten successive rulers, virtually overnight, the Church was befriended by the empire. Then, almost as quickly, it assumed its role as a ward of the state. Within a few hundred years the table was to turn so that the Church would come to control the empire.

The empire's embrace of Christianity began with Constantine the Great. Just prior to defeating Maxentius, at the battle of The Milvian Bridge in 312, Constantine claimed to have had a vision. While looking into the sun he saw a cross of light with the Greek words: Ἐν τούτῳ νίκα (*en toutō nika*), "In this sign conquer." Constantine then commanded his troops to place the Christian symbol, chi rho, on their shields. The Greek letters X (*chi*) and P (*rho*) are the first two letters of the Greek Χριστός (*Christos*) Christ.²¹

As emperor, Constantine held the title Pontifex Maximus. As such, he was the high priest of the college of pontiffs for the ancient pagan Roman religion. Even after his conversion he continued to hold this title, as well as to perform its pagan duties. Furthermore, because he also refused Christian baptism until just prior to his death, the reality of his conversion has always been questioned. Many considered it merely a brilliant political ploy that sought, and succeeded, to unite the empire religiously and thereby extend his influence. Others believe his conversion was real and that he simply appeased the pagans for the same political reasons. Whether his conversion was real or not, we do not know; but one thing is certain, it changed the course of history. From that day forward the Church and the empire have been entwined, and neither has ever been the same.

This also marked a change in the adversary's strategy. Satan had used this ploy before when persecution failed to do the job. His plan is so predictable. Truly there is nothing new under the

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sun—infiltration and seduction from within is always the next step after persecution fails.

Immediately, the empire became overtly encouraging toward the Church. Over the next few decades Constantine instituted many Imperial changes.

- In 311, by decree, Christians were granted a limited tolerance.
- The edict of Milan in 313 (signed by the co-Emperors Licinius and Constantine) granted all religions, including Christianity, full liberty to follow their faith as desired. Many have called these the Magna Carta of Christianity; for even their properties, which had been seized by the previous emperor, Diocletian, were restored.
- In 313 he declared Christian clergy exempt from taxation.
- In 314 he assembled the Council of Arles to settle the Donatist controversy, which struggled with reinstating those clergy who denounced the faith during Emperor Diocletian's persecution.
- In 315 he did away with various ordinances offensive to the Church.
- In 321 he issued a decree for the observance of Sunday as a day of worship.
- Once Constantine became the sole emperor (having forced the surrender of Maxentius and Licinius in 324, and then their execution in 325), he strongly encouraged his subjects to become followers of the Christian faith.
- In 325 he assembled the Council of Nicea—the first General Council of the Church.
- In 330, largely to escape the heathen influence of Rome, Constantine transferred the seat of government to Byzantium.

Constantine had given large sums of money for the support of Christian clergy, the circulation of Christian Scriptures and the building of Christian cathedrals, which was a new thing for the hitherto persecuted believers. He sought Christians to fill his chief advisory posts and, finally, he made certain that his son was given a Christian education.

All this had significant affects on the Church. With the chief of the pagan priests so strongly patronizing and favoring Christianity, it was only natural that other pagan priests would embrace it as well, or rather infiltrate it—for the apparent conversion of many was motivated merely by political gain. Instantly, yesterday's pagan priests became Christian priests. Like their supreme leader, the Pontifex Maximus, naturally they retained their priestly titles, which heretofore did not exist in the Christian community. It is here that the harlot of the seventeenth chapter (the symbol of the false prophetess who has plagued the people of God from days of old) gains her first real foothold in the Church.

Except for Julian the Apostate (361-363), all subsequent emperors, at least ostensibly, embraced the Church. In 392, Theodosius the Great decreed that all heathen sacrifices were to be considered treason. Then in 529, when Justinian the First demanded the school of philosophy in Athens to be closed, outwardly it looked as though Christianity had vanquished paganism. In truth the new Imperial Church had merely absorbed it, tradition-by-tradition and rite-by-rite: The Church had bedded down with Jezebel.

To the Church in Thyatira 2:18-29

⁽¹⁸⁾“*And to the messenger of the church in Thyatira write: These things says the Son of God, who has his eyes like a flame of fire and his feet are like polished brass: ⁽¹⁹⁾I know your works and your love and your faith and ministry and patience, also that your last works are more than the first.*

⁽²⁰⁾“*But I have this against you, that you permit the woman Jezebel—the one calling herself a prophetess—and she teaches and seduces my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols. ⁽²¹⁾I even gave her*

time that she might repent but she wishes not to repent of her fornication. ⁽²²⁾Behold, I am casting her into a bed and those committing adultery with her into great affliction, unless they repent of her works. ⁽²³⁾And I will kill her children with death;²² and all the churches shall know that I am he that searches²³ the desire²⁴ and hearts; and I will give unto each one of you according to your works.

⁽²⁴⁾“But to you I say, to the rest that are in Thyatira, as many as have not this teaching, who did not know the deep things of Satan, as they say, I am not casting on you another burden. ⁽²⁵⁾Nevertheless, that which you have, hold fast till I come.

⁽²⁶⁾“And the victorious one and the one keeping my works until the end, I will give to him authority over the nations, ⁽²⁷⁾and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as the pottery vessels are broken to pieces, as I also have received from my Father. ⁽²⁸⁾And I will give to him the morning star. ⁽²⁹⁾The one having an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Thyatira, the Historic City

Lydia (who was converted at Philippi, Acts 16:14), and her family have long been considered the likely founders of this local church. Located inland on the banks of the Lycus river (northeast of Smyrna and about forty miles southeast of Pergamum), of the seven historical cities, Thyatira was the least significant. Although it did not have a commanding presence, still it was a prospering industrial city, known especially for its booming trade guilds and the production of royal purple.

Jesus leveled very serious charges against the Christians of Thyatira. They had permitted “*the woman Jezebel*” to seduce them “*to commit fornication,*” a clear reference to both physical

²² *Kill with death*, is a Hebraism for *kill with most sure and awful death*; so too “dying you shall die” (Gen. 2:17); to not “die the common death of men” (Num. 16:29).

²³ ἐραυνάω *eraunaō*, *search* - the idea is a thorough investigation.

²⁴ νεφρός *nephros*, *kidney*, - idiom for the degree of desire and affection.

and spiritual infidelity. Apollo was the primary deity of Thyatira, a center of activity for the idolatrous and licentious Nicolaitans, who had also been seduced by this self-proclaimed prophetess, Jezebel—who, in truth, was an advocate of pagan worship. Like Balaam, she persuaded believers to compromise their faith by co-mingling theirs with hers. She taught that promiscuity and physical infidelity was acceptable, even necessary. It was a profane treatment of the spiritual teaching of Christian liberty.

But there was another offense. She also taught them “*to eat things sacrificed unto idols.*” Meats sacrificed at the pagan temples were seldom consumed on the altar. Only a very small portion of the meat was actually burned, sometimes only a few hairs from the animal’s head. After the priest took what portion he wanted, the worshiper who had brought the sacrifice to the temple took the rest. Worshipers then served these meats at special feasts for friends and coworkers, both within the temple compound or at their homes.

These feasts, when served at the homes of friends and coworkers, presented a problem for the Christians. Should they or should they not eat of it, in that it had been offered to an idol? An additional problem was that even the butcher’s meat had probably been offered to an idol, then sold to the butcher from the priest’s excess. This issue of sacrificial meats had been a controversy since the beginning of the Church. The apostles addressed it at the council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:29), and Paul spoke to it to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 8-10). Each had come to similar but slightly different conclusions. The Jerusalem Council instructed new gentile believers to simply abstain. Paul admonished the Corinthians to abstain if it was going to cause those with weaker consciences to stumble. The overriding principle was that one should not offend either his own or another’s conscience in this or other such matters.

In Thyatira, abstinence from these meats seriously limited the Christians’ social lives. It also made it impossible for them to join any of the trade guilds, all of which held common meals served with meats offered to the idols. Paul explained to the Corinthians that neither the idol, nor the meat offered to it, is anything; for, in and of themselves they are insignificant. However, not everyone

had this understanding, and many ate the meat with consciousness toward the idol as if giving regard to the sacrifice and thereby offending their conscience. It is for this reason that abstinence was best, lest one offends the conscience of the weak.

The religious significance placed on these sacrificial meats in Thyatira compounded the issue. Participating in these religious feasts was expected; no one got along in society without it. If one did not attend the feasts and eat the meats, he did not take part in a guild, and ultimately, he found no work, or his business received no patronage. Thus, no doubt Jezebel used an argument of situational ethics to convince believers that it was acceptable for them to partake in these banquets. After all, their very livelihood was at stake.

But the issues of Thyatira went beyond licentious behavior, idolatry, and sacrificed meats. Some were involved in the “*deep things of Satan*” (2:9). The Gnostics heretics (the Cainites, Carpocratians, and Naassenes) boasted of their knowledge concerning these deep things. The Ophites (another Gnostic cult) worshiped the serpent, and some even claimed the deep things of Satan, the serpent, as Paul spoke of “*the deep things of God*” (1 Cor 2:10).

The Prophetic Portrait of the Church of Thyatira

The darkest period in Israel’s history was under the rule of king Ahab and his pagan wife, Jezebel. She, a worshiper of Baal, had infiltrated Israel, seducing them with her devilish doctrine. Likewise, Jezebel’s seduction of the Thyatiran Era resulted in the darkest, most sinister time in Church history.

Prophetically speaking, the Thyatiran Age brings us into the Dark Ages. During the Pergamum period, the Church was tolerated and controlled by the state. With the advent of the Thyatiran Era, the tables had turned. Now the Imperial Church virtually controlled the empire. And most troubling, beyond merely tolerating the Babylonian Mysteries (as Pergamum had), the Thyatiran Era incorporated them into the Church, to be practiced as holy rituals. The Church had become the champion of the Babylon Mysteries.

Just as Jezebel claimed to be the prophetess of God, so too, the Imperial Church soon claimed for herself the prestige of

infallibility. Compromised by paganism and littered with many power-hungry, politically-driven, pseudo-Christian leaders, the Church wreaked havoc throughout the world, imposing its political agenda in the name of God. Even the true saints of God were murdered if they dared to refuse participation in its heathen rituals and doctrines.

Years earlier, seemingly to escape the growing oppression of paganism, Constantine had moved the center of the Church to Byzantium, granting equal status to both the Bishops of Constantinople and Rome. But in the centuries to follow, the Bishop of Rome would become the clear leader of the state Church. By the time the last emperor was dethroned in 476, the Roman Bishop was already the real power of the empire, and subsequently, the real power over the new territorial kingdoms established after the barbarian conquest.

One by one, the new territorial kings had professed their conversion to the Imperial Church and bowed their knee to the Pontiff, the Bishop of Rome. To this day, the Bishop of Rome (now known as the Pope), wields power over the fractured, sleeping, Roman Empire. To this day the Pope claims the title, Pontifex Maximus (the title held by the chief pagan priest of the Babylonian Mysteries). To this day, many teachings and rituals of Babylonianism are the hallmark of the Holy Roman Church.

The pagan priesthood of Babylon (which centuries earlier had migrated from Babylon to Pergamum and then to Rome) had virtually assumed control of the state Church. It was they, and other politically driven leaders of this Imperial Church which decided at the council of Ephesus in 431 that: Mary was born without original sin, that she was the mother of God, the mediator between man and Christ, and that four feasts should be established in her honor: annunciation, purification, assumption, and nativity.

Herein, primary doctrines of Babylonianism (Satan's counterpart to God's revealed truth) became doctrines of the Imperial Church. In ancient Babylon, Nimrod was worshiped as the Savior and his mother, Semiramis, whom he eventually married, was worshiped as the Queen of Heaven, the mother of God. This comparison is by no means meant to diminish or bring dishonor to Mary, nor to our lord Jesus. Certainly Mary is indeed "*blessed . . . among women*" (*Lk. 1:28*). But she, this blessed

saint and most honored among women, must be viewed within the proper perspective. To worship her as some sort of demigod is not fitting. Never has a saint of God, nor a holy angel, ever received worship. Always, they refuse it, redirecting the worship to the Lord. To worship Mother Mary (whom indeed is blessed and holy) is to dishonor her and her son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although the period of Thyatira eventually relinquished prominence to the Era of Sardis, the corruption remains to this day. Like Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, remnants of the Thyatiran Era will linger until the end of the Age. Jesus warned Thyatira that she would be cast *“into a bed and those committing adultery with her into great affliction, unless they repent of her works”* (2:22).

Because the Thyatiran Church remains till the end of the Church Age its legacy of Babylonian rituals remains to this day, still observed as if they were the essences of Christianity: the Christmas tree, the Easter egg and bunny, hot cross buns, the sign of the cross, holy water, prayer beads, various icons, sanctuaries, altars, holy church buildings, convents, chants, a priesthood, nuns, and various holy orders. These same pagan practices gave us the vast divide between the laity and the clergy, prayers to the saints, and prayers to the mother of god.

Once again, the name is nothing less than fitting. Thyatira means *“continual sacrifice.”* What could better depict the Imperial Roman Church than the Eucharist, wherein transubstantiation is said to occur? Here, the bread and wine change into the body and blood of Christ, so that he is continually sacrificed—a doctrine that blatantly ignores the truth that *“Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many”* (Heb. 9:28). This was a key issue with the reformers. Although Luther taught consubstantiation (that Jesus was nearby during the communion) and Calvin taught symbolism (that communion was simply a symbolic gesture by which believers remember Christ), both understood that the notion of Jesus being continually sacrificed was opposed to biblical teaching.

There are few words of encouragement for the Thyatirans, but Jesus does commend them for some things: He said, *“I know your works and your love and your faith and ministry and patience, also that your last works are more than the first”* (2:19). This

leads us to believe the Thyatiran mindset will experience some reform near the end of the Church Age. It does not take much consideration to equate these last works with those of the Vatican Council in 1962-65, from which a gentler Holy Roman Church emerged. Here, the Roman Church determined to seek reunion with the reformation denominations, increase laity participation, and use vernacular languages rather than the ancient, cryptic Latin. Of note also, is the genuine concern the current Pope Benedict XVI seems to have for the faith (as did the late Pope John Paul II), taking a stand for fundamental doctrines, even against great opposition. Certainly, as the Church Age is coming to a close these last works of the Imperial Church are much more than her historic failures, which reached their zenith during the Dark Ages.

Finally, another heartening word is given to those devout souls who, although having a heart toward God, have unwittingly found themselves members of this Thyatiran Church. To them he says,

To the rest that are in Thyatira, as many as have not this teaching, who did not know the deep things of Satan, as they say, I am not casting on you another burden. Nevertheless, that which you have, hold fast till I come (2:24-25).

His encouragement “*hold fast till I come*” is a reference to the rapture, the transfiguration of the faithful just prior to the great tribulation. During his ministry, Jesus warned his listeners to watch and to pray that they be counted worthy to escape the great tribulation (Lk. 21:36).

To the Church in Sardis 3:1-6

(1) “And to the messenger of the church in Sardis write: These things says the one having the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works, that you have a name that you live and you are dead. (2) You be watching and establish the remaining things that are ready to die. For I have not found your works complete before my God. (3) Remember, therefore, how you have received and heard, and keep it and repent. If however you do not watch, I will

come as a thief and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

(4) “But you have a few names in Sardis that did not defile their garments and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. (5) Therefore, the victorious one will be clothed in white garments and I will by no means blot his name out of the book of life. And I will confess his name before my Father and before His angels. (6) The one having an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Sardis, the Historic City

Located east of Smyrna and Ephesus, some thirty miles southeast of Thyatira, once the capital of the great kingdom of Lydia and home to the rich king Croesus, Sardis was an old city with an illustrious history of financial wealth dating back to the 6th century BC.

Its strategic location on the northern slope of Mount Tmolus, with the river Pactolus flowing at its base, made it practically impregnable. However, Cyrus was able to conquer Sardis in 549 BC, when a Median soldier paved the way to victory by successfully scaling the acropolis. The Persian rule ended in 334 BC, when Sardis surrendered to Alexander the Great. Years later it suffered yet another defeat at the hands of Antiochus the Great, so that now, when John addressed it, it was a city of contrast between its past splendor and its present unrest and decline. Although it had lost its greatness, it was still a considerable city in the 1st century. Pliny said it was here that the dyeing of wool was discovered. Ramsay called it the city of death, while others have said it was a city of softness, luxury, apathy, and immorality. This was also the seat of the licentious Cybele worship.

Along with Laodicea, Sardis is the most condemned of the seven churches; thus, the admonishment: *“I know your works, that you have a name that you live and you are dead” (3:1).*

Melito, a 2nd century bishop of Sardis, was known for his piety and learning. After visiting Palestine to assure himself and his flock as to the Old Testament canon, he wrote an epistle on the subject and a commentary on The Revelation. But things had changed in Sardis. This church was like the city itself; though it

once had a wonderful reputation, it was now morbid and decaying. Thus, Jesus continued his admonishment:

You be watching and establish the remaining things that are ready to die. For I have not found your works complete before my God. Remember, therefore, how you have received and heard, and keep it and repent (3:2-3).

The believers in Sardis had let their faith deteriorate to the point of mere nominal Christianity. Their experience and their deeds were all but non-existent. Therefore, Jesus warned them, “If however you do not watch, I will come as a thief and you will not know what hour I will come upon you” (3:3). This would have special meaning to them, for they lived under the constant threat of a notorious band of vicious thieves led by a man called Chakirijali. The bandits lived unchallenged in the mountains surrounding the city. At will, they would swoop down, ravish and plunder a community, then quickly return to the high country before capture.

The Prophetic Portrait of the Church of Sardis

Sardis means “that which was left” or “remnant.” In the prophetic view this church speaks of the Reformation Age. The Reformation—and its subsequent Protestant movements—began with much zeal. Heroic theologians and their faithful followers sought, and managed to some degree, the return to godly principles and biblical doctrine. Many of these saints gave their lives defending God’s Word and attempting to rid the Church of the Babylonian influences introduced by the Pergamum and Thyatiran periods. Their labors led the world out of the cruel inequities of the Dark Ages and into the Philadelphian Era, which would produce many great theologians and evangelists.

But from the beginning, the Sardis period was hindered by traditions and practices which they had brought with them from the previous Thyatiran period. Each reformer withdrew from the Imperial Church by differing degrees. The variations, although relatively minor, prevented them from uniting in their quest for purity. The divisions were immediate and sometimes very harsh. The result was our many Protestant denominations.

Like Sardis of old, these Protestant denominations, which once stood boldly for Christ, are now, largely, Christian in name only. So that today much of organized Protestantism no longer even accepts the basic doctrines of Christendom (the authority of Scripture, the deity of Christ, etc.). For many modern Protestants, Christianity is merely a tradition, a cultural philosophy that should adapt to its environment. For example, at the recent 2012 national legislative meeting of the United Methodist Church (the largest Protestant body in America), the council voted 60% to 40% to uphold the denomination's policy that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. That it was even on the docket for discussion is most distressing; that 40% of the council voted to modify the stance is abysmal.

Even more appalling is that the United Methodist Church is practically the only mainline traditional Protestant body that has not, as yet, relaxed its stance on homosexuality. The Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church, USA, and the United Church of Christ have all started flirting with this lifestyle that is clearly forbidden in Scripture. Within a week of the United Methodist's vote, the president of the United States of America (a professed Protestant of this the perceived bastion of Christianity in the modern world) announced that he, too, approved of the homosexual lifestyle. Thus, Jesus warned the believers in Sardis: *"You be watching and establish the remaining things that are ready to die"* (3:2). The New International Version translates *"You be watching"* as *"Wake Up!"*

Jesus does, however, commend them for having *"a few names in Sardis that did not defile their garments and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy"* (3:4). Others have mentioned that out of Sardis flow two streams. Of the one there is nothing to rebuke; of the other there is nothing to praise. These, of course, are Philadelphia and Laodicea.

To the Church in Philadelphia 3:7-13

(7) "And to the messenger of the church in Philadelphia write: These things says the holy one, the true one, the one having the key of David, the one opening and no one shall shut and shuts and no one shall open: (8) I know your

works. Behold, I have set before you an opened door, of which, no one has power to shut, for you have little strength but have kept my word and did not deny my name. ⁽⁹⁾Behold, I give of the synagogue of Satan, those claiming themselves to be Jews and they are not, but they lie. Behold, I will make them to come and worship before your feet and they shall know that I have loved you.

⁽¹⁰⁾“Because you kept the Word of my patience, I also will keep you from the hour of trial about to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. ⁽¹¹⁾I am coming quickly. Hold fast that which you have, that no one takes your crown. ⁽¹²⁾I will make the victorious one a pillar in the temple of my God, and by no means will he go out anymore. And I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God—the new Jerusalem—which descends out of heaven from my God, and my own new name. ⁽¹³⁾The one having an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Philadelphia, the Historic City

The city of Philadelphia, “brotherly love,” is located about twenty-eight miles southeast of Sardis in a valley leading to the Aegean Sea. Its economy was based on agriculture, industry, and commerce. The Emperor Tiberius had rebuilt the city after it was badly damaged in the earthquake of AD 17. Sardis had been struck even harder by the quake, but subsequent frequent tremors had so plagued the Philadelphians that for many years some residents had been living in tents, in fear, outside of the city.

Although not a large city, it was frequently visited by travelers. Situated on the trade routes leading to Lydia and Phrygia, Ramsay called it the missionary city, for it was a prime avenue to promote the spread of the Greco-Roman civilization and later, Christianity—whose primary opposition in this region was Judaism. Even during the Byzantine and medieval periods, Philadelphia remained perhaps the busiest trade route in the old world.

Although important to the empire, Philadelphia was not as gifted as the other seven cities to which these letters were written. Neither was the church filled with corruption and idolatry, as were

Pergamum and Thyatira. The pagan authorities often tested the Philadelphian believers, demanding they blaspheme the name of Christ or be killed. But they remained true with what strength they possessed. In this Jesus commended them, for although they had “*little strength*” they had kept his word and had not denied his name (3:8). Not even the slightest hint of judgment or condemnation is found in this message to the Philadelphians. There is only praise, encouragement, and promise. Indeed, only Smyrna and Philadelphia escape censure. They are also the only churches of the seven historical sites still in operation.

The Prophetic Portrait of the Church of Philadelphia

Prophetically, Philadelphia depicts the Church of the 18th and early 19th century; a time of great revival and missionary outreach. Avenues for evangelism, which had been closed for centuries, were suddenly and miraculously opened. Jesus said, “*Behold, I have set before you an opened door*” (3:8). As such, these champions of the faith during the time known as the Great Awakening were quite different from the twisted leaders during the Dark Ages who used the sword to force Christianity upon the vanquished.

The faithful Philadelphians were promised deliverance from the coming time of trouble.

Because you kept the Word of my patience, I also will keep you from the hour of trial about to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth (3:10).

This appears to be a clear reference to the coming great tribulation and to the faithful being spared from it. The dead in Christ and those alive at the time will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Th. 4:4-17).

The Church is always promised deliverance from this time of tribulation, it is not a time appointed for the Church. Similar to Jesus’ warning to the unfaithful in Sardis, Paul warned that the day of the Lord, the tribulation, would come

as a thief in the night, for when they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them . . . and they shall not escape.” He then encouraged his readers

saying, *“but you, brothers, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you like a thief (1 Th. 5:2-4).*

Although there are differences among the futurist, or pre-millennialist, as to when the resurrection of the Church takes place, the differences seem unwarranted. The Pre-tribulational view provides the most plausible chronology, and the view most consistent with both Scripture and theology. Still, some hold to a Mid or Post Tribulational viewpoint. Mid-Tribulationalists assume the translation of the Church will occur in the middle of the tribulation, while Post-Tribulationalists assume it will occur at the end, immediately prior to the return of the Lord. However, both views have serious trouble reconciling their respective chronologies with known coming events.

In the Post-Tribulational view, after the dividing of the just and unjust upon Christ’s return to set up his kingdom (Mat. 24:13, 25:31-46), there is no one left to populate the kingdom. In that everyone would then be either in hell or in a glorified, resurrected state, there would be no one, Jew or Gentile, in an as yet mortal body to enter the kingdom. Likewise, the Mid-Tribulational view fails to consider Paul’s comment that the restraining power must be removed before the man of sin, the antichrist orchestrates the seven-year covenant, which is to span the tribulation (2 Th. 2:6-11).

The tribulation is a time of punishment *“to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth”* (3:10). It is a time appointed for the ungodly, the rebellious, and those who have spurned the Christ. Although Israel is promised preservation as a people, this is a time for their punishment as well. It is the time Jeremiah lamented as Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7; Zech. 13:7-9). It is a time through which Israel must pass for having rejected their Messiah (Mat. 24-25). In the midst of Israel’s Babylonian captivity, the Lord told Daniel that from the command to rebuild Jerusalem his people had seventy weeks to prepare for the anointing of the Messiah. Then the Messiah will establish his kingdom, thereby fulfilling the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:12-13).²⁵

²⁵ See comments for The 70th Week, p. 129.

Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy (Dan. 9:24).

The seventy weeks speaks to weeks of years, a common and important measurement of sabbatical time in the Jewish calendar (Gen. 29:26-28; Lev. 25-26). Indeed, failure to keep these sabbatical weeks played a large part in Israel's Babylonian captivity. Gabriel told Daniel, however, that the 70 weeks would be interrupted, for the Messiah would be cutoff after the 69th week.²⁶ When the 70th week occurs it will span a seven-year covenant made by the evil prince, but he will commit the abomination of desolation in the middle of that week (Dan. 9:24-27). Jesus made it clear that this abomination of desolation, which occurs 3½ years into the tribulation is yet to occur; thus Daniel's 70th week is yet to come (Mt. 24:15). Jesus said when it does occur,

Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened (Mat. 24:21-22).

This is the time of Jacob's trouble—a time of punishment, specifically targeting the Jewish nation for having rejected their Messiah. *“Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it. It is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he will be saved out of it”* (Jer. 30:7). As such, this period is not designed for the Church, which is a separate redeemed body.

Therefore, as indicated by several passages, the Church will be caught away, translated into its heavenly state immediately prior to the tribulation. This is what we commonly refer to as the rapture in modern culture; thus, Paul's encouragement to the Thessalonians:

²⁶ See comments on The Years of God's Wrath, the 70th Week, page 127.

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (1Th. 4:13-18).

Although the word rapture is not found in Scripture, for a couple of reasons the term is not exactly amiss. First, in that it speaks of a mystical experience in which the spirit is exalted to a knowledge of divine things, it most definitely and accurately, describes the emotion and excitement every believer will experience when the Lord appears in the heavens.

Second, the definition of a word can change over a period of time due to common usage. Rapture is such a word. While the original meaning of the term rapture, in our language, speaks of a mystical experience in which the spirit is exalted to a knowledge of divine things, because of common use in modern culture, it has also come to speak of the mystical experience in which the body and spirit are exalted to the presence God in the physical sense, when the Lord appears. Just as words with a concrete literal meaning can also carry a figurative meaning (such as hard rock and hard rain), so too can a word carry a spiritual meaning as well as a concrete literal meaning; for always, context determines meaning. So that, when Paul said the trumpet will sound and believers, both dead and alive “*shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air*” (1 Thess. 4:17), he used the term ἁρπαγησόμεθα (*harpageesmetha*), which has the literal meaning of being caught up, seized, taken away, in a physical sense. Today’s common usage of the term rapture has come to carry the same meaning. Thus, the concept of rapture is

not unjustified, in a dynamic equivalent sense, to express this event.²⁷

After Paul had discussed these things with the Thessalonians, false teachers had crept into the congregation and contradicted his instructions, telling them they had missed the gathering and were actually in the Day of the Lord, the tribulation. Therefore Paul wrote to them again, carefully explaining the chronology of these future events. First the apostasy; next He (the Holy Spirit) that restrains the evil will allow the son of perdition (the antichrist) to be revealed; then, the Day of the Lord.

Now we beseech you, brothers, touching the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him, so that you be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor disturbed, neither by spirit, nor by speech, nor by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is come. Let no one deceive in any way, because [that day shall not come] except the apostasy come first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, the one opposing and exalting himself against all that is called God or that is worshiped; so that he sits in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God. Don't you remember that when I was yet with you, I used to tell you these things? And now you know the thing restraining, so that he be revealed in his own season. For the mystery of lawlessness already works—only there is one that restrains now, until he be taken out of the midst, and then shall be revealed the lawless one (whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to naught by his glorious appearance), of whom whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that perish; because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And, therefore, God sends to them a working of error, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be judged—those who did not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Th. 2:1-12).

²⁷ See 1 Th. 4:13-5:10; 1 Cor. 15:51; Jm. 5:7-9; Lk. 21:36.

The translation of the Church is addressed further in the next section, in the comments on 4:1.

To the Church in Laodicea 3:14-22

⁽¹⁴⁾ “*And to the messenger of the church in Laodicea write: These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of the creation of God: ⁽¹⁵⁾I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I would that you were cold or hot. ⁽¹⁶⁾Therefore, because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am about to vomit you out of my mouth. ⁽¹⁷⁾Because you say, I am rich and I have become rich and have need of nothing and you do not know that you are the wretched one, and miserable and poor and blind and naked. ⁽¹⁸⁾I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, that you may be rich, and white garments that you might be clothed and that the shame of your nakedness not be made manifest, and eye salve to anoint your eyes that you may see.*

⁽¹⁹⁾ “*As many as I love, I reprove and chasten. Be zealous therefore and repent. ⁽²⁰⁾Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him and he with me. ⁽²¹⁾The victorious one—I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also was victorious and sat down with my Father in his throne.*

⁽²²⁾ “*The one having an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*”

Laodicea, the Historic City

Not far from Phrygia, Colosse, and Hierapolis, Laodicea was located in the Lycus valley, about forty miles southeast of Philadelphia and forty miles east of Ephesus. Settled along the bustling eastern trade route from Ephesus, it was home to many banks, money lenders and manufacturers of wool carpets and clothing. It was a city very proud of its wealth and affluence. Ramsay called it the city of compromise. Here too, was another seat of Asklepios worship and, thus, another medical school. Centuries later, Cicero would live here and write several of his letters.

Jesus described the historic church of Laodicea as nothing less than apostate in both word and deed.²⁸ It was a church no longer concerned with sound theology. Their concern was for the luxuries of material life. Appropriately, the name Laodicea means “laity rules,” which in the historic context means “people rule.” This was a rebellious church that had little regard for its elders, its pastors. It is a renegade church in pursuit of personal satisfaction.

As with each of the seven churches, the Lord’s comments were tailored to their peculiarities. Here, he gives not one word of praise; nothing good is said about them. Rather, he indicts their faith for being “lukewarm and neither hot nor cold” (3:15). Certainly the Laodiceans would have understood the meaning of this statement. Not far from town were a number of extraordinary hot springs; when their waters reached town they were still lukewarm, tepid and not fit to drink. Who enjoys a lukewarm beverage? Aside from the unsavory taste, it breeds bacteria. Thus, he said “because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am about to vomit you out of my mouth” (3:16). His words are strong. He uses term ἐμέσαι (*emesai*) vomit, from which we get the word emesis. It is to vomit or reject with disgust.

The Christians in Laodicea were the exact opposite of those in Smyrna. Laodiceans took glory in, and bragged of, their material wealth. The persecuted saints in Smyrna lost their worldly possessions; many lost their lives for their faith. The believers in Smyrna served as role models for the faith; not so the Laodiceans. Those in Smyrna had trouble even keeping the necessities of life, while the Laodiceans were very pleased with their personal financial success; although the Lord was not so impressed. Thus, it is worth noting the special rebuke he has for each of their prized provisions.

As for their material wealth, being rich and increased with goods and having need of nothing, he told them, “you do not know that you are the wretched one, and miserable and poor and blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, that you may be rich” (3:17-18).

²⁸ Apostasy (see 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-8, 4:1-4; 2 Pet. 2 & 3; 1 Jn. 2:18-19; 2 Jn. 7-11).

They produced very rare and expensive black wool used for making fine garments. To this he said, *“buy from me . . . white garments that you might be clothed and that the shame of your nakedness not be made manifest” (3:18).*

They also manufactured a special powder, which, when mixed with a certain medium served as a medicinal eye salve. He said, *“buy from me . . . eye salve to anoint your eyes that you may see” (3:18).*

Someone has paraphrased this message as such: All that you have, all that is so precious to you, that which is central to your life means nothing to me. It has no value toward your future state. Buy from me, without price, that which is needed. Put to use the very medicine of which you are famous.

As we might recall, the Lord gave a similar message to Israel;

Everyone that thirsts, come to the waters, and he that has no money, come, buy and eat. Yes. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price (Isa. 55:1).

Eventually these lukewarm, non-committed Christians of Laodicea were exterminated in a great massacre. In the end, their wealth was of no value.

The Prophetic Portrait of the Church of Laodicea

Laodicea is the prophetic picture of the Church in the last days. We are in the last days. We are the prophetic Laodicea. Any honest look at modern Western Christendom will see the Laodicean state of mind.

The Western culture is wealthy beyond belief. The Western Christian culture is wealthy beyond belief. We, the Western world, are the leaders in luxurious items and medical supplies. This is especially true of American culture, where, although we comprise less than 5% of the world’s population, we are among the largest consumers of manufactured goods, the niceties of life, and advanced healthcare. Truly, we are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing.

When compared to other cultures, even the majority of those living on government assistance are rich. They have plenty to eat, a closet full of clothes, a roof over their heads, and indoor plumbing. They have a cell phone, a big, flat screen TV and cable,

air conditioning, and a nice car in the driveway. All this and they don't even have to work. Stack this up against those in any third-world country and even our poor live like royalty.

This rich mindset has infiltrated our churches as well. Even here one's success is measured by one's financial statement. Of course, we appease ourselves with the idea that God has blessed us because of our righteous heritage and commitment to Christian ethics. Because we are the product of God's blessing, we take great national and personal pride in our material possessions; which, after all, we have earned. Slick looking, fast talking, Bible-toting, preachers and televangelist on the airwaves 24/7, affirm our God-given right to these blessings. They sell books and sermons, and seminars, explaining just how Christians can and are meant to receive financial rewards. We are the modern embodiment of Laodicea. We are the fulfillment of this prophetic passage.

The gospel of Western Christendom is largely the prosperity theology of Laodicea. Although many followers of evangelical orthodoxy ostensibly reject this health and wealth gospel as fallacious, inwardly, and behind closed doors, they likely admire it, practice it, and rely upon it as truth. Like Laodicea, this self-deception is nothing more than a mask covering the ugly face of misplaced trust, which also like that of the Laodiceans, is placed in self, in wealth, in materialism, and in a medical system promising impossible cures.

A prime example of this opulence within the Church can be clearly observed by simply comparing the yearly missionary budget (of nearly any local church in America) with the total sums spent on worldly excesses by its parishioners. Then, to further make the point, divide the total of these worldly excesses into separate categories; very likely, even the individual categories will top the missionary expenditures. It is just as likely that certain families alone, within the church, will have personal excessive expenditures that top the entire church's missionary fund. Some topics that might fit well into these categories of excess could be: extravagant vacations, frequent expensive dining, seats to professional ball games, expensive jewelry, elegant clothing, luxurious motor vehicles, recreational flying, mansion-like houses, luxurious church buildings, ad nauseam.

In general, the average church member in America finds more pleasure in and gets more excited about sporting events than evangelism. And no doubt, he finds a greater sense of fulfillment in his patriotic fervor than in discipleship. Frankly, he is more concerned with his IRA, stock options, 401K and retirement plan than with his spiritual life or missionary work.

Am I saying that all luxuries, material goods, wealth and entertainment are wrong or sinful? Of course not; but I am saying their pursuit as life's goals, or measuring rod for success, is clearly out of step with spiritual life. When as much or more concern is given to trivial luxuries and sporting events than is given to spiritual matters, it is a good indication that we do not know how "*wretched . . . and miserable and poor and blind and naked*" we are.

Furthermore, to counterbalance this lust for wealth (perhaps for no other reason than merely to placate our conscience), we have developed a legalistic mindset that, at least outwardly, seeks the ethical reformation of society. Laying aside true efforts of evangelism, achieved by the testimony of personal example, we exert vast amounts of energy on socio-political reform. It is echoed from our pulpits, on Christian television and radio programs, books are written about it, and we orchestrate demonstrations and protests. We even form alliances with Christian heretics, that we might further pursue this self-serving, temporal agenda. We are so dogmatically bent on, and content with, the mere socio-political reform of our society that we pursue it even at the expense of those whom we actually would seek to convert. Sadly, I fear it is not society's conversion, or even reform, that we truly seek with our Pharisaical legalism; but we seek merely to placate our consciences.

Scripture warns of the apostasy that will prevail in the last days. Jesus asked, "*when the Son of man returns, shall he find faith be on the earth?*" (*Lk. 18:7-9*). The entire letter of Jude is given to this subject. Paul, Peter, and John refer to it in their epistles. Paul told the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord (the tribulation) will not come "*except the apostasy come first*" (*2 Thess. 2:3*). This Laodicean Church Age in which we currently live is that apostasy. At the beginning of these seven letters, and thus prophetically, at the beginning of the Church Age, Jesus is

standing in the midst of the churches (*1:13*); now in Laodicea, at the end of the Church Age, he is standing outside, knocking on the door seeking entrance.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me (Rev. 3:20).

Basking in the luxury of material wealth, the historic Laodicean Christian community was content and proud of its success. They were fat and sassy and without conviction. But this temporal, pseudo-happiness, coupled with their spiritual ignorance, resulted in spiritual lethargy and indifference. They are we, we are they. We are delusional. Neither they nor we know just how “*wretched . . . and miserable and poor and blind and naked*” we are.

Conclusion to the Churches

What a mixture, this Church in the last days; with remnants of the Thyatiran, Sardis, Philadelphian and Laodicean ages commingled, representing Christ to the world. One (the Thyatiran remnant) is entangled in ancient pagan mysteries. Another (the Sardis remnant) bears no vestige of Christ other than the “Christ” in Christianity, a title to which it clings even though it denies the fundamental doctrines that define the faith. In yet another (the Philadelphian remnant and the dominant body of the times), is deceptive opulence and gaudy self-reliance. Then, scattered among these three pathetic groups are the relatively few faithful souls of the Philadelphian remnant who uphold the Word of the Lord; and they, Jesus said, are of but little strength. May every reader of this work seek to be among the remnant of the Philadelphian believers.

PART THREE

GLORY

After These Things

The Open Door 4:1-11

⁽¹⁾After these things, I looked and behold, a door had been opened in heaven; and the first voice that I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you the things that must occur after these things."

⁽²⁾Immediately I came to be in the spirit: and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and someone was sitting upon the throne. ⁽³⁾And the one sitting look like a jasper stone and a sardius, and a rainbow round about the throne looked like an emerald. ⁽⁴⁾And round about the throne were twenty-four thrones, and upon the thrones were sitting twenty-four elders arrayed in white garments and golden crowns on their heads. ⁽⁵⁾And out of the throne come forth lightnings and voices and thunder. And there were seven torches of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. ⁽⁶⁾And before the throne was like a sea of glass, like crystal.

And in the midst of the throne and round about the throne, four living creatures full of eyes before and behind. ⁽⁷⁾And the first living creature was like a lion, and the second living creature was like a calf, and the third living creature had the face as of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. ⁽⁸⁾And the four living creatures, one by one, each of them having six wings; around and within full of eyes, and without rest day and night they are saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord, God, the Almighty, the one who was and who is and who is coming."

⁽⁹⁾And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne, to the one living unto the ages of the ages, ⁽¹⁰⁾the twenty-four elders

will fall down before the one sitting on the throne and worship the one living unto the ages of the ages, and they cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ⁽¹¹⁾“You are worthy, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power, for you created all things and because of your will they are and were created.”

Caught Away

Once again John indicates a progression in chronology by using the phrase, “*after these things*” (4:1). Of course the question is after what things? The answer is simple. After those things that he just discussed: the seven churches and their mystery (1:20), which foretold the details of the entire Church Age from Pentecost to the Lord’s return. Jesus had instructed him to write of three things (1:19):

“the things that you saw” — a reference to the glorious vision of Jesus which he had just witnessed,

“and the things that are” — clearly pertaining to the dispensation in which John lived, the present Church Age,

“and the things that are about to occur after these things” — those things that will follow the Church Age.

This sequence of events is consistent as The Revelation unfolds. Earlier John testified that he “*came to be in the spirit*” (1:10). What followed was the wonderful vision of the Lord and then his messages to the seven churches. Now, still in the continuum of events, with John still “*in the spirit,*” nevertheless, He says yet again, “*After these things, . . . Immediately I came to be in the spirit*” (4:2). This is not a misstatement on his part, but a perfect representation of the rebirth versus the resurrection. In our present position, the believer’s spirit is alive to the Spirit of God which dwells within, in our future glorified and resurrected state the believer is transformed from the natural to the spiritual body (1 Cor. 2:12-14; Ro. 8). While yet on earth believers are said to be “*not in the flesh, but in the Spirit*” (Ro. 8:9), although we are still clothed in our bodies of mortality. But one day, at the end of this current dispensation of grace, the dead in Christ will be resurrected and the living transformed. Bodies of mortality will

be exchanged for bodies of immortality (1 Cor. 15:42-58). We will be like Jesus and, like John, we will see him as he is (1 Jn. 3:2). We, as John portrays, will be caught away *“immediately in the spirit”* (1 Th. 4:13-18).

Coinciding perfectly with the chronology of eschatology in which the Church will be caught away just prior to the tribulation, John’s heavenly ascension serves as a wonderful picture of the Church meeting the Lord in the air. From this point forward, John’s vantage is from the heavenly perspective. Observe the similarities between John’s experience and the rapture.

- *“I looked” (4:1).*
 - *“looking for that blessed hope” (Tit. 2:13).*
 - *“unto them that look for him shall he appear” (Heb. 9:28).*
- *“a door had been opened in heaven” (4:1).*
 - *“I am the door” (Jn. 10:9).*
- *“the first voice that I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me” (4:1).*
 - *“the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God” (1 Th. 4:16).*
- *“Come up here” (4:1).*
 - *“the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Th. 4:16-17).*
- *“Immediately I came to be in the spirit and behold, a throne was set in heaven and someone was sitting upon the throne” (4:2).*
 - *“and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Th. 4:17).*

The parallels are too strong, the succession too exact to mean anything else but that John's experience is a picture of both the process and the chronological setting of the pre-tribulational translation of the Church.

Furthermore, we must not overlook the importance of OT typology. Enoch was a type of the Church—translated before the flood, while Noah was a type of Israel—preserved through the flood (Gen. 5:24). Lot also serves as a type of the rapture.

The same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the son of man is revealed (Lk. 17:29-30 NIV).

The angel had commanded him to, “*flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it*” (Gen. 19:22 NIV).

A comparison with Paul's encouragement to the Thessalonians sounds very similar. When Paul heard that false teachers had told the Thessalonians they were in the tribulation, he reminded them of their position in Christ, of their salvation. He reminded them the antichrist could not appear until the one restraining him is taken out of the way (2 Th. 2:1-14).

Yet another consideration as to the chronology and deliverance of the Church from the tribulation period is the prophetic view of the seven churches. Although the Laodicean mindset will be the prominent system at the end of the Church dispensation, remnants of the prior three Church periods linger till the end of the Age: Thyatira, represented in Roman Catholicism; Sardis, represented in the Reformation denominations; and Philadelphia, represented by fundamental evangelical theology. The Christian world makes distinction a between these systems, but the unbelieving world does not. To the world they all morph into organized Christendom.

While each system (Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea) has those who are true believers, they also harbor members who are not. There are always thespians among us. The thespians of Thyatira shall be cast into the great tribulation (2:22). Jesus had warned his listeners to “*be watchful, always, praying that you might be able to escape*” the great tribulation (Lk. 21:36). The unfaithful in Sardis are said to be overtaken, as though by a

thief in the night (3:3; cf.; 1 Th. 5:2-4). The Philadelphians are not censured, they are given deliverance. Jesus promised to keep them “*from the hour of trial about to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth*” (3:10). Finally, the Laodiceans, comprising the prevailing system at the end of the Age, are all but totally rejected. As we might recall, at the beginning of the Church Age, Jesus is seen in the midst of the seven churches (1:12-13); now, at the end of the Age, the Laodicean church apparently has no place for him. His doctrines and his works are deemed unnecessary to this self-sufficient congregation. Thus, he is outside the door, knocking, seeking entrance (3:16).

Contemplating the purposes for the tribulation period lends further support to the Church’s being exempt from this time of global trouble. There are four reasons for the great tribulation and none of them pertain to the Church. First, it is the time of Jacob’s trouble. It is a time of punishment for Israel’s unbelief and their rejection of the Messiah (Jer. 30:6-8; Mt. 27:25). At the beginning of this period, Israel is converted when the Lord miraculously saves them from the attack of many nations (Eze. 39). But chastisement follows as Israel is purged and prepared to enter the kingdom. Only a third of them survive this holocaust, which will be even worse than what they suffered in World War II (Zech. 13:8, 9).

The Church, however, is delivered from this time of trouble. Belief in the death and resurrection of Christ is its salvation (Ro. 8:1). Current believers (both Jew and Gentile) are chastised in the here and now for any disobedience in their lives (Heb. 12:6). Ultimately, each will stand before the βῆμα (*bēma*) judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). There, rewards are handed out or taken away.

Israel, on the other hand, stands before Christ upon his return and the dividing of the nations. Those who are yet alive and have received Jesus as their Messiah during this tribulation period will be ushered into the long awaited, promised kingdom (Isa. 9:6-8; Mt. 25:31-34; Ex. 20:33-36). Surviving Gentiles (who have also received Christ during this time) will also enter the kingdom as well. They will populate the kingdom in their natural bodies.

The wicked, and all who have mistreated Israel, will be sent to hell. The believers of this age, the Church, are a different cohort; we are a prepared people with a prepared place other than that of Israel (2 Cor. 5:17, Phil. 3:20). As Paul promised, believers in this current dispensation shall be caught up, both the dead and the living, Jew and Gentile, to meet the Lord in the air (1 Th. 4:13-18). If this resurrection did not occur until the end of the Tribulation, there would be no one to enter and populate the kingdom.

Second, the tribulation is the release of God's wrath toward the unbeliever (Isa. 13:9-13, Rev. 6:17, 16:1, Isa. 13:11-16). The believer is not appointed unto wrath (1 Th. 5:9).

Third, the tribulation is punishment for transgressing the laws, changing the ordinances, and breaking the everlasting covenant. After the flood, God's covenant included instructions that man should eat meats, abstain from blood, procure justice by capital punishment and be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 9). The world has broken these laws.

The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left (Isa. 24:5, 6).

The antichrist will also seek to change the laws of God.

The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings. And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time. But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end (Dan. 7:23-26).

However, believers are no longer considered part of this world system with its violent anger and rebellion against God and its violation of the eternal covenant; therefore believers are exempt from the punishment (Eph. 2:11-13, Jn. 17:14).

Fourth, the tribulation is the time designed to let man fulfill his desire for self-rule (Ro. 1:24-25, 2 Th. 2:10-12, Ps. 2:1-3). As a people, mankind has always sought self-fulfillment, attempting to achieve happiness, utopia, paradise on their own terms, without God. It has never worked and never will. Believers have willingly bent their knees to the Lord's rule and bowed their heads to his Lordship (Ps. 24:7-10, Eph. 3:14). This time of self rule is not for them.

Round About The Throne

What follows must have taken John's breath away. His first sight in heaven was a glorious throne and someone even more glorious sitting upon it. "*And the one sitting look like a jasper stone and a sardius, and a rainbow round about the throne looked like an emerald*" (4:3). The rainbow and the various gems of color each speak to attributes and action of our Lord: the covenant keeper, his holiness, the sacrificial blood, the life giver, etc.

Dr. Barnhouse painted a beautiful word picture to depict this scene. He imagined John's shock as the brilliance of God's presence suddenly engulfed his field of vision. At first, all he can see is the bright light shining in his face. As his eyes adjust to the setting, the one sitting on the throne comes into focus. John's eyes adjust a little more and the twenty-four elders come into view; then the four living creatures come into focus until at last, he is fully acclimated and able to view the whole scene into which he has been transported.²⁹

Twenty-Four Elders

One of the most frequently asked questions is: Who are the *twenty-four elders* (4:4)? Some think they represent Israel. Others believe they are the Church. Others still, suspect they are

²⁹ ζῶον (*zōon*), living creatures. Also translated *beasts*, which is a poor rendition of the word. It is not the same as θηρίον (*thērion*) in chapter 13:3, which is properly rendered *beast*. Evidently Satan had once been one of these living creatures (Eze. 28:14).

angels. We might argue that it does not really matter who they are. However, as with other seemingly minor details throughout the book, a clear understanding helps bring the larger picture into focus. Similar to a very large puzzle, even with some missing pieces we are able to understand the overall scheme, but with the placement of each piece greater detail is discovered.

Although we do not always recognize their significance such details are provided for a purpose; as such, we do well to seek to understand them when possible. Therefore, the following process of elimination might help us better understand the identity of these twenty-four elders. First, for various reasons, the possibility of their being angels must be eliminated. They are called elders, a term used for the leaders of God's elect. They are seated on thrones associated with the judgment throne of God in chapters five through eighteen. Angels will not be sitting in judgment of man. They wear white raiment, which is identified as the righteousness of the saints. Finally, and most compellingly, they are among the redeemed (5:8-10).

If we view them as representatives of Israel, we raise a difficult question. Who are the other twelve, if not sons of Jacob? And we face the same problem if we suppose they are representatives of the Church. For who are the twelve, other than the Apostles? Therefore, I believe the twenty-four elders represent both the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve Apostles of the Lamb, thereby representing the redeemed of both the old and the new covenant.

There is further evidence to support this view. Later, the angel shows John the great city of God, the New Jerusalem. The close association between the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve Apostles of the Lamb is clearly indicated by the names written upon the twelve gates and upon the twelve foundations (21:9-14). Upon the gates are the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and upon the foundations are the names of the twelve Apostles. Furthermore, Jesus told the disciples, "*When the son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, you also will sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*" (Mt. 19:28).

All Glory Unto Him

John heard the four living creatures shouting, *“Holy, holy, holy, Lord, God, the Almighty, the one who was and who is and who is coming . . . glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne”* (4:8-9). The twenty-four elders respond to this mighty chorus by falling prostrate before the Lord in worship. Casting their crowns before the throne, they acknowledge,

You are worthy, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power, for you created all things and because of your will they are, and were created (v.11).

Could we not use more of this same behavior in our present lives before the Lord? The more we worship, the more we praise and uplift His name, and doubtless, the more selfless we become. Would this not cultivate more concern for His honor than our own? As Paul observed:

We all, with open face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed unto the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18).

Warning

To warn of the judgments about to take place, *“out of the throne come forth lightening and voices and thunder. And there were seven torches of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God”* (4:5). We will hear this thunder again from time to time throughout the book; each instance warns of the devastating judgment about to occur.

Worthy is the Lamb 5:1-14

⁽¹⁾And I saw in the right hand of the one sitting on the throne, a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. ⁽²⁾And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loosen its seals?” ⁽³⁾But no one in heaven or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the scroll or to look thereon. ⁽⁴⁾And I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look thereon. ⁽⁵⁾But one of the elders said to me, “Weep not. Behold, the Lion who is

of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed to open the scroll and its seven seals.”

⁽⁶⁾And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes that are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. ⁽⁷⁾And he came and received it from the right hand of the one sitting on the throne. ⁽⁸⁾And when he had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one having a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁽⁹⁾And they sing a new song, saying, “You are worthy to receive the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and purchased for God with your blood from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, ⁽¹⁰⁾and made them to our God a kingdom and priests, and they will reign over the earth.”

⁽¹¹⁾And I saw, and I heard a voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders. And the number of them was myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ⁽¹²⁾saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb—the one who has been slain—to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.”

⁽¹³⁾And every creature that is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, “Unto the one sitting on the throne, and unto the Lamb, the blessing, and the honor, and the glory, and the strength unto the ages of the ages.” ⁽¹⁴⁾And the four living creatures said, “Amen.” And the elders fell down and worshiped.

The Wonder of it All

Heaven holds things that we are unable to comprehend in our current state. Paul told us, “*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things that God has prepared for them that love him*” (1 Cor. 2:9). Having experience a taste of heaven himself, Paul testified that he “*heard*

unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2 Cor. 12:4). Certainly God reveals truth to us by the Holy Spirit; and experientially, as believers, we taste of them, but one day they will be revealed in all their glory. Here, John is now before the throne seeing things he can not fully understand or explain. Yet, he tells us what he can.

I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes that are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth (5:4-5).

The number seven speaks to completeness and perfection. Seven horns symbolize omnipotence. Seven eyes symbolize omniscience. The seven spirits of God speaks to His omnipresence, the complete character and function of the Spirit of God (Isa. 11:2). There is but one God. God is Spirit (Dt. 6:4; Jn. 4:24).

Claiming His Inheritance

The rapid succession toward the consummation of this present world system begins here. As pointed out earlier, John’s viewpoint has changed. Having left the earth, he is now in heaven. If we are to have a proper perspective for the remainder of the book, we must go with him. And we must remain there, in heaven, with John, until returning with the Lord to establish his physical kingdom on earth.

The angel cried out, *“Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loosen its seals” (5:2)?* The significance of this scene is observed in the OT concept of the kinsman redeemer, as depicted in the book of Ruth. When an inheritance was forfeited, the necessary terms for its redemption were written on the outside of the scroll. The reason for the forfeiture was written on the inside. The scroll was kept in the family until someone was able to fulfill the contract. Once a qualified and willing kinsman paid the price to redeem the inheritance, he was free to loosen the seal and read what was written on the inside. Just as Boaz paid the price for Naomi and Ruth’s forfeited inheritance, Jesus paid the price for

what Adam forfeited in the garden (Ro. 5:18, 7:14, 8:19-25). Jesus is our Kinsman Redeemer.

Having paid the price with His own blood Christ is now claiming his redeemed inheritance. As he loosens the seals to reveal that which is hidden within, each seal discloses a continuation of terrible events that will transpire during the tribulation.

Is There No Man Worthy?

The fact that *“no one in heaven or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the scroll or to look thereon”*(5:3) is diametrically opposed to man’s idea that he can somehow reach a higher spiritual plane, achieve righteousness, save himself or somehow better his standing before God. However, this belief is just as popular today as it was two or even five thousand years ago. It is this conception that separates Judeo-Christian theology from every one of mans’ religions. All religions suppose man has the capacity to somehow reach God or advance to a higher spiritual plane. Judeo-Christian theology, biblical theology, teaches this is not possible.

Judeo-Christian theology adheres to the doctrine of total depravity, in which man is separated from God by his sinful nature and only God can provide for man’s salvation. This is what the Psalmist spoke of:

The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Ps. 142:2-3).

Paul reaffirmed this truth: *“there is none that does good, no, not one”* (Rom. 3:12).

While both Christian and Jewish theology teach that salvation is through the Messiah, the Jews, at large, currently reject Christ as their Messiah; but this will soon change. They will soon realize their error when God miraculously protects them from an attack by many nations. The event seems to occur at the beginning of

the seven-year tribulation; for Israel is said to burn the enemy's weapons as firewood for the next seven-years (Eze. 39:9-11).³⁰

The Lion is the Lamb

John is overwhelmed that “*no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look thereon*” (5:4). His mournful response is understandable once we realize what this means. The whole of creation has been waiting for this moment (Ro. 8:19-22), this, the final stage of redemption; and now it appears as though it cannot be achieved. Therefore he confessed, “*I wept much*” (5:4).

With all hope of restoration seemingly gone, tears streaming down his cheeks, one of the elders finally draws his attention to someone who is worthy.

Weep not. Behold, the Lion who is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed³¹ to open the scroll and its seven seals. And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing as though it had been slain (5:5-6).

Imagine John's surprise when he looked up to see the lamb and not the lion; a paradox to some, but a glorious revelation to others. Both lion and lamb represent Christ. As the lion he has the kingly right. He is the near relative who is both willing and able to pay the price. As the lamb he is the price, the sacrifice that pleased the Father.

Others have pointed out that the ἀρνίον (*arnion*), used for lamb is not the most common term ἀμνός (*amnos*). Here the diminutive *arnion* is used to reference the little pet lamb, the Passover lamb, precious to every owner. The diminutive form occurs twenty-nine times in The Revelation and only once elsewhere, in John 21:15. Every year each Jewish family would pick a yearling lamb that was without spot or defect. Four days prior to Passover, this lamb was brought into the home to be nurtured and cherished. No doubt, each family became very fond of their little lamb. Mom fed it leftovers. Dad occasionally

³⁰ See comments on p. 29ff, and p. 185ff.

³¹ νικάω (*nikaō*) *triumphed or prevailed* (5:5), from the root term *nikao*. It is also translated “victor and over-comer.” Today, there is a popular footwear marketed by this name.

reached down and scratched its chin. The children laughed and giggled as they ran in circles playing tag with the little fellow. Then came the evening of the fourteenth day of the month and their little pet was now their Passover meal.

The lamb speaks to God having sacrificed that which was dearest to Him. Who dares to charge God with being unfair or unjust when He asks of us those things that are most dear and precious to our hearts? And who dares to criticize or doubt God's motives when He allows evil (for which man is the responsible agent) to take its course?

Tears Of Sorrow, Tears of Joy

We can imagine John's tears of sorrow transforming into tears of joy as the seemingly hopeless situation is salvaged. The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fall down before the throne and sing a new song,

You are worthy to receive the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and purchased for God with your blood from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and made them to our God a kingdom and priests, and they will reign over the earth (5:9-10).

Then, on cue, all the angels about the throne join in:

Worthy is the Lamb—the one who has been slain—to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing (5:12).

Finally the excitement is too much and the host of heaven joins the refrain.

Unto the one sitting on the throne, and unto the Lamb, the blessing, and the honor, and the glory, and the strength unto the ages of the ages. And the four living creatures said, Amen (5:13-14).

PART FOUR
TRIBULATION

The 70th Week

From this new heavenly perspective, our attention turns back to earth where a series of horrific and cataclysmic events begin wreaking havoc. As the Lord loosens each of the seven seals, further punishment is unleashed upon the unsuspecting world. We are about to witness the tribulation. Nearly five hundred years before John received The Revelation, the angel Gabriel told Daniel that from the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem there would be seventy weeks until the end of transgression and sin. After sixty-nine weeks the Messiah would be כָּרַת (*karath*) cutoff, executed, and have nothing for himself. The people of another prince, who was yet to come, would destroy the city and the sanctuary. The prince that is to come would orchestrate a seven-year peace treaty, which he would later break, 3½ years later.

Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the

overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate (Dan. 9:24-27).

The weeks of which he spoke were weeks of years, an essential sabbatical time frame in the Jewish calendar. Each week consisted of seven-years. At the end of every 70 weeks came the 50th year, the year of Jubilee.

The command to rebuild Jerusalem (a well-documented historical event recorded in Nehemiah 2:1-8) was issued in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes. It was March 14th, 445 BC in the Julian calendar.³² On Palm Sunday, the 10th of Nisan, April 6th 32 AD³³ (in the Julian calendar), precisely 69 week-years after the command to rebuild the temple, Jesus rode a donkey through the streets of Jerusalem, officially presenting himself as both the Messiah and the Lamb of God. The crowd hailed him as King of the Jews. This was also the day for Passover lambs to be presented for examination to see if they were worthy. A few days later they killed him.

They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" (Matt. 21:7-10 NIV).

This occurred just as Zachariah predicated more than 500 years earlier.

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and

³² Because the Jewish calendar follows a 360 day year, versus our modern Julian calendar of 365.25 days, conversion is required. To make the conversion we calculate the actual number of days for the prophecy in the Jewish calendar: thus, 69 weeks of years is 173,880 days. This equals 483 years in the Jewish calendar, or 476 years in the Julian calendar.

³³ From 445 BC to AD 32 (minus 1 for year 0) is 173,880 days.

victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey (Zach. 9:9 NIV).

More than 600 years earlier, Isaiah foretold of this lamb as well.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cutoff from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished (Isa. 53:7-8 NIV).

Just prior to riding the donkey into Jerusalem, Jesus pronounced seven woes upon the scribes and Pharisees, identifying them as sons of those who had scourged, crucified, and killed the prophets. He warned them of Jerusalem's soon destruction and then bitterly mourned the occasion.

Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that kills the prophets, and stoned them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord (Mt. 23:36-39).

In AD 70, Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the Jews were scattered throughout the empire.

Jesus himself confirmed that a parenthetical phase (which we call the Church dispensation) would stand between the 69th and the 70th week of years. Gabriel told Daniel that in the middle of the 70th week, the prince that is to come would break his treaty, and “*cause the sacrifice and the offering to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate*” (Dan. 9:24-27). Jesus warned,

When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place,

whoso reads, let him understand: . . . For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be (Mt. 24:15;21).

The abomination of desolation marks the beginning of real trouble for Israel. While the entire week is called the tribulation, this last 3½ years is the great tribulation (Rev. 7:14; Mt. 24:15, 21). Jeremiah called this the “*time of Jacobs trouble*” (Jer. 30:7). It is a time of Israel’s punishment for having rejected their Messiah. The newly converted Jews, as well as all believers, will be hated, persecuted, killed without mercy (Mt. 24). But hope is on the way, for the Lord is coming soon.

An Overview of the Tribulation

Before commenting on the upcoming passages, let us take a few minutes to consider the staging, the scenario in which the next thirteen chapters of The Revelation take place. Suddenly, millions of people have disappeared. Aside from the confusion and emotional trauma of missing loved ones (wives, husbands, children, parents, friends), there are millions of injured and dead victims from the resultant car wrecks and airplane crashes. The anguish is worldwide.

This personal grief will come atop an already pervasive anxiety over global terrorism (which has every major city on edge), and the economic collapse that has been spreading from one nation to the next. Biological and chemical warfare is a very real threat, perhaps it has already been used to some extent. Tension in the Middle East has escalated to the point that nuclear war is pending. Many fear this war will result in global destruction. People from all nations are clamoring for deliverance.

Ten principle nations from the ancient Greco-Roman world are seriously courting each other. Then, in one fell swoop they unite, their combined military and economic powers unparalleled. At once, they entrust all their authority to a charismatic leader who has suddenly appeared on the world scene. He has been swaying the populous with answers and grandiose promises,

which he substantiates with various signs and wondrous abilities.³⁴

Immediately, this new leader establishes a seven-year peace treaty between Israel and its surrounding nations. The world is ecstatic because the tension and animosity held by the Arab nations toward Israel has been the root of the global terrorism and now it appears the terrorism will end.

Although most of the world is smitten by this character, certain countries are not. An alliance of several nations expresses its displeasure with rebellion. They attack Israel in direct defiance of this leader's authority, but their rebellion is quickly brought to an end as God miraculously destroys five-sixths of their armies. The new world leader will likely claim the victory, and his popularity grows even greater. But Israel is not fooled. The Jews instantly understand that it was God who saved them, and that Jesus is indeed their Messiah. It is this event that opens their eyes to the truth of their Christ.³⁵

Devastating natural and man made disasters continue to hit one after another. At the same time, civil unrest, looting, and gangs of bandits escalate. Living is hard. Beyond the crime, resources are becoming very scarce in a growing number of communities. In the middle of the seven-year truce the new world leader breaks the treaty. He enters the tabernacle in Jerusalem, making grandiose and blasphemous claims of deity, demanding obedience, thus committing the abomination of desolation of which both Daniel and Jesus spoke. But Israel will not have it.

Having already realized Jesus is their Messiah, Israel refuses the antichrist. He marks them as terrorist, enemies of the state, and the time of Jacob's trouble begins. What follows is a horrendous and relentless persecution of the Jews. Over the next 3½ years, two-thirds of the Jewish population will perish.

This leader, the antichrist, establishes himself as the emperor of the world. He demands global obedience to himself and to the empire. To identify traitors and terrorists, everyone is made to receive an identification mark on either their forehead or their

³⁴ See comments concerning the first beast on pp. 178 - 196.

³⁵ See comments concerning Gomer, Gog and Magog on pp. 32 and 188.

right hand. Without this mark no one can participate in commerce of any kind.

This identification mark is well received by the populous. It is viewed as the only logical option to effectively monitor and contain criminals and terrorists; those who they perceive might seek to destroy the world. All, who like the Jews, refuse the mark are branded as criminals, enemies of the state and of the new world order. If caught, they are condemned to immediate death.

However, the global situation continues to worsen and the world's anticipation and expectations for this leader's ability to solve the world's problems begins to dissipate. His promises have proven empty. There is now discord within the empire. Evidently, having had enough of his lies, the armies of the world gather to rebel: from the north, the south, the east, they converge upon the valley of Armageddon to depose the tyrant who has also called his armies to battle.

It is at this time that Christ returns. But this time he comes in power and glory. He comes to claim his kingdom, for the times of the Gentiles are complete. The beast, the false prophet, and all who received the mark of the empire are cast into hell. Those who were able to survive these horrific times, without submitting to the beast, are ushered into the kingdom.

The Chronology of the Seven Seals

As discussed earlier (in chapter 5), the opening of each seal marks the unfolding of further tribulational events. The blowing of the trumpets and the pouring of the bowls have similar affects. The seven seals span the length of the seven-years, with the seventh seal being comprised of the seven trumpets. As to the chronology of the seven bowls, there are various opinions. Some suppose they constitute the seventh trumpet, just as the trumpets are the seventh seal. Others believe they appear simultaneously with the seven trumpets. For reasons soon to be discussed I hold the latter view: so that the seventh seal is composed of both the seven trumpets and the seven bowls, which occur simultaneously and represent different aspects of punishment.

Jesus himself appears to have provided a clue to the chronology of the seven seals (Mt. 24:6-21). Immediately after pronouncing seven woes upon the Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus

spoke with his disciples in the famed Olivet Discourse. They had asked him when this would happen, what would be the sign of his coming, and of the end of the Age? His response was candid.

There will be wars, famines, pestilence, earthquakes, persecution, false prophets, and hearts running cold because of iniquity. The gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world. The abomination of desolation, which Daniel placed in the middle of the week, will mark the time of the unprecedented great tribulation (Mt. 24). This unparalleled time of trouble seems to start with the 6th seal. As such, five seals seem to occur during the first 3½ years of the tribulation, while the 6th and 7th seals (the 7th seal being simultaneously comprised of the seven trumpets and the seven bowls) span the length of the last 3½ years, the Great Tribulation.

The First Seal, The Rider of the White Horse 6:1-2

(1) And I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a sound of thunder, "Come." (2) And I watched, and behold, a white horse, and the one sitting on it had a bow, and a crown was given unto him, and he went forth conquering and in order to conquer.

Once again John hears a loud voice, a deafening sound like thunder rumbling in his ear. It is the mighty voice of the cherubim warning of the terrible things about to be unleashed upon the earth.

This rider is clearly antichrist. However, in that clearly, the riders of the next three horses are not actual persons but the depiction of particular troubles that befall humanity, it seems more consistent with the text to understand this rider of the white horse as representing the spirit of antichrist, the kingdom, the empire, rather than an actual person. Indeed, all four horsemen should be understood as such. The troubles brought forth by each are created by the beast, the evil empire that has seized control of the world.

Whether the rider is the leader or the empire itself, either way the message is the same. This is an imposter, a warrior with no real means to pursue true warfare. When Jesus, the Christ of God, appears, he will have a sharp two-edged sword, not merely a bow

with no arrows. Even the crown upon this rider's head is a fake. It is a στέφανος (*stephanos*), a perishable garland, a wreath made of branches and flowers, an imitation of the real thing. It was a crown such as this, a *stephanos* that soldiers placed on Jesus to wear for the crucifixion; only his was a *stephanos* of thorns. When Jesus returns in glory he will be wearing διαδήματα (*diadēmata*) diadems, the real thing; and he will be wearing many of them (19:12).

Even though the rider has a bow without arrows, still he goes forth to conquer. Just as the bully of the block is very effective merely by strutting about with an occasional exhibition of strength and superiority, so too shall this kingdom rise to power based upon its display of military might. True, he will have some strength (even the power of Satan), exercising great ferocity and executing all opponents. However, the power to inflict physical harm is not, in itself, victory. This power has no value in the world of spiritual battles. As our Apostle taught: *“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world”* (1 Jn. 4:4). And as our Lord admonished: *“fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell”* (Mt. 10:28). Nor will his physical strength be any match against the coming warrior, the true Christ, against whom all opposition will wither.

Daniel speaks of the antichrist, the leader of this evil empire, as coming to power peacefully, deceitfully. With a seemingly small following at first, he will rise swiftly on the world scene and move quickly to world domination.

And after the league made with him he shall work deceitfully: for he shall come up, and shall become strong with a small people. He shall enter peaceably even upon the fattest places of the province; and he shall do that which his fathers have not done, nor his fathers' fathers; he shall scatter among them the prey, and spoil, and riches: yea, and he shall forecast his devices against the strong holds, even for a time (Dan. 11:23-24).

His articulate, brilliant, and pragmatic solutions to the world's pressing problems will hold the masses in awe. The psalmist also speaks of him in this way:

The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords (Ps. 55:21).

Others have pointed out that he will follow the pattern of every dictator in history: liberation, conquest, victory, and then tyranny. The text shows he has but one thing in mind, for “*he went forth conquering and in order to conquer.*”

The Second Seal, The Rider of the Red Horse 6:3-4

⁽³⁾And when he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come.” ⁽⁴⁾And another, a red horse came forth, and to the one sitting on it, to him it was given to take peace from the earth, even so they would slay one another, and a great sword was given to him.

This rider incites war. Not, necessarily, one country against another, but civil unrest—fellow countrymen and neighbors warring against each other. The term μάχαιρα (*machaira*) sword is a knife or dagger. It speaks of something small that can easily be concealed, a tool of deception and close combat. It is different from ρομφαία (*rhomphaia*), the broadsword or spear used by soldiers as in 6:8.

Jesus warned, “*Then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another*” (Mt. 24:10). It will be a time of great anguish. Offense, betrayal, and hatred (fueled by the lack of basic necessities) will go beyond class warfare and racial divisions. Because various cataclysmic events will make food and shelter scarce, people will constantly be seeking and protecting these resources. They will procure them at any cost, any way they can: lie, steal, cheat, kill, whatever it takes to stay alive.

The Third Seal, The Rider of the Black Horse 6:5-6

⁽⁵⁾And when he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, “Come.” And I watched, and behold, a black horse, and the one sitting on it was holding

a balance in his hand. ⁽⁶⁾And I heard as it were a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius and three quarts of barley for a denarius, but do not hurt the oil and the wine.”

The third rider seems indicative of two things: famine in the midst of plenty and government control. The pair of balances would suggest price fixing and distribution control. Daniel warned that the evil prince

Shall enter peaceably even upon the fattest places of the province; and he shall do that which his fathers have not done, nor his fathers' fathers; he shall scatter among them the prey, and spoil, and riches: yea, and he shall forecast his devices against the strong holds, even for a time (Dan. 11:24).

His words and promises will be deceitful, perhaps promising social reform and equity for all. Yet, while he and the elite continue living in luxury, the rest of the world finds it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. A measure of wheat—a basic dietary staple—will cost a denarius, which in John's day was the equivalent of an average daily wage. Three measures of barley—a food generally fed to the animals—will cost the same. Perhaps he is warning that one day's wages will buy either one decent meal or three less desirable meals. What is certain is that this description of widespread inflation tells us the cost of food will be enormous.

With whole populations seeking daily necessities, and the Spirit of God no longer at work to convict and curb man's self-serving evil heart (2 Th. 2:6-7), hearts will wax cold toward one another. Jesus said, “*iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall grow cold*” (Mt. 24:12): neighbor against neighbor, kin against kin, fathers and sons at war with each other. Evil, selfish men will stoop very low to fill their bellies. When a day's wages will scarcely feed the man who works for it, much less his family, many men will simply desert their families to fend only for themselves. If this seems unlikely, just consider the millions of deadbeat fathers in our current society—those who have left their families to fend for themselves as they pursue personal satisfaction. This, seemingly, has always been an issue; thus Paul

warned Timothy that “*if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel*” (1 Tim. 5:8).

The rider is also told to “*hurt not the oil and the wine,*” a reference to the luxurious things of life. Thus, the haves and the have nots. Some, for a time, are unaffected by the inflation. They will have enough riches to supply whatever they need. But their surplus will be short lived. The day is drawing near when they will cast their silver and gold to the moles and bats as they run to the caves in the mountains to hide from the face of the Lord.

The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols he shall utterly abolish. And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he arises to shake terribly the earth. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he arises to shake terribly the earth (Isa. 2:17-21).

How deceptive is the false security of riches. Nor, ultimately, do they offer happiness and fulfillment. Having sought happiness in every indulgence and luxury a man could possibly desire, Solomon concluded it was all vanity. There is no fulfillment in any of it. Thus, he determined: “*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man*” (Ecc. 12:13).

The Fourth Seal, The Rider of the Pale Horse 6:7-8

⁽⁷⁾And when he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come.” ⁽⁸⁾And I watched, and behold, a yellowish green horse, and his name—the one sitting on it—was Death. And Hades followed with him. And there was given unto them authority over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with

sword, and with famine, and with death, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

The rider on the pale horse, Death, has Hades following close behind to gather its victims. One fourth of the earth's population will be destroyed by this horseman, but these are only the beginning of sorrows (Mt. 24:8).

Because *χλωρός* (*chlōros*) pale is the term from which we get chlorine, it some have suggested this could be a reference to chemical warfare. This seems very plausible, but other causes of death are likely: civil violence, disasters, famine, and aggressive wildlife. No doubt animals, even domestic animals, will be hungry as well, even to the point of attacking humans.

Sensing the approaching apocalyptic events, but unclear as to the actual biblical prophecies pertaining to these times, many folks are storing massive amounts of food and arms in anticipation of various sorts of calamities: global financial collapse, nuclear contamination, viral and bacterial epidemics, water shortages and riotous civil unrest. These “Preppers,” as they are called, are numerous. There is even a reality television series that seeks to evaluate the prospective effectiveness of certain serious Preppers, in the event their particular concerns come true. However, prepare as they might, all their efforts will come to naught. Many will be overrun and plundered by their neighbors, murdered for their stores. Some will be devastated by a calamity other than what they prepared for. Others still will suffer betrayal from within, or their stores will simply be seized by the government. One way or another, their preparations will not prevail against the trouble they will face.

The Fifth Seal, The Souls of the Martyred 6:9-11

⁽⁹⁾And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of them who had been slain for the Word of God and for the testimony, which they held. ⁽¹⁰⁾And they cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, Oh Master, the holy and true one, do you not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”

⁽¹¹⁾And a white robe was given to each one, and it was said to them, that they should rest yet a little time, until their

fellow-servants are also fulfilled, even their brothers, who were about to be killed as they were.

The fifth seal draws our attention back to heaven. Here John sees the souls of those being martyred during the first half of the seven-year tribulation. Because these martyrs are asking the Lord for vengeance, they are not likely members of the Church, the Bride of Christ. The Church is never instructed to ask, nor is it ever heard asking, for vengeance. Furthermore, in that they are told to rest until their fellow servants (i.e. those of the same cohort) are also killed, the possibility of a mid-tribulational resurrection or rapture must be ruled out; for many more of them will be martyred in the last half of the tribulation.³⁶

Immediately after the rapture—the translation of the Church just prior to the seven-year tribulation—many who had previously spurned the gospel will embrace it. They, in turn, will convert others. They will understand the identity of the prince of the covenant and reject him. Many of them will die for their new faith. These are the souls John sees under the altar in the fifth seal.

The Sixth Seal, The Hand of God 6:12-17

(12) And I watched when he opened the sixth seal, and a great earthquake occurred; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the whole moon became as blood; (13) and the stars of the heaven fell unto the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when being shaken by a great wind. (14) And the heaven was removed as a scroll being rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved. (15) And the kings of the earth, and the princes, and their generals, and the rich, and the strong, and every slave and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains. (16) And they say to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one sitting on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, (17) for the great day of their wrath had come and who is able to stand?”

³⁶ See comments on the rapture and the church of Philadelphia, page 99.

The sixth seal is the beginning of divine intervention and likely the last half of the tribulation. Up till this point the troubles have been human or satanic in origin. The restrainer, the Holy Spirit, had merely stepped aside and allowed the mystery of iniquity to take its course (2 Th. 2:6-8). But now judgment from God's own hand begins. What unfolds is a frightful upheaval of the earth's geography and atmosphere. The sun and moon darken, perhaps due to the widespread volcanic eruptions that release massive amounts of volcanic ash into the atmosphere. Earthquake activity will be so fierce that mountains will flatten and islands will be covered by the sea.

The world's economy will take a drastic change at this point. Stock investments, hidden bank accounts, cash, silver, gold—nothing will have enough value to procure the basic necessities: food, water, and shelter. The trivial pleasures of luxury will give way to the preservation and deliverance of their flesh in the midst of famine, and their souls from the coming wrath of God.

One would think that the knowledge of such devastating events on the near horizon is enough to strike terror into any sound mind. But the mind of man in these last days is anything but sound. It is, however, stubbornly rebellious—stubbornly rebellious, to the point of setting logic aside to pursue passion, even refusing to acknowledge the truth of Creation and the Creator (Rom. 1). Therefore, when the restraining power of God (which currently keeps evil at bay) steps aside to let evil run its course, these rebels will follow after the false Christ with great abandon. Paul expounded on this.

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now lets will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who

believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Th. 2:7-12).

The 144,000 Evangelists 7:1-8

(¹)After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that no wind should blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. (²)And I saw another angel ascend from the rising sun, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, (³)saying, “Do not hurt the earth, nor the sea, nor the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”

(⁴)And I heard the number of those having been sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand had been sealed from all the tribes of the children of Israel: (⁵)From the tribe of Judah twelve thousand had been sealed. From the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand. From the tribe of Gad twelve thousand. (⁶)From the tribe of Asher twelve thousand. From the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand. From the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand. (⁷)From the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand. From the tribe of Levi twelve thousand. From the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand. (⁸)From the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand. From the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand. From the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.

It is amazing that the Watchtower cult somehow construes the 144,000 evangelists to be themselves. Any teaching seeking to portray these 144,000 as anything other than literal Israelites is so absurd that it does not even merit the time or space for refutation. Nothing as to the identity of these 144,000 is left to doubt. They are Israelites, sealed and sent forth for the duration of the great tribulation (the last 3½ years of the seven-year tribulation) to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom. Here, these 144,000 Israelites are sealed for service to the Lord Jesus, their Messiah.

Up to this point the opening of each seal has seamlessly succeeded the last; but now, just prior to the seventh seal a dramatic pause occurs to accentuate the culmination of the first

six seals and to prepare for the terror of the seventh. For this has been but the beginning of sorrows.

The angel's call for a pause in the destructive actions, creates intense anticipation. Dr. Barnhouse likened it to viewing a movie in which a large bomb has been dropped on a city. The bomb is falling rapidly toward its target. Then, just inches before it hits the ground the film stops, the bomb is suspended in midair and suddenly someone appears on screen running from one house to another, knocking on doors and windows, warning everyone of the imminent danger about to befall them. This then is the picture before us, as if God has said, "time out, while I seal the elect."

Of great significance here is that God never leaves himself without witness. Because the persecution of converts will grow so severe after the abomination of desolation, God will place a seal upon these 144,000 witnesses to protect them from harm so that He might secure an evangelical witness for the coming kingdom.

A Great Multitude 7:9-17

⁽⁹⁾After these things I watched, and behold, a great multitude that no one was able to number, from every nation and tribe and people and tongue, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, having been clothed in white robes and palms in their hands. ⁽¹⁰⁾And they cry with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God, who sits on the throne and unto the Lamb."

⁽¹¹⁾And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell before the throne on their faces and worshiped God, ⁽¹²⁾saying, "Amen. The blessing, and the glory, and the wisdom, and the thanksgiving, and the honor, and the power, and the strength, to our God unto the ages of the ages. Amen."

⁽¹³⁾And one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These, who have been clothed with white robes, who are they, and whence came they?"

⁽¹⁴⁾But I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he told me, "These are those coming out of the Great Tribulation, and they washed their robes and made them white in the

blood of the Lamb. ⁽¹⁵⁾Therefore are they before the throne of God, and they serve him day and night in his temple. And the one sitting on the throne will spread his tabernacle over them. ⁽¹⁶⁾They will hunger no more, neither thirst any longer, nor will the sun fall upon them, nor any heat, ⁽¹⁷⁾for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and will guide them by life's fountains of waters, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

It is not insignificant that John was unable to answer the elder's question as to the identity of this multitude in white robes (7:13-14). That John could not identify them makes it quite clear they are not part of the Church. Certainly John would have recognized part of the body of Christ, of which he himself is an apostle. He would know those who are part of the temple of which he himself is a foundation stone (Eph. 2:20). He did not need to ask the identity of Jesus, nor was he puzzled at the identity of the twenty-four elders, but these, he acknowledged he could not identify.

The elder explained, "*These are those coming out of the Great Tribulation, and they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*" (7:14). Because this assembly consists of all nations, it is clear they are other than the 144,000. This great multitude, which has come out of the great tribulation constitutes the "*fellow servants and brothers*" mentioned in 6:11. They are neither part of Israel nor the Church, but they are fellow servants, fellow believers. The one thing they have in common with both the Church and Israel (as do saints of all ages) is that their robes are "*made white in the blood of the Lamb.*"³⁷ Although many modernists reject the efficacy of the blood of Christ, if God's Word be true, there is no redemption without it (Heb. 9:22).

The Seventh Seal, The Seven Trumpets 8:1-6

⁽¹⁾And when he opened the seventh seal, heaven became silent for about half an hour. ⁽²⁾And I saw the seven angels

³⁷ Blood, see Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:22; Rev. 1:5.

who stood before God, and there were given to them seven trumpets.

⁽³⁾And another angel came, and stood over the altar, having a golden censer. And many incense were given to him that he should add it to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar that was before the throne. ⁽⁴⁾And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. ⁽⁵⁾And the angel had taken the censer, and filled it with the fire of the altar, and cast it upon the earth. And there followed thunder, and voices, and lightning and an earthquake.

⁽⁶⁾And the seven angels that had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound the trumpets.

Everyone enjoys quiet time. Alone with our thoughts we dream, solve problems, and contemplate life's great and trivial issues. We have all heard and experienced the colloquialism that silence is golden. But here, something very intense is taking place. Something is about to happen, the likes of which neither heaven nor earth has ever witnessed. When the seventh seal is unfastened all "*heaven became silent for about half an hour*" (8:1). The silence is a profound and reverential dread, inspired by the somber, awesome reality of what is about to take place. The trumpets are about to sound. Trouble is coming. The pain about to take place is greater even than words can explain.

Then shall be Great Tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved (Mt. 24:21-22).

The saints under the fifth seal had cried out, "*How long, Oh master, the holy and true one, do you not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth*" (6:10)? At last the answer has arrived for God has not forgotten, as Peter said, "*the Lord is not slack concerning his promise*" (2 Pet. 3:9).

And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. And the angel had taken the censer, and filled it with the fire of

the altar, and cast it upon the earth. And there followed thunder, and voices, and lightning and an earthquake (8:4).

Again the thunder and lightening warn of approaching judgments. Suddenly the seven trumpets fall in rapid succession. I will not attempt to provide an explanation as to the exact meaning of each trumpet. Suffice it to say, the details will be apparent to those living at the time. What is clear is that terrible things are going to happen.

The trumpets, like the rest of The Revelation, must be taken literally. Although it is obviously figurative speech, it is a legitimate and common form of literal communication. For example, earlier John said the one sitting on the throne was to look upon like a jasper; he does not say the one on the throne was a jasper stone. Jesus spoke of the kingdom of heaven as the grain of mustard seed, but he did say it was a grain of mustard seed. These are analogies; they are a common type of figurative language.

Accordingly, figurative language is to be understood in a literal sense. Indeed, this is literal-figurative. As in all literal communication, the speaker has a clear, simple meaning, which the hearer is intended to understand. Analogy is merely one of several forms of figurative-literal speech that are very common aspects of everyday communication. So that, here, although we might not fully grasp the details of the scene, we can understand that literal, physical events will transpire; and when they occur the details of these passages will be self evident.

The First Trumpet 8:7

(7) And the first blew the trumpet, and there occurred hail and fire mingled with blood, and it was cast upon the earth. And the third part of the earth was burned up, and the third part of the trees was burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

Whether the blood falls with the hail or the hail and fire falling upon the men and animals causes the blood to flow, we are not certain. One's imagination is as good as the other's. But one thing is sure, one-third of the earth's forests and vegetation will be

burned to ashes. Multiple severe lightening storms could initiate such disasters. Perhaps such powerful tornadoes will occur that entire communities of people and livestock are sucked into the sky to be cast to the earth along with the hail and lightnings. Whatever the cause, it will be horrific.

The Second Trumpet 8:8-9

⁽⁸⁾And the second angel blew the trumpet, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea, and the third part of the sea became blood. ⁽⁹⁾And the third part of the creatures in the sea—those having souls—died. And the third part of the ships was destroyed.

Some think this might have reference to nuclear power, others think it could be a comet or another heavenly body colliding with earth. It seems to affect a localized area of the sea rather than a general worldwide destruction. One-third of sea life, as well as one-third of all seafaring vessels, will be destroyed.

The Third Trumpet 8:10-11

⁽¹⁰⁾And the third angel blew the trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven burning like a torch. And it fell upon the third part of the rivers and upon the fountains of the waters. ⁽¹¹⁾And the name of the star is called Wormwood. And the third part of the waters became Wormwood, and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

There are two things man cannot live without for more than a few days: sleep and water. Whereas the second trumpet affects the ocean and profoundly hampers world commerce, this third trumpet affects the drinking water—a necessary sustenance for the very life of man. Many suspect this is radioactive nuclear waste contaminating the waters. Perhaps, perhaps not, but something is going to destroy one-third of the world's drinking water.

The Fourth Trumpet 8:12-13

⁽¹²⁾And the fourth angel blew the trumpet, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars, that the third part of them should be darkened, and the day should not shine for the

third part of it, and the night in like manner. ⁽¹³⁾And I saw, and I heard one angel, flying in mid heaven saying with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe, to those dwelling on the earth, by reason of the remaining voices of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to trumpet.”

At the sound of fourth trumpet one-third of the sun, moon and stars will be darkened, thereby affecting both night and day. While many understand this to be the intensity of these luminary bodies, I am not so sure. It could very well be speaking to their duration, the total hours per day that they shine. Jesus said,

And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved, but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened (Mt. 24:22).

The term ἐκολοβώθησαν (*ekolobōthēsav*) shortened, carries the meaning of amputation. Could it be that the next three trumpets, of which the angel warns “*Woe, Woe, Woe*” are so intense that God speeds up the solar system, shortening the length of our 24 hour day to hasten the end lest the whole population be destroyed?

Nothing is impossible for the one who designed and set in course the cosmos. And let us not forget that we do have precedent for divine intervention as to the manipulation of time. Remember, the sun stood still for Joshua (Josh. 10:12-13). Regardless of the meaning, whether it is the brightness of these heavenly bodies or the speed at which the earth rotates, it will be a time of great cataclysmic change.

The Fifth Trumpet 9:1-12

⁽¹⁾And the fifth angel blew the trumpet, and I saw a star, having fallen from heaven onto the earth, and to it was given the key of the shaft of the abyss. ⁽²⁾And he opened the shaft of the abyss, and a smoke went up out of the shaft, like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened from the smoke of the shaft. ⁽³⁾And out of the smoke came forth locusts upon the earth, and authority was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have authority. ⁽⁴⁾And it was said to them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor

any tree, but only those men who have not the seal of God on their foreheads. ⁽⁵⁾And it was given them that they should not kill them however, so that they could be tormented five months—and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man. ⁽⁶⁾And in those days, those men will seek death and shall in no wise find it, and they will long to die, and death flees from them.

⁽⁷⁾And the shapes of the locusts were like horses prepared for war; and on their heads, as though crowns like gold, and their faces were as men's faces. ⁽⁸⁾And they had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions. ⁽⁹⁾And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots—of many horses rushing to war. ⁽¹⁰⁾And they have tails like scorpions, and stings also in their tails. Their mandate is to hurt men for five months. ⁽¹¹⁾They have over them a king—the angel of the abyss. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.

⁽¹²⁾The first Woe is past, behold, two Woes yet to come after these things.

These locusts seem to be demonic beings loosed from the abyss to which they have been committed. Both Jude and Peter speak of a special breed of fallen angels, which Enoch said are being kept chained under darkness unto the judgment of the Great Day (Jude 6; 2 Pet. 2:4; Enoch 10). Enoch explained that two-hundred angels, watchers, had left their first estate and mixed with the daughters of men. To them giants were born. They also mixed with animals and created freakish beasts. He said these fallen beings were bound for 70 generations under the earth until the day of judgment, at which time they would be confined to everlasting fire. Could these be the same beings (or perhaps their offspring from procreation with animals) loosed for a short time to wreak havoc before their final judgment? It is possible. It has been about 4,360 year since the flood (the time at which these fallen angels were cast into the abyss). Although we do not know how many years Enoch considered a generation to be, by any calculations these 70 generations must be near completion.

The Sixth Trumpet 9:13-21

(13) And the sixth angel blew the trumpet, and I heard a voice from one of the horns of the golden altar which is before God, (14) saying to the sixth angel—the one holding the trumpet, “Loose the four angels who have been prepared, at the great river Euphrates.” (15) And the four angels—who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year—were loosed, so that they should kill the third part of men. (16) And the number of the armies of the horsemen was two myriads of myriads. I heard the number of them.

(17) And thus, I saw the horses in the vision and those sitting on them, having breastplates the color of fire and of dusky red and of sulfur. And the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions, and out of their mouths proceeds fire and smoke and sulfur. (18) By these three plagues was the third part of men killed, by the fire and the smoke and the sulfur that proceeded out of their mouths. (19) For the authority of the horses is in their mouth and in their tails, for their tails are like unto serpents and have heads and with them they do harm. (20) But the rest of mankind, who were not killed with these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and the idols of gold, and of silver, and of brass, and of stone, and of wood that can neither see, nor hear, nor walk. (21) And they did not repent of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.

As the text clearly states, this is a great army prepared and moving to battle. A myriad is generally considered innumerable, although some have translated it ten thousand. Both the KJV and the NIV translate the passage “two myriads of myriads” (9:16) as two hundred million. In John’s day an army of this size was unimaginable. This is no longer the case. It is no longer something at which skeptics can scoff. For decades China has boasted of her ability to muster an army of two hundred million soldiers.

Furthermore, at the very least, it is curious that several years ago China completed the multilane 2,412 km Sichuan-Tibet

Highway, which stretches from east to west over fourteen mountains, dozens of rivers, and several forests, thereby making a previously inaccessible trek a nearly effortless journey. The question is, why did they build it? Unlike the West, China does not have a network of super highways for commerce and relocation. Even in today's modern world cross continental travel is foreign to most Chinese.

The Mighty Angel 10:1-7

(1)And I saw another, strong angel, having been clothed with a cloud, coming down out of heaven, and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire; (2)and he had in his hand a little, opened scroll. And he placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the earth, (3)and he cried with a loud voice, as a lion roars. And when he cried, the seven thunders uttered their voices. (4)And when the seven thunders spoke I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "You seal up the things that the seven thunders spoke and you must not write them."

(5)And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven (6)and swore by the one living unto the ages of the ages—who created the heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that there shall be no longer delay. (7)But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to blow the trumpet, also the mystery of God was finished, as he declared to his servants the prophets.

A Pause in Heaven

As mentioned earlier, a dramatic pause occurs from 10:1 through 11:14. The tension is building in anticipation of the seventh trumpet.

Opinions differ as to the identity of "*another, strong angel*" (10:1). The term ἄγγελον (*aggelon*) angel can also be translated as messenger. In this sense it has been used of Jesus, man, and celestial beings sent forth to minister. It is the narrow use of the word angel in our modern vernacular that confuses us. The

majestic description in the first three verses lead many to believe this angel, as well as the angel in 8:3, is the Lord Jesus himself. Some draw attention to ἄλλοι (allon) another, suggesting it refers to another kind of angel. While this cannot be ruled out, neither can it be determined merely by the term, which could refer to another of the same kind or another of a different kind.

Whether this messenger is the Lord or not does not detract from the clarity of the scene. However, each aspect of the vision does represent typical characteristics of the Lord (10:1-2): being “*clothed with a cloud*” symbolizes the majesty of God; “*the rainbow*” upon his head is the merciful and covenant keeping God; “*his face was like the sun*” speaks to the holiness of God; “*his feet as pillars of fire*” is the judgment of God; “*in his hand a little, opened scroll*” is the witness of God; and placing “*his right foot on the sea and his left on the earth*” addresses the power of God over creation.

Notice the passionate warning that “*he cried with a loud voice, as a lion roars*” (10:3). Immediately the thunder echoes an alert to the approaching storm. Also notice that we do not hear the actual message of the angel. For reasons known only to God, this message will not be known until it comes to pass; indeed, a voice from heaven commanded John: “*You seal up the things that the seven thunders spoke and you must not write them*” (10:4).

When the seventh angel blows his trumpet, everyone will know that man’s rule has come to an end. It is a stern warning, but there is also a promise in this trumpet. Soon “*the mystery of God*” will be finished.

What is this mystery? It is the same mystery “*declared to his servants the prophets*” (10:7). The OT is filled with passages that speak of this mystery—the mystery of the Messiah. Isaiah addressed a portion of this mystery when he spoke of the coming Messiah clothed in humility as a sacrificial offering.

He has no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men—a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not, . . . He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not

his mouth. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth, . . . Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; . . . When you shall make his soul an offering for sin, . . . He will see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied, . . . Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he will divide the spoil with the strong, because he has poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Isa. 53:2-3, 7,10-12).

Jeremiah prophesied of the kingly appearance of the Messiah.

The Lord, . . . will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness (Jer. 23:5-6).

David spoke of both the humiliation and the glory of the Messiah.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? . . . My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; and you have brought me into the dust of death, . . . You that fear the Lord, praise him; all you the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all you the seed of Israel, . . . The meek will eat and be satisfied. They shall praise the Lord that seek him; your heart shall live for ever. All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the kindred of the nations shall worship before you. For the kingdom is the Lord's, and he is the governor among the nations (Ps. 22:1, 15, 23, 26-28).

Certainly the concept of the Messiah coming in both humility and glory has not been a secret, to either the Jew or the Gentile. But it is also true that neither have clearly understood the purpose, the implications, nor the details of the Lord's coming—neither his first coming as a man, nor his future appearance as King. Even

believers (who have a certain degree of understanding about these issues) do not fully comprehend them. In this respect it is still the “*mystery of God*.” Furthermore, God’s mystery encompasses more than the first and second coming of the Lord. It speaks of the incarnation (Col. 2:2, 9; 1 Tim. 3:16); of Israel’s blindness as to the first coming of the Messiah and the fullness of the Gentiles (Rom. 11:25); of Christ dwelling within the believer’s heart (Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:26-27); of the resurrection and transformation of believers (1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Th. 4:13-17); of the Church (Eph. 3:1-12, 5:23-32, 6:19; Col. 4:3; Rom. 16:25); and of the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 13:3-50).

The Little Book 10:8-11

⁽⁸⁾*And the voice that I heard from heaven was speaking with me again, and saying, “You go, take the opened scroll in the hand of the angel who stands upon the sea and upon the land.”*

⁽⁹⁾*And I went toward the angel, telling him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, “Take and eat it, and it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.”*

⁽¹⁰⁾*And I took the little scroll out of the angel’s hand and ate it. And it was in my mouth sweet as honey, and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. ⁽¹¹⁾And they say to me, “You must prophesy again before many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.”*

Some believe this “*opened scroll*” (10:8) is the little book in 5:1, which is closed with the seven seals. However, this view cannot be held with certainty because of the diminutive reference, “*the little scroll*” (10:2). Others believe this “*little scroll*” represents the revealed Word of God and that John’s obedience in eating it confirms his acceptance of the Word. That it is sweet to the taste speaks to its many blessings and promises. Its bitterness in the belly would reference the judgments and condemnations, which are also very much a part of God’s Word.

Measuring The Temple 11:1-2

(1) And a reed, like a staff, was given to me, as one said, “Rise, and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those worshiping in it. (2) And the court outside of the temple leave out and do not measure, for it was given to the nations, and they will trample the holy city forty-two months.”

This command to “*measure the temple of God and the altar, and those worshiping in it*” is interesting. It is not the first or the last time we see God’s temple measured. Similar occasions are recorded in Ezekiel 40, Zechariah 2:1-3, and Revelation 21:15-17. Some have suggested this is an expression of ownership and evaluation, and that John’s task to measure “*those worshiping in it*” indicates they fall short of the divine measurement, as alluded to in David’s famous psalm:

For the kingdom is the Lord’s, and he is the governor among the nations. All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship, all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him, and none can keep alive his own soul (Ps. 22:28-29).

Left to ourselves, we are all found wanting. Our only hope for righteousness is God’s gift—His son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees, “*You will die in your sins, for if you do not believe that I Am, you will die in your sins*” (Jn. 8:24).

The angel then told John “*the court outside of the temple leave out and do not measure, for it was given to the nations, and they will trample the holy city forty-two months*” (11:2). Because it is under the rule of the gentiles, the outer court and the holy city are desecrated. Chronologically, that they should “*trample the holy city forty-two months*” places this in the latter half of the seven-year period.

As per the covenant framed by the evil prince, the Jews will occupy this site in peace during the first half of the 70th week. After 3½ years the prince will enter and desecrate their temple. He will likely claim to be their Messiah. Israel will reject him and he will initiate a full scale persecution against them and all others

who do not accept his authority. It will begin the Great Tribulation—the second half of the seven-year period (Dan. 9:27, 11:30, 31; Mt. 24:15-20). Speaking of this evil prince, Daniel said,

He will confirm the covenant with many for one week; and in the midst of the week he will cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he will make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate (Dan. 9:27).

Later Daniel explained that,

He will be grieved, and return, and have indignation against the holy covenant; so shall he do; he shall even return, and have intelligence with them that forsake the holy covenant. And arms shall stand on his part, and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that makes desolate (Dan. 11:30-31).

Two Witnesses 11:3-14

⁽³⁾“And I will give to my two witnesses and, having been clothed in sackcloth, they will prophesy a thousand two hundred and sixty days. ⁽⁴⁾These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the Lord of the earth. ⁽⁵⁾And if anyone desires to hurt them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone should desire to hurt them, he must be killed in this manner. ⁽⁶⁾These have the authority to shut heaven, so that no rain may moisten during the days of their prophecy. And they have authority over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague as often as they shall desire.”

⁽⁷⁾And when they finish their testimony, the beast ascending out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them, and kill them. ⁽⁸⁾And their corpses lie in the open street of the great city, which is called, spiritually, Sodom and Egypt, where even their Lord was

crucified. ⁽⁹⁾ *And from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations they look on their corpses three and a half days, and they do not allow their dead bodies to be placed in a tomb.* ⁽¹⁰⁾ *And those dwelling on the earth rejoice over them, and are glad, and they will send gifts to one another; because these two prophets tormented those dwelling on the earth.*

⁽¹¹⁾ *And after the three and a half days the spirit of life from God entered into them and they stood on their feet. And great fear fell upon those who watched them.* ⁽¹²⁾ *And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” And they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them.*

⁽¹³⁾ *And in that hour a great earthquake occurred, and the tenth part of the city fell and seven thousand names of men were killed in the earthquake; and the rest became terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.* ⁽¹⁴⁾ *“The second Woe is past. Behold, the third Woe is coming quickly.”*

We can only speculate as to the identity of the two witnesses. Most agree that one of them will be the prophet Elijah, who is to come before the great and terrible “*day of the LORD*” (*Mal. 4:5*). Even Jesus spoke of Elijah’s future appearance (*Mt. 17:11*).

Many suspect these witnesses are identified by the miracles they provide. The ability to “*to shut heaven, so that no rain may moisten during the days of their prophecy*” (*11:6*) is similar to one of Elijah’s works (*1 Kgs. 17:1*). If miracles are the identifying criteria the identity of the second witness might be that of Moses. For the “*authority over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague as often as they shall desire*” (*11:6*) is reminiscent of his works (*Ex. 7:17ff*).

If Moses and Elijah are the two witnesses, we might have additional insight into their appearance with the Lord on the mount of transfiguration (*Mt. 17:1-9*): Moses, representing of the law and physical salvation; Elijah, representing the prophets and spiritual salvation; and Christ, the promise and fulfillment of both.

Still the identity of these witnesses is merely speculative. Others (including the early Church Father, Tertullian), believe that

because Elijah and Enoch escaped death, they must return to earth to die. This seems to be a valid point, in that “*it is appointed unto man once to die*” (Heb. 9:27); however we know this general rule does not apply to all. Specifically, it does not apply to those believers who are translated at the Lord’s coming for the Church.

But we do not wish you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who are sleeping, that you grieve not, even as the rest—those having no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so those having slept in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the Word of the Lord, that we—those living, those remaining unto the arrival of the Lord—by no means shall precede those having slept. For the Lord himself, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, shall descend from heaven and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we—those living, those remaining—together, shall be caught up with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord (1 Th. 4:13-17).

Thus, it would seem that rather than returning to earth to die, Enoch set the precedent for the translation of the Church. Therefore, Moses and Elijah appear to be the most likely identities.

As a matter of practical application, take note of God’s provision and purpose for his servants.

If anyone desires to hurt them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone should desire to hurt them, he must be killed in this manner (11:5).

When God’s protection is upon His servants, all hell may prevail against them but to no avail. Jesus experienced this type of protection until his appointed time at the cross; so too did Daniel in the lions’ den, as did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fire. Tradition has it that even John, the author of The Revelation, was dipped into a cauldron of boiling oil, yet he did not die.

Such protection, however, must not be considered the norm. This kind of protection is a grace granted for a specific purpose

and for a limited time to accomplish a specific divine objective. At last, and admittedly voluntarily, this protection was lifted even from our Lord. Others too, who had temporarily experienced this protection, eventually died at the hands of the enemy. Early Church tradition has it that although the Roman persecutors were unable to burn Polycarp at the stake (because the flame simply fanned out around him), they did successfully pierce him through with a spear.

Whoever these witnesses are, their ministry will last for 1,260 days, exactly 3½ years then, *“the beast ascending out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them, and kill them. And their corpses lie in the open street of the great city”* (11:7-8). So hated are these righteous men that their bodies will be left in the street for 3½ days so everyone can witness and rejoice in their decay. No doubt it will be televised around the world with 24/7 coverage by political spinmeisters gloating over their demise, reminding everyone what great enemies of the state they were. But then the spirit of life suddenly enters and the two men stand to their feet. A voice summons them to the heavens and everyone is seized with fear. A great earthquake follows that kills thousands and destroys much of the city (11:11-12). Immediately, we hear the warning, *“the second woe is past,”* and the third is coming quickly (11:14). Chronologically, this is the second half of the seven-year period. There is no room for speculation; this is the Great Tribulation.

The Seventh Trumpet, The Third Woe 11:15-19

⁽¹⁵⁾*And the seventh angel blew the trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ. And he will reign unto the ages of the ages.”*

⁽¹⁶⁾*And the twenty-four elders—those sitting before God on their thrones, fell upon their faces and worshiped God,* ⁽¹⁷⁾*saying, “We thank you, Lord God, the Almighty, the one who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and reigned. ⁽¹⁸⁾And the nations were wroth, and your wrath came, and the time of the dead to be judged, and to give the reward to your servants—the prophets and*

to the saints, and those fearing your name—the small and the great; and to destroy those destroying the earth.”

(19) And God’s temple in heaven was opened; and the ark of his covenant was seen in his temple; and there occurred lightning, and voices, and thunders, and an earthquake and great hail.

This, the third woe and the seventh trumpet, is none other than the reign of Christ upon the earth, “*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ*” (11:15). It is time to divide the sheep and from the goats, the believers from the unbelievers (Mt. 25:31-46). For the unbeliever, it is a time of judgment and destruction. For the believer it is a time of blessing and reward. Abraham, the nomad, will have a city to call home. David will sit upon his promised throne, and assignments will be given throughout the kingdom to those worthy of rule.

Notice the condemnation of those who have been destroying the earth. In the annals of history no one has ever wreaked such havoc on the earth as our current generation.

- Toxic and nuclear wastes with no safe place to store them.
- The inevitable nuclear plant meltdowns that must be but a few years away.
- Repeated thermonuclear explosions.
- Biochemical and biological warfare.
- Polluted waters and space junk.

All this and more in just the last few decades. And it is sure to escalate during the tribulations. Curiously, few people are concerned about these very real dangers, but they are concerned about our carbon footprint and the spotted owl. Such is the wisdom of man—forever deceived, forever directing the discussion toward a red herring when the elephant is in the room.

PART FIVE

PARENTHETICAL PAUSE

Religion

A Parenthetical Review

The next seven chapters of The Revelation (12 through 18) are a parenthetical pause in the chronological progression. Here various essential aspects are discussed in greater detail. Chapter 12 begins by taking us back to the incarnation and Satan's attempt to kill the Messiah. Then it suddenly jumps forward to the Great Tribulation. Chapters 13 through 18 discuss various events that occur during this seven-year period of trouble. Chapter 19 then resumes the chronological presentation, thereby taking up at the end of chapter 11.

The Two Religions

Two very different women are seen in these chapters. One is birthing the Messiah; the other is the mother of harlots, seated atop the beast, which lies in wait seeking to destroy the newborn. One represents truth, the other a lie. Although numerous religions have existed throughout the course of human history, all but one share a common origin. Thus, in essence, there are but two religions in the world: the true and the counterfeit. One is submissive to the Creator of all things; the other is rebellious against Him.

Although truth and falsehood were both introduced to Adam and Eve, the organized form of either, as a religious system, did not commence till a few hundred years after the flood. Nimrod introduced the structured and systematic counterfeit: a polytheistic belief rife with idolatrous rituals and mysteries, wherein man (as Satan taught in the garden), is himself a god or can somehow achieve godhood by his own devices. Flavius Josephus explained that although God had instructed the post-diluvians to send fourth colonies to populate the earth, Nimrod, the son of Ham, encouraged the people to disobey God and to remain in his

kingdom. When God admonished them again, Nimrod reminded the people of the prosperity they enjoyed in the valley of Shinar, which, he argued, was by the work of their own hands not that of God's. Gradually his government turned into tyranny. He coerced the kingdom to depend on his power and dissuaded them from fearing God. He sought to avenge his forefathers whom God had killed in the flood; and lest God should flood the earth again, he built the Tower of Babel that they might survive the waters. Here too, he reintroduced the ancient mysteries which the fallen angels had taught his antediluvian forefathers; thus, the origin of the Babylonian Mysteries.

Conversely, Abraham introduced a structured and systematic approach to truth. There is one eternal God who created all things. He created man in his own image. However, through disobedience man has been separated from God—an issue that only God can resolve. This is the biblical doctrine of total depravity, a core feature of Judeo-Christian theology.

God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one (Ps. 53:2-3).

Although God desires man's fellowship, He cannot fellowship with sinners. Thus, man is separated from God by sin—stranded on the opposite bank of a great gulf. Despite all of man's creativity, goodness, and spiritual quests, we do not have the facility to bridge this gulf. However, because of His love for those created in His own image, God Himself has provided the means for man's recovery and his subsequent restoration to fellowship. This was the work of the Messiah, the Christ—God Himself manifest in the flesh, suffering the penalty on our behalf that we might receive forgiveness via His grace. Both the Old and New Testament speak of this many times.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon

the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this (Isa. 9:6-7).

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opens not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.⁹ And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth (Isa. 53:4-9).

Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:5-11).

It is God's desire that everyone would take advantage of this provision, that we would cross the bridge He has stretched across the gulf. Thus he pleads,

Ho, everyone that thirsts, come ye to the waters, and he that has no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price (Isa. 55:1).

Come. And let him that hear say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

Other than the Christ of God, man has no means to reach God or otherwise please Him. The Messiah himself said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the Life; no man comes unto the Father, but by me*” (Jn. 14:6).

Conversely, Satan’s objective is to convince men to turn from God, to rebel against the salvation God has provided. Knowing man’s innate understanding that there is a Creator and that life is of the spirit, and also knowing our propensity for pride, Satan plays upon our partiality. As in the garden, he took a portion of the truth and offered it up with a special twist. Neither his doctrine nor his tactics have changed. As such, at the root of every world religion is the notion that man, one way or another, is able somehow to reach a state of holiness, nirvana, godhood, union with God, or whatever its particular spiritual objective might be. Simultaneously, every world religion rejects the biblical teaching of total depravity—that man is helplessly separated from God by sin. Every world religion also rejects the doctrine of salvation by grace—that man’s only hope is provided by God Himself through His Christ, and that man must humble himself before the Creator and accept His gift.

To this regard (as far as rejecting the core biblical doctrines of total depravity, redemption, and man’s inability to achieve spiritual fulfillment on his own) every world religion basically teaches the same thing, though employing different processes to achieve the objective . . . self-righteousness, self-contentment.

Sometime ago, I shared the gospel with two highly educated professionals within a week or so of each other, each of whom, after hearing that Jesus was man’s only hope, responded, “That’s depressing.” It was depressing to them because they do not want to believe that man cannot cure himself. Satan understands this and has therefore structured the world religions to satisfy man’s

ego. This mindset exemplifies the fundamental difference between these two belief systems. It is summed up very easily. One believes that man is in sin and separated from God, that wholeness comes solely through the Redeemer, the Christ, whom God has provided. The other believes that sin can be overcome and that man has the capacity for wholeness in and of himself. As such, when the numerous philosophies and religions (which seemingly worship different gods) are reduced to their common denominator, it is this one fundamental thought: Man has the ability within himself to achieve righteousness, salvation, spiritual satisfaction, God's favor, godhood, paradise, nirvana, perfection, or whatever their ideal utopia might be.

This principle holds true whether speaking of Hinduism, Mormonism, Islam, Taoism, the Watch Tower, Moonies, Scientology, Islam, Shintoists, Zoroastrians, Evolutionists or Atheists. It is true of every religion or religious cult you might imagine. Most profess belief in some sort of god, some even profess belief in the one true God, and others believe they themselves are some sort of god; but once the drivel is removed, all share the common doctrine that in one way or another, man is the responsible agent for his own righteousness, wholeness, contentment.

With this in mind, we are ready to approach this section. There are two women present in the next few chapters; each representing one of these two belief systems.

One is the truth of God; and the other is the lie of Satan.

One is clothed with the sun; the other is arrayed in purple, scarlet, gold, silver and costly stones.

One is giving birth to the Savior; the other is killing the saints.

One is persecuted, the other is persecuting.

One is the Mystery of the Kingdom; the other is the Mystery of Babylon.

One represents the instrument of God's divine plan; the other represents the instrument of Satan's master plan.

The Godly Woman and The Dragon 12:1-6

(1) And a great sign was seen in heaven: a woman having been clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. (2) And she was pregnant and screamed suffering birth pains, and being tormented to give birth. (3) And another sign was seen in heaven. And behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his heads seven diadems. (4) And his tail dragged the third part of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who is about to deliver, that he might devour her child when she delivers. (5) And she delivered a male child, who is about to shepherd all the nations with a rod of iron. And her child was caught up unto God and to his throne. (6) And the woman fled into the wilderness, where, there she has a place prepared of God, that there they may nourish her a thousand two hundred and sixty days.

The Godly Woman

The first woman is “*clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.*” By implication, her origins reach all the way back to the garden and the promised redeemer. The Lord told the serpent, “*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; it shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (Gen. 3:15).*” More specifically, this woman in the scene before us represents the Jewish nation, to which the seed, the Messiah, was born. Joseph’s dream sheds light on the imagery of the sun, moon and stars. The sun is Jacob, the moon is Rachael, and the twelve stars the twelve tribes of Israel.

And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? (Gen. 37:9-10)?

The child about to be come forth is the Messiah: “*she was pregnant and screamed suffering birth pains, and being tormented to give birth*” (12:2).

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).

The prophet Micah also foretold of this birth.

But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity. Therefore He will give them up until the time when she who is in labor has borne a child. Then the remainder of His brethren will return to the sons of Israel. And He will arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God. And they will remain, because at that time He will be great to the ends of the earth. This One will be our peace (NASV Mic. 5:2-5).

The “*great red dragon, having seven heads . . . and upon his heads seven diadems*” (12:3) represents the aggregate seven, successive, historic and prophetic world empires; and it represents Satan, the power and inspiration behind these seven kingdoms (12:12-13, 17:12-13).³⁸ The “*ten horns,*” as the angel later explains to John, are future kingdoms that will unite to form the final world empire, the seventh head of the beast (13:1, 17:12; Dan 7:3-7).

John saw the dragon standing before the woman “*that he might devour her child when she delivers*” (12:4). Clearly, Satan

³⁸ It is interesting to note a few things about the dragon in ancient life. The dragon was the most popular symbol of heathen worship; it was used to give honor to various beings and gods. The dragon was also the second of two insignias for the Roman military. The eagle was the primary standard for a legion of soldiers, carried by the aquilifer. The draconari then carried the emblem of a red dragon for each of the ten companies, which comprised the legion.

and his world powers are bent upon destroying the Messiah. It is a dramatic portrayal of the events in Matthew 2:16-18, in which Herod attempts to kill the baby Jesus. The woman fleeing to the wilderness to be protected for 1,260 days is doubtless a reference to Israel's protection during the Great Tribulation, the time of Jacob's trouble. It is the coming persecution and punishment of which Jesus spoke (Mt. 24:15-20).

As in Daniel's prophecy of the 70 weeks in which the gap between the 69th and 70th week is not mentioned, so too, the Church is not portrayed in this scene.³⁹ The Church is a separate body from that of Israel. Both are redeemed by the blood of the Messiah; however, each has received different promises and has different functions in God's plan. At issue is the conflict between the seed of the woman and Satan (Gen. 3:15), the conflict between Messiah and his chosen people versus Satan and his world kingdoms. As such, consistent with all OT Messianic prophecies, the scene jumps from the 69th week directly to the 70th week; from the issues concerning Israel preceding the first coming to the issues concerning Israel preceding the second coming of the Messiah.

Rebellion

The dragon, Satan, "*dragged the third part of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth*" (12:4). Although we cannot know for certain, this apparently speaks to Satan persuading one-third of the angels of heaven to join his rebellion. At first such rebellion sounds astonishing: How could so many angels, living in utopia, serving the Creator, rebel against Him? But then we consider our own darkened, rebellious hearts, and such rebellion not only seems possible, but probable. How many men and women have experienced the grace and longsuffering of the Creator only to curse Him and shake their puny insignificant fists in His face.

Before Satan's rebellion, evil was but an abstract thought, a philosophical possibility. His disobedience put a face to it, made it a tangible reality. It also brought certain aspects of God's character to light. Attributes, of which, creation would have never

³⁹ See comments for The 70th Week, p. 129.

known had evil not been revealed. God's righteousness and goodness were revealed, for now all heaven could see the antithesis. We realized His power, for the mighty Lucifer was defeated. We learned of his justice, for the rebel was condemned. When man (whom God created after His own image) disobeyed as well, even more facets of God's character became known. His grace, tenderness, forgiveness, commitment and more were unveiled. It caused the angels to look on in wonder, confounded that their Creator's interest was so strong that He gave personal sacrifice to rectify the situation (Heb. 2:5-9).

Yet, man still rebels. Speaking to the degree of rebellion antediluvians exhibited, and explaining that man will be this way again at the end of the Age. Paul said,

Knowing God, they did not glorify him or thank him, but became vain in their reasoning and their undiscerning hearts, darkened. Affirming themselves to be wise they became foolish (Ro. 1:21-22).

A conversation I heard some time ago on a popular radio talk show aptly illustrates this point of rejecting God to the point of foolishness. Many archeologists believe Noah's Ark has been found in the mountains of Turkey. Even the Turkish government claims the Ark is there. Whether it has actually been discovered or not is not really pertinent to my point, but the reaction some folks have to even the possibility of finding it is most interesting.

A well-known scientist was discussing the archeological problem presented by certain metals (iron and titanium) found at the site. Because of his refusal to accept the biblical account of a universal flood, and because of his acceptance of the evolution hypothesis, it seemed obvious to him that ancient civilizations could not have known the requisite technology for making such metals. Therefore, he concluded, a better scenario to explain the existence of these metals is that aliens, from somewhere in outer space, built this giant ship, the remnants of which are lodged in the mountains of Turkey. Wow, talk about a leap in logic! This is pure foolishness.

The book of Enoch lends some insight into the antediluvian world. Although not part of Scripture, Enoch's work was esteemed a valid, historic record by ancient Jewish tradition; it

was even found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Jude and Peter, as well as several early Church Fathers (Barnabus, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Origin, and Clement of Alexandria) referenced Enoch. Tertullian set aside an entire chapter defending Enoch's work.

Enoch spoke of the knowledge this antediluvian world had of many subjects, including metallurgy. He explained that two-hundred angels, known as Watchers defiled themselves by leaving their first estate to cohabit with human women. To them a hybrid race of giants was born. The Watchers taught men about metallurgy. They taught about weapons and mirrors, as well as various other crafts and sciences such as herbs and astronomy. The Watchers taught women how to use makeup and how to abort babies. They taught people about certain metaphysical mysteries, about astrology, and how to practice sorcery and incantations (Enoch 7-8).

It was the extent of evil that these Watchers and their offspring, the giants נְפִלִים (*Nephilim*)—a hybrid race of giants—brought and taught to men that caused the Lord to bring the civilization to an end via the flood. Only Noah and his family were saved. No doubt, as Tertullian argued, Noah (Enoch's grandson) brought the book of Enoch with him, thus providing a vivid description of the antediluvian world, as well as the antediluvian prophecies concerning the Messiah and the last days.

Scripture does not tell us much about the Watchers and the Nephilim; but it does acknowledge their presence (Gen. 6:4). However, despite the record of the oldest known document to man; despite the record of Scripture; despite everyone's personal witness as to the metaphysical reality of our own soul and spirit (which predicts the probability of other spirit beings); despite the numerous recorded historical accounts of the flood in other cultures; despite the geological evidence for the flood; despite the witness of Jesus as to the truth of the flood and Noah's Ark; and even despite the presumed discovery of the Ark itself, certain people, even educated people, would rather look to imagined alien beings from a galaxy far, faraway, than to acknowledge the truth right before their eyes.

We have heard various illogical assumptions made by scientists who refuse to believe Scripture (the big bang, organic life springing from inorganic material, the evolution of the

species), but this is by far the wackiest. Refusing to accept the historical and Scriptural account, some of our most intellectual members of society choose rather to believe that beings, from another universe, traveled countless light years in highly sophisticated spaceships and built a primitive boat. Perhaps they were on a fishing trip? It could have been a father and son outing. Perhaps it was a group of space scouts?

Such reasoning is the product of our rebellious and proud hearts. In a final indictment as to the total depravity of humanity, there is yet another insurrection on the horizon. At the end of the utopian, one-thousand year reign of Christ, Satan will once again deceive many, leading a rebellion against the King of kings (Rev. 20:7-9). These rebels will not be among the kingdom's initial inhabitants (those who survived the Great Tribulation), but their children.

Not only does this tell us something about the depravity of the human condition, it tells us something about parenting and the social environment as they relate to shaping a child's morality. Here, in the utopia of the millennial kingdom, with godly parents, godly neighbors, and even the Lord himself walking in their midst, still depravity lurks in the heart of man. Which brings us back to the issue of total depravity. We are sinners, and without divine intervention, we do not have the capacity to do anything but spoil. This, the physical law of entropy, holds true even in the rebellious spiritual universe.

Satan is Cast Out of Heaven 12:7-12

⁽⁷⁾And there was war in heaven—Michael and his angels to war with the dragon and the dragon and his angels warred. ⁽⁸⁾But they did not prevail. Neither was their place found any more in heaven. ⁽⁹⁾And the great dragon was cast out—the old serpent, he that is called the Devil and Satan—the one deceiving the whole world was cast down to the earth and his angels were cast down with him.

⁽¹⁰⁾And I heard a great voice in heaven, saying, “Now has come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ, for the accuser of our brothers is cast down—the one who accuses them day and night before our God. ⁽¹¹⁾And they overcame him because

of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they loved not their life even unto death. ⁽¹²⁾Therefore rejoice, heavens and those dwelling in them. Woe to the earth and to the sea, because the devil is gone down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has but a short time.”

At last Satan is cast out of heaven. He has lost access to the throne of God where he has stood day and night accusing the saints. Because Satan does not lose his access to heaven until the middle of the tribulation, some think he might be present at the judgment of believers, which takes place at the beginning of the tribulation. This, however, is not a likely scenario. Even if he were present he would not be permitted to speak; for “*who shall lay anything against God’s elect? It is God that justifies*” (Rom. 8:33).

This is not a judgment before which unbelievers will appear. There is another tribunal set for them, the Great White Throne judgment, which we will see later. Nor is this a judgment to determine salvation: that was settled at the cross, so that, for believers, the Holy Spirit has proclaimed, “*their sins and their iniquities, I will remember no more*” (Heb. 10:17). This βῆμα (*bēma*) judgment seat is for believers, to settle the issue of rewards (Rom. 14:10). Thus, Paul explains: “*so that everyone may receive the things done while in his body, according to what things he practiced, either good or worthless*” (2 Cor. 5:10).

The Lord Shall Provide 12:13-18

⁽¹³⁾*And when the dragon saw that he was cast down to the earth, he persecuted the woman that brought forth the man-child. ⁽¹⁴⁾And there were given to the woman the two wings of the great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness unto her place, where she is sustained—there for a time, and times, and half a time—from the face of the serpent. ⁽¹⁵⁾And the serpent cast out of his mouth after the woman water like a river that he might cause her to be carried away by the river. ⁽¹⁶⁾And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth and swallowed up the river that the dragon cast out of his mouth. ⁽¹⁷⁾And the dragon was enraged over the woman and went away to*

make war with the rest of her seed—those keeping the commandments of God and having the testimony of Jesus—⁽¹⁸⁾ and he stood upon the sand of the sea.

Now banned from heaven and knowing that his time is short, Satan does everything within his power to exterminate every Jew from the earth. Satan has always sought Israel's destruction; now he proceeds with all the force he can muster. But our Lord is the Covenant Keeping God and He makes provision for His chosen people. As the Lord promised Abraham:

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curses thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12:2-3).

Jesus, reinforced God's promise to Israel when speaking of the Great Tribulation; he said, "*except those days be shortened, there should be no flesh saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened*" (Mt. 24:22). The preservation of Israel, as a people, is a constant theme throughout Scripture. Although the Jewish nation will suffer during this time, in which two-thirds of them perish, God will not allow their extermination.

And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, says the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God (Zach. 13:8-9).

Some suppose the phrase "*the two wings of the great eagle*" (12:14) speaks of the United States assisting the Jews to hide from persecution. That may be, but we really have nothing else to substantiate this opinion. Ultimately the location of their safe harbor and their means to achieve it is not to be known until the time is upon them. What is certain is that Israel, as a race, will be preserved through this time of Jacob's trouble. God has promised their entrance into His coming kingdom and thus, His seal of

protection is granted. Although many will die, the nation as a people will survive.

The Beast with Seven Heads 13:1-10

(1) And I saw a beast ascending from the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns ten diadems, and upon his heads names of blasphemy. (2) And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave to him his power and his throne, and great authority. (3) And one of his heads was as though having been slain to death, but his death-stroke was healed; and the whole earth wondered after the beast. (4) And they worshiped the dragon, because he gave authority to the beast. And they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like unto the beast? And who is able to war with him?"

(5) And a mouth was given to him speaking great things and blasphemies; and authority was given to him to continue forty-two months. (6) And he opened his mouth for blasphemies against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle—those dwelling in heaven. (7) And it was given to him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them. And authority was given to him over every tribe, and people, and tongue, and nation. (8) And all those dwelling on the earth—whose name has not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the one having been slain from the foundation of the world—will worship him. (9) If anyone has an ear let him hear. (10) If anyone is for captivity, to captivity he goes. If anyone will kill with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

The First Beast

Although there is obvious symbolism, very little is left to speculation in that much of it is defined elsewhere. For example, the sea, from which John "*saw the beast ascending*" (13:1), represents unsettled nations, a troubled state of affairs like agitated waves. Later the angel will explain to John that the waters "*are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues*"

(17:15). The “seven heads” (13:1) of the beast are seven kingdoms; “five have fallen, the one is [at the time of the Revelation], the other is not yet come” (17:9-10). Thus, the beast with seven heads represents the historic and prophetic world empires. We are also told the “ten horns . . . are ten kings (13:1, 17:12);” a confederacy of ten nations at the end of the Age that unite to form the final empire. Each of these will be discussed shortly.

Earlier John saw this “great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his heads seven diadems” (12:3) standing before the woman (Israel) in labor that he might destroy the child (Messiah). Now he sees it “ascending from the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns ten diadems (13:1).⁴⁰ Clearly, it is the same beast. The next time he sees this beast a woman is seated atop it, holding the reins. She is the harlot, Mystery Babylon who has been controlling this beast all along (17: 3).

Many understand this first beast (13:1-10) to speak of the antichrist, the ruler of this seventh and final Gentile world empire. This same view understands the second beast (13:11-18) to be the false prophet, the high priest of the new world religion that worships the first beast. However, it must be noted that The Revelation never specifically identifies the first beast as the antichrist, nor the second as the false prophet. Technically, there are many antichrists, which is defined as anyone who denies the incarnation and deity of Christ (1 Jn. 2:18-24, 4:3; 2 Jn. 1:7).

The term αὐτοῦ, the genitive of αὐτός (*autos*) him, lends no clue; for this does not necessarily speak of a person. As a reflexive pronoun *autos* can be him or it depending upon the subject. If the subject is a person *autos* is him, if the subject is a

⁴⁰ The dragon has ten crowns in 13:1 and seven crowns in 12:3 because the new ruler, the antichrist, subdues three of the kings, which the crowns represent. The scene in 13:1 occurs at the beginning of the tribulation, thus ten crowns. Although the scene of the dragon waiting for the child (12:3) partly occurs at Christ’s birth, as the following passages make clear, it fast forwards to the Great tribulation, the last 3½ years of the tribulation: “And the woman fled into the wilderness, where, there she has a place prepared of God, that there they may nourish her a thousand two hundred and sixty days” (12:6). Thus, only seven crowns; for the other three were destroyed at the beginning of the seven-year tribulation.

thing *autos* is it. For example, the same term is used referring to the fig tree in Matthew, “*When its branch is . . .*” (Mt. 24:32).

The beast being described as diverse from the others, lends no clue either. Daniel clearly states this is the case with both the final empire (the federation) and the ruler who will rise to power (the antichrist). The final kingdom itself will be different from the preceding kingdoms, and the king that quickly rises to power will be different as well.

The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, . . . And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first (Dan. 7:23-24).

A slightly different understanding and perhaps more consistent with the text, understands this first beast to be the empire, and the second beast to be the false prophet, the ruler, the antichrist. The details of John’s vision obviously associate this first beast with the four beasts of Daniel’s Vision.⁴¹ Merging the defining features of Daniel’s first three beasts, John’s beast is the fourth beast in Daniel’s vision. John saw a beast that was “*like a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave to him his power and his throne, and great authority*” (13:2). So this is the same empire as Daniel’s fourth and final empire (Dan. 7); and both are the same empire represented by the ten toes in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan. 2). They all speak of the same final world kingdom.

Both Daniel and John were told these beasts represented kingdoms. Daniel saw:

Four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another. The first was like a lion, and had eagle’s wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man’s heart was given to it. And behold another

⁴¹ Note that Daniel’s fourth beast is synonymous with John’s last beast. While John’s beast with the seven heads was a composite of the seven world empires, Daniel’s vision included only the last four kingdoms, from his present timeframe forward.

beast, a second, like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and it had three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh. After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns (Dan. 7:3-7).

In Daniel chapter eight, the angel names the first three kingdoms: Babylon, Media-Persia, and Greece. Although the fourth is not named, it is said to arise from the divided third Grecian kingdom.

Both prophets see this final empire as unique, very different from the other kingdoms. It's display of power causes the people to "worshipped the dragon, because he gave authority to the beast. And they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like unto the beast? And who is able to war with him (13:4)?"

The Times of the Nations

Of particular interest are the "seven heads" (13:1). The seven heads represent seven powerful kingdoms. Later the angel tells John, "five have fallen, the one is (that is, at the time of The Revelation), "the other is not yet come" (Rev. 17:9). As such, this beast is an aggregate view of "the times of the Gentiles" (Lk. 21:24), a period of time that has been confused by some. "The times of the Gentiles" is that time during which the world suffers under one powerful empire after another. The term ἔθνη (ethnōn) gentiles, is often used to reference non-Jews, but it is also properly translated nations. It speaks to people of a common culture or custom. In this context, because it makes reference to specific political kingdoms rather than the generic masses of non-Jews, Nations is more appropriate than the generic Gentiles.

Although the kingdoms which comprise the times of the Gentiles are largely populated by non-Jews—as evidenced by John's seven-headed beast (13 & 17), Nebuchadnezzar's dream

(Dan. 2), and Daniel's visions (Dan, 7 & 8)—at issue in this context are the political kingdoms, the nations. Thus, "*the times of the Nations*" is a more appropriate understanding. Furthermore, in that the first of these kingdoms existed even before God granted the Holy Land to Abraham (and thus, even before Mosaic law), the generic non-Jew usage is clearly inadequate. So too, then, is the idea that the times of the Gentiles refers to Jerusalem suffering Gentile rule since the Babylonian captivity, because this time frame is too narrow.

When John sees this beast again in chapter 17, it is under the control of the woman identified as "*Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of the Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth*" (Rev. 17:5). This is significant for three reasons. It shows that the world empires (represented by the seven heads) are connected; they are all part of the same beast being controlled by the same entity. It identifies the entity controlling these empires. And finally, especially when coupled with the marker *times of the Nations*, it allows us to clearly identify these seven empires.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Daniel's visions, and John's seven-headed beast are all the same topic—a composite sketch of the historic and prophetic *times of the Nations*, a succession of world powers greatly influenced, indeed controlled, by the Babylonian Mysteries.

That "*one of his heads was as though having been slain to death, but his death-stroke was healed*" (13:3) speaks to the current state of the this beast. It is not merely the wounded head (the empirical strength of the Greco-Roman Empire), but the composite beast itself that is killed and then lives again. So that the successive ruling kingdoms of the times of the Nations, which are controlled by the harlot, Mystery Babylon, are currently not wielding their powers. During this parenthetical period (as Christ builds his Church, assembling the elect from all over the world), the ruling power of Mystery Babylon is dormant. But as soon as the Church is complete and taken out of the way, the dormant beast will awaken; and it will arise with even greater strength than it had before.

Many have assumed the seven kingdoms to be Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, Rome, and the revived Roman Empire. However, this has difficulty at four levels:

1. It omits the first world kingdom of Nimrod's Babylon (Gen. 10:6-14).
2. It neglects the historic Talmud references in which Nimrod introduced the ancient antediluvian mysteries to the postdiluvian Babylonians; thus the Babylonian Mysteries.
3. It fails to clarify the interrelationship between the seven kingdoms, the Babylonian Mysteries, and the times of the Nations, for we must reach back to Nimrod's kingdom to make this relationship cohesive. Otherwise, the initiation of both the Babylonian Mysteries and the times of the Nations is nebulous (Rev. 17; Lk. 21:24).
4. It does not coincide well with Daniel's vision in which the final, fierce kingdom rises out of the weakened, four regions, into which the kingdom of Alexander the Great was divided (Dan. 8:21-22; 11:3-35). Daniel does not reference another kingdom intervening between the floundering divided Macedonian kingdom and the final revived kingdom. Although there were many skirmishes for hundreds of years within the divided Macedonian kingdom as the regions struggled for supremacy, the kingdom was never conquered as such. Daniel predicted these struggles (Dan. 11:3-35). First the king of the south would grow strong (fulfilled by Ptolemy I of Egypt); then one of his princes would again control (fulfilled by Seleucus I Nicator). Years later, an alliance would be formed and the daughter of the king of the south would marry the king of the north (fulfilled by Ptolemy II, and Antiochus I, a Seleucus). The marriage and the alliance will fall apart. Her descendent would invade the king of the north (fulfilled when Ptolemy III invaded Syria).

And so the rest of the chapter goes, with power struggles between the various factions. History shows Daniel's predictions happened just as he foretold. The final aspect of these struggles was the Western kingdom (the Roman Republic) flexing its muscles. Daniel spoke of "*the ships of Kittim*" (Dan. 11:30), which would be the Roman powers from the Western region, defeating Antiochus of

Egypt. Although the Roman Republic began to dominate by assuming the leadership role within this divided empire, division continued within the kingdom and the empire slowly fell asleep after the barbarian invasion.

It is important to note that the early Roman leaders did not consider themselves emperors or conquerors, but merely leaders of the republic and heirs to Alexander's kingdom. They looked to Alexander as a role model. The Roman Era of the empire continued to be largely fractured, just as the previous few hundred years had been since Alexander's death. Thus, Daniel viewed the Greco-Roman world as one kingdom that had divided into four weakened parts after the death of Alexander. There were constant struggles, and power shifted from one region to another, until these weakened regions slowly withered, so that in John's vision, the beast appeared dead. It is from this apparently dead empire that the ten nations forming the final kingdom will rise (Dan. 11:36ff).

To gain a clearer understand, we must digress a bit into world history and biblical prophecies. The times of the Gentiles, or the times of the Nations, began with Nimrod (the antithesis and contemporary of Abraham), the first to build a world kingdom.

Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar (Gen. 10:8-10).

Ancient writings show that Nimrod, whose name means *let us rebel*, led a rebellion against God. He encouraged the people of Babel (meaning *confusion*) to build a tower to the heavens that they might make a name for themselves. It is very reminiscent of the original rebel, Satan. According to some historians, such as Flavius Josephus, Nimrod was worshiped as a god; while his mother, Semiramis, to whom he was also married, was worshiped as the mother of god. In some ancient accounts, Nimrod attempted to kill Abraham. Having been warned by an astrologer

that one was coming who would put an end to his idolatry, Nimrod ordered all the infants killed. Abraham's mother escaped. In some versions, years later, Abraham confronted Nimrod to condemn his idolatry. Nimrod attempted to burn Abraham at the stake, but Abraham walked out of the flames unharmed. In some accounts they gathered armies and went to battle.

Whatever the relationship might have been between these two, clearly they were contemporaries and leaders of two very different belief systems: Abraham, the faithful follower of the Lord and the father of the Jewish nation, and Nimrod, the teacher of the idolatrous Babylonian Mysteries.

Enoch tells us the Watchers (the fallen angels who left their first estate to mix with human women), had originally introduced these mysteries (which became the source of great evil) to the antediluvians.⁴² Nimrod had reintroduced these idolatrous mysteries to Babel, the first world kingdom and the beginning of the times of the Nations. The successive world kingdoms also flourished under the influence of these mysteries. The times of the Nations will last until Christ's return, at which time it shall suffer sudden destruction. As such, the seven world kingdoms,

⁴² In this passage from the book of Enoch, the Lord is speaking to Enoch about the Watchers, who had asked him to intercede for them. It should be noted that the Watchers are different from the angels who fell with Satan. Enoch explained that 200 angels banded together. They make a pact to mix with the human women, whom they found very attractive. Their temptation was different from that of Satan, who was filled with pride. These were filled with lust. Perhaps, after seeing the mercy the Lord had shown for Adam, they thought the Lord would have mercy on them as well. However, it was not to be so. The Lord condemned them for having left their first estate and defiling themselves with the women. To these Watchers and the women with whom they mixed, a race of giants (the Nephilim) was born. The Watchers taught the humans about incantations, sorcery, and various sciences, such as metallurgy, astronomy, and herbs. They taught the men about war and the women how to abort babies and how to use makeup. Their offspring, the giants, were exceedingly evil; they practiced vampirism and cannibalism eating both the humans and each other. When these giants died their spirits were bound to the earth until judgment. These are the evil spirits that oppress, torment, and corrupt humanity today (Gen. 6, Enoch 7, 8, 15, 16).

controlled by the Babylonian Mysteries and thereby comprising the times of the Nations, are: Nimrod's Babel, Egypt, Assyria, Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, Media-Persia, Greco-Roman, and the coming revived Greco-Roman Empire.

Ministering during the floundering years of the sixth kingdom (the divided Greco-Roman Empire), Jesus issued a fourfold prophecy to Israel, the fulfillment of which has spanned two millennia. A common feature in prophecy is to mention only the pertinent highlights. The details and events that transpire in the intervening years go unmentioned. It has been likened to viewing mountain peaks from a very long distance. Although there could be scores of miles between the mountains, from a distance each peak ends seamlessly into the next. But for those close to the peaks, and certainly for those between them, the distinction is obvious. Such is the case with these prophecies concerning the last days and the coming of the Messiah. Jesus warned the Israelites that Jerusalem would be destroyed and defiled till the end of the times of the Nations. The Jews would be scattered about the world. There would be many signs of his personal return, and when He returns he would appear in all his glory.

They shall fall to the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the nations, until the times of the nations be fulfilled. And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory (Lk. 21:24-27).

The first two aspects of this prophecy were fulfilled in AD 70, when Titus destroyed Jerusalem. At least 1,100,000 Jews were killed, while some 90,000 were led away captive, scattered around the world where they largely remain to this day. They were to stay in these foreign nations until the time of the end, when the times of the Nations is to be fulfilled. Scripture clearly states that the Jews will be back in the Promised Land at the end

of the Age. They will be there for the Great Tribulation, the time of Jacob's trouble, the Day of the Lord.

The days are coming, says the LORD, that I will bring back from captivity My people Israel and Judah, says the LORD. And I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it (Jer. 30:3).

I will gather them out of all countries where I have driven them in My anger, in My fury, and in great wrath; I will bring them back to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely (Jer. 32:37).

Near the beginning of the seven-year tribulation, the Israelites will be converted. That is, they will come to realize Jesus is their Messiah.

They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me. Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land, with all My heart and with all My soul (Jer. 32:38-41).

Zechariah tells us the Jews will be deeply vexed upon realizing they had rejected and killed their Savior.

And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. (Zech 12:10).

Ezekiel details the events leading up to the Jewish conversion. After their return to the Promised Land, Israel will be attacked by an alliance of armies from the north and south:

Magog,⁴³ Meshech, Gomer,⁴⁴ Togarmah, Persia, Ethiopia and Libya (Ex 38-39). When God immediately and miraculously destroys these invaders, the Jews look to the Lord, having realized their error concerning the Messiah. Speaking directly to these armies, the Lord said:

I will knock the bow out of your left hand, and cause the arrows to fall out of your right hand. You shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured. You shall fall on the open field; for I have spoken, says the Lord GOD. And I will send fire on Magog and on those who live in security in the coastlands. Then they shall know that I am the LORD. So I will make My holy name known in the midst of My people Israel, and I will not let them profane My holy name anymore. Then the nations shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel (Eze. 39:3-7).

In the following verses, Ezekiel speaks of the Jews burning the invader's weapons as firewood for seven-years. Thus, it would appear the invasion, and subsequent Jewish conversion, takes place at the beginning of the seven-year tribulation (Eze. 39:9-10). This would explain Israel's immediate rejection of this antichrist 3½ years later, when he enters their temple claiming to be their Messiah (Dan. 9:27; 2 Thess, 2:4).

These prophecies of the Jews returning to their homeland are being fulfilled even as I write. Clearly, the current Zionist movement should be understood as a sign that the completion of the times of the Nations is imminent.

In 1917, British Field Marshall, Edmund Allenby, won Palestine and Syria from the Turks. The British designated Palestine the national home of the Jews, and widespread, albeit fleeting, support began for a Jewish homeland. By 1944, a small band of Zionist lead by Menachem Begin had established a meager presence in Palestine. By mid 1948, Israel had declared

⁴³ European Scythians, dominant in the region between the Caucasus and Mesopotamia for from 630 to 600 B.C.

⁴⁴ What is now southern Russia.

itself an independent state. Since that day millions have returned. Today, nearly half of the world's 13.3 million Jews live in Israel, with several thousand returning every year.

Also, as prophesied, the world is largely against Israel, deeming it a troublemaker. The Lord warned that when He brought His people back to their land, they would be a source of fear to the surrounding nations, and a hotspot of trouble to the whole world. He also issued a somber warning to those who oppose them.

Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it. . . . It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem (Zech. 12:2-3; 9).

Certainly the world scene is taking shape for the conclusion of the times of the Nations and the soon coming of our Lord.

Revived Greco-Roman Empire

As mentioned earlier, the beast John saw is a composite sketch of the kingdoms in Daniel's vision, comprising all that was notable about them.

And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave to him his power and his throne, and great authority (13:2).

The mouth of a lion speaks of the ability (like that of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian Empire) to relentlessly seize its prey. The feet of a bear are the power and strength of the Media-Persian Empire. The leopard is the agility and blood thirst of the Macedonian Empire under Alexander the Great (Dan. 7:3-6).

The rough male goat is the king of Greece: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. As for that which was broken, in the place where four stood up, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not with his

power. In the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce face, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up. His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper and do [his pleasure]; and he shall destroy the mighty ones and the holy people. Through his policy he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and in [their] security shall he destroy many: he shall also stand up against the prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand (WEB, Dan. 8:21-25).

As is clearly stated, the *male goat* was the Macedonian kingdom. The *great horn* was Alexander the Great, its first king. The four kingdoms that stood up in its place are the divided territories of Alexander's Macedonian Empire. Then in the last days "*a king of fierce face, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up.*" This is the antichrist, the ruler of the revived Greco-Roman Empire. Later, when John sees the beast again, the angel gives him a riddle to solve:

Here is the mind that has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings. The five have fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come, and when he comes he must remain a little while. And the beast that was, and is not, he is also the eighth and is of the seven; and he goes into destruction. And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings, who have received no kingdom as yet; but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. These have one mind and they give their power and authority to the beast (Rev. 17:9-13).

The "*ten horns*" (13:1) in John's vision correspond to the "*ten toes*" in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan. 2:41ff) and the "*ten horns*" of the fourth beast in Daniel's vision (Dan. 7:23ff). This confederacy of ten nations from the ruins of the ancient Greco-Roman world unite to form the final world empire. Because Daniel's visions are so important to understanding the beasts, the end times and The Revelation itself, it is well worth each reader's time to recall the book in its entirety.

The current attempt to unite modern Europe is strong. The rapid growth of global terrorism and the widespread stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction make this union even more urgent. The European political powers and the Bank of Europe are especially keen for the union; for it seems absolutely necessary to their economic survival. There is little doubt, even among unbelievers, that this union is coming. But what the world fails to realize, even though it has been clearly warned, is that out of this united European community will rise a world leader such as the world has never seen.

A succession of devious, wicked emperors—some virtually psychotic—caused the Roman Empire to crumble from within, leading to its eventual demise. Upon the heels of these wicked rulers, Constantine divided the kingdom into the Eastern and Western spheres. In time the Western Empire fell prey to the barbarian invasions. In AD 476, the Western political powers were dethroned. The Eastern political powers continued on till the Ottoman invasion and capture of Constantinople in 1453.

Yet, even as early as the Western region's collapse, politically speaking, Roman Catholicism was well on its way to holding the real power over the empire. Although the barbarous hordes had deposed the weakened imperial order, their time was short lived. The empire was soon divided into smaller political fiefdoms that bowed to the overbearing mystical powers of the Pontiff of Roman Catholicism, which itself, had been invaded and overrun by the Babylonian priesthood.⁴⁵ Via its superstitious religious rites, in which it combined Christianity with the Babylonian mysteries, the Papacy quickly conquered the dominion of men's souls and subsequently, retained authority over this fractured empire; and it did so with a hand as powerful as any Caesars'. One regional king after another bent his knee, humbled before the Holy See.

We speak of the fallen Roman Empire; but is it actually dead? In truth, all that has fallen is the martial, Imperial Rule. The fractured kingdom still exists. Divided? Yes. Stripped of world dominance? Somewhat, certainly as to the overpowering military sense; but considerable economic power is still wielded from

⁴⁵ See notes on the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira.

Europe. The major banking families still reside in Europe, and although the ancient aristocracies remain behind closed doors, they have not died out, nor have they stopped brandishing their power. In recent years their powers have grown more coordinated. Since 1954 an elite group of some 120 European aristocrats (and various other movers and shakers) have periodically gathered to discuss the state of world's current condition and their desired agenda for its future. They are referred to as the Bilderberg Group, because their first meeting took place at the Builderberg Hotel in Holland. It is not my desire to promote conspiracy theories, but simply to point out that powerful people exist and they do have a global agenda.

The fact is, this fractured ancient empire continues to strongly influence a vast number of colonies and provinces throughout the world. Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, and the American continents are essentially extensions of this fractured empire. Even portions of Asia are greatly influenced by some of these European countries. Add to this those nations that suffer the spiritual rule of the papal bull and the tentacles of this sleeping giant are astounding.

For all practical purposes, the influence exerted by these nations of the fractured ancient empire in matters of global politics, economics, religion, and even social life, has never ceased to exist. The ancient Greco-Roman world is still apparent in our language, our legal system, our engineering, our architecture and even in our arts and sports. Currently this dormant, seemingly dead, empire is but hiding in the shadows, as a puppeteer manipulating the strings from behind the curtain.

The New World Order

When it begins, ten nations from the peoples of the ancient Greco-Roman world (the kingdom that appeared to be dead) will unite to form one government. Some think these ten nations could be the ten primary kingdoms into which the Roman Empire eventually divided after the barbarian invasions: Thus, they would be the kingdoms of the Huns, the Ostrogoths, the Visigoths, the Franks, the Vandals, the Sueves and Alans, the Burgundians, the Odoacer provinces, the Saxons, and the Lombards. Although these began as small kingdoms and scattered fiefdoms, today

these peoples are organized into economic and political nations that constitute much of the ancient Greco-Roman world.

Whatever the final ten nations might be, clearly they will rise from the sleeping Greco-Roman world. They will hand everything over to an amazing, promising leader, but he will be a false prophet, the dreaded antichrist. Something will happen that causes him to depose three of the ten leaders (Dan. 7:8-24); thus, the dragon with seven heads has ten diadems when the antichrist comes to power at the beginning of the seven-year tribulation (13:1), but there are only seven diadems when he pursues Israel 3½ half years later to begin the great tribulation (12:3).

In line with this coming world kingdom, the current Western push for a new world order (which is code talk for a one world government) is quite fitting. As the wounds of this fractured, near dead empire heal, this union will grow more feasible. Similar to the backstage preparations for a magnificent opera (stage hands placing props, others grooming the actors, musicians tuning their instruments, the director still in his dressing room as yet unseen, waiting to make a grand entrance), so, too, is the current world condition. Over the last several decades (a very short period of time when compared to the two and a half millennia since Daniel's prophecy) we have heard considerable rumbling backstage, so that we know the curtain is about to rise.

While some of this rumbling is military in nature, some is economical, some religious, some social, and some political. The effects of industrialization, free trade, and the global economy cannot be overlooked. Indeed, each of the rumblings necessarily blend, each having significant impact upon the others.

The Brussels Treaty of 1948 was a significant rumble. What began as the military cooperation between five European nations soon developed into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which was established specifically to address the threat of communist attacks in Europe, the North Atlantic, and the Mediterranean. Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Portugal signed the original treaty. The United States signed in 1949; Greece and Turkey joined in 1951; West Germany in 1955; Spain in 1982.

The treaty states that an armed attack on any one of these nations will be considered an attack on all of them. Other portions of the treaty cover military, political and economic cooperation between the counties. In addition to the primarily military-oriented NATO, significant economic bonds also sprang from the chaos created in the aftermath of WWII. Many European countries desired new forms of international cooperation in order to revive their war-torn nations. The formation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was the first step. Established in 1952, the ECSC integrated the coal and steel supplies of six nations: France, West Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. In 1957 these same six nations signed the Treaty of Rome, creating the European Economic Community (EEC), or what we generally refer to as the Common Market.

The goals of the Common Market are to eliminate tariffs between the participating countries, to develop common policies for agriculture and social welfare programs, to establish free movement of the labor forces, to promote transport and free trade, and to abolish trusts and cartels. As such, the union—although primarily economically driven—is highly political in nature.

Another very significant rumble was heard in 1960 with the establishment of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). With this, Austria, Britain, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, and Switzerland formed a customs union and trading group to promote free trade between members. A year later, Finland joined and then Iceland in 1970.

In 1967, the executive body of the European Free Trade Association officially merged with the European Economic Community. Although Great Britain broke away from the EFTA in 1973 to join the EEC, and Iceland and Denmark did the same in 1981, the groups are not adversarial. The EEC even continues to maintain agreements with individual EFTA counties.

Another important prop on this world stage was set in place with the 1979 European Currency Unit (ECU). Hoping to promote economic integration, several western European nations adopted the ECU as a common monetary system. To establish the ECU as a measure for translating other currencies and to facilitate a central banking system between countries, each country placed

20% of its gold or currency into a fund for which they received an equal amount of European Currency Units.

The current undeniable reality of growing global terrorism, which is a product of the predicted global hatred of Israel, will bring Europe even closer together. As global tension escalates from civil unrest, the threat of thermonuclear war, the threat of nuclear power plant meltdowns, the spread of crime, terrorism and territorial wars, it will not be much longer, I suspect, before the world is clambering for someone to solve these disturbances. The answer will come in the form of a one-world government and its promising, charismatic leader.

Prior to WWII Europe suffered many internal conflicts, with various nations warring with each other. The foundation of the European Economic Community has brought a certain degree of stability to Europe, so that these struggles have disappeared, at least in Western Europe. Thus, it is very interesting that in October, 2012, the Noble Peace Prize was awarded to the European Union for its efforts in this regard.

The Role of the United States

The United States is not specifically mentioned in Scripture. At the very least, if there are references to the States they are not presently apparent. Although the United States is currently the dominant world power, this power could easily shift to Europe by any of several scenarios. However, whether the United States suffers a catastrophic economic lose, a devastating military defeat, is crippled by terrorism, or we simply form a submissive alliance with the powerful united Europe, one thing is certain, global power will shift to a united Europe, to ten nations arising from the ancient, divided kingdom of Alexander the Great.

This reality will not set well with many, but it is hard to image another outcome. Aside from the United States' military might (which must not be overrated, for advanced technologies are increasingly available to all, and others certainly have the potential to muster more troops), what makes us such a global power is economics. But this is changing. There are three legs to a strong economy: manufacturing, marketing, and service. In recent years, our manufacturing industry has dwindled to near non-existence. We are not as economically viable as we were

only a few decades ago, when we actually produced the majority of the world's goods.

What is left is a vulnerable economy consisting largely of the service and marketing industries, and a widespread, unhealthy, and unrealistic reliance on the fragile and often fraudulent stock market—which is little more than a fickle paper system revolving around speculation, hearsay, creative financial statements, investment guilds, and corrupt insider trading. As we have already witnessed, this house of cards could crumble in a heartbeat. Without a strong manufacturing industry it will take very little to shift economic power, and thus global power, to a united Europe.

Even in their developing stages with economic problems of their own, the current European alliances wield significant power. While the United States is merely some 5% of the world's population, the collective western Europe is about 12%; include the European satellites, and their influence has the potential to be overwhelming. The future, further tightening of their bonds will result in a formidable world power. Add to this the growing disdain many Europeans already have for the United States' dominant global presence, and the potential military power Europe will wield once they unite, and it is not hard to imagine a dramatic shift in the current state of global superpowers.

Although we relish the thought of our independence, historically speaking, American is but an extension of the old sleeping ancient empire, and it is not hard to imagine our reuniting with the fold once the trouble starts. It is interesting, to say the least, that recent investigations into the bloodlines of the presidents of the United States revealed that all but one (Martin Van Buren) is progeny of European royalty: 34 claim Charlemagne as an ancestor, 33 are related to both Charlemagne and Alfred the Great, 19 descend from King Edward III, and all but one is related to the King John "Lackland" Plantagenet, signer of Magna Carta. While many discard offhand this as nothing abnormal, no one, to my knowledge has yet to calculate the odds.

Certainly the United States' link to Europe is alive, and any number of events, or combinations thereof, could seriously weaken our current superpower status, thereby bringing about a submissive reunion with our European ancestry; such events could

be increased terrorist attacks in our homeland, the widespread use of atomic or biological weapons, crop failures, a failing stock market, increased oil prices, or any of numerous other economic or military concerns. The fact is, as loose and unbinding as it may be, our participation in NATO is already a step in that direction.

As for Asia and its world power status, it has is not been forgotten. As we shall see later, a large Asian army will cross the Euphrates River to war against the coming world empire (Rev. 16:12).

The Second Beast 13:11-18

(11) And I saw another beast ascending from the earth. And he had two horns like unto a lamb, but he spoke as a dragon. (12) And, in his sight, he exercises all the authority of the first beast. And he makes the earth and those dwelling therein to worship the first beast, whose death-stroke was healed. (13) And he does great signs, and makes fire to come down out of heaven upon the earth in the sight of men. (14) And he deceives those dwelling on the earth by reason of the signs that were given him to do in the sight of the beast, telling those dwelling on the earth to make an image to the beast who has the wound of the sword and lived. (15) And it was given unto him to give spirit to the image of the beast, even so that the image of the beast could speak, and cause that as many as should not worship the image of the beast should be killed. (16) And he prepares all (the small and the great, both the rich and the poor, and the free and the slaves) so that they will give to them a mark on their right hand, or upon their forehead; (17) so that no one would be able to buy or to sell, except those having the mark—the name of the beast or the number of his name.

(18) Here is wisdom. The one having understanding let him count the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.

The Antichrist/False Prophet

It seems fairly clear that the first beast (13:1-10) speaks of the empire rather than the ruler of the empire, whom is generally

referred to as the antichrist. This second beast, however, does appear to be the antichrist, the false prophet, the tyrant controlling the empire. Speaking of the ruler of the final kingdom Daniel said:

He shall be diverse from the former, . . . speaks words against the Most High, and . . . Shall think to change the times and the law; . . . A king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, . . . And his power shall be mighty, . . . and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper and do his pleasure; and he shall destroy the mighty ones and the holy people. . . . and shall obtain the kingdom by flatteries. And the overwhelming forces shall be overwhelmed from before him, . . . And after the league made with him he shall work deceitfully; for he shall come up, and shall become strong, with a small people. In time of security shall he come even upon the fattest places of the province; and he shall do that which his fathers have not done, nor his fathers' fathers; he shall scatter among them prey, and spoil, and substance (ASV Dan. 7:24-25; 8:23-24; 11:21-24).

He will indeed be special, both powerful and flattering, so humble, yet so bold, so generous yet so fierce, able to achieve marvelous feats; but it is Satan that gives him his power. Thus, some believe he might actually be the son of Satan—a hybrid born of an unholy union between Satan, or another demonic entity, and a human female. As incredible as this may sound, it is not without precedent. Before the flood, a certain band of angels (whom Enoch called Watchers) left their first estate to cohabit with human women. To them a hybrid race of giants was born (Gen 6, Jude 1:6, Enoch 7, 8). Moses spoke of them.

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. . . . There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown. And GOD

saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually (Gen. 6:1-5).

Enoch spoke of them in detail:

It happened after the sons of men had multiplied in those days that daughters were born to them, elegant and beautiful. And when the angels, the sons of heaven, beheld them, they became enamored of them, saying to each other, Come, let us select for ourselves wives from the progeny of men, and let us beget children. Then their leader Samyaza said to them; I fear that you may perhaps be indisposed to the performance of this enterprise; and that I alone shall suffer for so grievous a crime. But they answered him and said; we all swear; and bind ourselves by mutual execrations, that we will not change our intention, but execute our projected undertaking. Then they swore all together, and all bound themselves by mutual execrations. Their whole number was two hundred, who descended upon Ardis, which is the top of mount Armon. . . . Then they took wives, each choosing for himself; whom they began to approach, and with whom they cohabited; teaching them sorcery, incantations, and the dividing of roots and trees. And the women conceiving brought forth giants, whose stature was each three hundred cubits. These devoured all which the labor of men produced; until it became impossible to feed them; when they turned themselves against men, in order to devour them; and began to injure birds, beasts, reptiles, and fishes, to eat their flesh one after another, and to drink their blood (Enoch 7).

We should note that although the נִפְלִיִּים (*Nephilim*) giants first appeared in the antediluvian world, Moses tells us they returned after the flood: “*There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that*” (Gen. 6:4). Various biblical passages (as well as texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls) speak of several kinds of giants in the post-diluvian world: Nephilim, Rephaim, Zuzims, Emims,

and others.⁴⁶ Genesis speaks of these giants during the time of Sodom and Gomorrah, and then again, hundreds of years later, when Israel encounters them several times in the Promised Land. When Moses sent spies to evaluate Canaan, they returned with the terrifying report of Nephilim inhabiting the land.

The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that eats up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of great stature. And there we saw the Nephilim, the sons of Anak, who come of the Nephilim: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight (NASV Num. 13:32-33).

In that the original hybrid race of Nephilim was destroyed in the flood, and their fathers, the Watchers, were bound in darkness according to Enoch “for seventy generations underneath the earth, even to the day of judgment” (Enoch 10:15), how these new species of giants returned after the flood we are not told. All we know is that they were present.

Could it be that other heavenly beings (perhaps some who followed Satan’s rebellion) assumed human form, like the Watchers had done, and mixed with humanity as well? Perhaps, but there is another possibility, and perhaps it is more probable. Enoch tells us that while the Watchers are reserved to darkness underneath the earth, the spirits of their offspring, the hybrid Nephilim, remain earthbound. Then a curious comment is made: “Evil spirits shall proceed from their flesh.”

Now the giants, who have been born of spirit and of flesh, shall be called upon earth evil spirits, and on earth shall be their habitation. Evil spirits shall proceed from their flesh, because they were created from above; from the holy Watchers was their beginning and primary foundation. Evil spirits shall they be upon earth, and the spirits of the wicked shall they be called. The habitation of the spirits of heaven shall be in heaven; but upon earth shall be the

⁴⁶ Gen. 14:5; Numbers 13:26-33; Deut. 2:10; Josh. 11:22, 14:15; 1 Chron. 11:15, 23; 2 Sam. 21:19-20, 23:13; Job 16:4.

habitation of terrestrial spirits, who are born on earth (Enoch 15:8).

Could it be that these evil spirits, these off-springs of the Watchers are able, like their celestial fathers, to father terrestrial hybrid beings as well? Thus, the postdiluvian giants. Whatever the origin of the postdiluvian giants, we know they existed. But there is yet another, more pressing consideration, one that has immediate implication for our current generation. Consider the following issues.

- There is precedent for the existence of hybrid demonic/human creatures. Such creatures were present before the flood and at Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 6; Duet. 2:10).
- The last days will be as the days of Noah and Sodom and Gomorrah (Lk. 17:16; Jd. 1:7): People living as though judgment would never befall them, widespread immorality, and among hybrids living among them.
- The antichrist will be a wonderworking powerful ruler, like none before him (13:13).
- When the angel told Daniel about the ten toes mixed with iron and clay (which represented ten nations that would unite to form the final Gentile world kingdom), he offered a simple, yet profound, explanation: *“they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay (Dan 2:40-43).⁴⁷*

⁴⁷ As many have noted, this passage and the phrase is not easily understood, but it definitely speaks of something different from the original breed; something so dissimilar to *“the seed of men”* that the two cannot merge properly. Barnes noted that the term *עֲנָשׁ* (*enash*) man, often speaks of the inferior class versus those of nobility or greatness (e.g. Isa. 2:9, 5:15; Prov. 8:4). He also noted that *עָנָה* (*anash*) is the root to the term for being sick, ill at ease, incurable. He thought perhaps this could speak of feebleness or inferiority, as if referring to an intermingling with a race inferior to the original stock. However, the notion of one race of humanity being so inferior that it does not breed well with another is not consistent with Scripture, science, or

Considering that: 1) the antediluvian Watchers had mixed with human women; 2) the Nephilim appeared both before and after the flood; 3) as it was in the days of Noah and Sodom and Gomorrah; 4) the weakened final kingdom will be so due to mixing with the seed of men—could it be that another demonic, hybrid race will emerge to rule the final kingdom, a race from which the antichrist will arise? We do have sufficient reasons to speculate the antichrist might be something other than purely human.

Beyond the signs and wonders, and the flatteries (in which the antichrist will appear to fulfill the world's hopes and desires, telling them what they want to hear), he will have a wondrous presence with powers issued by Satan himself. He will have the ability to work great signs, even to make fire come down from heaven, so that many will be deceived and worship the beast as if it were God.

Given the times in which we live, with our advanced science and technology, with skeptics and atheists at every turn, impressing these people is not insignificant. But what condition could make skeptics and hardened atheists suddenly turn to religion so that they worshiped both the beast and the dragon (13:4)?

Miraculous activities alone will not convince man's stubborn heart; some men certainly, but not the majority of the masses. We saw this with the real Christ of God. Although Paul did foresee that because these subjects of the coming empire would refuse to receive "*the love of the truth, that they might be saved. . . . God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie*" (2 Th. 2:10-12); even so, the circumstance by which they are duped must be spectacular. There must be something, some provision beyond mere miraculous activity, that seals the deal as it were,

common practice. Scripturally, and scientifically, we are all of the same gene pool. In the practical sense, we know all the races intermingle just fine; so much so that often our most talented persons are of mixed races. Furthermore, whatever this weakened mixture is, it is such that was not present in the previous empires.

something beyond what any skeptic might perceive as illusion, as mere magician's trickery.⁴⁸

Of course, what I am leading up to is speculation; but it is based on both biblical precedent and current cultural beliefs. In recent years, the worldwide fixation on advanced alien life forms visiting earth from faraway galaxies has become a phenomenon on several levels, so that the notion of extraterrestrial beings is part of popular culture. There is increased interest in UFOs, alien abductions, and the archeological etchings of ancient cultures, which seem to suggest they experienced flying crafts and heavenly beings. Many credible people such as policemen, pilots, and even astronauts have reported UFO sightings. The mysterious 1947 crash in Roswell, New Mexico, still has people wondering.

The government's covert UFO investigations, which are now public knowledge, provided fodder for many conspiracy theorists. The unresolved mysteries of the great pyramids, Stonehenge and crop circles have piqued the interest of many scientists. Sci-fi books, motion pictures, and television programs about aliens, vampires, werewolves, and humans with superpowers are produced by the dozens. Religious cults are formed, anticipating imminent contact with extraterrestrial beings. Even the stoic scientific community listens for celestial radio waves with giant antennas that, perchance, they might intercept signs of intelligent life somewhere in the cosmos.

⁴⁸ It is not unprecedented that God should send forth such a delusion toward those who continue to reject the truth. Due to the hardness of their hearts, He gives them up in righteous judgment to Satan's delusions. We see this with the antediluvians: "*Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator*" (Rom. 1:24-25). King Ahab was also given over to a lie (1Ki 22:22-23). So too was Israel; thus, God commanded Isaiah, "*Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed*" (Isa. 6:9-10). Although the antediluvians followed their deception to destruction, God has a covenant with the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; so that, while they shall suffer greatly for following their hardened hearts and the subsequent deception, in the end, they will see their error and turn to the truth (Eze. 39:27-28; 2 Cor. 3:12-15).

It is a perfect scenario for the great lie. People are primed to believe in the reality of alien and hybrid life forms. People are primed to believe in, and expect, a new world order; even our politicians speak of it as if it is inevitable. This, atop growing civil unrest on a global scale, worldwide economic recession and depression, tension in the Middle East, the threat of nuclear destruction, and frequent natural disasters creating food and water shortages, provide a perfect setting for the global initiative, the new world order.

When the Church is suddenly raptured, the subsequent chaos has the world frantically looking for leadership, looking for answers. Enter the great lie: alien demonic hybrids, posing as friendly, advanced alien beings from a faraway galaxy, sporting advanced technology and powers that seem to manipulate the laws of physics. Having been cultivated, perhaps for generations, they will be more refined than the gross antediluvian giants. They will be more human than the theatrical ET version of aliens. Some of these hybrids are likely even to pass as human. Their leader, the wonder-working antichrist, will be hailed as a Savior, a god from an advanced civilization far, far away. He will tell the people what they want to hear, what they are primed to hear.

Again, this concept of demonic/human hybrids is speculation. While there is precedent for such a scenario, and even some passages that seem to suggest the possibility, there are no Scriptures that clearly state this is the case. Thus, it should not be understood as gospel. What is not speculation is that the new world order, a world empire is coming. The population, at large, will welcome it. It will be ruled by an evil, deceptive tyrant empowered by Satan himself. Today his origin and identity remain a mystery, but this is written that those who find themselves suddenly thrust into the coming global kingdom of antichrist might beware.

The world leader (whether we call him by the name antichrist, false prophet, or both) will possess an unparalleled charismatic political prowess to facilitate his rise to prominence. Daniel gives a graphic portrayal of his winsome, yet forceful personality. He is a self-deceived megalomaniac, filled with flatteries and promises for all, as well as war and murder for those who dare to offend him.

And at the latter end of their rule, when the transgressors have reached their full measure, a king of bold countenance, one who understands riddles, shall arise. His power shall be great, and he shall cause fearful destruction, and shall succeed in what he does, and destroy mighty men and the people of the saints. By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall magnify himself. Without warning he shall destroy many; and he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes; but, by no human hand shall he be broken. The vision of the evenings and the mornings, which has been told, is true; but seal up the vision, for it pertains to many days hence (Dan. 8:23-26).

The king will do according to his will; and he will exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvelous things against the God of gods . . . whosoever acknowledges him he will increase with glory; and he shall cause them to rule over many, and shall divide the land for a price (Dan. 11:36, 39).

Of course his boasting and flamboyant talk will be backed up by his ability to perform various signs and wonders. Not only will his charisma and abilities attract the masses, but the Holy Spirit will no longer be convicting man's conscience, thereby allowing their delusions to magnify (2 Th. 2:1-12).

As a postscript to this topic, I believe the notion of the pope being the false prophet and Roman Catholicism's being the harlot in chapter 17 (as supposed by many) can be ruled out with certainty. This is unfounded and causes undue schism within the Church. Certainly there are differences between Protestant and Roman Catholic theologies—differences that will not be settled until the Lord returns; but both systems (aside from nominal apostates within each) hold to the core doctrines of the gospel (i.e. the virgin birth, deity, sacrificial death, physical resurrection, and the return of our Lord Jesus Christ). Although the prophetic Thyatiran Church Age (which we understand to be Roman Catholicism) was seduced by the harlot, still the church of Thyatira has some redeeming value and is even praised for having last works greater than the first (2:19). Furthermore, the prophetic

Church period of Sardis, which represents the Reformation period from which the Protestant movement arose, is censored more severely than is Thyatira.

666

“Here is wisdom. The one having understanding let him count the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man and his number is six hundred and sixty-six” (13:18). As to the meaning of the number 666, we can only speculate. However, one thing is certain; the closer we get to the end, the more clearly we see and understand, until at last, once the Church is raptured, those who had learned and then believed these passages will recognize with certainty the meaning of 666.

About AD 180 Irenaeus, student of Polycarp, who himself was a pupil of John the Revelator, addressed the identity and the mystical number of the beast:

We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For that was seen not very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian’s reign.⁴⁹

144,000 Evangelists

(14:1) And I watched, and behold, the Lamb standing on the mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand, having his name and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads. (2) And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters, and like the sound of loud thunder. And the sound that I heard was like the harpist harping with their harps; (3) and they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. But no one could learn the song except the hundred and forty-four thousand—those having been redeemed out of the earth. (4) These are those who were

⁴⁹ Ante-Nicene Fathers. The Writings of the Fathers between AD 80 and 325 Volume I. *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, book V.

not defiled with women, for they are chaste. These are those following the Lamb wherever he goes. These were purchased from among men—first fruits unto God and unto the Lamb. ⁽⁵⁾And in their mouth was found no lie. They are unblemished.

God is faithful. He does not leave the world without witness. Even during this time of gross satanic influence, He goes to great length to assure there are preachers to speak the truth. Unlike the ministry of the two witnesses (which is seemingly directed primarily toward Israel to which they shine like a beacon of hope, 11:3 ff), these 144,000 Jewish evangelists will win converts of many nations and tongues (7:9).

Earlier, they were chosen and sent forth to do the Lord's bidding (7:1-8). Now their mission is complete and they are translated to glory, to stand before Him whom they had so diligently proclaimed.

Four Messengers 14:6-13

⁽⁶⁾And I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having eternal good tidings to proclaim unto those dwelling on the earth, and unto every nation and tribe and tongue and people, ⁽⁷⁾saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory; for the hour of his judgment is come; and worship the one who made the heaven, and the earth, and sea and fountains of waters."

⁽⁸⁾And another, a second angel, followed saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, that has made all the nations to drink of her wine of the wrath of her fornication."

⁽⁹⁾And another angel, a third, followed them saying with a loud voice, "If any man worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or upon his hand, ⁽¹⁰⁾he also will drink of the wine of God's anger—having been unmixed in the cup of His vengeance and will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. ⁽¹¹⁾And the smoke of their torment goes up unto the ages of the ages, and they have no rest day and night—those worshiping the beast and his image, even if anyone receives the mark of his

name. ⁽¹²⁾*Here is the patience of the saints—those keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.*”

⁽¹³⁾*And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write, Blessed are the dead—those dying in the Lord from henceforth. Yes, says the Spirit, so that they will rest from their labors, for their works follow with them.”*

Wrath, Judgment and Grace

We hear four voices and four messages. Three voices are heavenly angelic beings and one is the Lord himself. As the first angel flies through heaven John hears him pleading, *“Fear God and give him glory; for the hour of his judgment is come” (14:7).*

The second angel follows closely behind, proclaiming *“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great” (14:8).* For various reasons, many locations have been suggested as to the location of this *Fallen Babylon the Great*: Rome, Jerusalem, Mecca, the rebuilt ancient city of Babylon, even New York City. However, it is possible, and quite probable, that this fallen Babylon is not a literal city but the ancient religious system, which has controlled these empires.⁵⁰ Whatever this Babylon might be, when the time of its demise comes, those present at the time will know. The third angel completes the procession of heavenly messengers; his is a voice of warning. Anyone who worships the beast and his image, or receives his mark will experience the wrath of God.

The fourth voice is that of the Lord himself. His is a voice of comfort, giving assurance to those who heeded the preceding warnings; those who courageously withstand the demonic spurn of their tempter; those who lose their lives for their faith. Vehement hatred toward God and his followers has been a mainstay of history, but never with such intensity. During the Great Tribulation, the temptation to succumb to the evil powers will be so fierce and so overwhelming that the Lord has promised a special blessing to those who resist unto death.

Blessed are the dead—those dying in the Lord from henceforth. Yes, says the Spirit, so that they will rest from their labors, for their works follow with them (14:13).

⁵⁰ See comments on chapter 12 concerning two religions (pp. 159-163).

Note the difference in usage between two similar terms in verse 10: “*the wine of God’s anger*” and “*the cup of His vengeance*” (14:16). Although both can be translated as anger or wrath, they convey slightly different meanings. The term θυμός (*thymos*) in the phrase *the wine of God’s anger* emphasizes the emotional response of anger, the passion, the wrath; whereas the term ὀργή (*orgē*) in the phrase “*cup of vengeance*” speaks to the indignation, the resultant judicious action of His anger. God’s wrath is justified. Righteous anger is justified. God’s righteousness allows Him to express His wrath, to act upon it as He sees fit. Of course, man is not so. Even the redeemed are yet sinners, and though we might experience a hint of righteous anger, we do not have the judicial right to act upon it; for those with whom we are angry are we, we are they, for we are all yet sinners.

Also note the distinction between those worshipping the beast and those merely yielding to his power that they might survive; there is none: “*they have no rest day and night—those worshipping the beast and his image, even if anyone receives the mark of his name*” (14:11). Thus, those standing at the judgment hoping to plead ignorance, or weakness, or cowardliness, or coercion, shall have no case. They are complicit offenders.

The Harvest is Here 14:14-20

⁽¹⁴⁾*And I watched, and behold, a white cloud; and on the cloud one sitting like unto a son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and a sharp sickle in his hand.*

⁽¹⁵⁾*And another angel went forth out of the temple crying with a loud voice to the one sitting on the cloud, “Send forth your sickle and reap, because the hour to harvest has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.”* ⁽¹⁶⁾*And the one sitting on the cloud thrust his sickle over the earth and the earth was harvested.*

⁽¹⁷⁾*Another angel went forth out of the temple, which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.* ⁽¹⁸⁾*“And another angel went forth out of the altar, one having authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one having the sharp sickle, saying, Send forth your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are ripe.”* ⁽¹⁹⁾*And the angel thrust his sickle into the earth*

and gathered the vine of the earth and cast it into the great winepress of the vengeance of God. ⁽²⁰⁾ And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the winepress, as far as even the horses' bridles, from a thousand and six hundred furlongs.⁵¹

Armageddon

Herein is a preview of the infamous Battle of Armageddon (16:16-21, 19:17-21). If it were not such a pathetic commentary on our inability to convey God's Word, it would almost be amusing to hear the biblically ignorant speak of Armageddon. I have yet to hear one of them have even a portion of the prophecy correct. And the amazing thing is that they discuss it with such intensity and concern. Not being wise or interested enough to simply go to the source of the prophecy, they are satisfied to contend over the finer points of their ignorance.

In their decided ignorance, the mere mention of the term Armageddon elicits mystical hyperbole and images of the end of the world; wherein, of course, they have missed both the purpose and the process of the event. But we also find this a great common ground for evangelism; for herein we have the opportunity to explain exactly what this coming event is.

Simply stated, far from being the end of the world, the battle of Armageddon is a deliverance. It is the event at which the Lord returns to deliver the Jews, and the world, from its captivity under the times of the Gentiles. At the end of the seven-year tribulation, the armies of the world will gather to battle against the tyrant who has failed to live up to his promises.

And at the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him: and the king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over (Dan. 11:40).

And the sixth angel poured out his bowl upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that

⁵¹ A furlong is about 670 feet, so that 1,600 furlongs is about 184 miles.

the way of the kings of the east might be prepared (Rev. 16:12).

What these armies do not realize is that the Lord Himself has drawn them there for His own battle. With the armies of the world gathered for war, the Lord suddenly appears in the heavens. No doubt the warriors redirect their efforts, waving their pitiful fists in his face and firing their feeble weapons at him.

For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women ravished; half of the city shall go into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that one half of the Mount shall withdraw northward, and the other half southward (Zechariah 14:2-4).

Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare war, stir up the mighty men; let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, 'I am a warrior.' Hasten and come, all you nations round about, gather yourselves there. Bring down thy warriors, Oh Lord. Let the nations bestir themselves, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat;⁵² for there I will sit to judge all the nations round about. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. And the Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shake. But the Lord is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel (Joel 3:9-16).

⁵² Jehoshaphat means Yahweh judges.

Thrown into the winepress of God's wrath, the Lord makes quick work of his enemies. It will be a time of great carnage with the decimated armies scattered over an area some 175 to 200 miles wide. Satan is bound and cast into the bottomless pit, the beast and the false prophet are cast into hell, the nations are judged and the long awaited, one-thousand year kingdom of the Lord is established.⁵³

The Survivors

There will be many converts during the tribulation. Most of the Jews and many Gentiles will come to believe in the Lord (Ezek. 39:21-23). Thus, Satan's efforts to destroy reach beyond Israel, as he seeks to exterminate everyone who turns to God: "*as many as should not worship the image of the beast should be killed*" (13:15). Those who come to believe in the Lord, and who escape martyrdom, will populate the coming kingdom of the Lord (Mt. 24:13). Jesus will gather all nations to separate them;

As a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, placing the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then he will say to those on his right, Come, those blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom that has been prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Mt. 25:32-34).

It is the final harvest of the wicked vine (Mt. 13:30); the separation of the good and the evil. The primary event at this gathering of the world's surviving population will be the separation of believers from non-believers. While the unbelievers are sent to hell, the believers are prepared to enter and populate Christ's kingdom. This is an insurmountable obstacle to the idea of a post-tribulational rapture. If, as some suppose, the heavenly translation of the Church (1 Th. 4:13-18) does not take place until after the tribulation when the Lord returns in glory, then who populates the kingdom of Christ's 1,000 year reign on earth? For if the Church extends through the tribulation then all who become believers during the tribulation (both Jew and Gentile) are part of the Church and will be translated at his coming. But if the righteous are translated and the wicked are sent to hell, who then populates the kingdom?—for the world's population would then

⁵³ See, Rev. 19:17, Joel 3, Zech. 12:1-9; 14:1-4.

be zero: This is an impossible problem for a post-tribulational viewpoint. Indeed, it is not chronologically possible for the rapture of the Church to occur anywhere but just prior to the seven-year tribulation.

PART SIX

BOWLS OF WRATH

The Seven Bowls

The Vengeance of God 15:1-8

(15:1) And I saw another great and amazing, sign in heaven; seven angels having the seven last plagues; because in them the vengeance of God was completed. (2) And I saw as though a sea of glass mingled with fire, and them who are victorious of the beast and of his image and of the number of his name, standing by the sea of glass, having harps of God. (3) And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and amazing are your works, Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are your ways, King of the nations. (4) Who will not fear you Lord and glorify your name? Because you only are holy; because all the nations will come and worship before you; because your righteous acts were revealed."

(5) And after these things I watched, and the sanctuary of the tabernacle was opened in heaven, (6) and the seven angels (those having been girdled around in clean, bright linen and golden breast girdles) holding the seven plagues, came forth from the sanctuary. (7) And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, the one living unto the ages of the ages. (8) And the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power. And no one could enter into the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

Trumpets and Bowls

There are varying opinions as to the chronology of these seven bowls. Many believe that just as the seventh seal comprises

the seven trumpets (8:1-2), so too, the seventh trumpet comprises the seven bowls. But this view has major difficulties

First, unlike the clear connection between the seventh seal and the seven trumpets, in which the seven trumpets are the seventh seal (8:1-2), there is no apparent connection between the final trumpet and the beginning of the bowls. Secondly, the seventh trumpet details the culminating events immediately prior to the Lord's return. The bowls could not, chronologically speaking, occur at this point. There simply is no time for all of them to take place at such a late stage. Thirdly, as we will see, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls parallel each other far beyond what might be considered negligible coincidence. Finally, their similarities can be understood by simply realizing the difference between judgment and wrath. A clear understanding of the seven trumpets and the seven bowls is possible once we realize that John used two distinct terms throughout the text.

Earlier, we noted the difference between these terms.⁵⁴ The term θυμός (*thymos*) speaks to the emotional response, the passion, the wrath; whereas the term ὀργή (*orgē*) speaks to the indignation, the judicious action, the judgment. Wrath is the venting of anger; it is, in and of itself, an expression of great passion. Judgment is an issue of earned punishment. While judgment can be a decision handed down free of emotion, wrath is not so.

Understanding this distinction is key to understanding the difference between the seven trumpets and the seven bowls. Although technically separate from each other, they appear simultaneously. The trumpets pronounce the sentence of divine judgment (6:10; 8:3-6), while the bowls pour out divine wrath (15:1, 7). Admittedly those suffering these pains will not be overly concerned about this distinction; but the judge knows the difference and He has great concern for their differentiation. To those inhabiting the earth both spell trouble. In the end, those who survive will cry for the rocks and mountains to fall on them, to hide them from the face of Him whom they have spurned.

In this regard, it is interesting to note the similarities and differences between the two aspects of John's vision just prior to

⁵⁴ See comments on 14:10.

the sounding of the trumpets and the pouring of the bowls. Under the fifth seal, John heard the prayers of the saints, their petition for justice to be served:

How long, Oh master, the holy and true one, do you not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth (6:10)?

Along with the seven angels and their seven trumpets, John sees another angel standing before the altar adding incense to the prayers of the saints.

And another angel came, and stood over the altar, having a golden censer. And many incense were given to him that he should add it to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar that was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. And the angel had taken the censer, and filled it with the fire of the altar, and cast it upon the earth. And there followed thunder, and voices, and lightning and an earthquake (8:3-5).

Immediately following these prayers, the trumpets begin. Similarly, just prior to the pouring of the bowls, John sees a multitude of redeemed souls praising God and asking,

Who will not fear you Lord and glorify your name? Because you only are holy; because all the nations will come and worship before you; because your righteous acts were revealed (15:4).

Then, as if reminded of those who will not fear Him, God's passion seems to peak as He sends forth His holy messengers to deliver his wrath:

one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, the one living⁵⁵ unto the ages of the ages (15:7).

⁵⁵ The participial phrase “*God, the one who is and who was and who is coming*” does not imply the existence of more than one God, rather this is merely a literal translation of a common Greek idiom that uses participial phrases with articles for emphasis. This phrase would translate dynamically into the

As with the trumpets, I have provided little comment as to the physical or earthly manifestation of the bowls. Certainly they describe very real troubles and very real pains, but again, one's imagination is as good as another's. Whether the conditions are supernatural, manmade, or a combination of both is a moot point. Either way, this will be a time of great sorrow and great pain for all to endure.

The First Bowl 16:1-2

(1)And I heard a loud voice from the sanctuary, saying to the seven angels, "Go, and pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath onto the earth." (2)And the first left and emptied his bowl onto the earth; and baneful and malignant sores appeared on those having the mark of the beast and that worshiped his image.

Perhaps this speaks of a skin cancer caused by the judgment of first trumpet that will burn one-third of the earth's vegetation (8:7). Or maybe this skin condition has a direct relationship to the mark of the beast; perhaps it is an allergic response to defective personal identification implants, or to the radiation waves they are sure to emit. Whatever these sores are, they will affect those who have rejected the Lord by succumbing to the authority of the beast. At the same time, God's protective hand is at work upon the believers. This torment does not afflict those who have placed their trust in Him and have rejected the rule of the antichrist.

The Second Bowl 16:3

(3)And the second emptied his bowl into the sea; and it became as blood of a dead man, and every soul of life (those things in the sea) died.

Again there is a close correlation between the second bowl and the second trumpet. Here, in the second bowl the sea becomes as the blood of a dead man; in the second trumpet, the third part of the sea becomes blood (8:8).

English as "God, who lives for ever and ever," so that He is distinguished from the manmade gods that perish.

The Third Bowl 16:4-7

(4)And the third emptied his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and it became blood. (5)And I heard the angel of the waters saying, “You are righteous—the one who is and who was, the Holy One, because you judged these things. (6)Because they shed blood of the saints and the prophets they are deserving, and you have given them blood to drink. (7)And I heard the altar saying, Yes, Lord God, the Almighty, your judgments are true and righteous.”

Fresh drinking water is affected in the third trumpet (8:10-11), so too is this the case in the third bowl. The angel cries out that this decree is righteous. The wounded are fit for drinking blood. Return upon their heads their own savagery. Pay them their just reward. It is the bounty they have chosen for themselves. This is a classic case of “*he that sows the wind shall reap a whirlwind*” (Hos. 8:7). It is a basic rule in God’s universe that whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap (Gal. 6:7).

The Forth Bowl 16:8-9

(8)And the fourth emptied his bowl upon the sun; and it was given unto him to scorch those men with fire. And these men were scorched with great heat, yet they cursed the name of God—the one having authority over these plagues, and they did not repent to give him glory.

Man, the sea and drinking water have all been smitten, now the heavens are included. The intensity of the sun increases to a near unbearable inferno. Take note that in the fourth trumpet the heavens are affected as well (8:12, 13).

Here we see the vile stubbornness of man’s heart. Still he refuses to repent. Is there any so naïve as to suppose that man will be any different in hell? What a miserable scene it will be. Their hearts burning with hatred toward God, the more they fume, the greater their hatred grows, and the greater it grows the more they fume in an endless cycle fueled by eternity itself.

The Fifth Bowl 16:10-11

(10) And the fifth emptied his bowl upon the throne of the beast; and his kingdom was darkened and they gnawed their tongues from the pain. (11) Yet they cursed the God of heaven from their pains, and from their sores, and they did not repent of their works.

This fifth bowl is directed specifically to the beast and his advisors. Again there is a correlation with the fifth trumpet (9:1-12). The kingdom is darkened and demon power is released to inflict great pain; but they are not to kill anyone. Men will gnaw their tongues for the pain and wish for a death that does not come.

The Sixth Bowl 16:12

(12) And the sixth emptied his bowl upon the great river Euphrates; and its water was dried up so that the way of the kings from the rising of the sun might be prepared.

The great river ceases to flow as the mighty army from the east approaches its banks. This event is further detailed under the sixth trumpet (9:13-21). Although modern dams could stop the river's flow, this will likely be something cataclysmic in nature. Already China has constructed the road system, and the potential for such a massive army has existed for decades.

Parenthetical Stage 16:13-16

(13) And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs—⁽¹⁴⁾for they are spirits of demons, working signs that go forth unto the kings of the whole world to gather them together unto the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. ⁽¹⁵⁾“Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is the one watching and keeping his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.”

(16) And they gathered them together in the place that is called, in Hebrew, Armageddon.

The final act is approaching and just as we saw a dramatic pause between the sixth and seventh seals, and between the sixth

and seventh trumpets, so too, there is a parentheses between the sixth and seventh bowls. As the troubles crescendo, each pause dramatically sets the stage for the climax.

Hatred fueled by demon power will draw the nations to the great battle of Armageddon where the Lord will appear in the heavens to settle this issue of world domination once and for all (Zech. 14:1-7; Jd.14, 15; Rev. 19:11-21).

The Seventh Bowl 16:17-21

(17) And the seventh emptied his bowl on the air; and a loud voice came out of the sanctuary, saying, "It is done!"

(18) And lightnings, and voices, and thunders appeared; and a great earthquake occurred—such as has not occurred since man appeared upon the earth, so large an earthquake, so great. (19) And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And Babylon the great was remembered in the sight of God, to give to her the cup of the wine of the wrath of His vengeance. (20) And every island fled and mountains were not found. (21) And great hail, as a talent⁵⁶ in weight, comes down out of heaven upon these men. Yet these men cursed God because of the plague of the hail, because the great plague thereof is exceeding.

The angel cries out "*It is done!*" At last, the end of this most dreadful period has arrived. Others have pointed out that once before, at the cross, we heard a voice crying out "*It is finished!*" While that voice spoke of the price of redemption having been met, this speaks to the consummation of that redemption, the restoration of the redeemed creation (Rev. 5:1; Ro. 8:21).

The scene depicts a great cataclysmic upheaval; and again the thunders seem to warn of the woe that is but a footstep away. The dividing of the nations, the dividing of the sheep and the goats, is

⁵⁶ A talent varied in weight, from about 60 to over 100 pounds.

about to take place. Some will enter the kingdom, the rest will enter hell.

PART SEVEN

THE MOTHER OF ABOMINATIONS

The Other Woman

The Queen of Harlotry 17:1-7

(1) And one of the seven angels that had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot, the one sitting upon many waters; (2) with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication and those dwelling on the earth were intoxicated from the wine of her fornication."

(3) And he carried me away in the spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet-colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. (4) And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and covered with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations, even the unclean things of her fornication, (5) and upon her forehead a name written, Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of the Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth.

(6) And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, And I wondered, watching with a great wonder. (7) And the angel said to me, "Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast—the one carrying her, the one having the seven heads and the ten horns."

What a curious vision. We can only imagine the look on John's face as the amazingly wicked scene fills his eyes and he stands pondering its meaning. The angel noticed his bewilderment even before John spoke. "Why do you wonder?" the angel asked, seemingly puzzled that John did not easily recognize the woman and the beast, "I will tell you the mystery of

the woman and of the beast—the one carrying her, the one having the seven heads and the ten horns” (17:7).

Four aspects of this vision must be clearly identified if we are to understand this mystery: the Woman, the Beast, the seven heads, and the ten horns. Leaving nothing to speculation, each is clearly identified. The beast, the seven heads, and the ten horns have been discussed in the comments on chapter 13.⁵⁷ Here, John sees the same beast he saw in chapters 12 and chapter 13, but of course here there is this woman, the harlot, riding the beast. At last, the one who has been at the reins of this great monster is revealed.

Who is She?

Just who is this woman, this “*Mother of Harlots?*” This is a most important question; for those who identify her gain great insight into the development of both world history and eschatological events. Earlier, we made mention of the two religions of the world: one the truth, the other the lie.⁵⁸ The truth is represented by the woman giving birth to the Messiah (12:1 ff); now the lie is represented by the harlot riding the beast. Just as the woman giving birth to the Messiah, in chapter 12, necessarily reaches back to God’s covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12); so too this harlot dates back to Nimrod—a contemporary of Abraham—and the tower of Babel (Gen. 11). By extension, they both reach back to the Garden of Eden, where the actual conflict begins. God said there would be enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (Gen. 3:15).

It is this harlot, this Queen of Heaven (“*Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of the Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth*”) in which the world’s religious practices and pagan rites find their roots.

For thousands of years, Satan has disguised these mysteries masterfully. Peddled as necessary aspects of godliness, many of these rituals have even weaseled their way into the Christian culture. From their inception, God’s people have battled this corruption. Adam and Eve were the first to encounter the perverted truths upon which these mysteries are based. Later, the

⁵⁷ See pp. 176ff.

⁵⁸ See pp. 165ff.

Watchers (the fallen angels who left their first estate) introduced a distorted version of spiritual mysteries to the antediluvians. After the flood, Abraham contended with Nimrod who had reintroduced the mysteries—Satan’s counterpart to God’s revealed truth—to his Babylonian kingdom. Nimrod, who evidently died an early and violent death, was worshiped as the Savior. He was the anti-type to Christ. His mother (whom he married before his death) became known and worshiped as the Queen of Heaven.⁵⁹

Introduced prior to the tower of Babel and the dividing of the nations, the Babylon Mysteries accompanied the sprawling nations as they scattered about the earth. As the various cultures developed, the pagan rituals and ceremonies took on numerous faces; but always their ancient origin was evident.

As the mysteries spread, a seemingly endless list of new heroes were deified. Although the names of the deities changed with each culture, the underlying mysteries did not. Soon, in every culture, there was a god for every occasion. Multitudes of rites and religious observances were instituted, each having its own typical significance. In one form or another these Babylonian Mysteries permeated every culture and religious practice on earth, and they greatly influenced every world empire. Thus, the harlot is

the one sitting upon many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication and those dwelling on the earth were intoxicated from the wine of her fornication (17:2).

When in Egypt, the Israelites came face to face, for four-hundred and thirty years, with the Egyptian version of the mysteries. Even after their deliverance, while Moses was yet on the mountain receiving the Word of God, many Israelites were still enamored with these mysteries and implored Aaron to build Egyptian gods for them.

And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man

⁵⁹ See comments on Revelation 2:18ff; 12:1ff.

that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him. And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt (Ex. 32:1-4).

After wondering the wilderness for forty years, the very first generation of Israelites born in the promised land once again invoked these mysteries:

They forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger. And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroath (Jud. 2:12).

Ashtoreth is the Jewish name for the Babylonian goddess Ishtar, which is the same as the Phoenician goddess of fertility, Astarte. Later, this same goddess would be known as Aphrodite to the Greeks and Venus to the Romans. These cults were an ever present temptation to the ancient Jews. Indeed, Ashtoreth became a very popular idol among the Israelites (2 Sam. 7:3-4; 1 Ki. 11:5, 33; 2 Ki. 23:13). It was their persistent involvement with these cults that ultimately lead to Israel's Assyrian captivity, and later, to Judah's Babylonian captivity. Thus Jeremiah rebukes them:

The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offering to other gods (Jer. 7:18).

It was during their 70-year captivity in Babylon that the Israelites finally forsook these pagan rituals. Never again would they be seduced by this "Mother of Harlots." But they did begin a new trek of rebellion. Rather than pagan idolatry they turned to legalism—the spiritless religious rituals being practices by the

Pharisees and Sadducees when the Messiah arrived. At last, their stubborn rebellion resulted in their protracted dispersion from the Holy Land; so that they have now been scattered throughout the world for nearly 2,000 years.

Infiltration

Although the Jews finally gave up the mysteries, others did not. By the time Jesus appeared on the scene, the Babylonian Mysteries, which had dominated each of the world empires (Nimrod's Babylon, Egypt, Assyria, Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greco-Roman) had permeated every society on earth. In that these mysteries were introduced in Nimrod's Babylon, before the dividing of the nations, they made their way to even the farthest, most remote, societies on every continent. As the apostles spread the gospel, they faced considerable opposition from the various pagan cults espousing these mysteries. The great ruckus Paul created in Ephesus was a direct result of his having disrupted the economy of these lucrative pagan practices.

A man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together, with the workmen of like occupation, and said, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not only at Ephesus but almost throughout all Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable company of people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may count for nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship." When they heard this they were enraged, and cried out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" So the city was filled with the confusion; and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel (Acts 19:24-29).

As with Israel, it was not long before these mysteries found their way into the Church. The churches at both Pergamum and

Thyatira were rebuked for having allowed these pagan teachings to worm their way into their midst. In the prophetic view of the Church Age, in chapters 2 and 3 of The Revelation, Pergamum represents the Era in which the Church began flirting with paganism. Thyatira is the Era in which it unites with the pagan state.⁶⁰

Whether for real or merely a political ploy to unite and strengthen the failing empire, Emperor Constantine professed Christianity. However, he did so without revoking his pagan title, Pontifex Maximus—high priest of the ancient Roman religion, which was essentially the Babylonian Mysteries reinforced and rejuvenated by the pagan Babylonian priests when the ancient kingdom of Pergamum merged with Rome. As Pontifex Maximus, Constantine was the high priest of Dagon (the Assyrian/Babylonian fertility god. In concert with the iconic images of Dagon, the Pontifex Maximus had his matrix, the fish hat, and the fisherman's ring.

After more than three hundred years of severe persecution against the early Church, Satan had changed his tactics to infiltration. As is typical in the character of sin and deception, the infiltration was subtle. It is during this period of Church history that the harlot begins her overt seduction of the saints of the new covenant. Where they were once persecuted, now they were patronized. They had been poor and despised, now they were lavished with riches, and were the center of society.

With the Church now patronized by the empire, the pagan priests of the old state religion realized the political expedience of being baptized into the Christian faith. Christianity, at least nominally so, had become in vogue. Multitudes of non-believers and pagan idolaters joined the ranks merely for social or political acceptance. With them came their pagan mysteries; suddenly the Church was inundated with the ancient rites of Babylon.

The church of Thyatira was also rebuked for these mysteries.⁶¹ What Pergamum merely permitted had become a centerpiece for the Thyatiran church. In the prophetic view, the

⁶⁰ See notes on Rev. 2:12-17.

⁶¹ See notes on Rev. 2:18-29.

Thyatiran period is typically known as The Dark Ages.⁶² Here the tables had turned. Whereas in the Pergamum period the State controlled the Church, in the Thyatiran period the mystical Imperial Church controlled the State or rather, the numerous kingdoms and fiefdoms that had emerged after the Barbarian invasion. The Church had become littered with the atrocities of the Babylonian pagan practices. It is during this period that the title Pontifex Maximus shifted from the Caesar to the Bishop of Rome.

By the time Rome fell to the barbarians in 476, the Roman Bishop had grown into a very prominent Imperial figure, with the pagan rites of Babylonian/Roman paganism deeply seated in the state Church. As the empire began to splinter into numerous smaller kingdoms, it was quite a natural transition for the Roman bishop to claim the commanding role of High Priest. To this day the Pope lays claim to the title Pontifex Maximus, and little else in the multitude of pagan rituals has changed. What was once known as the house of senators is now the College of Cardinals. Still the Papacy claims rule over both the spiritual and temporal world. The Pope—who claims to be the vicar of Christ and the rightful ruler of the kingdoms of the world—uses St. Peter’s sword to symbolize his powers over temporal kingdoms, and Peter’s keys to symbolize his Papal power over the spiritual kingdom.

As the Imperial Church spread its influence, compromise with pagan cultures seemed but a small price for encouraging converts. One by one, various pagan rites, customs, and holidays were accepted by the state Church. The Mysteries had reached their climax; no longer merely tolerated, now they were practiced as holy necessities of the Christian faith. This is the origin of such practices as: relics, holy water, icons, prayer beads, prayers to the saints and to the mother of God, candles, altars, temples, Easter versus Passover, Christmas in December, hot cross buns, extreme unction, abbots, clerical robes, celibate priesthoods, and convents. Even the sign of the cross, made by moving the hand from head to belly to shoulders, originally signified a ‘T’ for Tammuz, the Phoenician name for the god, Nimrod.

⁶² See comments on chapter 2:18-29.

So often things are not what they appear to be. Paul warned the Corinthians of Satan's ability to transform himself into an apparent angel of light and of his emissaries' ability to appear as apostles of the Lord (2 Cor. 11:13, 14). Certainly this description fits this woman and her followers. How many times has this harlot convinced the world that she was a prophetess? The voice of God?

Once again Satan had successfully orchestrated a marriage between the people of God and the harlot of Babylon. During the Thyatiran Church Age pagan rituals so dominated the Church that true worship within the Imperial Church was all but nonexistent. Thus, reformers arose who sought to cleanse it of these evil intrusions. Prophetically, these reformers were represented by the Church Age of Sardis, the Reformation period.

The Harlot on the Beast

The significance of the title "*Babylon The Great*" written on the harlot's forehead seems a bit clearer once we realize the etymology of the terms and recall that Rome had become the location of the Babylonian Mysteries. The term בְּבֶלֶט (Babel) Babylon, meaning confusion in the original Chaldee, while the Ῥωμαῖος (*Rhōmaios*) Roma, means strength, power, great. Thus, the title "*Babylon The Great*" or Babylon Roma, "Great Confusion."

We have seen that the seven heads of the beast represent the world empires; but what of this phrase "*seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sits?*" Secular writers and early Church fathers commonly referred to ancient Rome as the seven hilled city. As pointed out earlier, during the final centuries of the Imperial Roman rule, Rome became the seat of the Babylon Mysteries. Thus, it is quite fitting that not only do the seven heads represent the seven world empires over which the harlot has and shall rule,⁶³ they are also the seven geographical hills on which the harlot resided during the writing of The Revelation.

One of the most popular complaints about religion is that it is behind nearly every war in history. This is a fair assessment.

⁶³ These ancient mysteries ruled over Nimrod's Babylon, Egypt, Assyria (all three of which were prior to Daniel's vision), Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, Media-Persia, Greco-Rome and the coming revived empire.

Many wars are fueled by religion. But it is the false religion of Babylon, not the truth of God that is the cause. Even the wars in which God commanded the Israelites to destroy whole societies were triggered by the sinful practices of this harlot. It is she who is *“drunken with the blood of the saints”* (17:6).

In various forms she has opposed every purpose of God; fighting tooth and nail to overthrow and destroy His works. Throughout history she has orchestrated the persecution of God’s people—both Israel and the Church have suffered at her hands. It is heartbreaking to read of the women, children and godly men who met violent, horrifying deaths at the hands of the holy crusaders. Such works as *The History of The Waldensees* and *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* are filled with the horrific persecution of the saints at the hands of the infiltrated Imperial Church. Even the holocaust in recent times was the work of this harlot. True, she and her beast currently lie dormant, but they are there, under the surface, awaiting the opportunity to rise again. No doubt, the Third Reich was such an attempt.

This Harlot has reigned over every ancient world empire; even in more recent times scarcely a kingdom on earth has not bowed its knee to this religious tyrant (17:2). And what more accurate description can be made of the various religious institutions (with their roots in the Babylonian Mysteries) which have ruled over the various world kingdoms:

Arrayed in purple and scarlet, and covered with gold and precious stone and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations, even the unclean things of her fornication (17:4).

This gaudy display of harlotry is based in the ancient mysteries. That this harlot has successfully infiltrated the Church is certain. In chapter 18, a voice from heaven commands, *“Come out, my people, out of her, that you not share in her sins”* (18:4).

While this may appear to be a blanket indictment of Roman Catholicism, it is not entirely the case. As pointed out earlier in comments on the church of Thyatira, this church definitely had problems, namely, being seduced by Jezebel and idolatry. However, it also had some redeeming qualities, so that the Lord did not censor it nearly as severely as he did the churches of both

Sardis and Laodicea.⁶⁴ Jesus warned of great punishment for those in Thyatira who were entangled with these practices, but to those innocent, deceived souls who merely followed their leaders' instructions, he is compassionate. Furthermore, he praises the church for its last works being greater than its first.

While Roman Catholicism (the Church period represented by the Thyatirans) is doubtless influenced by these mysteries, the two are not one and the same. This woman on the beast, representing the Babylonian Mysteries from which the pagan religions sprout, reaches all the way back to Nimrod. Thus, it is unwarranted and extra-biblical to equate the harlot of Babylon with Roman Catholicism, which is but an ailing aspect of Christendom, as are Sardis and Laodicea, in these last times.

The Beast with Seven Heads 17:8-13

⁽⁸⁾ *“The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss, and to go to destruction. And those dwelling on the earth (they whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world) will wonder, seeing the beast, that he was, and is not, and will be present. ⁽⁹⁾Here is the mind that has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings. ⁽¹⁰⁾The five have fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come, and when he comes he must remain a little while. ⁽¹¹⁾And the beast that was, and is not, he is also the eighth and is of the seven; and he goes into destruction.*

⁽¹²⁾ *“And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings, who have received no kingdom as yet; but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. ⁽¹³⁾These have one mind and they give their power and authority to the beast.”*

This is the same beast John saw earlier in chapters 12 & 13. It is a composite sketch of Gentile world power. The seven heads are seven world kingdoms over which the harlot ruled (Rev. 17:9, 10), each being lead about by the Babylonian Mysteries. At the

⁶⁴ See comments on Rev. 2:18-29.

time of John's vision five kingdoms had fallen (Nimrod's Babylon, Egypt, Assyria, Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, and Medo-Persia (Gen. 10; Ex. 1:8; Isa. 52:4; Dan. 2:36-39, 7:4-6). The sixth was the Greco-Roman world in which John wrote (Rev. 17:10).⁶⁵ The seventh, John said, is yet to come.

The future empire will come to power when ten kingdoms from the splintered, ancient Greco-Roman Empire unite as one (Dan. 7:24; 17:12).⁶⁶ From this empire a powerful leader will quickly rise to power. He is the antichrist (Dan. 7:23-24, Rev. 17:10-11).⁶⁷ The seventh head is the seventh kingdom, which is the first beast of chapter thirteen—the ten nations rising from the ruins of the ancient Greco-Roman Empire. Almost immediately, they yield their power to the second beast of chapter thirteen, the charismatic politician who is the false prophet and thus, antichrist. He will work signs and wonders in the presence of the first beast, the empire. He will demand allegiance and devotion to the first beast. He will construct an image to be worshiped, which represents the empire and (if the assumptions are true as to a demonic hybrid race posing as aliens from a faraway galaxy)⁶⁸ the master race, the gods who have come to save mankind.

Destruction of the Queen 17:14-18-24

⁽¹⁴⁾“These will war against the Lamb and the Lamb will overcome them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him, called chosen and faithful.”

⁽¹⁵⁾And he said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. ⁽¹⁶⁾And the ten horns that you saw and the beast, these will hate the harlot and shall make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her utterly in fire. ⁽¹⁷⁾For God put in their hearts to do his mind, and to come to one mind and to give their kingdom unto the

⁶⁵ See notes of chapter 13.

⁶⁶ Daniel's vision in the second chapter also addressed these ten kingdoms (Dan. 7:24). The ten toes of the image speak of the same ten kings of John's vision.

⁶⁷ See notes on chapter 13.

⁶⁸ See the section, The Antichrist/False Prophet, 196ff.

*beast, until the Words of God should be accomplished.
(18) And the woman whom you saw is the great city, having the reigns over the kings of the earth.”*

(18:1) After these things I saw another angel coming down out of heaven, having great authority; and the earth was illuminated from his glory. (2) And he cried with a mighty voice, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great, and is become a habitation of demons, and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. (3) Because all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth, by the power of her luxury, have become rich.”

(4) And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, “Come out, my people, out of her, that you not share in her sins, and that you not receive her plagues. (5) For her sins have joined together up to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. (6) Give back to her even as she gave back, and double the double according to her works—in the cup in which she mixed, mix to her double. (7) By as much as she glorified herself and waxed wanton, by so much give her of torment and mourning, for she says in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall in no wise see mourning. (8) Therefore, in one day will come her plagues, death, and mourning, and famine; and she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judged her.

(9) “And the kings of the earth—who committed fornication and lived wantonly with her—will weep and wail over her, when they see the smoke of her burning, (10) standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! for in one hour is your judgment come.

(11) “And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their merchandise any more: (12) merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stone, and pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and

scarlet, and all wood, thyme, and every ivory vessel, and every vessel of very valuable wood, and of bronze, and of iron, and of marble, ⁽¹³⁾and cinnamon, and spice, and incense, and ointment, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine meal, and corn, and cattle, and sheep, and horses and chariots and bodies and souls of men.

⁽¹⁴⁾“And the fruits that your soul’s lust are gone from you, and all sumptuous things and shining things are perished from you, and by no means shall they find them. ⁽¹⁵⁾The merchants of these things—those having become rich from her—will stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, ⁽¹⁶⁾saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, she having been arrayed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and covered with gold and precious stone and pearl! ⁽¹⁷⁾For in an hour so great riches is made desolate.

“And every ship master, and everyone sailing anywhere, and mariners, and as many as gain their living by sea, stood afar off, ⁽¹⁸⁾and cried out seeing the smoke from her burning, saying, ‘What city is like the great city?’ ⁽¹⁹⁾And they cast dust on their heads and cried, weeping and mourning, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, by which all those having ships in the sea became rich from her worth, for in one hour is she made desolate. ⁽²⁰⁾Rejoice over her, heaven and saints, and apostles, and prophets, for God has judged your judgment on her.”

⁽²¹⁾And a strong angel lifted a stone, like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, “Thus, with a rush shall Babylon, the great city, be thrown down and by no means shall be found any longer. ⁽²²⁾And the voice of harpists and minstrels and flute-players and trumpeters shall be heard no more at all in you; and every craftsman of every craft, by no means shall be found any longer in you; and the sound of a mill by no means shall be heard any longer in you; ⁽²³⁾and the light of a lamp by no means shall shine any longer in you; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride by no means shall be heard any longer in you; because your merchants were the great ones of the earth, because all nations were deceived by your sorcery. ⁽²⁴⁾And

in her was found blood of prophets and of saints and of all that have been slain upon the earth.”

Give Her Her Reward

At last we see the destruction of two age-old, evil institutions: political and religious Babylon. It is a time of treachery and treason within the ranks.

The ten horns that you saw and the beast, these will hate the harlot and shall make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her utterly in fire (17:16).

Something is going to upset the federation so that the antichrist turns on his own; thus the eventual gathering at Armageddon for war. Earlier, we discussed the possibility of a demonic hybrid race (similar to that which roamed the earth before the flood) from which the antichrist might rise.⁶⁹ If this is so, it is possible that the humans come to realize they had been deceived; that these hybrids, and their leader, are not extraterrestrials from a faraway galaxy as they had made themselves out to be, but are demonic beings—hybrids of demonic and human flesh. As we recall, in Daniel’s vision the kingdom would be partly strong and partly weak because they mixed with the seed of man.

And whereas thou saw iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay (Dan. 2:43).

On a practical note, as far as the treachery and destruction within the kingdom, there is a divine principle involved here, “*Whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap*” (Gal. 6:7). Since her inception this woman has seduced the rulers and nations of the world with her filthy cup full of vice and false promises. The world’s commerce and the world’s wealth have been at her disposal (18:3, 10-15). She has glorified and proudly lavished herself in luxurious garments (18:7, 16). She has forever been the enemy of God and of His saints (17:6). At last her reign of vice,

⁶⁹ See the section, The Antichrist/False Prophet, 196ff.

which fulfilled her sensual gratification, is over; and her fall is equal to her pomp. At last a voice in heaven, a voice of justice, cries out, “*Give back to her even as she gave back, and double the double according to her works—in the cup in which she mixed, mix to her double*” (18:6).

Her end is fitting to her life. “*Let destruction come upon him unawares, and let his net that he has hidden catch himself; unto that very destruction let him fall*” (Ps. 35:8). How untrustworthy is a partnership based upon sinful practices and ungodly principles. The very powers that she sanctified and empowered have betrayed her. Her fall is sudden and final. In the end, she will realize that she had been used, even as she had used others.

Secret of Her Strength

The strength of this religious institution is her confusion, her mysteries, and thus the indictment, “*all nations were deceived by your sorcery*” (18:23). Although well aware of her murders, tyranny and decidedly anti-godly conduct, still the world accepts her as the ambassador of righteousness. She is respected, hailed, and lavished with goods. Indeed, she is the master of deception. What is most striking is that even the godly, for the most part, fail to discern this most ancient cult. Thus, well-meaning Christians do not give a second thought to participating in such pagan rituals as Halloween, Easter eggs, icons, idol worship, prayers to the queen of heaven, temples posing as the sanctuary of God, etc., ad nauseam. Evidently, many sincere believers will continue to mix with this abominable system, thereby leaving a small glimmer of light within its sanctimonious walls. But at last even this small spark is extinguished. A voice cries out from heaven:

Come out, my people, out of her, that you not share in her sins, and that you not receive her plagues. For her sins have joined together up to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities (18:4).

And then . . .

And the voice of harpists and minstrels and flute-players and trumpeters shall be heard no more . . . and the light of a lamp by no means shall shine any longer in you; and the

voice of the bridegroom and of the bride by no means shall be heard any longer (18:22-23).

PART EIGHT

THE MARRIAGE SUPPER

The Wedding Reception

Praise our God 19:1-10

(1) After these things I heard as it were a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Hallelujah, the salvation, and the glory, and the power, of our God. (2) For true and righteous are his judgments, because He has judged the great harlot, who defiled the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged the blood of his servants by her hand.” (3) And a second time they said, “Hallelujah. And her smoke ascends into the ages of the ages.”

(4) And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God—the one sitting on the throne, saying, “Amen. Hallelujah.”

(5) And a voice came forth from the throne, saying, Praise our God, all His servants—those fearing Him, those small and those great.

(6) And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the sound of many waters, and as the sound of mighty thunders, saying, “Hallelujah, because the Lord our God, the Almighty has reigned. (7) Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and we will give the glory unto Him; for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife has prepared herself. (8) And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.”

(9) And he tells me, “Write. Blessed are those having been called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he tells me, These are the true words of God.”

(10) And I fell down before his feet to worship him. And he tells me, “See that you do not do it. I am a fellow servant

with you and with your brothers—those holding the testimony of Jesus. You worship God, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

Hallelujah

Here is a scene of great jubilation. The excitement seems to intensify until the crescendo of four hallelujah's. At any earthly wedding our attention is naturally focused on the bride: her ceremonial walk, her beautiful gown, her countenance, even her gifts. It is her day and she is the center of everyone's attention. This is not the case in heaven. Here, all eyes are on the groom. This is his day.

The first Hallelujah speaks to the attributes and characteristics of God, *“Hallelujah, the salvation, and the glory, and the power, of our God”* (19:2). The praise rings forth right after the destruction of the great harlot, as if responding to the earlier request to, *“Rejoice over her, heaven and saints, and apostles, and prophets, for God has judged your judgment on her”* (18:20).

The second Hallelujah echoes agreement and seemingly addresses God's righteous judgment in the destruction of the great whore: *“Hallelujah. And her smoke ascends into the ages of the ages.”* As the excitement mounts, the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fall spontaneously before the throne and shout the third Hallelujah: *“Amen. Hallelujah.”*

In a final climax of praise and glory to God, a voice comes from the throne saying, *“Praise our God, all His servants—those fearing Him, those small and those great.”* All heaven thunders in response and the sound of every voice cries out:

Hallelujah, because the Lord our God, the Almighty has reigned. Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and we will give the glory unto Him; for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife has prepared herself. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints (19:6-8).

The Lamb That Was Slain

Throughout The Revelation our Lord has been depicted in many different characterizations. We see him as the judge, the priest, the lion, the messenger, the warrior, the ancient of days, and even as the child born of woman. Each characterization speaks to some specific aspect of his person. Thus, there is something telling about this “*marriage supper of the Lamb.*” Some might wonder why the lamb? Why not the stately majestic lion? Or the warrior, victoriously returning from battle to receive his bride? Why the lowly lamb of God that was slain for the sins of the world?

This is not an insignificant detail. This thought of our Lord as the lamb of God will serve as an eternal reminder to his sacrificial love. It will remind the bride that while yet in sin, unworthy and condemned, the groom died for her. His wounds, forever present, display his matchless love toward those who believe in his name. This is the eternal relationship between the Lord and his bride. This too is the relationship that earthly husbands would do well to foster with their brides—complete self-sacrifice. How few marriages would fail if the husband loved and cherished his wife selflessly, even as the Lord has loved the Church.

She Is Ready

The Church has anticipated this marriage supper since its conception. The ancient oriental wedding had three stages of formality. First the commitment—what we in the west call the engagement. The second stage would happen many years later when the groom came to take the bride from her home. Finally, a feast is held to consummate the event.

The relationship between the Lord and the Church is patterned in this same order. The commitment was at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit filled believers with promise by God’s very presence (Acts 2:1). Next will come the taking away, the translation of the Church from mortal to immortal, from corruptible to incorruptible (1 Th. 4:13-18). Finally, the scene before us—the marriage supper itself, to consummate the event.

When considered as a custom of the culture in which the Revelation was written, the phrase “*his wife has prepared*

herself” (v.7), is quite interesting. In the oriental custom the bride wore two garments, the inner and the outer garment. She would have made the outer garment herself. The significance, in respect to our spiritual garments, is clear. Our inner garment is the righteousness of our Lord. It is by his merit we are clothed. The outer garment represents that which we have prepared ourselves. It represents our rewards for our works.

One day, even before the wedding feast, this heavenly outer garment will be tested and tried as with fire. Only the golden threads, silver linings, and buttons of precious stones will remain as part of that final wardrobe.

Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (1 Cor. 3:12-15).

“Therefore, my brothers, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).

The pertinent question for each of us is what will our personal outer garments look like after the test? Will they glitter in radiance and beauty, or will the holes and barren spots only point to what might have been and could have been, but is not?

From Bride to Wife

On earth she is referred to as the bride (22:17), but now, in heaven, she is called *“his wife”* (19:7). Certain things might be suggested as to her role in this relationship. This change could indicate maturity now that she has finished her course. Paul said,

till we all arrive at the unity of faith and of the full knowledge of the son of God, at a complete man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13).

Elsewhere he writes,

when the perfect thing is come, that which is in part will be abolished . . . then I will fully know even as I was fully known (1 Cor. 13:10, 12).

As yet, the Church is in the process of change, adapting and conforming to his image, just as a young bride learns to conform to her husband who is selflessly committed to her happiness. In time the bride transforms into a mature wife, completely adapted and submitted to her husband's character and leadership.

We all, with faces having been unveiled, beholding the glory of the Lord in a mirror are being changed to the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18).

This, like the story of Ruth, is a story of rags to riches. *“And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints” (v.8).* We, who were *“aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world (Eph. 2:12),”* have been elevated to the place of prominence. We, who once wore the rags of self-righteousness are now robed in the righteousness of the saints.

Love Lifted Me

The fact that we have been lifted from the depths of sin and reinstated to the status of fellowship with God should in itself elicit a commitment to present our bodies *“as a living sacrifice, holy, well-pleasing to God” (Rom. 12:1).* This is our reasonable service. That we have been ordained to be the wife of the Lamb should evoke something even greater. Certainly gratitude, gratefulness, reverence, and obedience should permeate every manner of life. But then, this is the battle is it not—learning to be holy, learning to be like him, learning to set aside the old man and to be robed in the new?

Throughout eternity, the Church will stand out as that select body, the wife of the Lamb. In this world, the Church should stand out as well; as the elect body, the devout bride who labors and waits for the return of her groom. If the Church herself does not obey and revere the Lord, how can we expect others to do what we do not? Thus, as we might recall, the reproof of Queen

Vashti for her arrogant display of irreverence toward her husband, King Ahasuerus; lest the other woman of the kingdom should follow her example (Es. 1:10ff). As part of the bride of Christ, we must always respect and keep the Lord's intention on display before the world. As Paul explained:

This grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence (Eph. 3:8-13).

In chapters 2 and 3 of The Revelation we saw the harsh punishment promised to certain disobedient churches if they did not repent. History has shown that most did not; and they suffered the expected consequence. The only extant churches of the seven are Smyrna and Philadelphia—the only churches to receive no rebuke. Our present generation, the Age of Laodicea, will certainly suffer the punishments promised her. Although the prophetic Laodicean Church period, at large, will continue its lavish lifestyle until Christ returns, it is not too late for individual participants in this materialistic, self-righteous, final period of Christianity to repent and join ranks with those of Philadelphia—a remnant of which is still present.⁷⁰

The Holy War 19:11-19

(11) And I saw heaven having been opened, and behold a white horse, and the one sitting on it being called Faithful and True. And in righteousness he judges and makes war.

(12) Now his eyes, a flame of fire, and upon his head, many diadems, having a name having been written that no one knows but himself; (13) and having been clothed with a garment having been dipped in blood, and his name has

⁷⁰ See notes on chapter 3.

been called The Word of God. ⁽¹⁴⁾And the armies—those in heaven—followed him upon white horses, having been clothed in fine linen, white and pure. ⁽¹⁵⁾And out of his mouth proceeds a sharp sword, that with it he might smite the nations; and he will rule them with a rod of iron, and he treads the winepress of the anger of the vengeance of God, the Almighty. ⁽¹⁶⁾And he has on his garment and on his thigh a name having been written: KING of Kings, and LORD of Lords.

⁽¹⁷⁾And I saw an angel standing in the sun and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds—those flying in mid heaven, “Come, assemble to the great supper of God, ⁽¹⁸⁾that you may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of generals, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and of them sitting thereon, and the flesh of all men—both free and bond, and small and great.”

⁽¹⁹⁾And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth, and their armies, having been assembled to make war against the one sitting upon the horse, and with his army. ⁽²⁰⁾And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet—the one having done the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those having received the mark of the beast and those worshiping his image—the two were cast alive into the Lake of Fire—the one burning with brimstone. ⁽²¹⁾And the rest were killed with the sword—the one proceeding from the mouth of the one sitting upon the horse—and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

Suddenly the scene changes from the celebration of the most spectacular wedding ever, to the severity of the most devastating war in history. John said, *“I saw heaven having been opened, and behold a white horse, and the one sitting on it being called Faithful and True” (19:11).*

A door in heaven was opened in chapter 4, the temple was opened in chapter 11, now the veil is lifted and all heaven is exposed. The *“KING of Kings, and LORD of Lords” (19:16)*, he is the desire of the ages. Humbly robed in human flesh at his first appearance, now he is the powerful King, the mighty warrior mounted atop his horse and ready for battle. He is returning to

claim the kingdom which is rightfully his possession. His arrival will capture the attention of the whole world: *“every eye will see him, even those who pierced him. And all the nations of the earth will mourn over him”* (1:7). Zachariah spoke of this as well.

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn (Zac. 12:10).

The fifth trumpet had released an army of demons from hell (9:1-2), now the seventh trumpet releases the armies of heaven (11:15-19). The armies of the world have gathered to battle the antichrist, their leader who turned into a brutal tyrant (Dan. 11:40; Rev. 16:12). Little do they realize the Lord has gathered them for a battle with himself (Zep. 3:8). And he has invited the birds of prey to feast on their carcasses.

And I saw an angel standing in the sun and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds—those flying in mid heaven, “Come, assemble to the great supper of God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of generals, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and of them sitting thereon, and the flesh of all men—both free and bond, and small and great” (Rev. 19:17-18).

As these armies see the Lord descending from heaven, in unison they turn their offensive toward him, in a final and futile attempt to prevent his return. The earth has become the final battle ground for the forces of good and evil as *“the beast and the kings of the earth, and their armies, having been assembled to make war against the one sitting upon the horse, and with his army”* (19:19).

How blind and full of self-deceit are the ungodly! It is more than obvious at this point that man cannot rule himself. Man will never have the ability to create a paradise or to achieve the peace on earth of which so many dream. Yet the pride of man refuses to accept defeat. How appropriate the proverb, *“pride goes before destruction.”*

Holy War Versus Evangelism

The similarities and the differences between chapters 1 and 19 are interesting. In chapter 1 we see Jesus in the priestly capacity as the judge of the Church. In chapter 19 he is a warrior and the judge of the unrighteous. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth for he has come to judge and make war. As others have noted, it is sin that makes war necessary. It is not war in and of itself that is wrong, but the evil deeds that demand it. There is such a thing as righteous anger, holy wrath, and godly judgment, *“in righteousness he judges and makes war” (19:11)*.

For several centuries the image of the Christian Church has been marred by the supposed holy crusades—the holy wars of the Roman Imperial Church. The idea of making converts by military force is foreign to Scripture. Even the wars God commanded Israel to pursue were the means of divine punishment upon hopeless societies of evil doers who, very likely, were hybrid races similar to the antediluvians. Like the flood in Noah’s day, these Jewish wars were not efforts of evangelism, but the sentence of divine judgment.

Furthermore, it has never been given to the Church to pass judgment, or condemnation, or to inflict physical assault upon those who opposed her. If we recall, Peter tried this tactic in the garden of Gethsemane the night of Jesus’ arrest; and Jesus rebuked him for it (Matt. 26:51-54). Our Lord’s first visit was full of mercy and grace, and he has instructed us to conduct ourselves similarly.

The Church is to make converts by love:

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Mt.:44)

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (Jn. 13:35).

Evangelism is not achieved by coercion and mayhem. The Church is instructed to let its light shine into a dark and desperate world (Mt. 5:16). While there is such a thing as righteous anger against sin and even against those who practice it, this anger is not for the Church to kindle, other than, perhaps, toward itself. But

the Church is to respond to the world with words of wisdom and grace; guiding lost souls to the Lord by example.

The time for war is coming. Both the Church and the armies of heaven will have their part in it, but it will not be a time of evangelism. The time for evangelism will be over; this will be a time of vengeance and judgment. The Lord has said, “*vengeance is mine*” (Ro. 12:19). We, his followers, should leave vengeance for the appointed time.

The white horses, upon which the armies of heaven are seated, speak of righteousness and power. Notice that the warriors carry no weapons. They are merely “*clothed in fine linen, white and pure*” (19:14). Holiness is the sword and shield of the Christian. Even on earth this is our offense and our defense; without it we stand stripped of our armor.

Who Is Able?

John said, “*out of his mouth proceeds a sharp sword, that with it he might smite the nations*” (19:15). Some have suggested this answers their arrogant boasting: “*Who is like unto the beast? And who is able to war with him*” (Rev. 13:4)?

Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, “Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.” He that sits in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.

I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shall break them with a rod of iron; thou shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye

*perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.
Blessed are all they that put their trust in him (Ps. 2:4).*

Faithful And True

The returning warrior, our “*KING of Kings, and LORD of Lords*” is identified by three other names. First he is “*Faithful and True*” (v.11). Dr. Barnhouse tells the story of an elderly lady in Scotland who was very near death. Her young minister paid her a visit shortly before she passed into eternity. He was amazed at the audacious assurance she had as to her eternal destiny—boldly stating that she would soon be with the Lord. When the young minister saw fit to warn her nevertheless, just in case she might be mistaken, the lady curtly answered that if she should be wrong and should awaken anywhere except in the presence of God, then God himself would lose more than she. She continued, “I would only lose my immortal soul but He would lose his good name.” Paul told the Thessalonians,

*God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you completely,
and your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved
blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Faithful is he calling you who, indeed, will do it (1 Th.
5:23-24).*

As the “*Faithful and True*,” he has not left us without direction, but with the Holy Spirit. He has not left us without hope, but with the promise of his return. He has not left us without supply and means, but with provision, strength, and a way of escape.

Even during his earthly ministry he was the faithful and true witness: “*I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which has sent me*” (Jn. 5:30). He was the perfect witness in his dealings with the community, always having the right balance between truth and tact. To the woman caught in adultery, enduring the shame of her guilt by public condemnation, He was non-accusing and simply said, “*go, and sin no more*” (Jn. 8:11). On the other hand, as for the scribes and Pharisees (who had seared consciences and hypocritical hearts), he publicly denounced as “*whited sepulchers*” (Mt. 23:27).

We could use such prudence in our administration of truth. How often have we heard the familiar story of Christian parents who have rejected and disowned their troubled teenager or young adult who has fallen into sin? “What will the neighbors think? What will the church think?” I should think at this point, that what the troubled young person needs is for his/her parents to be faithful and true friends. That does not mean condoning wrong actions but it does mean forgiving, loving, sticking by and giving emotional and spiritual support.

Though we often fail in our friendships, there is one who does not. There is a faithful and true friend that “*sticks closer than a brother*” (Prov. 18:24). It is he who commands us to “*love one another*” (Jn. 13:34).

No Man Knows But He

He has a name “*that no one knows but himself*” (19:12). How absurd and illogical it would be to attempt answering or even speculating as to what this name might be. There are things about our Lord that we might never completely understand; but as our relationship matures we will forever learn more of his matchless character. I have been married now for nearly four decades, but still there are things about my wife that I am yet to know. How much more will this apply to our Lord.

Oh the depth and riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! (Ro. 11:33).

The Word Of God

Next, he is called “*the Word of God.*” Jesus is the “*brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person*” (Heb. 1:3). As “*the Word of God*” he is the manifestation of the conduct, attitude, action and the very character of God. The term λογος (*logos*) word, means much more than mere verbal communication; it is the expression of thought. Jesus is the outward manifestation of the thought and heart of God.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn. 1:1, 14).

Unity

The armies of the world are “*assembled to make war against the one sitting upon the horse, and with his army*” (19:19). Although he is in all his glory and it is obviously futile to resist him, not one of the unrighteous will fall on his face in fear and worship. Rather, in their arrogance and selfish pride, their hatred toward him is heightened.

Their conduct is typical. It is always amazing how readily the ungodly come together for the avowed purpose of defending unrighteousness. Such unholy alliances are common in a world of darkness. We might recall that it was the trial and examination of Jesus that brought two political enemies, Herod and Pilate, together. How many times in history have enemies united with the common goal of destroying the righteous?

Such bonds are especially true when issues of morality are concerned. For the morals, which are ingrained in everyone’s conscience, are in discord with our Adamic nature. But if we can band together, with others who have offended their conscience in a similar manner, it somehow makes us feel justified. Such has been the case with several issues in both ancient and modern societies: abortion, homosexuality, greed, bigotry, murder, etc. We see it in our schools, our courts, our politics, even in our churches. We see it on a global scale with the world’s hatred for Israel. Thus, the popular phrase, “our enemy’s enemy is our friend.”

As for unity, the Christian world should be united in its attempts to spread the gospel, to make converts, to glorify the name of Christ. This is not a plea for the unrealistic regimental conformity of the various camps. Nor is it a plea for the godless concessions necessary to construct a One World Church, which is doubtless the ploy of our adversary. It is a plea for the cause of Christ. It is a plea to unite our efforts that we might advance the cause of Christ, rather than squabbling and being divisive over unresolved minutia. Would we not do better to recall the words of our Lord? “*He that is not against us, is for us*” (Lk. 9:50).

PART NINE

BASE CHARACTERS

Lake of Fire

Doom Comes at Last 19:20 - 20:15

⁽²⁰⁾And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet—the one having done the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those having received the mark of the beast and those worshiping his image—the two were cast alive into the Lake of Fire—the one burning with brimstone. ⁽²¹⁾And the rest were killed with the sword—the one proceeding from his mouth—of the one sitting upon the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

^(20:1)And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.

⁽²⁾And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, ⁽³⁾and cast him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years are finished. After these things he must be loosed for a little time.

⁽⁴⁾And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them; and the souls of them having been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the Word of God, and who did not worship the beast, nor his image, and did not receive the mark on the forehead and on their hand. And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁽⁵⁾The rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. ⁽⁶⁾Blessed and holy is the one having part in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no

authority, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with him a thousand years.

Time to pay the price has come. The passage is very clear as to the punishment of these evil doers: they are cast into “*Lake of Fire*” (19:20). The Lake of Fire (which is also called γέενναν (*geenna*) gehenna, Mk. 9:45) is different from ᾗδης (*hadēs*) *hades*—used 11 times in the NT. The OT שְׁאוֹל (*shē’owl*) *sheol*, is used 65 times and translated as ᾗδης 64 times in the LXX. As we see in the next chapter, “*death and Hades were cast into the Lake of Fire*” (Rev. 20:13-14). Whereas Hades is the current abode of the disembodied spirits, Gehenna is the final domicile of Satan, all the fallen angels and everyone whose name is “*not found having been written in the scroll of life, he was cast into the Lake of Fire*” (Rev. 20:15).

The Sinful Heart

A few brief applicable insights into man’s fallen heart might be worth interjecting at this point. Someone has pointed out that these four fiends characterize man’s evil heart: the beast, the false prophet, the cowards who received the mark, and the fools who are deceived (19:20). By nature man is selfish, rebellious, greedy and full of lies.

The beast, as seen in other passages, will be egotistical, arrogant, ambitious, power hungry, craving the control over men. How many men and women enter positions of leadership mistaking these similar qualities as leadership abilities? Arrogant, domineering, and two-faced, unable to place confidence in another’s ability. Taking themselves much too seriously and letting everyone know that who is the boss. He is a narcissist. His whole demeanor is in opposition to the Christian character.

The false prophet is a glory seeker, controlled by a sensual appetite, loving and craving praise. Everything about him is false: his appearance, his humility, his power and his message. He is an actor with the charisma to excite the masses. Again, as with the first character, this type of individual is often found in positions of leadership, even in the ministry.⁷¹

⁷¹ See: Mt. 23; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; Jd. 16-19.

The third character is the type no one (except perhaps an undercover detective) wants as a friend. He is the coward who “*received the mark of the beast.*” His only concern is for his own flesh. He readily “spills the beans” in order to save his own neck. How many among the ranks of Christendom would rather save their reputation or secure their position than run the risk of boldly claiming the name of Christ. This was the issue in the Donatist controversy in the mid 300’s when certain prophesying believers denied the faith to escape persecution under Emperor Diocletian. This fiend is the epitome of self-centeredness.

The fourth character is the fool, the one “*worshiping*” the image of beast. The fool is the type of person upon whom cults and false religions thrive. Although many will submit to him for economical or political reasons, it is the fool who will actually pay homage to the antichrist as if he were a god. Having heard the truth and rejected it, the fool is looking for someone to tell him what he wants to hear. He is the one Paul describes as “*having itching ears;*” he is willingly deceived, willingly led into darkness (2 Tim. 4:3-4). While a number of religious cults easily fit this description, the popular secular humanistic devotion to the big bang and evolution is classic.

How willingly so many otherwise intelligent people accept this illogical drivel as gospel: The notion that many billions of years ago, our precisely ordered physical universe sprang into existence from non-existent matter by the power of its own, theretofore, non-existent energy. After billions of years, a primitive biological life-form emerged. Not only had this primitive life-form emerged from the non-living, previously non-existent matter that had sprung into existence by its own non-existent energy, this new primitive organism managed to duplicate itself and to survive on nutrients that heretofore, were also non-existent.

Over several more billions of years, this now self-perpetuating, primitive organism became animated and eventually split into two genders, thereby achieving the capacity for selective reproduction. Then, after countless changes over even more billions of years, the most advanced life-form developed: the ability for critical thinking—the ability to reason and make inference.

In time, this advanced life-form realized its own metaphysical reality beyond its mere physical existence. Thus, these advanced, critically-thinking beings assumed an ethic—a universal sense of morality common to every family of its highly structured existence.

So what we have is a situation in which absolute non-existent matter, given enough time, sprang into existence by its own non-existent energy, which then formed into a highly ordered, complex physical universe, out of which sprang primitive organic life, which somehow sustained itself on other, non-existent organic nutrients, before evolving into an even more complex life form with real-time metaphysical intelligence and an innate, universal metaphysical conscience, based upon an absolute metaphysical ethic. Now perhaps I am naive, but somehow the very logic of this hypothesis seems non-existent, conceived, perhaps, somewhere in the process before the ability for critical thinking developed.

The famed biologist and evolutionist, Julian Huxley, epitomized this foolishness. I once read an apropos statement of his that succinctly illustrates a lesson I learned long ago, that logic can never convince passion. As I recall, his confession read something like, “The concept of evolution is absurd, but what else do I have? I refuse to believe in God.”

Apparently fanatical egotists never change. Long ago the psalmist noted that “*the fool has said in his heart, there is no God*” (Ps. 14:1). Neither do their foolish actions change. Even before the psalmist, the antediluvians exhibited this same egocentric stupidity:

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. . . . who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator (Rom. 1:22-23).

Something else that does not change is the responsibility these fools have for the knowledge they possess about creation itself.

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God has shown it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly

seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:19-20).

Paul said of these fools in the last days, because they will not receive the truth, God himself will cause them to believe the lie of the antichrist (2 Th. 2:11-12). Yes, the fool will take his place in hell along with the self-preserving coward, the glory-seeking false prophet and the egotistical antichrist.

Anti-Types

We also see the saintly antitypes of these imps. They were *“beheaded for the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 20:4)*. Far from being ambitious for themselves, their ambition is for the Lord; even to the point of martyrdom. More interested in truth than self-preservation, and wise enough to distinguish truth from falsehood, they *“did not worship the beast, nor his image, and did not receive the mark on the forehead and on their hand” (20:4)*. These are not cowards. They are men and women of principle, conviction, and courage, who shall receive the truth and shall lose their lives, that they might save them. These also shall reap what they have sown. To them will be given thrones of judgment. Their abode will be with the one for whom they have given their lives and they will partake in the first resurrection: *“And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (Rev. 20:5)*.

The First Resurrection

The *“first resurrection” (Rev. 20:5)*, is the resurrection of the just. It is portrayed as the harvest (Mt. 9:38, 13:30.39; Mk. 4:29; Rev. 14:15). The harvest in ancient Israel was associated with three feasts. The barley harvest occurred during the feast of first fruits. The main wheat harvest took place during the feast of weeks. The vintage gleaning was during the feast of tabernacles (Lev. 23:10-16). The first resurrection is also divided into three phases: Jesus Himself; the Church prior to the tribulation, those saints spanning the many eras of man’s existence.

Not only is the first resurrection divided into three distinct phases, it consists of different groups. Paul explained to the Corinthians that each would be *“in his own order” (1 Cor. 15:23-24)*. The term τάγμα (*tagma*) order, speaks of a troop or

company. As such, seven distinct companies exist: Christ (Jn. 20), the select saints at that time (Mt. 27:52-53), the Church (1 Th. 4:16-17), the 144,000 (Rev. 14:1-5), the tribulation martyrs (Rev. 7:9-17; 20:4-6), the Israelites (Isa. 26:16-21; Dan. 12:1-3), and finally the righteous who die during the millennium (Jn. 5:28-29).

Names of Evil

Here, our adversary is referred to by four different names. He is the Dragon, the Old Serpent, the Devil, and Satan. Each title has its own significance. As the Dragon or Monster, he is the source of uncleanness—the foul beastly leader. As the Old Serpent he is subtle, filled with schemes and tricks designed to ensnare us. Although there are many demons, he alone is the Devil. As such, he is the slanderer, the false accuser. Lastly, he is called Satan. He is the enemy of God. The destroyer. Our adversary. Our tempter.

Dare Any Deny Depravity? 20:7-15

(7)And when the thousand years are finished, Satan shall be loosed from his prison, (8)and will go forth to the four corners of the earth, to deceive the nations, Gog and Magog (the number of whom is as the sand of the sea) to assemble them to the war. (9)And they went up over the breadth of the earth and encircled the camp of the saints, and the city—the one having been loved—and fire came from heaven and devoured them. (10)And the devil—the one deceiving them—was cast into the Lake of Fire and brimstone, where were also the beast and the false prophet; and they will be tormented day and night unto the ages of the ages.

(11)And I saw a great white throne and the one sitting on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. (12)And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne. And books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged from the things having been written in the books, according to their works. (13)And the sea gave up the dead that were in it. And death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them,

and they were judged, everyone, according to their works.
(14) And death and Hades were cast into the Lake of Fire.
This is the second death, the Lake of Fire. (15) And if
anyone was not found having been written in the book of
life, he was cast into the Lake of Fire.

Only believers, both Jew and Gentile, will enter Christ's one-thousand year kingdom on earth. Life will go on; children will be born and the population will multiply and flourish. It will be a time of utopia. However, after 1,000 years of several generations, some descendants will not accept the truth. Many will forsake their godly upbringing and the Lord whom they had served.

How many have said, "If only he would reveal himself to me; then I could believe; then I would follow him." But in truth, even this does not convince the proud heart. Once dead, but now resurrected saints will be a common sight in the kingdom. Even the Lord himself will be present as the King of the earth. But still many born into the kingdom in later years will refuse to submit to His rule. Thus, Abraham's words to the rich man are more than appropriate, "*If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rose from the dead*" (Lk. 16:31).

Many have wondered why God will allow this last rebellion. The answer seems simple enough. It is a final commentary to and proof of the total depravity of the human condition. Years ago the psalmist observed that,

God looked down from heaven upon the children of men,
to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek
God. Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether
become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one
 (Ps. 53:2-3).

Without doubt, this final rebellion, more so than any event in history—including the crucifixion of our humbled Lord—reveals the total depravity of man. Thus, it is an appropriate final indictment of man's proud and self-centered existence.

Oh how this proves the folly of modern psychology. Those who would have us believe that crime, antisocial behavior, and misfeasance are products of circumstance and environment—an economically, politically or racially depressed society, a troubled

home life in childhood, etc. How this shows the error of all religions and philosophies that suppose they solve the human plight with utopia. So depraved is man's selfish heart that he will even scorn utopia, heaven on earth, because he himself is not the king, this brings us to the source of man's problem: his proud, selfish heart, about which, again, modern psychology is in error. Rather than seeking to correct man's selfishness, which generates so much anguish, modern psychology encourages man to ruminate over his plight, to pay more attention to himself, to medicate himself.

The fact is, every child is born into this sinful state of total depravity. It is part of our nature no doubt part of our genetic code. It is interesting to note that scientists now believe our behavior (such as diet and even attitude) can change our genetic code. Certainly, Adam's sins changed his, and we have inherited it. The nature of sin is transmitted immediately by natural generation from parent to child. As a result, every man and woman is lost and in need of God's salvation, which is wholly by God's grace. More than any other doctrine (aside from Theology Proper) this doctrine of the total depravity of man separates the Judeo-Christian belief from every other religion on earth. Each world religion believes that man has within himself the capacity to achieve righteousness. But this is a foreign thought to Judeo-Christian theology. Scripture teaches that man is born into sin and thereby unable to achieve righteousness. Righteousness comes only from God. It cannot be achieved. It is granted only to those who humble themselves before Him—an act that is offensive to man's pride.

This final rebellion points to another major truth. Even in his fallen state man has retained the image of God in which he was created. Indeed it is a quality of human personality (our freewill) that makes man responsible for his choices. We are individuals; each must make his own choices and decisions about God. The final rebellion also dramatically illustrates that it is the fool who "*says in his heart, there is no God.*" Our intellect says "He is;" but our proud hearts say, "I am."

One can only speculate as to what scheme Satan will use to convince these kingdom dwellers to rise up against the Lord. Although, I am certain of one thing: it will be nothing new. It will

be a recycled trick of historic fame. If there is one thing Satan has learned by now it is that the unregenerate man is a fool. One generation after another steps into the same snare their forefathers stepped in: *“Yea has God said. . . . You will be as gods. . . . Come, let us break our bands asunder . . . Surely you will not die. . . . Don’t you suppose. . . . Does it seem reasonable that God should. . . ?”* How willingly the proud rebellious heart is deceived.

Doom Comes At Last

This battle of Armageddon will be short; perhaps the shortest battle in the history of the world. John saw that, *“fire came from heaven and devoured them”* (Rev. 20:9). Their coup comes to a sudden end and their dreams of conquest disappear in smoke. As the prophet wrote: *“The hope of the righteous shall be gladness, but the expectation of the wicked shall perish”* (Prov. 10:28).

The coward and the fool will visit Hades till at last, they too, enter the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-14). The beast and false prophet are cast into the Lake of Fire; a thousand years later they will serve as the welcoming committee for their master, Satan (Isa. 14:9-11). Those who have difficulty accepting the thought of eternal torment should note that one-thousand years after their entry, the beast and the false prophet are still very conscious (Rev. 20:10); indeed, all hell is there to greet the arrival of their worthless leader.⁷²

Sheol beneath is stirred up to meet you when you come, it rouses the shades to greet you, all who were leaders of the earth; it raises from their thrones all who were kings of the nations. All of them will speak and say to you: ‘You too have become as weak as we! You have become like us!’ Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, the sound of your harps; maggots are the bed beneath you, and worms are your covering. How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, ‘I

⁷² There can be no doubt that: (a) The Lake of Fire will be an eternal torment (Rev. 19:20, 20:10; Jd. 7); and (b) the body and soul will suffer together (Mk. 9:42-48; Mt. 10:28).

will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.’ But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit (Isa. 14:9-15).

The Great White Throne

The Great White Throne Judgment is a frequent topic; often the topic of jokes in which one meets up with St. Peter. Few seriously consider the reality of this judgment or its gravity. This will be a most somber and awesome event. Not one soul standing before this bar will escape. His very presence spells his doom. Friends and relatives, neighbors and acquaintances, everyone whose name is not written in the lamb’s book of life will stand before this judgment seat. No doubt many will stand defiantly, shaking their fists in God’s face and demanding fairness. Some might plead ignorance, others might plead for mercy. But it is too late, their fate is sealed. All who stand before this tribunal are without hope.

“I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne” (20:12). There is no respecting of persons. Rich, poor, genius, idiot, ruler and slave will tremble before the Lord of Glory. The earth has fled away leaving them suspended in the vastness of space—overwhelmed by the brightness of the one whom they have spurned.

Some have scoffed at the idea of the heavens and the earth being destroyed by fire as predicted by Peter and Isaiah (2 Pet. 3:10-13, Isa. 65:17). But it is an amazing thing, this world in which we live. Our very existence depends upon some of the most explosive gases known to man. The air we breathe consists largely of nitrogen. The water we drink is largely hydrogen. Both are combined with oxygen—a necessary element for combustion—and electromagnetic energy is the substance of it all, as it is for all physical matter. Yet in some mysterious way, their respective explosive powers are held at bay. Who could question the effect that one slight movement of God’s hand might bring?

“And the books were opened” (20:12). Different books or records are mentioned in Scripture:

- The Lamb's book of Life: a list of the elect, who are found to be righteous in Christ (Rev. 21:27).
- The record of the thoughts and deeds of those who fear the Lord, and from which the saints will be rewarded (Mal. 3:16; 1 Cor. 3:13). The book of the deeds of the unrighteous, to determine degrees of punishment (Rev. 20:12).
- The book of life (Rev. 20:12), of which, we are told, one's name might be blotted out.

Thus, it is believed by many that the book of life is a reference to all that are born into Adam's race. However, the lamb's book of life is a record of all who seek refuge in the blood of the lamb. In the end, these two records will agree with each other, as one by one those dying without the protection of the blood of Christ are stricken from the book of life. Whereas, those who die in the Lord are able to shout, "*Oh death, where is thy sting? Oh grave, where is thy victory?*" (1 Cor. 15:55).

As discussed earlier, the believer will also stand before a judgment seat, but it is not this judgment of the Great White Throne.⁷³ The believer's judgment is a throne of mercy and redemption. Having been justified by the blood of Christ, the believer's judgment will determine rewards, or the lack thereof. Thus, there are noticeable differences between the Great White Throne and the throne of the bema seat, before which the believers stand (4:1-11; 1 Cor. 3:14-15).⁷⁴

- The Great White Throne has no rainbow to speak of the promises of God. There are no promises to remember.
- The Great White Throne has no thunderclaps or lightening to sound a warning. There are no more warnings; the time of reckoning has come.
- The Great White Throne has no mention of the seven Spirits of God that speak of His grace and mercy. Grace has passed and mercy has run her course, now judgment must fall.

⁷³ See page 102.

⁷⁴ See page 61.

- The Great White Throne has no sea of glass, no refuge and foundation on which to stand. There is nowhere to stand, no shelter in sight. The only possible cleft of refuge has been rejected and He who would have been their refuge is now their judge.
- And finally, the Great White Throne has no singing. Not even the singing of the blues, for they too speak of hope. There is no hope, only the condemnation of silence.

PART TEN

ALL THINGS NEW

New Heaven and Earth

God's Day 21:1-8

⁽¹⁾And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and the sea is no more. ⁽²⁾And the holy city, the new Jerusalem, I saw coming down out of heaven from God, having been prepared as a bride having been adorned for her husband. ⁽³⁾And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them. ⁽⁴⁾And He will wipe off every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor pain, will be any longer; because the first things are passed away."

⁽⁵⁾And the one sitting on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new. And he tells me, Write. For these words are faithful and true."

⁽⁶⁾And he said to me, "It has occurred. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one thirsting of the fountain of the water of life freely. ⁽⁷⁾The victorious one will inherit these things, and I will be to him, God, and he will be to me, a son. ⁽⁸⁾But for the cowardly, and unbelieving, and those having become detestable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all the

liars, their part will be in the lake—the one burning with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them and they will be His people, and God himself will be with them.

At last the desire of God’s heart has been fulfilled. God’s day has come. Christ’s work is over and God has realized his original intention for man’s companionship. Each person of the Godhead has realized His reward. The Son has received His bride, the Church. In a mystical union that we cannot as yet even begin to understand, He will glory in her throughout eternity (Eph. 3:9-13, 21, 5:23-32). The Holy Spirit has received, within the body of the redeemed, His holy temple. Never again will the Holy Spirit see his temple defiled. This in itself will be paradise. And the Father has received His family of sons. At last the family is complete, His parental heart is satisfied and these, the objects of his love and mercy, will forever adore and revere Him in the highest.

The Battle Is Over

Finally the battle of good and evil is over, *“He will wipe off every tear from their eyes” (20:4)*. The pain and anguish of sin and sin itself are no more. Never again will a cold-hearted father, tormented by his own iniquities, beat his wife or his children. Never again will a wife stand at the door waiting for her drunken husband to bring home the remains of his squandered pay check. Never again will a mother cradle her precious babe, his eyes begging for relief from a excruciating terminal disease. And never again will heaven witness the angst of the Creator, as He ponders His sorrowful creation. The former things have passed away; the new day has dawned. *“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Ps. 30:5)*.

Water of Life

How vain man is to fancy himself self-sufficient, surrounded by sorrow, pain, famine, mental depression, sickness and death; yet seldom is there one who will reach for the liberating water of life that is ever set before him. More often than not, even when he stumbles upon it, he walks away cursing it for having soiled his garments. But how marvelous is the grace of God. In his forbearance, he has never withheld his promise. He says to those who will hold their dusty cups under his pitcher, *“I will give to the one thirsting of the fountain of the water of life freely” (21:6).*

The Cowardly

What a motley group, these who have chosen the Lake of Fire. They are,

Cowardly, and unbelieving, and those having become detestable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers,⁷⁵ and idolaters, and all the liars, their part will be in the lake—the one burning with fire and brimstone, which is the second death (21:8).

One might easily understand the conviction of the unbelieving, the abominable, the whoremonger, the sorcerers, the idolaters and the liars, but why the cowardly? He seems so innocent? Then we must remember that cowardliness is the furthest thing removed from faith. By definition, they are at opposite ends of the scale. They cannot co-exist.

It is cowardliness that causes faith to waver. It is cowardliness that destroys faith. God has given to the believer the spirit of *“power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2*

⁷⁵ The term φαρμακεῦσιν (*pharmakeusin*) pharmacopoeia, translated “sorcerers” speaks of those mixing and making drugs; specifically those which are designed for magic and mystical practices.

Tim. 1:7). In Christ is the means of courage and strength to victory. Other than hate, cowardliness is also the furthest thing from love. The coward is so, solely due to his self-centeredness. The coward issues no love, for love is self-sacrificing, something the coward will not do.

Of course, this is not to say that anyone who has ever experienced fear or cowardliness is incapable of faith or love and is thereby sentenced to “*the second death*.” The problem with the cowards in this text is they are too fearful even to seek forgiveness. They lack the necessary courage required even to desire a change of life. They are in the sorriest of life’s ruts; slithering and stalking in the shadows, lest the glorious gospel should shine upon their evil deeds.

The Second Death

“*The second death*” (21:8) is never defined in the Bible as a ceasing to exist, or annihilation. Physical death, which is the separation of the soul and spirit from the body, is the first death (Jm. 2:26). The second death is the eternal separation of soul, spirit and resurrected body from the presence of God. There will be but one abode for these who experience the second death, it will be the tormenting Lake of Fire.

The New Jerusalem 21:9-22:5

⁽⁹⁾*And one of the seven angels (those having the seven bowls being full of the seven last plagues) came and spoke with me, saying, “Come hither, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”* ⁽¹⁰⁾*And he carried me away in spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God: ⁽¹¹⁾having the glory of God, its light was like a precious stone, like a jasper being clear as crystal; ⁽¹²⁾having a wall great and high; having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels and names having been written thereon, which are of the twelve tribes of*

the sons of Israel. ⁽¹³⁾From the east were three gates, and from the north three gates, and from the south three gates, and from the west three gates; ⁽¹⁴⁾and the wall of the city having twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

⁽¹⁵⁾And the one speaking with me had a golden measuring reed so that he might measure the city, and its gates, and its wall. ⁽¹⁶⁾And the city lies foursquare, and the length thereof is as much as the breadth. And he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs—the length and the breadth and the height thereof are equal. ⁽¹⁷⁾And he measured its wall, a hundred and forty-four cubits, a measure of a man that is of an angel; ⁽¹⁸⁾and the structuring of its wall, jasper; and the city, pure gold, like pure glass. ⁽¹⁹⁾The foundations of the wall of the city having been adorned with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation, jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; ⁽²⁰⁾the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardis; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. ⁽²¹⁾And the twelve gates, twelve pearls; respectfully, each one of the gates was of one pearl; and the street of the city, pure gold, like transparent glass.

⁽²²⁾And I saw no sanctuary in it. For the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the sanctuary of it. ⁽²³⁾And the city has no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it, for the glory of God enlightened it, and the lamp thereof, the Lamb. ⁽²⁴⁾And the nations will walk by the light of it, and the kings of the earth bring their glory into it. ⁽²⁵⁾And its gates, by no means, shall be shut by day—for no night shall be

there. ⁽²⁶⁾And they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; ⁽²⁷⁾and by no means will anything unclean enter into it, even the one making an abomination and a lie, but only those having been written in the Lamb's book of life.

^(22:1)And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, ⁽²⁾in the midst of its street. And on this side of the river and on that, a tree of life, bearing twelve manners of fruits, according to the month, each yielding its fruit. And the leaves of the tree, for the healing of the nations, ⁽³⁾and no longer will there be any curse. And the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His servants will serve him. ⁽⁴⁾And they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. ⁽⁵⁾And night will be no more. And they have no need of light from the lamp, neither light from the sun, for the Lord God will give them light; and they will reign unto the ages of the ages.

John's eyes are feasting upon the new heaven and the new earth and his heart is basking in the warmth of eternity. We can only imagine the chills tingling down his spine as an angel whisks him away to an even more glorious sight.

And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb (22:1).

The scene is nearly beyond comment. One's imagination is as good as another's. Indeed, too much comment might even be counterproductive, detracting rather than adding to its splendor. I have thus limited my comments to but a few gems that defy refrain. But I will say this, the scene is real—the stones, the gates, the river, the foundations, all of it. Certainly

each has its specific symbolic significance, but this does not negate its eternal tangibility.

1,400 Miles

Imagine this beautiful sparkling city of gold and precious jewels towering into the sky more than 1,400 miles, as wide as it is high, a vision of perfect symmetry. The wall surrounding the perimeter of the city is the first thing to catch John's attention. More than 200 feet thick with twelve gates and twelve foundations, named respectively after the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of the lamb. This leaves no doubt as to the inhabitants. But it is not merely the home of Israel and the Church; this is home for the saints of all ages.

You will hear no malicious words darting forth from mouths like missiles from a silo. Not even an occasional slip of the tongue. No one will harbor thoughts of envy, jealousy or spite. The gut instinct of hatred will never contort the face into a look that could kill. A man's contract will be his word for "*by no means will anything unclean enter into it, even the one making an abomination and a lie*" (21:27).

Our Occupation in Heaven

Does it not sound reminiscent of the Garden of Eden? "*And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb*" (22:1). How often has the question been asked, "What will we do in heaven?" Certainly, no one but God knows that in detail; however we do have some indication of what will occupy our time, for "*His servants will serve him . . . and they will reign unto the ages of the ages*" (22:3-5). Whatever it might entail two things are certain: duty and responsibility. Some have suggested this seems very similar to that which was given to Adam in the garden, to till and to govern.

But the occupations in heaven will be a tertiary importance. The primary concern will be the Lord. The primary blessing will be His presence.

And they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. And they have no need of light from the lamp, neither light from the sun, for the Lord God will give them light; and they will reign unto the ages of the ages” (21:4-5).

Alpha and Omega 22:6-21

⁽⁶⁾*And he said to me, “These words are faithful and true, and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angels to show to his servants the things that must occur with swiftmess. ⁽⁷⁾And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is the one keeping the words of the prophecy of this book.”*

⁽⁸⁾*And I John (the one hearing and seeing these things), and when I heard and I saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel, the one showing me these things. ⁽⁹⁾And he tells me, “See that you do not do it. I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers, the prophets, and those keeping the words of this book. You worship God.”*

⁽¹⁰⁾*And he tells me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. ⁽¹¹⁾The unrighteous, let him be unrighteousness still; and the filthy, let him be filthy still; and the righteous, let him do righteousness still; and the holy, let him be holy still.*

⁽¹²⁾*“Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me to render to each man as his work is. ⁽¹³⁾I am*

the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

⁽¹⁴⁾“Blessed, those washing their robes, so that their authority will be over the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. ⁽¹⁵⁾Outside: the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one loving and making a lie.

⁽¹⁶⁾“I Jesus have sent my angel to testify these things to you for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star.

⁽¹⁷⁾“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And the one hearing let him say, Come. And the one thirsting let him come; the one wishing let him take the water of life freely. ⁽¹⁸⁾I testify to everyone hearing the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds unto them, God will add unto him the plagues—those having been written in this book. ⁽¹⁹⁾And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and out of the holy city, moreover the things having been written in this book.

⁽²⁰⁾The one testifying these things says, “Yes, I am coming quickly. Amen.”

Come, Lord Jesus. ⁽²¹⁾The grace of the Lord Jesus, be with all of you.

Bless Those Who Know

If there is one thing the world can count on, it is that the Lord will return in glory to finish his work. The message in these final sentences brings us right back to where we started, “to show his servants those things that must occur with swiftness” (1:1 & 22:6). Everything in The Revelation is

certain. These things will happen soon, and once they begin they will progress rapidly. The phrase δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει (*dei ginosthai en tachei*) leaves no room for speculation; *it must occur quickly*. It has to happen and it behooves it to happen with haste.⁷⁶ Therefore,

Blessed is the one reading and those hearing the words of the prophecy and keeping the things that have been written therein, for the time is near (1:3).

Happy is the man who has understanding. Confident is the man who has wisdom in these matters.

The knowledge of the Lord's soon return demands a life style in accordance with his commands. Many passages that speak of His return simultaneously admonish a sanctified life. For example:

Be longsuffering . . . unto the coming of the Lord . . . establish your hearts, because the coming of the Lord draws near . . . do not murmur, brother, against one another . . . behold, the judge stands before the door (Jm. 5:7-9).

The Lord make you to abound and to exceed in love toward one another and to all men . . . to establish your hearts without blame, in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints (1 Th. 3:12-13).

What we shall be has not yet revealed. We know that when he appears we will be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And everyone having this hope in him purifies himself even as he is pure (1 Jn. 3:2-3).

⁷⁶ See the comments on verse 1:1.

Worship God Alone

Once again, excited and doubtless overwhelmed by a sense of unworthiness, John falls on his face before the angel. And like every other holy angel or holy man that has found himself the object of worship, the angel responds quite negatively.

See that you do not do it. I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers, the prophets, and those keeping the words of this book. You worship God (22:9).

Peter's response was the same as the angel's when he faced this predicament at the house of Cornelius; "Stand up," he told Cornelius, "I myself, am also a man" (Acts 10:26).

On the contrary, Jesus did not reject such worship. It is clear proof of his claim to Deity. Time and again he willingly received worship from his followers:

Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, "Of a truth thou art the Son of God" (Mt. 14:33);

And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, "Be not afraid: go tell my brethren" (Mt. 28:9-10).

And Thomas answered and said unto him, "My LORD and my God." Jesus said unto him, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (Jn. 20:28-29).

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me saying, "Fear not; I am the first and the last and the living one; and I was dead

and behold, I am living unto the ages of the ages; and I have the keys of death and of Hades” (1:17-18).

Only a fool, blinded by pride or hatred, would deny that Jesus claimed deity and accepted worship as God. Thus, every man and woman who hears the gospel is faced with the most important decision of his or her life: What will he or she do with this Jesus? Was he a lunatic who should have been lost to the annals of history? Was he a liar who shall stand before God for his sin? Or was he who he claimed to be: God in the flesh, the Creator of the world, the only hope for mankind? Certainly the gospel is a two-edged sword. For those who accept it, it is eternal life; for those who reject it, is eternal death.

To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? (2 Cor. 2:16).

Thief in The Night

“Behold, I am coming quickly” (22:7). How suddenly the world will be caught in their iniquities. He will come suddenly, when they least expect it (1 Th. 5:2). The irony is that the world has been warned time and again; but the warnings are met with deaf ears. Nevertheless, God has given sufficient notice so that they are without excuse. The time is at hand and the Lord says of that day:

The unrighteous, let him be unrighteousness still; and the filthy, let him be filthy still; and the righteous, let him do righteousness still; and the holy, let him be holy still (22:11).

Jesus said, *“my reward is with me to render to each man as his work is” (22:12).* Notice that he speaks of rewards and not salvation. There is a great difference. Rewards are earned, salvation is of grace through faith (Eph. 2:8); it is a

free gift, granted merely upon request. Rewards, both the good and the bad, are the result of works. Believers will be rewarded for their works of righteousness (1 Cor. 3:12-15); unbelievers will be rewarded with punishment for their works of unrighteousness (Mt. 25:41-46).

The Open Book

It is a sad commentary indeed upon the current Christian society that so much of Christendom believes the book of The Revelation is a great mystery. In ignorance it is considered to be obscure and without relevance. What an obtuse response to the Lord's command:

Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. . . . I Jesus have sent my angel to testify these things to you for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star (22:10, 16).

Jesus meant for The Revelation to be read, He expected it to be understood. At both the beginning and the end of the book, he made it very clear that it was given "to show his servants those things that must occur with swiftness" (1:1 & 22:6). Thus, it is imperative for all teachers of God's Word in these last days to have a clear understanding of the eschatological events written herein.

Yes, as is the nature of prophetic Scripture, there are certain cryptic details that will not be clearly understood until they take place. But the theme of the book, the overall picture, the book at large, is certainly understandable, and the closer we get to its fulfillment, the more so.

The book of Daniel, like The Revelation, was also written for those living in the end times. Of these last days, Daniel said, "none of the wicked will understand, but they that are wise will understand" (Dan. 12:10). Likewise, even the book of Enoch was written for the last days.

The words of the blessing of Enoch, wherewith he blessed the elect and righteous, who will be living in the day of tribulation, when all the wicked and godless are to be removed. And he took up his parable and said, Enoch a righteous man, whose eyes were opened by God, saw the vision of the Holy One in the heavens, which the angels showed me, and from them I heard everything, and from them I understood as I saw, but not for this generation, but for a remote one which is for to come. Concerning the elect I said, and took up my parable concerning them: The Holy Great One will come forth from His dwelling; and the eternal God will tread upon the earth, (even) on Mount Sinai; and appear in the strength of His might from the heaven of heavens (Enoch 1:2-4).

But Beware!

God's final message to the world is quite fitting to His character. Not willing that any should perish but that all would come to repentance, this is a message of mercy and grace. How tender is His final call to those who have despised His holy name. Having exposed himself and suffered the slanderous, defamatory, proud and rebellious tongue of man, still His mercy triumphs over judgment,

The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And the one hearing, let him say, Come. And the one thirsting, let him come; the one wishing, let him take the water of life freely (22:17).

But just as salvation is true to God's character of grace and mercy, so too is judgment true to His character of holiness and righteousness. Take heed! You who reject His mercy, you who add or subtract from His Holy Word. Certainly you

heap to yourselves burning coals of fire that will never be extinguished.

I testify to everyone hearing the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds unto them, God will add unto him the plagues—those having been written in this book. And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and out of the holy city, moreover the things having been written in this book (22:18-19).

God's Love Persists

Oh the love of God! Even after the tender invitation and the stern warning, still the message burns in His heart. It is as though He is compelled to issue on final warning. *The one testifying these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly. Amen" (22:20).*

Imagine John's response; standing dumbstruck, mouth wide open, and eyes as big saucers. He has not only witnessed but participated in an interactive vision, the likes of which never a man has seen. What was he to say? What could he say? Thus the short and very appropriate benediction,

Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus, be with all of you (22:20).

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