

REVELATION  
for Christians  
Today

Lonnie Woodruff

# **REVELATION FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY**

**LONNIE WOODRUFF**

H & H PUBLISHING  
111 E. 22<sup>nd</sup> St.  
BENTON, KENTUCKY 42025

Copyright © 1989  
Lonnie Woodruff  
All Rights Reserved  
Revised 1993  
Revised 2012

All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version.

# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	1
A Method of Interpretation	3
Symbolism	4
Numerology	7
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	9
Greetings (1:1-8)	9
John's Vision of Christ (1:9-20)	15
Questions on Chapter 1	24
<b>INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTERS 2 &amp; 3</b>	25
"Angels of the Churches"	25
"Overcome"	26
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	31
The Letter to Ephesus (2:1-7)	31
The Letter to Smyrna (2:8-11)	36
The Letter to Pergamos (2:12-17)	39
The Letter to Thyatira (2:18-29)	45
Questions on Chapter 2	53
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	55
The Letter to Sardis (3:1-6)	55
The Letter to Philadelphia (3:7-13)	59
The Letter to Laodicea (3:14-22)	64
Questions on Chapter 3	72

<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	73
The Throne of God (4:1-11)	74
Chapter Summary	82
Questions on Chapter 4	84
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	85
God’s Sealed Book (5:1-4)	85
Christ Prevails to Open the Book (5:5-14)	89
Questions on Chapter 5	95
<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	97
The Seals, the Trumpets, and the Plagues	97
Introduction to the Seals	97
A “Seal”	99
The First Four Seals: The Four Horsemen (6:1-8)	99
Summary of the First Four Seals	105
Introduction to the Last Three Seals	105
The Fifth Seal: The Cry of the Martyrs (6:9-11)	106
The Sixth Seal: The Great Earthquake (6:12-17)	108
Questions on the First Four Seals (6:1-8)	111
Questions on Seals 5,6, and 7 (6:9-17; 8:1-5)	112
<b>CHAPTER 7</b>	115
“Who Shall Be Able to Stand?” (7:1-3)	115
The 144,000 Sealed (7:4-8)	117
The Victorious Multitude: Servants of God (7:9-17)	120
Chapter Summary	127
Questions on Chapter 7	129
<b>CHAPTER 8</b>	131
Introduction to the Seventh Seal	131
The Seventh Seal: Silence in Heaven (8:1-5)	132
Introduction to the Seven Trumpets	136
A ‘Trumpet’	136
The First Four Trumpets: Spiritual Trials (8:6-12)	138
The Eagle’s Warning (8:13)	145
Questions on the First Four Trumpets (8:6-12)	146

<b>CHAPTER 9</b>	149
Introduction to the Last Three Trumpets	149
The Fifth Trumpet: Locusts From the Bottomless Pit (9:1-12)	149
Introduction to the Sixth Trumpet	158
The Sixth Trumpet: The Army of Horsemen (9:13-21)	159
Questions on Trumpets 5,6, and 7 (9:1-21; 11:12-19)	166
<b>CHAPTER 10</b>	169
The Little Book Open (10:1-7)	169
John Eats the Little Book (10:8-11)	174
Questions on Chapter 10	177
<b>CHAPTER 11</b>	179
A History of the Church	179
The Two Witnesses (11:1-14)	180
The Seventh Trumpet: Judgment (11:15-19)	193
Questions on Chapter 11	197
<b>CHAPTER 12</b>	199
The Woman, the Child, and the Dragon (12:1-6)	201
The Devil Cast From Heaven (12:7-12)	206
The Dragon Persecutes the Woman (12:13-17)	211
Questions on Chapter 12	215
<b>CHAPTER 13</b>	217
The Beast Out of the Sea	218
The Beast Out of the Earth	219
The First Beast (13:1-10)	220
The Second Beast (13:11-17)	227
Understanding the Number “666” (13:18)	231
Questions on 13:1-10	235
Questions on 13:11-18	236

<b>CHAPTER 14</b>	239
The Lamb and the 144,000 (14:1-5)	239
The Proclamations of Three Angels (14:6-11)	244
The Blessed Dead (14:12-13)	247
The Vision of the Harvest Judgment (14:14-20)	248
Questions on Chapter 14	254
<b>CHAPTER 15</b>	257
Introduction to the Seven Plagues (15:1—16:1)	259
Questions on Chapter 15	266
<b>CHAPTER 16</b>	267
The Seven Last Plagues	267
The First Plague: A Grievous Sore (16:2)	269
The Second Plague: The Sea Turns to Blood (16:3)	270
The Third Plague: The Waters Turn to Blood (16:4-7)	271
The Fourth Plague: Men Are Scorched (16:8-9)	273
The Fifth Plague: Darkness and Pain (16:10-11)	274
“Armageddon”	275
The Sixth Plague: The Euphrates Dried Up (16:12-16)	276
The Seventh Plague: Hell Out of Heaven (16:17-21)	282
Questions on the First Four Plagues (16:1-9)	288
Questions on Plagues 5,6, and 7 (16:10-21)	289
<b>CHAPTER 17</b>	291
The Vision of the Harlot (17:1-6)	293
The Mystery Revealed (17:7-18)	299
Questions on Chapter 17	312
<b>CHAPTER 18</b>	315
The Fall of Babylon Announced (18:1-8)	317
Lament for Babylon (18:9-20)	323
The Finality of the Fall (18:21-24)	329
Questions Concerning the Fall of Babylon (18:1—19:4)	335

<b>CHAPTER 19</b>	337
Heaven Rejoices (19:1-7)	338
The Marriage Feast (19:8-10)	344
Christ on a White Horse (19:11-16)	350
The Beast Defeated (19:17-21)	354
Questions on 19:5-21	360
<b>CHAPTER 20</b>	363
The Binding of Satan (20:1-3)	365
The Thousand-Year Reign (20:4-6)	367
Satan Loosed (20:7-10)	370
The Final Judgment (20:11-21:1)	373
Questions on Chapter 20	377
<b>CHAPTER 21</b>	379
The Holy City New Jerusalem (21:2-8)	381
The Holy Jerusalem	389
The Bride: The Lamb's Wife (21:9-27)	393
Questions on Chapter 21	405
<b>CHAPTER 22</b>	407
The River of Life (22:1-5)	407
The Angel Concludes (22:6-9)	412
Jesus' Final Statements (22:10-21)	414
Questions on Chapter 22	421
Conclusion to Chapters 21 and 22	422
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	423
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	437



## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this study of the book of Revelation. Many people consider Revelation to be one of the most fascinating books ever written. It contains symbols and figures that strain our imagination to even visualize their appearance. Many people read the book with great amazement and curiosity without any understanding of what the symbols represent. Others spend a great deal of time attempting to solve the meanings of these great visions. Since Revelation is so fascinating, many use it to attract listeners by applying all types of speculative meanings to these symbols. Many times these explanations associate the symbols in Revelation with specific events that are taking place in our world today. These interpretations can be very intriguing to people because they seemingly explain many of the events and conflicts presently taking place in our world. Some interpreters even predict impending doom and destruction of this world, which plays on the emotions of people. Because of this many people are, unfortunately, attracted to these interpretations and accept them without reservations.

It is our conviction that the only way to understand these visions is by deriving the meanings of the symbols from Scripture. This defeats the idea that we may arbitrarily apply certain symbols in Revelation to specific events taking place in our world today. We must have a basis for interpretation, and that basis is the Word of God. We must search the Scripture for definitions of these symbols. The only way this can be accomplished is by accepting all Scripture as the perfect and infallible Word of God. If we allow God to speak to us through his Word and accept it totally without doubting, the book of Revelation will literally come alive. It is the crowning touch to the Word of God. It brings together God's plan for man from the Garden to Eden to this present Christian dispensation.

Since the Bible is sole foundation upon which we will build this interpretation of Revelation, there are some Biblical concepts that we must first understand. One of the most fundamental of these concepts is understanding that the Bible is written by using physical and spiritual contrasts and comparisons. We live in a physical world and are bound by the physical laws that keep this world intact. Therefore, it is sometimes very difficult for us to think in terms of things that are spiritual in nature. However, Jn. 4:24 tells us that God is a spirit. Therefore, those things pertaining to God are spiritual. As human beings, we recognize that we have a physical body and a spiritual soul. We understand our physical bodies and the physical things around us because we can recognize them through the use of our five senses. However, this is not the case with things that are spiritual. We cannot see, hear, smell, feel, or touch anything that is spiritual. Therefore, in order for us to comprehend things that are spiritual, God must provide a way for us to understand these matters. He accomplished this by using physical things that we know and understand to illustrate things that are spiritual in nature. This concept will be referred to throughout this book as physical/spiritual comparisons and contrasts.

Possibly the verse in the Bible that is most helpful in understanding physical/spiritual contrasts and comparisons is 2Co 4:18 which states, "while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal."

This verse is telling us not to put our hope in things that are material. Instead, we are to trust in things that are spiritual. The verse then explains that things which are material are temporary. They only last for a little while. However, things that are spiritual are eternal. Spiritual things are things we cannot see with our material eyes. Therefore, in order for us to understand spiritual things, they must be described by using material things we can see and understand. In Revelation, we must look for the spiritual meanings of the physical objects in the visions.

One of the first items that most of us would recognize as an example of a physical/spiritual

comparison is how the physical tabernacle built by Moses is a comparison to the spiritual church of today. As the people of Israel were camped around Mt. Siani, God commanded Moses to build a tabernacle and gave him specific measurements to follow in its construction. This tabernacle is used several times in the book of Hebrews as a comparison of the church. Therefore, the tabernacle was a physical representation of the spiritual church of this present Christian dispensation. Many people, places and events in the Old Testament serve as physical examples of things that take place in this Christian age. By using these various Old Testament examples, we will be able to understand the spiritual aspect of the visions of Revelation.

Revelation is written in the form of apocalyptic literature, which makes use of symbols and figures to express spiritual concepts. God gave these symbols to the apostle John to be written down for our study and understanding. We know these symbols are understandable because 22:9 says that we can “keep the sayings of this book,” and 22:14 says that those who “do his commandments” will be blessed. Certainly, God will not promise to bless us with sayings that cannot be understood.

Because the meanings of these symbols are so misunderstood, Revelation is becoming widely used in the “Christian world” today as the basis for beliefs that are totally contrary to the teachings of the New Testament. There are almost as many theories about the meanings of these symbols as there are writers who attempt to interpret them. There are premillennial theories; postmillennial theories; amillennial theories, and a host of individual interpretations within each of these. With so many different interpretations of the book, a great deal of confusion surrounds it, so much so that many people avoid studying it altogether.

Many who seek to interpret the book give the symbols such fanciful meanings that they cannot possibly have any scriptural foundation. It is impossible to interpret Revelation correctly without first having a proper understanding of the New Testament and God’s plan of salvation for man. Revelation is inspired by God, and we must treat it accordingly. We must not arbitrarily apply meanings to these symbols without Biblical or historical authority.

This book is not intended to be a comparison or refutation of the many different interpretations of Revelation being proposed today. It is an attempt to derive the meaning of the symbols used in Revelation by examining how they are used throughout the Bible. This gives us a Bible based definition of the symbols in Revelation. Contrary to what many believe, a thorough knowledge of the history of the destruction of Jerusalem or Rome is not necessary in order to interpret Revelation. This is not to say that a little basic knowledge of history would not be helpful; however, the amount of historical knowledge needed is very small. The Bible is virtually the only book needed in order to understand Revelation. By approaching Revelation in this manner, we believe we can come to a very Biblically based interpretation, which can readily be accepted by those who hold God's Word to be the truth.

Since this interpretation of Revelation is based solely on the Bible, we believe it deserves careful consideration. It is our conviction that these interpretations will serve to strengthen our faith and knowledge of God’s Word. We hope to provide an understanding that will enable Christians to combat those who challenge our beliefs with many unbelievable interpretations. We should not expect to convince the world of these interpretations because the world does not have the same respect and admiration for God's Word that Christians have. However, these interpretations should strengthen our faith by giving us a better understanding of God’s Word.

Many people believe that we cannot arrive at the true meanings of Revelation; however, we must remember that the term “revelation” means to reveal, not to conceal. God has revealed many things to us in this great book. We must not let them remain hidden by leaving its covers closed. The lessons contained in Revelation are hidden from many people, but not because God desires this to be so. They are hidden because of man’s own misunderstanding of Scripture. (See 2Cor. 4:3)

This presents a major problem for Christians who desire to study Revelation. Many people who have written books interpreting Revelation do not have the correct understanding of the New Testament. Also, many writers who are correct in their beliefs concerning the Scriptures are greatly influenced by those who are not. This is understandable because in our attempts to learn more about God's Word, we read and study the materials that we have available. Therefore, we have a situation in which most of the literature available concerning Revelation is written without using the Bible as a basis for determining the meaning of these symbols. Without using Biblical definitions of these symbols, it is impossible to arrive at their correct meanings. We will strive to use the Bible as the basis of all interpretations.

The King James Version was chosen as the text in this book. In passages where there is some question concerning the translation, the American Standard Version will also be quoted.

## METHOD OF INTERPRETATION

Several different methods are used to interpret Revelation. Four of the most widely accepted are: (1) futurist, (2) preterist, (3) historicist, and (4) philosophy of history. It is not within the scope of this book to explain these different methods of interpretation. For further information, two good sources are: (1) James Burton Coffman. *Commentary on Revelation*<sup>1</sup> and (2) Ray Summers, *Worthy Is the Lamb*.<sup>2</sup> A fifth method is the parallelist. Coffman uses this method as does William Hendriksen in his book, *More Than Conquerors*.<sup>3</sup> About the parallelist method Coffman states, "As yet, this is not a widely recognized 'school' of interpretation,"<sup>4</sup> but it will be "far more widely received in the future than at present."<sup>5</sup> This is the method of interpretation we will follow.

The parallelist method divides Revelation into separate and distinct visions covering the entire Christian age from the first coming of Christ until Judgment. Each vision, though it covers the same period of time, has a separate meaning from all other visions. Each vision will describe different events, both physical and spiritual, that take place during this present Christian age. It is important to understand this parallelist method because it vastly differs from the methods that have been used for years. Many of the writers of recent times have used the historicist method. It basically says that the events described in Revelation have already been fulfilled by certain events that have occurred in past history. In contrast, those using the parallelist method say that the book is being fulfilled continually throughout the entire Christian age. According to this method, the visions describe general principles that have application for all Christians of all ages and do not necessarily represent some specific event that has already occurred or will take place in the future. We believe that it is not only possible for God to write a prophecy covering the entire Gospel age, but that is exactly what he did.

By using this method of interpretation, we will undertake to show that the book of Revelation was written to Christians of all ages. We believe that Revelation has the same meanings for Christians today as it did for Christians in the time of the apostle John. We realize that Christians at the time of the writing of Revelation may have had tremendous advantages over us in understanding the book because: (1) They were near to the time of Christ; (2) They may have still possessed special gifts from God; (3) They were also familiar with the Hebrew language and its usage of symbols and numbers. If Revelation does apply to Christians today as it did to those in the first century, that makes it even more important that we study and understand this marvelous book.

## SYMBOLISM

Realizing that Revelation is a book of symbols is an important concept to understand before entering into our study. These symbols must not be taken literally but should be thought of as a description of events that God is revealing to us. Most writers who interpret Revelation apply figurative meanings to at least some of the symbols; others interpret them literally. We must keep in mind that these symbols are figurative in nature, and we must search the Scriptures to find their correct meanings. We must take care to have a biblical reason for the meaning of these symbols and not arbitrarily apply any meaning we might like in order to make them fit our interpretation.

Revelation is difficult to study verse by verse because many times the meaning of a symbol used in one passage may have to be derived from a passage not yet studied. There are also symbols that may be best understood by collectively studying all passages dealing with them. For these reasons, we are including in this introduction the meanings of some of the most important symbols. We will not attempt to give reasons for arriving at these particular meanings in this introduction because they will be discussed in detail in the text. It will be helpful to study these definitions along with the passages in which they are used before entering into a verse by verse study of the book.

Another important concept to understand concerning these symbols is that more than one symbol may be used to describe the same thing. Just as we might describe an item by giving its size, color, and shape, several symbols may be used to describe the same force operating in this world. Each symbol is used to identify different characteristics of that which is being described. For example, Jesus is described as both a lamb and lion. Each of these symbols describe certain characteristics of our Lord.

Some of the major symbols along with reference passages, definitions, and definition passages when applicable are given below.

<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Reference Passage</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Definition Passage</b>
Babylon the great	18:2, 10; 18:3	Religious powers that control the lives of many people	1Chron. 9:1
Beast out of the earth	11:7; 13:11; 17:8, 11; 13:15	Religious powers that control the lives of many people upon the earth	Dan. 7;
Beast out of the sea	13:1; 17:8, 11	Civil governments which rule this world	Dan. 7
Bride	21:9	The church	Rom 7:4
False prophet	16:13; 19:20; 20:10	Religious powers which practice false teachings	2Pet. 2:1
First resurrection	20:5	Spiritual resurrection; Baptism	Eph. 2:5-6

Great city	11:8; 17:18; 18:10	People who worship God but not according to the teachings of the Bible; The apostate church	17:2, 18
Holy city, Holy Jerusalem, New Jerusalem	21:2,10; 22:19	The church	Heb. 12:22-23
Lamb	5:6,12	Christ	Jn. 1:29
Mountains	6:14; 8:8; 17:9	Great governmental powers which rule this world	Amos 4:1
Overcome Second death	1; 2; 21:7 20:14; 21:8	Obedience to gospel Spiritual death; Destruction in hell	1Jn. 5:4, 5 21:8
Sun, moon, and stars	6:12,13; 8:12; 12:4	Lights of the world; Those forces which direct the physical and spiritual lives of people	(See comments on 6:12.)
Temple	11:1, 19; 15:8	The church; The dwelling place of God	1Cor. 3:16; 2Cor. 6:16
White robes	3:4,18; 7:9,14	The righteousness of saints	19:8
1/4 part of man	6:8	The physical part of man's being	(See comments on 6:8.)
1/3 part of man	8; 9; 12:4	The spiritual part of man's being	(See introduction to the series of seven trumpets.)
1000 years	20:4, 6	The Christian dis- pensation; The gospel age	(See comments on introduction to chapter 20.)

## NUMEROLOGY

To correctly interpret Revelation, it is also important to understand how numbers are used in the book. They, like symbols, have figurative meanings instead of literal numerical values. Most of the numbers are used as a description of something rather than a literal number. For example, the number “144,000” is used to represent the entire redeemed from the earth, not a literal “144,000” people. The Christians of the first century probably had a better understanding of these numbers than we have some two thousand years later, but we can determine the use of many of these numbers by studying how they were used in the Hebrew language. Summers states, “In that early day, when language was primitive and the vocabulary meager, one Hebrew word sometimes was compelled to do duty for a score of diverse meanings. Under such conditions men came naturally to use numbers as we use words.”<sup>6</sup> Numbers came to have a certain descriptive meaning just as words do. This can easily be illustrated by looking at how the number 7 is used symbolically in Scripture. Mat 18:21-22 says, “Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.” We also understand that Jesus did not intend for us to keep count to 490 times. The number 7 is being used in a figurative manner. It symbolizes complete forgiveness. We are to forgive as many times as necessary. We do this with numbers to a certain extent in our language today. For example, we tend to associate the number “13” with being unlucky. The following is a brief explanation of some of the numbers used in Revelation. Others will be discussed later as they appear in the text. (For further information, Summers has an excellent section on numerology.)

Number	Definition
1	Unity or the ability to stand alone. God is 1.
2	Strength or courage. 2 are stronger than 1. The disciples of Jesus went out by 2's.
3	Deity. The divine or spiritual number. The Godhead is 3-fold in nature: God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.
4	This physical world in which we live. The 4 winds and 4 corners of the earth are frequently used. There are also 4 directions of the earth: north, south, east, and west
7	Perfection. A sacred number; the perfect divine number, “3,” plus the perfect number of this physical world, “4,” equals “7” or total perfection.
10	Completeness. If a person has all 10 fingers and toes, he is humanly complete. The number “5” is used in connection with this to mean half complete or more specifically, incomplete or short of perfection.
1000	10 x 10 x 10 Ultimate completeness.
12	Organized religion. There were 12 tribes of Israel and apostles. These represent the two laws which God gave man to follow.

6	Evil. This number falls short of the perfect number, "7." It carries with it the idea of impending doom or destruction.
3½	A time of despair or confusion. This number is expressed several ways such as: time, times, and half a time; 1260 days; and 42 months.
144,000	The entire redeemed from the earth; all God's people of all ages.

## IMPORTANCE OF PROPHECY

One other very important point that must be made before entering into our study deals with Old Testament prophecy. Many in the religious world attempt to connect the Old Testament prophecies with the prophecies in Revelation. There can be no doubt that they are connected but not in the way they are commonly used. We must keep firmly in our minds that the Old Testament prophets prophesied of events concerning the nation of Israel up to and including the first coming of Christ and the establishment of the church. The prophecies in Revelation are prophecies concerning the church during this Christian age. The prophecies in the Old Testament and those in Revelation deal with two different periods of time. We must not apply the Old Testament prophecies to the second coming of Christ. The obvious question at this time would be: How are they related? They are related in an extraordinary way. This is extremely important in understanding Revelation! The same symbolic language used by the Old Testament prophets to describe the church that was in the future to them is used in Revelation to show that we have received that which was promised. One very easy example of this is found in Isa. 60:11 and Rev. 21:24-25. Isa. 60:11 states:

Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that *men* may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and *that* their kings *may be* brought.

This prophecy was made by the prophet Isaiah and concerned the coming of the church when Christ came to earth the first time. It spoke of a time to come when the gates of the church would be open continually. This was in contrast to Old Testament times when the gates of the cities were closed at night to protect them from their enemies. It also states that the Gentiles would come into this city and even their kings could enter. We know this must be speaking of the church because Jesus made a way for the Gentiles to come to him. They were not a part of the nation of Israel; however, they are a part of the church today.

Then we read in Rev. 21:24-25:

Rev 21:24 And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.

Rev 21:25 And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.

These verses are telling us that we now have that which was prophesied by the prophet Isaiah. The saved from all nations walk in the light of the church today. The kings of the earth can bring their glory and honor into the church today by obeying the gospel and becoming members of

God's church. The gates of the church are never closed. Anyone may come into it at any time by obeying God's Word. More information on these verses can be found in the comments made on Rev. 21:24-25.

This should help in understanding the relationship of the prophecies in the Old Testament to the prophecies in Revelation. Many prophecies can be used in this manner to determine the meanings of symbols used in Revelation. This will be a very important concept in the study to follow.

## **DATE OF WRITING**

Of all the questions we are asked concerning Revelation, the one we most often hear is; "When do you believe the book was written?" Because of that, we feel the necessity of addressing this issue. There are only two things we know with certainty about the time of the writing of Revelation: 1) It was written sometime during the latter part of the life of the apostle John, and 2) We do not know the exact date. Anything beyond that is conjecture on the part of those attempting to determine the exact date. This is not to say that sometime in the future someone might find additional information that would be helpful in determining the correct date of writing. However, for now, we do not have enough information to determine the exact date.

We would also like to address reasons why we believe we are so often asked this question. Within the church today, there are two major beliefs concerning how Revelation should be interpreted. First, many believe that Revelation was fulfilled during the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. For those who hold this belief, it is imperative that the book was written prior to that destruction. They claim that Revelation was written sometime around A.D. 68. The other group believes that several visions in Revelation find their fulfillment in events leading up to and including the fall of the Roman Empire in A.D. 476. Those people believe that Revelation was written around A.D. 95, during the rule of the Emperor Domitian. Therefore, there are two groups with competing ideas concerning the method of interpreting Revelation, and the date of writing is important to each of these proposed interpretations. Therefore, in our opinion, in most cases when someone asks you, "When do you believe the book was written?" they are simply asking, "Which method of interpretation do you prefer?" Since we do not consider either of these interpretations to be correct, we simply do not prefer either date. Therefore, we consider the best answer to the question concerning the date of writing to be: Revelation was written sometime during the latter part of the life of the apostle John. This would have most likely been sometime during the late 80's or early 90's.

As you begin to read and study the interpretation presented in this book, you will soon understand that the date of writing has absolutely no effect on the interpretation. It could have been written as early as the 60's or as late as the 90's. Regardless of the exact date the apostle John pinned Revelation, the message remains the same. It is our hope that sometime in the future, there will be no need for debating the date of writing.

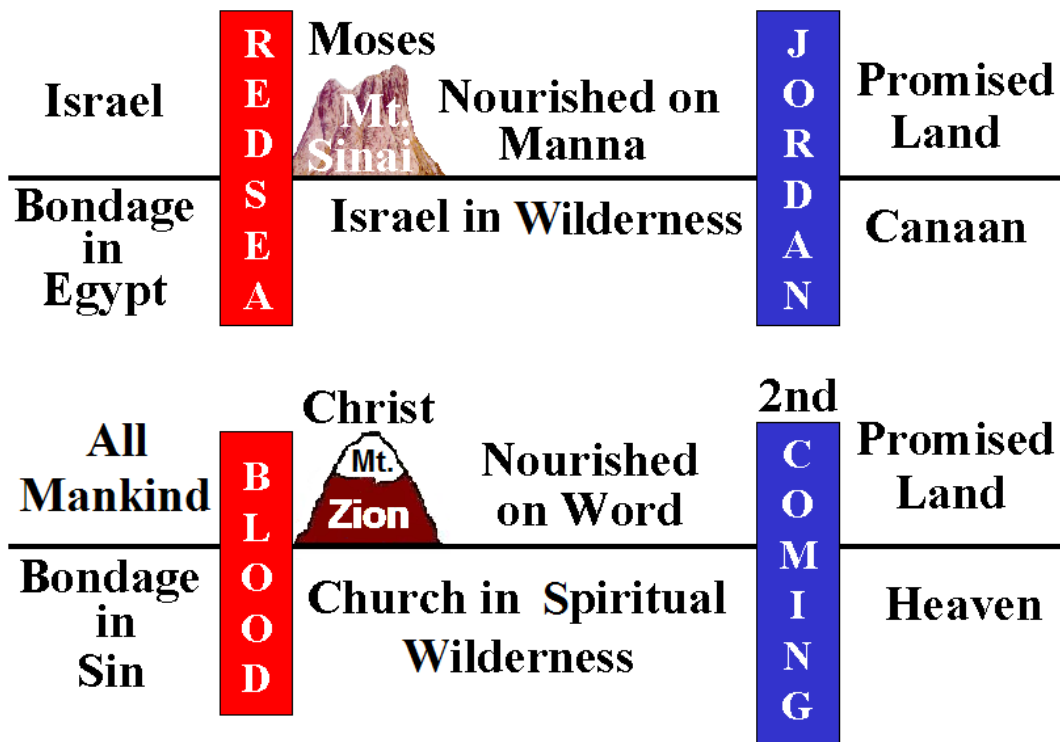


## BIBLICAL PATTERN

Revelation is the crowning touch of symbolism used throughout the Scriptures. It brings together many symbols used in both the Old Testament and New Testament, and develops a tremendous cohesiveness of all symbolic language throughout the Bible. Before beginning our verse by verse study of the text, a discussion of how to study and determine the meanings of these symbols is in order. Let us begin by examining how many of the events of the Old Testament symbolize events to come during the Christian dispensation. Heb. 10:1a states, "For the law, having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things." We have long studied and understood how many people, places, and events of Old Testament times were likenesses of people, places, and events to come during the Christian dispensation. For example, Moses was a likeness of Christ; David also symbolized Christ as king of God's people; and the tabernacle symbolized the church.

The Israelites under the law of Moses lived in a physical, earthly kingdom. Many of the events in this physical kingdom were likenesses of spiritual events that were later to take place in the spiritual kingdom of God. Today, Christians (spiritual Israel) live in that spiritual kingdom – the church. This symbolic connection between the physical kingdom of old Israel and the spiritual kingdom of the church is of utmost importance in understanding Revelation. This concept must be kept clearly in mind at all times. We offer the following diagram and explanation as a means of understanding this concept.

### A Parallel Comparison of Israel and the Church



The book of Revelation deals with the spiritual kingdom of God (church), which is a likeness of the Old Testament physical kingdom of Israel. Please follow the drawing above as you read each of the comparisons below.

1. The Israelites were slaves under Egyptian bondage. Today, mankind is in the spiritual bondage of sin. (Heb. 2:14-15, Rom. 8:13-15).
2. The Israelites crossed the Red Sea to escape physical bondage. Today, mankind crosses the Red Sea of the blood of Christ in order to escape spiritual bondage ( Rom. 6:1-4). (Ever wonder why the Red Sea was so named?)
3. The law of Moses was given on Mt. Sinai to govern the physical kingdom of Israel. The law of Christ was given on Mt. Zion (Micah 4:1-4) to govern the spiritual kingdom of the church (Heb. 12:22; Rev. 14:1; Micah 4:7).
- 4a. The Israelites wandered in the physical wilderness forty years awaiting their promised land called Canaan. Today, the church is wandering in the spiritual wilderness of this world awaiting its promised land called heaven (Rev. 12:6, 14)
- 4b. The Israelites were nourished on physical bread from heaven called manna. Today, the church is nourished on spiritual bread from heaven - Jesus and his Word (Jn. 6:31-35).
5. The Israelites crossed the Jordan River into their promised land. When Christ comes again, the church will cross over into its spiritual promised land of heaven.
6. The Israelites were given an earthly, physical promised land. The church will inherit a heavenly, spiritual promised land.

These parallels are especially useful when studying the following symbols in Revelation.

<b>O. T. Example</b>	<b>N. T. Parallel</b>	<b>Symbolism</b>
1. Physical Bondage	Spiritual Bondage	Great Tribulation
2. Crossing Red Sea	Blood of Christ	First Resurrection
3. Mt. Sinai	Mt. Zion	Lamb on Mt. Zion
4. Wilderness	Church in World	1000 Year Reign
5. Jerusalem	Church (Holy City)	New Jerusalem

The drawing above will be used throughout this book in order to determine the meanings of certain symbols. It would be impossible to overstate the importance of this parallel drawing. It illustrates a pattern created by God and gives us a Biblical basis for determining the meanings of the great visions in Revelation. This parallel comparison will be used almost like a mathematical formula. As you will see, several of the visions fit perfectly into this pattern. That will enable us to determine exactly what is under discussion in these visions. Then, all we have to do is to keep the vision in the proper context of events determined by this pattern.

Today, many in the religious world search for ways to interpret Revelation by looking for codes or hidden meanings. There are no hidden codes. The way to interpret Revelation is by using the pattern designed by God. It is a pattern based on physical/spiritual comparisons. The nation of Israel was a physical nation, and the events recorded in the Old Testament are physical events. The church is a spiritual institution. As Christians today we live in a spiritual church. Those physical events in the Old Testament were patterns of spiritual events to come in this Christian age. The prophecies in the Old Testament were prophecies of events that would affect

the nation of Israel prior to and including the first coming of Christ and the establishment of the church. The prophecies in Revelation deal with events that will affect the church all during the Christian age and into eternity. We can understand those prophecies by using the pattern established by God in the Old Testament.

## OUTLINE OF REVELATION

Chapter 1 Vision of Christ and His Relationship to the Church

Chapters 2&3 Letters to the 7 Churches

Chapters 4&5 Throne Scene

Chapters 6:1 - 8:5 Seven Seals

Chapters 8:6 - 11:19 Seven Trumpets

Chapter 12 Church in the Wilderness

Chapter 13 Beasts with 7 Heads

Chapter 14 Christians around Mt. Zion

Chapters 15 - 16 Seven Last Plagues

Chapters 18:1 - 19:5 Fall of Babylon

Chapter 19:6 - 19:16 Marriage Feast

Chapter 19:17 - 19:21 Destruction of Beast and False Prophet

Chapter 20:1 -20:10 The 1000 Year Reign

Chapters 20:11 - 21:1 Great White Throne Scene

Chapters 21:2 - 22:21 Symbolic Description of the Church

<sup>1</sup>James Burton Coffman. *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979).

<sup>2</sup>Ray Summers. *Worth Is the Lamb* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1951)

<sup>3</sup>William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1956).

<sup>4</sup>Coffman, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Summers, p. 21.

# CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1 can be divided into two major sections. Verses 1 through 8 are devoted mainly to greetings and salutations. The main emphasis of this section is to show that Jesus Christ is the author of Revelation. The second section, verses 9 through 20, is a figurative description of Jesus Christ. Various symbols are used to describe his many different characteristics. Verse 20 gives a brief description of the church.

## GREETINGS

**Verse 1. The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:**

Revelation begins with the glorious declaration that the writings and visions of this book are from Jesus Christ. Many commentators interpret this book by trying to decide why the apostle John used certain symbols. This is a mistake. The visions and symbols used were not thought up by man; they were given to him by God. The apostle John received these visions from Jesus Christ, and John wrote down the things he saw. (See v. 11.) This understanding takes us away from trying to apply these symbols only to the people in the time of John and puts us in the realm of trying to understand how Jesus used these symbols to speak to Christians all through the Christian age. To understand these symbols, we must study how they are used by God in our only source from him – his inspired Word, the Bible.

Much emphasis has been placed on the phrase “shortly come to pass.” Many try to prove that the visions in this great book were fulfilled almost in their entirety by the time of the destruction of Jerusalem or the fall of the Roman Empire. This type of interpretation renders the vast

majority of Revelation inapplicable to Christians today. We believe that Revelation applies to Christians today just as it did to those living in the first century. God speaks to all Christians throughout the ages through the use of these symbols.

The phrase “shortly come to pass” must mean that the events described in this book are about to begin. Jesus stated in Mt. 3:2 that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. This meant that the church was about to be established, but it was also to continue until the end of time. The phrase “shortly come to pass” should be viewed in the same manner. The events of this book were ready to begin, but they are not to end until Christ’s second coming. Some of these visions even take us into the time of Judgment and eternity.

Rev. 20:6 indicates that Christians are to live and reign with Christ for a thousand years. This is certainly not, in man’s view of time at least, a time that will shortly come to pass. If we are to view this book as being fulfilled in a short period of time, then a thousand years must be a short period of time. To limit the fulfillment of Revelation to a couple of years or a few hundred years keeps us from understanding the messages in this book, which are directed to Christians of all ages.

Jesus also said, “Behold, I come quickly” (22:12). It has been about two thousand years since this was written, yet Christ has not appeared the second time. Therefore, if we interpret this as we view time, it is hard to understand two thousand years as being “quickly.” We should interpret this as God views time – short in comparison to eternity. Jas. 4:14 says that our life is but a “vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” We strongly believe that Revelation is for all Christians of all ages and can be logically interpreted in that manner.

**Verse 2. Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus *Christ*, and of all things that he saw.**

John is stating that he recorded all the things that he saw

and heard. It seems likely that this is a reference to the visions of Revelation instead of the testimony of Jesus while he was here on earth because of the phrase “all things that he saw.” John obviously did not record all the things he saw Jesus do while he was on earth. This again points out that Revelation is God’s message to man recorded by John. The symbols were not devised by John; they came from God.

**Verse 3. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.**

A blessing is pronounced upon all those who read or hear the words spoken in this book. “This is the first of seven beatitudes in the book of Revelation. For the other six, see 14:13, 16:15 19:9, 20:6, 22:7 and 22:14. In this interpretation, we hope to show that these blessings are just as great for us today as they were for Christians of the first century.

“The time is at hand” is similar in meaning to the phrase must shortly come to pass” in verse 1. Obviously, some of the things foretold in Revelation were to happen shortly after the book was written, but we should not limit everything in the book to a few hundred years after the time of John. The time was at hand for the things written in Revelation to begin taking place. Some of the writings that refer to the church were already taking place because the church had already been established at the time of the writing of this book. This phrase “the time is at hand” refers to the beginning of events that would affect the church in many ways.

**Verse 4. John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;**

This letter is addressed to the seven churches of Asia that are named in verse 11. Even though it is addressed specifically to these seven churches, we should not

consider these things inapplicable to us anymore than we should consider the book of Romans inapplicable to us because it was addressed “to all that be in Rome” (Rom. 1:7). All Christians of all ages are to read, study and apply the messages of Revelation to their lives just as with any book in the New Testament.

This book comes from the one “which is, and which was, and which is to come.” This must be a reference to God Almighty because the next phrase tells us he has the “seven Spirits” before his throne. According to 4:8, chapter 4 is a picture of the throne of God, and in 4:5 the seven Spirits of God are pictured as being before this throne. Also, in 4:8, God is called the one “which was, and is, and is to come.” The seven Spirits that are before the throne must represent the Holy Spirit. (For a complete interpretation, see comments on 4:5.)

Verse 5 explains that these greetings also come from Jesus Christ. Therefore, in verses 4 and 5 we have a statement, which when interpreted reads, “Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come [God]; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne [the Holy Spirit]; and from Jesus Christ.” This message of grace and peace came from the entire Godhead.

**Verse 5. And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,**

Jesus is described as a faithful witness, first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.

To be a faithful witness is to completely carry out the will of the one who sent you. This is exactly what Jesus did. He completely carried out God’s will here on earth. Therefore, he was raised from the dead never to die again and was given a place on the throne in heaven at God’s right hand. We also have our reward if we carry out God’s will faithfully. We, too, will be raised from the dead and given an eternal home with God in heaven.

Concerning Christ, Col. 1:18 states, “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.” Rom. 8:29 says he was the “firstborn among many brethren.” To be the firstborn indicates there are others to follow. When Christ was raised from the dead, he became the head of the church. When we are baptized, we are raised from spiritual death to become members of that church. (See Rom. 6:4; Eph. 2:1,5-6.)

Christ is also called the prince of the kings of the earth. The word “prince” means first in rank or power. Jesus ranks higher than any other king. In 17.14, he is called, “Lord of lords, and King of kings.”

The last phrase of this verse goes with verse 6. John is praising Jesus as he says, “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,... to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.” Jesus is worthy of this glory and dominion because he gave his life in order that we might have forgiveness of our sins. Chapter 5 is an elaboration of this particular subject.

**Verse 6. And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.**

The ASV translates the term “kings” as “kingdom.” This means that we are a kingdom and we are priests unto God. The church is the kingdom and Christ is our king. (See Eph. 1:22.) All Christians are priests today because we have the ability to communicate directly with God through prayer to ask for forgiveness of our sins. We offer our own sacrifices to God. According to Rom. 12:1, Christians offer themselves to God as living sacrifices. Under the old law, only the Levitical priests could offer sacrifices to God for the sins of the people.

It is difficult to know which term, “kings” or “kingdoms,” is more appropriate because their meanings are virtually identical. We are pictured as reigning with Christ in 20:4. A king is one who reigns. Therefore, Christians are kings who are reigning with Christ. This



concept is important in understanding Revelation. According to verse 6, Jesus has made us kings and priests. In 5:10, we have a similar statement, but we are also told that our reign will be upon this earth. Since we understand and believe that we are in the last time that will exist upon this earth (1 Jn. 2:18), and that there will be no future one thousand years with Christ ruling on an earthly throne; then Christians must be considered kings and priests today. We are presently reigning upon this earth, (Also see 5:10.)

Understanding this concept is important because it defines the time being dealt with in Revelation. It helps us understand some very controversial passages such as 20:4 where those people were spoken of as reigning with Christ for a thousand years. If we are reigning on this earth today as Christians, this period of a thousand years must refer to this present Christian age.

**Verse 7. Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.**

Acts 1:9-11 says that the apostles beheld Jesus as he was taken up in a cloud and that he would come again “in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” Therefore verse 7 must refer to the second coming of Christ. “Every eye shall see him.” All people on this earth will be fully aware that Christ has returned. There will be no secret rapture, secret resurrection of the church, while leaving those in sin on the earth to undergo a period of tribulation. When Christ comes again, all people will see him. Those who have been faithful will be taken up to be with the Lord forever, and those who have not known God will be punished with everlasting destruction. (See 1Thes. 4:16-17; 2Thes. 1:7-9.)

This is why the verse states that “all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.” All those who have been disobedient to God’s commands will be frightened beyond imagination. It will be the most fearful time ever. Rev. 6:15-16 describes the unfaithful at this time as seeking to

hide “themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains.” They even bid the mountains and rocks to fall on them so they might flee the imminent destruction and torment. This is why we must always be careful to keep ourselves in the fold of God. We can avoid these terrible events because he has “washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God” (v. 5-6).

**Verse 8. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.**

The first question often asked about verse 8 is: Who is speaking, God or Jesus? In verse 11 Jesus calls himself the “Alpha and Omega.” In 4:8 God Almighty is called the one “which was and is, and is to come.” Therefore, we have two phrases. One is used to refer to God, the other to Jesus, yet they are both used here to refer to the one called “Lord.” If there is anything we can learn from this, it must be that Jesus is God. This proves the deity of Christ. In many ways it is impossible to distinguish between God and Christ. They are one in mind, spirit, and purpose. Jn. 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” We know from Jn. 1:14 that the Word was Jesus. From this we see that Jesus is God. Jn. 10:30 says, “I and my Father are one.”

All the phrases used in this verse that refer to the Lord show his completeness. He has always existed; he exists today, and he will exist forever.

## JOHN'S VISION OF CHRIST

**Verse 9. I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.**

John was in the isle of Patmos when he received this

revelation from God. “Patmos, a small island near the southwest coast of Asia Minor, has rugged terrain of volcanic hills and is only about thirteen square miles in area. Many think that John was banished to this island because he was preaching the gospel, but information concerning this is uncertain at best.”<sup>1</sup> We do know that John was experiencing some type of persecution because he told the seven churches of Asia that he was their companion in tribulation for the Word of God and testimony of Jesus Christ. Whatever these tribulations were, John had remained faithful to the Lord. Our faith must also be strong enough to endure any trials that we might encounter. We may not suffer the same types of severe physical persecutions that John suffered, but we are faced each day with temptations that test our faith. In order to withstand these trials, we must be able to draw strength from our “companions in tribulation,” or other people who are attempting to live a Christian life.

John says that he is “in the kingdom... of Jesus Christ.” This should eliminate any idea of Jesus establishing a kingdom at the end of this Christian dispensation for a thousand years. The kingdom has already been established. It was established on the first Pentecost after Christ’s crucifixion. (See Acts 2.) John was in that kingdom, and we become a part of that same kingdom when we obey the gospel and are added to the Lord’s church.

**Verse 10. I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,**

It is hard to determine exactly what is meant by “in the Spirit.” Possibly this was some miraculous state that the apostle was in as he received the writings of this book, but we believe this probably was not the case. The statement also shows this took place on the Lord’s day. It seems that John was simply stating that he was in the act of worshiping the Lord. Jn. 4:24 says that we must worship “in spirit and in truth.” Since this was the Lord’s day, John would have been worshiping, and in that respect he was in the Spirit.

As John was worshiping God, he heard a great voice behind him. This voice sounded like a trumpet, which indicates that words of great importance were about to be spoken. All through the Bible, a trumpet is used to warn of the approaching of great events. These would range from the sounding of the trumpet before a battle in the Old Testament to the announcement of the second coming of Christ in 1Thess. 4:16. This voice must have been Christ's because in verse 18 he describes himself as "he that liveth, and was dead," and is "alive for evermore." Therefore, Christ's voice is described as a great trumpet because the things he is about to speak are extremely important.

**Verse 11. Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.**

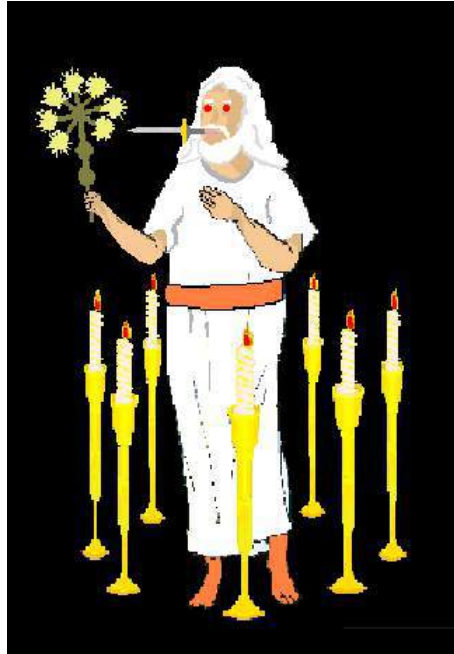
Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. The similar expression we might make today would be "from a to z." This simply means that all things are included. Nothing exists that was not made by our Lord, and everything is under his control. Jn. 1:3 says that "all things were made by him." It should be noted that this phrase, "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last," is omitted in the ASV, but it can be found in 1:8,17; 21:6, and 22:13.

The things that John was about to see and record were to be sent unto the seven churches of Asia. It must be significant that this book is addressed to "seven" churches. The number "7" represents divine completeness. The complete church of God includes all those congregations of Christians that exist from the time the church was established until Christ comes again. Although this book was addressed specifically to these seven churches, its message is certainly relevant to all churches of all times.

**Verse 12. And I turned to see the voice that spoke**

**with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;**

As John turned to see who was speaking to him, the vision describing our Lord began. The first items he saw were seven golden candlesticks. Verse 20 gives us the definition of these seven candlesticks. They represent the seven churches. We should not limit the meaning of the seven golden candlesticks strictly to the seven churches to which this book was addressed. This book, just as all other books of the New Testament, was written



so that all Christians of all ages might read it and apply the things written therein to their own lives. The number “7” is the divine complete number and is used to represent the church in its completeness throughout the gospel age.

We might also look at why “golden” candlesticks were used to represent the church. The candlestick itself is used for light, and the church should definitely be the spiritual light unto the world. It was gold because gold is a metal of great value. There is nothing more valuable on this earth than the church. The church on this earth today is the most precious thing in the sight of our Lord, and we should be shining forth as lights in this world by spreading the gospel. Therefore, the seven golden candlesticks represent the complete church of all ages, which has value beyond compare and is lighting the world spiritually with the gospel of our Lord.

**Verse 13. And in he midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.**

In the midst of the seven candlesticks, John saw someone he described as being like the Son of Man. This description is figurative as it describes the characteristics of Jesus. If this had been Jesus as John knew him in the flesh, he certainly would have recognized him immediately and would have been more emphatic in his identification than the phrase “like unto” allows.

It is important that Jesus was standing in the midst of the seven candlesticks since they represent the church. This is exactly what he said concerning his dwelling with the church today. In Mt. 18:20 Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Jesus dwells with his people today. This dwelling cannot be physical because he has already ascended to heaven. Therefore, his dwelling with us today must be spiritual. In 2Cor. 6:16, we read, “As God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Christ was also clothed with a garment down to his feet. In Revelation the clothing or garments are always used to indicate a covering of righteousness. The garments of faithful Christians are always white, indicating a state of holiness or sinlessness. Our garments are white because we have washed them and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (See 7:14). Therefore, Christ being completely clothed down to the feet would indicate total righteousness or complete holiness.

He was also wearing a golden girdle. The only way we have of determining the meaning of these symbols is by looking at other passages in the Bible that contain similar symbols and using those passages to draw conclusions. In this instance, Eph. 6:14 contains the definition needed to determine the symbolic meaning of the golden girdle. It states, “Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with

truth.” If Christians are told to be girded with the truth, it is reasonable to assume that this same symbolism would apply to our Lord. Gold is a pure metal of great value, and the truth or the gospel is also pure and of great value. Therefore, this golden girdle must represent the truth or the gospel of our Lord.

**Verse 14. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;**

The white color is the key to the symbolism used in verse 14. White has always been used to represent purity. This shows that Christ is totally pure or completely void of sin. This same type of symbolism is used in 1Pet. 1:19, which describes Jesus as “a lamb without blemish and without spot.” Heb. 4:15 states that he was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

His eyes are described as a “flame of fire.” Fire is a symbol often used in connection with the judgment of God or major events that God performed. Some examples of this are:

- (1) The Lord appeared to Moses in a burning bush (Ex. 3:2-3).
- (2) When God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mt. Sinai, he descended upon the mountain in fire (Ex. 19:18).
- (3) The Lord will return from heaven the second time in flaming fire (2Thes. 1:7-8).

In addition to this, Deut. 4:24 says, “For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.” God will not tolerate those who claim to be his children following other gods. Nothing escapes the eyes of our Lord. He knows all and sees all. The acts we perform in the sight of our Lord will either approve or condemn us before God.

**Verse 15. And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.**

Two more characteristics of Jesus are symbolically described in verse 15. First, his feet are like fine brass that

has been burned in a furnace. Mic. 4:13 metaphorically describes the church as having hoofs of brass that it will use to “beat in pieces many people.” Also, in Ezek. 22:18, the house of Israel is described as being the “dross,” which is the scum or waste that forms on brass as it is burned in a furnace. The feet of Jesus in this passage are like polished brass that has been burned in the fire to remove all impurities. Jesus is totally pure and holy, but he will eventually use those feet of brass to crush all who are disobedient to the gospel.

Second, his voice was as the sound of many waters. Water is used in Revelation to represent the teachings and instructions we receive in order to sustain our spiritual lives. Just as water is necessary to sustain our physical lives, the Word of God (gospel) is the spiritual water necessary to sustain our spiritual lives. The voice of Jesus is the source of all our spiritual waters. Everything needed to obtain spiritual life comes from him.

**Verse 16. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.**

Verse 20 defines the seven stars. They are the “angels of the seven churches.” This does not answer the question of the meaning of the stars because we now have to determine the meaning of the “angels of the seven churches.” There is a great deal of discussion among commentators concerning the meaning of the “angels.” We will address that question in verse 20. However, we would like to emphasize the fact here that the seven stars are held in our Lord’s right hand. Therefore, the seven stars must represent someone who Jesus holds in his hand. From this we should be able to draw some conclusions about the stars and the angels. (See v. 20.)

Jesus is also pictured as having a sharp two-edged sword proceeding out of his mouth. This symbol is clearly defined in Eph. 6:17. It states that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. (Also see Heb. 4:12.) Therefore, the sword



proceeding out of the mouth of Jesus must be the Word of God.

The countenance of Jesus is described as the sun shining extremely bright. This reminds us of the transfiguration of Jesus in Mt. 17:2 where the following description is given: "And his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." Jesus is the spiritual light of this world. In 1Jn. 1:5 we read, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." The spiritual light man walks by today is the gospel. Obedience to that gospel will bring us out of the darkness of sin and into the glorious light of his kingdom. (See Col. 1:12-13.)

**Verse 17. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last**

When John saw this figure of Christ, he fell down before him "as dead." This must indicate a state of fear, awe and complete submission because as Jesus touched him with his right hand to comfort him, he said, "Fear not." Jesus then identifies himself as the "first and the last." This is another way of stating the same thing as was stated in verse 8: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending." These phrases indicate that Jesus is complete in every way. (See v. 11.)

**Verse 18. I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.**

This proves conclusively that the one being described in chapter 1 is Jesus because he is the only one who has ever been resurrected from the dead to live eternally. We have accounts in the Bible of other people being resurrected from the dead, but they all eventually died again. Christ was raised from the dead by God to live forevermore. (See Acts 2:24.)

Jesus says that he has the "keys of hell and of death." He controls them. "Hell" in this passage is used to mean the grave. Therefore, Jesus has power over the death of man

and has the ability to raise him from the grave. The “key” to this power was the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross for man’s sins. When Jesus died on the cross, he made atonement for man’s sins and gave us the hope of a resurrection unto eternal life.

**Verse 19. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter,**

John is instructed to record the things that he had seen, the things which are, and the things hereafter. This would include the vision seen prior to this statement, the things that he is seeing and hearing at present, and those visions that he is to see later. Jesus told John to record these things by writing them down. At this time he had not recorded anything because he was struck with fear while viewing the first vision and had fallen “as dead” at the feet of Jesus (v. 17).

If this verse can be used as a clue to help determine the period of time covered in Revelation, it would signify all things during the Christian dispensation – past, present, and future. If the phrase “things which shall be hereafter” refers to the events recorded in the book, it definitely would not limit Revelation to a few hundred years after its writing. Since events concerning Judgment are recorded several times in the book, then why should we assume events occurring between the fall of Rome in AD. 476 and the end of time are completely left out? They are not left out. Revelation is written to Christians of all times.

**Verse 20. The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.**

Verse 20 gives the meaning of the seven stars and the seven candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven candlesticks represent those seven churches. We should not confine the meaning of

these seven candlesticks to the seven specific churches to which this letter is addressed and named in verse 11. Since the number “7” represents divine completeness, we should understand that this is a figurative way of addressing all true churches throughout the history of the world. The candlesticks, as discussed in verse 12, represent a source of spiritual light to all people of the world. Therefore, any church that is true to our Lord and spreads the gospel is a candlestick in the sight of God. Rev. 2:5 shows the possibility of a congregation having its candlestick removed. This means that when a church becomes unfaithful to our Lord by being disobedient to him or by failing to proclaim the truth, it is no longer a spiritual light unto the world. It is not a true church. Its candlestick has been removed. A message of this type is definitely not limited to the seven churches of Asia. Every congregation, regardless of when it exists, must constantly strive to serve our Lord and keep its candlestick in place.

The symbolism most difficult to understand in this verse is that of the seven stars representing the seven angels of the churches. Many different ideas have been proposed concerning the meaning of these seven angels of the churches. Some include:

- (1) Heavenly beings that oversee each church
- (2) Elders that oversee the local congregation
- (3) Ministers of individual congregations  
because the word “angel” means messenger

All of these interpretations have some merit, but we believe the stars or angels represent each individual Christian in any true church. In verse 16, Christ is pictured as holding the seven stars in his right hand. From this we should be able to ask the question: Who does Jesus hold in his hand? Without any doubt the answer to that question is Christians. In Jn. 10:28, Jesus says concerning Christians, “Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” When anyone is obedient to the commandments of Jesus, he holds them in his hand. They are in the spiritual care of Jesus. As long as we are faithful, no man is capable of taking us away from the Lord. He is the supreme power.

There are “seven” stars in the Lord’s right hand and “7” is the number indicating divine completeness. Therefore, by these seven stars in his right hand, Jesus shows us that he holds all Christians of all ages in his hand. See the introduction to chapters 2 and 3 for more information on the use of the word “angel.”

<sup>1</sup>James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979), pp. 27-30.

# **INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTERS 2 & 3**

Chapters 2 and 3 contain seven letters addressed specifically to the seven churches in Asia. Although each letter is directed to a specific church, we must realize that those lessons are for us today. The number “7” is the number of divine completeness, showing that these lessons are for all churches of all ages. We should study the criticisms and commendations given to those seven churches and strive to apply the lessons to our individual congregations.

Each of these letters begins with a portion of the symbolism used in chapter 1 to describe Christ. This shows the contents of these letters are from Jesus Christ – not from some man. The apostle John wrote these letters as they were given to him by divine revelation from Jesus Christ. This great book is definitely not the work of man, and the symbols used herein were not developed by man. This book comes to us from Jesus Christ and is applicable to all people of all ages.

## **“ANGELS OF THE CHURCHES”**

Each of these seven letters is addressed to the angel of that specific church. There are several ideas concerning the meaning of the angel of the church, but as discussed in 1:20, the angel represents those whom Christ holds in his right hand – Christians. Therefore, each letter is addressed to all Christians who worship at these specific congregations. The problem some would have with this interpretation is understanding how it could be possible to describe Christians as angels. It might help to solve this

problem by looking at how heaven is used symbolically in the Bible. In Eph. 2:6, Paul said that God has “made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” These heavenly places are a reference to the church. Rev. 12:12 uses this same symbolism to describe the spiritual dwelling place of Christians here on earth as heaven. With this in mind, it is not difficult to understand how angels could be used symbolically to represent Christians. Just as angels are literally dwelling in heaven with God today, we are figuratively dwelling in God’s heavenly place, the church, here on earth. Therefore, the angels of the churches are those Christians who are dwelling in God’s spiritual place on earth – the church.

We should also point out that the vision works correctly by addressing each of the letters to the seven churches to one of the seven angels. Jesus is holding the seven stars in his hand in verse 16. According to verse 20, these seven stars represent the angels of the seven churches. Therefore, in this vision there are: 7 churches, 7 candlesticks, 7 stars, 7 angels and 7 letters. By addressing each letter to one of the seven angels, the vision works perfectly. So, we can determine the meaning of the “angel of the church” by the determining the meaning of the 7 stars Jesus is holding in his hand. (See the section on Numerology in the introduction to this book for a discussion of the symbolic use of the number 7.)

## **“OVERCOME”**

One important concept in interpreting Revelation is understanding what it means to “overcome.” Many writers emphasize this term by using it as the theme of the entire book. There can be little doubt that Revelation was written to warn us about many things that will test our faith. It is also written to encourage us to remain faithful through these trials and tribulations, and by so doing, we will be rewarded with an eternal home in heaven. When this happens, those who have remained faithful will have obviously “overcome” all things because all of our trials

will have ceased at that time. Many commentators believe that this is the meaning of the term “overcome” throughout Revelation.

Although this is definitely our final overcoming of all things, using this term strictly in this manner puts mankind into the eternal realm when he “overcomes”. It also takes away the meaning of Revelation for Christians today and demands we look entirely to eternity for its fulfillment. Then, how is the term “overcome” used in Revelation? To determine this we must examine how this term is used elsewhere in the New Testament. In 1Jn. 5:3-5, we read, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” To overcome the world is to separate oneself from a world of sin by becoming obedient to God’s commands. In this passage we are given three ways of overcoming the world. They are: (1) being born of God, (2) by our faith, and (3) by believing that Jesus is the Son of God. All three of these statements are obviously different ways of saying the same thing. When we believe that Jesus is the Son of God; have faith in him; and are born again by baptism, we “overcome” this world of sin. We have our sins forgiven and enter into that holy city of God, which is his church.

In 1Jn. 4:3, those who do not believe that Jesus came to earth in a fleshly form are called the “spirit of antichrist.” Then, 1Jn. 4:5 says they are “of the world.” This refers to their being outside of Christ or his church and living in a world of sin. In 1Jn. 4:4, we read that those who are of God (Christians) have already “overcome them.”

Each of the letters to the seven churches contains a promise to those who “overcome.” To properly understand these promises, it is first necessary to understand certain symbols used throughout Revelation because each promise is tied directly to some type of symbolism. The meaning of these symbols remains constant throughout the book.

Therefore, if we study a symbol in one passage, it will also give us an insight into its usage in other passages. We recommend that you make a complete study of “overcoming” and the symbols used to bestow the promises upon Christians. This should make it clear that almost all symbols used in Revelation have a constant meaning. A simplified definition of some of these symbols will be given here, but more complete definitions will be given in sections dealing specifically with each symbol.

We believe it will become apparent that “overcoming” refers to our obedience to the gospel, and that the promises given apply to us as Christians today as part of God’s holy city, the church. We must also not forget that our obedience to the gospel must be continued. Rev. 2:10 says, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” Also, 2:26 says, “He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end” shall have “power over the nations.” Notice that the “overcoming” takes place first; then keeping the works unto the end must follow. This is exactly what happens when we obey the gospel. We first “overcome” the world of sin by our obedience. Then, we serve God faithfully by doing his works for the remainder of our lives. To those who overcome, the following blessings are promised:

**2:7** We are able to eat of the tree of life. Rev. 22:2 states that the tree of life is located in the midst of the beautiful city of God, which is his spiritual kingdom – the church. Since we know that it is located in the church, and we are told here that it is located in the paradise of God, then the church must be the “paradise of God.” When we “overcome,” obey the gospel, we enter into that paradise of God, the church, where we have forgiveness of sins. Therefore, as long as we remain faithful, we have access to the tree of life.

**2:11** We shall not be hurt of the second death. Rev. 20:14 defines the lake of fire as the second death. When we “overcome” this world of sin by becoming Christians, we obtain forgiveness of our sins, which is necessary to avoid



the second death. If we are faithful Christians, we will not be hurt of the second death.

**2:17** We shall be able to eat of the hidden manna and receive a white stone with a new name written on it. Just as the children of Israel were fed literal manna from heaven as they wandered in the wilderness, the church is fed today by spiritual manna from heaven, which is the Word of God. (See 12:14.) The key to understanding the white stone and the new name is the word “new.” When we “overcome,” we enter into the church and receive a new name, which is “redeemed,” “Christian,” or “saved.” All of these terms refer to the same thing. When one becomes a Christian, he enters into a “new” state of purity and holiness. He has “overcome” this world of sin. The color of the stone also strengthens this interpretation because white is always symbolic of purity.

**2:26-28** We shall have power over nations and shall receive the morning star. Rev. 19:15 describes Christ as having a sharp sword going out of his mouth, which he uses to smite the nations. He also rules them with a rod of iron. Obviously, this sharp sword is symbolic of the Word of God. Therefore, Christ rules over the nations through Christians preaching and teaching his Word. Christ is our morning star. When we enter into the church, or “overcome,” we enter into Christ or receive the morning star. (Also see comments on 22:16.)

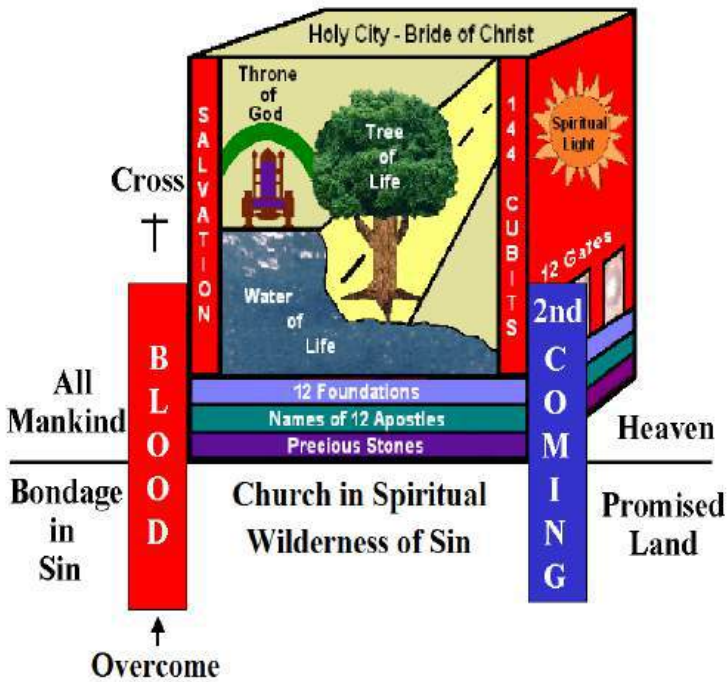
**3:5** We shall be clothed in white raiment; have our names written in the book of life, and Jesus will confess our names before God. All of these take place when one obeys the gospel. Rev. 3:4 speaks of those who had not defiled their garments. Therefore, they were walking with Jesus in white. Phil. 4:3 indicates that a person's name is written in the book of life when he obeys the gospel. In Mt. 10:32 Jesus says, “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.” Therefore, “overcoming” means that upon becoming a Christian, we walk with Jesus in white; have our names written in the book of life, and Jesus confesses us before God in heaven.

**3:12** We will be pillars in the temple of God. Jesus will write upon us God's name and the name of the city of God, new Jerusalem, and his new name. As we "overcome" this world of sin and enter into the temple of God (the church), Jesus will write God's name and his new name upon us showing that we are among the saved. Only those who are redeemed will receive this new name. We also receive the name of the city of God, which is new Jerusalem. Just as the city of Jerusalem was the headquarters of religious activities under the old law, new Jerusalem, the church, is the place of our worship today. Only those who have "overcome" this world of sin by obedience to the gospel are in this new Jerusalem. (See the section on "The Holy Jerusalem" in chapter 21 for additional information.)

**3:21** We will be able to sit with Jesus in his throne. Just as Jesus "overcame" by his physical death and resurrection, we "overcome" this world of sin by our spiritual resurrection. Just as Jesus was raised to his throne in heaven, we are raised to our spiritual throne in the church. Rev. 1:6 says that Jesus has made us kings and priests unto God. A king is one who sits upon a throne. This concept makes chapter 20 much more understandable. Rev. 20:4 says, "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them." This shows that Christians are reigning on thrones today and have the judgment of God, which is his Word.

Therefore, to "overcome" means to render obedience to God's law, thereby overcoming this world of sin and entering into God's holy city, the church, where we have forgiveness of our sins. We must remember that it is our duty to remain faithful. If we do not, we are told that our names will be blotted out of the book of life. Also, 22:19 says that we can be taken out of that holy city. As members of the Lord's church, we need to realize just what the church is and exactly what it means to be members of that church. When we obey the gospel and enter into the Lord's church, the holy city, we receive all the blessings awarded to those who "overcome." We must then remain faithful in order to keep these blessings and finally receive

the “crown of life,” which is our eternal inheritance in heaven. This can easily be illustrated by the drawing below. In this graphic, the church is illustrated as being between the cross and the second coming of Christ. That is where the church is located today. It is in the spiritual wilderness of this world and surrounded by sin. When we “overcome” this world of sin through our baptism, we pass through the blood of Christ. This places us in the church. As you proceed through this chapter and read each of the “overcoming” statements made to the seven churches, you should notice that when we “overcome” we receive the spiritual benefits pictured in the church.



This drawing of the church is taken from chapters 21 and 22. If you have questions concerning this drawing, it might be appropriate to study chapters 21 and 22 before proceeding with this chapter.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE LETTER TO EPHESUS

**Verse 1. Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;**

This first letter is addressed to the church at Ephesus. Most likely the book of Ephesians was written to this same church. “The city itself was the most important city in the Roman province of Asia. It had an excellent harbor which helped it become a great commercial city and export center. Its population has been estimated at one-third of a million. Ephesus was also a city of religious importance under Roman rule. It became a center of the emperor cult, and eventually possessed three official temples.”<sup>1</sup> One of these was known worldwide and is called “Diana of the Ephesians” in Acts 19:34. “The city, now uninhabited, has been undergoing excavation for many years and is probably the most extensive and impressive ruined site of Asia Minor.”<sup>2</sup>

A part of the description of Christ, given in chapter 1, is used to identify him as the author of each of these letters. The description used in this verse was taken from 1:13,16. (See those passages for further comments. Also, see the introduction of chapters 2 and 3 for comments concerning the “angel” of the church.)

**Verse 2. I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:**

Jesus begins by praising this church. They were doing many things that would be considered great qualities for any church today. They were performing many good works and laboring long and hard for the Lord. We constantly

stress this in our teaching, and rightfully so, because we must do these things in order to be acceptable to God. But, as this letter points out, these works must be done for the correct reasons. While working for the Lord is important, it must be done because we love him. Any other reason is like unto Cain's sacrifice – unacceptable to God. (See Gen. 4:4-5; Heb. 11:4.)

These people were also praised for being unable to “bear them which are evil.” They would not condone the practices of sin. They taught against it and refused to allow it in their midst. This is a good lesson for the church today. Sin should not go unnoticed and uncorrected in the church. Robert Usrey says, “It is vital that responsible and merciful people freely judge the guilty and try to influence the guilty to judge themselves.”<sup>33</sup>

They also had tried those who falsely claimed to be apostles and had proven them to be impostors. This enables us to conclude that the congregation at Ephesus was doctrinally sound. They had the ability to distinguish between false teachings and the truth. Today, we must be sound in the gospel and be able to recognize false teachings. We can accomplish this only by a thorough study of the Word, thereby gaining knowledge of God's will for mankind. Even though study is of utmost importance, it is by no means all that is required. These people at Ephesus knew the Word, yet they were condemned for forsaking their first love (2:4-5) and were warned that their candlestick could be removed. Knowledge is of no benefit if it is for the sake of knowledge alone. Our study and application of God's Word in the church, as well as our individual lives, must be because we love the Lord. If we attend church or worship for any reason other than because we love the Lord and are seeking to do his will, our worship is in vain.

**Verse 3. And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.**

These people had borne the Word of God. They had taken it up and patiently carried it to many people. They

had carried it in the face of difficulties and rejection. It is almost frightening when we compare the many virtues of the church at Ephesus with some congregations that presently exist. Ephesus did many good works, which some congregations today fall very short in doing, yet they were condemned and told that their candlestick was in danger of being removed. Let us each examine ourselves to make sure we are working for the Lord and doing so out of love for him and not for ourselves.

They had also labored and not fainted. They were working long and hard by doing what God had commanded. They were praised for this; however, later, they are severely condemned as a congregation. This again points out that they were doing these works for the wrong reasons. We know the correct reason: It is because we love the Lord. Our labors and works in the church must not be for selfishness, pride, or the praise of men. We must do them because we love the Lord and desire to serve him by doing his will.

**Verse 4. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.**

Jesus condemned this congregation for this reason: They had left their first love. They must have forgotten the first commandment as is stated in Mt. 22:37-38: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment."

Many ideas have been presented concerning the meaning of leaving one's first love, but it seems that only one admonition could have been intended here. They had ceased to love the Lord. Although they were performing works that the Lord had commanded, they were being done without love. Compare this to a man held as a slave. He does the work assigned by his master out of fear rather than out of love. Our Lord does not desire us to be slaves, but rather, servants because we love him.

**Verse 5. Remember therefore from whence thou art**

**fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.**

They were admonished to repent and do the first works or else their candlestick would be removed. The “first works” must make reference to the Christian’s first duty, which is to love God. In the above verses, they had been praised for their many works, yet they were not considered “first works.” Our first duty as Christians is to love God. If we do this, all of these other works will follow.

They were commanded to repent. Even though they were doing these good works, something was lacking making it necessary for repentance to take place. We can never work our way to heaven on our own accord. This is not to say that we do not have to perform these works. It means we must work for the correct reasons. The concept being presented here is that God gave his Son to die on the cross for us because he loved us. Therefore, the Christian’s first duty is to love God (Lk. 10:27). If we love him, we will desire to do his work. Notice he commanded them to do the first works, not give up what they were doing to do something else. They were to do this in addition to the works they were already performing.

If they did not do the first works, Jesus said he would remove their candlestick. Since the candlestick is the symbol for the true church, removing the candlestick means that this congregation would no longer be considered the true church of our Lord. It would be no better off in God’s sight than those who practice error. The candlestick, the true church, was and is the spiritual light unto the world, and if it were removed, it would no longer produce that light.

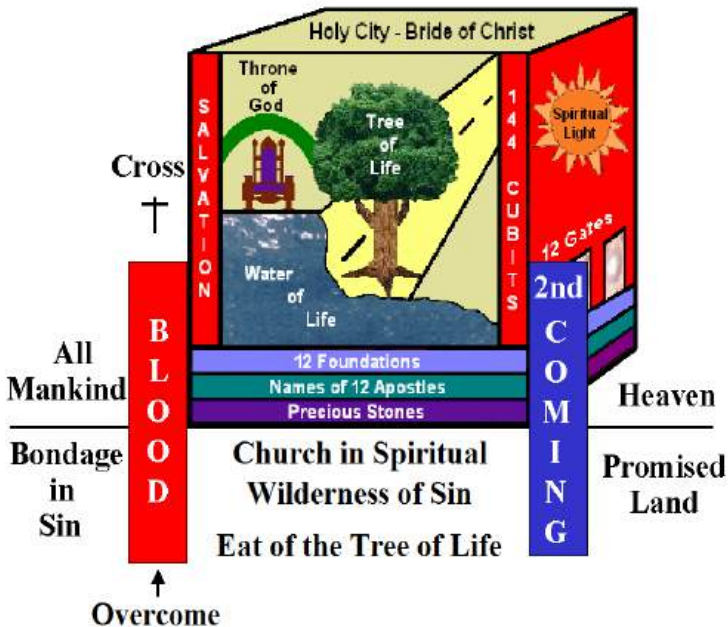
**Verse 6. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.**

No one is certain who these Nicolaitans were. Perhaps they were followers of Nicolas, one of the seven on whom the apostles laid their hands (Acts 6:5-6). Since there is no solid evidence to support this, we should not place blame.

Regardless of the nature of these deeds, Jesus praised the Ephesians for hating them. They, obviously, were deeds that the Lord hated, and he praised his people for being like him in that respect. Notice also that Jesus hated the deeds of these people, not the people themselves.

**Verse 7. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.**

“He that bath an ear, let him hear” calls this announcement to the special attention of any person who has the ability to listen and the desire to understand. To



“hear” means more than just the ability to distinguish words. It means to understand the message and do the things that we are instructed to do. Speaking of Christ, Acts 3:23 says, “And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.” These people were not going to be



destroyed because they did not actually hear him speak. They were going to be destroyed if they failed to follow his teachings.

These messages are from the “Spirit.” In 1:4, a greeting is given to each of the churches from the seven spirits which must represent the Holy Spirit. (See comments on 1:4.) To find that these messages come from the Spirit should not surprise us because Eph. 6:17 describes the Word of God as the “sword of the Spirit.” (Also see Jn. 14:26.) These messages are the words of God given to man by the Spirit.

The promise given to the church at Ephesus and applying to all Christians is this: “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” The symbolism that immediately comes to mind is the tree of life that stood in the midst of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9). As long as Adam and Eve were obedient to God in not eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they could eat of the fruit of the tree of life. As indicated by Gen. 3:24, this tree of life could sustain their physical life forever. This is a likeness to the church. The church is our spiritual Garden of Eden and referred to here as the paradise of God. As long as children of God remain obedient to God’s commands, they remain in the spiritual Garden of Eden and have access to the spiritual tree of life. Christ is our spiritual tree of life. He is standing in the midst of the church, the paradise of God. (See 1:13.)

This is illustrated in the drawing. The church will exist all during the time between the cross and Jesus' second coming. This is the Christian dispensation. All during this time Jesus will stand in the midst of the people in the church – Christian. We gain access to our tree of life by being obedient to the gospel and crossing the blood of Christ through baptism. As long as we remain in the church, we can eat of our spiritual tree of life and live eternally with God. If we are unfaithful, God will remove us from that spiritual paradise and block our way to the tree of life. We must also be thankful that we have the opportunity to return if we repent and ask forgiveness as

illustrated by the prodigal son (Lk. 15:11-32). (For further comments on this symbolism, see the introduction to chapters 2 and 3 and also 22:2.)

This symbolism also ties in closely with other symbols used in Revelation. In verse 7 the tree of life is located in the paradise of God. In 22:2, the tree of life is located in the holy city. Therefore, the paradise of God and the holy city are the same. The holy city symbolizes the church because 21:9 calls it “the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” The “holy city” and the “paradise of God” are two different ways of describing the church of our Lord. When we “overcome,” we conquer this world of sin and enter into the church, the holy city, the paradise of God, where we have access to our spiritual tree of life, Jesus Christ our Lord. If we remain faithful, we continue to have access to the spiritual tree of life, and eventually we will receive the crown of life or heaven (v. 10). According to 22:19, if we are disobedient, we can have our names removed from the book of life and from the holy city.

## THE LETTER TO SMYRNA

**Verse 8. And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;**

Christ identifies himself as “the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.” A statement similar to this is used to identify Christ in 1:17-18. This shows that Christ is definitely the author of this letter.

“Smyrna was a city in the Roman province of Asia, on the Aegean shore of what is now Asiatic Turkey. It was famous for its beauty and for the magnificence of its public buildings.”<sup>4</sup> The city was deeply involved in worshipping pagan gods. There were at least three temples erected in the city to honor Cybele, Zeus, and Roma. They also erected temples to Roman emperors, and the city became a center of emperor-worship. It is believed that the Jews also

became caught up in this emperor-worship and may have encouraged the death of the famous martyr Polycarp in AD. 155.

**Verse 9. I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.**

This congregation must have been suffering many physical hardships. Jesus points out that he is aware of their trials and tribulations but praises them for being rich. Because of their physical poverty, “rich” must refer to their spiritual well-being. To be called spiritually rich is something for which every congregation of the Lord’s church should strive. It is fine to have nice, large buildings and plenty of money in the collection plate, but the most important thing in any congregation is to be spiritually rich.

Part of the persecution that this church suffered was due to the blasphemy of a group of people who claimed to be Jews but were of the synagogue of Satan. The use of the term “Jew” must be a reference to Christians. In other words, the actual meaning is this: There were people who claimed to be Christians but were actually followers of Satan. The use of the term “Jew” as a reference to Christians can be found in other passages in the New Testament. In Jas. 1:1, James addressed his letter to the “twelve tribes.” We know he was not writing to the literal twelve tribes of Israel because they had been dispersed many years prior. He was using this as a figurative term to mean all Christians because he refers to them as his “brethren” (Jas. 1:2). Just as the twelve tribes of Israel were God’s chosen people under the law of Moses, all Christians are his chosen people today under the law of Christ. Rom. 2:28-29 also uses the term “Jew” to mean Christians. It makes a comparison between Jews of the Old Testament who were Jews because of physical circumcision and the “Jews” (Christians) of the New Testament whose circumcision is of the heart. Therefore, the term “Jews” is a symbolic reference to all Christians.

With this in mind, we realize this verse is teaching that just because a person claims to be a Christian does not necessarily make it so. These people claimed to be Christians, but Jesus said they were of the synagogue of Satan. The only way we can be Christians is by obeying the commands of God.

**Verse 10. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.**

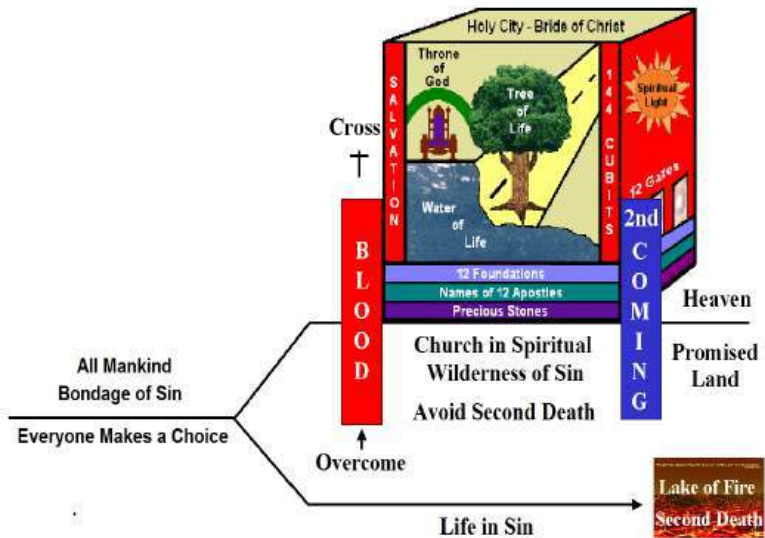
The intent of this verse is to encourage Christians to remain faithful even though our trials and persecutions may sometimes seem to be unbearable. Some of these people were going to have their faith tried by being cast into prison by Satan. Any time Christians suffer for the cause of Christ, Satan is responsible. He will use all powers or forces available to him in order to cause Christians to forsake Christ.

These persecutions were to be for a period of ten days. To understand this as a literal ten days of imprisonment would be unreasonable because it would require that everyone be imprisoned for the same exact amount of time. The number "10" is used in Revelation as a descriptive number showing completeness. Therefore, these persecutions were to last for a complete period of time. It is not the intent of verse 10 to tell these people how long they would be persecuted, but, instead, to tell them they were to experience complete trials of their faith. This is why they were encouraged to remain faithful all their lives.

Even though we overcome this world of sin by our obedience to the gospel, we must remain faithful through the many trials of this life, even to the point of death, in order to receive the crown of life. When we become members of God's family, his church, we also become adopted children of God (Rom. 8:14-17). As children in God's family, we have an inheritance awaiting us (Rom. 8:17). According to Mt. 19:29, the inheritance we are to

receive is everlasting life. When we are baptized, we are resurrected from spiritual death unto spiritual life (Rom. 6:3-18), and eternal life in heaven is the crown of that spiritual life. If we remain faithful until death, we will receive that crown of life and live eternally in heaven. (Also see I Pet. 5:4.) Jas. 1:12 says, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”

**Verse 11. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.**



Rev. 21:8 states, “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.” Anyone not having his name written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire (20:15). We also know that Christians are the ones who have their names written in the book of life. (See Phil. 4:3.) Therefore,

when we overcome this world of sin by becoming Christians, our names are written in the book of life, and we no longer have to fear the second death. All must go through the first death, which is the death of our physical bodies, but Christians are not subject to the second death because they have overcome sin. We have a responsibility to remain faithful because 3:5 indicates that it is possible to have our names removed from the book of life.

Rev. 20:6 says, “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power.” This shows that “overcoming” and “having a part in the first resurrection” are the same. They both allow us to avoid the second death. They both represent obedience to the gospel. When we obey the gospel or have our part in the first resurrection, we overcome this world of sin. We enter into the church, which is the holy city or spiritual paradise of God. We begin our reign with Christ during this present gospel dispensation or the “thousand years.” (See comments on the “thousand years” in the introduction to chapter 20.)

## THE LETTER TO PERGAMOS

**Verse 12. And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;**

This letter is addressed to the church in the city of Pergamos or Pergamum (ASV). It was a city in the Roman province of Asia, in the west of what is now Asiatic Turkey.<sup>5</sup> “By Christian times, Pergamum had become the chief center of Roman emperor-worship, no less than three temples being erected there to Roman emperors, but with many other temples also, to Zeus, Athena, Dionysus, and Asklepios (the serpent-god of healing).”<sup>6</sup>

This city boasted of its great religious displays. This made it difficult for Christians who lived there to remain faithful in the face of persecutions. As Coffman says, “In this atmosphere, there were some Christians, no doubt, who

avored the incorporation of Christianity into the religious life of the community without a collision with the pagan world.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, they were in great danger of compromising their faith.

This letter to the church at Pergamos comes from the one with the sharp sword with two edges. This identifies the writer of this letter as Jesus Christ because 1:16 describes Christ as having a sharp two-edged sword proceeding out of his mouth. (Also see 19:15.) Eph. 6:17 defines the sword of the Spirit as the Word of God. Therefore, this sharp two-edged sword proceeding out of his mouth must represent the Word of God. In Jn. 12:49, Jesus says, “For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.” Jesus came to earth to carry out the will of his Father. Therefore, this sword represents those words that Jesus spoke while on earth, as well as those things that he revealed through the Spirit to the apostles after he ascended to heaven. (See Jn. 14:26.)

Several references are made in Revelation to things proceeding out of the mouths of different symbols. Just as the sword proceeding out of the mouth of Jesus represents his words, that which proceeds out of the mouth of other symbols represents the speakings and teachings of those forces. (See 9:17; 12:15; 16:13.)

**Verse 13. I know thy works and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.**

Jesus begins by praising this church for the works they were doing. They had held fast his name and had not denied the faith. This must have been difficult, considering the persecutions they were suffering. They had not denied the faith even when one among them had been martyred. This should be an example to us as we face the trials of life. Most Christians living at this present time do not face this type of physical persecution. We may have many social pressures and temptations that make it difficult to make

decisions we know to be right in God's sight, but we face few physical tortures. These people at Pergamos had both. They were faced with the social pressures of that day as well as actual physical persecutions. This is evident in verse 14 because some were eating things sacrificed to idols and committing fornication as a part of the emperor-worship so predominant in this city. Sometimes temptations may be harder to overcome than persecutions. To be a Christian means that we must "hold the faith" regardless of persecutions or temptations.

Jesus knew they lived in a difficult situation because he said they were dwelling where "Satan's seat is." Some believe this statement refers to a temple erected in the city honoring the pagan god Zeus. It had a huge altar forty feet high "carved like a great throne into the face of the mountain dominating the city."<sup>8</sup> This also may have been where Antipas was killed. There is no way of knowing if this passage is referring specifically to the altar in this temple, but we do know that Satan's seat is anywhere that sin dwells. This does show that Pergamos was a center of sin and corruption.

In most of these letters, symbols were used that had a special meaning to those living at that certain location, but they also hold a meaning applicable to all Christians of all ages. This serves to show the magnificent way in which Revelation is written. Only God could have composed such a marvelous book.

Concerning Antipas, this is the only time his name is mentioned in the Bible. He must have been a very faithful Christian and probably well known in the church. Though he lost his physical life, what an honor to be named a "faithful martyr" by Jesus Christ himself!

**Verse 14. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.**

Some at Pergamos held the doctrine of Balaam who taught the children of Israel to eat things sacrificed unto



idols and to commit fornication. (See Num. 25:1-2; 31:16.) This error of Balaam is also mentioned in 2Pet. 2:15 and Jude 11. To the Jews the name of Balaam had become synonymous with sacrificing to idols and fornication, just as we associate the name of Judas with one who betrays his fellow man. Jesus condemned these people for this practice in the same manner as he condemned the people of Israel in the time of Moses. (See Num. 25:3-4.) We must always be aware that false teaching can creep in among us. We must condemn it just as Christ did and remove it from our midst or he will condemn us.

**Verse 15. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.**

Many believe the doctrine of the Nicolaitans was the same as the doctrine of Balaam. From the construction of verses 14 and 15, it is hard to determine if there are two false doctrines being discussed or only one. It could be that the Nicolaitans were practicing the same things Balaam had taught during the time of Moses. This is only supposition on the part of some commentators; however, it seems that nothing definite can be established. This verse seems to indicate that the doctrine of the Nicolaitans was in addition to the doctrine of Balaam because of the use of the word "also." We do know that the church at Ephesus had this same problem approximately one hundred miles away, so it must have been well known and fairly widespread. (See comments on v. 6 for more information about the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.)

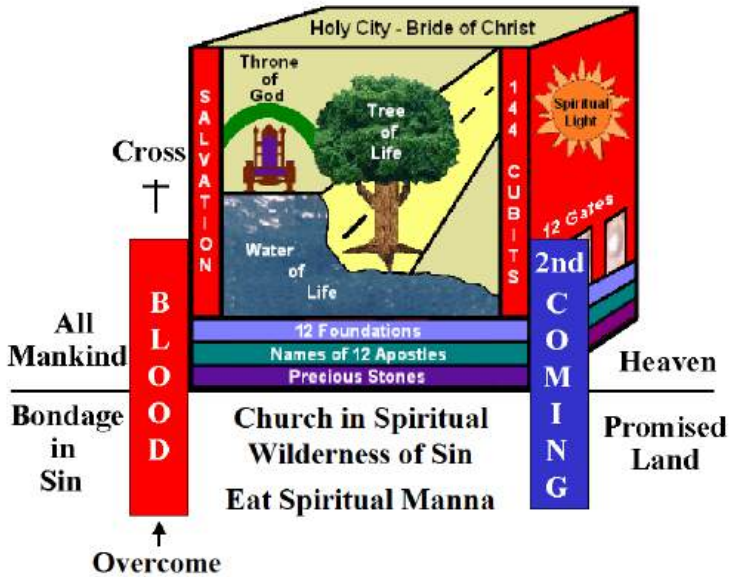
**Verse 16. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.**

In this congregation two groups of people were practicing false doctrine. One group held the doctrine of Balaam (v. 14), and the other held the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. Regardless of the specific teachings of these groups, we know these doctrines were not in accordance with the true gospel of Christ. The people were warned to repent or Christ would come and fight against them with

the sword of his mouth. As explained in verse 12, this sword of the mouth is the gospel of Christ. Therefore, Christ is warning them that if they refuse to repent and turn from these false doctrines, he will come and fight against them with the true Word of God. He surely must do this through strong Christians who preach and teach his Word. The gospel is a powerful instrument. Heb. 4:12 says, "The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword." We must use this gospel to fight against any type of false teaching.

Jesus will not tolerate false teaching among his people. If false teachers exist within a congregation, it is our duty to use the Word of God to war against them and cause them to repent. For a church to be true and faithful in the sight of God, it cannot tolerate false teaching!

**Verse 17. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.**



“He that hath an ear, let him hear” again calls special attention to the promise given to those who overcome. The first part of the promise says that by overcoming we will be able to eat of the hidden manna. This symbolism is taken from the Old Testament. When the children of Israel were wandering in the wilderness, God fed them with literal manna (bread) from heaven. Christ said, “Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” (Jn. 6:49-51) We partake of that living bread by being obedient to the gospel that he gave us.

Today, the church is the spiritual kingdom of God wandering in the “wilderness” of the world. It is fed by Christ through his Word, which is the spiritual manna from heaven for Christians today. Rev. 12:6 describes the church as being in the wilderness today and states that it is being fed by God. All of these symbols fit together and are used

to explain the situation of Christians in the world today. When one “overcomes” this world of sin through baptism, he enters a period of “wandering,” waiting for heaven, which is our “promised land.” He is being fed by spiritual “manna” from heaven, which is Christ or his Word. This manna is called “hidden” because it was hidden throughout the time of the Law of Moses. Eph. 3:9 speaks of the gospel as a “mystery” that was “hid” from the beginning of the world. Also, to those who are outside of Christ, the saving grace of the gospel is hidden. Only when one becomes a member of the church does that spiritual manna nourish his soul unto everlasting life.

When one overcomes this world through obedience to the gospel, he receives a white stone with a new name written in it. There are many ideas about the meaning of the white stone. Since it is white and is given to those who overcome, it must represent something concerning our salvation. If the meaning of this white stone is to be drawn from history, two possible explanations agree with the symbolism here. First, “in the ancient law courts, white and black stones were used for registering the verdict of juries.”<sup>9</sup> White was a vote for acquittal and black for condemnation. When one partakes of the hidden manna or the gospel of Christ, he receives a white stone representing a pardon of all his sins. Second, small stones, not necessarily white, were sometimes used as admission to public events. If this is the symbolism intended, it would represent admission to the church when we partake of the manna from heaven. Either or both of these interpretations may be correct because they actually stand for the same thing; the forgiveness of sins, and this enables us to enter into the Lord’s church.

The key to the meaning of the white stone may be in this fact. It has a new name written in it that no man knows except the one who receives it. This new name must be “redeemed” or “Christian.” We should not look for a specific word or words that make up the new name. Instead, we should look for the symbolic meaning of the “new name.” It is the name that a person receives when he overcomes the world of sin through salvation. This could

be described in several ways such as “saved,” “redeemed,” or ‘Christian.’ This is similar to the “new song” (14:3), which is sung by the 144,000 who are the “redeemed” from the earth. The key is that it was “new.” When Christ died on the cross, he made salvation available to all those who obey him. This salvation was not available under the old law. Therefore, it is a new name or a new song available to those who live during the Christian dispensation. When we obey the gospel of Christ, we are given a new name; the name of the redeemed, and we sing a new song; the song of salvation. This is why “no man knoweth the name saving he that receiveth it.” The only ones who can wear the new name or sing the new song are those who are obedient to the gospel of Christ. Everyone else will be outside of Christ and have no hope of heaven unless they obey the gospel and wear the new name.

## THE LETTER TO THYATIRA

**Verse 18. And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;**

Thyatira came under Roman rule in 133 B.C. and was located in what is now known as Asiatic Turkey. The city of Akhisar stands at this same location today. Thyatira was situated on the road from Pergamum to Laodicea making it an important point in the Roman road system. “It was also an important center of manufacture: dyeing, garment making, pottery, and brass working are among the trades known to have existed there.”<sup>10</sup> This is where Paul met Lydia, a seller of purple (Acts 16:14). “It was also the home of many influential trade guilds, having their own deities, temples and guild halls, where feasts, tending to obscenity, and all kinds of immoralities were practices.”<sup>11</sup>

This letter to Thyatira comes from the one whose eyes were like unto a flame and whose feet were like fine brass. Both phrases were used to describe Christ in chapter 1. This once again shows that these letters to the seven churches were from Christ, not man. (See comments on 1:14-15 for interpretations of these symbols.)

**Verse 19. I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.**

Christ praises this church for their works, charity, service, faith, patience, and works. Notice that their works were mentioned twice; however, he says the last were more than the first. This indicates they were working more all the time. As they grew in faith, they were also performing more works. Many people today teach that works are not necessary for us to be saved eternally, but Jas. 2:17 says that “faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.” “Works” are an outgrowth of faith. If we have faith, works come naturally. If we grow in faith, our desire to work for the Lord will also grow.

**Verse 20. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.**

Even though Christ praised this congregation for many things, he still had something against them. They were allowing the woman Jezebel to teach a doctrine contrary to the gospel of our Lord. By her teaching she caused some Christians at Thyatira to revert to idol worship and to commit fornication. These same sins were prevalent at Pergamos and were referred to there as the doctrine of Balaam (v. 14). If this was the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, as some suppose, the church at Ephesus was also commended for hating them. From this it seems quite evident that the early church had a serious problem with those who desired to eat things sacrificed to idols and commit fornication. Both of these sins were part of idolatrous pagan worship, which meant they were forsaking the true God for idols. The children of Israel made these same mistakes many times during the Old Testament period.

Most likely the name “Jezebel” refers to one specific woman who was teaching and leading others into idolatrous worship, rather than some factious group. We have no way of knowing if this was her actual name or a symbolic name assigned to her by God because of her deeds.

In Old Testament times, Jezebel was the wife of Ahab, the seventh king of Israel, and the daughter of the king of

Sidon. She was well known among the Israelites for her deeds of fornication and sorceries (2 Kings 9:22). Regardless of whether this was her actual or symbolic name, this church was condemned for allowing her to teach false doctrine. This is the lesson for us: God will not tolerate false teachings in his church, and neither should we as Christians.

**Verse 21. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.**

The long-suffering of the Lord is evident in this verse. Jezebel had “space” to repent indicating that the Lord had given her sufficient time to repent of her deeds. He was willing to give her time to repent, yet he was not willing to let her continue in her deeds indefinitely. We should have this same attitude in the church today. We must avoid fellow-shiping sin in the church. Those who sin openly must be corrected. Gal. 6:1 tells us that we are obligated to restore anyone who has been overtaken in a fault. We must give them time to repent; however, we must not let sin continue. We must not ignore or fellowship sin, thereby causing others to follow that same path. (Mt. 18:15-17 outlines the procedure a church should follow in practicing discipline.)

**Verse 22. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.**

It is hard to understand exactly how Jesus would cause this false teacher and her followers to be afflicted with great tribulation, but one thing is for certain, it would happen if they did not repent. We may not know exactly how God operates in this world, but we should understand that he is in control of all things. Though we may not recognize certain events as being directly controlled by God, we do know that “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28). We cannot tolerate false doctrines in the Lord’s church, and we must make every effort to bring those who teach such to repentance. If they refuse to repent, it is our duty to remove that sin from the church by “marking them which cause divisions” (Rom. 16:17), and “withdrawing yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly” (2Thess. 3:6).

**Verse 23. And I will kill her children with death; and**

**all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.**

This further emphasizes that God will not tolerate those who seek to lead his people astray. God may or may not operate directly against false teachers in the church today, but he definitely expects us as Christians to “war against them with the sword of the Spirit.” (See v. 16; 19:14-15.)

The language of verses 22 and 23 reminds us of the action that the Lord took against Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10). Since John was receiving these visions directly from Christ, we understand that Jesus was still operating in the world in ways that have since ceased. We know the writings of the New Testament are complete and there will be no further revelations. Since Jesus was still operating in the world in this fashion, it is possible that he would act against this church just as he did against Ananias and Sapphira. Furthermore, we have no way of knowing whether Jezebel repented or Jesus carried out this condemnation. One or the other definitely took place.

**Verse 24. But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.**

God assures those who are faithful that they will not be required to bear any greater burdens than they already have. Christ is making a definite distinction between those who follow him and those who hold false doctrines or follow Satan. The rest are the ones who have not followed the teachings of Jezebel. They have not committed fornication or participated in pagan idol-worship. They were faithful children of God.

There were two groups of people in this church at Thyatira. One was faithful: one was not. The lesson for us is that even though some may be in our congregations who are living in sin or teaching false doctrines, we can remain faithful if we reject the false teaching and worship God as he has directed.

We do not know exactly why Jesus said he would put no other burden upon them. Perhaps their burden was as great as they could bear and continue to remain faithful. God will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear (1Cor. 10:13). Perhaps they had proven their faithfulness to God. Therefore, he would put no other burden upon them.

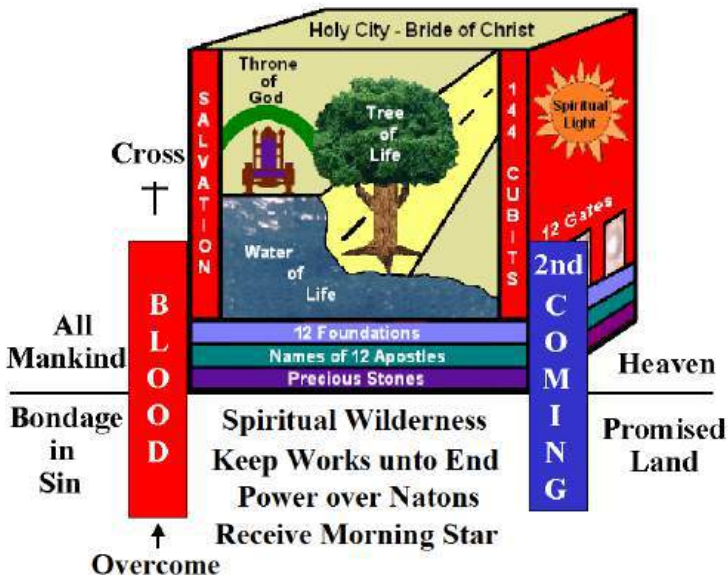


**Verse 25. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.**

The thing these people possessed and were admonished to hold fast was their faithfulness to Christ. Jesus told them to hold fast till he comes. Some say this does not refer to the second coming of Christ but rather “visitation through the trials soon to confront the churches.”<sup>2</sup> We believe it means the second advent. Christians must continually be careful to hold fast their faith. If the above were true, there would come a time after Christ had made his visitation through trials when Christians would not have to be concerned with holding to their faith. Besides, we are not sure what “visitations through trials” are. Rev. 3:11 says, “Behold, I come quickly hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.”

**Verse 26. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:**

Jesus promises that he will give power over the nations to those who overcome. In 1Jn. 5:4-5, those who overcome are defined as Christians. Therefore, verse 26 says that Christians will be given power over the nations. (Refer to the introduction of chapter 2 for a more complete discussion of “overcoming.”) The natural question would be: How do Christians have power over the nations? The answer is: We have the gospel of Christ. The gospel is the “power of God” unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). This is the power Christians are given.



This is evident because verse 27 defines this power as a “rod of iron.” The last phrase in verse 27 shows that this “rod of iron” is the same “rod” that Christ received of his Father. In Jn. 12:49-50. Jesus said, ‘For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.’ The Father gave Jesus the words he should speak – the gospel. This is the rod or power over nations that God gave Jesus, and he in turn will give it to all those who overcome by obeying his words.

Speaking of Christians 20:4 says, “Judgment was given unto them.” Jn. 12:48 says that we will be judged by the Word of God. We do not have to wait until the Judgment Day to know how we will be judged. We will be judged according to the gospel of Christ. Christians have that judgment today. We have that power of God.

This power is not a physical power: It is a spiritual power. Christians are part of the most powerful kingdom that has ever existed. We are part of God’s spiritual kingdom, the church, which can never be shaken (Heb. 12:28). Those in that kingdom possess the greatest power on earth – the spiritual power of God, the gospel. Anyone who desires to enter into that eternal kingdom must submit to that power.

We must also notice that in order to have this power, we must keep the works of Jesus unto the end. Anyone who falls back into the world of sin no longer has access to that power of God: “It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they had known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them” (2Pet. 2:21).

As further evidence that “overcoming” means to be obedient to the gospel, we should consider the structure of this verse. Notice that overcoming takes place prior to keeping the works unto the end. We must first overcome this world of sin by obeying the gospel, then we must remain faithful throughout our lives in order to receive our eternal reward.

**Verse 27. And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.**

The power that Christians will use to rule the nations is

described as a “rod of iron.” This is the same power that Christ uses to smite the nations in 19:15. As explained in verse 26, this rod of iron represents the gospel. It is the unbreakable spiritual power of God that Christians use to rule in this world. (Significant information on this “rod of iron” is given in comments on 19:15.)

The power of this rod of iron is compared to the ease with which an iron rod would break a piece of clay pottery. (See Ps. 2:9.) The Word of God is the most powerful force that exists upon this earth. No power of man is capable of destroying the Word of God or his kingdom. It will stand forever (Heb. 12:28).

Christ received this rod of iron from his Father. He received the gospel and will give the power of that gospel to all who obey it. (See v. 26 for more information.)

**Verse 28. And I will give him the morning star.**

Jesus says he is the “bright and morning star” (22:16). When we overcome this world of sin through our obedience to the gospel, we receive Christ. This obviously does not mean we receive him bodily; it does mean that we receive all the blessings he has promised to those who obey him. Some of the blessings Christians receive when they come into contact with Christ by obeying the gospel are these: all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3); forgiveness of sins (Rom. 6:17- 18); redemption (Rom. 3:24); an advocate with the Father (1Jn. 2:1); an inheritance (Eph. 1:11; Heb. 9:15); and everlasting life (Jn. 3:16).

We must understand that Christians are promised these blessings and have access to them from the moment of their obedience to the gospel, and that we must also remain faithful throughout our lives to receive that final crown (v. 10).

**Verse 29. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.**

This same statement is used in each of the letters to the churches. (Please refer to the comments on v. 7.)

Coffman has an excellent section in his book concerning the reasons for the corruption of the church at Thyatira. He points out that it is the duty of the eldership of any church to be constantly alert for any false teachers who might enter the congregation and to use their authority to see that they are removed.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*New Bible Dictionary* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1984), p. 337.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>Robert S. Usrey, *Church Discipline for Caring Christians* (Searcy, Ark.: Resource Publications, 1983), p. 83.

<sup>4</sup>*New Bible Dictionary*, p. 1125.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p.912.

<sup>6</sup>James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979), p. 57.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 57-58

<sup>9</sup>William Barclay, *The Revelation of John, Vol 1* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1960), p. 118.

<sup>10</sup>*New Bible Dictionary*, p. 1197.

<sup>11</sup>Coffman, p. 62.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

# CHAPTER 3

## THE LETTER TO SARDIS

Sardis was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia and once enjoyed great prominence and prosperity. The original city was an almost impregnable fortress-citadel, towering above the broad valley of the Hermus and almost surrounded by nearly perpendicular cliffs of loose rock. Despite its strategic position, the city was captured twice by soldiers who scaled the cliffs in cover of darkness and attacked the city from weakly defended positions. This happened once in 546 B.C. and again in 214 B.C. when it came under Roman rule. The city never regained the prominence under Roman rule that it had enjoyed in earlier times. Today, all that remains of a once important city is a small obscure village named Sart.<sup>1</sup>

**Verse 1. And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.**

This letter to Sardis comes from the one who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars. In 5:6, the Lamb who was slain is described as having seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God. The seven Spirits must represent the Holy Spirit or the powers of God and Christ to see all and know all. Rev. 1:16 pictured Christ as holding the seven stars in his right hand, and 1:20 defined the seven stars as the angels of the seven churches. (For more information on the seven Spirits and the seven stars, see comments on the references given above.) In this verse, these symbols are used to show that this message to Sardis is from Jesus Christ.

The church at Sardis was in a fearful situation. Jesus had no words of praise for them. He immediately states that this church had a name as being alive, but actually they were dead. They were performing works that some must have

considered as evidence of their being an active and faithful congregation of the Lord's church; however, according to verse 2, their works were imperfect in the sight of God. They were either not performing the works that God expected them to do, or they were working for the wrong reasons. In either case their works were not acceptable to God. This is somewhat similar to the church at Ephesus (2:1-7), which was performing works but for the wrong reasons.

The lesson in this verse shows that it is possible for a congregation to be considered a true church of Christ by those who observe the works being performed, yet they may not be acceptable to God because they are working for the wrong reasons. Our works must not be for the praise of men. Instead, we must work for the praise of God (Jn. 12:43). A congregation must constantly monitor itself to be certain its motives are proper. They must make sure they are alive – not dead.

**Verse 2. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.**

This congregation is exhorted to build upon the things that remain. Verse 4 states that a few in that congregation were still walking according to God's commands because they had not "defiled their garments." Therefore, the "things which remained" must have been the works and efforts of those who had remained faithful. These faithful members and their works were the things that they were exhorted to build upon in order to be considered a faithful church. This would be true in any congregation. The only way to build a strong congregation is to build upon those things that are spiritual. God's Word is the foundation of any congregation that is alive. We must use that to build a strong church. The temptation today is to use all sorts of gimmicks to "bribe" people into attending church. Many denominational organizations are adept at this strategy, but we must remember that a true church is one that is built upon the Word of God and is striving to do the works of the

Lord because they love him.

The “things which remained” were “ready to die.” This indicates that even works that are acceptable to God will eventually fade away and die if they are surrounded by a congregation that is “dead.” We must constantly be “watchful” in order to build on good works, as well as correct the things that are not acceptable.

**Verse 3. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.**

The church at Sardis was told to remember what they had received and heard. This must be a reference to the gospel. To remember the gospel means to return to its teachings. Therefore, they were being exhorted to return to the teachings of the gospel and “hold fast” to it. They were also commanded to repent because they had left those teachings.

In verse 2 they were told to be watchful. Verse 3 reveals what would happen to them if they failed to watch. Since they were commanded to remember the gospel, being “watchful” must mean that they were to “watch” carefully that they kept the teachings of the gospel. To be watchful means to be alert concerning the happenings around you. To be watchful of the gospel would mean to be careful to teach the truth and do those things commanded.

Jesus warns that if they were not watchful, or did not return to the teachings of the gospel, he would come upon them as a thief. A similar warning was given to the church at Ephesus (2:5) as Christ said he would remove their candlestick. It is hard to understand just how Jesus might do this, but we must know with confidence that it can happen. If we fail to abide in the doctrine of Christ, we cannot be considered a true church. The fact that Jesus says he will come as a thief may be significant in understanding verse 3. To come as a thief would mean to come unexpectedly or in silence. A church may die and not be aware of it. Today, many influences gradually creep into the church. Over a period of years, a congregation could

accept these influences and gradually drift away from the teachings of the Bible. If this were to continue, at some point Christ would no longer consider them a true church. They might never realize when this happened because it had been so gradual. They would probably still consider themselves a true church and certainly would not know at what hour Christ came upon them.

**Verse 4. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.**

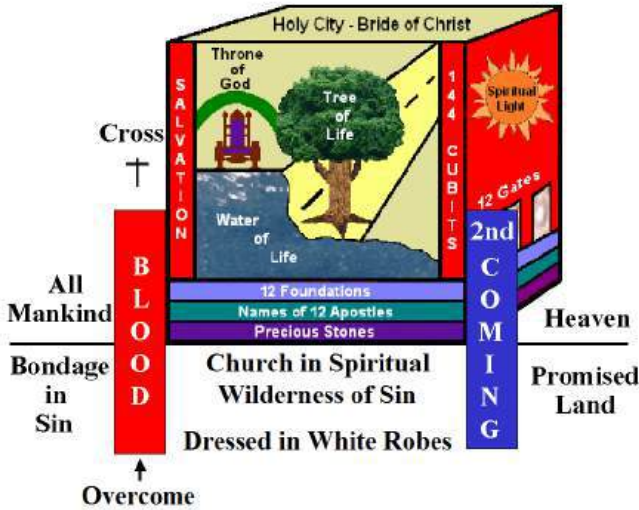
A few in Sardis were still walking according to Christ's teachings because they had "not defiled their garments." Their garments were still white because they had not spotted or defiled them with sin. Jas. 1:27 says we are to keep ourselves "unspotted from the world." In Revelation the figurative representation of keeping ourselves unspotted from the world is keeping our garments white. In 3:18, the people of Laodicea were told to purchase white raiment in order to be clothed and cover their shame. According to 1Jn. 1:7, if we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus "cleanseth us from all sin." As long as we walk according to the teachings of the Bible, our garments will be kept white by the blood of the Lamb. That makes us worthy to walk in white with Jesus.

The phrase "even in Sardis" emphasizes what a terrible situation to which this church had regressed. It seems to indicate that it was almost surprising that there could be Christians still walking according to the truth at Sardis. This shows that, even though it may be difficult, it is possible to live a Christian life even when those around you have forsaken him.

**Verse 5. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of Life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.**



God promised to clothe those who overcome with white raiment. Verse 4 said that some at Sardis had not defiled their garments. They already possessed their white garments. From this we can conclude that “overcoming” means to overcome this world of sin by becoming a Christian. When we obey the gospel, our garments are



made white because our sins are forgiven. It then becomes our responsibility to keep our garments white or unspotted from the world. As stated in 2:10, we must remain faithful unto death to receive the crown of life.

Also, Christ will confess those who overcome before his Father in heaven. Christ confesses our name in heaven when we confess his name here on earth (Mt. 10:32). This again proves that we overcome when we become a Christian. When we obey the gospel, Jesus will clothe us in white, confess our name in heaven before God, and write our name in the book of life where it will remain as long as we remain faithful. (See 2:19.)

As presented in this illustration, we “overcome” the bondage of sin by passing through the blood of Christ. We then come into the church where we are dressed in spiritual white robes, which indicates our sins are forgiven.

**Verse 6. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.**

(For comments on this verse, see 2:7.)

## **THE LETTER TO PHILADELPHIA**

Philadelphia was founded by Eumenes, king of Pergamum, in the second century B.C. and named after his brother, Attalus, whose loyalty had earned him the name Philadelphus<sup>2</sup>, which means “lover of his brother.”<sup>3</sup> “It was situated near the upper end of a broad valley leading down through Sardis to the sea near Smyrna; and it lay at the threshold of a very fertile tract of plateau country, from which much of its commercial prosperity derived.”<sup>4</sup> The city was well known for its number of temples and great religious festivals.<sup>5</sup>

Attempts were made several times to change the name of this city. It has borne the names of Neocaesarea, Flavia, Decapolis, and Little Athens, but none of these ever caught on. Today it is called Ala Sheher.

The area where Philadelphia stood was particularly susceptible to earthquakes, being near a fault line. A destructive quake struck the city in A.D. 17, and several earthquakes followed during an extended period of time. They were so severe that some citizens refused to live within the city proper any longer.<sup>6</sup>

**Verse 7. And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;**

The letter to the church at Philadelphia begins in the same manner as the other letters to the churches. A description of Jesus Christ is used to show that this letter is from him. The first part of the description of Jesus states that he is “holy” and “true.” “Holy” points to the fact that Jesus is pure and blameless. “True” indicates that

everything he says is absolutely correct; nothing is false about him.

Jesus has the key of David. A key is symbolic of the power and authority of the one who possesses it. Since this key was once owned by David, this power of Christ is a likeness to the power once held by David. To understand this, we must determine what power David possessed, which is now held by Christ. This is answered in Lk. 1:32-33. It states concerning Jesus, “The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.” Christ now sits on the throne of David, ruling the house of Jacob, which is the church.

The comparison being made in this passage, as in many other passages in Revelation, is between the physical kingdom of Israel and the spiritual kingdom of Christ. Just as David sat upon his throne ruling the physical kingdom of Israel, Christ now sits on his throne in heaven ruling his spiritual kingdom, the church. This is the key of David; the authority of Christ over the church. (See also Acts 2:29-35.)

With this key, Jesus opens and no man can shut and shuts and no man can open. No man has the authority to permit or reject anyone’s admission to the Lord’s church – only Christ. (See Acts 2:47.) Jesus opens the door to all who obey his gospel: He shuts the door to all who do not.

**Verse 8. I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.**

The actual translation concerning the open door is a door “having been opened.” The church at Philadelphia was one of the two faithful churches to which letters were specifically addressed. They received no condemnation. Because of this, the door that had been opened unto them was still open and no man could shut it. This door, which Jesus uses the “key of David” to open, is the door of admission to the church to those who obey the gospel. It

will remain open as a door to that heavenly abode to all who keep the Word and do not deny the name of Christ.

This should help us understand that the door to the church and the door to heaven are one and the same. The church is that eternal kingdom, which will one day dwell in heaven. Just as the physical kingdom of Israel was the only nation to pass through the Jordan River into the promised land, those in the church, Christians, will be the only ones to pass through the valley of death into our eternal promised land of heaven. Heaven is the church's promised land today! When we obey the gospel, Christ opens the door of the kingdom to us. That door stands open before us and will finally provide entrance to our promised land of heaven. No man is capable of shutting that door. The only one who can shut that door is Christ, and he will do so only if we become unfaithful.

**Verse 9. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.**

Evidently, some in Philadelphia claimed to be Christians but were not following the ways of Christ. The term "Jews" is used to represent Christians. Just as the Jews were the chosen people of God under the old law, Christians are God's chosen people today. (See Rom. 2:28-29. For additional comments on this symbolism, see 2:9.)

Christ says that those who claimed to be Christians, but were not, were followers of the devil. This is an important lesson for us. Just because one claims to follow Christ does not necessarily make him a Christian. In order to be a Christian, one must be obedient to the laws of Christ and submissive to his will. Many people today claim to be Christians although they have never obeyed the gospel. This makes them of the synagogue of Satan. Christ states that eventually they will know that he loves the true Christian who does his will. This must be a reference to eternity because Jesus will not force anyone to worship him today. We are responsible for making our own choice to

follow him or not. To those who wait until Jesus forces them come and worship, it will be too late to render obedience to the gospel and become Christians. They will be lost eternally.

**Verse 10. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.**

Because they had kept his Word, Jesus promises them that he will keep them from the temptation that is to engulf the entire world. We have no way of knowing exactly what this temptation is referring to. It may have been some specific temptation that was going to take place at that particular time, which Jesus chose not to have these people endure. It could also mean that by keeping the Word in our hearts, we will be able to avoid many temptations. In either case, we know that having a strong faith is important in overcoming temptation.

**Verse 11. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.**

Christ states that he will come quickly. Similar language is used in 22:7, 12, 20. This again points out that the time frame being discussed in Revelation is that of the Christian dispensation.

Rev. 1:1 spoke of events that must shortly come to pass. Many Bible scholars would limit this time to a few hundred years after the writing of Revelation. Christ said he would come quickly, but it has been two thousand years. The events that were shortly to come to pass are those events that take place during the entire Christian age. Therefore, Revelation is written to all Christians of all ages.

These people were admonished to hold fast to that which they had so that no man could take their crown. The crown must be that crown of life referred to in 2:10. The crown of a spiritual life on earth is eternal glory in heaven: "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1Pet. 5:4).

Two points should be made about this statement. First, if we hold to the teachings of the Word, no man is capable of taking our crown. This crown is protected by God, and no one is strong enough to take it. Second, it can be taken if we fail to hold to the teachings of God. This puts the keeping of this crown directly in our hands. It is dependent upon our faithfulness to Christ. As long as we are faithful, we know we will receive this crown. If we become unfaithful, it will be taken away. It will be taken by man in the sense that he offers the temptations that can cause men to turn from God. Let us be careful to “hold fast” in order to someday receive our crown of glory. (See 1Cor. 9:24-25.)

**Verse 12. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.**

Several promises are made in verse 12 to those who overcome. Jesus says that he will: (1) make him a pillar in the temple of God, (2) write upon him the name of God, (3) write upon him the name of the city of God, new Jerusalem, and (4) write upon him a new name. These promises apply to anyone who overcomes this world of sin by becoming a Christian.

For one to be made a pillar in the temple of God, the church, means that he stands strong and firm against a world of sin. The intent of this statement is not to compare the strength of Christians within the church because we know there always have been, and always will be, those Christians who are strong in the faith and also those who are weak. This is saying that when a person becomes a Christian, his sins are forgiven, and he stands strong and firm in this sinful world because of that forgiveness.

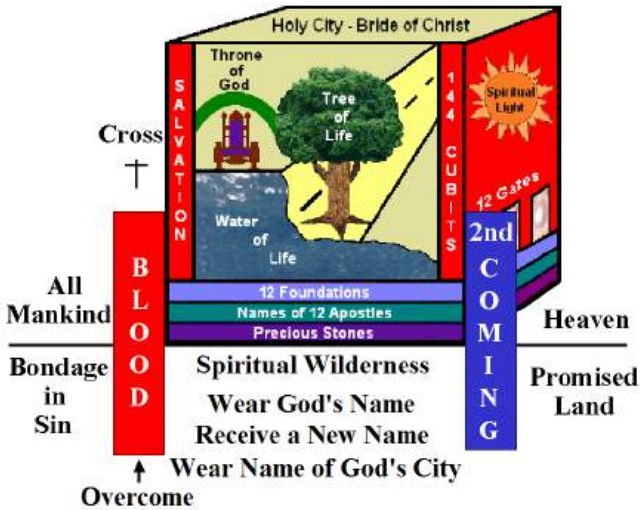
When a person overcomes this world of sin by becoming a Christian and is made a pillar in the church, he will not go out again. This is not teaching that it is impossible for one

to leave the church or to fall back into the ways of sin. It is possible to have our names taken out of the book of life and out of the "holy city" (22:19). The meaning in verse 12 is the same as it is in many other places in the Bible: If we remain faithful, no man, or even the devil himself, has the power to take us out of the church or away from the fold of God.

Jesus promises to those who overcome that he will write upon them his Father's name and the name of the city of God, which is new Jerusalem. To have God's name symbolically written upon us would show that we belong to God. We are servants of God, not of the devil. Rev. 14:1 states that the 144,000 have the Father's name written in their foreheads. The 144,000 represent all who follow Christ. Therefore, to have the Father's name written upon us shows that we are Christians. We are part of the 144,000. We are the servants of God. The same reasoning applies to having the name of the city of God written upon us. According to Heb. 12:22-23, the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, is the church. To have that name written upon us means that we are a part of the church, the city of God.

This city comes down out of heaven. This same language is used in 21:2 as John sees the holy city, new Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. The description that follows in chapters 21 and 22 is a beautiful description of the church, the holy city of God. The holy city is that spiritual city that God has already given to man. It was established on the day of Pentecost when Peter preached the first gospel sermon; thereby, giving man his first opportunity to become a part of it. When men obey the gospel, they overcome this world of sin and become a part of that spiritual city of God, the church.

In our drawing it becomes easy to understand that when we contact the blood of Christ through our baptism, we leave the bondage of sin and come into the church. As



Christians we symbolically wear God's name and the name of his city, which is new Jerusalem. We also wear a new name. This is prophesied in Isa 62:2 which states, "And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name." Notice that the people are to be called by a "new name" when the Gentiles see the righteousness of God. The Gentiles saw the righteousness of God when Jesus came to earth the first time and made the gospel available to all mankind. Therefore, we know that this is speaking of this present Christian dispensation. Today, we wear a new name that the Lord has determined. It should not be thought of as only one specific name, but rather any of the Biblical names that refer to the disciples of Christ. The most obvious of these names would be "Christian." However, there are other names that are also a new name as compared to the old name of Israelites or Jews. Those would include: "saved," "redeemed," or "saints." We must always cherish the "new name" that God has given us.



**Verse 13. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.**

(See comments on 2:7.)

## **THE LETTER TO LAODICEA**

Laodicea was located at an important crossroad intersection on the Roman road system. One was the main road that crossed Asia Minor from east to west toward the ports of Miletus and Ephesus. The other ran northward toward Pergamum and south to the coast of Attalia.<sup>7</sup> This strategic position made Laodicea an extremely important banking and industrial center. Products of these industries included garments of fine quality, glossy black wool, and drugs developed by the medical school located there. One drug was an eye-salve that was supposed to cure inflammation.<sup>8</sup> Because of this, the admonition given in verse 18 to “anoint thine eyes with eye-salve” must have been extremely meaningful to those people.

Also significant is the fact that Laodicea was located on a row of low hills between two small valleys and had no good water supply. “Water was piped to the city from hot springs some distance south, and probably arrived lukewarm.”<sup>9</sup> There were also sources of cold water located within a few kilometers of the city. The main point is that no matter where the people of Laodicea acquired their water, it would arrive in a lukewarm state. This condition made the water extremely unpleasant to drink. Therefore, when the Lord called them a “lukewarm” church, they surely knew exactly what he meant.

**Verse 14. And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;**

Jesus is described as the faithful and true witness of God. Rev. 1:5 states that this entire book of Revelation is “from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness.” A faithful and true witness is one who provides an accurate account of

something Jesus did that while he was upon earth. He completely and accurately carried out the will of God.

Jesus is also described as the beginning of the creation of God. Referring to Jesus as the Word, Jn. 1:1-3 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." Jesus has always existed with God: he was a part of the creation from the beginning.

**Verse 15. I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.**

The people at Laodicea were condemned for being neither cold nor hot in their works for the Lord, they would have perfectly understand this illustration. Laodicea had no good source of either cold or hot water, and the long distance either type of water had to be transported in order to reach the city caused it to arrive in a lukewarm state. They did not have good cold water for drinking, nor good hot water for bathing.

God says that he would prefer his people to be either cold or hot instead of lukewarm. Most people interpret this to mean that God would prefer us to be either totally committed to him or totally against him than to be "lukewarm." At one time we held this view; however, we no longer believe this to be the correct interpretation of this statement. This interpretation comes from the way we use of the words "hot" and "cold" as descriptive terms in our language today. We commonly describe someone's enthusiasm toward almost anything as being either "cold" or "hot." However, we do not believe this is the way these terms are being used in this passage. In order to understand the meaning of this verse we must realize that both cold and hot water have good, desirable qualities. Cold water is preferred for drinking and hot water for bathing. So, both cold and hot water is very desirable in certain situations. So, the comparison being made in this verse is between two types of desirable water and one type of undesirable water.

Therefore, God is saying that he wants us to have the desirable qualities of either good cold water or good hot water, but does not want us to be lukewarm!

The church at Laodicea believed they were a tremendous congregation of the Lord's church (v. 17); yet, Jesus said they were "lukewarm." They were not diligent in their works; neither were they void of good works. The message seems to be that they were complacent. They were doing some good works; however, they were slothful in their labors. As we would put it, they were trying to do just enough to get by. Obviously, this is not acceptable to the Lord.

Many congregations face this problem today. We must not become satisfied with our beautiful buildings and seemingly adequate contributions on Sunday morning. Congregations must strive hard to do the works that God would have us do.

**Verse 16. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.**

Just as lukewarm water has an unpleasant taste to us, a lukewarm Christian is unpleasing to God. We will spew lukewarm water out of our mouths because of its taste; God will spew lukewarm Christians out of his mouth because of their mediocre attitude toward him. He desires that we have good traits as described by both cold and hot water, but not lukewarm.

We need to keep this firmly in mind as we attempt to lead the Christian life and not be complacent in our work for the Lord. We must be devoted to living the Christian life and performing good works, or else God will spew us out of his mouth.

**Verse 17. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:**

The opinion the Christians at Laodicea had of themselves and their actual condition was considerably different. They

believed they were a healthy, hard-working, prosperous congregation of the Lord's church. Actually, they were in a wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked condition, according to the Lord. This was terrible. We must learn to view ourselves in the correct manner – as the Lord sees us. We must not think too highly of ourselves, and we must constantly strive to do the Lord's work in an humble, honest, hard-working manner.

These statements are referring to the spiritual condition of this congregation. Very likely, they were physically prosperous. This condition led them to mistakenly believe that they were also spiritually prosperous. This would also make this description figurative. To be poor, wretched, and miserable would describe the terrible spiritual state into which this congregation had degenerated. To be blind would indicate that they were unable to “see” their condition. In order to solve problems in a congregation, we must first be able to see or recognize that a problem exists. The Christians at Laodicea did not even know they had problems. Just the opposite was true. They thought they were a prosperous congregation and had need of nothing. They were blind!

The term “naked” shows that they had shed their spiritual clothing. Christians are described throughout Revelation as being clothed in white, which indicates they are spiritually pure in the sight of God. Since these Christians were naked, they no longer wore the figurative white spiritual clothing of a Christian. (See v. 18.) They had left the sinless state of a Christian by refusing to do the works that God required.

**Verse 18. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see.**

The counseling that Jesus gave them in this verse was designed to cure the problem spoken of in verse 17. They thought they were rich and had need of nothing, but they had the wrong type of riches. Jesus told them to purchase

from him gold that was tried by fire. This gold would be completely free of impurities and extremely valuable. The riches of this earth will someday be destroyed, but the spiritual riches will never perish. We are to lay up “treasures in heaven” (Mt. 6:20). These people were admonished to stop putting their trust in the physical riches. Instead, by doing the works of God, they were to purchase spiritual treasures – the most valuable of all.

They were to purchase white raiment that they could use to clothe themselves to cover their shame. To purchase white clothing means to put on the holy and righteous state of a Christian by obtaining the forgiveness of sins.

They were also to anoint their eyes with salve in order to see. This indicates that they should take a close “look” at their situation and attempt to cure it. They should stop being “blind.” They should recognize their problems and strive to correct them.

These instructions that Jesus gave to the church at Laodicea are applicable to Christians today. We must not be “lukewarm,” but we must strive to do the works of our Lord to the best of our abilities. By doing what the Lord would have us do, we purchase gold tried by fire and lay up treasures in heaven, which will never perish. We also wear the white spiritual clothing of Christians, indicating that our sins have been forgiven. We are to be certain we are not “blind” to our spiritual problems. We must constantly watch to keep ourselves pure in the sight of God.

**Verse 19. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.**

Jesus says he rebukes and chastens those whom he loves. He definitely rebuked and chastened the people at Laodicea. He said he would spew them out of his mouth (v.16); however, according to verse 19, he loved them. He rebuked them in this letter because he loved them and desired that they should repent. Heb. 12:6 says, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” Since we must be sons of God in order to be chastened, we should be thankful that he loves

us enough to chasten us.

An earthly father is designated by God to be the head of his family (Eph. 5:23), just as Christ is the head of his spiritual family the church (Eph. 1:22-23). An earthly father disciplines his children because he loves them and desires that they obey him. The same is true with our heavenly Father. He loves us and desires that we walk according to his commands. This verse teaches that he will discipline us in order to cause us to repent when we sin.

We should not think of the chastening as being punishment sent from God because of some sin we have committed. The Greek word from which “chasten” is derived means to educate, instruct, or teach. Therefore, chastening is an educational process. Prov. 22:6 says, “Train up a child in the way he should go.” This is a process of instruction, not just punishment, when a child does something wrong. The same is true with God as he trains his children. Through his Word, he instructs and teaches us how to live a Christian life. He chastens us.<sup>10</sup>

**Verse 20. 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.**

The door spoken of in this verse is door that man controls. This is in contrast to the door in verse 8, which God controls. The door that Christ controls is always open to his people so that they may dwell with him. Man makes the choice of whether to open or close the door that he controls. Christ always stands at man’s door knocking and hoping that he will be allowed in. It is up to man to decide whether to open that door or not.

Man must do two things before Christ will come in unto him.” Man must (1) hear his voice and (2) open the door. To hear his voice would be to hear the gospel. To open the door indicates that one has become convicted of what he has heard and has obeyed that voice. Once man has obeyed Christ’s words, he will come in unto him and sup with him. It takes more than just hearing the Word in order to be a child of God. Man must do those things commanded;

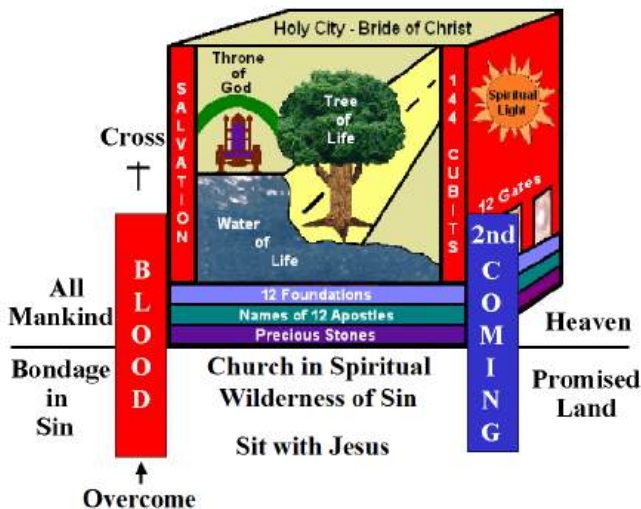
thereby, opening the door for Christ to dwell with him.

To sup with Christ would mean to sit at the same table with him and partake of the same food. This indicates the closeness of the relationship. There can be little doubt that this also includes the eating of the Lord's Supper whereby Christians commune with God on the first day of the week.

**Verse 21. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.**

Christ promises that those who overcome will be granted the right to sit with him in his throne. "Overcoming" refers to our obedience to the gospel. (See the introduction to chapter 2.) This is how we overcome this world of sin. Therefore, this verse says that Christians are the ones who Christ will grant to sit with him in his throne.

To correctly interpret this, we must understand that Christians do not sit upon physical thrones. We sit upon spiritual thrones. This is a likeness to Christ "overcoming" and "sitting down with the Father on his throne." Rom 6:4 says, "We are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father even so we also should walk in newness of life." When we are baptized, we are simulating the physical death and resurrection of Christ. Jesus overcame this world by a physical death and resurrection. When we are baptized, we overcome this world by a spiritual death and resurrection. When we overcome this world of sin through a spiritual resurrection, Christ will grant that we should spiritually sit with him in his throne. This is stated in Eph 2:5-6. "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus:" To be "quickened" or "raised up" is to be made alive or "resurrected." When we become obedient to the gospel through our baptism, we open the door to Christ and he comes in and sits with us. This is another way of saying that we have entered the church and sit with Christ as he reigns on his throne.



All Christians need to realize the importance of this today. To be members of the church means that we have spiritually overcome this world of sin just as Christ overcame it through his death and resurrection. See the illustration above. It means that we are sitting upon spiritual thrones today, reigning with Christ in a spiritual kingdom. Rev. 5:10 says, "We shall reign on the earth." We reign on the earth today, in the spiritual kingdom of God, the church.

This interpretation also agrees with that of 20:4: "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them." Christians are sitting on thrones today possessing the judgment of God, which is his Word. (See comments on 14:7; 15:4.) This in turn gives us a much clearer understanding of the "thousand years" spoken of in 20:2-6. When one overcomes this world of sin by being obedient to the gospel, he sits upon a spiritual throne and reigns with Christ during the thousand years. This shows that the thousand years represents the Christian age. We do not have to wait for some thousand-year period after Christ's second coming in order to reign with him. Christ is sitting upon his throne and reigning in heaven today;



Christians are sitting upon their spiritual thrones and reigning upon this earth with Christ.

**Verse 22. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.**

(For comments, see 2:7.)

This concludes the letters to the seven churches of Asia. We believe these letters were not only intended for these seven churches, but also for all churches of all ages. Each congregation should read these letters and make application to their particular situation. Every one of the promises given to those who “overcome” applies to anyone who becomes a Christian today. These are the glorious blessings we receive from God when we obey the gospel. This should help us understand that nothing is more blessed, or more valuable upon this earth, than being a member of our Lord’s church.

<sup>1</sup>*Bible Dictionary* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1984). p. 1073.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 925.

<sup>3</sup>James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979), p. 78.

<sup>4</sup>*New Bible Dictionary*, p. 925.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p.926.

<sup>6</sup>Coffman. P. 78

<sup>7</sup>*New Bible Dictionary*, p. 681

<sup>8</sup>Coffman, p. 87

<sup>9</sup>*New Bible Dictionary*, p 681

<sup>10</sup>Raymond C. Kelcy, “God Chastens Those He Loves,” *Gospel Advocate*, 4 December 1986, pp. 729, 732



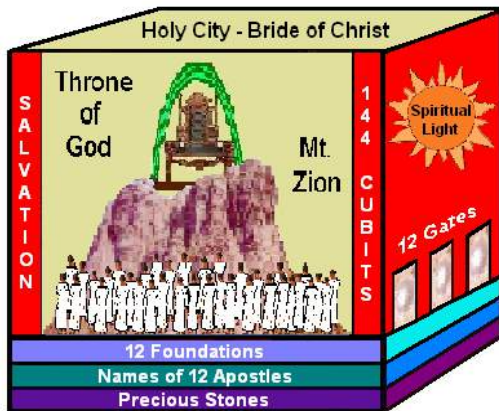
# CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4 pictures John being caught up into heaven. There he is shown things that are to happen in future times, which refers to this present Christian dispensation. (See v:1)

Some symbols in chapter 4 seem to almost defy explanation, but the overall meaning of this chapter is relatively clear: God is sitting on his throne; possessing all power and worthy of all glory and honor. He is in control of all things.

The following is a brief description of the overall throne scene of chapter 4. God is sitting on his magnificent throne in heaven, which is encompassed by an emerald (green) rainbow. Seated around this throne are twenty-four elders dressed in white raiment with crowns of gold on their heads. In front of the throne are seven lamps of fire and a sea of glass. In the midst of the throne and round about it are four living creatures with six wings and full of eyes. These living creatures continually worship God. The twenty-four elders cast their crowns before God's Throne as they also worship him. In this vision, God is the center of all things, and all worship is directed to him.

The people of John's day were suffering terrible persecution originating from the Roman throne. This vision assured the first-century Christians, as well as assuring us today, that God is



sitting on his throne in heaven and is in complete control of all things. No matter how many persecutions, hardships, or trials we may have here on earth, and regardless of the source of these hardships, we must remember that God is the ultimate ruler. Although many powers on earth bring hardships to Christians, they are only temporary. God's power is complete and eternal.

As chapter 4 is studied, it is extremely important to understand that this is a description of God's Throne as it exists today in the church! We do not have to wait until we reach heaven for God to be in control of all things. He is in control of all things today, and we as Christians are symbolically standing before his throne today as we worship him in his church (7:15). In Old Testament times, God dwelt among the people in the tabernacle, and later in the temple. The tabernacle was a physical pattern of the spiritual tabernacle, church, to come in the Christian dispensation. (See Heb 8:2.) God dwells in his spiritual tabernacle today. We as Christians serve that glorious Throne of God as we worship in his church. He is the King on his Throne and we are his subjects. We must recognize the closeness of the relationship we have with God today.

In this drawing the Throne of God is pictured as being on Mount Zion, which is another symbolic representation of the church. Mic 4:7 states, "And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever." Then in Heb. 12:22a we read, "But ye are come unto Mount Sion..." As Christians today we have come to Mount Zion, and we stand before the Throne of God as we serve him in the church.

## THE THRONE OF GOD

**Verse 1. After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.**

As this vision begins, John sees a door opened in heaven.

If this door has a symbolic meaning, it shows that the door to heaven is always open to those who are willing to obey God's will. "After this," also translated "after these things" (ASV), refers to the visions and letters of chapters 1 through 3. Therefore, the "hereafter" refers to time still in the future to John. It is this present Christian dispensation, which will extend to Christ's second coming.

Some would have us believe that the visions which are to follow in Revelation take place during a period of time after a so-called rapture in which the church will supposedly be secretly taken from this earth, and those who remain will go through a period of great tribulation. They believe that after this period of great tribulation, Christ will then return to earth to set up an earthly kingdom and reign for one thousand years. This would render Revelation meaningless to Christians today. Those who believe this theory make the same mistake as the Jews did in the time of Christ. They asked, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel?" (Acts 1:6). They were looking for an earthly kingdom, but God gave Christians a spiritual kingdom – the church. (For more information see comments on chapter 20.)

The voice John heard is generally accepted to be Christ's although this cannot absolutely be proven. In 1:10, John heard "a great voice, as of a trumpet." This was definitely Christ's because in 1:18, he said, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore." Since Christ's voice was described in 1:10 as being like a trumpet, it is probable that the voice in this verse was also Christ's.

**Verse 2. And immediately I was in the spirit; and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.**

John was taken up to the spiritual realm to view the things God would reveal to him. The first vision he saw was God sitting on his heavenly throne. We know this was God sitting on the throne because verse 8 states that those who were giving praise were directing it to the Lord God

Almighty.

A throne is always recognized as being symbolic of the great power and authority of a king. God's throne is set in heaven indicating his total power and authority. No earthly throne can come close to matching the power of this heavenly throne. God's throne has already been set. It exists today as described in this chapter, and we must put our trust in this throne rather than some earthly throne.

Although this throne is set in heaven, we must remember that God dwells with us today in the church. God is a spiritual being and he reigns on a spiritual throne. We, as physical beings, cannot literally see this throne; however, it is with us in the church. We must stop thinking about God being located in some place far away from us. He dwells on his throne with his people in the church today.

**Verse 3. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.**

This is a description of God and his throne by using symbolic language. Since we cannot see a spiritual throne, it must be described in physical terms that we can understand. We are told that looking at God was like looking at a jasper stone and a sardius. Phillips translates the jasper as a diamond, others say it should be opal. The sardius, which was sometimes called carnelian, is thought by some to be a variety of agate that was used extensively by engravers; others say it was red jasper. Probably no significance should be attached to these stones other than their beauty and value. It could be possible that the color of these stones is significant, since the color of the rainbow around the throne helps define its meaning. But, since we are not positive what type of stones these are, we cannot make such an application.

Since we are not given any specific definition of the rainbow, we must look to the Old Testament to determine its symbolic meaning. The only account of a rainbow being used as a symbol in the Old Testament is in Gen. 9:8-17. Just after God had destroyed the earth with water, he made

a covenant with Noah promising him that the earth would never again be destroyed in that manner. To remind people of all ages of this promise, God placed a rainbow in the clouds. Gen. 9:13 states, "I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth." The rainbow is a token of the covenant God made with Noah. If we apply this meaning to the rainbow around the throne, this rainbow would also be a token of a covenant that God made with his people. The final covenant that God made with his people is the law of Christ, or the New Testament. Therefore, this rainbow around the throne of God should remind all men that he has made a covenant with us, and its reward is everlasting life if we are obedient to it. The covenant God made with Noah has never been broken; neither will this covenant he has made with Christians. The emerald rainbow is our token!

This rainbow is described as looking like an emerald. There are at least two probable reasons for this. First, this would signify the tremendous value of God's covenant with man. Second, since an emerald is green, this rainbow would appear green. The color green is used in 9:4 to describe those people who have spiritual life. This symbolism was taken from nature. Almost any plant that is alive and growing must be green because the green coloring substance, chlorophyll, is necessary for a plant to sustain its physical life. If we adapt this to our spiritual life, green would be the color of those who are living and growing spiritually as in 9:4. This enables us to conclude that the rainbow is green because it is a token to remind us of the spiritual life-giving covenant that God made with man.

**Verse 4. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.**

Circled around God's throne were twenty-four thrones with twenty-four elders seated on them. They were clothed in white with crowns of gold on their heads. The first question that must be answered is this: Who are these

twenty-four elders? To determine this we must rely on the symbolic number “12,” which is used to represent organized religion. God has made two covenants with man – the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ. The Law of Moses was represented by the twelve children of Israel, and the Law of Christ is represented by the twelve apostles. If we take “12,” the number of organized religion, and double it for the two covenants, the result is “24.” These twenty-four elders represent the lawgivers of the Old Testament and New Testament.

Later, in verse 10, these elders worship God just as the four living creatures do in verse 8. This shows that these two laws came directly from God. He gave the laws to mankind through a certain chosen few. The law of Moses was given directly to the twelve tribes of Israel, but the law of Christ was given to all mankind through the twelve apostles. When Christ came, he fulfilled the old law and established the new. The law that Christ gave is the method whereby mankind can be spiritually acceptable to God. These twenty-four elders represent these spiritual laws.

Man is a spiritually oriented being by nature. Throughout history he has proven this by worshiping all forms of gods. God is showing us here that the one true form of spiritual worship must be according to the laws he has set up. If mankind is to be acceptable to God, all of his spiritual worship must be in accordance with the law God has given through his chosen lawgivers, and it must be directed to the one and only true God. Those in the Old Testament worshiped under the Law of Moses. Today, Christians worship according to the Law of Christ, which is the gospel.

The twenty-four elders are dressed in white indicating purity or cleanliness. In 3:4-5, we are told that Christians are the ones who are worthy to be clothed in white. Our obedience to the law of God makes us worthy to be clothed in white. (See 3:18.) If we are to be pure or cleansed from our sin in the sight of God, we must put on these white garments. These twenty-four elders are dressed in white because they gave mankind the law, which will allow us to



clothe ourselves in white. When we obey that law, we are spiritually cleansed, and we wear the spiritual white garments of righteousness.

These twenty-four elders also had crowns of gold upon their heads. Crowns are representative of authority. In this case they represent the authority of those who have given man the laws of God. In verse 10 they cast these crowns before God, indicating their authority comes from God and that he is the source of all power and authority.

One objection often given to this particular interpretation of the twenty-four elders is that if they included the twelve apostles, John himself would have been included in the throne scene. We must remember that these twenty-four elders are symbolic. They would not have to be the actual twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve apostles to represent the ones who received God's laws. Let us keep our interpretation symbolic, not literal.

**Verse 5. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.**

The lightnings, thunderings, and voices came from the throne, which shows they came from God. These symbols are often used to represent the presence of God as in Ex. 19:16 when he descended to Mt. Sinai to give Moses the Ten Commandments. These symbols are also used in 8:5, 11:19, and 16:17-18 to show that the events being described are taking place in the presence of God.

The seven lamps burning before the throne represent the seven Spirits of God. Since the number "7" is the complete sacred number, this must represent the total divine spirit of God or the Holy Spirit. We know the Holy Spirit is in close contact with the Throne of God because 1Cor. 2:11 states, "Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God."

The seven lamps burning before the throne describe the Holy Spirit. Ps. 119:105 says, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." According to Acts 1:8; 2:3-

4, when Christ ascended to heaven, he sent the Holy Ghost unto the apostles. Concerning this, Jesus said, “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak and he will show you things to come” (Jn. 16:13). The Word of God is a lamp unto our feet, and it lights our way that we may be able to walk according to the ways of God. The Holy Spirit gave us that Word. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is described as seven lamps burning before the throne of God. He gave mankind the complete divine revelation of God.

**Verse 6. And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.**

Concerning the sea of glass, Coffman says, “If the sea represents populations of the earth, as in later chapters, the calmness of it here would indicate the tranquility and peacefulness of souls in the service of God.”<sup>1</sup> He also says, “There is also the possibility that it is an inert factor in the vision.”<sup>2</sup>

The sea of glass being described as crystal may be the key to understanding this passage. Pure crystal is completely transparent and colorless. It has no spots or discoloration. Throughout Revelation, the “sea” is used to represent masses of people. (See comments on 8:8.) If we apply this symbolism to this passage, it describes a mass of people, without flaws, standing before the throne of God. This could only represent Christians. Their sins are forgiven, and they stand flawless before the Throne of God. This same situation is described in 7:15. Concerning Christians it states, “Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth in the throne shall dwell among them.” God is sitting on his throne today, and those who have had their sins forgiven (Christians) are figuratively standing before that throne serving him day and night, continually, in his church.

Also, around the throne were four beasts. It is unfortunate that the KJV translates this word as “beasts.” A much better translation is “living creatures,” which is used in the ASV. To use the term “beast” in this verse causes considerable confusion when interpreting chapter 13. The “beasts” of chapter 13 are entirely different from these “living creatures.” Because of this, we will use the language of the ASV and refer to these four “beasts” as “living creatures.”

Most commentators cite passages such as Isa. 6:2 and Ezek. 10:20 when trying to determine who these living creatures are. In these passages similar creatures are called cherubim. Hendricksen comments concerning the cherubim: “They are a very high order of angels, one of the highest orders.”<sup>3</sup> He further concludes, “The cherubim guard the holy things of God, Gen. 3:24, Ex. 25:20. Hence, it is altogether normal and natural that we find them here in this vision in close proximity to the Throne.”<sup>4</sup> Whether these creatures are cherubim or not may be impossible to determine. Furthermore, just as was the case with the twenty-four elders, it is not necessary to know who these four living creatures are in order to determine what they represent.

To interpret symbolic language, we must search for representations, not identities. Let us consider some facts concerning these living creatures, and attempt to draw some conclusions about what they represent, not who they are. First, there are four of these living creatures. The number “4” is used in connection with things of this world, or things of a physical nature. Second, in chapter 6 each of these four creatures introduces one of the first four seals. These four seals deal with physical events that take place in this present world all during the Christian age. Third, these creatures are similar to the twenty-four elders in that their purpose is to continually worship God. Just as the number “24” (12 doubled) indicates that all spiritual worship must be directed toward the one true God, the number “4” indicates that all physical things are from God, and we should apply our physical talents in service to him.

To interpret Revelation properly, we must be able to distinguish between those things that symbolize physical matters and those that symbolize spiritual matters. For example, the opening of the seals deals with physical things of this world, but the sounding of the trumpets deals with spiritual matters. The same concept applies here. The elders represent God's control over spiritual matters, and the living creatures represent his control over physical matters. (See comments on 6:1.)

**Verse 7. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.**

Summers gives the two most widely accepted views of this description of the four living creatures. One is that "the lion represents bravery, the young bull represents strength, the man represents intelligence, and the eagle represents swiftness or speed."<sup>5</sup> The other is that "they represent the fourfold division of animal life so that all of God's creatures are worshipping him. The lion represents wild animal life, the calf represents domesticated animal life, the man represents human life, and the eagle represents bird life."<sup>6</sup> In keeping with our interpretation, the latter seems to be more acceptable. If these four living creatures do represent all physical things, this interpretation fits very well. All physical creatures were created by God, and we as physical beings are to devote our physical activities to him.

**Verse 8. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.**

The main point concerning the living creatures is that they never cease to worship God. We as Christians should always be conscious of keeping God first in our lives.

These creatures have six wings full of eyes. Isa. 6:2 pictures a similar creature with six wings. He covered his face with two; covered his feet with two, and used two to fly. This description of the living creatures is also similar,

although not identical, to living creatures seen by Ezekiel in a vision recorded in Ezekiel chapter 1. The key to understanding this may be the number “6.” In Revelation the number “6” brings to an end the things of this world. For example, after the completion of the sixth seal and the sixth trumpet, we are taken into the time of Judgment. (See 6:12-17; 11:12-14.) The number “6” seems to deal with the period of time that man spends here on this earth. Therefore, these living creatures with many eyes have total vision of everything that happens on this physical earth. This may represent the power of God to see and know all of man’s physical actions.

**Verses 9,10. And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,**

These verses show that all physical things (four living creatures) and all spiritual things (twenty-four elders) are created by God. Because of this they never cease to worship God who sits on his throne for ever and ever. In verse 10 the twenty-four elders cast their crowns before the throne, showing their authority came from God and that he is the supreme authority. All things, both physical and spiritual, are created by God and for his pleasure. We must always give God the glory for our physical lives and, most assuredly, for our spiritual lives also.

**Verse 11. Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.**

Because God created all things, he is worthy to receive the glory and honor and power. According to Coffman, these same words greeted the emperors in their triumphal processions.<sup>7</sup> The Romans considered their emperor to be the most powerful force in existence, but the purpose of chapter 4 is to show man that God is the supreme being. He

is the final source of all power, and he is in control of all things today. He created all things and he created them for his own pleasure. (See Col. 1:16.)

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

As was stated in the introduction, certain symbols in chapter 4 are difficult to interpret. The only way to interpret difficult passages is by interpreting them in light of other passages that are understandable. We believe the interpretation of this chapter will become increasingly clear as the remainder of Revelation is studied and understood.

Chapters 4 and 5 are somewhat of an introduction to the remainder of the book since they are describing the Throne of God and Christ. The main point of this vision is to show that God is in control of all things that take place on this earth. Beginning with chapter 6, many of these things that God controls are revealed.

We believe it will also become clear that Revelation deals with both physical and spiritual matters of this world. Therefore, to correctly interpret the book, we must first be able to determine if the matters being described are physical or spiritual. Since the number “12” is used to identify things of a spiritual nature and can be doubled to “24,” we have interpreted the twenty-four elders as representing those “24” lawgivers that God used to communicate his will to mankind. This also shows that all of man’s spiritual worship must be directed toward God by being obedient to the spiritual laws that he has given. In keeping with this line of reasoning, the number “4” is always used to identify matters of a physical nature, so we have interpreted the four living creatures as representing the complete physical creation of God. They show that man’s physical actions must also be in service to God. We should worship him spiritually as well as physically in the same manner as the twenty-four elders and four living creatures continually worship God in this vision.

Chapter 4 pictures God’s Throne as it exists today. This is not a description of a throne that is inaccessible to us

today, but rather, a symbolic description of God on his Throne as he rules over all things today. Eph 2:6 says, “And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus:” Christians have undergone a spiritual resurrection, and we now sit with Christ around the throne of God pictured in this chapter. As members of the Lord's church, we are before God's throne and serve him continually. (See 7:15.)

<sup>1</sup>James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979), p. 109.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1956), p. 106.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>Ray Summers, *Worthy Is the Lamb* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1951), p. 132.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>7</sup>Coffman, p. 112.

# CHAPTER 5

## GOD'S SEALED BOOK

Chapter 5 is a continuation of the throne scene of chapter 4; the difference being that Christ takes his place on the throne with God. In this vision God holds a book sealed with seven seals (v. 1), and no man is worthy to open the book. The main theme of chapter 5 is to show that Christ was the only one who could open the book (v. 5). Verse 9 explains why: He had died for our sins and had redeemed us to God. He was slain for our sins; therefore, God gave him power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory and blessings (v. 12). Because of this, all creatures in heaven and earth are to worship him (v. 13-14).

There are many ideas concerning the contents of this book. Although the contents are important and are revealed as the seven seals are loosed in 6:1-8:5, the significant point in this chapter is the actual opening of the book. The opening of this book is symbolic of Christ opening a new era to mankind. When Christ died on the cross, he opened a much better way for man. He brought in the gospel dispensation whereby man can have forgiveness of his sins. No man could do this because there was no one worthy to make the necessary sacrifice. It had to be a perfect sacrifice. This is why John wept (v. 4). At that time it appeared to John that this book could not be opened and man would remain in a state of sin. Therefore, as we study chapter 5, let us keep in mind that Christ's ability to open this book represents the giving of the new law which redeemed man to God.

The events of chapter 5 revolve around this book sealed with seven seals. The following comments have been made concerning the contents of this book? "This scroll is the book of the destiny of mankind"<sup>1</sup>, "This is a book of the future of the world and of mankind."<sup>2</sup> "It is the New Covenant, since the New Covenant tells how God will save



the church, Israel, the world and the universe.”<sup>3</sup> “Certainly, there is some bearing which the book had upon the mystery of redemption, and the long-secret device by which God would achieve it in the death of his Son.”<sup>4</sup> Whatever the exact meaning of the book, it is used to show that God has put his Son in control of all things because he gave the supreme sacrifice for our sins.

In order to better understand the meaning of the sealed book, consider the following observations. In verse 1, God was holding the book in his right hand, showing that it was extremely important. It had writings on both sides, indicating a lengthy book full of information. It was sealed with seven seals. In first-century times, the most important books were sealed with several seals. The number “7,” being the divine number, indicates divine importance – the greatest of all.

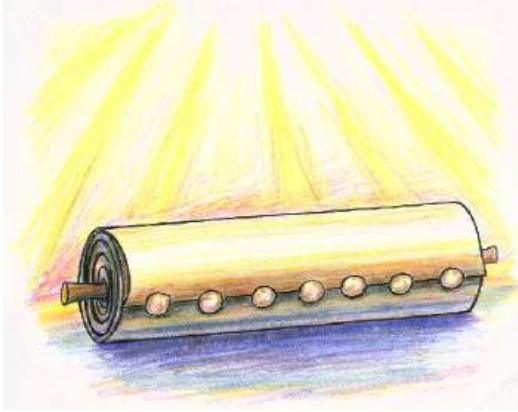
Verse 3 says that no “man” was worthy to open the book, in fact, no man could even look at it. John wept because no one could open the book, but he was immediately told that Christ had prevailed to open it. This indicated that Christ had done something which no other being had done thereby becoming worthy to open the book. Verse 9 explains what he had done. He was slain for our sins, and he redeemed us to God. Therefore, the opening of this book must represent the beginning of a new age in which all men can obtain the remission of sins.

In 6:1-8:5, the seals are opened. The things revealed are the physical events that take place upon the earth during the entire Christian age. The seventh seal then describes the time of Judgment.

As explained in the introduction to chapter 6, a seal is used to designate the authority of the one who uses it. It also shows that the contents of this book cannot be changed. They have been placed there by God and sealed by him. In 6:1-8:5, the contents of this book will be revealed, but they can never be changed. The events contained in this book must definitely come to pass. This enables us to conclude that this book holds descriptions of major events that will take place on earth throughout the

Christian age and into the final Judgment.

**Verse 1. And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.**



God is holding this book in his right hand, showing that it is tremendously important. The right hand of God is always considered a place of importance. For example, when

Christ purged our sins, he ascended into heaven and sat down on the right hand of God (Heb. 1:3). Also, Mt. 25:34 explains that those who are to inherit heaven are on the right hand of God.

This book was probably in the form of a scroll, which was commonly used during that time. But regardless of the type of book, the important point is that it had writings on both sides. It was an extremely large book and filled with a great amount of information.

It was sealed with seven seals. Coffman points out that “especially important documents were sealed with multiple seals.”<sup>5</sup> Since “7” is the complete sacred number, this indicates God had sealed the book, and it was completely under his control. He obviously had written the contents of this book giving it the highest possible importance. It must have contained God’s eternal plan for mankind.

**Verse 2. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice. Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?**

An angel begins to search for someone worthy or capable of opening the seals of this book. The search was extensive because no man in heaven, or in earth, or under the earth was found who could open the book (v. 3). Not even this angel, who possessed great strength, could open the seals of this book. The one who would be able to open this book would possess special qualities. The nature of this special quality is revealed in verse 9, which states that Christ was worthy because he was slain and had redeemed us to God. Christ is the only one who could and did make the ultimate sacrifice of shedding his blood to make atonement for our sins unto God. Because of this, he was worthy to open this great book and had received the power necessary to do so. Rom. 1:3 says that Christ had received power because of his resurrection from the dead.

**Verse 3. And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.**

No one in heaven, or earth, or under the earth was capable of opening this book. Not only could they not open it, they could not even look at it. This shows the vast difference between the power of man and of Christ who later opens the book. Man could not even look at it, but Christ took it and opened the seals.

**Verse 4. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.**

The strong angel searched everywhere, but no one was found who could loose the seals of the book. No one was found who could even look upon the book. There was no man who even came close to being worthy to open the book. Because of this John wept.

The “weeping” by the apostle John probably indicated much more than mere disappointment about being unable to see the contents of the book. Since the opening of the book represented the beginning of a new era when men would have forgiveness of sin, it appeared to John that if no

one could open the book, there would be no redemption for man. This is why John wept. It appeared at this point in the vision that Satan would remain in control over man and everyone would be lost eternally.

The first four verses in this chapter picture time as it was before Christ died on the cross. The old law did not provide forgiveness for our sins. According to Heb. 9:15, people under the Law of Moses were redeemed from their sins when Christ died on the cross. Therefore, making the sacrifice of death to redeem man was a prerequisite of being able to open this book.

## **CHRIST PREVAILS TO OPEN THE BOOK**

**Verse 5. And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.**

Verse 5 brings us to the time after Christ's resurrection. John is told to stop weeping because Christ has prevailed to loose the seals of the book, which means that he had made the necessary sacrifice. To "prevail" carries the same meaning as "overcoming." Rev. 3:21 says that Christ "overcame" and sat down with his Father in his throne. This is exactly the meaning of verse 5. The same Greek word is used in both references, and the ASV even uses the word "overcame" in this verse.

Christ is called the "Lion of the tribe of Juda." In Gen. 49:9-10, Judah was called a "lion's whelp." Christ is the lion that descended from Judah. Christ being described as a lion indicates his mighty strength and power. These characteristics made it possible for Christ to make the necessary sacrifice and become worthy to open the book that God held.

Christ, the one who had prevailed to open the book, was also described as being the root of David. This prophecy of Christ comes from Isa. 11:1 where he is described as being a "rod out of the stem of Jesse." There should be no doubt

that Christ is the one described here as prevailing to open the book.

The description of Christ as being a lion is in direct contrast to his description in verse 6 as being a lamb. We are all familiar with Christ's characteristics that cause him to be described as a lamb, but we should always remember that he is also a lion who possesses all power and authority in heaven and earth (Mt. 28:18).

**Verse 6. And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.**

The "lion" of verse 5 is also the "lamb" of verse 6 because both possess the ability to loose the seals of the book. Without a doubt, this is the Christ. He is standing in the midst of the throne. Heb. 1:3 states that after Christ had "purged our sins," he "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on High." He purged our sins by shedding his blood on the cross. This is why he is pictured as a lamb that had been slain.

The lamb is described as having seven horns and seven eyes. We are told that these represent the seven Spirits of God. Coffman says that "horns were familiar symbols of honor, power, authority and glory in the biblical and other Hebrew literature."<sup>6</sup> In keeping with the use of the number "7" as representing divine perfection and completeness, this would show that Christ possesses all divine power and authority. He is all-seeing and all-knowing because of the seven eyes.

The seven horns and seven eyes are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. Rev. 4:5 says that the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne are the seven Spirits of God. This is not a contradiction, neither are there two sets of seven Spirits of God. This is simply another description of the same "Spirits of God." Just as Christ is described as a "lion" and a "lamb," the seven Spirits of God are described as seven lamps before the throne and seven

horns and seven eyes. All of these symbols describe different characteristics of the same seven Spirits of God. Since the number “7” is used to show completeness, they must be a symbolic reference to the Holy Spirit.

**Verse 7. And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.**

Christ was the one who had prevailed to take this book out of God’s hand. This shows that God gave Christ all power and authority. This took place at Christ’s resurrection. Rom 1:3 says that Christ was “declared to be the Son of God with power,... by the resurrection from the dead.” Also, Eph. 1:22 says that God put “all things” under Christ and also made him over “all things” to the church.

**Verse 8. And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.**

When Christ took the book out of God’s hand, immediately the living creatures and the elders fell down to worship him. These same heavenly beings were worshiping God in chapter 4. This shows that Christ has received total authority from God and is worthy of all our worship just as God is. It should be pointed out that this was the beginning of Christ’s reign. When Christ was resurrected from the dead, he began his reign, and according to 1 Cor. 15:25-26, he will continue to reign until all enemies are destroyed with the last enemy being death. Therefore, Christ is reigning today during this present Christian dispensation and will continue to reign until he delivers the kingdom to God at the end of time. (See 1Cor. 15:24; Heb. 10:12-13.) We should not look for a thousand-year period of time after this world comes to an end to reign with Christ because we are reigning with him today as kings and priests. (See 1:6; 5:10; 1Pet. 2:5-10.)

These twenty-four elders and four living creatures were worshiping God with harps and bowls full of odors and incense, which are interpreted for us as being the prayers of

saints. If the bowls of incense are symbolic of prayers, it follows that the harps must be symbolic also. The harps represent the ability of saints to worship God by singing. We know this to be true because in the next verse they begin to sing. In 14:2, the 144,000 are described as having voices as harpers harping with their harps. The next verse (14:3) says that these 144,000 are singing. This shows that God considers the voices of saints to be beautiful as they worship him in song.

**Verse 9. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;**

They begin to sing a new song praising Christ for being worthy to open the seals of the book. He was worthy to do this because he had been slain. This is definitely a reference to Christ's crucifixion. When Christ died on the cross, he "redeemed us to God." He provided forgiveness of sins to all those who are willing to obey him.

They sang a "new" song. This song was new because this was the first time it could have been sung. Before Christ died on the cross, this song of redemption could not be sung. Those who lived under the law of Moses did not have forgiveness of sins until Christ died (Heb. 9:15). Because of this, they could not sing the song of redemption. When Christ died for our sins, this song of redemption could then be sung. It was a new song.

By the blood of Christ, people out of every kindred, tongue and nation were redeemed to God. This is the fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham. Acts 3:25 states that promise "And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed." Gal. 3:16 defines this "seed" as Christ. He was a direct descendant from Abraham. When Christ died on the cross, all nations of the earth were blessed by the "seed" of Abraham. He redeemed all men to God who obey his commands. When we become members of his church, we have access to that redemption

through his blood. (See Acts 20:28.)

**Verse 10. And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.**

We are kings and priests today, and we are presently reigning upon this earth in God's kingdom, the church. A king is one who reigns over a kingdom. The kingdom consists of those who are subject to the king. Christ is our king and is reigning on his throne in heaven at God's right hand today. We in the church are subjects in his kingdom and are reigning with him today. He has made us kings upon this earth. (See 20:4.) Under the law of Moses, the priests made atonement for the people's sins by offering sacrifices. Today, we are priests in the church. We have direct access to God's throne by prayer through Jesus, our high priest. (See Heb. 4:15,16.)

Notice that our reign is here on this earth. We are reigning on earth today in God's spiritual kingdom, the church just as Christ is reigning on his throne in heaven. Some would like to apply this verse to a future time of a thousand years, but we are already made a kingdom (past tense). Verse 9 identified the event that made it possible for us to become a kingdom and priests. It was Christ's death and resurrection. Obviously, that has already passed. Since that event made it possible for us to be a kingdom, the kingdom must exist today. (Comments made in 1:6 are also appropriate for this verse.)

**Verse 11. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;**

Because Christ paid the price of redemption for man's sins, a tremendous host of heavenly beings began to worship him.

The numbers "10" and "1000" are used in Revelation to symbolize completeness and ultimate completeness. Therefore, the numbers "ten thousand times ten thousand" and "thousands of thousands" are used to mean the total,



complete heavenly host. Every being in heaven praised Jesus because he had redeemed man. This shows that we must worship Christ because of his sacrifice. It is very likely that this number also represents the vast number of Christians that will worship God during the Christian dispensation.

**Verse 12. Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.**

Because Christ was slain, he was worthy to receive power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory and blessings. He gave the ultimate sacrifice for man's sins – his life. By doing this he completed God's plan to redeem man. Therefore, God gave him all things. Notice there are seven of these attributes. Since "7" is the number of divine completeness, we should not be surprised to find seven qualities in this list.

**Verse 13. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.**

All created beings in heaven and earth are praising God and the Lamb. This shows that Christ has taken his place on the throne beside God and is worthy of our praise. Man must absolutely have no other gods before him. God created all things, and all things must honor him.

**Verse 14. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.**

We have interpreted the four beasts as representing all physical things and the twenty-four elders as representing the spiritual lawgivers. This verse shows that our physical labors and our spiritual worship must be directed toward

God. We must strive to serve Jesus in everything we do.

<sup>1</sup>Rubel Shelly, *The Lamb and His Enemies* (Nashville, Tenn.: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Christian Foundation, 1983), p.47.

<sup>2</sup>James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex: Firm Foundation publishing House, 1979), p 116. As quoted from Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1919) p. 505.

<sup>3</sup>Coffman, p. 116. As quoted from Watchman Nee, “*Come Lord Jesus*” (New York: Christian Fellowship publishers, 1976), p. 66

<sup>4</sup>Coffman, p. 116.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 116-117.

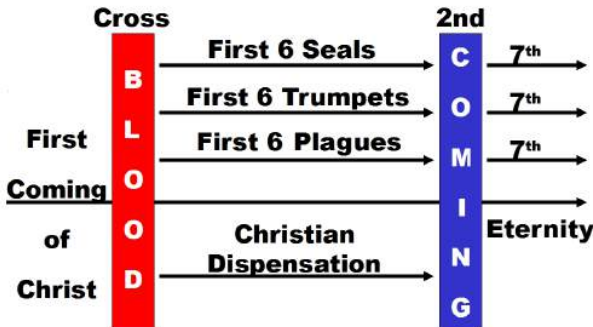
<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 121.

# CHAPTER 6

## THE SEALS, THE TRUMPETS, AND THE PLAGUES

Three visions in Revelation deal with three series of seven occurrences: the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven last plagues. These visions are parallel from the standpoint of covering the same time period. The first six

### 7 Seals - 7 Trumpets - 7 Last Plagues



events in each of these series describe things that take place during this Christian dispensation. The seventh takes us into the time of Judgment. The difference in the visions is that they each describe different events that affect mankind. The seven seals describe the forces on this earth, which affect the physical lives of men. The seven trumpets describe those forces that affect the spiritual lives of men, and the seven plagues show the consequences of being

disobedient to God. This is illustrated in the time-line drawing. The Christian dispensation is the period of time between Christ's death on the cross and his second coming. The visions of the seals, trumpets and plagues each deal with events that will take place all during this period of time. They each deal with different events that occur during the Christian dispensation. In each of these visions, the sixth event takes us to the end of time on this earth. The seventh event then gives us a glimpse into eternity. It does not explain what our eternal abode will be like; however, it does give information concerning the eternal fate of those who have obeyed God and those who have disobeyed God.

As we study these three visions, it will be helpful to make comparisons. Events that are clear in one series may help explain those that are not so clear in another.

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE SEALS**

Before studying the vision of the seven seals, it is important to have an overall understanding of the entire vision. As Christ opens each of the first four seals, one of the four living creatures introduces the vision. Four horses of different colors are revealed and are ridden by four different riders. The horse is a symbol of war. In order for armies to be strong during this period of history, they had to possess many horses. These horses are symbolic of the different types of wars Christians must fight, and their color determines the type of war being described.

In keeping with the use of the number "4" in Revelation, the events of these four seals are physical events that must take place upon this earth during the entire Christian age. The fifth seal shows that God is aware of the physical persecutions and trials that Christians must suffer. It also shows that if Christians remain faithful through these trials, they will have a home in heaven with God. The sixth seal takes us to the end of time. It represents an end to all physical things here on earth and describes the total destruction to take place on that last day.

Chapter 7 answers the question asked in verse 17: “Who shall be able to stand?” It assures us that if we remain faithful, when that last day comes, we will be able to stand. We will not have to hide from God, as sinners are pictured as doing in verse 16. Rev. 7:9 says that the redeemed “stand” before the Throne of God.

The seventh seal then takes us into the time of Judgment. All sinners will have their place in total destruction as symbolized by an earthquake, which would be a great shaking of the people of the earth. Therefore, this vision of the seven seals is a picture of the entire Christian age and Judgment.

Many commentators have difficulty with Revelation because they seek to interpret the book as a chronological order of events. They fail to see how the time of Judgment could take place so early in the book. Because of this, they avoid interpreting anything as meaning the time of Judgment until they get into the latter part of chapter 19. The reason we are at the Judgment scene so soon in the book is that the vision of the seven seals is complete within itself. It covers the entire Christian dispensation, the end of time, and Judgment. The next vision in Revelation, the seven trumpets, will follow this same pattern. The obvious question would be: If we have covered all of time and Judgment, why would we have another vision covering the same time period? The answer is this: The subjects being discussed are different. The seals deal with physical matters, and the trumpets deal with spiritual matters. This is an important concept to keep in mind while studying Revelation.

## A “SEAL”

The next thing that must be done in order to understand this vision is define a “seal.” In Old Testament times, a seal or signet was used as a symbol of authority. A king would place his seal upon a document to signify its authenticity. Esther 3:12 gives an example of a letter being sealed with a

king's ring to show that it definitely came from the king. Today, we put a signature on a document to indicate the same thing. In some cases, seals or stamps may still be used.

Another purpose of a seal would be to preserve or secure something. We seal jars, packages, and envelopes to secure their contents.

If these meanings of a seal are applied to this book sealed by God, it shows: (1) that God has written and preserved the contents of this book, and (2) it is definitely a message from God. Since the contents of this book are sealed or preserved by God, they cannot be changed by man. Just as a king would place his seal upon a document to make it a law, God has placed his seven divine seals on this book to show that the events contained therein will definitely occur. As Christ opens these seals to reveal the contents of this book, we must realize that the events pictured will absolutely take place. God has sealed them!

God sealed this book with seven seals, showing its divine completeness. In earlier times, multiple seals were used to show the importance of the document. This is a book of great importance. It was written and sealed by the most powerful King of all – God Almighty.

## **THE FIRST FOUR SEALS: THE FOUR HORSEMEN**

**Verse 1. And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.**

The Lamb (Christ) opened the first seal, and there was a great noise of thunder, indicating an event of tremendous importance was about to be revealed. According to 5:9, Christ had acquired the ability to open these seals because he had given his life to redeem man.

The ASV translates the last phrase of this verse as follows: “and I heard one of the four living creatures saying..., Come.” This statement seems to be directed to those in the vision, not to John. It is as if these living

creatures were bidding the actors to come on stage.

Each of the first four seals is introduced by one of the four living creatures. Since the events being described deal with physical events taking place on the earth, we have interpreted the symbolic meaning of the living creatures in 4:6-9 as representing God's ability to see and know all the physical actions of mankind. (See comments on v. 8.)

**Verse 2. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.**

As Christ opens the first seal, a white horse appears. The rider is carrying a bow and receives a crown. We are in agreement with those commentators who identify the rider of this horse as Christ. The symbolic white horse is also used in 19:11, and in that passage its rider is definitely identified as Christ. The horse is symbolic of wars and battles that Christians will have to fight on this earth throughout the Christian age. The color white is always used to represent purity or holiness. Therefore, this white horse signifies a righteous war. In 19:19-21, the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies make war with Christ who sits upon the white horse. In 19:14, the army of Christ, Christians, are also pictured as sitting upon white horses and following Christ.

The bow carried by this rider indicates great strength in battle, and the crown he wears represents power and authority.

This white horse is a symbolic description of the battle that Christ and his followers will fight on this earth. It is a war against evil. Mt. 24:14 says, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the



world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” Christ is fighting this war against evil through his followers as they spread the gospel throughout the entire world. Christ conquers evil every time a person becomes obedient to the gospel. Christians have a powerful weapon to use in this battle as symbolized by the bow. It is the gospel. Rom. 1:16 says the gospel is “the power of God unto salvation.” We also have great authority as represented by the crown. Our authority comes from God through his Word.

Today, Christ sits upon a white horse leading his followers, who also sit upon white horses, spreading the gospel throughout the world. This is a war that will definitely take place because God has sealed it. The white horse is being ridden throughout the world today, and it will continue to be ridden until Christ returns.

**Verses 3, 4. And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.**

As Christ opens the second seal, the second living creature bids the vision to begin as he says, “Come.” The horse in this seal is colored red, which symbolizes bloodshed. Joseph’s brothers dipped his coat of many colors in blood to fool their father into thinking he was dead (Gen. 37:31). Since red is the color of blood, it is symbolic of bloodshed or death.

The rider of this red horse has the power to take peace from the earth and cause people to kill one another. We





should not identify this rider as any one specific person. He represents any force on this earth that is responsible for wars that cause people to kill each other. Mt. 24:6-7 says, "And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars:... for nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom." Throughout history, men have been at war with one another, and it is no different today. We hear or read of conflicts somewhere in the world almost daily. This is one form of physical persecution through which Christians must remain faithful in order to be acceptable to God. These physical trials will be present as long as the world stands because God has sealed it.

The rider of this red horse was given a great sword. This probably reminded the people of John's time of the great Roman short sword. It was the supreme weapon of that age and was used to inflict terror and slaughters upon many people. It is symbolic of any weapon that might be used to take peace from the earth.

**Verse 5. And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.**

As the third seal is opened, there appears a black horse. The color black is representative of mourning or death. Therefore, the events described by this seal will bring severe hardships and possibly even death to those affected by it.

This horseman has a pair of balances in his hand. According to verse 6, they are used for weighing food. To weigh food would indicate that it is in short supply. This shows that throughout the Christian age, there will be times of poverty and hardship upon the earth. During these times, food will have to be measured or, as we might put it, rationed. (See Lev. 26:26.) People will face many types of suffering during their lives. This will continue all through the Christian dispensation, and we must continue to remain faithful to God as we are affected by this black horse.

**Verse 6. And I heard a voice In the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.**

A measure of wheat or three measures of barley could be bought for a penny, or shilling (ASV). According to William Barclay, this measure was “equivalent to two pints and consistently defined in the ancient world as a man’s ration for a day.”<sup>1</sup> He also says the amount of money specified here was the “equivalent of four pence and was a working man’s wage for a day.”<sup>2</sup> If these figures are correct, this would mean that a man’s complete wages would be needed in order to feed himself. This would most definitely be a poverty situation.

This third seal then represents more physical trials and hardships that people must endure upon this earth. Mt. 24:7 says, “There shall be famines and pestilences, and



earthquakes in divers places.” There will always be situations of poverty and famines and people who are in need as long as the world exists. These trials may be difficult and even cause death, and they will continue as long as the earth stands because God has sealed it.

The voice among the four beasts, which was probably God’s (see 4:6), said that the oil and wine should not be hurt. It may not be possible to know the exact meaning, but this probably indicates that there will always be riches among the poverty. Oil and wine have always been items of luxury. They are valuable to own and expensive to buy. Mt. 26:6-13 gives the account of the woman who anointed Jesus’ head with expensive ointment. The disciples thought

the ointment should “have been sold for much, and given to the poor” because it had great value (Mt. 26:9). This seal explains that items of great value and people who are wealthy will always be a part of this world. While some are near starvation, others will be living a life of luxury. This is the situation of the world today, and according to this seal, it always will be. The black horse is being ridden throughout the world today.

**Verses 7-8. And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.**

As the fourth seal is opened, a pale horse appears, and its rider is identified as death. Death would also be the symbolic meaning of the pale color. Hell, or Hades, which is the place of the dead, follows after this horse. The persecutions described by this seal will be so severe as to cause the death of those affected by it.

The rider of this pale horse is given power over the fourth part of the earth to kill by the sword, hunger, death, and beasts of the earth. The proper interpretation of verse 8 lies in understanding the meaning of the fourth part of the earth. A complete examination of the fractions “1/4” and “1/3” is given in the introduction to the series of seven trumpets in 8:6. To understand the meaning of these fractions, it is almost essential that they be studied together so that comparisons can be made. We



will give a brief explanation of the “fourth part of the earth” here.

The fraction “1/4” is used to designate a part of something. This is exactly how it is used in this verse. We know the earth is used to symbolize those people who live upon it because it is people who are killed by the sword, not the actual earth. Therefore, this rider on the pale horse, death, had power over the fourth part of the people of the earth.

The problem many people have in interpreting the “fourth part” is that they make it a literal number instead of figurative. This number is no different from most other numbers in Revelation; it is descriptive. It describes the part of man that the rider of this horse controls. In order to understand this, we must first recognize that man, unlike animals, has two parts to his being. He has a physical body and a spiritual soul. We often use this concept in our prayers as we ask for both physical and spiritual blessings.

As is true throughout Revelation, the number “4” is used to designate the physical things of this world. In order to use the number “4” to designate one of the two parts of man, it would be used as a fraction because a fraction is a part of the whole. Therefore, this fraction “1/4” is used to designate the physical part of any man. It identifies which part of man this rider on the pale horse controls. He controls only the physical life of man. He has the power to take physical life with the sword or hunger, but he can never destroy man’s spiritual life if he remains faithful throughout these physical persecutions. Mt. 10:28 says, “And 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.” Therefore, the purpose of this fourth seal is to show that throughout the gospel age, we will be subject to physical persecutions, maybe even to the point of death.

The fraction “1/3” is used extensively in the series of seven trumpets to designate the spiritual part of man.

It is likely that the term “beasts” also has a figurative meaning in this passage. In Dan. 7:17, the term “beast” is

used to symbolize worldwide earthly kingdoms. This is the meaning that must be applied to the beast with seven heads and ten horns in chapters 13 and 17. Since that is the meaning of the “beast” in those passages, it probably should be applied here also. The “beast” would then represent those ungodly civil governments of all ages that torture and kill anyone who is disobedient to their laws even though they may conflict with God’s laws.

Whether this term refers to persecuting governments or actual wild beasts that have been used to kill Christians for the pleasure of great audiences, the lesson remains the same. All through the gospel age, Christians will be subjected to many physical persecutions. We must be careful never to deny our faith, even in the face of certain death.

## **SUMMARY OF THE FIRST FOUR SEALS**

From the interpretation of the first four seals, it becomes apparent that they deal with events that take place on this earth all during the Christian dispensation. The first seal represents Christians going out into the world to spread the gospel; thereby waging war against evil. The second represents wars and conflicts that will be fought between people and nations. The third describes certain types of physical hardships that will be prevalent throughout the ages, and the fourth describes all types of physical persecutions that people will suffer until Christ comes again. God has said these events must take place. They are sealed.

Not all people are affected by all of these seals. Some may suffer the hardships of famine while others undergo the persecutions of civil governments. Some may even be fortunate enough to live in a time and place where these trials and persecutions are limited. The purpose of this vision is to show that these events must occur all through the Christian age until Christ returns.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE LAST THREE SEALS

The first four seals deal with events in which the people of this world affect each other. For example, the first seal teaches that the gospel will be spread throughout the world and those who teach it definitely affect those who hear it. The second seal shows that there will be wars upon this earth until Christ comes again, and they are caused by man himself. The third seal says that some will live lives of luxury at the expense of others who are in poverty, and the fourth seal explains that there will always be those who persecute and oppress others.

The last three seals are somewhat different to this. They describe events that God will set into motion and no man can avoid. The only thing man can do is prepare himself for these great events by being obedient to the gospel. Whether a man is prepared or not will determine how he is affected by these last three seals.

### THE FIFTH SEAL: THE CRY OF THE MARTYRS

**Verse 9. And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:**

The opening of the fifth seal reveals the destiny of Christians who keep their faith through the physical persecutions of this life. The specific group of Christians referred to in verse 9 are those who are slain because they remain faithful to God. They are martyrs. The fourth seal revealed that some men would persecute others even to the point of death, and this seal shows that Christians will prevail even though they may lose their physical lives. We know these “souls” are Christians because they had the Word of God and his testimony, which they refused to surrender.

The souls of these martyrs are found under the altar. According to 8:3, the altar is located “before the throne.” This places the souls of these martyrs in the presence of

God. This teaches that God knows the persecutions and trials of his people and is always concerned. If we remain faithful, even at the expense of our physical life, we will eventually be able to dwell in the presence of God forever.

We should not view these souls that were slain as any specific group of martyrs. They represent anyone who is required to give his life in service to God.

**Verse 10. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?**

The martyrs are asking God to avenge their blood on those who had persecuted them. This should not be misunderstood to mean that Christians should take vengeance on their persecutors. Lk. 18:7,8 says, “And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.” Christians should be totally against all forms of sin, yet it is not our responsibility to go out and physically destroy those who sin. Christians, armed with the Word of God, are to fight a spiritual war against sin. Coffman says, “For Christians, upon their own behalf, to engage in acts of vengeance is indeed sinful; but for them to pray for God’s vengeance to fall upon their enemies is right, a proposition that is proved by the verse we are studying.”<sup>3</sup>

**Verse 11. And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.**

According to 19:8, white robes represent the righteousness of saints. White robes were presented to the martyrs, indicating that they had lived righteous lives. This identifies these souls as Christians.

An incorrect interpretation of verse 11 causes many to misunderstand the meaning of the white robes. It is common among those who interpret Revelation to believe

that we will be in heaven before we receive these white robes. This one misinterpretation causes several other passages in the book to be misunderstood. We repeat for emphasis sake, the white robes are the “righteousness of saints.” When we obey the gospel, we put on the white robes of righteousness. In 3:4, speaking of the saints of Sardis, Jesus said there are a few who “have not defiled their garments.” When they obeyed the gospel, they had put on the “righteousness of saints.” (white robes), and they had kept them undefiled because they continued to be faithful to Christ. The white robes are not literal. They are symbolic of the forgiveness of sin we have through our obedience to the gospel.

White robes were given to these martyrs in this passage to identify them as Christians. When we reach heaven, it may be that we will actually wear white robes, but there is no way to know this for certain. Since we do not even know what form our bodies will take, how can we possibly know what we will wear?

These martyrs were told that they should rest for a little season until other of their brethren should be killed as they were. This “little season” must refer to the entire Christian dispensation because we know that persecutions and even killing of Christians due to their faith has not ceased on this earth and will not cease until Christ returns. We are blessed to live at a time and place where freedom of religion is an accepted practice, but we have no way of knowing what the future holds in regard to this matter.

The lesson of verse 11 is that God will eventually avenge the blood of martyrs, but he will do it when the time is right. God does not keep us from the persecutions of this life, but he will avenge our blood at Judgment.



## THE SIXTH SEAL: THE GREAT EARTHQUAKE

**Verse 12. And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;**

### 7 Seals - 7 Trumpets - 7 Last Plagues



The opening of this sixth seal takes us to the end of time. Please take another look at the drawing used to explain the timing of the seals, trumpets and plagues. The description given in this verse must represent events as they will occur at Christ's second coming. They represent the end of all worldly or physical things as we know them. The same type of figurative language is also used in the Old Testament to describe great events of our Lord. (See Joel 2:10-11; Isa. 13:5-11.)

Many view these events as literal, and this seems reasonable because 2Pet. 3:10 says that when the Lord comes again "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." However, we recognize that Revelation is written in symbolic language, and many of the items described in this sixth seal could also have symbolic meanings. For example,

the sun, moon, and stars are those heavenly bodies that give light unto the earth; however, when they are used symbolically, they would represent those forces on this earth that give light, or direction, to the people of the world. Mt. 5:16 says, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works." (Also see Jer. 4:22-23.) Those who are leaders, whether they are political, religious, educational, or social could be considered as lights unto the world.

When the sun becomes black and the moon as blood, these lights of the world will cease to shine. When Christ returns, the only power that will exist will be his. All others will cease. Those who are great leaders upon this earth will no longer have any power at all. The light of their great leadership will be darkened.

At this time there will also be a great earthquake. This represents a tremendous shaking of the people of the earth. Heb. 12:28 says that we (Christians) have received a kingdom that cannot be shaken. At the end of time, all physical things of this world will be destroyed, and only the church will be able to stand. This warns us not to put our trust in the powers of this world because when Christ returns, they will all cease. We must put our trust in God, the greatest power of all, and be a part of his kingdom, which will never be shaken – the church.

**Verse 13. And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely fig when she is shaken of a mighty wind.**

Just as a strong wind will cause figs to fall to the ground before they have ripened, the powers that control the earth will be cast down at Christ's second coming even though they may be at the height of their powerful reign. No power on earth will be able to stand against the power of God. Even if verse 13 were interpreted literally, the message remains the same, At Christ's second coming, all things of this world will be destroyed.

**Verse 14. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.**

Mountains are used figuratively in the Old Testament to denote powerful enemies of God's people in the form of governmental kingdoms or nations, (See Isa. 41:15; Jer. 51:24-25; Amos 4:1.) "Islands" are sometimes used to figuratively represent leaders among the people. (See Isa. 41:1; 59:18.) When we apply these meanings in verse 14, it teaches that all earthly kingdoms and their leaders will fall from power. This once again shows that God is all powerful, and at his coming all powers in force will fall before him. They will be moved out of their places.

**Verse 15. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;**

As is common throughout the book, the number "7" is evident in verse 15. There are seven classes of people mentioned here, ranging from the greatest to the least, according to their status upon the earth.

When Christ returns, many people from all walks of life will seek places to hide in order to escape the wrath of God Almighty because they will be unprepared to meet him.

**Verse 16. And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:**

When Christ returns, anyone who is unprepared to meet him will desire to hide in any way possible. They will beg to be crushed by rocks and mountains in preference to facing the wrath of God. Obviously, they will not have this choice. This description is given in order to show how terrible it will be to face God unprepared.

**Verse 17. For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?**

The “great day of his wrath” must refer to the Judgment day. Jude 6 says that the “angels which kept not their first estate” have been “reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.” When Christ returns to this earth, the day of Judgment will have come. There will be no period of one thousand years between Christ’s coming and Judgment. It will take place immediately. For those who are unprepared, it will be a day of fear and destruction unlike any ever before known to man. This sixth seal has included a description of that terror in verses 15 and 16.

The question asked in this verse, “Who shall be able to stand?” is important in understanding, not only the sixth seal, but also all of chapter 7. On the last great day there will be those who will not have to hide their faces and beg for rocks or mountains to fall on them. Those people will be the redeemed. They are the ones who have obeyed the gospel and been faithful through the trials of life. Chapter 7 is a description of those who will be able to stand” at this great day.

The sixth seal is a figurative description of the final destruction of all physical things of this world at Christ’s second coming. For those who are unprepared, it will be a great day of fear, but it will be a great day of victory to those who are “able to stand.”

<sup>1</sup>William Barclay, *The Revelation of John, Vol. 2* (Philadelphia. Pa.: Westminster Press, 1960), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

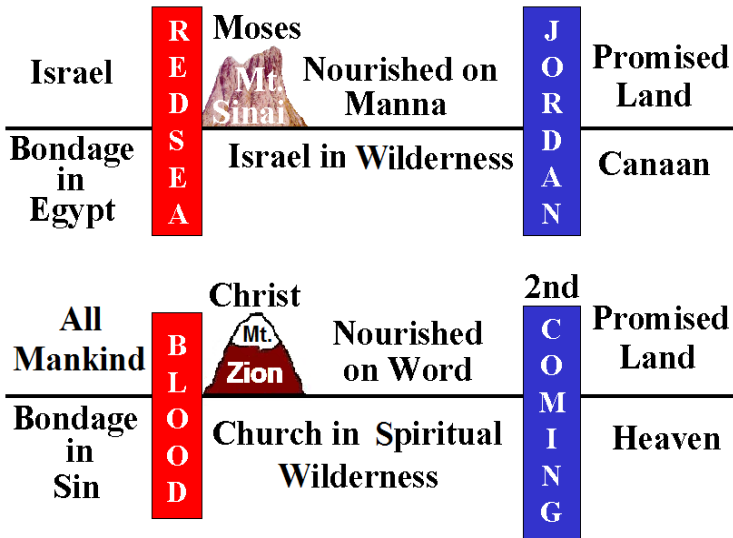
<sup>3</sup>James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979), p.145.

# INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER 7

## PHYSICAL/SPIRITUAL PARALLELS

Chapter 7 is interpreted by using a great parallel that exists between physical Israel and spiritual Israel (church). This parallel gives us a Biblical basis for understanding these visions. Below is a concise drawing of this parallel, which was explained at the beginning of this book. Please review those pages and examine the diagram below. The top of the time line refers to physical Israel of the Old Testament, and the bottom line shows the spiritual parallel of this Christian dispensation.

### A Parallel Comparison of Israel and the Church



First, verse 14 deals with a period of time known as the great tribulation. Just as Israel of old was in physical tribulation of slavery during the time of Moses, all those who are living outside the spiritual kingdom of God today are in great spiritual tribulation. They are in the bondage of sin. (See Jn. 8:32-34.)

Second, the giving of the law of Moses on Mt. Sinai was the great physical parallel to Christ giving his law (gospel) on spiritual Mt. Zion. (See Mic. 4:1-7.) According to Mic. 4:7, Christ reigns on spiritual Mt. Zion today; therefore, those who stand on Mt. Zion with him are Christians. They are described in Rev. 14 as the 144,000. See the summary at the close of this book for a thorough discussion of this symbolic number. The great truth being pictured in the visions of this chapter is that those who are in the bondage of sin (great tribulation) are coming out of that spiritual tribulation by washing their robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb. They then become a part of the symbolic 144,000 who reign with Christ on Mt. Zion. Verse 9 describes them as a great multitude dressed in white robes who stand before the throne of God. They are Christians.

# CHAPTER 7

## “WHO SHALL BE ABLE TO STAND?”

Chapter 7 answers the question asked in 6:17: “For the great day of his wrath is come and who shall be able to stand?” Those who stand are identified as the 144,000 sealed of the twelve tribes of Israel. Verse 3 explains that these 144,000 are the servants of God. This identifies them as Christians. They are also described as a great multitude standing before the throne of God and clothed in white robes. Verse 14 says that their robes were made white by the blood of the Lamb. This also shows that these people are Christians. This leads to the conclusion that the 144,000 and the great multitude clothed in white robes both represent the same people – Christians. Christians are those who are sealed by God and have their sins forgiven by the blood of the Lamb. They will be able to “stand” in the day of Judgment.

We should not view this chapter as a chronological order of events taking place between the sixth and seventh seals. Neither is it “an interlude” between these two seals, as some claim. It is taking place on this earth today! The servants of God are being “sealed” (v.3) and are washing their robes white in the blood of the Lamb (v. 14) all during this Christian dispensation. The first three verses of this chapter show that God is prohibiting the final events of the sixth seal until the events of chapter 7 are fulfilled.

**Verse 1. And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.**

The use of the number “4” is quite evident in this verse. There are four angels standing on the four corners of the earth and restraining the four winds. The number “4” is used in association with the physical things of this earth.

Therefore, this is a figurative description of God delaying the destruction of this earth, which was described in the sixth seal. God will not allow this earth to be destroyed until certain things described in chapter 7 take place. Verse 3 states exactly what must take place before this earth will be destroyed: the servants of God must be sealed.

It is also possible that the terms “earth,” “sea,” and “trees” are figurative. In Ps. 1:3, a tree is used to represent people. Therefore, it is possible that these terms are used to represent certain groups of people. It actually makes no difference whether these terms are figurative or literal in the overall interpretation of this chapter because when Christ returns the earth, as well as all those living upon it, will be affected.

**Verse 2. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, 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,**

John saw another angel ascending from the east or “sun-rising” as the ASV translates it. Many commentators believe he came from the east because this is the direction from which the sun rises to give light unto the world, but anything definite on this symbolism would be impossible to prove.

The important concept in this passage is that this angel, a messenger from God, carries the seal of the living God, and his duty is to seal the servants of God in their foreheads (v. 3). This shows that the events of this chapter are taking place during this present Christian dispensation because Christians are being sealed today. In Eph. 1:13, Paul told the Ephesians, “After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.” They had believed and were sealed. When we believe and obey the gospel today, we are sealed by that same Holy Spirit. To be sealed is to show that we belong to God. Throughout the ages, kings have used seals or signets as stamps or symbols of their authority. When we obey the gospel, we receive the seal of God in our foreheads. This is a figurative representation



showing that we belong to God. We obviously do not receive a literal seal in our foreheads. This seal is symbolically placed in the Christian's forehead to show that he gives his mind, thoughts, and allegiance to the one and only living God.

**Verse 3. Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.**

This angel carrying the seal of God told the four angels of verse 1 not to destroy the earth until the servants of God had been sealed. God will not destroy this world, or let it be destroyed, until all those people who desire to obey the gospel have done so. This verse seems to be saying that God will not destroy this world as long as people continue to render obedience to the gospel. This concept is also present in other passages in Revelation. (See 6:11; 18:2; 20:7-9.)

We can rest assured that this earth will never be totally destroyed by man. It will exist until all the servants of God have been sealed and Christ has returned to take his faithful home. Then God will destroy it forever.

### **THE 144,000 SEALED**

**Verse 4. And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.**

The number of people who received this seal of God in their foreheads was 144,000. A great deal of confusion and controversy exist in the religious world today concerning this number. Some believe that only 144,000 people will be able to enter heaven; however, as we know this is completely contrary to the teachings of the New Testament. This number should be viewed as a symbolic descriptive number. This is the case with most of the numbers in Revelation.

As we study this verse, let us look first at what is meant by "all the tribes of the children of Israel." In verses 5

through 8, there is a listing of the twelve tribes, and twelve thousand are sealed from each one. The first thing we notice about these twelve tribes is that they are not the actual twelve tribes of Israel. For instance, there was no tribe of Joseph. (Comments concerning this are made in v. 5-8.) Because of this, we can be sure that these 144,000 people do not come from the actual twelve tribes of the Old Testament. This shows that these twelve tribes of Israel are symbolic rather than literal.

Many times the symbols in Revelation can be understood by comparing the spiritual kingdom of the New Testament with the physical kingdom of the Old Testament. The spiritual kingdom, the church, is a likeness to the physical kingdom of Israel. The twelve tribes of Israel were God's chosen people under the law of Moses, and Christians are the chosen people of God today. The phrase "twelve tribes of Israel" is used to symbolically represent the entire church of God. It represents all those people who have ever lived upon this earth and have been faithful to God's commands. Christ's death on the cross was a sacrifice for the sins of all men who obey his will. He died for the forgiveness of sins of those under the old law, as well as those of us under the new law. (See Heb. 9:15-17). All who have their sins forgiven are in the church of God and are a part of the 144,000.

The concept that the twelve tribes of Israel are symbolic of the church is evident in other passages in the New Testament also. In Jas. 1:1, James addresses his epistle to the "twelve tribes," which must refer to Christians since the actual twelve tribes no longer existed. Also, in Gal. 6:16, the church is referred to as the "Israel of God." (For additional information, see comments on 2:9.)

Since the "twelve tribes" represent all people who are faithful to God, the number 144,000 is symbolic of the saved of all ages. This is exactly what we are told in 14:1-4. It states that the 144,000 are the "redeemed from the earth." The 144,000 are those who follow Christ and will "be able to stand" in that last day when all others will attempt to hide. The 144,000 are all those people whom God has

sealed, or will seal, by the time Christ returns. From the discussion of verse 2, we know that God seals those who are obedient to his will.

The number “144,000” is consistent with the use of numbers as outlined in the introduction of this book. The number “12” is used to represent organized religion. The number “1,000” stands for completeness. From each of the 12 tribes, 12,000 are sealed which indicates the complete number of those who have obeyed God. If we multiply 12,000 by 12 for the number of tribes, the product is 144,000. This represents all the saved of all ages.

One interrelationship in Revelation should be mentioned concerning the 144,000. In 21:17, the measurement of the wall of the holy city is given. It measures 144 cubits. The wall represents the law of God that man must obey in order to enter into this holy city, the church. The wall measures 144 cubits, and the people inside this wall are the 144,000, or the saved of all ages. Those who obey the gospel pass through the 144-cubit wall and become a part of the 144,000.

**Verses 5-8. Of the tribe of Juda were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nephthalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.**

These four verses list the twelve tribes of Israel, and twelve thousand are sealed from each of them making a total of 144,000. As discussed before, the tribes named here are not the actual twelve tribes of Israel that received portions of the promised land. The tribes of Dan and

Ephraim are omitted, and the tribes of Joseph and Levi are added. If these were the literal twelve tribes of Israel, there would be no one saved in the tribes of Dan and Ephraim and those in the tribes of Joseph and Manasses would be included twice. This forces the conclusion that the twelve tribes listed here are not the literal twelve tribes of Israel. They represent all of God's chosen people.

The question then arises: Why are these twelve tribes named individually? Coffman quotes Beckwith as saying, "Nineteen different arrangements of these names are found in the Old Testament, with none of which does this list agree."<sup>1</sup> This must be done in order to help us make a correct interpretation of this passage. If these twelve tribes were not named, we would immediately assume the "tribes of the children of Israel," spoken of in verse 4, were referring to the literal tribes of Israel. We would have no reason to consider this a figurative representation of all God's people.

This also agrees with the description of the church in chapter 21. The names of the 12 tribes are located over the 12 gates to the city. There are 12 gates and 12,000 are saved from each tribe. Again, when we multiply the 12 gates times the 12,000 from each tribe, the result is 144,000.

One other interesting fact is that the tribe of Judah is listed first instead of Reuben who was Jacob's firstborn. In most cases the firstborn will be named first, but since Judah was the tribe from which the Messiah came, it is placed first in this list.

## **THE VICTORIOUS MULTITUDE: SERVANTS OF GOD**

**Verse 9. After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;**

"After this" indicates the beginning of a different

vision. Therefore, some of the symbols in this part of the chapter may refer to the same things as the symbols used in the first part. For example, in this verse, the great multitude refers to all the children of God just as the number “144,000” did in verse 4.

The great multitude, which no one could number of all different peoples, was clothed in white. Rev. 19:8 defines fine linen, “clean and white,” as the symbol used to describe the church, or Christians. Therefore, the multitude standing before the throne must be Christians. Since Eph. 1:13 defines those whom God seals as Christians, then both symbols, the 144,000 and the great multitude, refer to the same group of people – Christians. These Christians clothed in white, the symbol of purity and holiness, are standing before the throne, which indicates they are in the presence of God. As Christians today, we are figuratively standing before the Throne of God serving him day and night in his temple (v. 15).

People of all nations and tongues serve God in his temple (church) today. This is in contrast to the old law of Moses, which required only the children of Israel to be subject to those laws.

This great multitude of people held palms in their hands. According to Cruden’s concordance the palm tree “is the usual emblem of constancy, fruitfulness, patience and victory; which the more it is oppressed, the more it flourisheth; the higher it grows, the stronger and broader it is in the top.”<sup>2</sup> Every Christian should strive to gain these attributes. Overcoming the trials and persecutions of this life should serve to strengthen our faith in the Lord. Palm branches were also spread before our Savior as he entered Jerusalem, indicating those people’s willingness to serve him. (See Jn. 12:13: Mk. 11:8.)

As members of the Lord’s church today, we figuratively stand before the Throne of God dressed in white robes with palms in our hands. The white robes indicate the sinless state we are in because of Christ’s sacrifice, and palms represent our willingness to serve him.

**Verse 10. And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.**

This great multitude, representing all Christians, cry with a loud voice as they praise God and Christ for the salvation they have provided. This should be the cry of all Christians today. We must thank God and praise him continually for the salvation that he has made available to all men who are willing to obey him.

**Verse 11. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,**

God is the one and only true and living God and is worthy to be worshiped by every being that exists. The angels worship God, indicating that all heavenly beings owe their allegiance to him. The elders, referring to the twenty-four elders around the throne as described in chapter 4, are worshipping God. Since they represent the spiritual lawgivers of God, this shows that all man's spiritual worship must be directed to God in accordance with those laws that he has given.

The four beasts, or living creatures that represent the physical things of man, are also worshipping God. This shows that our physical lives should be devoted to the service of God. All mankind, and even the heavenly beings, must continually direct all their spiritual worship and physical activities toward serving the one and only God of heaven.

**Verse 12. Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.**

As might be expected, these angels, elders, and living creatures were praising God in seven ways. It is probably no coincidence that "7" is the divine complete number.

God is complete, and all of our worship should be directed to him.

**Verse 13. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?**

This elder must have been one of the twenty-four elders seated around the Throne of God in 4:4. It may be significant that one of these elders asks these questions of John because the twenty-four elders are representative of the spiritual laws of God, and this great multitude represents all those people who have been obedient to those laws.

This elder asks John two questions to which he obviously knows the answer because he answers them in the next verse. It also seems likely that John also knew the answer to these two questions because, according to the next verse, he was confident the elder knew the answers. The inference is: if John knew the answers, then certainly the elder knew.

**Verse 14. And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.**

There is much discussion in the religious world today concerning this verse and specifically what is meant by great tribulation. Many teach that immediately prior to the second coming of Christ, there will be a seven-year period of great tribulation in which the "Antichrist" will control the world. This is completely contrary to the teachings of the New Testament. Therefore, we must look for the biblical meaning of "great tribulation."

This verse identifies those people who come out of great tribulation as those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. They are Christians.

One important concept in understanding this passage, as well as several other passages in Revelation, is knowing exactly when we make our robes white. White is symbolic of purity or holiness. Our robes, garments, are symbolic of the type of lives we are leading here on this earth. When we wash our robes and make them white in the blood of the

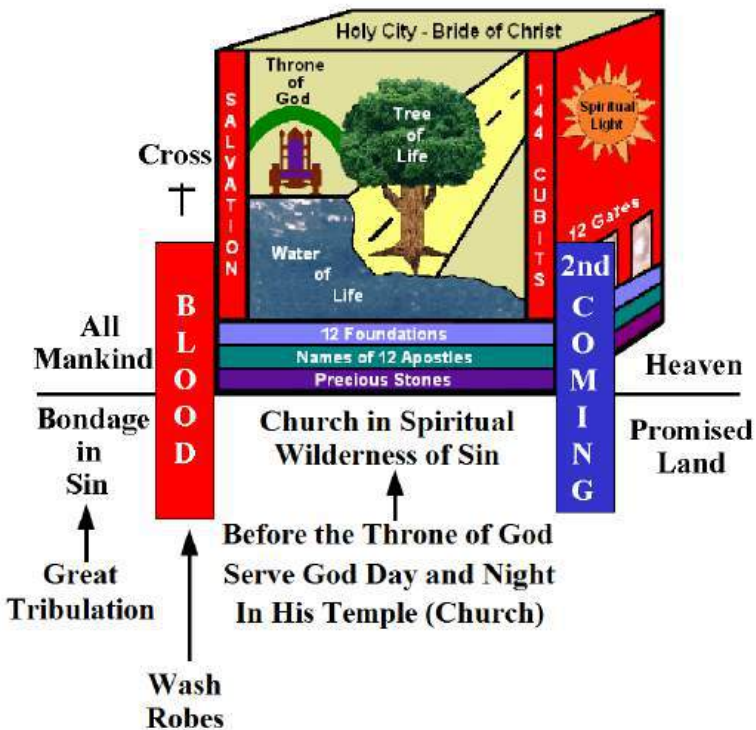
Lamb, we put on the white robes of righteousness. (See 19:8.) If our robes are not white, we are living in a state of sin and following the ways of the devil. In Acts 22:16, Saul was told to be baptized in order to wash away his sins. When we obey the gospel through baptism, our sins are washed away, and our robes are made white by the blood of the Lamb. We are then living in a state of righteousness in the sight of God. This does not mean that we can never again commit sin. It means that as long as we are faithful to God, we have those sins forgiven. We know this to be true because, according to 3:4, there were some in the church at Sardis who had defiled their garments. They had gone back to the ways of sin after having their garments made white by the blood of the Lamb. (For additional comments on the white robes, see 3:4-5,18; 6:11; 19:8.)

Knowing that Christians come out of great tribulation when they wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb enables us to determine the meaning of the period of great tribulation. It is the place of spiritual bondage to sin in which all sinners find themselves before they obey the gospel of Christ. This symbolism is a parallel to the likeness of Moses delivering the children of Israel from physical bondage. Just as Moses, who is the likeness of Christ, delivered the Israelites from physical bondage in Egypt, Christ delivers mankind from the spiritual bondage of sin. Moses led his people across the Red Sea, and Christ leads mankind out of the bondage of sin through the red sea of his blood. This situation was prophesied in Isa. 61:1b which states, "he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." In Luke 4:17-19, Jesus reads this passage from the prophet Isaiah to show that it was written as a prophecy concerning himself. Verse 21 of Luke chapter 4 confirms that Christ fulfilled this prophecy.



Those who are outside of Christ are in the greatest bondage known to man. They are the slaves of sin and the devil. The Israelites were in great physical tribulation as slaves to the Egyptians. Sinners are in great spiritual tribulation as they are enslaved by the devil. For more information on this subject, please refer to the illustration in the section titled “Suggestions for Studying Revelation” at the beginning of this book, as well as the introduction to this chapter. Also it might be helpful to once again look at the drawing of the time line of the church pictured here. It should be easy to see from this illustration that those in the great spiritual tribulation of sin are able to escape that tribulation by crossing the blood of Christ and entering the church.

The actual translation of this verse is, these are they which “are coming” out of great tribulation. This wording



agrees perfectly with this interpretation of the great tribulation. As people continue to be obedient to the law of Christ, they are coming out of great spiritual tribulation; washing their robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb, and being added to the church of our Lord.

**Verse 15. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.**

Because these people have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple. The temple of God in the New Testament is his church. We read in 1Cor. 3:16, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God." If God's people are his temple, then certainly, they make up his church. (See Eph. 2:21.) As Christians, we are constantly serving God day and night in his temple.

As God sits on his throne, he also dwells among his people today. Mt. 18:20 says "where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them." In 2Cor. 6:16, we read, "Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." God is dwelling with his church today. (Also see comments on 21:3.)

Please notice that this passage follows precisely the Old Testament pattern given by God. Just as the people of Israel were in great physical slavery in Egypt, those people living in sin today are in great spiritual tribulation. In order to escape physical slavery, Moses led the people across the Red Sea. Christ gave his blood on the cross to make a way for man to escape great spiritual tribulation. His blood became our Red Sea. In order to obtain forgiveness of sin, we must cross the red sea of the blood of Christ. After the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, they were free from the physical bondage in Egypt. When we cross the blood of Christ, we are free from the great spiritual tribulation of sin. Because of this, we stand before the Throne of God and continually serve him in the church.

As Christians we must understand that we are under a much better covenant than those who were under the Law of Moses. We are under that “perfect law of liberty” (Jas. 1:25). Because Christ died for our sins, we dwell with God as he dwells with us. We have direct access to his throne through our prayers. Heb. 4:16 says, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace.” The people under the Law of Moses did not have this opportunity. What a great privilege we have today to stand before the Throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple – the church!

**Verse 16. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.**

Because of the language of this verse and also verse 17, most people interpret the events of this vision as taking place in heaven. However, we must remember that we are dealing with figurative language. It is not the intent of these verses to describe our literal situation in heaven, but rather our spiritual situation in God’s church.

As Christians we shall “hunger no more, neither thirst anymore.” This means we will no longer hunger or thirst after righteousness. In Mt. 5:6, our Lord said, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” The Israelites, under the law of Moses, were hungry and thirsty for righteousness, which could not be acquired under that law. Righteousness came with the Law of Christ. Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness today can be filled by obeying the gospel and becoming members of the Lord’s church.

Language very similar to these verses was used by Isaiah to prophesy the coming of the church. Isa. 49:10 states, “They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.” Christ established his church, and those in it do not hunger and thirst for righteousness. We have been filled because Christ died for our sins.

Christians also have a shelter from the heat and sun. This

symbolism is also used in Isa. 49:10 to prophesy the coming of the church. Another similar passage is Isa. 4:6: "And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow In the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain." The church is a place of refuge from the sins of this world. As long as we are faithful members of the Lord's church, the heat of the sins of this world cannot harm us because our sins are forgiven.

**Verse 17. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.**

As members of the Lord's church today, the Lamb (Christ), who is in the midst of the throne, will feed us. The church is being fed by Christ today through his Word. This idea is also expressed in other passages in Revelation. Rev. 2:17 states, "To him that overcometh (Christians), will I give to eat of the hidden manna." Just as the Israelites were fed literal manna from heaven to sustain their physical lives, Christians are fed spiritual manna from heaven to sustain their spiritual lives. In chapter 12, the church is symbolically described as a woman clothed with the sun (v. 1), and verse 6 says, "And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days." The church is fed and sustained on spiritual food from God today, which is his Word.

Christ will also lead us unto living fountains of waters. Water is a substance necessary to sustain one's physical life. These living fountains of waters are waters that will sustain our spiritual lives for all eternity. We must partake of them here on this earth in order to enter into that eternal abode. This spiritual water is the gospel of Christ. Rev. 22:17 says, "And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." When one obeys the gospel today, he is partaking of this fountain of living waters. It is available to all men who are willing to come and partake of it through their obedience to the

gospel. (For more information on this water of life, see comments on 22:1.)

We are also told that God will wipe away all tears from our eyes. The question that must be answered is: When does this occur? Most people interpret this as taking place in heaven, and no doubt this will be true of heaven, but the point that is missed is that it also takes place spiritually in the church today. There are at least four passages in Isaiah that use wording similar to this statement to prophesy the coming of the church. They are Isa. 25:8, 30:19, 35:10, and 60:20. In each of these, the coming of the church is described as a time when God's people shall have their tears or sorrows taken away. For our purposes here, we will discuss Isa. 25:8. It reads, "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces." We know this is a prophecy of the church because Isa. 25:7 states that this will be the time when "he will destroy... the face of the covering cast over all people." Second Cor. 3:14-16 specifies when this covering or veil was removed. It was removed when Christ established his new law. This covering over the face of the people was removed at the same time God wiped away the tears from off their faces. Therefore, God wiped away tears when he established the new law.

We obviously still have the sorrows and physical tears of this life; then what were these tears that he wiped away? They were the tears of sin in our spiritual life. Under the old law, forgiveness of sins was not attainable. Their sins were remembered again every year (Heb. 10:3). When Christ came, he did away with that old law and established a new one which made forgiveness of our sins possible. He gave us salvation. He wiped the spiritual tears of sin from our eyes. This is exactly what is stated in Isa. 25:9. Speaking of the day when God would wipe away tears, Isaiah said, "And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this Is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this Is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." Also we read in Isa. 30:19, "For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; You shall weep

no more. He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry; When He hears it, He will answer you.” According to Isa. 59:11-12, those people were weeping because their sins and transgressions were testifying against them before God. Today, the gospel provides a way for people to wipe away those spiritual tears of sin. When we obey the gospel and become a part of the Lord's church, our tears are wiped away, and we rejoice in his salvation. There are no more tears of unforgiven sin to those who are faithful members of the Lord's church. Our sins have been forgiven!

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

There are two major symbols in this chapter that explain a great deal about what it means to be a Christian. The 144,000 represent all those who have been sealed by God, showing that we belong to him and are a part of the redeemed. The great multitude standing before the throne of God in white robes, is a vision of God's people as they serve him in the church today. It is our sincere hope that this interpretation will serve to enhance our understanding of what it means to be a Christian. ‘There is nothing on this earth as important as being a member of the Lord's church. When we obey the gospel, our robes are washed and made white by the blood of the Lamb. We enter into God's temple where we serve him day and night. We no longer hunger and thirst after righteousness because we are filled. We have obtained the righteousness, which is in Christ Jesus (2Cor. 5:21). We have a place of refuge from the sins of this world, and we partake of the living waters of life. God also wipes the tears of spiritual sorrow from our eyes, and we are able to rejoice because of the salvation we have in Christ.

Since many people apply these symbols to heaven, we might also add that heaven will surely have these qualities because the church is made up of those who will be taken to heaven. However, we must understand that this message

was intended for those of us in the church today.

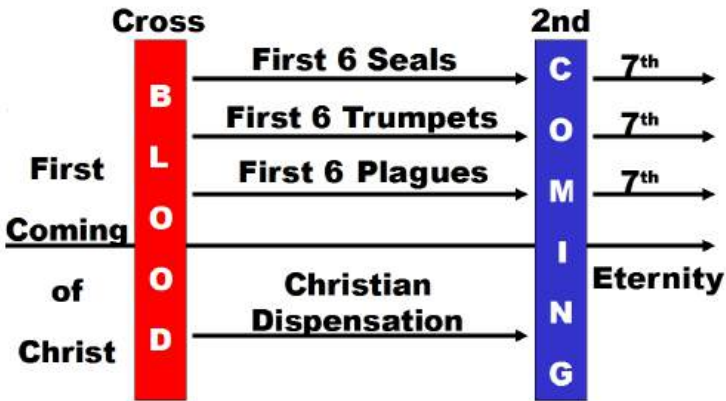
<sup>1</sup>James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979), pp.164-65. As quoted from Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1919), p. 542.

<sup>2</sup>Alexander Cruden, *Unabridged Concordance* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1968), p. 348.

# CHAPTER 8

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SEVENTH SEAL

### 7 Seals - 7 Trumpets - 7 Last Plagues



In order to correctly interpret this book, we must have a clear understanding of the similarities that exist among the visions of the seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven plagues. Once we understand that they are arranged in almost identical fashion, it then becomes possible to use one to help interpret another. In each of these series, the first six accounts deal with events which take place upon this earth with the sixth taking us up to the end of time. The seventh division then describes the time of Judgment and eternity. (For an example of this, read the following passages and notice their similarities: 8:1-5; 11:15-19; 16:17-21.)

This interpretation also agrees with the use of the number "7." Since the number "7" symbolizes divine completeness, it follows that the seventh division in each of these series



describes events which will occur when God completes his plan for man. This is identical to the procedure God followed while creating the world. All things were created in six days, and God rested on the seventh. In these visions, God's plan for man upon this physical earth is completed in the first six divisions of each series. The seventh division then takes us into that period of eternal rest for the faithful or eternal destruction for the unfaithful.

## **THE SEVENTH SEAL: SILENCE IN HEAVEN**

**Verse 1. And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.**

As this seventh seal was opened, there occurred a period of silence of about half an hour. As discussed in the introduction, this seventh seal must be interpreted as it relates to the overall structure of Revelation. The sixth seal takes us up to the second coming of Christ, and it follows that this seventh seal must deal with eternity. Why then is the description of silence used? Two possible reasons have been proposed. First, the things that await us in heaven are not revealed. Concerning this Coffman says, "What will it be like in heaven? The scriptural answer to that question is this half hour of silence. It is not revealed." In 1Jn. 3:2, we read, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." Probably, it is not within man's ability to understand what heaven will actually be like. The second proposed reason for the silence is that it describes the peaceful state which will exist in heaven.

The reason for the length of this period of silence being about half an hour is not clear. Possibly no significance should be placed on the half hour because it is an approximate time. We know this from the use of the term "about."

There is one other possible meaning of the silence in heaven. It could be used to show that this seventh seal takes us into the presence of God. Hab. 2:20 states, "But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before

him.” As we move from the time of the sixth seal into the time of the seventh, we are entering into the presence of God. As we come before God, there is a period of silence. This helps us understand that the seventh seal definitely deals with Judgment and eternity.

**Verse 2. And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.**

This verse presents some difficulty because of its placement in the text. It is obviously an introduction to the series of seven trumpets that follows, but why it is placed here instead of between verses 5 and 6 is hard to determine. Many commentators hold the view that verse 1 concludes the series of seven seals and this verse begins an introduction to the series of seven trumpets. We must reject this theory because of the close correlation in the structure of the writings of the three series. The series of trumpets and plagues both end with a description of thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake. (See 11:19; 16:18-21.) It follows that the series of seven seals would also end with this same wording as is used in verse 5. (See the introduction to chapter 8 for additional comments on this subject.)

Another reason for believing this seventh seal ends with verse 5 is because verse 5 is closely associated with the symbols of the fifth seal. In fact, it answers the question that the Christians under the altar were asking in 6:10. (See v. 5 for a complete explanation.)

Some even believe this verse was misplaced in the text by copiest error.<sup>2</sup> We also reject this theory because the wording of verse 6 would be awkward if it immediately followed verse 2. Therefore, we believe this verse is correctly placed, but we are uncertain why. The introduction of the seven angels with the seven trumpets is similar to the introduction of the angels having the seven last plagues in 15:1-6. The book sealed with seven seals was also introduced in chapter 5 before the seals were broken in chapter 6. In each of these cases, the introduction of the series took place in heaven directly in the presence of

God. (See 5:1; 15:6.) The seventh seal took us into the presence of God. Therefore, the seven angels with the trumpets may be introduced here specifically to show that the warning sounded by these trumpets came directly from God.

**Verses 3,4. And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer, and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand.**

As the vision of the seventh seal continues, an angel comes and offers much incense upon the altar with the prayers of the saints. In order to understand this, we must first determine the symbolic meaning of this altar. Under the law of Moses, priests offered blood sacrifices upon an altar to make atonement for the sins of the people (Ex. 29:11-14). We are no longer under that law. We are under the law of Christ, which has made us all priests of God (1Pet. 2:5). All Christians today may directly approach the throne of God through prayer in order to obtain the forgiveness of sins. We do not need a priest to do this for us. This altar is symbolic of our ability to commune with God through prayer.

An incense is a substance with a sweet smelling fragrance. For this angel to offer incense along with the prayers of saints indicates that our prayers are a sweet fragrance to God. They are very pleasing to him. (See v. 4.) God desires that his people should continually come to him through their prayers. Christians are told, "Pray without ceasing" (1Thess. 5:17). Prayer is a marvelous privilege that Christians have today under the Law of Christ. We should understand that it pleases God to hear our prayers, and we should commune with him often.

**Verse 5. And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and**

**there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.**

This angel took fire from the altar and cast it into the earth. The earth is sometimes used as a symbol to represent those people who oppose God. (See 12:12-16; 13:11; 16:2.) With that in mind, this angel is casting fire upon those who have been unfaithful to God. The last phrase of this verse says there was a great earthquake, which must represent the shaking, or fear, of these people. This is a symbolic description of the fiery destruction, which those people will suffer for all eternity who have been disobedient to God.

The purpose of the opening of the seals is to reveal things that must absolutely take place. The silence in the first part of this seal shows that these events take place in the presence of God, and the fire cast into the earth refers to the sinner's eternal destruction in hell. This is the complete picture of Judgment. This seventh seal describes the final conclusion of God's plan for mankind. These events have been set into order because Christ died and ascended to the Throne of God; thereby, becoming worthy to open the seals of God's book. (See 4:5-6.)

As the seventh seal concludes, there are voices, thunderings, and lightnings. Chapter 4 described the Throne of God, and 4:5 says, "And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices." These symbols are used to represent the presence of God. (See Ex. 19:16.) This is a powerful conclusion to the final event God has planned for mankind that will usher us into eternity.

This phrase, "voices, and thunderings, and lightnings," helps tremendously in understanding how Revelation is structured. This same phrase is used to conclude the seventh trumpet and the seventh plague. (See 11:19; 16:18.) This helps us understand that these three series are parallel in form. They all cover the same period of time, which is this present Christian dispensation. The first six divisions of each series describe events that take place on this earth, and the seventh division describes the time of Judgment. In the case of this seventh seal, it helps determine where the vision of the seven seals ends and the vision of the seven

trumpets begins. The natural division is between verses 5 and 6, with the only problem being the introduction of the angels who are given the seven trumpets in verse 2. We readily confess that we have no conclusive explanation concerning the placement of that verse. Perhaps someday it will be understood. The point is, we must not let something we do not fully understand destroy the obvious meaning of those things that we are capable of understanding.

The latter part of this seventh seal also answers the question that the martyrs under the altar were asking in the fifth seal (6:9-11). They asked, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" They were told that they should wait for a little season. When the events of this seventh seal occur, this prayer will be answered. These martyrs were described as being "under the altar." The altar represents our ability to commune directly with God because the prayers of the saints are "upon the golden altar." Fire was taken from this altar in answer to those prayers and cast into the earth where those people dwelt who had slain Christians. This shows that God will avenge the blood of his people.

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE SEVEN TRUMPETS**

Without any doubt, this is an extremely difficult section of Revelation. It has been interpreted in many ways. Some say these trumpets are descriptions of specific events that took place during the time of the Roman Empire. Others say they are pictures of God's judgment on wicked people, possibly causing them to repent. We will interpret these trumpets as warnings about events that will occur at various times and places throughout the Christian age that could cause people to turn from God.

Although the class studies and sermons we hear dealing with Revelation seldom include lessons from this section, we believe this may be one of the most enlightening and important sections for Christians to study in the entire book since it deals with events that could cause one to lose his

faith. In this series of 7 trumpets, the first four are warning Christians of trials and persecutions that will occur on this earth, which could cause a person to lose his spiritual life. At the same time, these warnings should help Christians understand these events more clearly; thereby, giving us the information necessary to enable us to hold fast to our faith during these trials of life. The last three trumpets are events that are directed and controlled by God against those people who have refused to obey him. From this we see that the 7 trumpets are structured in the same manner as the series of 7 seals. In the seals there were 4 horsemen that rode during this Christian dispensation followed by 3 events dealing with people who refused to obey God. This same 4-3 structure will also be present in the series of 7 last plagues in chapter 16. In each of the series of Seals, Trumpets and Plagues, the sixth event will take us to the end of time and the seventh will take us to Judgment and eternity.

In the discussion of chapter 8, we are forced to devote most of our time interpreting these symbols instead of making application to our lives. This is unfortunate! Perhaps someday Revelation will be understood well enough that time can be devoted to teaching the lessons contained therein instead of trying to determine what the symbols represent. We encourage you to meditate upon the great lessons of this marvelous vision and make your own applications as the symbolism becomes more understandable. We certainly do not desire to emphasize one section of Revelation over another, but we truly believe that having a good understanding of this vision, and especially how it relates to the rest of the book, is one key to understanding Revelation.

## **A “TRUMPET”**

First, we must examine why each part of this vision is announced by the sounding of a trumpet. A trumpet is used many times in the Bible to announce great events that are about to occur and also to warn of impending danger. The

great and final coming of the Lord will be announced by the sounding of a trumpet. In 1Thess. 4:16, we read, “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.” Ezek. 33:1-6 is a good example of the trumpet being used as a warning. Verse 3 of that passage says, “If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people.” Both of these meanings should be applied to these seven trumpets. They announce great events that are to take place during this Christian age and warn of their dangers.

The symbolic meaning of a trumpet explains one difference between this vision and the vision of the seven seals. A seal signifies events that are absolutely certain to take place, but a trumpet warns of events that we can prepare ourselves against in order to avoid their consequences. We have no control over the events described by the seals, but we can and must prepare ourselves to avoid the consequences of the trumpets because we have been warned.



The key to interpreting this series of seven trumpets lies in understanding the symbolic meaning of the “third part of man.” As has been explained before, many of the numbers in Revelation are descriptive. They are not intended to have a specific numerical value. Therefore, we must determine the descriptive meaning of the fraction “ $1/3$ .” The answer lies in comparing this “third part” with the “fourth part” in 6:8. In that passage the rider of the pale horse had power to take man’s physical life, or the “fourth part of man,” but not his spiritual life.

Man has two parts to his total being. He has a physical life and a spiritual life. The physical things of this world are symbolically described in Revelation by the number “4.” The spiritual matters are described by the number “3.” If we identify a “part” of anything, we use a fraction. Therefore we understand that the “physical part” of any man would be described by the fraction “ $1/4$ ,” and the

“spiritual part” of any man would be described by the fraction “1/3.”

The “third part of man” is used throughout the trumpet series. Therefore, the warnings that are sounded by these trumpets are to prepare man so he will not lose his spiritual life. This would condemn his soul to hell. In other words, they describe events taking place all during the Christian dispensation that affect the spiritual part of man – his soul.

## **THE FIRST FOUR TRUMPETS: SPIRITUAL TRIALS**

**Verse 6. And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.**

With this verse the vision of the seven trumpets begins. According to verse 2, the angels who sound these trumpets received them from God. This shows that the following events are messages directly from God.

**Verse 7. The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.**

Just as the series of seven seals tells of events that are to take place here on earth, some of which could cause our physical bodies to suffer or even be killed, this series of seven trumpets warns of events that will take place on earth and could destroy the spiritual part of man – our soul. Notice again that the trumpets sound warnings. It is not sealed that man will lose his spiritual life because of these events, but rather, we are warned that this could happen if we are not prepared to face these trials.

To properly interpret this verse, the figurative meaning of the trees and green grass must be determined. In Judg. 9:7-15, trees are used to symbolize men who went forth to select a king. In Isa. 40:6-8, grass is also used as a symbol for people. This provides a biblical foundation for interpreting trees and grass as people. In 9:4, the locusts, which came up out of the earth, were not allowed to hurt



the grass, trees, or any green thing, but only those men who did not have the seal of God in their foreheads. It should be obvious that the comparison being made in that verse is not between plant life and sinners. The comparison being made is between Christians and non-Christians. The locusts were not allowed to harm Christians. From this we understand that trees, grass, and any green thing are symbols used to represent Christians.

The use of the green color to symbolize Christians is easy to understand once we understand that it is referring to the Christian's spiritual life. For almost any plant to be alive and growing, it must be colored green because the green coloring substance, chlorophyll, is necessary for a plant to carry on its life-sustaining processes. When this symbolism is applied to people, the color green would represent those who are alive and growing spiritually. The trees, green grass, and any green thing represent those people of this world who have attained spiritual life. They are Christians. (For more on this, see 9:4.)

With this understanding of trees and green grass as representing those people who have spiritual life, and the "third part" as representing the spiritual part of their being, it becomes apparent that this first trumpet warns of persecutions and trials which could cause one to lose his spiritual life. The third part of trees and all green grass being burned up symbolizes the possibility of Christians losing their spiritual life because of these persecutions. The hail and fire mingled with blood represents the trials and persecutions of this life, which Christians must overcome daily. To be mingled with blood shows the severity of these persecutions. Some may be so severe as to cause one to lose his physical life.

This is a tremendous lesson for all Christians today. We must keep a constant watch for our souls. There are all manner of temptations and persecutions in the world today, which can cause Christians to lose their spiritual life. This is the warning sounded by this first trumpet.

There is also a difference between the meaning of trees and green grass. A tree represents Christians who are strong

and deeply rooted in the faith; while the grass represents weaker Christians who are shallow rooted and, therefore, more susceptible to these persecutions. This is why we see all green grass being burned. It represents those who are not strong enough to overcome these persecutions.

To understand this verse, one must remember that the “third part” represents the spiritual part of any person. Therefore, the lesson presented here is that even strong Christians are capable of losing their spiritual life because of the terrible persecutions that they may have to suffer. The grass is also green, indicating that it represents those who have spiritual life, but all of it is burned up. This shows that those who are weak spiritually will be especially vulnerable to the persecutions of this life.

**Verse 8. And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood;**

In 17:1, 15, the symbol “many waters” is defined as “peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.” In Isa. 60:5, the sea is used to symbolically represent masses of people. It states, “The abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee.” Those converted to Christ would be Christians. Therefore, the “sea” symbolically represents the masses of people on this earth. In this verse, a great mountain burning with fire is cast into the sea of people causing their third part, or spiritual part, to become as blood. In Amos 4:1, a mountain is used to symbolize a great government of this world. This mountain is burning with fire representing the persecutions a government is capable of bringing upon the people under its control. This is exactly the situation of the people in the Roman Empire during and after the time of the writing of Revelation. The government was persecuting and even killing those who were not willing to submit to the emperor-worship. The government was levying tremendous persecutions upon the people and causing those who were not strong Christians to deny their faith. This, in turn, caused those people to lose their spiritual life or the “third part” of their being. By

using this example of Roman persecutions, we are by no means confining it to that period of time. Throughout the history of the world, governments have persecuted their people and will continue to do so until Christ comes again. Therefore, this trumpet is warning people of all times not to lose their spiritual life by giving in to persecutions from any source regardless of how severe they may be.

At this time we need to make another point concerning the “third part” of man. The third part of a person is the part that is spiritual in nature and does not necessarily represent the saved state of an individual. For instance, we know many people today who are spiritually-minded but are lost. They believe that God exists and by their own standards are trying to please him; however, they have never obeyed the commands of God, which would put them into that saved state. They still have a spiritual part to their total being. We must obey the commands of God in order to have spiritual life. On the other hand, there are many people today who do not believe God exists. They are not interested in finding out anything about him and are offended if you try to talk with them about any religious matter. These people have lost the spiritual part of their being. Their lives deal totally with the physical or material things of this world with no thought of the spiritual.

In this verse we see a great burning mountain, representing all types of persecutions and trials, being cast into the sea, which represents the masses of people living on the earth. When this happens the spiritual part of the sea is turned into blood. This is saying that the “third part” or spiritual part of many people of this earth will become as blood. This may mean that they will no longer have any desire for spiritual things. Regardless of exactly what the blood means, it will create a situation where “spiritual life” will have a very difficult time existing. This symbolism is taken from nature. Any creature living in the sea must have the water in order to live. They could not live in blood. This is precisely what the next verse describes.

**Verse 9. And the third part of the creatures which**

**were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.**

Those people in the masses of the sea who have “life” would be Christians. This is warning that it is possible for Christians to lose their spiritual life because of the persecutions represented by the burning mountain falling into the sea and causing the sea to become blood in verse 8. The “third part” (soul) of Christians is in danger of dying because of the situations created by these events. We must remember that these are warnings sounded by the trumpet. A Christian will not absolutely lose their spiritual life because of these events. We are being warned in order to keep that from taking place. We must always be aware that many events in this world can test our faith and possibly cause us to lose our spiritual life. Therefore, we must constantly be on guard.

It is impossible to say exactly what the ships represent in verse 9, but they may represent the spiritual leaders of the people here on earth. If that is correct, this verse warns that even those people who are spiritual leaders may succumb to the persecutions of verse 8 and lose the spiritual part of their being. These warnings are given so we may be able to prepare ourselves for these trials and persecutions, and thereby avoid losing our spiritual life.

One other possible meaning of the “ships” can be derived from Paul’s comments concerning the ship when he was shipwrecked. In Acts 27:30-31, upon being shipwrecked the ship-men were about to flee the ship, but Paul told them, “Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.” Many believe that a spiritual analogy can be made from this statement, which would show that one must remain in the spiritual ship, the church, in order to be saved. If we apply this analogy to verse 9, the ships that sail the sea would represent those individual congregations of the Lord’s people that exist among the people of this earth. If this is the correct interpretation of the “ships,” this trumpet is warning that, due to persecutions of this life, entire congregations of the church may be destroyed. This means that entire congregations may become unfaithful and no

longer be considered a true church by our Lord. They may lose their spiritual life.

**Verses 10,11. And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of water, 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.**

As the third trumpet sounds, a great star named Wormwood falls from heaven upon the third part of the rivers and fountains of waters. Because of reasons already given, we interpret the “third part” as being the spiritual part of any man’s being. Therefore, we are dealing with symbols that affect the spiritual part of man, not the physical. The star fell upon the third part of rivers and fountains of waters, and we obviously know that literal rivers and waters have no spiritual part; therefore, these symbols must figuratively represent certain groups of people.

To decide exactly who they represent, we must determine how each of these symbols is used in the Bible. First, water is a life-giving substance that is necessary to sustain our physical life. In Jer. 2:13, God refers to himself as “the fountain of living waters.” This is obviously referring to God’s ability to supply the water necessary for our spiritual life, which would be his Word or the gospel. Jn. 7:38 says, “He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” This, of course, is referring to the teaching of the gospel by those who believe and obey it. In Job 29:6, the term “river” is used to indicate abundance. Therefore, the rivers and fountains of waters represent the abundant teachings of those who attempt to direct the spiritual life of people on this earth.

These rivers and fountains of waters are made bitter as a great star named Wormwood falls upon them. This star was burning as a lamp, which shows how it hurt the rivers and fountains of waters. The star appeared to be a lamp, or a

spiritual light; however, in actuality, it must have been deceptive teachings from Satan. In 2Cor. 11:14, we read, “And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.” This is further supported by the fact that the star is named Wormwood. In Prov. 5:4, wormwood is defined as a bitter substance. As this star of deceptive teachings from Satan named Wormwood falls upon the spiritual rivers or fountains of waters of this world, their teachings become bitter. “Many men died of the waters because they were made bitter.” They die spiritually, not physically. They listen to these false teachings; believe, and follow them. In doing so, they turn from the true teaching of the Bible and lose their spiritual life.

It is easy to look around in the world today and observe that many of our spiritual waters are “bitter.” Almost daily we turn on our radios or televisions and find programs that teach false doctrines and affect the spiritual lives of millions of people. As people believe and follow these false teachings, they turn from the true teachings of the gospel and are lost. They die spiritually because of these “bitter” teachings.

**Verse 12. And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.**

The fourth angel sounds the warning that the third part of the sun, moon, and stars will be smitten, and also the third part of the day and night. We must not expect a literal fulfillment of this where one-third of the sun, moon, stars, day, and night cease to exist. Instead, we should look for the spiritual fulfillment of this trumpet. It may be impossible to say exactly who is represented by the sun, moon, and stars, but we do know they represent someone who is responsible for giving light unto the earth. Since we are dealing with the “third part” of these objects, this must be referring to “spiritual” lights that shine upon the earth. Those people who preach, teach, and guide people

spiritually would be those who provide spiritual light.

If the “third part” or spiritual part of these lights cease to shine, this would indicate that there will be times upon this earth when man’s spiritual lights will be darkened. There will be no one to stand up and proclaim the true light of the gospel. This has already happened during the period of time known as the Dark Ages and may very well be taking place in certain areas of the world today.

We are also told that “the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.” This means there will be times upon this earth when no spirituality will be found day or night because these spiritual lights have ceased to shine. Again, there are places in this world today where little or no spirituality exists among the people. We should not think of this as a worldwide situation although it could happen, but rather, a situation that could take place at any time when men cease to teach and obey the spiritual light of the gospel. The spiritual thoughts of man will cease to exist day or night, and he will concentrate wholly upon the physical things of this world.

An important warning is being sounded by this trumpet. There will be times when the spiritual lights of man will cease to shine, and this will cause spiritual darkness upon the earth. Men will cease to be interested in spiritual matters. Therefore, there will be no spiritual activities day or night. Christians must heed this warning and always let our lights so shine as to be seen among men (Mt. 5:16).

## THE EAGLE’S WARNING

**Verse 13. And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!**

Verse 12 concluded the sounding of the fourth trumpet, and 9:1 introduces the sounding of the fifth trumpet. But, between the warnings of these trumpets, John hears an angel (eagle, ASV) flying through heaven saying, “Woe,

woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth,” because of the three trumpets yet to sound. This places great significance on the events of the last three trumpets as they warn of events that will bring tremendous grief upon those whom they affect.

Verse 13 also serves to divide the series of trumpets into two sections. The events of the first four trumpets affect anyone upon this earth who chooses not to heed their warnings. The last three affect only those who are not Christians. (See 9:4.) In the series of seven seals and seven plagues, there also appears to be a 4-3 sequence although they are not as clearly defined as in this trumpet series.

These last three woes are directed to the “inhabiters of the earth.” First, this shows that these events are to take place here on this earth. Since we are in the “last times” upon this earth, they must be taking place now. (See 1Jn. 2:18.) They take place all during the Christian dispensation. Second, this also helps define who the “inhabiters of the earth” are. In Revelation, the “earth” is sometimes used to symbolically represent the dwelling place of those who follow Satan. The best example of this is in 12:9, 12. (See the comments on those verses.) We know that the “inhabiters of the earth” refer to those who follow Satan in this passage because 9:4 says the fifth trumpet affects only “those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.” Those who are not sealed by God are sinners, and they are symbolically referred to in this verse as the “inhabiters of the earth.”

<sup>1</sup>James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979), p. 175.

<sup>2</sup>William Barclay, *The Revelation of John, Vol 2* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 39.



# CHAPTER 9

## INTRODUCTION TO THE LAST THREE TRUMPETS

This chapter is a continuation of the series of seven trumpets. As discussed in 8:13, these last three trumpets or “woes” affect only those who follow Satan. This enables us to understand that we can avoid these last three woes by becoming a Christian and living a Christian life.

The fifth trumpet is the only one of the first six that does not refer to the symbolic “third part” of man. Therefore, it deals with events that affect man’s physical life. Since the sixth trumpet does deal with the “third part” of man, it is warning of events that will destroy the spiritual part of man. Since both of these trumpets affect only sinners, the fifth trumpet deals with the effects of sin on man’s physical life, and the sixth trumpet deals with the effects of sin on man’s spiritual life.

The seventh trumpet (11:15-19) describes events connected with Judgment and eternity. The final woe of the seventh trumpet is destruction in hell, which obviously will affect only sinners.

### THE FIFTH TRUMPET: LOCUSTS FROM THE BOTTOMLESS PIT

**Verse 1. And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.**

As this fifth angel sounds, a star falls from heaven, and he is given the key to the bottomless pit. Many commentators will emphatically state that this star represents the devil and that he was allowed to have the power to open the bottomless pit to release his wicked forces upon the inhabitants of the earth. This concept is being pictured in this verse, but to say that the star definitely represents the devil is a matter hard to prove. For instance, we saw a star fall from heaven in 8:10 as the third angel sounded his trumpet, which due to the meaning of the third trumpet must have represented those forces that corrupted the spiritual teachings of men.

The passage that comes closest to proving this star represents the devil, is 12:12. It says, "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath." This passage is definitely referring to the devil; it is a "woe" and is directed against the "inhabitants of the earth." This is almost exactly how these last three trumpets are introduced in 8:13. Because of this, it seems safe to assume that this star which fell from heaven does represent the devil, or at least those forces upon the earth that cause people to follow the devil.

Also, 12:9 describes Satan as being "cast out into the earth." If we are to equate these two passages, we must first clearly understand the meaning of 12:9. (Refer to the interpretation of chapter 12.) Since Christ has cast Satan out into the earth, it may very well be true that this verse and 12:9 are describing the same event because chapter 9 describes many of the ways in which Satan will torment the people of the earth during this present Christian dispensation.

Another significant point in this verse is the fact that he was "given the key of the bottomless pit." God is in control of everything. Anything that happens in the world today happens because God allows it. God allows the forces of the devil to work on earth today, but provides a way of escape from any temptation we might encounter (1Cor. 10:13).

The "bottomless pit" represents the abode of the

followers of the devil. As it is opened in verses 2 and 3, locusts arise out of it and thus represent all people who practice sin and teach others to follow the ways of the devil.

Some also try to associate this fifth trumpet with the loosing of Satan for a little season in chapter 20. They do this because 20:3 speaks of Satan as being bound and shut up in the bottomless pit with a seal that he should not deceive the nations again until the “thousand years” are completed. There are some problems with this interpretation. For example, since Satan is bound in the bottomless pit, it would be impossible for him to be represented by the star falling from heaven in this verse. If that were the case, he would have to be both on the inside of the bottomless pit bound, and on the outside with the key to loose himself from the inside. We must be very careful when comparing symbolism in different visions. Even though the basic meaning of the symbols remain the same in all the visions, they may be used in different ways to explain events from a different perspective. This passage is a description of events that will take place all during this Christian dispensation. However, 20:3 shows that Satan’s power is limited and will remain so until he is loosed for a little season at the end of this Christian dispensation to gather his followers together (20:7). At that time, Christ will return and commit them to an eternal destruction in hell (20:10).

To properly interpret verse 1, we must keep in mind that the purpose of the seven trumpets is to warn of forces and events here on earth that will destroy our spirituality and cause man to be lost if he is unable to overcome them. The events explained in this fifth trumpet are present in the world today because sin is present. The forces of the devil are always at work. They have been released from the bottomless pit. The things pictured in these last 3 trumpets show how sin affects mankind.

**Verse 2. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.**

As the bottomless pit is opened, there arises a great smoke so thick that the sun and air are darkened. The smoke must represent the teachings and influence of the devil because it arises out of the bottomless pit, which according to 20:3 is the dwelling place of Satan. In 15:8, smoke is used to show the completeness of the glory and power of God as it completely fills his temple. The smoke in verse 2 represents the power of the devil and shows that his influences cover a tremendous territory. Just as a thick smoke would cover the sun, a thick smoke of false teachings would cover the spiritual light of the world – the gospel.

**Verse 3. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.**

From the smoke, or false teachings of the devil, came locusts that were given power to hurt those people who do not have the seal of God (v. 4). These locusts have power upon the earth, showing that these forces are at work in the world today. They represent all those forces of the devil that constantly work in the world today and cause people to follow the ways of the devil. These people will be “hurt” by the consequences of their sins.

The sting of these locusts is likened to the sting of scorpions, which is extremely painful but seldom deadly. As people follow the devil, many times they suffer painful consequences, both physical and mental, because of the sins they commit. Also, 1Cor. 15:56 says, “The sting of death is sin.”

There are many “locusts” in the world today that cause people to believe there is no God. They teach that man is the supreme being and that he must rely on his own abilities to have the pleasures of this world. They cause man to follow the devil.

Notice that this power was given unto the locusts. This indicates that God permits this to happen. All power lies with God, but he allows man to choose whom he will follow. If one chooses to follow Satan, he also receives these consequences of sin. The statement “power was given” is used repeatedly throughout Revelation showing that God is supreme.

**Verse 4. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.**

The powers of the locusts are limited to this verse. They are allowed to hurt only those men who do not have the seal of God in their foreheads. Rev. 7:3 defines those who have the seal of God in their foreheads as the servants of God. Therefore, in this verse the scorpions are allowed to hurt only the followers of the devil, not the servants of God.

With this in mind, it becomes obvious that the comparison being made here is not between plant life and disciples of Satan; it is between Christians and non-Christians. The scorpions are not allowed to hurt Christians. Therefore, trees, grass, and any green thing all represent Christians. For plant life to exist, it must be green in color. Therefore, green is the symbolic color of life and, in this case, represents spiritual life. The use of trees and grass as symbolic representations of men can be found in Judg. 9:7-15 and Isa. 40:6-8. Trees would represent those who are strong in the faith while grass represents those who are weaker. Grass is shallow-rooted and weaker than trees and, therefore, would be more easily overcome by trials and temptations than the deep-rooted trees. The key to this is the use of the phrase “any green thing.” This would represent all Christians from the weakest to the strongest. They all have spiritual life just as any plant that is alive and growing will be colored green.

Another important concept to gain from verse 4 is the type of torment the scorpions are allowed to inflict. We

know that Christians are susceptible to all types of physical happenings on this earth just as non-Christians are, so the torments pictured in this fifth trumpet must be a direct result of the sinful state of the non-Christians. Those who live in sin today bring many hardships upon themselves because of the type of lives they lead. Examples of this might include the pain and suffering that come to those who give their lives to alcohol, drugs, promiscuity, and every other type of sinful act. Christians should not have to deal with these sufferings because they no longer practice such things. They have put them aside to live their lives as Christ has directed (1Cor. 6:9-11). This fifth trumpet then warns us of the many types of pain and suffering that are associated with the practice of sin.

**Verse 5. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man.**

Another limitation is placed upon the locusts that forbids them to kill their victims. They only have power to hurt or torment, but this torment could be severe because it was likened unto a scorpion striking a man. The locusts that came out of the bottomless pit represent all forms of evil that attack man, and they have the power to torment those who follow their sinful ways. If we look around us, we see many who fit this very picture. Because they have given sin the opportunity to rule in their lives, they suffer tremendously. As one example of this, think of the situation of our inner cities with all the problems of alcohol, drugs, prostitution, homosexuality, etc., and look at the pain and suffering, not only physical but mental, that results from these sins. As we know, the inner cities by no means have a monopoly on these sins. They can be found in almost every community, and Christians must avoid the practice of such activities.

These locusts have the power to torment sinful men for a period of five months. We should not interpret this time period as literal. The number "5" is being used as a

descriptive number, as is the case with most of the numbers throughout the book. The number “5” signifies incompleteness. It means that the locusts’ control over mankind is incomplete. If they had complete control, man would have no way of avoiding their torment, but this is not the case. Man can avoid the consequences and torments of sin by turning from them and leading a Christian life. Therefore, the time that sin is allowed to control a person’s life must be determined by that person himself. The devil can control only those people who allow him to do so. The time the devil is allowed to control a person’s life is incomplete. The moment a person renders obedience to God’s will, the devil loses his control and Christ becomes the focal point of his life.

**Verse 6. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.**

The torments of the locusts are so severe that men will seek death in order to avoid them. This takes place in our world today. We have hot lines and crisis centers to help those who believe that death would be preferable to continuing a life in shambles because of the practice of sin. We hear on the news almost daily of these who have taken their lives to avoid the miseries that they have brought upon themselves. The practice of sin can cause men to be so miserable that they had rather die than continue to live under the conditions they have created for themselves. As Christians we should realize that a righteous life will not only assure us of a heavenly reward, but it will also spare us from the many miseries in this world caused by sin.

**Verse 7. And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men.**

This verse begins a description of the locusts, or followers of Satan, who constantly battle against mankind to cause them to follow their evil ways. We should

remember that no locust has ever actually looked like the description given here, nor will there ever be one in the future. These descriptions are showing us the characteristics of those who spread the evil ways of Satan.

These locusts are described as being like horses prepared for battle. This simply indicates that Satan's followers are prepared to wage war upon mankind. The devil is not passive. He is very active in the world today as he seeks to destroy anyone who will follow him. He constantly wages war with man through his followers who advocate the pleasures of sin as being the answer to all of man's needs and desires.

On the heads of these locusts were objects that appeared to be crowns of gold. This indicates their deceptive nature. They appear to be figures of authority whose actions and leadership appear to be correct in every way; however, in reality they are leading men to the depths of torment.

The faces of the locusts are like the faces of men. This should warn us that these locusts are actually people of the world today who are following Satan and seeking to lead others along that same road of sin.

**Verse 8. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions.**

The locusts being described as having hair like women again points to the idea that these symbols are describing the characteristics of those who practice sin in the world today and lead others to do the same. It may be impossible to determine exactly what this symbol represents, but a reasonable explanation seems to be that it represents the promiscuous practice of all types of sexual sins such as prostitution and homosexuality. Many people today are living lives of torment and mental anguish because of the practice of such sins. Remember, Christians do not face this pain and anguish because they do not practice the things that cause these problems if they are truly following God.

These locusts also have the teeth of lions. In 1Pet. 5:8, the devil is described as a "roaring lion" who is walking about "seeking whom he may devour." Disciples of Satan



today are devouring all those who will follow them. This simply means to be overcome by the ways of sin. These locusts have the ability to devour anyone with whom they come in contact. If anyone listens to their false teachings and follows their ways, they will be devoured by sin.

**Verse 9. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.**

These locusts have breastplates of iron that represent their strong defense. Iron is extremely hard and very difficult to penetrate. Therefore, these forces of evil are extremely difficult to destroy. Christians are told in Eph. 6:14, to put on the “breastplate of righteousness,” which indicates that righteousness keeps sin out of our lives. By the same token, these locusts are well protected against anyone who might try to destroy them.

The sound of the wings of the locusts is likened unto the sound of many horses running to battle. As in verse 7 this indicates that the followers of Satan are vast in number and are constantly waging an aggressive war against mankind. We should remember that although the devil is constantly warring against everyone, we as Christians, according to Eph. 6:13-17, have an armor that is impossible to penetrate. If we wear our armor at all times, the devil cannot touch us, and we do not have the torments of sin in our lives as those do who follow the devil.

**Verse 10. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.**

This verse is similar to verse 5 in that the locusts are likened unto scorpions, and they have power to hurt men five months. (Refer to v. 5 for comments on symbols that are identical in this verse.)

The stings, or pain caused by these locusts, are inflicted by their tails, which are like the tails of scorpions. Some significance seems to be placed on the fact that their stings are in their tails due to the fact that this symbolism is

repeated in verse 19. It is hard to know the exact meaning of this, but one possible explanation is that the torment inflicted by these locusts comes after a person has been overtaken by the influences of sin. A person is led into sin by the teachings of those already practicing those things. Therefore, they would be overtaken by the teachings that come out of the mouths of those people. This type of symbolism is used in verses 18 and 19 where fire, smoke, and brimstone coming out of the horses' mouths destroy the spiritual part of man. This must refer to the teachings of men that lead others to follow the ways of Satan. This type of symbolism is also used when referring to the teaching of the gospel. In Eph. 6:17, the gospel is referred to as the sword of the Spirit. Christ is pictured in 1:16 as having a sword proceeding out of his mouth. From the use of these symbols, it is evident that in Revelation, when the teachings of men are implied, it speaks of them as proceeding out of their mouths. Since the torment of these locusts are located in their tails, and we know that the torments of sin follow participation in these acts, it follows that the torments are located in their tails because the torment and agony that people suffer in their lives come after they are led into a life of sin by the teachings of others. The very sins that they enjoy and take pleasure in turn on them and sting or torment them.

**Verse 11. And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.**

As has been discussed all through this fifth trumpet, the king, leader, or master of those who teach and practice sin today is the devil. His identification is made positive in this verse as he is described in three different ways. First, he is referred to as the angel of the bottomless pit, and we know from 20:2-3 that this bottomless pit is the dwelling place of Satan. Second, he is referred to as Abaddon, which is the Hebrew word for destruction. The devil is responsible for the destruction of all who follow him. Third, he is referred

to as Apollyon, which means the destroyer. The devil is the ultimate destroyer. Christ offers us eternal life, but the devil has nothing to offer but eternal death and destruction.

This entire fifth trumpet has dealt with the effects the devil and his followers have upon mankind. Following the devil and his ways will cause many agonies in this present life and eternal destruction in the hereafter. It should be emphasized again that, according to verse 4, Christians are exempt from the torments of the devil and the agonies that sin causes in this life because they do not practice such things.

Therefore, the warning being sounded by this fifth trumpet is that the devil leads many well-armed followers into constant battle against the people of all nations. Those who are overcome by these sins are tormented because of them, even to the point of seeking death. God's people are not affected by these torments because they live righteous lives and do not participate in the sins that cause these torments.

Man has the power to choose whether to serve the devil or not because his control over man is incomplete. The devil controls only those people who choose to follow him. Anyone who seeks to avoid this woe can do so by becoming a Christian and leading a Christian life.

**Verse 12. One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.**

The fifth, sixth, and seventh trumpets are referred to as three woes. The term "woe" seems to place special emphasis on the last three trumpets as being especially severe. This verse announces that one of the terrible woes is finished, but two more are yet to be described.

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE SIXTH TRUMPET**

This sixth trumpet, the second woe, represents God's final releasing of forces that will destroy the spiritual part of man. The symbolism used in this sixth trumpet is similar to that of the fifth trumpet; so much so, that many

commentators call the sixth trumpet a continuation of the fifth. Even though they are similar, there is one major difference, and that is; the devil was given the power to inflict the torments in the fifth trumpet, but God releases the forces that act in the sixth trumpet.

This sixth trumpet pictures the final destruction of the “spiritual” part of man just as the sixth seal described the destruction of the “physical” part of man. The sixth plague will describe the final plague that will be poured out on those who oppose God. (See the introduction to chapter 9 for additional information.)

### **THE SIXTH TRUMPET: THE ARMY OF HORSEMEN**

**Verse 13. And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,**

As the sixth angel sounded his trumpet, John heard a voice coming from the four horns of the golden altar before God. In Ex. 29:12, the blood of a bullock, which was given as a sin offering, was put upon the horns of the altar. In 8:3 the golden altar is used symbolically to represent man’s ability to commune with God through prayer. In 6:10 martyred saints under the altar were asking, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” This sixth trumpet must be the beginning of the answer to that prayer. The altar symbolizes man’s prayers, and the horns of the altar symbolize the blood sacrifices many Christians have been required to make for the sake of their faith.

This sixth trumpet affects only those who are not Christians because they are the ones who indulge themselves in the practices of sin. As God turns them over to the ways of sin to follow the devil, they lose the spiritual part of their being and will eventually spend eternity in hell (2Thess. 2:11-12).

**Verse 14. Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates.**

The use of the great Euphrates as a symbol is the subject of much discussion. One idea, which we might eliminate in the beginning, is that this is speaking of actual events that are to take place in the future in the area around the Euphrates River. We should not expect to see God leading forces of 200,000,000 horsemen, looking like the description given in verse 17, against the nations of this earth. Understanding the Bible and its teachings concerning the second coming of Christ makes this type of explanation border on the ridiculous. Therefore, we must look for the intended symbolic meaning.

The “great river Euphrates” is also used as a symbol in 16:12, which is the sixth plague. This is the well known passage dealing with Armageddon. A full explanation of the symbolic Euphrates River is given in that passage. (Refer to those comments.) For our purposes here, it represents the dividing line or boundary between the ways of righteousness and ungodliness. When God looses the forces symbolically bound in the great river Euphrates, they will overtake and destroy the spiritual part of any individual who is following the ways of the devil. (See 2Thess. 2:11-12.) The actual meaning of the word “Euphrates” is “that makes fruitful, or grows.” When people become so evil that they no longer desire to grow spiritually or become fruitful, God will turn them over to the ways of the devil.

**Verse 15. And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men.**

God gave the command to loose the four angels that were to slay the third part of man, or the spiritual part of his being. At first this seems to be a contradiction in our thinking because we do not expect God to allow the spiritual part of man to be destroyed; however, there are two passages in the New Testament that we need to keep in

mind in order to properly interpret this verse. The first passage is 2Thess. 2:11-12: “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.” This passage indicates that when a person reaches the point in his life where sin and unrighteousness is all he desires, God will send forces which will cause that individual to turn his face completely away from God, and he will be damned. The spiritual part of that person will be completely destroyed.

Second, Rom. 1:28, describing those who are filled with all types of sin and unrighteousness, says, “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.” This verse again points to the fact that there can come a time in a person’s life when he becomes so engrossed in sin that God will turn him over to Satan. When this happens, the spiritual part of that person will no longer exist. It will be destroyed. This is the warning being sounded by this sixth trumpet.

This should by no means lead us to question the long-suffering and patience of God, but instead, it should make us realize that man can lower himself so deeply into sin that he will be completely overcome by the devil and his ways. When this happens, it is not because God wills it, but rather, because that person has chosen to serve the devil instead of God.

This enables us to conclude that the angel being “prepared for an hour and a day, and a month, and a year” refers to the time when an individual completely turns from God, and God turns him over to Satan to be damned. It can happen at any time. Some commentators take the view that this time refers to the second coming of Christ; however, verse 20 indicates that some were not killed by the plagues of this trumpet and continued in their sinful ways. This would eliminate the possibility of this “time” referring entirely to the second coming of Christ. Although this is true, the fact remains that those who are living a life of sin at Christ’s second coming will be destroyed spiritually. The

ultimate spiritual destruction of those in sin will come when Christ returns, but it is also possible for man's "spiritual part" to be destroyed during his own lifetime because he completely forsakes God to follow the devil.

It might also be pointed out that this type of interpretation also corresponds with the fact that there are four angels. The number "4" is used to describe events that happen on this earth. They will destroy the spiritual part of those who are indulging themselves in a life of sin.

**Verse 16. And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them.**

This army of 200,000,000 horses is similar to the symbol used in the fifth trumpet. There the locusts were described as being shaped "like unto horses prepared unto battle." Therefore, these horsemen would again refer to those forces of evil upon the earth who attack men and overcome them spiritually. The difference in the warnings of the fifth and sixth trumpets is: The locusts, which looked like horses in the fifth trumpet, were only allowed to torment the physical part of men, but in the sixth trumpet God allows these horsemen to destroy the spiritual part of men also.

These horsemen are not directed against Christians because they were not allowed to hurt Christians in the fifth trumpet (9:4). Those people who will be destroyed spiritually are those who have been attacked by the forces of the devil in the fifth trumpet and overcome by them. If a person remains faithful to the Lord, he will not suffer the torments of sin (fifth trumpet), neither will the spiritual part of his being be destroyed (sixth trumpet). His spiritual part will remain alive in service unto the Lord.

The number of these horsemen is "two hundred thousand thousand," which obviously represents a tremendous force. The number "1000" signifies completeness. Therefore, this number symbolizes the thorough job that will be done by these horsemen. The number "2" represents strength. Therefore, these horsemen are many in number and very strong. They are very capable of destroying the spiritual

part of men who have turned against God.

**Verse 17. And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone.**

Again, the description of the horses is similar, although not identical, to the description of the horses given in the fifth trumpet. We are again dealing with symbols describing the forces of evil, which God will allow to act upon those who reject him. The riders of these horses are described as having “breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone.” This shows just how indestructible these forces are. It would be virtually impossible to destroy them.

The heads of these horses were like the heads of lions. This illustrates the ability of these forces to devour anyone whom they attack.

Out of the mouths of these horses come fire, smoke, and brimstone. This is symbolic of the terrible false teachings that these forces use to overcome their prey. As men listen to the teachings of the devil, they will eventually be destroyed by them.

Notice that the angels bound in the great river Euphrates are not destroying the spiritual part of man. The horsemen, which represent the followers of the devil, are the ones who actually destroy the spiritual part of man. It is as if the long-suffering of God has finally ended, and he is allowing those people who oppose him to be completely overtaken by the devil. An example of this situation is Rom. 1:28: “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.”

**Verse 18. By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths.**

The fire, smoke, and brimstone, which represent the evil teachings that come out of the mouths of those who



practice such things, are responsible for destroying the third part of man, or his spiritual part. All we have to do to know that this situation exists is to observe the world today. There are many who have turned completely away from God and have absolutely no dealings with spiritual matters in their lives. The spiritual part of their being has been destroyed by sin.

**Verse 19. For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt.**

It is once again stated that the power of these horsemen, which God permits to destroy the spiritual part of evil men, is in their mouths. This further emphasizes the idea that the things that proceed out of their mouths are evil teachings, or all types of teachings and influences that originate with the devil. Even the tails of these horses were like unto serpents that had heads. This gives them the power to hurt people in the same manner as the tails of the scorpions have this power in verse 5. There is one major difference in the visions. The serpents have the power to “kill” the third part, the spiritual part, of men, but the scorpions can only torment men. This shows that these false teachings of Satan are capable not only of causing much physical and mental pain and anguish as described by the fifth trumpet, but they can also cause one to forsake God totally; thereby, causing the death of the spiritual part of his being.

**Verse 20. And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk:**

This verse is very important in helping to determine the meaning of the “third part of men.” Notice that those who were not killed, referring to their third part being killed (v. 18), continued to worship devils and idols of gold, silver, brass, and stone. The part of man that is being killed is that part which desires to worship a higher being – his spiritual

part. Those people, whose third part was not killed, continued to worship, but they were worshiping objects other than the true God. This enables us to draw the conclusion that the “third part of men” is referring to the spiritual part of man’s being that desires to worship a higher being, and that it is not referring to man’s saved or lost state. In other words, man is capable of having an active spiritual life, but can direct his worship toward something other than God and be lost.

It is not clear what the last phrase in this verse, “which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk,” is modifying. Some say it is a description of the idols that were being worshiped. We believe it refers to the state in which these people find themselves who worship these idols. Mt. 13:15 says, “For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed.” Col. 2:16 says, “As ye have therefore received Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.” These people who are not killed spiritually still have a desire to worship a higher being. But they worship all manner of idols instead of the true God. Therefore, those who worship anything other than the true God cannot see, or hear, or walk. They cannot see the light of the gospel. They will not hear those who teach the truth, and they do not walk according to the ways of God.

**Verse 21. Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.**

Not only do these people continue to worship idols, they also continue to do those physical acts that are contrary to God’s will such as murders, sorceries, fornication, and thefts. It should be clear that this sixth trumpet warns of the final destruction of man’s spiritual part. However, it is possible that man can retain some desire to worship spiritually, either correctly or incorrectly, and continue to do those deeds that are not pleasing to God. Just to worship God is not enough. It must be in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:24).

<sup>1</sup>Alexander Cruden, *Unabridged Concordance* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1968), p. 580.

# CHAPTER 10

## THE LITTLE BOOK OPEN

The lessons of this chapter are built around the symbol of the “little book open.” There are several ideas among commentators about the meaning of this symbol, but we believe the only plausible explanation is that it represents the New Testament. We offer the following reasons for this interpretation.

- (1) This little book is always open. God’s Word is always open to anyone who is willing to read and obey it.
- (2) John was told to take the book from the angel (v.8). He asked the angel to give it to him; however, he was again told to take it. God’s Word is always open and available to us, but we must take it. No one can obey the Word for us. It is each individual’s responsibility.
- (3) John was told to eat the little book. This shows we are to study and consume the teachings of the Bible. We must completely digest it.
- (4) After John ate the book, he was told he must prophesy again. To prophesy means to teach God’s Word, and in order to do that, we must first study and digest it.
- (5) This vision comes between the sixth and seventh trumpets. The trumpets warn of events that could

cause man to lose his spiritual life, but we may prepare ourselves to overcome these events by studying God's Word.

- (6) Verse 7 says that when the seventh angel sounds, the "mystery of God" will be finished.

The "mystery of God" is a reference to the gospel of Christ.

Due to the explanations given above, we believe that the only plausible explanation of this "little book open" is that it represents the Word of God.

One possible objection that we might attempt to answer is: The Word of God would not be referred to as a "little" book. We believe this refers to the fact that God's Word is understandable. Man has the ability to study and comprehend its message. If God's Word were a "large" book, it would be difficult to read and understand, but God's book is a "little" book. It may be understood by any man who seeks to know its message.

**Verse 1. And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire:**

The vision of chapter 10 begins with a description of a mighty angel who has a little book open in his hand (v. 2). The use of the term "mighty" indicates this angel possessed tremendous strength. This would in turn place great significance on the events of this vision.

This angel is symbolically described in four ways. First, he is clothed with a cloud. It may not be possible to put an exact meaning on this symbol, but one possibility is that it represents purity. When spiritual clothing is spoken of in Revelation, it is always white, which represents purity or holiness. We are not told that this cloud was white, but it probably was because no righteous, spiritual being was ever clothed in anything except white in the entire book of Revelation.

Second, he has a rainbow upon his head. The only time

the rainbow is used symbolically in the Bible, except in Revelation, was when God placed the rainbow in the sky to remind Noah of his promise to never again destroy the world with water. In 4:3 the emerald rainbow over God's Throne reminds us of the everlasting covenant God made with man to save those who are obedient to his will. The "little book" in this vision is that covenant between God and man. It is the New Testament.

Third, the face of the mighty angel was like unto the sun. This illustrates that the gospel, which he holds in his hand, is a tremendous light unto men. In Jn. 8:12, Jesus describes himself as "the light of the world," and tells us if we follow him, we "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." The light of our life today is the gospel, which outlines the way whereby we can be saved. This type of symbolism is also used in 1:16 to describe Jesus as it states, "his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength." Jesus is the light of the world today, and we can walk in that light by being obedient to the gospel.

Fourth, the feet of this angel are described as pillars of fire. Since he placed one foot on the sea and one on the earth to cover all mankind, the fire probably shows the urgency of the burning message of the gospel.

**Verse 2. And he had In his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth,**

This mighty angel holds in his hand a little book that is open. Because of the reasons given in the introduction to this chapter, this little book is interpreted as the New Testament. It is significant that this little book is open. The gospel is available to all men at all times; it is never closed. The fact that this angel is standing with his right foot upon the sea and his left on the earth indicates that the gospel is for all men. There is no accountable person on this earth who is exempt from the teachings of the New Testament. The gospel is for all!

**Verses 3, 4. And cried with a loud voice, as when a**

**lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices. And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.**

As this mighty angel cried with a loud voice, seven thunders uttered their voices. John was about to record the messages of the seven thunders; however, a voice from heaven instructed him not to write down their words. Much controversy and speculation surrounds the voices of the thunders and what they spoke. There is simply no way of knowing what they said because John was told not to record their words. Instead of trying to determine what was spoken, we must look at the entire picture and attempt to understand what the thunders symbolize, and why John was not allowed to record their messages. First, thunder is used by God to announce events of great importance. For example, in Ex. 19:16 there were thunders as God descended upon Mt. Sinai to give Moses the Ten Commandments. Therefore, in the context of this passage, the mighty angel is holding the gospel in his hand. As he cries with a loud voice, the thunders sound, indicating a message of great importance. There is nothing more important in this world than sounding the message of the gospel of Christ. If this is the lesson being taught by these symbols, then why are their messages sealed? The most likely reason is that the gospel was already complete at the time of the writing of Revelation. Everything that man needed to know concerning how to obey the gospel had already been revealed through the writings of the apostles. We need no further revelation. God's Word is complete in every respect, and our obedience to it will be rewarded with eternal life in heaven.

**Verses 5-6. And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the**

**things which are therein, that there should be time no longer:**

The angel lifts his hand to heaven and swears by the God of heaven that upon the sounding of the seventh trumpet, time should be no longer. God has created all things; therefore, when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, God will also bring all things to an end. The seventh trumpet will take us into the time of Judgment (11:15-19), just as the seventh seal did in 8:1-5, and the seventh plague will in 16:17-21.

At the sounding of the seventh trumpet, all things as we know them will pass away, and we will see a new heaven and a new earth as God has promised (2Pet. 3:10-13). When this happens time will be no more. We will be in an eternal state.

Due to the context of this chapter, it is very possible that the phrase “there should be time no longer” has a much more significant meaning than simply informing us that time will cease when the seventh angel begins to sound. As we look at the structure of the chapter, one question to ask is: Why is the sounding of the seventh trumpet mentioned here? The answer to that question may lie in the fact that these trumpets are warnings. But, since there is an entire section concerning the seventh trumpet, what is its significance here? It could be to warn us that when the seventh trumpet sounds, man will no longer have time left to obey the gospel. Let us look at the structure of the chapter. The mighty angel is holding the gospel open in his hand (v. 2); the seven thunders sound the importance of the gospel (v. 3-4); the angel warns that when the seventh angel sounds, man will no longer be able to obey this gospel because the mystery of God will be finished (v. 6-7).

Therefore, we must study and proclaim the gospel all through the Christian age (v. 8-11), so man will be able to avoid the eternal punishment that will come with the sounding of the seventh trumpet (11:15-19). At that time all things will be finished. Man will no longer have the opportunity to obey the gospel. His eternal destiny will be sealed.



**Verse 7. But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.**

The entire description of events during the seventh trumpet is given in 11:15-19. When this trumpet sounds, the mystery of God will be finished. This mystery that will be finished is the gospel, or God's plan to save man. Col. 1:26-28 states, "Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Therefore, the mystery that was hidden throughout the ages was the fact that Christ was to come to earth and die for the sins of all men, including the Gentiles. Because of this, we can be sinless in God's sight through Christ Jesus. When this seventh trumpet sounds, this gospel will be finished or completed, and man will no longer have the opportunity to be obedient to it.

The last phrase in this verse is rendered as follows in the ASV: "according to the good tidings which he hath declared to his servants the prophets." This reinforces the belief that the "mystery" refers to the gospel because the gospel is "good tidings."

## **JOHN EATS THE LITTLE BOOK**

**Verse 8. And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth.**

John receives instructions from heaven to take the little book out of the angel's hand. Although it is not stated, it is understood that the voice out of heaven was either God's or Christ's, or at least a message from them. John was told to

“go and take the little book,” which indicates that one must study God’s Word in order to receive it. God will not force his Word on anyone.

It is emphasized once again that the little book is open. The Word of God is never closed; it is always open to those who are willing to take it.

**Verse 9. And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey.**

John asked the angel to give him the little book, but he was again told to take it. This is the second time he has been told that he must take the book, which emphasizes the fact that every person is responsible for his own actions in seeking and accepting God’s almighty Word. No one can do it for us, and God will not overwhelm us with his Word in some miraculous way. The gospel is God’s power unto salvation (Rom. 1:16); however, it is our responsibility to follow the commands he has given in order to receive that salvation.

John is instructed to take the book and “eat it up.” This must symbolize the thorough study or digestion of God’s Word to which every Christian should apply himself. This will enable us to correctly understand God’s message (2Tim. 2:15).

John is also told that as he eats the book, it will be sweet as honey in his mouth, but it will make his belly bitter. It is easy to understand that God’s Word would be sweet to those who read, understand, and obey it; thereby, receiving the forgiveness of sins as God has promised. The psalmist writes in Ps. 119:103, “How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” God’s words are sweet to those who accept them.

Understanding why one’s belly would be made bitter after digesting God’s Word is somewhat more difficult. This must be a reference to the necessity of teaching God’s Word to others once it has been studied and digested. This is in agreement with verse 11, which states that John must

once again prophesy before many people. A situation similar to this is recorded in Ezek. 2:9-3:4. Ezekiel was sent a “roll of a book” from God and told to eat it. After he ate the book, God instructed him to go and speak his words unto the house of Israel. Therefore, after Ezekiel ate the roll that contained God's words, he then went and spoke the words that he had eaten to the people of Israel. When anyone studies and understands God’s Word today, they must feel the necessity of teaching others. A passage that is parallel in meaning to the message of this verse is Jn. 7:37-38 which states, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” As one studies and understands God’s Word, it will be sweet as honey to his mouth, but his belly will become bitter in order that the rivers of living water will flow from it.

**Verse 10. And I took the little book out of the angel’s hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.**

When John consumes the little book, the results were exactly as the angel had stated. It was sweet to his taste but bitter to his belly. Obedience to the gospel is the sweetest thing on earth; however, there is also a great urgency to teach others this same sweet gospel.

**Verse 11. And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.**

This verse once again supports the interpretation of the “little book open” as being the New Testament. John had just taken the little book and consumed it, and is immediately told in the following verse that he must prophesy again to many nations and people. We should point out that John is actually participating in this vision. Therefore, the lesson being given to subsequent readers of Revelation is that each one of us must study, consume, and digest God’s Word and then deliver that message to all people of the world.

# CHAPTER 11

## A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

Chapter 11 can be divided into two major sections. The first section, verses 1 through 14, gives a great deal of information concerning the “temple of God.” It also concludes the sixth trumpet. The second division, verses 15 through 19, is the sounding of the seventh trumpet.

Several symbols are used in the first section of chapter 11 including: (1) “temple,” (2) “holy city,” (3) “two witnesses,” (4) “two olive trees,” (5) “two candlesticks,” and (6) “two prophets;” all of which have the same basic meaning. They represent those people who are faithful to God – the church.

Once we understand this, it then becomes possible to see that chapter 11 gives a complete history of the church from its beginning until the time of its ascension to heaven to dwell with God eternally (v. 12). Certainly, not every detail concerning the church is given, but the major points are clearly outlined. They are as follows:

- v. 3 -- God gives his people the power needed in order to spread the gospel during this Christian dispensation.
- v. 5-6 -- God provided protection for his people in order that the gospel might be spread throughout the world.
- v. 7-10-- Once the gospel was spread throughout the

world, forces would arise upon this earth that would almost destroy the church for a certain period of time.

v. 11 -- After this period of time, God again breathed life into his people and the church once again became strong.

v. 12 -- At God's appointed time, the church will be called to heaven to dwell with him eternally.

v. 13 -- Those forces that have persecuted the church will be destroyed, and great fear will fall upon those people at Christ's second coming.

## THE TWO WITNESSES

**Verse 1. And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.**

John is given a reed, which is some type of measuring device, and told to measure the temple of God. This temple must represent the church. Christians are spoken of as being the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16), and, of course, Christians make up the church. John was also instructed to measure "them that worship therein," which would be all those individual Christians who make up the complete church. Therefore, John is being instructed to measure the church, as well as each individual person who dwells in the church.

The next question to answer would be this: What does it mean to "measure" the church? First, notice that no measurements are ever given, so it is not the actual measurements that are important, but the fact that it can be measured. This shows that exact measurements can be taken, and this, in turn, indicates that it is possible to tell exactly who is in the church and who is not. Obviously, the dividing line between those inside the church and those outside is God's Word. The gospel, God's Word, is used to define the boundaries of his church. Those who are obedient to the gospel are in the church; all others are

outside. This enables us to conclude that the “reed like unto a rod,” which is used to measure the temple, represents the gospel.

The gospel is the exact measurement of the church. It defines the exact boundaries of the church. Not only does it measure the entire church, it measures each individual therein. Only those individuals who have obeyed the gospel and are continuing to do the appointed works are Christians.

As mentioned above, the measurements of the temple, or holy city (v. 2), are not given. But if you desire to know the measurements of this holy city, all you have to do is read 21:15-17. (See comments on that passage.)

In Revelation the altar is a symbol of man’s ability to communicate and make atonement for his sins directly to God through prayer. In 8:3, a golden altar is pictured before the Throne of God and is used for offering up the prayers of saints. In the Old Testament, the altar was used to offer sacrifices to God to make atonement for the sins of the people (Lev. 4:20). In the church today, we do not have a literal altar to offer sacrifices for our sins, but we do have something that accomplishes the same thing and more; that is prayer. Through prayer we commune with God and receive forgiveness of our sins. To measure the altar means to determine its size, or in this case, who can use it. Only those people who are in a covenant relationship with God can commune with him through prayer (1Pet. 3:12). Only the prayers of the saints will be offered upon God’s altar (8:3). It has been measured.

**Verse 2. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.**

John received instructions not to include the court of the temple in his measurements. This shows that only the true church is to be included. Even though the court is in close proximity, it is not part of the true church. It may not be possible to determine exactly who is represented by the

court of the temple, but since it is so close to the true church, it may represent the dwelling place of those who profess to be Christians and are close to the truth, but have never been obedient to God's law. They have never actually entered into the true church. This situation exists throughout the world today. Many profess to know God; however, they have never been completely obedient to his commands. Therefore, they are not part of God's church although they are close to the truth and even claim the title "Christian."

The court could also represent the dwelling place of unfaithful members of the church. These people are also close to the church; in fact, they have once been a part of it.

It makes little or no difference which of these interpretations we choose because the court represents the location of all of these people, both those who are close to the truth but have never been completely obedient to it, and those who were once faithful members but have fallen away. They are all outside the true church.

The main point in this passage is the fact that the people in the court will tread the holy city under foot. The holy city is another way of referring to the church. Throughout Revelation, the temple and the holy city are two different symbols used to refer to the same thing – the church of our Lord. (For more information about the symbolic "holy city," see comments on 21:2.) The ones who are in the court will trample down or walk on those who are in the true church. This is another way of saying that they consider the church to have little or no value. It is something to be trodden under foot – maybe even destroyed. This situation exists in the world today. Many are close to the truth, but have no regard for the true church at all. They trample it by their degrading and slanderous remarks and sometimes even persecutions. Many would even prefer that the true church be nonexistent. This type of activity is to continue for a period of forty-two months, which is symbolically speaking of the entire Christian age. Throughout the ages, men have sought to tread down, weaken, and even destroy the church, and this passage

explains that this will continue until Christ's second coming. (For more on the use of the symbolic "forty-two months," see the introduction to chapter 12.)

**Verse 3. And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.**

There are many different proposals as to the identity of the "two witnesses" such as: Moses and Elijah;<sup>1</sup> the Old Testament and the New Testament;<sup>2</sup> and apostles Peter and Paul.<sup>3</sup> Coffman says these two witnesses are "definitely and undeniably, God's word, and God's church."<sup>4</sup> If we are searching for a literal "two" witnesses, then we agree that Coffman must have the correct answer because of the context of this passage. The subject of chapter 10 is the "little book open," which is the Bible, and verses 1-2 describe the temple, which is the church. Also, 22:17 says, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come." In this instance, the two who are bidding people to come to Christ are the Spirit, which operates through the Word, and the Bride, which is the church.

Although this seems to be a plausible explanation, we believe that a slightly different approach should be used to determine the meaning of the "two witnesses." It is our conviction that the "two witnesses" is a descriptive term referring to the church. This is very close to the interpretation presented by Coffman because the church must use the Word of God in order to "witness," or teach the world about Christ. God's Word and his church are inseparable. To be a member of the church means to be obedient to the Word. Therefore, we do not believe it is necessary to divide the Word and the church into two separate witnesses for Christ.

The church is the witness for Christ today. Many times in the church today, we avoid using terms that are used extensively by other religious organizations. This is true with the term "witness." We are reluctant to use this term because we do not want to be identified with false religion. Granted, many religious organizations do not use this term



according to its biblical meaning; nevertheless, the term is biblical. In 20:4, we see as a part of that vision “the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus.” Therefore, we know that Christians are referred to as witnesses of Jesus. Jesus also spoke of himself as “the faithful and true witness” in 1:5 and 3:14. This indicates he had been faithful in carrying out God’s will. If we as Christians carry out the will of our Lord, we are his faithful witnesses. In 1Jn. 5:10a, we read, “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself:” Christ is the faithful and true witness, and he dwells in Christians today. As we attempt to live for Christ, we are witnesses for him.

Verse 3 also states that the two witnesses “shall prophesy.” In verse 10, these two witnesses are referred to as two prophets. In 10:11, John was told that he “must prophesy again before many peoples.” God’s children are the ones who prophesy by using and teaching God’s Word, the Bible. God’s people, the church, are his witnesses to all the earth. One other reason for interpreting the “two witnesses” as a symbolic representation of the church is because the church is the subject of this vision. In verse 1, John was told to measure the temple, which is the church, and verse 2 further describes the church by referring to it as the “holy city.” The subject of this vision does not change with verse 3; it only further describes those who make up the church by calling them “witnesses.”

If the witnesses of Christ are Christians who make up the church, then why are they described as “two” witnesses? The answer again lies with the use of numbers in Revelation as symbolic descriptions instead of literal numeric values. The number “2” is used to show strength, and this is exactly what is stated in verse 3. These witnesses are being given power from God. Summers says, “There was a symbolic significance in the fact that Jesus sent His disciples forth two by two. Two witnesses confirmed the truth, and their testimony which otherwise would have been weak was made strong. Always this number meant augmented strength, redoubled energy, confirmed power.”<sup>5</sup>

These two witnesses are also called two candlesticks in

verse 4. We know from 1:20 that the seven candlesticks represent the seven churches. We also recognize that the number “7” is used in that verse to indicate the complete divine church of Christ throughout the ages. It is not limited to the seven churches to which this letter was specifically addressed. (See comments on 1:20.) This same type of symbolism is used here with the number “2.” It indicates strength. It describes the church as strong witnesses for Christ. The church on the earth has received power from on high through the Word, and all Christians should be strong witnesses for Christ as we prophesy or teach that Word throughout the world.

**Verse 4. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.**

This is a continuation of the description of the two witnesses. They are called two olive trees and two candlesticks. The number “2” is again used to show the great power or strength possessed by these witnesses.

Romans 11 gives a vivid description of the church by using the olive tree as a symbol. God’s chosen people under the old law, the children of Israel, are described as the good olive tree. The Gentiles, who were not a part of God’s people under the old law, are described as a wild olive tree. When Christ established his new law, it was for all men, not just a chosen few. When the Gentiles, or the wild olive tree, are obedient to the new Law of Christ, they are said to be grafted into the good olive tree. They become a part of God’s chosen people, the church. Therefore, it becomes easy to understand that the witnesses for Christ are a part of the good olive tree spoken of in Romans 11.

The two candlesticks also refer to the church. (For additional information, see comments on v. 3.) This should enable us to understand that the subject of this vision is the church. In verses 1 and 2, it is described as the “temple” and the “holy city.” Verses 3 and 4 further describe the church as “witnesses,” “olive trees,” and “candlesticks.” In each case there are two, which indicates they have received power from God. They are standing before God, which

again shows that these symbols must represent the church because 7:15 states that Christians are before the Throne of God, serving him day and night in his temple.

**Verse 5. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed.**

God's protection for his church is shown in this verse. God will not allow man to destroy his kingdom. Heb. 12:28 says that we have received a kingdom which cannot be moved. Therefore, man does not have the power to destroy it. God's kingdom will last forever.

It should be pointed out that there appears to be a conflict between verses 5 and 7. Verse 7 says that the beast will be able to overcome and kill them, but this happens after they have "finished their testimony." Here we have a situation where God would not allow anything to happen to his church until the gospel had spread throughout the world. After this took place, the church would die out for a period of time, only to rise again. But, in verse 5 God says he will protect his church, and even destroy its enemies if necessary, in order to provide an atmosphere conducive to the existence of his church. (Also see 12:16.)

**Verse 6. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.**

These witnesses, those who make up the church, have great power upon this earth. According to verse 3, this power comes directly from God. We must be careful to remember that we are dealing with symbolic language. Causing the rain to stop falling upon the earth; turning water to blood, and causing all types of plagues must be symbolic of the powers that Christians possess through the teaching of the Word. These acts of power serve to remind us of the power of God that Elijah and Moses possessed as they faithfully served him. If we serve him today and

prophesy or teach his Word, we possess the tremendous power in that Word.

The smiting of the earth with all plagues should be emphasized since two entire chapters, 15 and 16, are devoted to the seven last plagues. These plagues are directed against non-Christians through the teaching of God's Word. (For more information, see 16:2.)

**Verse 7. And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.**

In order to properly understand verse 7, we must take a look at the sequence of events in chapter 11.

- v. 3--The witnesses are given power to prophesy.
- v. 5--With God's help, they will be able to overcome their enemies.
- v. 7--When they finish their testimony, the beast will overcome and kill them.
- v. 10--People will rejoice over their death.
- v. 11 --The Spirit of life from God will enter into them, and they will live again.
- v. 12--They will ascend up to heaven.

The above verses give a complete history of the church from the time of Christ until its ascension to heaven at his second coming. Therefore, the phrase "when they shall have finished their testimony" must take us up to a particular moment in the history of the church, not to the end of time because, later, they are to "stand upon their feet." The most likely interpretation of this would be the spreading of the gospel throughout the world during the first century, and after this was completed or "finished," the beast overcame the church and destroyed it for a period of time. This interpretation also agrees with the interpretation of the beasts of chapter 13 as representing those forces of civil government and the apostate church, which joined forces to destroy the church during the Dark Ages. (See

13:6-7, 15.)

It would not be practical to go into a full interpretation of the beast at this point because the entire thirteenth chapter will be devoted to that subject. Therefore, to get the full meaning of verse 7, it might first be necessary to have a basic understanding of chapter 13. One other important point about the beast is that he is said to arise out of the “bottomless pit,” indicating that these forces of evil which will overcome and destroy the church are from the devil. This also agrees perfectly with the interpretation of the beast that John saw “ascend out of the bottomless pit” in 17:8. This was the apostate church, or the great city, which was responsible for “killing” the church during the Dark Ages.

To understand the full meaning of these symbols, all of these passages must be carefully considered. It is not within the scope of this book to include such a study, but we strongly suggest you make these comparisons after you have completed a study of all these related passages. We are confident it will be worthwhile and will greatly increase your understanding of how these symbols and visions are related.

Therefore, verse 7 is a figurative description of one major event in the history of the church. The gospel was spread throughout the world, and after this was completed, the forces of the devil, manifested in the powers of the Roman civil government and the apostate church, made war against the true church and overcame it. This sent the world into the Dark Ages when people were not permitted to read the Bible. They were forced to worship according to man’s laws, which were contrary to the laws of God.

**Verse 8. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.**

The bodies of these witnesses (the church) are described as lying in the street of the great city. This agrees exactly with the interpretation of verse 7 since the great city is used in Revelation to symbolize the apostate church. (See 16:9;

17:18; 18:2.) The true church, which was overcome by the apostate church, is figuratively described as lying in the street of the great city (the apostate church). This is where the church was killed, and the people of that city are the ones who rejoiced over the church's death (v. 10). The great city is described as a "spiritual" Sodom, Egypt, and Jerusalem. Many commentators miss the point by interpreting this as a description of the literal, earthly city of Jerusalem. This is a description of that great city, the apostate church, by using Sodom, Egypt, and Jerusalem as symbols. Just as there were all types of physical immorality in Sodom, there are all types of spiritual immorality in the great city (the apostate church). When one forsakes the true God to worship another god or man, he commits spiritual fornication. The people of the great city, the apostate church, are spiritually immoral, just as the people of Sodom were guilty of physical immorality. (See 17:18; then 17:4.) The great city is also described as spiritual Egypt. Egypt was the great persecutor of God's people in the Old Testament, just as the great city was the great persecutor of the church during the Christian age. (See 13:12,15-17; 17:18; then 17:6.) Throughout the Dark Ages, the apostate church was responsible for the spiritual death of many people, and in many cases even their physical death if they did not worship as directed. It was responsible for the death of the true church for a period of time, but the church would rise again according to verse 11.

The great city is also described as the place where our Lord was crucified. Christ was crucified physically in Jerusalem, but he was crucified spiritually in the "great city" (the apostate church). When the witnesses or the true church were killed, Christ was crucified again. To fall away from the true church is to crucify the Son of God afresh (Heb. 6:6). This "great city" had fallen away from the true teachings of the gospel and were successful in destroying those who were following Christ. They had "spiritually" crucified Jesus again.

Verse 8 has given us a vivid description of the "great city" that was responsible for the death of the true church

after the first century. The great city is also the beast that ascended out of the bottomless pit and overcame the church (v. 7). The dead bodies of the witnesses lay in the street of the great city until the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they came to life again (v. 11).

**Verse 9. And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves.**

The phrase “people and kindreds and tongues and nations” refers to the vast number of people who are a part of the great city. These people would not allow the bodies of the witnesses (the church) to be put in the grave. They desired to keep them in sight where they could gloat over their death. This is obviously not literal. They must have accomplished this by constantly reminding the people that nothing spiritual existed except the apostate church. They were proud to have destroyed the true teachings of God. The apostate church has always claimed to be righteous and worship the true God, yet they worship according to man’s ways instead of God’s. To have the truth taught by the true church would definitely have an adverse affect upon the apostate church. Therefore, they were extremely happy that the true church was killed. They kept the bodies of these witnesses in front of the people to remind them that they had been killed. This caused people to remain in subjection to man’s spiritual laws rather than God’s. There was great rejoicing because of the death of the true church.

The bodies of these witnesses were kept out of the grave for a period of 3½ days. The number “3½” is descriptive, indicating a time of great despair and confusion. “Days” are probably used here to indicate a shorter period of time than 3½ years or 1,260 days, which was used earlier in the chapter to represent the entire gospel age. We should not try to make calculations as to a literal amount of time referred to by these numbers, but we should view them as a description of things that are to take place during that period of time. The Dark Ages was definitely a time of

extreme despair and confusion concerning spiritual matters because the church was, for all practical purposes, nonexistent.

**Verse 10. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.**

The two witnesses are referred to in verse 10 as the two prophets. This again points to the fact that the two witnesses represent those who teach the Word of God because the term “prophet” refers to one who proclaims the Word sent from God. (See 10:11.) Therefore, these two prophets represent Christians who teach the Word of God with power. To be a witness for God is to prophesy or teach his Word. This teaching of God’s Word is exactly what tormented the people of the earth. To those who do not believe God’s Word, or do not want to follow it, the teaching of the truth torments them. It condemns their way of life and shows them to be eternally lost if they continue following the ways of Satan. This is why the people of the earth are described as rejoicing, making merry, and sending gifts to one another. They no longer had to listen to the teaching of the truth because the beast had made war against the church and had overcome it for a period of time.

**Verse 11. And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them.**

In our interpretation of chapter 11 as describing the history of the church throughout the gospel age, we have no problem equating verse 11 with the restoration of the church, which took place in the latter 1700s and early 1800s. This is when men such as James O’Kelley, Barton W. Stone, Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell, and others began to teach that the Bible should be used as the only authority for determining how man should worship God. By doing this, they began to preach the same gospel



that was preached by Christ and the apostles in the first century. This, in turn, brought the church back to life, or as it is described in this verse, the two prophets “stood upon their feet.” By using the Bible as our only creed, we can obey the same plan of salvation that made people members of the Lord’s church in the first century. Therefore, we are members of the same church, the Lord’s church, which was established on the day of Pentecost. The church is again alive and spreading throughout the world today.

**Verse 12. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.**

In chapter 11, major events concerning the church throughout the Christian dispensation are clearly outlined. First, God gave the church power to prophesy in this world. Second, the gospel spread throughout the known world during the first century. Third, forces from the devil, such as the civil authorities and the apostate church, made war against the church and killed it. Fourth, during the restoration movement, men began to teach the same pure gospel that was taught in the first century, and the church came to life again. Now, as explained in this verse, the next major event that will affect the church is its ascension to heaven. We should point out that no timetable is given. We have no way of knowing how much time will pass between the time the church was restored to life and its ascension to heaven. We do know that verse 12 takes us up to the end of time or the second coming of Christ. It also, along with verse 13, takes us to the end of the sixth trumpet. Since the trumpets deal with spiritual matters, nothing could fit the ending of this sixth trumpet any better than the ascension of God’s spiritual kingdom, the church, to heaven and the destruction of all things that claim to be spiritual, but are not.

Verse 12 also reinforces the interpretation of the “two witnesses” as representing the church because 1Cor. 15:24 says that the kingdom (the church) is what Christ will deliver up to God at the end of time.

**Verse 13. And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.**

The “same hour” places the events of verse 13 in the same time frame as that of verse 12. These events take place near or at the second coming of Christ. We know this because 10:6-7 states that there should be time no longer when the seventh angel shall begin to sound. Similarities of verses 12 and 13 and 6:12-16, which is the sixth seal, should be noted. The sixth seal described the end of all physical things of this earth, and these two verses, which bring to a close the events of the sixth trumpet, describe the end of all things that are considered spiritual in nature. In verse 12 the spiritual kingdom of God, his church, is called up to heaven. In verse 13 the great city that was spiritual in nature, yet not according to God’s plan, is destroyed.

In verse 13, a great earthquake causes the tenth part of the city to fall; slays seven thousand men, and causes the remainder of men to be frightened and give glory to God. Admittedly, the specific symbols of this verse are hard to understand; however, as stated above, the overall picture seems to be quite clear. The earthquake represents an event that will shake the earth and frighten men as never before in the history of the world. No event fits this description as well as the second coming of Christ. At that time, all men who have opposed God will be frightened and glorify God as never before. Also, in this earthquake, as a more accurate translation puts it, there were slain seven thousand names of men. The number of divine completeness is “7,” and “1000” represents ultimate completeness. The meaning seemingly intended here is that all men who claim to be divine or spiritual in nature, but actually oppose God, or do not follow God’s ways, will be slain. This means that God will put down all earthly powers and authority that claim to be spiritual in nature. At that time, all men will recognize that God is the only divine being, and that all of our

worship should be directed toward him – not toward men who may claim to be divine. The problem is: for them it will be too late.

One other question remains: What is meant by the tenth part of the city? The destruction of the great city, Babylon, is described several times in Revelation in different ways, but each time it describes total destruction. Consider the following passages:

18:21 – “Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.”

18:2 – “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit...”

16:19 – “And the great city was divided into three parts...”

14:8 – “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.”

11:13 – “A great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell,...”

The number “10” is used to signify human completeness. Therefore, if the tenth part of the city fell, it would no longer be complete. It would be fragmented. It would be completely destroyed.

**Verse 14. The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.**

Two of the three “woes” that were introduced in 8:13 have now passed. These woes are inflicted upon men who follow the ways of the devil, but Christians are exempt from their torments. (See 9:4.) The same is true with the third woe that follows. It pictures the final destruction in hell of those who oppose God and refuse to follow his ways.

## **THE SEVENTH TRUMPET: JUDGMENT**

**Verse 15. And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.**

The sounding of the seventh angel takes us into the time of the final judgment. This should be clear enough from verses such as 10:6-7, which state “that there should be time no longer” when the seventh angel begins to sound, but “the mystery of God should be finished.” Also verse 18 defines this seventh trumpet as “the time of the dead that they should be judged.”

It should be noted that the ASV translates the word “kingdom,” in singular form. “The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord” indicates that the church has been delivered up to God. And 1Cor. 15:24 says, “Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.” When this time of the seventh angel arrives, all things of this world will come to an end. Christ will deliver the kingdom up to God, and he will reign forever and ever. Heb. 1:3 shows that Christ is on the Throne of God, reigning in heaven today. When this seventh angel sounds, the things of this world will be no more, and the church will be taken to heaven to dwell with God eternally.

**Verse 16. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God,**

These twenty-four elders must be the same as those mentioned in 4:4. In this verse they fall upon their faces and worship God, which supports the idea that they represent the spiritual things of God. As the spiritual kingdom of this world is delivered up to God to live with him eternally, the spiritual beings that surround the throne immediately fall down and worship God because of this great event.

**Verse 17. Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.**

The twenty-four elders continue to praise God because the church has ascended to heaven. The key to verse 17 is the fact that the phrase “and art to come” is not in the actual text. This verse is similar to 1:8 and 4:8, which state that Christ is the one who is, who was, and who is to come. Then why is the phrase “art to come” left out of this verse? The answer is this: In the time of this seventh angel, he has already come the second time. Therefore, at this time he will be the one “who is” and “who was.” Notice it also says that he “hast reigned.” Christ is now reigning on his throne in heaven, and we are reigning with him. When the time of the seventh trumpet arrives, the reign of the church here on earth will come to an end, and it will be taken to heaven.

Another important point in verse 17 is that Christ was able to reign because he took unto himself his great power. When did he take this power? According to Rom 1:4, he was “declared to be the Son of God with power,... by the resurrection from the dead.” Also, Eph. 1:19-20 speaks of the mighty power of God “which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand.” Eph. 1:22 says that God “put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.” Christ received all power and began his reign over the church when he was resurrected from the dead and ascended to his throne in heaven.

Therefore, the idea being expressed in verse 17 is that the twenty-four elders are giving thanks unto Christ because he came to earth, died, and was resurrected; thereby, receiving great power and reigning over the church. Because he did this, he completed God’s plan for man and provided forgiveness of sins for all who are obedient to his will. Without this supreme sacrifice by our Lord, man could never have been reconciled unto God. This is why the twenty-four elders are giving thanks unto him. He made that sacrifice and reigned over the church. Therefore, in the

time of this seventh trumpet, the kingdom will be delivered up to God, and we will live with him forever and ever.

**Verse 18. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.**

This emphasizes the fact that the seventh angel takes us into the time of Judgment. At this time, God will judge the living and the dead. He will reward those who have been faithful to him and destroy all who have opposed him. "Destroy the earth" would be better translated as those who "corrupt the earth." This includes all those who have followed, or encouraged others to follow, the ways of Satan.

We might emphasize that the next event which will take place after the church ascends to heaven at the second coming of Christ (v. 12) will be Judgment. There will be no literal period of one thousand years for man to live in bliss upon this earth. When Christ comes the second time, man's eternity will be sealed. There will be no second chance. Those who have been obedient will live eternally with God, and those who have not will dwell eternally in the devil's hell.

**Verse 19. And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.**

The temple of God always refers to God's dwelling place. After Judgment, the eternal dwelling place of God will be opened in heaven, and those who have been faithful to him will dwell there eternally.

The ark of his testament is again symbolic of the inner sanctuary of God. Under the old law, the ark of the covenant was kept in the Holy of Holies, the dwelling place of God. When all of this is opened and visible, God's plan

for man will be completed, and we will be in our final eternal state.

The lightnings, voices, thunderings, earthquake, and great hail indicate the final conclusion of all things. They conclude this series of seven trumpets, just as this same type of language concludes the series of seven seals in 8:5 and the series of seven plagues in 16:18-21. This should help us understand the structure of the series of seals, trumpets and plagues. They all cover the same period of time, the gospel age, but describe different events that will take place throughout that age. Notice also that 15:8 says no man is able to enter into the temple of God until the seven plagues of the seven angels are fulfilled. This places the plagues in the same time frame as the first six trumpets because the temple of God is opened in the time of the seventh trumpet. At this time, man will be able to enter that temple, our final dwelling place, and dwell eternally with God.

<sup>1</sup>William Barclay, *The Revelation of John, Vol 2* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1960), p. 70.

<sup>2</sup>V E. Howard and J. L. Hines, *Study of Revelation* (Texarkana, Tex.: Central Printers and Publishers, 1967), p. 78.

<sup>3</sup>James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979), p. 240.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 239.



<sup>5</sup>Ray Summers, *Worthy Is the Lamb* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press 1951), p. 21.

# INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER 12

## PHYSICAL/SPIRITUAL PARALLELS

The great parallel between Israel and the church is vitally important in understanding the symbols used in this chapter. The part of this parallel that helps us interpret this chapter is the section dealing with the wilderness wanderings.

### A Parallel Comparison of Israel and the Church

Israel	REDEEMER	Moses	Nourished on Manna	JORDAN	Promised Land
Bondage in Egypt					Israel in Wilderness
All Mankind	BLOOD	Christ	Nourished on Word	2nd COMING	Promised Land
Bondage in Sin					Church in Spiritual Wilderness

In the same manner as Israel wandered in the wilderness and suffered the hardships of this physical world, the church is living in the spiritual wilderness of sin in the world today. In a spiritual comparison, Christians are constantly fighting battles against sin in the likeness of Israel fighting literal battles of warfare against their physical enemies. After the law of Moses was given on Mt.



Sinai, the children of Israel wandered for forty years as they awaited entrance into their promised land. Likewise, Christ gave his law on spiritual Mt. Zion, and those who obey that law (Christians) begin a period of spiritual wanderings in a world of sin, awaiting their promised land of heaven.

Another parallel that may be drawn from this is how God nourishes his people. In the wilderness, Israel was nourished on literal manna. Today, the church is nourished on spiritual manna, which is the Word of the Lord. (See Jn. 6:31-35).

## CHAPTER 12

The subject of chapter 12 is a glorious woman who is clothed with the sun and has the moon under her feet. She is also wearing a crown of twelve stars. Reasons will be given in the text of this chapter that will identify this woman as the complete church of God of all ages. The church being described as a woman is in agreement with other passages throughout the New Testament. The church is referred to as the “bride” of Christ in 21:9. In Rom. 7:4, the church is described as being married to Christ. Christ is the bridegroom; the church is the bride.

The church, being described as a glorious woman, is also a contrast to the “great harlot” of chapter 17. The great harlot is symbolic of those who commit spiritual fornication or are unfaithful to God. The glorious woman represents the true church of God, or those who are faithful to him.

It is also important to understand the overall context of the visions throughout the chapter. The following is a brief overlook at the events contained in this chapter.

## First Vision

- v. 1..... The woman appears.
- v. 2..... She was about to deliver a child.
- v. 3-4.... The great red dragon appears and attempts to devour the child.
- v. 5..... The child is caught up to the Throne of God.
- v. 6..... The woman flees into the wilderness and is nourished by God.

## Second Vision

- v. 7..... There is war in heaven.
- v. 8-9 ... The devil and his angels are cast out of heaven.
- v. 10..... Salvation, strength, the kingdom, and the power of Christ comes.
- v. 11..... People overcome the devil by the blood of the Lamb.
- v.12-13. The devil goes out to persecute the woman.
- v. 14..... The woman goes into the wilderness.
- v. 14..... The woman is nourished by God.
- v. 15..... The devil attempts to destroy the woman.
- v. 16..... The devil is unable to destroy the woman.
- v. 17..... The devil goes out to make war against the seed of he woman, or those who keep the commandments of God.

One other symbol that must be discussed in order to properly interpret chapter 12 is the number “3½.” Verse 6 says that God will feed the church for a period of 1,260 days. In verse 14, the church is described as being nourished “for a time, and times, and half a time.” To “nourish” the church and “feed” the church would be equivalent. Therefore, the period of 1,260 days is the same period of time as the “time, times, and half a time.” The “time” (1); “times” (2); and “half a time” (½); totals 3½. If we take the Jewish calendar year of 360 days and multiply that by 3½, the result is 1,260 days, or the same period of time as 3½ years.

Many people fail to understand this great chapter because they seek to interpret these numbers literally. The numbers

are figurative; they describe the nature of the time period being discussed. In this case the number “3½” means a time of despair, confusion, and longing. For the church to wander in the wilderness for a period of 1,260 days means that it is in a time of despair, suffering many persecutions, and longing for the coming of her bridegroom. This is the situation of the church today as it wanders in the wilderness of this world. This is a likeness to the forty years of Israel wandering in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses. This was a time of great despair for those people as they awaited entrance into their promised land of Canaan. The difference in the situation of the children of Israel and the church today is that Israel was a physical kingdom; however, the church is a spiritual kingdom. We are in a spiritual kingdom today wandering upon this earth in a time of despair and waiting for our spiritual promised land of heaven. From this we see that the 3½ years; 1,260 days; and a time, times, and half a time all represent this entire gospel age. It will last until Christ returns.

In order to complete our understanding of the number “3½,” we must discuss one other symbolic number that can be derived from this number – forty-two months (11:2; 13:5). Forty-two months is also equivalent to 1,260 days or 3½ years. Forty-two months multiplied by 30 days per month yields 1,260 days. Also, 3½ multiplied by 12 months per year yields 42 months. All of these numbers are used to describe the nature of the situation in which the church exists in this world today.

It is significant to note that the symbolic forty-two months is always used when referring to this gospel age as a time of physical persecution of the church. (See 13:5; 11:2.) The number “1,260” is used in connection with spiritual trials that the church must face (v. 6; 11:3). This is in keeping with the use of the number “4” to represent physical things and the number “12” to refer to religious matters.

With these things in mind, it becomes apparent that the subject of chapter 12 is the church of our Lord, which is represented by the glorious woman. Information is given

concerning the church as it exists in the world all during this Christian dispensation. Events are pictured that lead up to the first coming of the Messiah and the establishment of the church. We are told how the church is fed and protected by God as Satan goes about seeking to destroy it. Information is also given concerning how an ungodly world will help create a situation that will allow the true church to exist. It is our hope that a study of this marvelous chapter will greatly increase our understanding of the true church and how it dwells in the spiritual wilderness of this world during this Christian age.

## **THE WOMAN, THE CHILD, AND THE DRAGON**

**Verse 1. And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars:**

With the appearance of this great wonder or sign in heaven, a new vision begins. This great wonder was a glorious woman about to give birth to a man child (v. 5). As will be discussed later, this man child must be Jesus, so this woman must represent that which made it possible for him to come into this world. There are two possible explanations of the symbolism. One is that this woman represents the physical mother of Jesus; the other is that she represents the Jewish system of religion that God established in order to maintain a direct line of descendants from Abraham to Jesus Christ. We can immediately eliminate Mary, the physical mother of Jesus, as the correct meaning of this symbol because of the inability of this interpretation to agree with the symbolism of the woman in verses 6 and 13-17. Therefore, we must conclude that this woman represents the Jewish system of religion, the old law, which was used by God to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah (Gal. 3:24). Gal. 3:14 says that the blessing of Abraham would come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ. Jesus is referred to as the seed of Abraham in Gal. 3:16. Gal. 3:19 states that the old law was given

because of transgressions until the seed (Jesus) should come. The old law was established to prepare the world for the coming of Christ. Therefore, the woman must represent those under the old law or the church of the Old Testament. Act 7:38 says, "This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and *with* our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:" The symbol of the glorious woman must also be used to represent the church of the New Testament because she is spoken of in verse 6 as fleeing into the wilderness after Jesus is caught up to heaven.

This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that this woman has a crown of twelve stars upon her head. The number "12" is used to represent organized religion. The old law was given to the twelve tribes of Israel, and the new law was given by the twelve apostles. The crown of twelve stars represents the authority of the glorious woman, which was given to her by God.

This woman was clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet. The sun and moon are often used to represent the ability to give spiritual light unto the world. This is exactly the case here. The glorious woman, which represents the church, is the light of the world today as it has been throughout the ages.

**Verse 2. And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.**

As discussed in verse 1, the old law was given to prepare the world for Christ. This verse brings us to the time of the first coming of Christ. Just as a woman has great pain immediately prior to the birth of a baby, the world was in great need of a Messiah. The way had been prepared for Christ, and the world needed a Savior. The Jewish system of religion was about to produce the Messiah who would be the Savior of the world.

**Verse 3. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.**

Another wonder appeared in heaven – a great red dragon. According to verse 9, this great red dragon was the devil. The dragon had seven heads and ten horns; the meaning of which will be discussed at length in chapters 13 and 17. Briefly, the seven heads represent governmental powers that have controlled the world throughout the ages, and the ten horns represent kings and kingdoms that later arise in this world with great authority. (See 17:9-12.) One relationship that should be discussed here is that this same description is used to describe the beast out of the sea in 13:1, and the beast that carried the scarlet woman in chapter 17. This should make it clear that these beasts, which are described later in the book, are manifestations of the devil. They are powers that have been in force here on earth all throughout the history of the world and are doing the work of the devil. The devil has always used man to carry out his evil deeds and will continue to do so until the end of time.

The red dragon also has crowns upon his heads, which represent the power and authority he uses to cause many people to follow him instead of Christ.

**Verse 4. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.**

The great red dragon, the devil, is pictured as destroying the third part of the stars of heaven. To determine the meaning of the stars, let us refer back to 1:16 where Christ is pictured holding seven stars in his right hand. These stars must represent those people who are faithful to him – Christians. This interpretation is reinforced by the use of “heaven” in the remainder of chapter 12 as being symbolic of the dwelling place of the righteous. This is in contrast to the “earth,” which symbolizes the dwelling place of those who are in sin. The “stars of heaven” represent God’s people who live during any age.

The third part of these stars are cast down to the earth. Again, this “third part” is not a literal number, but instead,

as explained in chapter 8, it represents the spiritual part of man. Therefore, this symbolism shows the ability of the devil to destroy the spiritual part of God's people. Notice the devil possessed this ability to destroy the "third part" of man before Christ was born. Under the Law of Moses, man lived in a state of sin because he could not obtain forgiveness under that law unless he lived it perfectly. Therefore, as long as the Law of Moses was in force, the devil could destroy the spiritual part of God's people. This is why he stood before this glorious woman seeking to devour Christ as soon as he was born. He knew that Christ could provide forgiveness of sins and this would destroy his powers. (See Heb. 2:14-15.)

The power the devil exhibits in destroying the "third part" of the stars would lead us to believe that he would have the strength to destroy a baby as soon as it was born, but this is not the case. The child was the Son of God with power to overcome the devil. This is exactly the concept explained in verses 7 through 12, which describe the war in heaven. Christ overcame the devil and was caught up to heaven (v. 5). This made it possible for us to overcome the devil in our lives today.

**Verse 5. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.**

The only logical interpretation of verse 5 is that this man child is Jesus Christ. In 19:15 a description is given of someone riding a white horse who rules the nations with a rod of iron. According to 19:16, this rider is definitely Jesus Christ because he is called King of kings and Lord of lords. Therefore, Jesus must be the man child born of this woman, who was to rule the nations with a rod of iron.

If Jesus is the one being described here, then what does it mean to rule the nations with a rod of iron? Again, in 19:11-16 Christ is described as riding a white horse and leading armies clothed in white. These armies clothed in white must be Christians who go forth into the world proclaiming the gospel to all nations. Therefore, the rod of

iron that Christ uses to rule the nations must be the law which he gave man to follow – the gospel.

Another major event described in verse 5 is the ascension of Jesus to heaven where he assumes his place on God's Throne. The entire life of Jesus is covered in this one verse. Probably, the reason for this is to emphatically define the exact identity of the man child. There can be little doubt that the man child is Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Verse 6. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.**

The "wilderness" is a familiar symbol taken from accounts in the Old Testament concerning the forty years of wilderness wanderings by the children of Israel. The spiritual kingdom of God, the church, is in a period of time today likened unto that period of wilderness wanderings. After the Law of Moses was given on Mt. Sinai, the children of Israel entered into a forty-year period of wanderings in the wilderness before entering their promised land. The same is true with the church today. The law of Christ was given in Jerusalem, Mt. Zion (Mic. 4:2), and the church is now wandering in this world, awaiting our promised land which is heaven.

Verse 6 is a description of the church entering into a period of time comparable to the wanderings of the children of Israel in the Old Testament. During this time the church will dwell in a world of sin. It will be attacked from every side by the forces of evil. The major difference in these times is that we are now in a spiritual kingdom, rather than a physical kingdom. The physical kingdom of the Old Testament was a likeness of the spiritual kingdom, which was established by Christ (Heb. 10:1). The church wanders today in despair and dissatisfaction, yet longing and hoping for the second coming of Christ when he will take us out of this present world to our promised land of heaven.

This helps us understand why this period of time,



covering the entire gospel age, is described as 1,260 days. This number “1,260” is another form of the number “3½,” or a time, times, and half a time (v. 14). It is used to describe a time of despair, dissatisfaction, or longing. Therefore, the number “1,260” shows what this period of time holds in store for those who seek to follow Christ. The “1,260 days” is a figurative description of the entire gospel age and not to be understood as a literal 1,260 days. (For more information, refer to the introduction of this chapter.)

We should also note in this verse that, even though the woman fled into the wilderness, she had a place that was prepared by God where he feeds her. This, like many other passages in Revelation, describes God’s protection and care for his people. Christians feed upon, and are nourished by, God’s Word, the Bible. In Acts 20:28, Paul admonishes the elders of the church at Ephesus to “feed the church of God.” As Christians wandering in this wilderness of a world of sin, we must constantly feed upon the Word of God. It will nourish our spiritual lives and give us strength to remain faithful through the many trials we must face.

## THE DEVIL CAST FROM HEAVEN

**Verse 7. And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,**

A great deal of discussion and many different interpretations have been presented concerning the meaning of the next few verses, which describe a war in heaven. One problem faced in interpreting this passage is determining the correct placement in time of the events of this war. Some people place it before the beginning of time; thereby, using this passage to determine the origin of Satan. Others believe that its fulfillment is yet to come. Still others believe it took place at the time of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection. We believe this latter interpretation is closest to being correct. We must keep clearly in mind that we are dealing with figurative symbols and visions that were shown to the apostle John, not literal events. Therefore, we

must look for the symbolic meaning of the “war in heaven.”

To properly interpret verse 7 would be almost impossible without first having a general understanding of verses 9 through 11. It might be helpful to study those verses before coming to any definite conclusions about this verse. We will point out a few facts that must be understood at this time and give a more complete discussion of each symbol in the verses to follow. Verse 9 states that the devil and his angels were cast out into the earth, and verse 10 lists some things that happened because of that casting out. We know this to be true because of the phrase “now is come.” The things that came about because the devil was cast out of heaven were: (1) salvation, (2) strength, (3) the kingdom of God, and (4) the power of Christ. When did all of these things take place? The undeniable answer to that question is: at the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it becomes clear that the devil was cast out of heaven and down to the earth when Jesus was resurrected from the dead.

With these facts in mind, the next question to answer is: What does it mean to be cast out of heaven into the earth? In Eph. 2:5-6, Paul writes that God has “quickened us together with Christ” and has “made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” In this text the “heavenly places” is the dwelling place of those who are resurrected from the grave of sin. When we become Christians, we are resurrected from a life of sin to a state of sinlessness in Christ. Those who are in this state of sinlessness, or have their sins forgiven, are those who are in the Lord’s church. Therefore, the “heavenly places” is symbolic of the dwelling place of those who have their sins forgiven – the church.

The war being described here is the war whereby the devil was cast out of the dwelling place of God’s people. This simply defines the power of the devil before Jesus was resurrected to his power afterwards. Before Jesus became the sacrifice for our sins by his death, there was no forgiveness of sins. In that respect, Satan was in control. However, after Christ was resurrected from the dead, Satan

lost his power because man's sins could be forgiven.

The only way man could be reconciled unto God was by a perfect sacrifice, and until this happened man was in a lost state because he had no forgiveness of sins. His sins were remembered again each year because the blood of animal sacrifices could not take away sins (Heb. 10:3-4). When Jesus died on the cross, he became a sacrifice for the sins of those under the old law, as well as for those under the new law (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:15). This is how Satan was cast out of heaven. After Jesus died, man could get complete forgiveness of his sins, and the devil would have absolutely no control over him. He was cast down! Heb. 2:14 says that Christ through his death might “destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” This power of death was spiritual death because Jesus gave us spiritual life through his death. The meaning of this passage is close to that of 20:2, which describes Satan as being bound for one thousand years. The difference being; in this verse Satan is cast down, but 20:2 shows that he is bound by the gospel. So, he can never be in control again as long as man remains faithful to God.

This brings us to the point of defining exactly what this “war in heaven” was and when it took place. We should not think of this war as an isolated event. It is obvious that the dragon, or devil, was defeated in this war when Jesus died for our sins; however, this war had been in progress since the time Adam and Eve disobeyed God and sinned. Since that time, the devil had contended with God for the souls of man and was in control as long as there was no forgiveness of sins. When Christ died, he won that war; cast the devil out of heaven, and allowed him to have spiritual control over only those who are disobedient to God’s law. Satan was cast out of heaven, which is the spiritual dwelling place of God, the church, and down to the earth, which represents the dwelling place of those who disobey God.

**Verse 8. And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.**

The devil and his angels were defeated. They were cast

out of heaven. This simply means that the devil no longer has any control over God's people. The complete forgiveness of sins has been obtained. This is not to say that the devil does not tempt Christians, because he obviously does. This means that as long as a person continues to be faithful and walk in the ways of our Lord, the devil cannot touch him. The place where God's people dwell; where our sins are forgiven, and where the devil is not allowed is that spiritual dwelling place of God here on earth – the church of our Lord.

**Verse 9. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.**

This makes certain the identification of the great red dragon of verse 3 as the devil. Until Christ made the sacrifice for our sins, the devil had the ability to deceive the whole world because forgiveness of sins was not available at that time. When Jesus made the forgiveness of sins possible, the devil and his angels were cast out of heaven and into the earth. The earth is used to symbolize the dwelling place of the devil and his followers. This is in contrast to heaven, which symbolizes the church, or the dwelling place of Jesus and his followers.

**Verse 10. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.**

When the devil and his angels were cast out of heaven, salvation came to man. This pinpoints the time the devil was cast out of heaven as being when Christ died on the cross. This is also the time when the kingdom of God was given to man. Although the church was not established until the day of Pentecost, the old law was fulfilled when Christ died. It came to an end (Col. 2:14). The testament, or will, of our Lord went into effect when he died. A person's

will goes into effect after he is dead, but the terms of that will are not known until it is read. This is exactly how Jesus gave us the new law. When he died on the cross, his will went into effect, but the terms of that will were not read until the day of Pentecost (Heb. 9:15-17).

The power of Christ also came when the devil was cast down to the earth. Rom. 1:4 says that Jesus was “declared to be the Son of God with power,... by the resurrection from the dead.” Therefore, this also points to the fact that the devil was cast out of heaven and down to the earth when Jesus died and was resurrected from the dead.

The devil is spoken of as accusing “our brethren,” or God’s people, before God day and night. Satan had been able to do this all through Old Testament times. He accused them because their sins were unforgiven. When Christ died to forgive those sins, Satan could no longer accuse them. He lost that war and is no longer able to accuse God’s people of sin because they stand sinless in his sight.

The phrase “day and night” simply indicates a continual process. He was able to constantly accuse God’s people of sin until they received forgiveness.

**Verse 11. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.**

In verse 10, those who were being accused before God day and night were referred to as “our brethren.” This must refer to the people of God of all ages because all those who follow God, regardless of whether they lived under the old law or the new law, overcame the devil by the blood of the Lamb. The blood of Christ was man’s atonement for sin unto God. This again is further proof that the “casting down” of the devil took place when Jesus died on the cross. The devil accused “our brethren day and night” until they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, the casting down is symbolic of man receiving the forgiveness of his sins. The devil can no longer accuse God’s people of being sinners because they have obeyed his commandments and received the forgiveness of their sins.

The word of their testimony must refer to the gospel that was given by our Lord after his death. Many Christians have “loved not their lives unto the death” because they have been required to give their physical lives in order to remain faithful to Christ, thereby preserving their spiritual lives.

**Verse 12. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.**

Heaven is symbolic of the spiritual dwelling place of Christians – the church. The earth and sea represent the dwelling place of those who are living in sin (Eph. 1:3,20; 2:6). Christians are told to rejoice because they are dwelling in the spiritual heavenly place where the devil has no control over them. Those who are dwelling in the earth, or the place of spiritual wickedness, are warned that the devil is among them having great wrath. The only people the devil can control are those who are sinful in the sight of God. We must emphasize that this does not mean the devil cannot tempt God’s people, because he can. It means that he has no power over them as long as they remain faithful.

The devil is angry because he knows that he has only a “short time,” and verses 13 through 17 describe the actions of the devil during this period of time. This “short time” must represent the remainder of time here on earth, or the gospel age. He will spend this time persecuting the church (v. 13), or those who keep the commandments of God (v. 17). With man’s understanding of time, it is hard to realize how this could be a “short time,” but in terms of eternity, the gospel age will be short. When Christ died on the cross, the devil must have realized that his doom was sealed. He will tempt all men and persecute the church until the end of time. Then, according to 20:10, he will be cast into the lake of fire where he will be tormented forever. To the devil, this indeed must be a “short time.”

## THE DRAGON PERSECUTES THE WOMAN

**Verse 13. And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.**

We must once again identify this woman as the system of religion, or worship, that God has designed for mankind throughout the ages. In our Christian age, this woman would be the spiritual kingdom of God, his church. When the devil was cast out of heaven into the earth, he immediately began to persecute the church. This woman had brought forth the man child (Jesus) who was responsible for casting Satan from heaven to earth. This destroyed the devil's power over man by making the forgiveness of sin available.

**Verse 14. And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent**

This verse is similar to verse 6. Just as in verse 6, this verse pictures the church as fleeing into the wilderness, which is a place prepared by God where he will feed and protect his people. (See v. 6 for a discussion of the wilderness symbol.)

The woman was given two wings of an eagle to fly into the wilderness. Since this is a place of nourishment, it indicates that God protects his people and has made a way for them to escape the temptations of the devil. In Ex. 19:4, God uses this same type of symbolism to describe how he delivered the children of Israel from the hands of the Egyptians. This woman flying into the wilderness is a picture of the church today. God provides Christians a place of protection from the devil when he forgives our sins, and he nourishes us through his Word.

The symbol "time, and times, and half a time" is used in this verse instead of "a thousand two hundred and threescore days" (v. 6). It should now become clear that both of these symbols, which are types of the number "3

½,” are used to represent the same period of time – the entire gospel age. God will nourish and feed his people all through the Christian dispensation. Therefore, this “time, and times, and half a time” must be symbolic of this entire Christian dispensation. It describes the nature of this wilderness wandering as a time of despair as we long for the spiritual promised land of heaven. (See the introduction of this chapter for a discussion of the number “3½.”)

**Verse 15. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.**

The serpent, as mentioned in verse 13, goes out to persecute and, if possible, destroy the woman, which is the church. This is exactly what the devil is doing today. He is constantly at work tempting and persecuting God’s people and trying to do anything possible to cause the faithful to turn from God. The symbolism used to describe this is a flood of water proceeding out of the serpent’s mouth to carry the woman away. In 22:1 and 17, the Word of God (the gospel) is referred to as the water of life proceeding out of the Throne of God. Therefore, water out of the mouth of Satan would symbolize all manners of false teachings, lying, and deceit that he and his followers use to attack and, if it were possible, destroy the church.

**Verse 16. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.**

This is an interesting verse because it states that in some way the earth, which symbolizes the dwelling place of those people other than Christians, actually assists the church in her battle against the devil. It is hard to say exactly how this happens. Most likely it means that there are people who are not members of the Lord’s church who actually oppose many of the ways of the devil. If we look at the world today, we can observe this very situation. There are many who are not members of the Lord’s church because they have not obeyed the gospel, yet they believe



in Jesus, teach others about him and vigorously oppose the ways of Satan. They have been deceived into believing that partial obedience is acceptable.

These people actually make it easier for the true church to exist. If the world were completely void of any spirituality, other than those who are members of the church, it would be difficult for the church to exist at all because of the unrestrained evil that would prevail. Rev. 20:7-9 seems to suggest that a situation such as this might occur prior to, but very near, the second coming of Christ. Therefore, those people who are spiritually minded yet not members of the Lord's church, actually serve a purpose here on earth by creating a situation that will enable the true church to exist. In this manner they assist the woman by swallowing up the flood cast out by the devil.

One side note here should prove beneficial as you pursue your private studies of Revelation. The "earth" seems to be used symbolically in several places to indicate those people who are spiritual in nature but not members of the church. This is in contrast to the "sea," which is symbolic of the masses of people who dwell in this world who do not believe in Jesus. In other places, the "sea" seems to include both of these groups. This type of symbolism becomes apparent in chapter 12 where "heaven" is used to represent the dwelling place of Christians – the church, and the "earth" is the dwelling place of sinners.

**Verse 17. And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ**

Because the devil no longer has any control over those who are in the church, he goes forth to persecute and tempt them in any way possible. The "remnant of her seed" is defined as those who keep the commandments of God. They are Christians. They are referred to as the remainder of her seed because Jesus was the first seed the woman brought forth. (See vv. 2, 5.) Gal. 3:16 describes Christ as the seed (singular) of Abraham, and Gal. 3:29 describes

those who are “in Christ” (Christians) as being the seed of Abraham. Therefore, the promise God made to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through him was fulfilled by his seed. That “seed” was Christ. As Christians we are the remnant of that seed because we keep the commandments of God.

They also have the testimony of Jesus, which means it is our duty as believers to teach and preach the Word. This is how Jesus is known in the world today. (See 1 Jn. 5:10.)

## CHAPTER 13

In order to properly interpret chapter 13, we must first determine the symbolic meaning of a “beast” by using the Bible as our guide. In Daniel 7, the term “beast” is used symbolically in a manner similar to the way it is used in this chapter. Daniel sees a vision of four great beasts coming up out of the sea and, according to Dan. 7:16, he did not understand the meaning of the vision and asked to be told the interpretation. In Dan. 7:17, he was told that the four “beasts” were four kings that would arise out of the earth. Therefore, the symbolic meaning of “beast” is “king,” or more specifically “kingdom,” as will be discussed later. In Dan. 7:18, Daniel was told that the saints of God would take the kingdom and possess it forever. We know the kingdom that the saints possessed was the church. From Dan. 7:23 & 27, we learn that the saints possessed this kingdom during the time of the fourth beast. Daniel then asked if he might be told the meaning of the fourth beast because it was exceedingly dreadful (v. 19). Verse 23 defines this fourth beast as the fourth kingdom upon the earth. This was to be a worldwide kingdom because it says he “shall devour the whole earth.” The fourth worldwide kingdom to arise from the time of Daniel was the Roman Empire, and this was also when Christ established his kingdom, which will last forever. Daniel lived during the time of the Babylonian Empire. Persia and Greece followed, with Rome being the fourth. Therefore, the “beast” is a symbolic term used to represent governmental forces that rule in this world.

## THE BEAST OUT OF THE SEA

The first beast in chapter 13 rises up out of the sea and has seven heads and ten horns. As with many of the symbols in Revelation, there are several proposed interpretations of

these seven heads, but there is only one that keeps the biblical meaning of the “beast” clearly intact. It states that these seven heads represent the seven worldwide kingdoms, which have existed throughout the



history of the world, namely Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and the Holy Roman Empire, which arose after the time of the writing of Revelation. Possibly many refuse to accept this interpretation because of the criticisms of false religion that are necessary if this interpretation is used; however, Coffman says he has reached this conclusion with “enthusiasm and confidence.”<sup>1</sup> The beast represents the forces of civil government that oppose God and his people, and the seven heads of this beast represent the seven governments, which have at one time controlled the major portion of the world. We might also add that since the number “7” represents divine completeness, the possibility of another worldwide kingdom arising must not be ruled out. But, we consider this unlikely because of the interpretation of the ten horns, which will be discussed later. Also, 17:11 states that an eighth beast does exist, which leads to the conclusion that these numbers have a numeric value as well as symbolic.

Since the number “7” symbolizes divine completeness, this indicates that all of these worldwide kingdoms have existed because God desired it. All we have to do to know

that this is true is read the account of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 4. In that chapter, both verses 25 and 32 state that God will give the kingdom of men to "whomsoever he will."

This interpretation is also in complete agreement with the symbolism used in Rev. 17. In 17:9, the seven heads are defined as seven mountains. In Jer. 51:24-25 & 29, a "mountain" is used symbolically to represent a strong nation or government that oppresses God's people. Significantly enough, the "mountain" in that passage represents Babylon, which is one of the seven governments that at one time controlled the world. Since we know the seven heads are seven mountains and that Babylon is represented as a "mountain," this interpretation is founded on biblical usages of these terms. (For more on this particular reasoning, see comments on 17:8, 9.)

One other fact about this beast is that it has ten horns. In 17:12, these ten horns are defined as ten kings, or kingdoms, that will arise after the seventh head of this beast has fallen. (See 17:10.) Since "10" is the number that stands for human completeness, this shows that many kingdoms will have power in the world during the time of the "10 kings." The beast, or the powers of civil government, will be made up of many different nations, and each will possess a portion of the worldwide power of civil government. (For more information, see comments on 17:12.)

The final destiny of this beast is given in 19:20. It will be "cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone."

## **THE BEAST OUT OF THE EARTH**

The second beast described in chapter 13 is the beast out of the earth that has two horns. Since it is a beast, we immediately recognize that it represents the power of civil government. In addition to that, the beast had the power to force people to make an image to the beast and worship it (v. 15). Therefore, the beast controlled, not only the physical actions of man, but his spiritual worship also. This

is the meaning of the two horns. It was a twofold beast. It possessed civil powers and spiritual powers.

Because of these spiritual powers, this beast is also called a “false prophet” in 16:13 and 19:20. This shows that the beast was a false religious power and caused many people to worship in ways other than those designed by God. Rev. 19:20 also explains the final destiny of this false prophet. It, too, will be cast into the lake of fire.

The beast out of the earth is the healing of the beast that received the death wound as described in verse 3. The beast out of the sea represents the Roman Empire that was wounded to death. The Roman Empire was resurrected in the form of the Holy Roman Empire, which is represented by the beast out of the earth. This was the healing of the death wound. (See comments on 17:8.) We know this is correct because verse 12 says that the beast out of the earth exercised all the power of the first beast, the beast out of the sea, whose deadly wound was healed. The religious power of this beast was that of the apostate church, which eventually manifested itself in the form of Roman Catholicism. (There is much additional information concerning this interpretation in the text of this chapter.)

## THE FIRST BEAST

**Verse 1. And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.**

As the vision begins, John is standing upon the sand of the sea watching a seven-headed beast rise up out of that sea. We should not try to determine which sea this was, or exactly where John was standing, because these symbols are figurative, not literal. Although we might not be able to determine with any absolute certainty the meaning of the sea, it probably represents the masses of people dwelling upon the earth as explained in 12:16. The seven-headed beast, as explained in the introduction, represents the civil governments that control the world. Therefore, this vision describes the governmental powers of the world, which rise

up to control the people of the world.

The seven-headed beast has ten horns and ten crowns representing the power and authority of these civil governments. The names of blasphemy were written upon the heads of the beast. This shows that many governments of the world are opposed to its citizens worshipping the true God and are hostile to the practice of Christianity. Some governments may attempt to destroy all forms of religion and even go so far as to attempt to break the bonds of the family.

**Verse 2. And the beast which I saw was like unto 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 him his power, and his seat, and great authority.**

This beast out of the sea is described as being like a leopard; having the feet of a bear, and the mouth of a lion. These are figurative descriptions of some of the characteristics of these ungodly civil governments. This shows that these governments possess great powers of destruction. Many governments throughout the history of the world have controlled their people by the use of physical force, violence, hardships, and persecutions. Many times these forces have been used to prevent God's people from worshipping him, or to demand that they worship according to laws established by man. Just because we live in a nation that offers freedom of religion, we should not lose sight of forces which exist in this world that seek to prohibit God's people from worshipping him.

The power that these governmental forces possess is from the dragon, or the devil. This is one of the manifestations of the devil present on the earth today. The devil uses these forces to attack the church and attempt to destroy it. As was stated in 12:17, the devil has gone out to "make war" against the church.

**Verse 3. And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast.**

This verse should virtually prove to the serious student of Revelation that the beast does not represent any one person or king. If the heads of this beast represented successive kings of the Roman Empire, then one of them would have died and later been resurrected to life again. For Christians, who believe the Bible, to accept an interpretation such as this is hard to fathom. Even so, many conservative commentators interpret the head that was slain as the Roman Emperor Nero, and they seek to find the answer to the resurrection spoken of in verse 3 in a Roman myth of that time, which promoted the idea that Nero would be resurrected. Again, to base an interpretation of the Revelation of Jesus Christ on a myth, which may not have even existed, is almost absurd. Obviously, we realize that Nero was not resurrected, and to base an interpretation on a myth such as this is simply an effort to make these symbols fit a situation, rather than seeking to determine what the symbols really mean.

The meaning of this symbolism lies in the fact that the Roman Empire was destroyed and resurrected again in the form of the Holy Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was destroyed in A.D. 476, and came back into power in the form of the Holy Roman Empire with the coronation of Charlemagne by Pope Leo III on Christmas Day, A.D. 800. This completed the alliance between the Roman government and the Papacy. For several hundred years to follow, these two powers worked together as they forced people to worship according to the edicts of the Pope. (See 13:15-17.) Those who would not submit were sought out, imprisoned, tortured, and even put to death. This cast the world into a period of time known as the Dark Ages. During this time, the Bible was chained to pulpits and only “priests” were allowed to read it. (For further information on this, consult articles on subjects such as the “Holy Roman Empire,” “Papal Inquisition,” “Spanish Inquisition,” and the “Middle Ages.”)

When the death wound of the Roman Empire was healed and it regained its powers in the form of the Holy Roman Empire, the world wondered after the beast. This would be



true because the vast majority of the world was directly under its control. Also, for a government as strong as the Roman Empire to fall and then rise again to regain its powers would be a feat the entire world would view with amazement.

**Verse 4. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?**

The dragon, which was defined in 12:9 as the devil, gave power unto this beast. Because of this, we recognize that the beast, or those governmental forces that oppose and persecute God's people, receives its powers from the devil. These forces are active in the world today as they make war against God's people, which is described in 12:17.

Notice that the people of the world are worshipping two things. They worship the beast and the devil, which gave power unto this beast. To worship this beast would be the same as worshipping the devil who provided the beast with its powers. As Christians we should be extremely careful to keep our priorities in order. We are members of God's kingdom first. We are subjects of our king in heaven – Christ Jesus our Lord. As Phil. 3:20 states, "Our conversation (citizenship) is in heaven;..." We must live in this world and be subject to the earthly powers that govern it, but we must also remember that many of the laws that governments bind upon their people originate with the devil.

This interpretation of this beast as being the Roman Empire reincarnated in the form of the Holy Roman Empire is strengthened by the fact that they worshiped this beast. The Holy Roman Empire thrived because it existed in conjunction with the apostate church, which devised laws for man to follow in his worship to God. This was totally against God's will and a perfect example of a government that received its power from the devil. The two questions that people asked at the end of this verse indicate that there was no force on earth that was equal to it. The Holy Roman

Empire possessed tremendous physical and spiritual powers over the people of the world.

**Verse 5. And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.**

Out of the mouth of this beast came great speakings and blasphemies. This indicates that the governments in power upon this earth have the ability to speak, or do great things in the sight of men. Many times people are so overwhelmed by the powers possessed by worldly governments that they are fooled into thinking that these governments are the most powerful forces in existence. This leads many people to forget about God and put their trust in the earthly forces of men. (See v. 13-14.) Not only does this beast speak great things, he also speaks blasphemies. This would be only natural because their power comes from the devil. Many governments that exist in the world today seek to destroy all forms of religion because they see it as a threat to their own powers.

This beast was given power to exist forty-two months. This period of time represents the entire gospel age, just as it did in 11:2. The time period of “42 months” is used instead of “1,260 days,” or a time, times, and half a time, because it indicates a period of time when God’s people will suffer great hardships or persecutions. (See the introduction to chapter 12 for a discussion of the number 3½, which includes the symbolic forty-two months.)

**Verse 6. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven.**

This is a figurative expression indicating that these civil governments blaspheme God, his church, and all Christians.

In Old Testament times, the tabernacle was used by the Israelites as a place to perform their religious exercises. It contained the Holy of Holies, which was the dwelling place of God. Today, the church is a likeness to that tabernacle. It

is where we as Christians offer our worship to God. It is also the dwelling place of God as he dwells with his people here on earth. (See 21:3; 2Cor. 6:16.)

“Them that dwell in heaven” is a direct reference to Christians. This same symbolism is used in 12:12 to describe Christians as dwelling in God’s kingdom, the church. Eph. 1:3 and 2:6 describe Christians as dwelling in “heavenly places in Christ,” and we know that to be “in Christ” means to be in the church. Therefore, Christians symbolically dwell in heavenly places while here on earth. This is the place where God’s people dwell today and have their sins forgiven by the blood of Christ.

Therefore, the idea being conveyed by the symbolism in verse 6 is that the beast, or ungodly civil governments that draw their power from the devil, speak strong sayings against God, his church, and his people. They do everything within their power to destroy religion, or worship of any kind, so that they may have complete control of their populace, both body and soul.

**Verse 7. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.**

This is similar to 12:17, which speaks of the devil going forth to make war against God’s people. This beast (wicked governments) receives its power from Satan, which makes this one of the ways the devil goes about waging war against Christians. Many of God’s people throughout the history of the world have been tortured, persecuted, and even killed, or as this verse puts it, overcome by the powers of wicked, worldly governments. In many places throughout the world today, it is against civil law to worship God, or preach, or teach his Word in public.

Power was given to this beast over all kindreds and tongues and nations, indicating that, to a certain extent, all people of all ages are affected by these powers. Some may be directly affected by persecutions, and others may be more subtly affected by the blasphemies spoken against God and his people. As Coffman puts it, “This means that

there is no place on earth where sin does not dwell, no place where the authority of the beast is totally absent.”<sup>2</sup>

**Verse 8. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.**

The point of this verse is to show that Christians will not worship the beast. Only non-Christians will worship it. Non-Christians are described here as those whose names are not written in the book of life. According to 21:27, Christians have their names written in the Lamb’s book of life. All those who dwell upon the earth, except Christians, will worship the beast. They will obey his laws and be overtaken by his powers. They will hold in high esteem the great things that he speaks (v.5) and be a part of his blasphemies against God.

There seems to be some question in this verse as to whether the phrase “from the foundation of the world” modifies “the Lamb slain” or “the book of life.” Most commentators agree that the KJV is correct in making it modify “the Lamb slain” over the ASV, which has it modifying “the book of life.” The controversy seems to arise from 17:8, which has the same phrase modifying “the book of life.” Although it is true that God’s plan from the foundation of the world was to write those people’s names who are obedient to him in his book of life, it seems clear that the intent of verse 8 is to show that the book of life is owned by the Lamb. The book of life exists, and Christian’s names are written in it because Jesus was slain. Without his sacrifice, there would be no redemption for man (5:9; Rom. 3:25). However, Jesus did make the perfect sacrifice for us when he died on the cross and redeemed us to God. This was God’s plan “before the foundation of the world” (1Pet. 1:19-20). Therefore, from the very beginning of all things, the foundation of the world, it was God’s plan that Jesus would be “slain” so that people could have the opportunity to have their names written in “the book of life.”

**Verse 9. If any man have an ear, let him hear.**

This calls special attention to the words that follow. An expression similar to this was used at the end of each of the seven letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3. It means that if any man has the ability to understand and the willingness to do so, he should give special attention to the thoughts that follow.

**Verse 10. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.**

This verse has been used by many to teach everything from the idea that it is wrong to defend the church with physical force to it being wrong for Christians to take up the sword in battle. Although these subjects are important and need much study and thought, we do not believe this verse refers to these matters. We must use the context of chapter 13 to determine its meaning. The war or conflict being discussed in this chapter is between the beast and Christians. Verse 7 says, "And it was given unto him (the beast) to make war with the saints,..." What type of captivity is this? Verse 8 says that "all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him," except Christians. To worship the beast would be to serve the devil who gives the beast his power (v. 2). Therefore, the captivity spoken of here refers to being captive to the devil by worshiping the beast. From this we see that the beast (the civil powers of man) are used by the devil to overcome people spiritually and make them captives unto himself. Those who lead people into the captivity of the devil will someday go into captivity themselves. This captivity must refer to the final captivity in hell with the devil and his angels. Therefore, verse 10 is telling us that those people who lead others into the captivity of the devil by teaching his sinful ways will eventually themselves be captive in the devil's hell.

This same logic applies to the killing with the sword. Those who kill or persecute Christians on this earth with the physical sword are doomed to an eternity in hell by the

spiritual sword, the gospel. This would be the “patience and the faith of the saints.” God may not immediately avenge the blood of saints, but eventually it will come to pass. (See 6:10.) If we keep the commandments of God, we will finally win that spiritual battle forever. We must be patient and have faith that God will keep his promise.

## THE SECOND BEAST

**Verse 11. And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.**

John sees a second beast coming up out of the earth. As discussed in 12:16, this “coming up out of the earth” presents the idea that this beast is born out of those people who practice false religion. This interpretation harmonizes with the overall meaning of this beast.

The second “beast” is similar to the first beast in that it possesses the powers of civil government. As explained in the introduction to chapter 13, this is the symbolic meaning of a “beast.” However, this beast also has the features of a “lamb.” The use of a lamb as a symbolic description immediately implies that this is also a religious beast because the “lamb” is often used as a symbol to describe Christ. This beast being “like a lamb” indicates that it only seemed to be religious, or it appeared to be like Christ. This appearance was used to deceive those upon the earth into worshipping him. (See v. 4.)

This beast also has two horns. In the Old Testament the “horn” is used to signify divisions of powers within a kingdom. In Dan. 7:24, ten horns symbolize ten kings, which arise in a kingdom. Therefore, the two horns of this beast indicate there are two divisions of power making up this one beast. This is exactly the situation that arose in the world after the fall of the Roman Empire. The Holy Roman Empire and the apostate church, which eventually became the Roman Catholic Church, joined forces to form a beast with a single purpose – to rule the world. The two horns then represent the two divisions of power of this beast

(Holy Roman Empire); (1) the civil power, which was headed by the Emperor of Rome, and (2) the religious power, which was headed by the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, this beast possesses great strength, both civil and religious, which it uses to war against the people of God. It should be noted that Christ was described as a lamb having seven horns (5:6). This teaches that even though great powers persecute Christians here on earth, the complete and final power is held by Christ Jesus our Lord.

This beast spoke as a dragon. In 12:9, the dragon is used as a symbol to describe the devil. Also, the dragon has always been symbolic of a powerful force that is capable of destroying even the strongest people. This beast is like that. He speaks with powerful sayings, which are from the devil, and deceives many people.

Of all the interpretations that have been proposed as the meaning of this beast, none fit so precisely as does the apostate church, which grew into the system of Roman Catholicism and worked hand in hand with the civil powers of the Holy Roman Empire to rule the world. This beast hurled the world into the Dark Ages when only “priests” were allowed to read the Bible, and all men were forced to give their allegiance to the beast in both physical and spiritual matters.

**Verse 12. And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.**

This religious beast (Holy Roman Empire) exercised all the powers of the beast that received the death wound but was healed (Roman Empire). The Roman Empire had fallen, or as stated in verse 3, was wounded to death. It had been “healed” or resurrected in the form of the Holy Roman Empire. The beast out of the earth (Holy Roman Empire) thereby obtained all the powers of “the first beast” (Roman Empire). By forcing all mankind to worship him, this religious beast caused “the earth and them which dwell

therein to worship the first beast.” This actually says that by worshiping this religious beast, people were worshiping the Holy Roman Empire, which was the Roman Empire resurrected.

**Verse 13. And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth In the sight of men,**

This is a symbolic representation of the powers the religious beast claimed to possess. We should not view these as actual miracles but as great deceptions that the beast used to control many people. The fire from heaven indicates how persuasive these deceptions were. This beast performed things in the sight of men that were so amazing that they convinced the people his powers actually came from God. Verse 13 does not mean that the beast actually had the power to bring fire down from heaven, but he did have the ability to do those things that would deceive men into thinking he could perform such miracles.

Causing fire to come down from heaven brings to mind the great prophet Elijah who did bring fire from heaven by praying to God (1Kings 18:37-38). This may be the reason this particular symbolism is used to describe the deceptions of this beast. Elijah was a true and faithful prophet of God who actually performed this miracle. This beast is a “false prophet” (16:13; 19:20) who deceived many people by working great wonders in their sight.

**Verse 14. And deceived them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.**

These miracles, or wonders that seemed like miracles, were used to deceive men into making an image to the beast, which had the wound by the sword and did live (Roman Empire). To make an image means to make a representation, or copy, of something. Images are used in idol worship to represent the god that people are



worshipping. Verse 15 says that people were forced to worship this image of the Roman Empire. How did they make an image of the Roman Empire that people could be forced to worship? The answer to this lies in the fact that a religious structure was set up that patterned itself after the governmental organization of the Roman Empire. The structure of the Roman Catholic Church is an image of the Roman Empire. Just as the Emperor was the supreme authority in the Roman civil government, the Pope became the supreme authority of the Roman Catholic Church. He claimed infallibility here on earth with the authority to make laws dictating how people should worship God. This was a man-made organization that set up the Pope as head of the church here on earth. This is in direct contradiction to the Bible, which stipulates that elders are to rule the individual congregations of the Lord's church. This structure was an image of the Roman Empire, and it required people to worship this image even under the penalty of death if they refused (v. 15). Under this system, men were forced to worship the Pope who had set himself in the place of God as head of the church. This very situation was foretold by Paul in 2Thess. 2:3-4. In that passage, Paul stated that the time would come when a man would set himself as God in the temple (church) of God, professing to be God.

**Verse 15. And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.**

“And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast” means that the civil powers of the Roman government had the power to make certain the “image of the beast” (the Roman Catholic Church) existed. The laws of the land were used to force the subjects of Rome to worship according to the edicts of Roman Catholicism. History records many accounts of people who were persecuted, tortured, and even killed because of their refusal to worship as directed by Rome. (For more

information, you can easily research the actions of the Medieval Inquisition, a tribunal set up by the Catholic Church to investigate and eliminate heresy.) The Catholic Church sought out “heretics” and turned them over to the civil government of Rome for punishment. In this manner, the civil government of Rome gave life unto the religious beast and caused many to worship the religious image of that government.

**Verse 16. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads:**

To cause someone to receive a mark in his right hand or forehead means that this person owes all his works, thoughts, and allegiance to the one whose mark he wears. In this case, the mark indicated that all men of all walks of life, small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, were forced to give their allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church. They had no choice because civil law required that people worship according to the methods established by the Roman Catholic authorities. If they did not worship in this manner, they were considered heretics who were sought out and punished.

We must remember that this mark was not a literal mark that could actually be seen by others. It is a figurative way of indicating to whom one pledges himself; gives his allegiance to, or worships. This same type of symbolism is used in 14:1 to show that Christians belong to God because they have his name written in their foreheads. Christians do not have God’s name literally written in their foreheads, but they do commit their minds and will to him. They figuratively have God’s name written in their foreheads. When men render their labors and allegiance to anything, they figuratively wear that mark in their right hand and forehead.

**Verse 17. And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.**

This beast was in control of practically everything in this world. If any man expected to function in business or work, he had to be in subjection to this beast. He had to wear the mark of the beast, his name, or the number of his name. All of these indicate that the man was in agreement with the beast and gave his allegiance to him. When one worshiped according to the directions of the beast, he could “buy and sell” without fear of reprisal from these religious or civil authorities.

## UNDERSTANDING THE NUMBER “666”

**Verse 18. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.**

Verse 18 has been interpreted in many ways by many writers. This is not surprising because the phrase, “Here is wisdom,” seems to imply that the correct interpretation of this verse is not an easy one. It requires that we have an “understanding” of the symbols used in this book and apply this knowledge to the number of the beast in order to determine its proper meaning.

This number “666” is the number of the beast and also the number of a man. In trying to determine the meaning of “666,” many have used gematria, which is the assigning of a numerical value to certain letters of the alphabet. One common application of this is the use of Roman numerals, which have assigned numeric values. By taking the value of each letter in a person’s name and adding them together, you can obtain the total value for that name. Several names, and even offices people hold, have been suggested as the identity of this beast because the total value of the number of their name is “666.” Some of the more common proposals using this method are Nero, Lateinos (referring to the Roman Empire), Domitian, and even Hitler.

The problem that immediately becomes apparent with this method is that there are many possible answers. It soon becomes a matter of opinion as to which one we accept as

the correct interpretation. For this reason, we must reject this as the proper method of determining the identity of this beast.

We believe that an altogether different approach should be used to determine the meaning of the number “666.” First of all, we must realize this number is not given to identify the beast. We know the identity of the beast. This was explained in verses 11 through 17. This beast is that great religious power that united itself with the civil government of Rome to form the Holy Roman Empire. It later evolves into many different types of false religions that work closely with the governmental forces of this world in order to deceive many into following the ways of the devil. (See 17:5.)

If the number “666” is not used to identify the beast, then how is it used? Like most of the numbers in Revelation, it is descriptive. It is used to give certain information about this beast. We use numbers in a manner similar to this to a certain extent in our language. For example, some people believe specific numbers are lucky or unlucky for them. Also, we tend to associate the number “13” with someone who is superstitious or unlucky. Therefore, it becomes our task to “understand” what information is being given by associating this beast with the number “666.” As is the case with other numbers in Revelation, we believe the meaning of this number can be derived by examining how it is used in other passages in Revelation and applying that meaning to this passage. This also agrees with the message in this verse, which says we must have an “understanding” to be able to “count” the number of the beast. The “understanding” we must have may very well be an understanding of the entire book of Revelation, which we can use to determine the meaning of the number of the beast.

One objection, which might be offered to this method of determining the meaning of “666,” is that this is the only time this particular number is used in the entire book. This is true, but the number “6” is used in other passages and, interestingly enough, it is used three times. It is used in

each of the three series of seals, trumpets, and plagues to bring us to the end of all things, which would be the second coming of Christ. The seventh section in each of these three series then takes us into the time of Judgment, the final rewarding of God's people, and the final destruction of those who follow Satan. (See 11:18.) This enables us to take the meaning of the sixth seal, the sixth trumpet, and the sixth plague and learn what it means to have a number of "666." The sixth seal (6:12-17) teaches that at the second coming of Christ, all physical things of this earth will be destroyed. Those who have not obeyed God will seek to hide from him in any way possible to avoid his wrath. The sixth trumpet (9:13-21; 11:12-14) describes the terrible situation of those at Christ's second coming who are not spiritually-minded, or have not worshiped God. All those who claim to be spiritual, but worship according to man's laws, will be destroyed. The sixth plague (16:12-16) shows that God will gather all those together who have not been obedient to him into a place of unimaginable sorrow.

This enables us to conclude that the number "666" figuratively shows what will happen to the beast and his followers at the end of time. This beast will be completely destroyed at Christ's second coming. The physical powers of this beast will come to an end. There will be no powers in existence except God's. The spiritual nature of this beast will also be destroyed. The only people who have any spiritual hope at this time will be those who have trusted in Christ, not the beast. Finally, this beast will be brought before God in a very sorrowful state to receive his judgment and the final plague of God. This beast will be totally destroyed as described by the number "666."

This is the meaning of the number "666" when applied to the beast, but we must remember that it is also the number of a man. It will be the number of any man who puts his trust in something other than God. The powers of man have no meaning at all beyond our death or Christ's second coming. Therefore, we must put our hope in the almighty, eternal power of God in order to inherit eternal life. Let us continually strive to put our faith and trust in the Lord in

order to make certain that we do not wear the number “666.”

<sup>1</sup>James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979), p 293.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*, p. 307.

# CHAPTER 14

## PHYSICAL/SPIRITUAL PARALLELS

Once again the great parallel between physical Israel and the church can be used in this chapter to determine the meaning of the symbols. This chapter deals with the parallel between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. Please notice this parallel in the drawing. Moses received the Law of Moses as he stood on Mount Sinai and Christ gave his law, the gospel, on spiritual Mount Zion. The people of Israel gathered around Mt. Sinai as Moses received the law.

### A Parallel Comparison of Israel and the Church

Israel	R E D S E A	Moses	Mt. Sinai	Nourished on Manna	J O R D A N	Promised Land
Bondage in Egypt		Israel in Wilderness		Canaan		
All Mankind	B L O O D	Christ	Mt. Zion	Nourished on Word	2nd C O M I N G	Promised Land
Bondage in Sin		Church in Spiritual Wilderness		Heaven		

Those who stand around spiritual Mt. Zion today are Christians. They are symbolized in this chapter as the 144,000. This is in total agreement with the definition of the 144,00 in chapter 7. (Please refer back to that chapter for more information on the 144,000.)

A perfect example of this parallel is found in the New Testament in Hebrews 12:18 and 22. Hebrews 12:18 states that Christians “are not come unto the mount that might be touched...” They are not come unto the physical Mt. Sinai. This means that Christians are not subject to the Law of Moses. Only the nation of Israel followed that law. Hebrews 12:22 says, “But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God...” This statement was written to Christians. They are the people who are come unto spiritual Mt. Zion.

This was also prophesied in the Old Testament. Mic 4:1a states, “But in the last days it shall come to pass, *that* the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established...” The “last days” are a reference to the Christian dispensation. That mountain was called Mt. Zion in verse 2 which says, “...for the law shall go forth of Zion.” Then in verse 7b, we read, “and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever.” The Lord is reigning over his people (Christians) in spiritual Mount Zion today. He gave his law on Mt. Zion, and those who are obedient to that law (Christians) stand with him around Mt. Zion.

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter should be viewed as a continuation of chapter 13, which described two great beasts that control the people of the world. Verses 1 through 5 of this chapter describe those who do not worship these beasts. They are the ones who follow the Lamb – Christians. They are the 144,000. (See chapter 7.) Verses 8 through 11 show that this beast, or as it is referred to in this chapter, Babylon, will eventually fall. Its powers will cease, and this beast, along with those who have followed it, will be destroyed.

The last section of this chapter (v. 14-20) provides



another look at Judgment. This section can also be divided into two parts. Verses 14 through 16 picture Christ harvesting the earth or taking the faithful home to heaven. This will be the final gathering of the 144,000 who were described in verses 1 through 5 as following Christ instead of the beast. Verses 17 through 20 picture the “reaping,” or gathering, of those who have opposed God. This will be the final gathering of those who worshiped the beast or were a part of Babylon (v. 8-11). Chapter 14 once again takes us through the Christian dispensation and into eternity. (In order to fully understand the meaning of Babylon as a description of the beast, chapters 17 and 18 must be studied.)

### THE LAMB AND THE 144,000

**Verse 1. And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads.**

In the first five verses, additional information concerning the 144,000 is given. Rev. 7:3-4 identifies the 144,000 as the servants of God who are sealed in their foreheads. Here they are described as having the Father’s name written in their foreheads. Both descriptions show that they are followers of Christ and have given their allegiance unto him. To have the Father’s name written in one’s forehead means that they belong to God. This is in direct contrast to those in 13:16 who had the mark of the beast in their hands or foreheads. Those people worshiped or



served something other than the true God. This enables us to conclude that everyone in the world today wears a mark in their foreheads. Christians have their Father's name written in their foreheads, and everyone else wears the mark of the beast. Of course, this is not a literal mark. It is symbolic and defines whom we serve. Mt. 6:24 says, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Everyone upon this earth must decide whom he will serve, or whose mark he will wear – God's or the devil's.

The Lamb (Christ) is pictured as standing on Mount Zion and the 144,000 are standing with him. This shows that the 144,000 are those who are obedient to the law of Christ. Mic. 4:2 says, "For the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." The law that was to go forth from Zion was the same as the word of the Lord that went forth from Jerusalem. This took place on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 when the Apostles first preached the gospel message of God to men gathered from every nation. From that point forward, all people who were to be acceptable to Christ had to follow the teachings of the gospel. They were no longer subject to the Law of Moses. In this passage in Revelation, we have a figurative description of Christ reigning over those who choose to follow him. Christ gave his law on spiritual Mt. Zion and is reigning there today. Since Heb. 12:22 says, we are "come unto Mt. Sion," it is evident that those who are gathered around Mt. Zion are Christians. This shows that the number 144,000 is a figurative number that represents all Christians. It does not represent some particular group or segment of individuals. It represents all those who follow Christ. Therefore, when one obeys the gospel, he comes to Mt. Zion and becomes a part of the 144,000. (For more about the use of the number "144,000," see comments on 7:4.)

Therefore, by using the parallel of Mt. Sinai and Mt. Zion we are able to determine exactly who the 144,000

represent. They are Christians who follow Christ all during the Christian dispensation. This in turn allows us to identify the subject of this chapter. Since the 144,000 represent Christians, then the message of this chapter is written to all Christians who live throughout the Christian dispensation.

**Verse 2. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps:**

A voice from heaven is described as the voice of many waters and of great thunder. This must have been either the voice of God or Christ, but it may be impossible to know for certain which. It actually makes little or no difference because they are one in purpose. The voice of great thunder indicates that this message is of tremendous importance. The voice of many waters shows that this message was a life-sustaining message. Just as water is a necessary life-sustaining substance, this message is one that is necessary to sustain spiritual life. The 144,000 are those who have heeded this message and are the redeemed from the earth (v. 3). Therefore, this voice from heaven was from God who sounds the gospel message, which man must obey in order to become a part of the 144,000.

The other voice that John heard was the voice of harpers harping with their harps. This must have been the voices of the 144,000 because verse 3 says they were singing a song that no man could learn, except the 144,000.

Many would have us believe that this verse authorizes the use of instrumental music in our worship to God. The common reasoning behind this belief states that if there are harps in heaven, then surely we are permitted to use them in worship here on earth. There are two major reasons why this belief is incorrect. First, we are dealing with symbolic language that uses a symbol to represent or describe another item. In this case the harp is the symbol, and it is used to represent and describe the voices of Christians. It shows how God views the voices of Christians as they sing praises unto him. Just as we consider the harp to be a

beautiful and pleasing musical instrument, the voices of Christians are beautiful and pleasing to God. The second reason why this passage does not authorize the use of instrumental music in worship is that these harps are not actually in our eternal heavenly abode. John is describing a vision he saw in heaven, which in turn describes events that take place on earth. This passage is describing the actions of Christians as they worship God in his church. When one obeys the gospel, he becomes part of the 144,000. He then uses his “harp,” or voice, to sing the new song of redemption. He follows the Lamb wherever he goes (v.4) and stands without fault in the sight of God (v. 5).

Once we understand this passage, we recognize that it not only fails to authorize the use of instrumental music in worship, but it once again points out that singing is the only acceptable form of musical worship to God. John heard “voices” (v. 2), and they were “singing” (v. 3). Christians are authorized to sing praises to God, and anything other than that is an addition to God’s Word. (See 22:19.)

**Verse 3. And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.**

The 144,000 were singing a new song before the throne that no one else could learn. Since the 144,000 are the “redeemed from the earth,” then this song is the song of the redeemed or Christians. There is no literal song that Christians can learn but non-Christians cannot learn. Therefore, this song must be a representation of some spiritual difference between Christians and non-Christians. This, of course, is spiritual life or salvation. That Christians would sing this song is prophesied in Isa. Isa 26:1, which states, “In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will *God* appoint *for* walls and bulwarks.” This prophecy says that Christians would sing a song of salvation. Therefore, the song that the 144,000 were singing was a song of salvation. Then why is

it called a “new” song? Before Christ figuratively stood on Mt. Zion by giving his life as an atonement for man’s sins and bringing in the new law, the gospel, there was no salvation. Man could not sing the song of salvation before Christ died on the cross. When he died, he redeemed man to God and gave Christians a new song to sing – a song of salvation. It is also a “new” song in the sense that when a sinner becomes a Christian, he has a new song to sing. As the gospel is taught throughout the world today and sinners render obedience to it, they learn the new song of salvation. They become a part of the 144,000 and have the name of the Father written in their foreheads.

The ASV translates the last phrase as, “even they that had been purchased out of the earth.” Acts 20:28 admonishes elders to “feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” When Christ died, he purchased salvation for all those who are obedient to his will and become members of his church. The 144,000 are those whom he has purchased. They are Christians.

**Verse 4. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.**

Several more characteristics of the 144,000 are listed in this verse. Each gives further proof that the multitude of 144,000 refers to Christians who live on this earth during this present Christian dispensation.

First, the 144,000 are virgins because they have not been defiled with women. This must refer to spiritual virginity because we know that God has sanctioned the marriage relationship, which would eliminate the possibility of this meaning physical virginity. To be a spiritual virgin would mean that one has remained true to God. He has not committed spiritual adultery by forsaking the true God to follow other gods. In Jas. 4:4, James calls those Christians who would be a “friend of the world” adulterers and adulteresses. He says, ‘Whosoever therefore will be a

friend of the world is the enemy of God.” To forsake God to become a friend of the world is to commit spiritual adultery. This symbolism is also used in Revelation in 14:8, 17:2, and 18:3. The image of the beast in 13:14-15 is referred to as the “great harlot” in 17:1 (ASV). Those who worshiped the image of the beast were said to be committing fornication with this “great harlot.” To worship anything other than God is to commit spiritual fornication. The 144,000 are spiritual virgins, or Christians, who remain faithful to God.

The 144,000 are also those who “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.” Those who follow the Lamb (Christ) are, obviously, Christians. This is further proof that the 144,000 represents those who follow Christ throughout the Christian dispensation. Jn. 12:26 says, “If any man serves me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be.”

The 144,000 are further described as being the “redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.” Jas. 1:18 says, “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” When we obey his “word of truth,” we become children of God. We are redeemed. Under the law of Moses, the people were required to honor the Lord with the firstfruits of their increase. (See Prov. 3:9.) In other words, that was the portion given to the Lord. Today, if we are the firstfruits of his creatures, we have given ourselves unto the Lord. We are Christians. We are the 144,000.

**Verse 5. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.**

1Pe 2:1 states, “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings.” These things are to have no place in the lives of Christians.

The 144,000 are without fault. The ASV translates this as being without blemish. This symbolism is similar to that of 3:4, which says that there were some in the church at Sardis

“which have not defiled their garments.” To be without blemish means to keep our garments white by remaining faithful to Christ and being continually cleansed from our sins by his blood. The 144,000 are Christians who are continually faithful to Christ; thereby, keeping their garments white. They are without spot or blemish. When we overcome this world of sin by washing our robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb (7:14), we become part of the 144,000. We stand without fault before the throne of God.

## **THE PROCLAMATIONS OF THREE ANGELS**

**Verse 6. And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,**

We should not think of this as an angel actually preaching the gospel in heaven. Instead, this shows that the gospel is to be preached unto all men of all nations. It is the Christian's responsibility to see that the gospel is preached throughout the entire earth. Obedience to this gospel redeems us to God and makes us a part of the 144,000. It is available to anyone who will accept it.

**Verse 7. Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.**

We are admonished to worship God and give him glory because he made all things. We are to do this because the hour of his judgment is come. There is a problem with this statement because when the Judgment Day “is come,” there will be no further opportunities to be obedient to the gospel. Why did this angel have the gospel to preach to all nations at the time of judgment? This must be the preaching of the gospel all through the gospel age, which began with Pentecost and will end with Christ's second coming. With this in mind, it becomes a real possibility that the

“judgment” being referred to here is not the final Judgment but the giving of God’s law, which he will use to judge all men. Similar wording is used in 15:4 which states that “all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.” Before Christ died on the cross, only one nation (Israel) was subject to the old law that God gave through Moses. After Christ died, all nations were subject to his new law (gospel). All nations came to worship before him. The words which Jesus spoke will be used to judge men (Jn. 12:48-49). Therefore, when Jesus gave the gospel to all nations, he made his judgment known to all men. The gospel is to be preached to all men of all nations, and they will be judged by that same gospel.

Verses 1 through 7 describe the 144,000. They are the redeemed of the earth. They are the ones who are obedient to that gospel, which is being preached to all nations. The way we distinguish the 144,000 from those who follow the devil today is by the Word of God. If we desire to know the judgment of God, all we have to do is open the pages of the New Testament. In Mt. 19:28, Jesus says, “Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” The twelve apostles spoke the law of Christ as he revealed it to them through the Holy Spirit. The law that they spoke will be used to judge mankind. In that sense the twelve apostles are sitting on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes (the church) today. Christ is also judging men by that same law as he sits on his throne in heaven.

**Verse 8. And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.**

This angel announces the fall of the great city (Babylon), which caused all nations to commit fornication. The “fornication” must refer to spiritual fornication because of the following comparison. Chapter 17 describes a great harlot who committed fornication with the kings of the



earth (v. 1-2). The “kings of the earth” are the same as “all nations” because they represent the leaders of all nations on this earth. Part of the name written upon the forehead of this woman is “Babylon the great” (17:5). According to 17:18, this woman is a representation of the “great city.” In 18:2, this woman is also referred to as “Babylon the great.” Therefore, “Babylon” and the “woman” of chapter 17 are both symbolic of the same forces that operate upon this earth. This great harlot (Babylon), which commits fornication and causes all nations to participate with her in spiritual fornication, must be symbolic of all types of false religious organizations which cause nations to forsake God by worshiping according to the ways of man. This would be spiritual fornication. Therefore, “Babylon” represents all those who seek to worship God by following man’s laws instead of God’s. (For a more complete understanding of Babylon, chapter 17 must be studied thoroughly.)

This announcement is proclaimed as if we are past the end of time, looking back on events that took place on the earth. The point of verse 8 is that Babylon will fall and those who become residents of Babylon by committing spiritual fornication will have no hope. The only people who will have hope at the end of time will be the 144,000 who have followed the Lamb (v. 4). They are virgins; they have not committed spiritual fornication.

**Verses 9, 10. And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:**

This angel warns that those who worship the beast and his image will receive the wrath of God. Worshiping the beast and his image is the subject of chapter 13, which must be studied thoroughly in order to fully understand the meaning of this symbolism. To keep the interpretation of

verse 9 brief, worshipping the beast means to worship anything other than the true God. Rev. 13:8 says that all who dwell upon the earth, except Christians, will worship the beast. Therefore, the overall meaning in this verse is that anyone who worships anything other than the true God will be subject to the wrath of God. Many people in the world today would have us believe that because God is a God of love, he could not possibly send anyone to a devil's hell for all eternity. Verse 10 completely disputes that idea. God is a God of love, but he is also a just God. Those who become his children by being obedient to his law will inherit all things (1Pet. 1:3-4), and those who worship anything else will receive the wrath of God.

Those who worship the beast shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God and be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the Lamb. This same punishment is spoken of in 18:1-7, which describes Babylon as receiving the torment of God. We should not understand the fire and brimstone literally. This is a figurative description of a torment that will be so severe it would be impossible for man to completely comprehend. For that reason, it is described in terms that would cause severe pain to our physical bodies. This warning should be sufficient to cause man to desire to avoid the wrath of God in the only way possible – by being obedient to his will.

To receive this punishment in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb means that they give approval of the punishment that is to take place.

**Verse 11. And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.**

The punishment that awaits those who worship the beast and his image is eternal torment. This torment will be constant. There will be no periods of rest or relief. It will be a punishment so horrible that we cannot possibly begin to comprehend it now. It is described as eternal fire because that would be one of the most painful physical torments we

could imagine.

The very knowledge of this eternal torment should be enough to cause us to strive to worship the true God in the way he has designated, not according to man's designs.

## **THE BLESSED DEAD**

**Verse 12. Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.**

A child of God should have patience because, eventually, those who oppose God and persecute Christians will be punished by God. In 6:10, the question was asked, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" They were instructed to rest for a time, or until all those "that should be killed as they were" was fulfilled. In other words, they were to be patient. All through the Christian dispensation, Christians will be persecuted by many people in many different ways. Yet, we are commanded to be patient; keep the commandments of God, and remain faithful. If we do this, we shall "inherit all things" (21:7), and those who have persecuted us will be punished eternally by God. (In 13:10, there is a similar statement. The context of both passages are similar and should be studied together to better understand the meaning of this passage.)

**Verse 13. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.**

A blessing is pronounced upon those who die in the Lord, which must refer to Christians. They are promised rest from their labors. This is in direct contrast to those who worship the beast and his image. They will be tormented forever with no rest (v. 11). This again points to the patience of the saints. Times may be hard for us now; however, eventually, we will have eternal rest if we remain

faithful.

There has been much discussion about the meaning of “their works do follow them.” One thing may be determined for certain; works are necessary to be pleasing to God. For Christians to be pleasing in the sight of God, they must do his works. At least two of the churches in chapters 2 and 3 were condemned because they were not doing the “works” that were expected of them. (See 3:1,15-16.)

The work of a Christian is to lead others to Christ. Those who are converted to Christ are the “fruits” of someone’s labor. When Christians die, they rest from their labor, and those who have been converted because of those labors will also be blessed when they die in the Lord. The works of Christians will follow them.

## **THE VISION OF THE HARVEST JUDGMENT**

**Verse 14. And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.**

This must have been Jesus sitting upon the cloud, even though the phrase “like unto” is used. This same language is used in 1:13 as John saw “one like unto the Son of man.” From the description given in that verse, we know that Jesus was the one being described. Therefore, the one being described in verse 14 must also be Jesus. He is described as having a golden crown on his head, which denotes his authority as a king. The sickle that he has in his hand indicates that he has the power and authority to execute the judgment that is about to take place.

He is also sitting upon a white cloud, which again points to the fact that this verse is speaking of Jesus. Jesus was taken up in a cloud and the apostles were told that he would return in the same manner (Acts 1:9-11). This cloud that Jesus was sitting upon was white to represent the holiness and righteousness of Jesus.

Verses 14 through 16 picture the gathering of the

righteous to be taken home to heaven. The second picture of the Judgment scene (v. 17-20) is a description of the gathering of the unrighteous. They will be punished with everlasting punishment, which is described in verse 20. We should not make the mistake of viewing these two events as happening at separate times. They will take place at the same time. The righteous will go home to dwell with Jesus, and the unrighteous will be cast into eternal punishment. Jn. 5:28-29 says that “the” hour is coming in which “all” who are in the grave will come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation. There will be one resurrection in which all people will come forth to receive their final judgment.

**Verse 15. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.**

Mt. 24:36 says that no one, except the Father in heaven, knows when the second coming will take place. This angel comes out of the temple, the dwelling place of God, and brings Christ the message that the time to harvest the earth has arrived. We know that Christ dwells with God in heaven, and that they are not separated to the extent of needing angels to carry messages. This is simply a figurative representation of the second coming, showing that Christ will come when God says the time is right. Verse 14 describes the one who will harvest the earth; verse 15 tells who will make the decision that the time has arrived, and verse 16 shows that Christ will carry out the will of God by reaping the harvest of the earth – the saved.

The harvest of the earth being ripe indicates that the time is right for Jesus to claim the redeemed. Just as grain is harvested when it has matured, the redeemed of this earth will be harvested when it is fully matured. Exactly what this means or when this will happen, man has no way of knowing, but it is possible that verse 15 means that Jesus will come the moment this earth has yielded all the

righteous saints it will ever produce. At that time, the harvest will be ripe.

**Verse 16. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.**

This is a figurative description of the second coming of Christ when he will take the righteous home to dwell with him forever. The sickle is a tool that was used during John's time to harvest grain and is used here to show that Jesus possesses the authority and power necessary to harvest the earth. When the time comes for this earth to yield its harvest, Jesus will carry out the reaping.

In order to keep the interpretation of chapter 14 in its proper perspective, we must point out that verse 16 concludes the description of Christ's Second Coming as it relates to the collection of the saints. Verse 17 begins a description of the end of time as it concerns the gathering and punishing of the wicked.

**Verse 17. And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.**

Verses 17 through 20 describe the gathering of the wicked to be punished for their deeds. Like the angel in verse 14, this angel comes out of the temple, which indicates that he is also sent from God. This angel also possesses a sharp sickle, which shows that he has the power to carry out the will of God.

There might be some question concerning why an angel harvests the wicked but Jesus harvests the righteous. We do not know the exact order of events of the second coming of Christ, but this seems to indicate that Jesus will take the righteous from this earth to their eternal home in heaven and the angels of God will deliver the wicked to be punished in hell. In 1Thess. 4:16-17, we read that the righteous will meet the Lord "in the air" to remain with him eternally, and 2Thess. 1:7-9 says that Jesus will come with his "mighty angels" to take vengeance on those who have not obeyed him. These verses are at least in agreement with this type of interpretation. Regardless of exactly how it will

be accomplished, we do know that when God says the time has come for the earth to be harvested, the righteous will go home with Jesus to dwell forever and the wicked will be cast into eternal punishment. We must not make the mistake of believing that these two events will occur at different times. This vision gives us two pictures of two different events that will occur at Christ's second coming. (See Jn. 5:28-29.)

**Verse 18. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.**

This angel comes from the altar and has power over fire. This is similar to the conclusion of the seventh seal in 8:5-6, which pictures the final destruction of those who oppose God. The altar is symbolic of man's ability to make atonement for his sins and commune directly with God through prayer. (See comments on 8:3-4.) In the fifth seal (6:9-11), Christians under the altar are asking the Lord how long it will be before he will avenge their blood on those who persecuted them. Verse 18 is the beginning of the answer to that prayer. At the end of time, the unjust will be gathered together to receive their punishment. This is emphasized by the fact that the angel, who has control over the fire, is the one who gives the command to gather the clusters of the vine. Again, in 8:5, during the time of the seventh seal (Judgment), an angel takes fire from the altar and casts it into the earth. This represents the fiery punishment that awaits those who disobey God. When these clusters of the vine are gathered by the angel with the sharp sickle, they will be punished for their evil deeds (v. 19). Therefore, the clusters of grapes must refer to sinners because they are the ones who will be punished. At Christ's second coming, as an answer to the prayers of Christians who have been persecuted, all ungodly people will be gathered together to receive their sentence of an eternal fiery hell.

**Verse 19. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.**

The vine of the earth, or all sinners, will be gathered together on that last day. They will then find themselves committed to a place of eternal punishment because the wrath of God will wax strong against them. This eternal punishment is pictured as being like a great winepress. Just as the grapes are trodden underfoot in order to remove the juice, all sinners will be trodden underfoot by God. This punishment will be extremely severe because verse 20 says that the blood of those people will reach the depth of horses' bridles.

We must keep in mind that we are dealing with symbolic language. These people will not be placed in a literal winepress. This figuratively shows the severity of their punishment. When Judgment comes, those who have persecuted Christians will be punished, but those who have followed Christ will be rewarded. (See comments on v. 12 and 13:10.)

**Verse 20. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.**

This is a description of the severe torment those who are disobedient to God will suffer. It is likened unto a lake of blood measuring 1,600 furlongs. This indicates the vastness and severity of the punishment. It is probably pictured as coming up to the bridles of horses because the horse is used in the series of seven seals to describe the many types of physical persecutions that Christians will have to suffer upon this earth. After judgment, those who have ridden these horses of persecution against Christians will find themselves in extreme torment.

Verse 20 also states that this winepress of God will be trodden "without the city." Most likely, this is a reference to the fact that Jesus was crucified "without the gate" (Heb.



13:12). Just as Jesus suffered outside the city of God under the Law of Moses, these people will suffer outside the spiritual city of God, which is the church. The church will spend eternity in heaven while those outside it will be punished forever.

# CHAPTER 15

## INTRODUCTION

Chapters 15 and 16 contain the vision of the seven vials of wrath, which are also called the seven last plagues. Chapter 15 is an introduction to the vision, and chapter 16 reveals the things actually contained in the seven vials. This is definitely one of the most misunderstood sections in Revelation. Many attempts have been made to find the

### 7 Seals - 7 Trumpets - 7 Last Plagues



proper interpretation of this vision, but few are logical and in agreement with the teachings of the New Testament. Although much difficulty lies in these chapters, we believe it is possible to understand many of the lessons contained therein. We will interpret this vision by following the same parallel method as has been used throughout the book. This interpretation will be based upon the belief that Revelation is written to, and for, all Christians who live throughout the entire Christian dispensation. Revelation is a prophecy dealing with the entire Christian age. This concept is, once again, pictured in our drawing. The seven last plagues will be poured out all during the Christian dispensation, beginning with the giving of the gospel on the day of Pentecost and lasting until Christ comes again. The seventh vial will then be poured out at Judgment, and it will affect only those who have been disobedient to God. Although the meaning of these symbols will be applied to events that take place all during the Christian age, we must remember that they are not describing specific events which may be dated. The visions deal with general events that may occur over and over throughout the Christian age.

In this vision, John views seven angels holding seven golden vials containing the wrath of God (v. 7). God instructs these angels to pour out their vials of wrath upon seven different items, which symbolically represent those forces that oppose God. They are as follows:

- 1<sup>st</sup> vial - earth (16:2)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> vial - sea (16:3)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> vial - rivers and fountains of waters (16:4-7)
- 4<sup>th</sup> vial - sun (16:8-9)
- 5<sup>th</sup> vial - seat of the beast (16:10-11)
- 6<sup>th</sup> vial - river Euphrates (16:12-16)
- 7<sup>th</sup> vial - into the air (16:17-21)

Many commentators seek to find the meaning of these vials of wrath by comparing them with the ten plagues that God sent upon Egypt through the hand of Moses. Obviously, there must be a connection, but we would be mistaken to believe that their meanings are identical. The similarity or connection between these seven last plagues in Revelation and the ten plagues of Moses is that the ten plagues of Moses are a type, or likeness, to the seven last plagues. The ten plagues were physical plagues that affected the people of Egypt who held God's people in bondage; however, the seven last plagues are spiritual plagues, which affect those people who oppose God today! Many things in the Old Testament are a likeness, or shadow, of things that appear in the New Testament. Heb. 10:1 says, "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things." Therefore, the law of Moses was a shadow, or likeness, of the new law, which was to come through Christ. This is the concept we need to use in determining how the seven last plagues relate to the ten plagues of Moses. The ten plagues were sent against the Egyptians, but the seven last plagues of Revelation are sent against those who oppose God during this Christian dispensation.

As this chapter is studied, careful attention must be paid to the interpretation of 11:6 because it contains the ideas upon which this entire interpretation of the seven last plagues is based. Speaking of the "two witnesses," which represent Christians, 11:6 says, "These have power.., to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will." Christians have the power to smite the earth with plagues. This idea is once again brought out in verse 15:6. When God made righteousness and the truth of the gospel available to mankind, represented by the "white linen" and "golden girdles," the effects of these plagues were set in

order by God as he commanded the angels to pour them out upon the earth. When Christians preach and teach the gospel today, we are smiting the earth (sinners) with these plagues. (For more discussion of this concept, see v. 6.)

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SEVEN PLAGUES

**Verse 1. And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.**

As the vision begins, John sees seven angels holding the seven last plagues, which contain the wrath of God. These are the “last” plagues because we are in the “last” times. (1Jn. 2:18). Therefore, this Christian dispensation will bring to a close all of man’s activities on this earth. There will be no future laws or “times” set up by Christ. There will be no thousand-year period of time on this earth after Christ’s second coming during which he will, supposedly, establish another law for his people to follow. We are serving Christ under the final law that will be given. This Christian age is the “last time,” and these “last plagues” take place during this Christian dispensation. They affect those people who oppose God or are unfaithful to him during this time.

**Verse 2. And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.**

After John saw the seven angels with the seven last plagues, he then observed people standing on a sea of glass mingled with fire. These people had gotten the victory over the beast, his image, and his mark. This beast is a reference to the symbols used in chapter 13, which describe powers that oppose God and persecute his people. (For a full understanding of these symbols, chapter 13 must be studied.) Rev. 13:8 says that everyone would worship this beast “whose names are not written in the book of life.” Therefore, those who do not worship the beast are those whose names are written in the book of life – Christians. This, in turn, means that the people standing on this fiery sea, who had gotten the victory over the beast, are Christians.

The place where these Christians were standing is described as a “sea of glass mingled with fire.” In 4:6, there is a description of God’s throne with a “sea of glass” before it. To stand before God’s Throne would symbolically mean we are in a covenant relationship with him. (See 7:15.) However, this sea of glass is mingled with fire. “Fire” is used symbolically to represent the many trials and tribulations that Christians must suffer as we strive to live a Christian life. Therefore, the lesson being taught is that it is not easy to be a Christian. In order to stand before God’s Throne, Christians must constantly endure the trials of this life. Acts 14:22 says, “We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”

These people had gotten the “victory” over the beast. This again defines these people as Christians. According to 13:8, those who do not worship the beast have their names written in the book of life because of their obedience to God’s will. In 1Jn. 5:4, we read, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world.” When we are obedient to God’s law and are baptized into Christ, we overcome this world of sin; we overcome the beast and his image; we have our names written in the book of life; and we stand justified before the throne of God; however, there are many trials and tribulations that we must endure.

These Christians standing on the fiery sea have the “harps of God.” The interpretation of these harps is identical to 14:1-2, which pictures the 144,000 as standing on Mt. Zion where they are called “harpers” harping with their harps. The 144,000 figuratively represent all of God’s people and, according to 14:3, they were singing. The same is true in this passage. Those people standing on the fiery sea represent all those who are obedient to God’s law. They are pictured as having the harps of God, which represent their voices because they sing in verse 3.

Many people try to use verse 2 to prove instrumental music is an acceptable form of worship to God. In the comments on 14:2, reasons are given why these “harps” do not sanction the use of instruments of music in worship. (Please refer to those comments.)

**Verse 3. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.**

God’s people sing praises to him because he has provided a way whereby man can receive forgiveness of his sins. Man obtains forgiveness by being obedient to the law that God has given him to follow. Before Christ came the first time, the Law of Moses was in effect for the Jewish nation. When Christ died on the cross, he forgave the sins of those who had been faithful to him under that law (Heb. 9:15). We now live under the Law of Christ and, if we are obedient to it, we have immediate forgiveness of our sins. This is why the people of God are singing the song of

Moses and the Lamb. Their sins have been forgiven because they have obeyed the law that God gave them to follow. The law of Christ now provides a way for us to have victory over the beast, his mark, and the number of his name, and we must give God praise for this.

Furthermore, these laws of God are declared to be “great and marvellous works.” They are also referred to as “just and true” ways. To sing the song of the Lamb indicates that we belong to him and follow his ways. He is the King over all who obey him; therefore, this song should be the attitude of all Christians today.

**Verse 4. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.**

The song that all Christians sing continues by declaring that God only is holy and that all people should worship him. This, obviously, should be the attitude of all people today who seek to follow God and call themselves Christians.

Also emphasized in verse 4 is the fact that God’s judgments are made known. Therefore, all nations must worship him. Another verse that uses similar language and should be studied along with this verse is 14:7. These verses describe the situation of the world today pertaining to man’s worship to God. All nations, or all people, are responsible to be obedient to the gospel. This is in contrast to the situation in the Old Testament when only the descendants of the twelve children of Israel were responsible to be obedient to the law of Moses. The law of Moses was given to only one nation – Israel. However, today the gospel is for all men. In Jn. 12:48b, Jesus says, “The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.” God’s judgment has already been made known to man. We will be judged by the gospel of Christ, the written word of the New Testament. If we are obedient to it, we will receive our reward in heaven. If we are not, we will be cast into outer darkness. Therefore, the purpose of the song Christians sing in this vision is to show that in order to be obedient to God, we must follow the instructions he has given in his Word. God’s followers between the time of Moses and Christ were under the law of Moses. They sang the song of Moses. When Christ came, all nations were put under one law – the gospel. Today, we sing the song of the Lamb. All people of all nations must obey the gospel because it is the judgment of God!

**Verse 5. And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened:**

The scene changes with this verse. After John saw Christians standing on the sea of glass mingled with fire, he looked and saw the temple of the tabernacle opened in heaven. The temple of the tabernacle is a likeness to the ancient tabernacle, which the children of Israel carried with them in the wilderness. According to Ex. 25:8-9, this was where God dwelt among his people. This tabernacle of the testimony in heaven is the dwelling place of God in heaven. This is designed to show that the plagues, which are about to be revealed, come directly from God.

Another reason we know this “temple of the tabernacle of the testimony” refers to God’s dwelling place in heaven is because of 11:19. There, the temple of God was opened in heaven and the “ark of his testament” was seen. This took place in the time of the seventh trumpet, which is the time of Judgment. (See comments on 11:18-19.) According to 15:8, no man will be able to enter this temple until the seven plagues of God are fulfilled. This again shows that these seven last plagues will take place during this Christian dispensation because this is the last time before Judgment.

**Verse 6. And seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles.**

These angels were introduced in verse 1 and are pictured as coming out of the temple of God. This indicates that these seven plagues came directly from God and are under his control.

These angels were clothed in pure white linen. In 19:8, white linen is defined as the “righteousness of saints.” According to 11:6, the witnesses of God, or Christians, have the power “to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.” (See comments on 11:3-6.) We do not say that these angels represent Christians, but they do bring the plagues from God, which Christians have the ability to use to smite the earth. The only thing Christians possess today, which they can use to smite the earth, is the Word of God. That is what comes directly from God out of the tabernacle of the testimony. The obvious question that arises is this: How can the Word of God be a plague? It is a plague to those who disregard its teachings and are not willing to accept it or hear it. If one is living in the pleasures of sin with no intention or desire to turn from that type of life, he surely will not want to hear a message which proclaims that

his end will be eternal destruction. It becomes a plague to him. Therefore, as Christians go forth in the world today preaching the Word of God, they are smiting those who are unwilling to obey the gospel with all types of plagues.

The angels also have their breasts girded with golden girdles. Eph. 6:14 contains symbolic language as it admonishes Christians to “stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.” Also, in the description of Jesus in 1:13, he is wearing a golden girdle. The golden girdles that the angels are wearing stand for the truth. The truth comes from God, and Christians must be girded with that truth at all times. This is how the seven plagues of God are poured out upon the earth today – by Christians who teach God’s Word.

**Verse 7. And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever.**

These golden vials are given to the seven angels by one of the four beasts (living creatures). This is a reference to the four living creatures described in 4:6-8. These four living creatures were also responsible for introducing each of the first four seals of chapter 6. There may be no special significance in the fact that the living creature handed the angels the vials of wrath, but it is noteworthy that this agrees with the overall interpretation of the seals, trumpets, and last plagues. In chapter 6, the living creatures introduced the first four seals, which represent physical events that take place on this earth. The vision of the seven vials of wrath deals with spiritual matters that affect men, but these spiritual matters also have an effect on the physical lives of those who oppose God. Since they deal with physical matters, the four living creatures present them to the angels. There may be no way of knowing exactly why the living creature hands the angels the vials of wrath. Therefore, we simply offer this explanation for further study.

One thing is clear; these vials contain the “wrath” of God. For anyone to teach today that God will not punish those who are unrighteous is absurd. It is an attempt to evade the plain teachings of the Bible. Those who do not obey the gospel will be punished with “everlasting destruction” (2Thess. 1:8-9). Let us believe what the Bible says!

**Verse 8. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power, and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.**

The temple of God is filled with smoke from his glory and power. Smoke is used to show the complete glory and power of God. If smoke is allowed to enter a room, it completely fills that room. There is no place to stand without being surrounded by it. The same is true with the glory and power of God. It is complete. No place exists outside the power and glory of God. He created all things and is in complete control of all things.

No one will be capable of entering into the final dwelling place of God until all plagues have been fulfilled, or all things of this earth have ended. This is in likeness to the 10 physical plagues sent against Egypt in the time of Moses. The children of Israel could not leave Egypt until the 10 plagues were completed against the people of Egypt. Verse 8 identifies the time frame of the seven last plagues. They are to take place before God will allow his people to enter into his heavenly abode. Therefore, these plagues must take place during this present Christian age. They will affect man until the time of Judgment. At that time God will take his children home to live with him eternally. (For an Old Testament likeness of this symbolism, see Ex. 40:34-35.)

As we study the seven plagues in chapter 16, it will become evident that there is a distinct 4-3 division of these plagues, just as there is in the visions of the seals and the trumpets. The first four deal with the effects these spiritual plagues have directly on men as the gospel is proclaimed today. The last three show how God will deal with the unrighteous. The last of these, the seventh plague, specifically describes the sinner’s eternal destruction in hell.

# **CHAPTER 16**

## **THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES**

Chapter 15 is an introduction to chapter 16, and information concerning the structure of this chapter is given in the comments on 15:8. As we study this chapter, we must remember that Revelation is written in symbolic language; therefore, the plagues must not be interpreted as literal, physical plagues like those in the time of Moses. Instead, their symbolic meanings must be found. Some symbols are used nowhere else in Revelation; others are used and defined throughout the book. We believe the symbols retain their same basic meaning throughout the book; therefore, it becomes possible to take the meaning of the symbols from other places in the book and apply them to the same symbols in this chapter. This also helps to draw some logical conclusions about the meaning of the new symbols. By doing this, we believe it is possible to interpret this chapter in a way that is both understandable and in agreement with the teachings of the New Testament.

One outstanding feature about the seven plagues is that they correspond closely to the series of seven trumpets (8:6 - 11:19). The same basic symbols are used in both visions, and they also follow the same order. Because of this, their meanings must be similar. There must also be differences, or else there would be no need for two separate visions. We believe that the connection between the two visions, and the differences also, can be determined by comparing the meaning of the two main symbols of each vision, which are the trumpets and plagues. The trumpets sound a warning.

They warn people of events that are to take place here on earth and, for the most part, affect the spiritual lives of men. The plagues generally describe the problems and torments that those people will suffer who do not submit their lives to the will of God. In both cases, they are describing events throughout the Christian age and into the time of Judgment. In other words, generally speaking, the trumpets warn people about being disobedient to God, while the plagues describe the problems and torments those same wicked people will face here on earth and in Judgment. (See introduction to chapter 15 for more information concerning the seven last plagues.)

**Verse 1. And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.**

John hears a great voice coming out of the temple telling the seven angels to pour out their vials of wrath upon the earth. This must have been the voice of God because it came from the temple, which was described in 15:8 as being filled with the glory and power of God. Also, verse 9 states that God controls these plagues. If he has control over them, he would be the one to give instructions that they should be poured out. Whether God actually spoke these words, or had another heavenly being to give the instructions, makes no difference because the message is the same. God will send plagues upon those people who are disobedient to him.

The angels are instructed to pour these vials of wrath upon the earth. This means that the vials will be poured out upon people dwelling in this world. As we will see in the chapter, each vial is poured out upon a different portion of this earth. Therefore, it becomes important to understand that these different parts of the earth are used to symbolize different groups of people. Also, in the fourth plague, we see the vial being poured out on the sun. Obviously, the sun is not an actual part of this physical earth; therefore, it must represent a certain group of people dwelling in this world.

## THE FIRST PLAGUE

### A GRIEVOUS SORE

**Verse 2. And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image.**

As the first angel pours out his vial upon the earth, a grievous sore affects those people who have the mark of the beast. This makes it clear that those affected by these last plagues are non-Christians. Rev. 13:8 explains that those who worship the beast are not Christians because their names are not written in the book of life. This also helps us understand how the “earth” is sometimes used symbolically. People of the “earth” are those who put their faith and trust in some spiritual power other than the true God. This is in contrast to the “sea,” which is used in the second plague to symbolize the ungodly populations of the world. The lesson being taught in this passage is that God will cause sores to fall upon those who worship something other than the true God. The question that must be answered now is: When will this happen? We believe it applies to the present Christian age, just as does most of Revelation. These noisome and grievous sores are also symbolic. They represent the pains and anguishes that sin will cause people to suffer while on earth. Ex. 9:8-11 gives the account of the boils, which was one of the ten plagues God sent against the people of Egypt. In that situation, the people of Egypt opposed God and persecuted his people. In this first plague, all people who worship the beast are the ones who oppose God and oppress his people. They are ones who are affected by these sores. Putting our faith and trust in anything other than God will bring many trials and heartaches in this life. The ungodly powers of this world, whether physical or spiritual, will fall, and those who have depended on them will suffer because of that fall.

Sin will cause all types of mental and physical anguish



that could be avoided by following the ways of the Lord. In order to understand that this must be true, all we have to do is look at the suicide rate in our nation. Many people get so tangled up in the ways of sin that they completely destroy their lives. They can see no way to escape and end up taking their own lives. Many others become physically sick because of the practice of sin. Problems such as sexual diseases and AIDS are largely caused and spread by the practice of sin. People with these types of mental and physical anguishes are “plagued” by sin and their own unwillingness to follow the ways of God.

## THE SECOND PLAGUE

### THE SEA TURNS TO BLOOD

**Verse 3. And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man; and every living soul died in the sea.**

The second angel pours out his vial upon the sea. Several times throughout Revelation the “sea” is used to represent people living upon this earth who are not attempting to follow God. The “earth” in the first plague (v. 2) represented the people of this world who put their faith and trust in false religious powers. Both of these first two plagues affect those who are not Christians. They are directed against those people who live on this earth and engage themselves in the acts of sin. It should be emphasized that the symbols “earth” and “sea” have slightly different meanings. The earth refers to those people who are spiritually-minded, or who seek to worship someone or something other than the true God. They may even seek to worship God, but they are doing it according to the ways of man. On the other hand, the “sea” represents those who have no desire to worship or believe in a higher being other than man himself. They put their trust and faith in the governmental or political powers of this world. (For more comments on these symbols, see 12:16.)

It should be clear that both the “earth” and “sea” represent groups of people who are not Christians, and they are the ones affected by these seven last plagues. Therefore, each of these plagues will affect anyone who lives in sin instead of righteousness. This is a likeness to the plagues sent against the people of Egypt. All Egyptians were affected; only God’s people were exempt. Ungodly people are continually affected by these seven last plagues.

This second plague affects the masses of people, symbolically represented as the “sea,” who do not believe in God. The sea becomes as the blood of a dead man, which means that those who do not believe in God are spiritually dead. To be without God in this life is to be spiritually dead and without hope of life in the eternity to come. The spiritually dead of the earth will undergo the second death (21:8), which is eternal destruction. They are as dead men.

### **THE THIRD PLAGUE: THE WATERS TURN TO BLOOD**

**Verse 4. And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood.**

The third plague is directed against the rivers and fountains of waters. Many interpret these as literal rivers and waters of this world. We must remember we are dealing with symbolic language and, therefore, must seek to find the symbolic meaning. Verse 6 indicates these rivers and fountains of waters are given blood to drink, which means they have the ability to drink. This shows that they symbolically represent a certain group of people. They represent those who “have shed the blood of saints and prophets” (v. 6). (For a complete discussion of these symbols, refer to comments on 8:10.) For the sake of brevity, in this verse these rivers and fountains of waters represent the abundant teachings of those who attempt to direct the spiritual lives of people upon the earth. Specifically, they represent those leaders of false religious organizations who demand or deceive people into

worshipping God according to their instructions.

These people are responsible for shedding the blood of saints and prophets (v. 6). Many Christians have lost their lives throughout the ages because they refused to worship God according to the ways of false religion. As this plague is poured out upon these waters, they become as blood. This indicates that these people are spiritually dead. Because these people practice false teachings and persecute Christians, God has judged them to be spiritually dead or becoming as blood, which signifies spiritual death. (See v. 5.) They are spiritually dead upon this earth, and because of this they will have a part in the “second death,” which is the lake of fire. (See 20:14; 21:8.)

**Verse 5. And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus.**

An angel declares that the Lord is righteous and that his judgment dealing with those people who have persecuted the saints is just and fair.

The phrase “art, and wast, and shalt be” shows the eternal aspect of God. He has always existed, he exists now, and he will exist forever into the future. Notice that God has already judged that these things must happen. The judgment of God has already been made known to man through the gospel. Jas. 2:12 says that we shall be judged by the gospel or the “law of liberty.” (Also see Jn. 12:48.) We do not have to wait until judgment to know how we are to be judged. God’s judgment has been given to us in his Word. (For additional comments, see 14:7; 15:4.)

**Verse 6. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.**

Because these leaders of false religions have been responsible for the persecution and killing of many Christians throughout the ages, God has given them blood to drink. They have also been responsible for many people losing their spiritual lives. Since blood symbolizes death,

this means that these people are spiritually dead even as they live their physical lives. They have shed the blood of Christians. Therefore, they are spiritually dead. Furthermore, their spiritual lives will be required of them through all eternity. God says that they are “worthy” of that judgment. In other words, they will receive their just and due punishment.

**Verse 7. And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.**

A voice comes from the altar proclaiming that the judgments of God are true and righteous. Note that this proclamation comes from the altar. The “altar” is used in other passages in Revelation to symbolize man’s ability to communicate with God. In the Old Testament, man offered sacrifices upon the altar to make atonement for his sins. Today, Christians make atonement for sins through prayers. Verse 7 seems to refer to the question that the saints under the altar are asking in the fifth seal (6:9-10). They desired to know how long it would be before God would avenge their blood on those who had persecuted them. In the third plague, God again shows that those who persecute Christians will suffer persecution themselves because he has judged that it will be so. This should help Christians today, as we suffer the trials and hardships of this life, to understand that someday we will be rewarded and those who persecute us will receive their just punishment from God.

#### **THE FOURTH PLAGUE: MEN ARE SCORCHED**

**Verse 8. And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire.**

The fourth plague is slightly different from the others in that the vial is poured out upon the sun, which in turn is given the power to plague men with heat and fire. Again, these symbols should not be interpreted literally. They are

figurative descriptions of problems that will affect men here on this earth. We use language similar to this today as we speak of people who have gotten themselves into difficult situations. We say the “heat” is on them, or they have gotten themselves into a very “hot” spot. This is the situation many people find themselves in today as they reject the Word of God. The preaching of God’s Word is not an easy thing for sinners to hear. Because they do not want to accept the teachings of the gospel, it “burns” them. It puts the “heat” on them.

The sun must represent the teaching of the gospel. In 2Cor. 4:4, the gospel is referred to as “the light.” According to 1Jn. 1:7, Christians walk in the “light,” which must refer to the righteousness of God’s ways. If we walk in the light, we are obedient to the gospel. Just as the sun is the physical light of this world, the gospel is the spiritual light of the world. (For more information about the symbol “sun,” see comments on 8:12.) Therefore, this fourth plague teaches that the preaching and teaching of the gospel of Christ will torment those who refuse to accept it.

**Verse 9. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.**

People who refuse to obey God will blaspheme God because of these plagues. They refuse to repent or accept the gospel of Christ; therefore, these plagues continue to scorch them every time they hear the gospel preached.

Verse 9 states that God controls these plagues, but the gospel must be preached in order for them to be sent upon ungodly men. We know this because 11:6 says that the “two witnesses” (Christians) have the power to “smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.”

The fourth plague is a likeness to the ten plagues sent against Egypt in that these people refuse to repent. Every time a plague was sent against Egypt, Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to let the children of Israel go (Ex. 14:8). As one refuses to hear and accept the gospel, he is hardening his heart against God. He will continue to live in

sin and be plagued by the gospel.

## **THE FIFTH PLAGUE: DARKNESS AND PAIN**

**Verse 10. And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain,**

The plague of this fifth angel is poured out upon the seat of the beast. This seat refers to the dwelling place of the beast, or his territory of rule and reign. The “beast” refers to those beasts described in chapter 13, which represent all political and religious powers that oppose God and persecute his people. (For a full understanding of the “beast,” chapter 13 must be studied.)

As this angel pours out his vial of wrath upon the seat of the beast, his kingdom becomes full of darkness. To become full of darkness means that these forces no longer give light to the people. They will lose their power. This shows the power of God over the beast. God’s kingdom will stand forever, but the kingdom of the beast, whether it be political or religious, will be full of pain, suffering, and darkness when it falls. We should never place our trust in powers of this earth. We must trust only in the power of God.

Governmental and religious powers of this earth that persecute or ridicule God’s people will rise and fall, but God’s kingdom will stand forever. Those people, who put their trust in kingdoms other than God’s, will suffer greatly, both mentally and physically, as these powers collapse upon this earth. They will “gnaw their tongues for pain.” It must be painful to watch the powers in which you have trusted collapse around you. This is why Christians must always trust in God. His kingdom will never fall.

**Verse 11. And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.**

Instead of turning away from these powers of the devil and living a life of righteousness, the people affected by

this plague blame God for their sufferings. They refuse to repent of their evil deeds. Therefore, their “pains” and “sores” continue.

All through the study of these seven last plagues, we must remember that we are dealing with symbolic language. These plagues are describing the pain and suffering that people on earth, who refuse to obey God, will endure. This is why terms such as “pains” and “sores” are used. They represent all types of sorrows and sufferings that will affect non-Christians.

### **“ARMAGEDDON”**

Of all the terms we hear and are familiar with in Revelation, “Armageddon” may be the most common. If we turn on our televisions or radios and listen to almost any “religious” program, we are likely to hear this term. We constantly hear predictions that the end of world is near, and that we need to prepare ourselves for the great battle of Armageddon. The world in general today believes that “Armageddon” will be a literal battle fought between the forces of God and the Anti-christ in the Valley of Megiddo. They also believe that Christ will be victorious and set up an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem and reign for a thousand years. We even have those in the church today who are believing and teaching theories similar to this. This is a dangerous belief because it affords a second opportunity on earth to be obedient to the law of Christ. We know that no such second chance exists. When a person dies, his judgment is sealed, and he will either spend eternity with God in heaven or in the devil’s hell.

We hear so much false teaching today about “Armageddon” (the sixth plague) that it becomes extremely important for Christians to understand the correct meaning of this passage, if for no other reason than to strengthen our own faith. We cannot expect the world to immediately accept our teachings about Armageddon because they do not have the same understanding of the New Testament as we do. Therefore, it becomes our responsibility to teach the gospel to all who will hear it. Many take the word of some

man as being the “gospel” and accept it with unwavering faith. We must always keep our minds open to the study of God’s Word and “try” those who teach it in order to determine if they are teaching the truth (1Jn. 4:1).

We will seek to interpret the sixth plague in the same manner as we have interpreted the entire book. Its application will be to the people of this world who live during the Christian age. The sixth plague will take us to the end of all things here on earth, just as does the sixth seal and sixth trumpet. (See comments on 6:12, 9:13-21, and 11:13-14.) These three series are parallel in terms of the time period they cover. In your own private studies, make close comparisons of these three series.

## THE SIXTH PLAGUE

### THE EUPHRATES DRIED UP

**Verse 12. And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.**

The angel pours out his vial upon the great river Euphrates. This makes it possible for the “kings of the east” to have a way prepared. The difficulty in the sixth plague is similar to that of many other passages in Revelation. Many people interpret these symbols literally. However, we are dealing with spiritual matters that are described symbolically by using physical items with which we are familiar. Although there is a literal Euphrates River, which originates from two main sources in the Armenian Mountains and flows into the Persian Gulf, we must determine how it is used symbolically in this passage. In the Old Testament, the actual river Euphrates was the eastern boundary of the land that Israel possessed. (See Gen. 15:18; Deut. 1:7-8; 2Sam. 8:3-4.) If we translate this meaning into symbolic language concerning the church today, it becomes a spiritual boundary between the people of God and those who follow the devil. Therefore, the



Euphrates River is used to symbolize the spiritual boundary between the ways of righteousness and ungodliness. We know that the boundary between righteousness and ungodliness is the law of Christ, or the New Testament. It is the gospel. The gospel is the symbolic meaning of the “water” of the great Euphrates. Just as water is a necessary life-giving substance that man must have in order to sustain his physical life, the gospel is the necessary life-giving substance of our spiritual lives. This water, or the gospel, is the dividing line between the ways of righteousness and unrighteousness. Those who obey the gospel, or partake of this spiritual water, will move from the place of unrighteousness to the place of spiritual righteousness – the church.

When the angel pours out his vial upon these waters, they are dried up. This would mean that some people may become so hardened to the message of the gospel that God will turn them over to their ways of sin. Concerning this, 2Thess. 2:11-12 states, “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.” Also in Rom. 1:28, we read, “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.” These Scriptures teach that when a person becomes so involved in sin that he has no desire to hear about God or make any attempt to turn from his sins, God will “give them over” to those ways of sin. The water of the Euphrates will be dried up for those people. They will believe the lies spoken by the forces of the devil and be condemned.

The “kings of the east” must represent those forces of the devil that constantly work in the world today. Just as many literal kings, who were located east of the Euphrates River during Jewish history, were a threat to the Israelites’ physical lives, the spiritual kings located east of the figurative Euphrates River are a threat to the spiritual lives of men. These kings are referred to in verse 13 as the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. These three

symbols are used throughout Revelation to describe those forces that oppose God. In 12:9, the dragon was called the devil or Satan. In chapter 13, the beast out of the earth describes those religious forces devised by man to persecute the true children of God. The beast out of the earth is symbolized here, and also in 19:20, as the “false prophet.” We know this to be true because the actions of the false prophet in 19:20 are virtually identical to the ones given for the beast out of the earth in chapter 13.

When we put the meaning of these symbols together, the lesson of verse 12 becomes understandable. When man refuses to hear and obey God’s Word, the “waters” (gospel) of the “great river Euphrates” (the boundary between righteousness and unrighteousness) are “dried up.” That person is engulfed in sin and overcome by the “kings of the east” who lead the forces of the devil against men.

**Verse 13. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.**

Frogs come out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. They must represent false teachings, or maybe even threats of persecutions, that come from the forces represented by these symbols. These symbols were defined in verse 12. It is significant to note that these frogs came out of the “mouths” of these symbols. This indicates that the words spoken by the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet is that which affects men. These words or teachings are described as unclean spirits, which have the characteristics of frogs. We have no way of knowing exactly why the frog is used as a symbol, but it probably indicates that these speakings go out in every direction. As we all know, frogs do not necessarily follow a straight line. They hop about in every direction. The false teachings symbolized here are much the same. They go forth in all directions and cause men to follow the ways of the devil, either through the persuasion of false teachings or by threats of persecution.

Another reason why this symbol may have been used is that it was one of the ten plagues sent against Egypt. Frogs were used as a physical plague sent directly against the people of Egypt who were persecuting God's people. Today, they symbolize a spiritual plague sent against those who will not obey God's Word.

**Verse 14. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.**

These spirits of devils or frogs go forth unto the whole world. They are very much at work in the world today. They are deceiving mankind by the working of miracles, which should not be thought of as actual miracles but as great deceptions that will cause men to follow their ways rather than God's. There are men today who claim to be able to work miracles such as speaking in tongues or healing the sick by simply the laying on of hands. These are examples of the unclean spirits or frogs that plague mankind today and cause him to follow Satan. By these spiritual deceptions, these spirits of the devil are going forth to the "kings of the earth" and to the "whole world."

As these spirits of devils go forth unto the entire world, they are gathering their followers together unto the "battle of that great day of God Almighty." This is what many people refer to as the "battle of Armageddon." Obviously, a battle is being fought, but it is not some physical battle to be fought by using our modern weapons of war. It is a spiritual battle that is constantly being fought as these "spirits of devils" go forth over the earth seeking to deceive all mankind into following the ways of Satan.

The "great day" refers to the Judgment day. Jude 6 states, "The angels which kept not their first estate," are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." Therefore, the Judgment day is spoken of as a day of battle. The point that is missed by many is that this will be the final battle that Christians will fight. We are constantly fighting battles with the devil in the world today,

but the battle to be fought on Judgment day will be the final battle in which our Lord will be totally victorious over Satan. Rev. 17:14 states, "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them." After the day of Judgment, Christians will no longer have to fight those spiritual battles. We will be victorious and dwell with our Lord forever. The battle will be won.

**Verse 15. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.**

Many have a great deal of difficulty understanding why verse 15 is placed in this particular position in the text. With this understanding of the battle of that great day, the meaning of this verse becomes clear. We as Christians are admonished to be constantly watchful and "keep our garments." As these "spirits of devils" go forth throughout the world waging spiritual war against mankind, we must be extremely careful not to lose the battle ourselves. We are to be watchful. We are to keep our garments. Rev. 3:4 indicates that a few Christians at Sardis had been able to "keep their garments," while the garments of others had become defiled with sin. Christians are constantly engaged in a spiritual war against sin, and we must be certain to keep our garments clean.

All Christians are admonished to keep their garments lest they walk naked. To walk naked would mean that we have lost our white garments of righteousness. Rev. 19:8b says, "For the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." To lose our white robes of righteousness is symbolic of leaving that sin-forgiven state of a Christian and returning to a world of sin.

Jesus tells us that he will come as a thief. This means he will come the second time when men are least expecting him. Just as a thief enters when a building is vacant or no one is expecting him, Jesus will come when men have turned from God and have their minds centered on matters of this world rather than on spiritual matters. Mt. 24:37 states, "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the

coming of the Son of man be.” The people in the time of Noah watched him preparing the ark. They laughed and mocked him. Their minds were on anything except the teachings of God, which Noah proclaimed. The flood came at a time when the people of the earth least expected it. This is a likeness to the second coming of Christ. He will return when men turn a deaf ear to the teachings of the gospel and have their minds totally on things of this world. He will not be expected! He will come as a thief. This is why Christians are admonished to be watchful and keep their garments. If we become as people of the world, we will lose our “garments” of righteousness and be naked in a sinful world. (See 3:3-4.) We would no longer have the right to inherit eternal life.

**Verse 16. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.**

Of all the verses in Revelation, and possibly even the entire Bible, verse 16 with its reference to “Armageddon” may be the most familiar to those who profess any type of “Christianity.” There are so many different ideas about Armageddon that it would be impossible to discuss every theory. We will present what we believe to be the truth about Armageddon and encourage you to make comparisons with the many other interpretations. The basic belief of the world today concerning Armageddon is given in the introduction to the sixth plague (v. 12). It will be our purpose to take this verse in its context and draw some logical conclusions about Armageddon, which are in accordance with the teachings of the New Testament.

The word “Armageddon” as it is used in the Hebrew language would be translated “Har-Magedon” in the Greek. This is the only time this word is used in the Bible, and there is no evidence that a place with this specific name has ever existed. This means that this word must have a symbolic meaning. Many believe it refers to the Valley of Megiddo, which was the sight of many bloody battles fought by the Jewish nation. They also believe that the final battle between the saints and the Anti-christ will be fought

on this territory immediately preceding the second coming of Christ. Furthermore, they believe that when Christ does appear the second time, he will lead his followers to a great victory in this valley and proceed to set up an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem for a period of one thousand years. The mistake in this type of reasoning is that it requires a literal interpretation of these symbols. Just as in the entire book of Revelation, these terms are figurative, not literal, and require a figurative interpretation about spiritual matters, not physical.

It is likely that the Valley of Megiddo is the source of this figurative term "Armageddon." Throughout the ages the Israelite nation had mourned many times because of events that took place in this valley. This is illustrated in Zech. 12:11 which states, "In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the valley of Megiddon." This was truly a place of great sorrow for the Jewish nation. Therefore, the term "Armageddon" would carry with it the symbolic meaning of a place of great sorrow.

In the Greek language, the first syllable of this word (har) means "mountain." Therefore, the actual meaning of Armageddon would be the "mountain of sorrows." This should help us understand that, even though the Valley of Megiddo is probably the source of this symbolic word, it does not refer specifically to that place because we are dealing with a mountain instead of a valley. Symbolically, a mountain would refer to a massive amount of almost anything. In our language today, if we have a huge quantity of some item, we may say we have a "mountainous" quantity, or to describe a giant of a man we may say he is "as big as a mountain." With these thoughts in mind, we should begin to understand the symbolic meaning of this term. These people who follow the spirits of devils (v. 14) are going to be gathered into a place called "Armageddon" or "mountain of sorrows." They will be gathered into a place where the amount of sorrow they will undergo will be indescribable. They will suffer beyond our greatest imaginations. This is the sixth plague. Therefore,

Armageddon is not a battle at all. It describes the immense grief those people will feel who have disobeyed God when Christ gathers them together at his second coming.

As people go forth in the world today disobeying God, they are sealing their destiny to be gathered into a place called Armageddon. They may be enjoying the pleasures of this world for a season, but they are destined to find themselves in a state of tremendous sorrow when Judgment comes. They will be on the losing side of that great and final battle when “the Lamb shall overcome them” (17:14).

It should now become clear that the overall meaning of the sixth plague shows that when men refuse to obey the gospel of Christ, God will turn them over to their evil ways. He will deliver them over to follow the ways of Satan, which are described as unclean spirits coming out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. When Christ comes again, they will be gathered together into a place of immense sorrow, figuratively called Armageddon. Here they will lose the final battle of “that great day” (Judgment), and the devil and his followers will be cast into the lake of fire to be tormented forever and ever (20:10).

Christians are told to “keep their garments” so they will be able to avoid the consequences of this terrible sixth plague.

## **THE SEVENTH PLAGUE**

### **HAIL OUT OF HEAVEN**

## 7 Seals - 7 Trumpets - 7 Last Plagues



The sixth plague brought us to the end of all activities upon the earth. The sixth seal and the sixth trumpet also took us to the end of time. Remember, these three visions are parallel, describing different events, all of which are taking place during the present Christian dispensation. The seventh plague takes us into the time of Judgment and eternity. Therefore, even without a great deal of study in this passage, it becomes obvious that the seventh plague will represent the final plague which all those who are disobedient to God will suffer—an eternity in the torment of hell. This will be God’s final and everlasting plague that he will “pour out” upon all those who follow Satan.

**Verse 17. And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air, and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.**

This vial of wrath is poured out into the air. It is difficult to understand exactly why the “air” is used as a symbol. It probably indicates the total coverage of this plague. We know that this final plague will affect all those people who are disobedient to God. If dust were thrown into the air, it would cover a wide area as it fell to the ground. This vial of



wrath is pictured as being poured out into the air and covering the entire world. This would be in contrast to the first six plagues, which were directed at specific groups of people in this world. This has helped us understand who are affected by those plagues, as well as the meanings of the plagues. One passage which should be considered in determining the meaning of this verse is Eph. 2:2. It speaks of those who are in sin as being those who “walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air.” With Satan being the prince of the air, this plague affects Satan and all of his followers. This is in complete agreement with the overall interpretation of these plagues, and also the teachings of the New Testament concerning events that will take place at the end of time.

After this vial is poured out into the air, a voice is heard coming from the Throne in the temple of heaven saying, “It is done.” Since this voice comes from the Throne, it must be the voice of God proclaiming that “it is done.” This would mean that all things of this present world are finished. God’s plan for man has been completed. This is further proof that the series of seals, trumpets, and plagues are parallel, covering the same periods of time. In the trumpet series (10:7), we have a reading that is similar to this verse. It says, “In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.” When the time of the seventh seal, the seventh trumpet, and the seventh plague arrives, all things of this present world will have ended. Man’s sojourn on this earth will be over. This present Christian dispensation will be completed. Man’s destiny will be sealed. There will be no further opportunities for man to obey the gospel of Christ. Those who were obedient to God here on earth will spend an eternity with him in heaven, and those who followed Satan will be afflicted by the seventh plague for all eternity. “It is done.”

**Verse 18. And there were voices, and thunders, and**

**lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.**

Again the symbols of voices, thunders, lightning, and earthquake used in verse 18 are similar to those used at the conclusion of the seventh seal (8:5) and the seventh trumpet (11:19). In each case they signify the final conclusion of all things that God has planned for man. Voices, thunders, and lightnings are used to announce major events of God. This was true at the giving of the Ten Commandments unto Moses on Mt. Sinai. As God descended upon the mountain in a thick cloud, there were thunders, lightnings, and the voice of a trumpet so exceedingly loud that the people trembled. (See Ex. 19:16; 20:18; Heb. 12:18-19.) The seventh plague will be the final act of God dealing with mankind. At this time, man's destiny will be sealed for all eternity.

The earthquake could easily represent the shaking of the people because of their fear. Heb. 12:21 records that Moses was so fearful as he looked upon Mt. Sinai in the presence of God that he said, "I exceedingly fear and quake." When the time of the seventh plague arrives, those who have been disobedient to God will exceedingly fear and quake. The people of this earth will be shaken as never before.

**Verse 19. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.**

The "great city" in verse 19 must be the same one referred to in 17:18 as the "woman." This woman was also called the "great harlot" in 17:1 and referred to as "Babylon the Great" in 17:5 and 18:2. The meaning of this great city is discussed in detail in the above references. Briefly, it represents those systems of organized religion devised by men instead of by God. This means they have left the true teachings of God to follow the ways of men. They have committed spiritual fornication. At the time of this seventh plague, these false systems of organized religion designed

by men will fall. They will be destroyed or, as it is described here, they will be divided into three parts. This destruction is probably described this way because the number “3” is a reference to the divine, and this destruction will be a divine destruction carried out by God.

Another reason we know the “great city” is used symbolically in this passage is because the next phrase tells of the fall of the “cities of the nations.” If the “great city” represented the actual cities of this world, we would have two successive phrases with exactly the same meaning. This would be pointless. In fact, studying and comparing phrases such as this helps us a great deal in determining the meanings of these symbols. Conclusions can be drawn from their similarities and differences. Throughout the book, there are “clues” such as this that help to determine the meanings of these marvelous visions.

The point of verse 19 is that during the time of the seventh plague, all powers that exist in this world will fall. These false spiritual organizations of men will fall, and those physical forces such as governments, cities, and nations will fall. The power of God will overcome and destroy all powers that are in existence. At that time everyone will understand that God is all in all and will submit to his power.

When all powers other than God’s have been destroyed, great Babylon will come in remembrance before God, and she will receive the fierceness of his wrath. Babylon is discussed in detail in the introduction of chapter 18, but for our purposes here, it represents those who oppose God. Just as Babylon of old was an enemy of God’s people, and took them into captivity on several occasions, the “Babylon” of today is made up of those people who oppose God. During this time of the seventh plague, all those who have opposed God will come before him to receive the fierceness of his wrath.

**Verse 20. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.**

The thought that this physical world will be completely

destroyed during the time of this seventh plague continues in this verse. Since the main emphasis of the entire seventh plague is to show that all powers will fall and become directly subject to God, these “islands” and “mountains” are most likely used symbolically. The term “island” is used in the Old Testament to represent leaders among the people of the nations. (See Isa. 41:1; 49:1; 59:18.) Mountains are used symbolically to represent powerful kingdoms or nations. (See Isa. 41:15; Jer. 51:24-25; Amos 4:1.) If this symbolic meaning is intended in this verse, it would mean that the powers which some individuals (islands) of this world have acquired over others would then mean nothing. Also, those powers of mighty governments (mountains) of this world would no longer matter. The only power that will exist at that time will be God’s. If the symbolic meanings of islands and mountains are not intended here, then this would show the destruction of this physical world. When Christ returns, “the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10).

Regardless of which of these interpretations may be correct, the basic meaning of verse remains the same. During the time of this seventh plague, Judgment, and eternity, all power will lie directly with God and all men will be subject to it.

We might also add that due to the context of this passage and the fact that almost the entire book of Revelation is written in symbolic language, we prefer the symbolic meaning given for this verse.

**Verse 21. And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.**

The final part of the seventh plague is the great plague of hail. In verse 19, the disobedient stood before God to receive the fierceness of his wrath. Verse 21 is a figurative description of that wrath of God being poured out upon those who refused to obey him while they lived upon this

earth. This will be an “exceeding great” plague. The weight of these hailstones is described as being about the weight of a talent. According to Howard-Hines *Study of Revelation*, each stone weighed approximately one hundred pounds.<sup>1</sup> If this were a literal plague, such as the plague of hail sent against Egypt by God through Moses, it would be impossible for man to withstand. But, this is not the case. This is a figurative description showing the severity of this final plague, which God will levy against those who have followed the ways of the devil.

The final plague of eternal hell will be so great that we cannot begin to understand it as physical men. It will be a plague of the spirit that will last forever. Living in physical bodies, we can only understand physical pain. Therefore, this description of hell is given in terms of the physical body. We can understand how severe a plague of hail such as this would be against our physical bodies, and this is used as a description of how severe this final plague will be against the spirits of the wicked in hell.

The seventh plague, which is the final plague, will be directed against wicked mankind and will last forever. The only way to avoid this plague is to be a Christian and follow the ways of God. Let us always be diligent to follow God’s ways and do the works he has commanded. Let us remain faithful to him and spend our eternity in a place so wonderful it also defies description. Let us spend our eternity in heaven.

<sup>1</sup>V. E. Howard and J. L Hines, *Study of Revelation* (Texarkana, Tex.: Central Printers and Publishers, 1967), p. 110.

## CHAPTER 17

The central figure of chapter 17 is the woman or “great harlot” who sits upon many waters. This translation of the words “great harlot” is taken from the ASV and will be used in this commentary.

In order to understand chapter 17, the basic meaning of the “great harlot” must first be established. The term “harlot” carries the meaning of not being faithful to one man. If this is translated into spiritual terms, it would designate those who are not faithful to the one true God. Just as harlots have many physical partners, spiritual harlots worship many gods. They are unfaithful to the true God. They are committing spiritual fornication. This great harlot is described as committing spiritual fornication with the kings of the earth, which means they have joined themselves together to persecute and even kill the saints. (See v. 6.) Therefore, this great harlot is representative of those who claim to be spiritual, but they refuse to worship the true God according to the ways he has commanded.

References in the Old Testament support this interpretation. In Isa. 1:21, Israel is referred to as the “faithful city;” however, when that nation left the ways of God, it became a harlot. In Ex. 34:14-17, God warned the Israelites not to marry the inhabitants of the lands around them lest they “go a-whoring after their gods.” Also Jer. 3:1 states, “But thou has played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again unto me, saith the Lord.” Therefore, “harlot” was a well-known term used by the Jews to

describe spiritual unfaithfulness to God. The only sure way to interpret Revelation is to study the usage of these symbols throughout the Scriptures and apply those meanings to the symbols used in Revelation.

Since the harlot represents those who worship something other than the true God, or have once worshiped God but later turned away from him, nothing in the history of the world fits this symbol more perfectly than the apostate church. The apostate church arose because of a gradual wandering away from the teachings of the Scriptures and a setting up of laws designed by men to worship God. It was spiritual fornication. Man was unfaithful to the true God and began to worship other gods or, more specifically, a man who claimed to be God on earth. This situation is perfectly described in 2Thess. 2:3-4. As Paul writes to the Thessalonian church explaining that the second coming of Christ was not going to soon take place, he says, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God."

Roman Catholicism grew out of a falling away from the true teachings of God. One man eventually set himself up as God on earth by claimed infallibility and called himself "Pope," which means "father." We have but one Father, and he is our God in heaven. Today millions of people around the world still worship the man in this same office. They believe that he is incapable of error and that he acts as a direct messenger from God. In fact, he actually "exalteth himself above all that is called God" because he claims the right and ability to change the laws that God has given man to follow. He places himself higher than God.

Although this is the basic meaning of the "great harlot," it is by no means the entire fulfillment. The "great harlot" includes anyone today who claims to follow God but not according to the teachings of the New Testament. It also includes anyone who has been a member of the church but

has left to follow other gods. This great harlot represents anyone who is not worshiping God according to the way he has designed. They are committing spiritual fornication!

## THE VISION OF THE HARLOT

**Verse 1. And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither, I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:**

This vision is introduced by one of the angels that had the seven vials of wrath. He invites John to see the judgment of the great harlot. There may be no significant reason why this particular angel shows John this vision, but it is noticeable that this great harlot will end up in destruction, just as those people did who disobeyed God and received the seven plagues.

The subject of this vision is the judgment of the great harlot. We will take a symbolic look at the fate of this great harlot as it has already been determined by God. She is first described as sitting upon many waters. There is no doubt about the meaning of these “many waters” because they are defined in verse 15 as “peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.” The great harlot will affect or control vast numbers of people around the world. Many people throughout the Christian age have been deceived or forced into worshiping according to the dictates of this great harlot. Because of this, many have committed spiritual fornication!

**Verse 2. With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.**

The kings of the earth commit fornication with this great harlot, and the people of the earth are made drunk with the wine of her fornication. For kings of the earth to commit fornication with her indicates that they have shared in her deeds. They have aided her in her desire to commit spiritual



fornication. This means that many governments of the world have been, and still are, partners with this great harlot. They combine their powers in order to control their people, and in doing so, they cause them to partake of that spiritual fornication also. To understand that situations such as this have existed, all we have to do is look back through history to the time of the Holy Roman Empire. The powers of the Roman Catholic Church and the government of Rome combined forces to rule the people. The “church” made laws for man to follow in worshiping God and the Roman government enforced them. During this period of world history, many were convicted and even executed as heretics simply because they refused to worship according to Catholic doctrine. (For more information, refer to encyclopedia articles concerning the Medieval and Spanish Inquisitions.) Man-made religious powers have joined forces with governmental powers to cause many to commit spiritual fornication. This situation still exists in many places today although it may have taken a slightly different form by becoming more subtle in its ways.

Other verses to study in connection with verse 2 are 14:8 and 18:3. In both passages the language is similar and must be referring to the same situation. In comparing these verses along with verse 18, it becomes clear that the “great harlot,” “Babylon,” and the “great city” are three different ways of describing the same thing. “Babylon” indicates that these people are great enemies of God; the “great harlot” shows they are committing spiritual fornication; and the “great city” shows the vast number of people involved in this spiritual fornication. The “great city” is also used to show the contrast between those who oppose God and those who serve him as Christians in his “holy city.” (See Heb. 12:22; Rev. 22:2,10,19; 3:12.) These forces are also described in chapter 13 as the beast out of the sea and the beast out of the earth. For a complete understanding of this chapter, chapter 13 must be studied. For the serious student of Revelation, comparing all these symbols would be a tremendous and interesting study to pursue. All of the relationships and similarities can never be covered in a

book such as this. We hope to give some basic interpretations that will be helpful in your own private studies of Revelation.

It should also be noticed that in 14:8 all nations were “made” to drink of the cup of her fornication. Considering that verse in light of verse 2, we see that many people follow this great harlot willingly, while others are forced to follow. Either way, those who partake of her evil ways of spiritual fornication become a part of her and will receive the judgment that God will levy against her.

**Verse 3. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.**

John was taken into the wilderness to view the judgment of this great harlot. Exactly why this vision takes place in the wilderness may not be completely understood. Most likely it defines the place of operation of this great harlot. In 12:6, the “woman,” which was symbolic of the true church of our Lord, fled into the wilderness where God cared for her. In that passage, the wilderness is symbolic of the world of sin. This symbolism is taken from the Old Testament. During the time of Moses, the Israelites, God’s chosen people under the law of Moses, actually wandered in a wilderness for forty years and were fed literal manna sent from heaven. They were seeking to enter their promised land. They are called “the church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38). In the spiritual likeness of this, the church of the New Testament, God’s chosen people under the law of Christ, wanders in the world today feeding on spiritual manna from God, which is his Word. We are also seeking our spiritual promised land of heaven. This enables us to conclude that the wilderness represents this world of sin in which we live. Therefore, verse 3 teaches that the great harlot operates today in the spiritual wilderness of this world. Obviously, this harlot is not under the same protection as the woman of chapter 12, but rather, she is a part of the “wilderness” which the true church wanders in

today. She is a source of persecution and temptations that the church must overcome in order to enter into our promised land of heaven.

The vision that John sees in this wilderness is a woman sitting upon a scarlet-colored beast, which has seven heads and ten horns. The meaning of the beast will be discussed in detail in verses 8 and 9. But, for our purposes of interpretation here, it simply represents those governments that use their powers in order to persecute God's people. The point of verse 3 is to show the close relationship between the great harlot and the beast. The great harlot, or religious powers of men upon this earth, is riding the governmental powers of nations – the beast. This shows that these powers join forces and help each other control the people of the world. This exact situation occurred only a few hundred years after the time of Christ. The religious powers of Roman Catholicism joined forces with the governmental powers of the Roman Empire to control both the physical and spiritual aspects of man's life. Roman Catholicism "rode" the Roman government. Laws concerning man's worship to God were made by the religious powers and enforced by the secular government of Rome. People who were considered heretics by the Catholic Church were tried, punished, and even executed by the civil government of Rome. These actions plunged the world into a period of history known as the Dark Ages. This is only one example where religious powers and governmental powers have combined to dictate the type of religious activities their people must follow. Although this powerful combination of forces may not exist today to the extent it once did, there are still many nations whose governments are greatly influenced by strong religious powers. Some of these governments may even depend on these religious organizations in order to remain in power.

It would be a mistake to believe that the Roman Catholic Church is the total fulfillment of this "great harlot." This great harlot includes all people of all ages who commit spiritual fornication. This "great harlot" has simply changed forms. It was once basically the Roman Catholic

Church because that religious power controlled the earth. Eventually, both the political and religious powers of this religious organization were somewhat diminished. As this took place, many other false religious organizations began to come into existence. They began to have a great influence in the religious and political lives of many people. This “great harlot” changed forms but continued to operate under many different names instead of one. This helps us understand that the “great harlot” still rides the beast today. (This very situation was foretold in verse 5. Consult that verse for other comments.)

**Verse 4. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:**

Being dressed with expensive clothing and adorned with valuable jewels shows the vast amount of riches controlled by the “great harlot.” All through the Dark Ages, the amount of wealth and possessions accumulated by the Catholic Church is almost beyond comprehension. This religious power controlled a great amount of the world’s wealth. It was accumulated because of the “abominations and filthiness of her fornication,” which she held in a golden cup in her hand. The spiritual fornication, which she committed with the kings of the earth, enabled her to obtain great wealth. Still today, a great amount of wealth is possessed or controlled by false religious organizations. Many of these religious powers survive because of the tremendous amounts of money they are able to raise and control.

**Verse 5. And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.**

A further identification of the great harlot is written in her forehead. She is called “Babylon the Great.” Babylon was a great enemy of God’s people during the Old

Testament times. It is used symbolically in this passage to describe the great harlot as a great spiritual enemy of God's people. The religious powers who are committing spiritual fornication are spiritual enemies of God's people.

During the Dark Ages, Roman Catholicism was responsible for the persecution of many people. Anyone attempting to worship God in any way other than that designed by the Catholic organization was considered a heretic and was sought out and punished. Any religious organization today who commits spiritual fornication by worshipping God in ways other than that which is outlined in the gospel is an enemy of the true church. Christians may not suffer as many physical persecutions as they did at one time, but there are still nations today in which Christians are in physical danger because they practice their religious beliefs. The persecutions that Christians suffer today are directed more toward the mental aspect of their being rather than the physical. Today, Christians are harassed and belittled because they will not participate in certain activities that the Bible condemns, but society considers acceptable. Many times it is difficult to be a Christian and stand for the truth.

This great harlot is also described as the "mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." Although this may be an unpopular interpretation of this passage, there is almost no mistaking its intended meaning. Shortly after apostolic times, the church began drifting away from the teaching of the Bible. It became the apostate church, or the church that had fallen away. Eventually, the religious power of the Roman Catholic Church arose out of this apostate church. It became a religious power that was committing spiritual fornication. This religious power practically ruled the world through the Dark Ages. In 1517, Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the All Saints Church in Whittenberg, Germany. This is generally considered to be the beginning point of what became known as the Reformation Movement. Although this began as an attempt to reform the Catholic Church, it actually led to the present situation in which there are

literally hundreds of religious organizations that are also practicing spiritual fornication. This “great harlot” became the “mother of harlots and abominations of the earth.” She gave birth to many false religious organizations. Any religious practice that is not according to the Bible is spiritual fornication. It is an abomination to God. This is why it is so important for Christians to accept their responsibility of teaching and spreading the gospel to a world lost in sin.

**Verse 6. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.**

The great harlot is pictured as being drunk with the blood of saints and martyrs of Jesus, which indicates the excessive amount of blood shed by this harlot. This again points to the period of world history known as the Dark Ages. During this time, many were persecuted and killed because they refused to submit to man-made laws of worship. (For more information on this subject, consult *Fox's Book of Martyrs*, edited by W. Grinton Berry.)

As John observed this “great harlot” riding the seven-headed beast, he wondered with great admiration. This is an expression of total amazement. (See v. 7 for comments.)

## **THE MYSTERY REVEALED**

**Verse 7. And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.**

The angel asked John, “Wherefore didst thou marvel?” The ASV translates the word “marvel” as “wonder.” John did not in any way believe this beast was something marvelous to be followed. He was totally astonished at what he was seeing. He stood in amazement as he observed a great vision that he did not understand. We know he did not understand the vision at this time because the angel

perceived this and reassured him by stating that he would show him the “mystery” of the woman and the beast that carried her. The remainder of chapter 17 is an explanation of the beast, which the woman rode, and the relationship between the two.

The beast that the great harlot rode is described as having seven heads and ten horns. This same beast is described in 13:1 as the beast out of the sea. The great harlot is another description of the beast out of the earth, which was introduced in 13:11. Coffman writes concerning the harlot, “She rides the sea-beast; she is the land-beast!”<sup>1</sup> This chapter is an expansion of the meaning of the “beast out of the sea” and the “beast out of the earth.” The term “beast” shows that this great religious power possessed the powers of civil government, and the term “harlot” shows that she commits spiritual fornication. (For a discussion of the “beast” as a symbolic term, see the introduction to chapter 13.)

**Verse 8. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.**

The beast that this harlot rides is described as the “beast that was, and is not, and yet is.” A similar description is applied to the beast out of the sea in 13:3. In that passage, the beast is described as having one of his seven heads “wounded to death” but this “deadly wound was healed.” In verse 10 there is an additional description of these heads: “Five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come.” By combining the descriptive statements in these three passages, we can see that this beast must represent something of which five are already fallen and one is in existence during the time of John but will fall and then be restored as the seventh head of the beast. There are many ideas concerning the meaning of this seven-headed beast, but we believe that Coffman correctly identifies the seven

heads as “seven world-kingdoms hostile to God and to his people, namely, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and a seventh to arise at a future time after Revelation was written.”<sup>2</sup> This seventh head would then represent the Holy Roman Empire, which was the next worldwide kingdom to arise after the fall of the Roman Empire in A.D. 476. Many reasons will be given as we continue our study through the text concerning why we believe this interpretation to be correct.

This seven-headed beast represents those governmental powers of this world that oppose God. The number “7” stands for divine completeness. Therefore, the possibility of another worldwide kingdom still exists; however, significantly enough, there have been exactly seven worldwide governments throughout biblical history. It is likely that in this passage the number “7” carries a dual meaning. There have been seven worldwide governments, and they fulfill God’s plan concerning governments that control the entire world. They are complete. We know that the governments of this world are in power because God wills them to be. This concept is supported by the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 4. Daniel interpreted the king’s dream to mean that God would remove him from power and later raise him up again as king of Babylon. This was done in order that Nebuchadnezzar might “know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will” (Dan. 4:32).

All people who dwell on this earth, whose names are not written in the book of life, will be amazed at the resurrection of this seventh head. The same statement is made in 13:8 concerning the beast out of the sea that had one of its seven heads wounded to death but was healed. The beast out of the sea is the same beast that is being described in this chapter. Also, 13:8 states that all who dwell on the earth would worship this beast. The people of this world wondered at the powers of this beast. They listened to its great speakings and blasphemies, and they worshiped it. This is exactly what happened within a few



hundred years after Christ ascended to heaven. The Roman Empire fell in the year A.D. 476. It became the head that was “wounded to death” (13:3). It was also the beast that “was, and is not.” In A.D. 800, the powers of the civil government of Rome combined with the religious power of the Catholic Church to form the Holy Roman Empire, which ruled the world. This brought back the power of the fallen Roman Empire in the form of a religious-governmental power. The death wound had been healed. The beast that “was not” once again existed. This seventh head, Holy Roman Empire, is also referred to as the great harlot in this chapter. Two powers actually combined to form one government. One part was the civil government, which is described symbolically as the “beast.” The other was the religious part, which is symbolically described as the “great harlot.”

The relationships in Revelation are almost endless. The beast that John saw “ascend out of the bottomless pit” is the same as the “beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit” in 11:7. In that passage it is described as making war against the two witnesses, the church, and “killing” them. The beast is also referred to as the “great city” in 11:8, just as it is in this chapter in verse 18. All of these passages are closely related and must be studied together in order to have the full picture.

**Verse 9. And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.**

“The mind which hath wisdom” means that the things being revealed in the following verses can be understood if one is willing to study the Bible and apply that knowledge to the symbols used here. Many fail to understand verse 9 because they literalize the mountains. They are commonly interpreted as the seven mountains upon which Rome is built. If this were true, the seven heads of the beast would also represent the mountains upon which Rome is built because they “are seven mountains.” If the woman that sitteth on these mountains is Rome, the beast would be the

land upon which Rome is built. This would make it all but impossible to interpret the death wound and healing of one of these heads (13:3).

Also, many interpret the seven heads of the beast as seven kings who ruled the Roman Empire. If this were true, one of the kings would have had to die and then be resurrected from the dead. (See v.8; 13:3.) This is commonly answered with a Roman myth, which states that the Emperor Nero was resurrected as the Emperor Domitian. Anyone who believes the Bible certainly knows that this did not happen, and to base an interpretation of the Bible on a heathen myth is almost absurd.

**Verse 10. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.**

The best translation of verse 10 is the ASV, which renders it, "And they are seven kings." The seven kings are the same as the seven mountains and the seven heads of the beast. This is just one more clue to the meaning of the seven-headed beast. The word "king" in this text carries with it the meaning of a sovereign. To be in agreement with the symbols used in this chapter, this must refer to sovereign nations or kingdoms. This same symbolic language is used in Dan. 7:17-23. Four great beasts were to rise out of the earth from the time of Daniel until the time of Christ. In Dan. 7:23, the fourth beast was referred to as the fourth kingdom upon the earth, which would devour the whole earth. This was the kingdom, or beast, which would be in power when Christ came the first time to set up his everlasting kingdom, the church. (See Dan. 7:14, 27.) Therefore, this fourth beast must have represented the Roman Empire, which was in power during the time of Christ. In Dan. 7:17, these four beasts are referred to as four kings. Therefore, the term "king" is used to refer to a kingdom. The same is true in our text. The seven kings are referring to seven kingdoms.

Of these seven kingdoms, five are fallen, one is, and the other is not yet come. "The one is," or the kingdom in

power during the time of the writing of Revelation, would be the Roman Empire. The five that have fallen would be the five worldwide kingdoms which ruled the world previous to the Roman Empire. They were: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece. The one “not yet come” would be the Holy Roman Empire; the next and only worldwide kingdom to have existed since the fall of the Roman Empire. This interpretation agrees with verse 8, which describes the beast as being one that “was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit.” It also agrees with 13:3, which pictures the beast as sustaining a deadly wound and having the deadly wound healed. These are all references to the fall of the Roman Empire and its future resurrection in the form of the Holy Roman Empire, which is the seventh kingdom, or beast. When this seventh kingdom arises, it must continue a short space. There is absolutely no way to determine the exact amount of time referred to as a short space. The only thing which we can know for certain is that it would not continue to dominate the world until the end of time. It would come to an end. This is exactly what happened. The Holy Roman Empire did lose its worldwide powers.

**Verse 11. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.**

An eighth beast is introduced in verse 11. This also lends credence to the thought that each of the 7 heads of the beast stands for a specific worldwide kingdom because in this verse we see an eighth beast. Therefore, we are being given an actual count of the worldwide kingdoms that have existed throughout the history of the world.

This eighth beast comes from the one “that was, and is not... and is of the seven.” In order to determine the identity of this eighth beast, we must determine which kingdom is referred to as the one that “was, and is not.” Verse 8 refers to this beast as the beast that “was, and is not, and yet is.” Therefore, it refers to a kingdom, which was in power, but lost its power, and later regained it. This is the same

kingdom as the “one is” in verse 10. The kingdom in power during the time of John’s recording of Revelation was the Roman Empire. Therefore, the one which “was, and is not” is the Roman Empire. It was wounded to death or fell in A.D. 476. This death wound was healed, and the Roman Empire rose again in the form of the Holy Roman Empire. This eighth beast is a manifestation of the Roman Empire and the Holy Roman Empire. It is the beast that “was, and is not,... and is of the seven.” The only plausible explanation of this is the worldwide power of the Roman Catholic Church and the religious organizations that were born by her, which still exists today. The “great harlot” is now being referred to as a “beast” because it will continue to oppress God’s people, both physically and spiritually, until Christ comes again. The headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church is located in the Vatican in Rome, and it exerts a vast amount of both religious and political pressures throughout the world. Many other false religious organizations exert tremendous amounts of pressure on governments throughout the world. The structure and authority of the once powerful Roman Empire is still with us today in a religious form. It is the eighth beast. As discussed in verse 3, this beast may include the many powerful religions on this earth today that oppose God by refusing to follow his ways, or by worshiping other gods.

This interpretation is further upheld by the statement, “and goeth into perdition,” which means destruction. In 2Thess. 2:3-4, there is an explanation of the apostasy that began to take place in the church shortly after the time of the apostles. It says that there would be a falling away and the man of sin would be revealed, “the son of perdition.” Then 2Thess. 2:8 explains that this son of perdition will be destroyed with the brightness of Christ’s second coming. Therefore, these powerful false religions, which began by falling away from the true teachings of the Bible, will remain in existence until Christ completely destroys them at his second coming. This eighth beast is a religious beast that possesses great power today and controls the thoughts and actions of untold millions, or billions, of people.

Although the final destruction of this beast will be at the second coming of Christ, chapter 18 gives a great deal of information concerning its destiny before Christ comes again. When he does appear the second time, he will completely destroy everyone and everything that opposes him.

**Verse 12. And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast**

According to verse 3, this seven-headed beast also has ten horns. These horns represent ten kings that had not risen to power at the time of the writing of Revelation. As was explained in verse 10, these kings represent kingdoms. The number “10” is used in Revelation to symbolize completeness; therefore, these ten horns represent a complete number of kingdoms that are to have power with the beast. Unlike the seven heads, no specific information is given about these ten kingdoms. Because of this, we should not try to name any certain powers that they might represent. Instead, we should realize that they represent all governmental powers that would arise after the fall of the seventh head of the beast (Holy Roman Empire.) The seventh head (Holy Roman Empire) in verse 10 was to continue for a short space. Then an eighth beast (religious beast) would arise, and these ten horns (governmental powers) would be in power at the same time of this eighth beast. The seventh head represented the Holy Roman Empire, which gradually lost its worldwide powers toward the end of the Middle Ages. As this took place, many powerful nations began to arise throughout the world. No one power has dominated the world since the time of the Holy Roman Empire. This period of time is symbolically described as the “ten horns.” There is no way of knowing how many kingdoms will exist during this time, or how long each one will last. According to verse 16, and all of chapter 18, this situation will exist until Christ comes again. This places the world today in this period of time described as the “ten horns.”

These ten kingdoms are to be in power one hour with the beast. This would be the eighth beast (religious beast) since the seventh head of the beast has already fallen. This shows that these ten kingdoms and the eighth beast are to be in power at the same time. Since the eighth beast is the final manifestation of the Roman Empire remaining in the form of the Roman Catholic religious organization, along with many other false religious organizations that were borne by her, the situation being described here shows that many governmental kingdoms are sharing power, or combining powers, with false religious powers in order to rule the people of the world. This exact situation is taking place in many countries around the world today. The power of false religious organizations reigns supreme in many nations today. These false religious powers are a controlling influence in many governments as they establish laws for their people to follow.

To receive power “one hour” with the beast would mean that these governments coexist with the beast for an undefined period of time. Some may exist for many years and some for only a few. While these governments remain in power, they will share their powers with the beast. The powerful forces of the apostate church, or false religion in general, may see many governmental powers rise and fall, but the religious powers will remain intact. The religious organizations draw their power from the powerful forces of the various civil governments. This causes many to worship God according to laws designed by this spiritual beast. The power of the religious beast may also be extended to the influences that many false religious organizations have in the world today as they impact laws made by governments. All governments are influenced by the religious beliefs of the people in that nation. Following the false religious beliefs of the beast, which is supported by the 10 horns, will cause many to commit spiritual fornication and be lost in the sight of God.

**Verse 13. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.**

These ten kingdoms have one mind in the sense that they all share their powers with this eighth beast, or false religious organizations. They strengthen the beast. Because of the great influences of false religions, the governmental kingdoms will seek to honor the requests of the religious beast. This will enhance the powers of the government in order to control the people of that nation. In this manner the “10 horns” support the beast. They give their power and strength unto the beast. The religious powers and governmental powers of this world work together in order to rule the people. It should be pointed out that regardless of the type of political government in power, this same religious beast still has a tremendous amount of influence on it. This is how many governmental kingdoms have “one” mind to share their powers with the religious beast.

**Verse 14. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.**

These governmental kingdoms and the religious beast will make war against the Lamb. There have been, and possibly still are, some places where Christians are in danger of physical persecutions because of their public worship to the true God. This religious beast constantly wages spiritual war against the saints through its false teachings. In this manner, the ten kings and the beast are waging war against the saints. As Christians we must understand that the world does not appreciate the true teachings of the gospel because the gospel condemns them if they refuse to obey it. This lesson is taught over and over in the series of the seven last plagues. The people of this world are interested in the material things of this world, and they will levy all manner of persecutions against Christians who are trying to warn them that they should live according to the teachings of the gospel. By these physical and spiritual persecutions against Christians, they are making war against the Lamb.

This war will rage as long as the earth stands. Christians

are to take comfort in the fact that the Lamb will be the final victor because he is Lord of lords and King of kings. In other words, Christ is more powerful than any force that could possibly exist on earth. He is presently reigning on his throne in heaven and ruling in his spiritual kingdom, the church. When he comes the second time, he will destroy all powers that exist, and he will deliver the kingdom up to God who will reign supreme forever and ever. (See 1Cor. 15:24.)

Those who follow him are called, chosen, and faithful. In 2Thess. 2:13b-14a, we read, “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto he called you by our gospel.” Man is called by the gospel, and those who obey it are referred to as the “called” or “chosen.” Mt. 20:16b says, “For many be called, but few chosen.” Those who answer the call of the gospel are the called, chosen, and faithful. They are Christians.

**Verse 15. And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.**

Verse 15 is helpful in interpreting chapter 17, as well as other passages throughout Revelation, because it defines the “many waters,” which the great harlot was sitting upon (v. 1). They represent “peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.” This great harlot influences and controls a vast number of people. This spiritual beast, which began as the apostate church and later became the “mother of harlots” (v. 5), has controlled multitudes since its origin. It controls them both spiritually and physically by using powerful governmental forces to carry out its own desires.

Since this information about the great harlot is given in this particular place in the text, we are able to conclude that the eighth beast is referring to the same thing as the great harlot. This is another example of how different characteristics of the same force are sometimes described by more than one symbol.



**Verse 16. And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.**

Before entering into the discussion of verse 16, it must be pointed out that chapter 18 is a commentary on this verse. We will give the basic interpretation here, but for a full understanding of verse 16, chapter 18 should be studied.

This is an interesting verse because, as discussed in verse 12, the world is now in the period of time in which the ten horns, or ten kingdoms, are in power. During this period of time, there will be multiple kingdoms. The world will not be ruled by some powerful worldwide kingdom. Again, there is no way of knowing how long these kingdoms will stand or how many there will be, but this is the situation that prevails in the world at this present time. This makes the information given in verse 16 refer to events that are still in the future. We do not in any way claim to be able to predict the future. So our comments will be based entirely on the symbols as they have been used throughout the book.

The indication in verse 16 is that there will come a time upon the earth when the civil powers of government will turn against the religious powers of this world and eventually destroy them. This seven-headed beast with the ten horns represents wicked civil governments, which persecute God's people and oppose his ways. The ten horns are a part of that beast; they represent a time when the civil powers will be divided among many nations. There will not be one worldwide kingdom. These ten horns, or multiple kingdoms, will hate the harlot and make her desolate. The harlot represents all forms of false religions. It began with the apostate church of Rome and later became the mother of harlots or other false religions (v. 5). Therefore, the civil governments of this world will eventually turn against the powers of false religion and destroy them. To make her desolate and naked, and to eat her flesh and burn her with fire shows the totality of the destruction. There is

absolutely no way of knowing when this will happen or how it will be accomplished. It could be tomorrow, or it could be thousands of years away. We can be sure that, eventually, it will take place.

There are governments today that are presently attempting to do this very thing. Many communist countries seek to prohibit, or at least closely regulate, any religious activities that take place within their borders. Many wars fought today are political/religious wars. This struggle may continue for many years, but eventually civil powers will overcome and destroy these religious powers that rob them of some of their authority over their people. Maybe we should also remember that governments can have adverse affects on religious organizations in subtle ways as well as violent. They may enact laws that make it difficult for religious organizations to continue to exist. On the other hand, they may allow their citizenry to do many things that are totally contrary to God's will and sinful in his sight; thereby, eventually causing these religious organizations to be overcome by the sinful atmosphere around them. Again, we do not know how this will take place, but we can be sure that, eventually, it will happen.

The ASV renders verse 16 slightly different: "And the ten horns which thou sawest, and the beast, these shall hate the harlot, ..." Regardless of which version may be exactly correct, the meaning remains the same. This beast is the beast that the great harlot rode in verse 3. The ten horns represent the dividing of the power of this beast among many nations. The ten horns are a part of the beast and will share the governmental powers of the world at this time. They will eventually work together to destroy the powers of false religion.

We were told in verse 1 that the subject of this vision is the judgment of the great harlot. This vision has taken us from the time of her beginning through the time of her destruction.

**Verse 17. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the**

**beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.**

In verse 8, comments were made concerning God's control over the civil powers that rule throughout the world. Refer to that verse and the comments concerning Nebuchadnezzar's dream recorded in Daniel 4. Rom. 13:1 states, "For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." Those who are in power on this earth today rule because God allows it, and he will "put it in their hearts to fulfill his will."

Since we cannot foresee the future, it is impossible to completely understand why God deals with the people of this world as he does in matters of civil governments. God's desire for man is that all would be saved, but that obviously will not happen because of man's refusal to obey his commands. We have no way of knowing what political situations in this world will be the most advantageous for spreading the gospel. We have no way of knowing what governmental powers are needed in order to keep sin from raging uncontrolled. We may believe that we know which types of governments are best for us; however, all too many times, our decisions are based on our physical desires rather than our spiritual needs, which should be considered first. Very likely, there are people who are obedient to the gospel because they live in difficult situations. Possibly, they would not be Christians if times were easy. On the other hand, there are probably those who are Christians because they do not face physical persecutions, which might be more than they could endure. Governments of this world are in power because God desires it to be so. They are fulfilling the will of God. We must put our trust in God.

God also puts it in the hearts of the rulers of the kingdoms of this world to "give their kingdom unto the beast." Verse 12 states that the kingdoms are to receive power one hour with the beast, which is the eighth beast of verse 11. (See v. 11 for an explanation of this eighth beast.) The kingdoms of this world will support this beast or harlot. (See v. 3.) They will honor her requests. They will do what is necessary for this beast, or harlot, to exist. This will take place "until the words of God shall be fulfilled."

This is probably a reference to the things that have been described in this vision. The kingdoms of this earth will support the beast until all things described in this vision have been completed.

One question that might be asked at this point is: Why does God make it possible for this spiritual beast to exist in the world since it commits spiritual fornication against him? Again, we might point out that we may not always understand why God chooses to do things in a certain way. Our ways are not necessarily God's ways (Isa. 55:9). There is at least one probable reason why this beast exists. It exists in order to assist the existence of the true church. A hint of this is in 12:15-17 where the devil is described as making war against the glorious woman, which represents the true church. Rev. 12:16 says, "And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth." It might be impossible for the true church to exist if all people outside it were completely opposed to God and had no spiritual thoughts whatsoever. Sin would rage so rampant that anyone who even spoke against it might be killed immediately. Imagine what the world might be like if there were no spiritual activities at all, except for faithful Christians. Sodom and Gomorrah are probably the best examples we have of such a situation. Because many people are spiritually minded, even though they are worshiping God by their own means thereby committing spiritual fornication, they enable the true church to exist. Therefore, God allows this beast, the harlot, to exist in order to create an atmosphere conducive to the existence of the true church.

**Verse 18. And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.**

The woman, or great harlot, which has been the subject of this vision, is also described as the "great city." In 18:2, the great city is referred to as "Babylon the great." "Babylon the great" was also the name written in the forehead of the great harlot (v. 5). The great harlot is this woman that reigneth over the kings of the earth. This

makes it easy to see that all of these symbols are used to describe the same thing – false religions that commit spiritual fornication against God. The symbol of a “city” is used in many cases to indicate a group of people who have a common purpose. A good example of this is Heb. 12:22 where the church is referred to as “the city of the living God.” This city of God represents all those who have one thing in common – they are Christians. This “great city” is used symbolically in the same manner except it is further defined as being a harlot. This would mean the great city represents all those who commit spiritual fornication.

The great city “reigneth over the kings of the earth.” This ties the meaning of this verse to verse 17, which says that they agree to “give their kingdom unto the beast.” In the sense that these kingdoms give their power and authority unto the harlot, she is ruling over them. Her wishes and desires are granted by the kings of the earth.

<sup>1</sup>James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979), p. 396.

<sup>2</sup>Coffman, p. 293. As quoted from Albertus Pieters, *Studies in the Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Win. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), p. 214ff.

## CHAPTER 18

Chapter 18 is a broadened description of events that were briefly discussed in 17:16. (Refer to that verse as you consider this interpretation.) It describes events that are to take place in a period of time still in the future to us. As was emphasized in the comments on 17:16, we are in no way trying to predict the future. There is absolutely no way to put any timetable on the events described here. We can only interpret the symbols as they have been used throughout the book and make application to their usage in this chapter.

The main symbol used in chapter 18 is “Babylon the great,” which is another way of describing the great harlot. In 17:5 the great harlot has the name “Babylon the great” written in her forehead. The Babylonian Kingdom was a great enemy of God’s people in Old Testament times as they took Israel into captivity and eventually destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. The symbolic “great harlot” shows that these people commit spiritual fornication, and the “great city” shows the vast number of people who oppose God in this particular way. Therefore, “Babylon the great” is symbolic of those great multitudes of people who oppose God by committing spiritual fornication. They also oppress and persecute the true church of God.

Chapter 18 is a continuation of the judgment of the great harlot described in chapter 17. Events are foretold that will take place on earth concerning this “great harlot,” or

“Babylon the great.”

Probably, the best known interpretation of chapter 18 among members of the church today assumes that the great harlot and Babylon represent the actual city of Rome. Many of the events that take place in this chapter are applied to the destruction of Rome in AD. 476. It would be fairly easy to believe this interpretation because it does give an alternative to premillennial interpretations, which basically state that a period of great tribulation will occur after the saints have been raptured. These events are supposed to occur just prior to Christ’s returning to earth to establish an earthly kingdom. Although we believe the events referred to in this chapter are in the future, we do not believe they are dealing with these types of premillennial interpretations.

There are also several reasons why we do not accept the interpretation that applies these events to the destruction of Rome. We will present some of these reasons for your consideration and encourage you to read more about these interpretations and make further comparisons in your own studies.

First, it does not apply the meaning of the great harlot and Babylon as they are used in the Bible. The great harlot represents those who commit spiritual fornication. Obviously, there were those in Rome who committed spiritual fornication, but they certainly were not the only people to ever live who committed spiritual fornication. The great harlot refers to all those people, not just the ones who happened to live in Rome between the time of Christ and A.D. 476.

Second, applying the meaning of this chapter specifically to Rome takes away any meaning it might have for Christians who live during other periods of world history. The knowledge that this great harlot will be destroyed is something in which all Christians of all ages can rejoice and take comfort. To realize that Rome would be destroyed would concern only those Christians who lived during that particular period of time.

Third, to interpret this chapter as being the destruction of

Rome forces the interpretation of chapter 17 to also deal specifically with Rome. This, in turn, forces literal interpretations of certain symbols in chapter 17, such as mountains and kings. If we interpret the kings as the actual emperors of Rome, we have to accept the Nero-resurrection myth. There is absolutely no way we can believe an interpretation of the Bible based on some heathen myth.

Fourth, the things that undergo destruction in chapter 18 are destroyed forever. They will never exist again. (See v. 14, 21-23.) Obviously, after Rome was destroyed, it was rebuilt and still remains today. It arose to once again become an important city as a center of government and trade. When the destruction described in chapter 18 takes place, it will be complete and everlasting.

## **THE FALL OF BABYLON ANNOUNCED**

**Verse 1. And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power, and the earth was lightened with his glory.**

“After these things” refers to the vision that John has just seen which told of God’s judgment of the great harlot (17:1). Beginning with this verse, John is seeing a different vision, but the subject remains the same. John is still viewing the judgment of the harlot, and this same subject continues through 19:3.

John sees a powerful angel coming down from heaven who announces that Babylon the great has fallen. Angels play an important part in many of the visions of Revelation. Therefore, it would be difficult to place any special significance on this particular angel. The main idea presented is that this angel possesses great power. He is capable of announcing the fall of Babylon, or even causing it, if directed to do so by God.

**Verse 2. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.**



The mighty angel announces that Babylon is fallen. It is important that we understand how this vision is organized. It is written as if we are viewing the destruction of Babylon after it has taken place. This places us in a period of time after the destruction of Babylon and looking back at events that occur during that destruction. These events are still in the future for us today, yet they are described in this vision as being in the past. This should present no problem in correctly interpreting this vision because John would have been in this exact situation at the time of writing Revelation, regardless of whether it applied to events near the end of the world or to the destruction of Rome. If chapter 18 did apply to the destruction of Rome, it would be describing events approximately four hundred years in the future to John. If the Bible can reveal events four hundred years in the future to John, it certainly can reveal events that are still in the future to us today. Let us not limit God's ability to know the future, or his willingness to foretell certain events. He has done this throughout the entire Bible. As early as Gen. 3:15, a reference is made to the first coming of Christ, which took place more than five thousand years later.

Babylon is to "become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird." This is a symbolic expression describing the condition of Babylon the great once she has fallen.

As of now, Babylon is a city or multitude of people who do practice certain spiritual activities although they do not follow the pattern outlined by God. At some point in the future, those people will cease to participate in these spiritual activities. The spiritual nature of this city will be lost. It will become the "habitation of devils." Those who inhabit it will no longer seek to worship God. They will practice unrestrained sin. It will be a hold for everything unclean and hateful.

**Verse 3. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of**

**the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.**

The great harlot will receive the judgment of God described in this chapter because she has led many to commit spiritual fornication. This same thought is present in 17:2, which states that the kings of the earth, and its inhabitants also, have committed fornication with the great harlot. As people follow the false religious teachings of the great harlot, they become a part of the great city of Babylon, which will eventually receive the destruction described in this chapter.

This should also serve to point out the fact that the “great harlot” and “Babylon” are two ways of describing the same thing. Both symbols cause the kings and inhabitants of the earth to commit spiritual fornication. (See 17:2.)

All we have to do to understand that the merchants of the earth are made rich by this great city is to look at the wealth which the Roman Catholic Church and other false religious organizations have possessed and controlled throughout their existence. There have been times in history when people were not allowed to trade unless they followed the dictates of Roman Catholicism. In order to be in business, or even have a job, it was necessary to prove one’s allegiance to this religious organization. This exact situation is referred to in 13:17 where this great harlot, Babylon, is described as the religious beast with two horns. It states, “And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.” This great harlot controlled much of the world’s wealth, and anyone doing business with her must also have been a part of her. Therefore, the merchants of the earth, who committed spiritual fornication with the great harlot, have been made rich through the abundance of her riches.

**Verse 4. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.**

We have an interesting situation in verse 4. The people of

God are bidden to come out of the city of Babylon (the great harlot). This indicates that some of God's people are in this city of Babylon. How could it be that some of God's people are in this great city of spiritual fornication? The answer lies in the fact that throughout the ages many have sought to worship God in the correct way, but have faced tremendous persecutions or even death if they did not worship according to the dictates of this religious organization. It is likely that many were not able to withstand these persecutions and submitted to the laws of worship established by this organization, though they did not believe in them. The point of verse 4 is that God will not permit his people to remain in a situation such as this. If they are going to remain faithful to God and be obedient to him, they must come out of this situation. They must withstand the persecutions and have no part in this great city of Babylon. If they remain in this city of spiritual fornication, they are partakers of her sins and will receive the plagues that God will direct against this great city.

Verse 4 points out that God's people must not only be obedient to the first principles of the gospel, but they must also worship in the correct manner in order to be acceptable unto him. Mt. 15:9 states, "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." If one worships in any manner other than that designed by God, he is worshipping according to the commandments of men, and that is vain worship. It is not acceptable to God. It is comparable to the sacrifices of the Old Testament. Only those sacrifices that were ordained by God were acceptable; everything else was unacceptable.

The plagues that this great harlot, and everyone who commits spiritual fornication with her, will receive must be those seven last plagues described in chapter 16. The seventh and final plague will be eternal destruction in hell, which all those who oppose God will receive.

**Verse 5. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.**

God will remember those people who commit spiritual

fornication against him. Every man will be judged according to his works whether they be good or bad (2Cor. 5:10). The great harlot and all who partake of her sins will stand before God in judgment to answer for those deeds. God will remember her sins. He will remember the sins of anyone who has not been obedient to his will. For a person's sins not to be remembered at judgment, he must obey the gospel of Christ and become part of the family of God – his church.

**Verse 6. Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled, fill to her double.**

This is a message of consolation to the saints. The great harlot may be responsible for the persecution of many saints during the Christian age; however, Christians can take comfort in the fact that the punishment this great harlot will receive will be far greater than any persecutions she has inflicted. Her cup will be doubled. No physical persecution can possibly match the eternal torment that those who are disobedient to God will suffer.

**Verse 7. How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow given her for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.**

Because the great harlot has glorified herself and lived sumptuously upon this earth, she will be tormented eternally. Since the time that men fell away from the true teachings of the gospel, false religious organizations have controlled, and still control, vast amounts of wealth. Enormous cathedrals stand as great monuments of this wealth throughout the world. Huge amounts of wealth are also controlled by many religious organizations today who claim to be a part of the true church but are actually a part of the great harlot.

The latter part of verse 7 once again helps identify the great harlot (Babylon). She claims to sit as a queen. A queen is one who is married to the king. This great spiritual

harlot claims to be married to the King of kings – Christ. She claims to be the true church, which is married to Jesus Christ (Rom. 7:4), but is actually a spiritual harlot committing adultery with many gods. She claims that she is “no widow.” This again points to the marriage relationship between Christ and the church. Just as the true church of Christ believes that her husband has risen from the grave and sits on his throne in glory today, this great harlot claims the same thing about herself. She claims to be the true church. Therefore, she professes not to be a widow. She also believes that she will “see no sorrow.” She believes that one day she will be in heaven with God. This is a fearful statement because many people today mistakenly believe they are serving God; however, in actuality, they are a part of this great harlot.

The great lesson that must be learned, is that God will not accept man’s designs of worship. We must worship according to the plan God has given us in his Word. This great harlot “saith in her heart,” or truly believes in her heart, that she is the true church of God. Yet, God tells her that she will receive “much torment and sorrow” because she is actually committing spiritual fornication.

**Verse 8. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.**

Because this great harlot glorifies herself; lives deliciously, and claims to be the true church of God, yet commits spiritual fornication, she will be destroyed. In one day, death, mourning, and famine will come upon this great figurative city of spiritual Babylon. This must mean that her fall will be sudden and complete. This great city is also referred to as the eighth beast in 17:11. In 17:12 the ten kings were to receive power with this beast for “one hour.” According to 17:16, the ten kings will also be the ones responsible for the destruction of this beast. The ten kings refer to the complete number of civil governments that will reign with the beast. Many different governments will rise

and fall during this period of time and reign for “one hour.” The reign of some may be short; others may last for many years. Near the conclusion of the reign of these “ten kings,” they will unite to destroy the great religious city, which commits spiritual fornication. These times of “one day” and “one hour” are not meant to be used in determining the actual amounts of time involved in these events. If that were the case, the length of time it would take those governments to destroy the great harlot would be longer than their reign with her. However, we can be sure that this destruction will come “one day.” When it does, this great harlot (city of Babylon) will be utterly and completely destroyed by those who have shared their powers with her.

There is no way of knowing when this event will take place, but when it does, most likely it will be an extremely difficult situation for those living at that time, and especially for Christians. According to 17:16, the governments of this world will be responsible for the destruction of this great spiritual harlot. When this does take place, Christians may find it difficult to remain faithful to the Lord. According to 12:16, these false religious organizations actually assist the true church to remain in existence by helping to provide an atmosphere of spirituality upon the earth. When this great spiritual harlot is destroyed, this assistance will be removed. Sin will prevail throughout the earth, and the church will be surrounded by an ungodly world. It is not difficult to believe that this situation could occur because, if it were possible, many governments today would prefer eliminating all forms of religion. According to these verses, someday they will succeed in accomplishing this task.

This is similar to another situation that was prophesied in the Old Testament and fulfilled in A.D. 70. It was called the “abomination of desolation” in Dan. 9:27 and spoken of by Christ in Mt. 24:15. This abomination of desolation was the destruction of Jerusalem, or the ending of the Jewish system of religion, which had been observed from the time of Moses. When this destruction was accomplished, it was a time of great tribulation (Mt.24:21). When this great

harlot is destroyed, it is also likely to be a period of great tribulation although there is no way to actually know what will take place during this period of time.

We offer the following discussion on this subject for your consideration as you continue to study Revelation. In comparing other passages in Revelation that seem to have similar meanings, it is likely that the period of time spoken of here is comparable to the “little season” of 20:3, 7. In that period of time, the devil will be loosed out of his prison for a “little season,” and his forces gathered together to make war against the saints. Rev. 20:9 says they will compass about the camp of the saints (the church) and when this is accomplished, the end will come. If these times are comparable, this would mean that the destruction of this great harlot will take place very near the second coming of Christ. It will be a period of time when the only religious activities taking place will be those of the church. Sin will rage wild upon the face of the earth and the camp of the saints will be surrounded. Satan will control the lives of many people, and the world will find itself in a catastrophic situation. (See comments on 20:7, 8.) This situation will be caused by sin. Man cannot live in a situation where sin rages uncontrolled by anyone or anything. This was the situation that existed during the days of Noah before the destruction of the world by the flood. The only people who were faithful to God were Noah and his family. They were completely “compassed about” by sin. Mt. 24:37 says, “But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”

## LAMENT FOR BABYLON

**Verse 9. And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning,**

The kings of the earth who have committed spiritual fornication with this great harlot and have been made rich by this association will lament for her when they see her

destruction. According to 17:16, the ten horns, or ten kings (17:12), which represent all the kingdoms of the world, will be responsible for the destruction of the harlot. Also, verse 3 makes a reference to the kings of the earth as being the ones who commit fornication with this great harlot. As Coffman says, "Here is the great paradox."<sup>1</sup> Those who destroy this great harlot will suddenly realize that they have destroyed the source of their riches. They will lament for her as they see the smoke of her burning. They will be in great sorrow because of their actions. This realization will come quickly, even as the smoke is still rising from her burning.

It is hard to imagine what this world would be like without false religious organizations. However, many governments today would like to destroy all forms of religion. According to this passage, they will eventually be successful, only to find out that they have destroyed the very thing that made them rich and powerful.

**Verse 10. Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.**

These kings of the earth, or civil governments that were responsible for the destruction of the great harlot, will stand afar off viewing the destruction of the great city of Babylon. They stand afar off because they are afraid to come near, or be associated with this great harlot any longer for fear of being destroyed themselves.

This destruction is said to take place in "one hour." This is in contrast to verse 8, which says the destruction took place in "one day." We should not view this as two different time periods or two different times of destruction. This most likely means that this destruction will take place at the end of the "one-hour" reign with the ten kings. The beast is to reign with the ten kings for one hour, and at the end of that reign, the ten kings will destroy the beast in one day, which indicates her end will come suddenly and quickly.



**Verse 11. And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her for no man buyeth their merchandise any more:**

As discussed in 17:4, the great harlot has controlled, and still controls, a great deal of the wealth of this world. When this destruction comes, this wealth will be lost. It is hard to imagine what this period of time might be like, and we must refrain from making unfounded guesses; however, we are told that those who have depended on this wealth will weep and mourn because people will no longer buy their merchandise. This great harlot controls much of the earth's wealth, but when she is destroyed, this wealth will be lost and those who depended on it for their own livelihood will suffer. Another reference is made to this same situation in verse 15.

**Verses 12, 13. The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men.**

These two verses list the merchandise that the merchants of the earth sold to the great harlot. There may be symbolic meanings in this list of merchandise, but more than likely, this is used to emphasize the amount of wealth possessed by the great harlot. She is capable of purchasing all types of precious stones and many other costly items that require great wealth. When the great city of Babylon is destroyed, those who sold these items will no longer be able to do so and will suffer greatly because of it.

We must emphasize the last phrase of verse 13. It includes slaves and souls of men in this list of merchandise purchased and controlled by the harlot or the city of Babylon. An alternate translation of this is "bodies and souls of men." The great harlot not only controls great

material wealth, she also controls the bodies and souls of men. A cross reference which should be studied in connection with these verses is 13:11-17, which describes a beast with two horns coming up out of the earth. This beast is the same as the great harlot or the city of Babylon. The difference is that chapter 13 describes the governmental powers that this great harlot possesses. The two visions are giving different information about the same great religious harlot or beast. In 13:15 the two-horned beast had the power to “cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.” This is control of the souls of men. Rev. 13:17 shows that “no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.” This is control of the actions or bodies of men. Therefore, the great harlot not only controls the great wealth of the world, she also controls the bodies and souls of men. Those people who are a part of the great spiritual harlot are enslaved by it. They have pledged body and soul to it.

Remember, the great harlot still exists today. It has simply changed forms and now exists under many names instead of only one. (See 17:5.)

**Verse 14. And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all.**

The great harlot, according to 17:4, was “arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls.” At this time these riches will depart from her. These are the things that she has lusted after from her beginning. When her destruction comes, she will no longer control these items of great wealth.

It is emphatically stated that she will find them “no more at all.” This will be the end of this spiritual harlot on earth. She will not rise again at some later date to reclaim her wealth. She will be gone forever. This once again re-emphasizes the fact that this city of Babylon cannot be referring specifically to the literal city of Rome, which rose

again to become a prominent city. However, verse 14 states that this will not happen to spiritual Babylon. The wealth of this great spiritual city will be lost forever.

**Verse 15. The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing,**

These merchants, who sold these costly items to the great harlot and have been made rich by her, stand afar off as they observe her burning. Her destruction will be so great that not even those who were made rich by her will be willing to come to her aid. They will not attempt to help her in any way for fear of their own destruction.

They will weep and wail as they watch her burning. This will happen because of their own greed and the knowledge that the source of their wealth has been destroyed. We must not try to determine when this great event will take place; exactly how it will happen, or what will be the situation upon this earth that will cause it to take place. The indication here is that it will include a time of great economic chaos throughout the world. When the civil governments of this world have succeeded in destroying the great spiritual false religious organizations, the world will probably find itself in a very difficult state of affairs. Although it may be “intellectually stimulating” to ponder events that might occur during this period of time, let us not go beyond what we are told in God’s Word.

Also, remember that it is not the purpose of this vision to tell when, or even how, such events might occur. It is recorded to assure the saints that this great spiritual harlot will not win the war, but instead, she will finally be destroyed. According to 17:1, the subject of this vision is the judgment of the great harlot. It should be a source of comfort and strength to Christians to know that this great harlot will finally be destroyed. Even though she may possess great material wealth throughout her lifetime, Christians are the ones who are actually wealthy. We possess forgiveness of our sins, which gives us an inheritance more valuable than anything on this earth.

**Verse 16. And saying, Alas, alas that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls!**

A description of the great harlot, which is almost identical to this description of the great city, is given in 17:4. This again points to the fact that the great harlot and the great city are identical. It is simply two ways of describing the same thing. Each description gives different information about the same subject. (For more information about the description of the great city, see comments on 17:4.)

**Verse 17. For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off,**

Once again, the time of her destruction is given as “one hour.” It is also used in verses 10 and 19. (For information about this symbol, see comments on v. 8,10.)

The shipmasters, sailors, and those who trade by sea will also stand afar off, not wanting to be a part of this great destruction. This shows the totality of the destruction. Just as the merchants of verse 15 stood afar off weeping and wailing, anyone who trades or deals with this great harlot in any way will mourn her destruction because of the economic losses they will suffer. Also, no one will come to her rescue. Everyone will watch her destruction, but no one will assist her for fear of being destroyed themselves.

**Verse 18. And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city!**

When the destruction of this great spiritual city of false religion comes, those who have destroyed her (v. 9; 17:16), along with those who were made rich by her (v. 15), will realize that the great city served a purpose on earth. At least those people who are part of this great harlot are morally good people. They may not be worshiping according to God’s plan; however, they do believe in God and are

spiritually minded. According to verse 2, when this great city is destroyed, it will become a habitation for devils. The spirituality of this great city will be lost and the people in it will no longer believe in God. Men will cry, "What city is like unto this great city!" There will be none. People will no longer seek to serve God and sin will overwhelm the world.

**Verse 19. And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.**

Those who have been made rich by the great harlot will be exceedingly sorrowful. They will cast dust on their heads and cry by weeping and wailing. These are signs of that great sorrow. There will no longer be any need for the great cathedrals or beautiful buildings in which to worship. There will no longer be any need for the golden altars and marble images, or the priceless paintings and fine stained glass windows, which are outward signs used by false religious organizations to show the world that they believe in God. The wealth owned and controlled by this great city will be lost forever.

**Verse 20. Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.**

In the fifth seal in 6:10, the saints under the altar asked, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" This is at least a partial fulfillment of the answer to that question. God will be responsible for the destruction of this great city. According to chapter 18, there will come a time when this great spiritual city of false religion will cease to function, and we know that Christ will destroy it forever in hell when he comes again. (See 2Thess. 2:8.) When Christ returns again, all those who have been a part of the great spiritual harlot throughout the ages will suffer eternal

destruction.

For the holy apostles, prophets, and all who follow their teachings, this is cause for rejoicing. This assures Christians today that false religion will not win over the truth. God will destroy it, but he will bless those who follow him. This could also be taken as a warning that God will destroy all those who have a part in false religions. Therefore, we must make sure to follow the ways designed by God.

## THE FINALIY OF THE FALL

**Verse 21. And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.**

The destruction of this great city of Babylon, the spiritual harlot, will occur with great violence. When false religion is finally destroyed on this earth, it will not happen quietly or simply gradually decline until it no longer exists. The ten kings of 17:16 will destroy it with great violence. Chapters 17 and 18 overwhelmingly point to the concept that the secular governments of this world will join forces to eliminate all forms of religious practice. The only thing remaining of a spiritual nature will be those Christians whose faith is strong enough to enable them to remain faithful to God. (See 20:9.)

To see that this is possible, all we have to do is look at the situations in the world today concerning governmental relationships with religious organizations. Some are blessed to live in countries where religious practice is welcomed and even encouraged. Others live in nations where religious practice is simply tolerated, while still others are unfortunate enough to live in nations where worship to the true God is prohibited, or at least strictly controlled. According to chapters 17 and 18, a time will come when the governments of all nations will end their associations with religious organizations. With great violence, these religious organizations will be destroyed, never to rise

again. They will be found no more at all (v. 22).

It should also be noted that the “sea” is sometimes used as a symbol to represent the people of the earth. (See comments on 12:16.) It is very possible that this meaning can be applied here also. Just as a great stone cast into the sea would cause a violent upheaval of water, the destruction of Babylon will be a catastrophic event for the people of the earth. This is why the people who actually destroy this city of false religion will quickly mourn her extinction. (See v. 9; 17:12, 16.)

**Verse 22. And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee;**

This great city of false religion will cease to function. Nothing pleasant or worthwhile will ever be accomplished by it again. Verse 2 says this great religious city will become the habitation of devils and a hold of every foul spirit and a cage of everything hateful and unclean. The spiritual nature and organization of false religion will be destroyed.

In verses 21 through 23, the phrase “shall be found no more at all in thee,” or one similar, is used six times. This emphasizes the finality of this destruction. This great city of false religion will never again exist. Its destruction will be eternal. Man’s organized structures of false religion will be destroyed forever.

The repeated use of this phrase should be enough to underscore the fact that this chapter is not describing the fall of the actual city of Rome. Rome rose again, and without any doubt, all of the items mentioned in verses 22 and 23 have been heard or seen again in that city since its initial destruction. This chapter describes the fall of a symbolic “great city,” which is also described as a great harlot, signifying that those who are in this great city commit spiritual fornication. To commit spiritual fornication means to be untrue to God. This is false

religion. When the “great city” of false religion falls, it will be completely destroyed, never to rise again.

**Verse 23. And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.**

When the great city of false religion is destroyed, the light of a candle will no longer shine in it. Even though the religious teachings of the great city are false, the Bible is still read and used as a guide for moral values. The people of the great city claim to believe and follow the teachings of the Bible, even though they do not practice everything it teaches. This is especially true concerning the plan of salvation that enables one to enter the “Holy City” of God, the true church. (See 3:12.) From this standpoint, the Bible, or God’s Word, shines as a light in this great city. When the great city of false religion is destroyed, this light will cease to shine. Remember, it will become the habitation of devils as stated in verse 2.

When this destruction comes, the voice of the bridegroom and the bride will no longer be heard in this city. This meaning is similar to that just stated. The bridegroom is used symbolically to represent Christ (Jn. 3:29), and the bride represents the church (21:9). Therefore, the voice of the bridegroom and bride is the Word of God, or the teachings of the Bible. Teachings concerning the bridegroom and the bride can be heard today in false religious organizations. They are made up of those who profess to know God and claim to be a part of his church, yet they commit spiritual fornication by disobeying his commands. When the great city is destroyed, the teachings of the Bible, the voice of the bridegroom and bride, will no longer be heard. It will become a hold of every foul spirit (v. 2).

According to verses 11 and 16, the merchants of the great city are those who supply its needs and luxurious desires. Here they are described as the great men of the earth. Those



men, who are powerful and well known upon this earth, supply this great religious city its goods. Many today become wealthy by supplying the needs of these great false religious organizations. In 2Tim. 4:3-4, we read, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” Some of the most well known men of this entire world are leaders of these false religious organizations. They are merchants unto the great city!

All nations are deceived by the sorceries of the great city. In 13:13-14 this same situation is described as governmental powers of the religious beast that arise out of the earth. This beast was the first manifestation of the great harlot, or the great city of Babylon. As the apostate church began to organize by the canons of men, it gained great political power and became one horn of the great two-horned beast of the Holy Roman Empire (13:11). It used these political powers to require that all men worship according to the ways designed by the apostate church and proclaimed the penalty of death for those who did not submit (13:15). It did great wonders in the sight of all men, causing them to worship this spiritual beast (13:13). It deceived all nations by its sorceries!

This great religious beast, which caused people to commit spiritual fornication, is referred to in chapter 17 as the great harlot. According to 17:2, this great harlot committed fornication with the inhabitants of the earth and made them drunk with the wine of her fornication. She deceives all nations by her sorceries!

Rev. 17:5 says that this great harlot became the mother of harlots. Part of the name written in her forehead was “Babylon the great, the mother of harlots.” Rev. 17:18 shows that this woman is that great city, or Babylon the great. Therefore, Babylon the great is a figurative city which includes all those who commit spiritual fornication against God. Verse 3 says that the kings of the earth have committed fornication with this great city and the

merchants of the earth are made rich by the abundance of her delicacies and all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication. All nations are deceived by her sorceries!

The above information shows that the great city has deceived the people of this world since its beginning, and it will continue to do so until the time of its destruction.

**Verse 24. And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.**

The great city or spiritual harlot has been responsible for the persecution and death of many of God's people throughout the ages. Rev. 13:15 says that the great religious beast, which possessed civil powers, used this power to cause "as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed." The image of that beast was the religious organization that patterned itself after the great civil beast (Roman Empire). Those who refused to worship this image of the beast, the religious organization, were proclaimed heretics, sought out, and punished or killed if they persisted in their refusal to submit. (More information is given in chapter 13.)

How could this great harlot be responsible for all who have been slain upon the earth? The Jews on the day of Pentecost were accused of killing the Messiah, yet they had not actually driven the nails in his hands. The Roman government had actually killed him, but because of the Jews rejection of Christ and their false accusations against him, they were responsible for his death. Many wars that have already been fought and are still being fought are religious wars. They are wars that are brought about by the great city of false religion. Many of the governmental decisions made in the world today dealing with problems between nations are based on the religious beliefs of those nations. Coffman says, "it is the spirit of lawlessness and apostasy from the truth, spectacularly represented in the harlot; it is the whole religious apparatus moving throughout history and responsible for wholesale deaths all over the world."<sup>2</sup>

Babylon the great, the great harlot, is a tremendous religious force that exists as a powerful beast today. It is responsible for many circumstances that occur daily. Revelation teaches that the great harlot is not only responsible for many persecutions against the church, but actually aids the true church in its existence. (See 12:16.)

All Christians need to have a better understanding of the function of false religion around the world today. With a good understanding of Revelation, we firmly believe it is possible to understand more clearly why there is so much false religion today. It provides an “atmosphere” in this world that is conducive to the existence of the church. If the church were completely surrounded by people who had no religious belief at all, it would be almost impossible for the church to exist. Even though false religion is not acceptable to God, it does serve a purpose.

<sup>1</sup>James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979), p. 426.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*, p. 435.

## CHAPTER 19

Chapter 18 pictured God's judgment of the great harlot and events that will bring an end to the powers of false religion on this earth. Therefore, the events described in chapter 18 will take place on earth before the second coming of Christ. Chapter 19 foretells the final outcome of the beast and false prophet. (See v. 20.) The false prophet is another symbol used to describe the same people as the great harlot. The "great harlot" symbolizes their spiritual fornication, and the "false prophet" symbolizes their desire to teach others to follow their ways of sin. A biblical definition of a false prophet is given in Second Peter chapter 2. The beast represents "the kings of the earth" (v. 19), which are those governmental powers that oppress the church and cause all types of persecutions and hardships. Therefore, chapter 19 is a picture of the final destruction of those who have persecuted God's people throughout the ages, either by civil or religious powers. They are symbolized in this chapter as the beast and the false prophet.

The chapter division is somewhat misleading because there is a gradual transition from the vision of the judgment of the great harlot in chapter 18 to the subject of chapter 19. The actual division between the two visions comes closer to being between verses 4 and 5 of chapter 19. Verse 4 could actually serve as the concluding verse of the judgment of the great harlot or as the introductory verse to

the vision of chapter 19. Therefore, the first three verses of this chapter are concluding comments concerning the judgment of the great harlot.

In order to properly interpret chapter 19, the time frame of this vision must clearly be understood. As is the case with many of the visions in Revelation, information concerning this present Christian dispensation is given, and then we are taken into the final judgment. (Compare this with the outline of the seals, the trumpets, and the plagues.)

The purpose of this vision is twofold. First, it assures us that the church has been established. Then, it compares the destiny of the church to that of the beast and the false prophet. Because the church has been established, man has a way to avoid the plagues God will levy against the great harlot (18:4) and the final destruction of the beast and the false prophet (v. 20). Obviously, we avoid these plagues by following the teachings of our Lord and being numbered among his faithful.

Throughout the years, many in the church have believed and taught that Revelation dealt largely with our final eternal abode or heaven. When we come to understand that many of the symbols actually refer to the spiritual city of God, the church, Revelation will take on a much different meaning and have a more powerful message for Christians today. This should be a tremendous help to us as we endeavor to live the Christian life.

## HEAVEN REJOICES

**Verse 1. And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God:**

After the vision of the complete destruction of the great city of Babylon, John hears many people in heaven giving praise and honor unto the Lord. This is representative of Christians giving glory unto God because he refused to allow these false religions that were persecuting them to stand. When this time of the downfall of the great harlot

arrives, God will have partially answered the question that was asked by Christians in 6:10. They asked, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" God will avenge the blood of saints by bringing total destruction upon the great harlot who was responsible for their deaths (18:24). This will be only partial judgment because, according to verse 20, the final judgment against the beast and false prophet will be eternal destruction in hell.

As Christians we must give God our praise and honor because of this judgment. Because we have obeyed him, he has given us salvation and will eventually destroy all those forces that have persecuted us.

**Verse 2. For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.**

God's judgments are true. The judgments that God has rendered against the great harlot will definitely take place. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind who believes the Bible that God will do those things which he has foretold. Many people today believe that since God is a God of love, he could not possibly punish man eternally in hell for deeds that were committed on earth. God is a God of love, but he is also a just God. Much of Revelation is devoted to the idea that saints are persecuted now, but eventually they will be free of those persecutions and those who persecuted them will be punished by God in eternal torment. In 6:11, after the saints had asked God when he would avenge their blood, he told them to rest for a little while until the brethren who were to come after them had suffered their persecutions. The indication is that God will definitely avenge the blood of saints. This should give Christians hope and strength to remain faithful through all kinds of trials.

God's judgments are righteous. Not only will God's judgments come to pass, they will be exactly right for the acts committed. God is a righteous judge, and he will

administer punishment to those who have disobeyed him in exactly the correct manner. Many times we as human beings are not capable of completely understanding the ways of God, and we must simply believe it because he has said it. For instance, the punishment that God will levy against sinners seems to be far greater than we as human beings might think appropriate. According to God, this is just punishment. In 18:6, speaking of the great harlot, God said, “Reward her even as she has rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double.” This should be a great deterrent to anyone who might want to believe that God will not punish those who sin.

God states that he has judged the great harlot and has avenged the blood of the saints at her hand. In this vision, we are still at some period of time, possibly far off in the future, looking back at what has happened on earth. Chapter 18 described the judgment that God will direct against the great harlot in order to avenge the blood of saints. It is important to remember that this great harlot has already been “judged.” God has told us exactly what will happen to her. The only thing remaining is the fulfillment of that judgment.

**Verse 3. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.**

The smoke of this great harlot, which rises up forever and ever, indicates the eternal nature of her destruction. This was pointed out in 18:21-23. Not only will this great harlot be completely destroyed from this earth, she will also be cast into eternal punishment where she will remain forever (v. 20).

Those people in heaven cried, “Alleluia.” This is the cry that all Christians should have as we read these chapters assuring us that those who persecute us will eventually have their measure of torment in hell. It should be the desire of every Christian to witness the destruction of those forces that cause people to be unfaithful to God.

**Verse 4. And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia.**

The twenty-four elders and the four beasts (living creatures) are those described in chapter 4. Information is given in the comments on that chapter concerning the identity of these twenty-four elders and four beasts. For the discussion here, let us summarize by saying that the twenty-four elders represent the spiritual part of man's being and the four beasts (living creatures) represent his physical part. The lesson of verse 4 is that all spiritual worship and all physical worship should be directed to the one and only true and living God. There is no other being to whom we should direct our spiritual worship; neither should we give our physical means or abilities to any other god. God is worthy of all man's worship, both spiritual and physical. Therefore, these twenty-four elders and four beasts show that we must praise God because he has judged the great harlot which persecuted the saints. Verse 4 is also a fitting introduction to the remainder of this chapter. It teaches that man may escape the plagues of the great harlot by following the King of kings and Lord of lords.

**Verse 5. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.**

This is a further admonition to those who are servants of God. We must praise God if we are to be acceptable to him. We should praise him because he has pronounced judgment on the great harlot, and we should praise him for providing a way for us to escape her punishment. All men are to praise God, both small and great. It does not matter to God whether a person is well known to the people of this earth or lives in relative obscurity (Rom. 2:11). What does count is: regardless of one's position in this world, he gives praise and honor to God.

**Verse 6. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the**



**voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.**

In order to correctly interpret the remainder of chapter 19, it is important to understand verse 6 correctly. Many believe that since we have just seen the destruction of the great harlot, this verse must take us into the time of Judgment. This chapter does take us into that time period but not until verse 17. This vision is constructed like many of the visions throughout Revelation. It takes us through the time of the Christian age and then into Judgment. As the vision changes from the destruction of the harlot to a description of the church, we are changing our viewpoint. In the vision of the destruction of the harlot, we were in the future looking backward at events that are yet to be fulfilled upon the earth. As the vision changes, we are again taken back through the Christian age. Events are described that will take place during the Christian age, and later in this vision, we are shown some of the events that will occur during the time of Judgment.

We know the time period being dealt with here is the Christian age because of the statement, “for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” Christ is reigning today on his throne in heaven. Christians need to have this concept clearly in mind, especially in view of the teachings of many religious organizations today. They believe Christ’s reign will be for one thousand years after his second coming. Christ’s reign began when he ascended to heaven to sit on his throne at God’s right hand. (See Lk. 1:31-33; Rom 15:12; Heb. 1:1-8.) A king reigns as he sits on his throne ruling over his kingdom. Today, Jesus is King of kings. He is sitting on his throne in heaven and ruling over his spiritual kingdom, which is the church.

Acts 2:29-35 gives the account of Jesus being exalted to his throne at God’s right hand. He is compared to David who sat on his throne as king ruling over the children of Israel. Jesus now sits on his throne in heaven ruling over God’s children who make up the church – his kingdom. Therefore, the voice of the great multitude crying, “Alleluia,” represents the voice of Christians proclaiming

that our Lord now reigns. If Jesus had not yet ascended to his throne in heaven, there would be no forgiveness of sins because the law of Moses could not forgive sins (Heb. 10:3-4). Christians must proclaim the glad tidings that Jesus has risen to his throne and has made forgiveness of sins possible for all men.

The voice of the great multitude is described as many waters and mighty thunderings. Just as the “waters of life” represent the words of God (Jn. 4:14), the waters that flow from the mouths of Christians are their proclamations and teachings about Jesus and his gospel. Let us make sure we proclaim “many waters.” These voices are described as thunderings because of their importance. Thunder is used by God to announce events of great importance. (See Ex. 19:16.) Nothing on earth is more important than the proclamation of the Word of God. Verse 6 is teaching that Christians are to continually give thanks and proclaim the mighty truth that Jesus has risen to his throne and is reigning over the church today.

As a sidelight to this verse, this understanding of the reign of Christ also makes it possible to understand the meaning of the “thousand years” of chapter 20. In 20:4, the saints are described as reigning with Christ for one thousand years. Rev. 5:10 says we shall reign upon the earth. Since Christ is reigning in heaven today and Christians are reigning with him upon the earth, then we must be in the thousand-year period.

**Verse 7. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.**

The church is the bride of Christ. Rom. 7:4 states, “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.” We are married to him who was raised from the dead – Christ. Because we are married to him, we will bring forth fruit unto God. The marriage of the Lamb and his wife (the church) has already

taken place. The gospel of Christ has been given, and his church has been established. When we become members of that church, we are married to Christ.

We are reminded to be glad, rejoice, and give honor unto him because the church has been established. All men now have the opportunity to become part of that church and receive forgiveness of his sins. This is in contrast to the law of Moses, which was given exclusively to the Jewish nation. There were no provisions in that law to take away the sins of the people. The establishment of the new law gave us cause to rejoice and be glad because we now have forgiveness of our sins immediately available by becoming members of Christ's church. This brings us in contact with his blood. (See Rom. 6:3-4.) By establishing the church, Christ gave us a new and better law that made forgiveness of sins directly available to all men through him. (See Heb. 8:6-13.) The children of Israel did not have this. Only the priests were allowed to enter the tabernacle to offer sacrifices for sins on behalf of the people. All Christians are priests of God today (1:6). Let us be glad and rejoice!

It is also stated that the wife hath made herself ready. The church has been established and is prepared to be taken to heaven to be with Christ for all eternity. We do not know when this will happen, but we know that the church is married to Christ. Membership in the church is available to anyone who is willing to be obedient to the law of Christ. When men obey the law of Christ, they become members of his church and put on the white robes of righteousness (v. 8). By putting on these white robes, the wife makes herself ready to meet her husband when he returns.

## **THE MARRIAGE FEAST**

In order to have a complete understanding of this passage, we must first discuss the Jewish customs of marriage and also the parable of the wedding feast found in Mt. 22:1-14.

Coffman has an excellent section concerning the "Marriage Metaphor."<sup>1</sup> Concerning the symbolic language

used in this vision, he writes,

It is exceedingly important to remember that the Jewish customs of marriage are those prominent in all of these usages. The betrothal, which often took place as much as a year before the actual marriage, was fully equivalent legally to the marriage itself; during this period of waiting, the bridegroom was absent preparing a place for the bride (as in John 14:1-13), and any infidelity upon her part was considered as adultery; then came the great day of the marriage supper when the bridegroom and the bride began to live together... "The marriage supper," here, comes after the long period of waiting is over, and the bride and the bridegroom are taking up life together.<sup>2</sup>

This makes it clear that the church today is in that waiting period. The church is married to Christ, but he is away preparing a place for them to live together eternally. When he returns for her at his second coming, she will have made herself ready by being arrayed in fine linen, clean and white, and will partake of the "marriage supper of the Lamb" (v.9). Then, those in his church will dwell with him eternally in that place he has prepared.

Another good comparison to this symbolic metaphor is the parable of the wedding feast in Mt. 22:1-14. It is not our purpose to explain the entire meaning of this parable. We only want to make some major comparisons that applies to the symbolism being used in this passage in Revelation. In Mt. 22:2-10, the king is bidding many to "come unto the marriage." (See Mt. 22:4, 9.) This is taking place today as the gospel is being taught. All men are being asked to come to the marriage, which means to come into the church. Mt. 22:11 says, "The king came in to see the guests." This is a comparison to God sending our King (Jesus Christ) the second time. Also, in Mt. 22:11-12 when he came in, he looked at his guests to make sure they had on a wedding garment. This would be the same as the fine linen, clean and white, of verse 8. Only those who had on the wedding garment were allowed to partake of the marriage feast (Mt. 22:12-13). All others were cast into outer darkness (Mt. 22:13). As men today accept the invitation to come to the

marriage, they are accepting the invitation of the gospel to come into the church. When they obey the gospel, they are given a symbolic wedding garment, which is the white robe of righteousness. This indicates that their sins have been forgiven and that they are spotless in the sight of God. (See Eph. 5:25-27.) Christians also have the responsibility to keep their garments white. In the account of the church in Sardis (3:1-6), there were evidently many who had defiled their garments because he says in 3:4 that there were a “few” names in Sardis which had not “defiled their garments.” To keep our garments undefiled means to continue to walk in the ways of righteousness. Also, in 3:18, the Laodiceans, who thought they were something but were actually nothing, were told to purchase “white raiment” in order to be clothed. To purchase white raiment is to purchase forgiveness of sins. If we keep our garments white (Mt. 22:11), we will be able to partake of the wedding feast when our king returns. All others will be cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt. 22:13).

This is also in full agreement with the interpretation of the term “overcometh,” which is used at the conclusion of each of the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3. Rev. 3:5 states, “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment.” According to 1Jn. 5:4-5, to “overcome” is to be “born of God” or to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Both statements refer to the same event, which is rendering obedience to the gospel of Christ and being added to the church by our Lord (Acts 2:47). (Refer to the section on “overcoming” in the introduction of chapter 2.) When one overcomes this world of sin and is added to the church, he figuratively puts on the white robe of righteousness by having his sins forgiven. (Also see Isa. 61:10.)

This particular concept is of utmost importance in being able to correctly interpret many passages in Revelation. It is not within the scope of this book to make comparisons of all passages relating to this subject; therefore, we urge you to make that study on your own. If we could, we would

“guarantee” that it will benefit you greatly in your study of Revelation.

**Verse 8. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.**

From the previous discussion, it should be clear that verse 8 refers to Christians as they wear their white robes of righteousness in the church today. We are specifically told what the white robes represent in this verse. They represent the “righteousness of saints.” The mistake many make in interpreting verse 8 is that they apply this strictly to heaven. Obviously, in heaven the saints will wear white robes of righteousness, but the point which is missed is that we receive those white robes here on earth when we obey the gospel. Rev. 16:15 admonishes Christians to keep their garments. We, obviously, cannot “keep” something we do not already have. These white robes demonstrate the difference between people in the world who live in sin and those who have forgiveness of sins in the church.

The color white is always used symbolically to represent purity, cleanliness, sinlessness, or holiness. The following are some references that should help us understand the meaning of wearing white garments.

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; ... (Isa. 1:18).

...wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow (Ps. 51:7).

Many shall be purified, and made white, ... (Dan. 12:10).

And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; ... (Mk. 9:3).

Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have

not defiled their garments; ... (Rev. 3:4).

He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; ... (Rev. 3:5).

I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear;... (Rev. 3:18).

These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14b).

When one obeys the gospel, he puts on the white raiment of righteousness. This means he is living in a state of righteousness on this earth. This is possible because the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from our sins (1Jn. 1:7). This does not mean that Christians cannot sin or do those things which fall short of God's will. It means that we are his children, and he will forgive us of those shortcomings as long as we continue to strive to follow his commands. (See 1Jn. 1:7.)

In the parable of the "wedding feast" (Mt. 22:1-14), their wedding garments are comparable to our white robes of righteousness. We must strive to keep our white robes clean and unspotted because when God sends his Son to earth the second time, these white robes will make it possible for us to partake of the great wedding feast, which is eternity in heaven.

**Verse 9. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.**

As men hear the gospel of Christ, they are being invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. The meaning of the marriage supper can be derived from the parable of the wedding feast of Mt. 22:1-14. Mt. 22:10 states, "So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together

all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.” Those wedding guests are those people from all walks of life who have heard the invitation of the gospel and have answered its call. They have come unto the marriage (Mt. 22:4). They are the bride of Christ. They are awaiting the return of the bridegroom to live in the place he has prepared for his bride. (See comments concerning the marriage feast at the end of v. 7.) In this parable, we never observe the actual eating of the supper. It is logical to assume that this took place after the king came in to see his guests (Mt. 22:13). This represents the time when the king will divide those who are faithful from those who are not (Mt. 22:12-13). We know this will take place at Judgment. Therefore, this marriage feast must represent the final feast for all Christians, which will be our eternal life in heaven.

This is also in agreement with the teachings in the parable of the great supper as recorded in Lk. 14:16-24. In this parable the Lord sent his servants out into the “highways and hedges” to compel any who would come into his house to eat the great supper he had prepared. In Lk. 14:22-23, many had been invited but there was still room available, so the lord sent the servant out once again in order to fill the house. Those people who accepted the invitation to the great supper represent those who accept the invitation of the gospel, become Christians, and enter into the house of the Lord – his church. Verse 24 states for certain that those who were bidden to come but refused will not partake of the great supper. We also know that only those who are in Christ, or in his church, will receive the inheritance he has prepared for us (Eph. 1:11). The requirement for partaking of the great supper was to come into the house, and the requirement for receiving the inheritance of God is to enter into his house – the church. This enables us to conclude with a great deal of certainty that the marriage supper of the Lamb is referring to the final reward which those will receive who are faithful to him. The concept that must be kept firmly in mind is that the invitation to this marriage supper represents the



invitation of the gospel to come into the Lord's house. Those who accept this invitation are of all men most blessed.

**Verse 10. And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.**

John falls down at the feet of the angel who has shown him this vision and begins to worship him. This must be the angel introduced in 17:1 who took John to see the vision of the great harlot. From that point forward, we have been introduced to several angels, but they were all part of the vision that John was seeing. It actually makes little or no difference exactly which angel John began to worship because the point of verse 10 is to show that we are to worship no one except God, not even another heavenly being. Worship to God must also include Jesus Christ because he has ascended to heaven to sit on his throne at God's right hand. The central idea of chapter 5 is to show that Jesus died for our sins and is worthy of our praise and honor (5:12-14).

If men are not allowed to worship another heavenly being, then certainly we should not worship another man or some image created by man. Neither should we worship dead saints who have passed on before us. The only being that we should worship is God.

The angel informed John that he, too, was a servant of God, along with John and his brethren who had the testimony of Jesus Christ. The ASV states this part of the verse in this manner, "See thou do it not: I am a fellow-servant with thee and with thy brethren that hold the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Concerning this, Coffman comments, "'They that hold the testimony of Jesus,' as used here, is a reference to the Twelve Apostles."<sup>3</sup> Possibly this is correct, but the "spirit of prophecy" refers to the ability to teach God's Word. (See 10:11.) Therefore, any

Christian who teaches the Word has this “spirit of prophecy.” This verse also says that this “spirit of prophecy” is the testimony of Jesus. Any Christian who teaches God’s Word is testifying to the fact that Jesus lived and is the Savior of all men who obey him.

## **CHRIST ON A WHITE HORSE**

**Verse 11. And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.**

John looked and saw heaven open. This marks the beginning of a new vision with its subject being a rider upon a white horse. We know this rider is Jesus Christ because verse 16 identifies him as King of kings and Lord of lords. The vision presents a symbolic explanation of how Jesus Christ spreads the gospel throughout the world during the Christian dispensation. One common mistake in interpreting this vision is to consider this a description of events that will occur in heaven. The vision has nothing to do with our eternal abode in heaven, other than the fact that those who are dressed in white and follow Christ as he rides the white horse will be the ones who will eventually enter heaven. (See v. 14.) We believe that as you study verses 11 through 16, it will become clear that the subject of this vision is the spreading of the gospel by teaching the Word throughout the world today.

In 6:2 the first of the seven seals introduces a rider upon a white horse. Some commentators go to great lengths trying to prove that these passages are not dealing with the same subject. We find absolutely no reason to believe they are different. They both use the symbol of the white horse. In 6:2 the rider goes forth “conquering, and to conquer,” and this verse says that “in righteousness he doth judge and make war.” The passages are parallel. They both describe the spreading of the gospel throughout the world. (See comments on 6:2.)

The rider of this horse is called Faithful and True. In 3:14

Christ is referred to as the faithful and true witness. In 1:5 he is also called “the faithful witness.” When Christ came to earth and carried out his Father’s will, he was the faithful and true witness of God. He did the will of his Father in heaven. For us to be faithful and true witnesses of Jesus Christ, we must keep his commandments.

In righteousness Christ does judge and make war. According to Jn. 12:48, the world will be judged by the Word. It is no secret what the judgment of this world is. We have already received it in the written Word. All we have to do in order to know the fate of those who are disobedient to God is read the Bible. God’s judgments have already been given. The only thing left is the final sentencing. (See comments on 15:4.)

The war spoken of here is a spiritual war. Christians do not declare physical war on those who refuse to obey the gospel. We do not gather armies to literally destroy dens of sin and iniquity. We war against evil by teaching the gospel. This is exactly how Christ desires it to be done. In verse 15 Christ is described as having a sharp sword in his mouth, which he uses to smite the nations. The sharp sword is the Word of God (Heb. 4:12). As we teach the Word of God around the world today, we smite evil in every nation with this great sword. This is exactly what Christ meant when he said, ‘Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword’ (Mt. 10:34). As Christians preach and teach God’s Word, Christ is figuratively going forth throughout the world on a white horse making war against the forces of evil.

**Verse 12. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.**

“His eyes were as a flame of fire” is a repeat of the description of Jesus in 1:14. Fire symbolically represents the consuming nature of God (Deut. 4:24). He goes forth in the world today making war against evil, and nothing escapes his sight. He knows the acts of every individual whether they are for him or against him. (See 1:14 for more

discussion of this symbol.)

On Christ's head were many crowns. This symbolizes the power and authority of Christ. He wore many crowns, diadems (ASV), to show that his authority is greater than any earthly king.

Christ had a name written upon his head "that no man knew, but he himself." These words have been explained in many ways, and many guesses have been made about the identity of this name. Searching for the actual name that was written in his head has nothing to do with the proper interpretation of this phrase. We know who rides the white horse: It is Christ!

The point of this statement is that no man could wear this name – only Jesus. Jesus came to earth and fashioned himself in the form of a man (Phil. 2:8). He lived a sinless life and became the perfect sacrifice for our sins (Heb. 5:8,9). Only Jesus could wear this name because he is the only one who could, and did, shed his blood to atone for our sins.

**Verse 13. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.**

Christ being clothed with a vesture dipped in blood is an obvious reference to his crucifixion and death. All of these descriptions in verses 11 through 16 are designed to identify the rider of the white horse as Christ.

His name is called the Word of God. Jn. 1:1 states, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Jn. 1:14 says, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Jesus has always been with God. He came to earth in the form of a man and gave his life in order that we might have forgiveness of sins. While he was on earth, he spoke the commandments that God gave him, and if we obey those commandments, they will enable us to have life everlasting. (See Jn. 12:49, 50.)

**Verse 14. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.**

The armies who are following Christ upon white horses and dressed in clean white linen can only be Christians. Verse 8 says that fine linen is the righteousness of saints. The saints, or Christians, are those who have obeyed the gospel and are “following” Christ. Christians are going forth throughout the world, with Christ as our leader, teaching the gospel and making war against the evil ways of mankind.

There are two reasons why some might not understand these followers on white horses to be Christians. First, they do not understand that Christians put on their white robes of righteousness when they obey the gospel and receive forgiveness of their sins. Second, this verse says these armies were in “heaven.”

There are two logical explanations why these armies are in heaven; both fit the interpretation presented and possibly both meanings are intended. (1) John saw these armies in heaven just as he did all the visions, but their symbolic meaning is applied to Christians on earth. The armies following Christ in heaven on white horses represent Christians following Christ by obeying his Word on this earth. (2) The term “heaven” itself can have a symbolic meaning. Eph. 2:6 states, “And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” These heavenly places must refer to the church because when we are “in Christ,” we are in his church (Gal. 3:27). Therefore, if heaven is intended to be symbolic in this verse, it would refer to the church. The armies would then be those in the church who follow Christ. We also know the church is definitely being described because Christians make up the church, and they are the ones clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

As Christians, let us make sure we are in Christ’s army fighting the spiritual forces of evil.

**Verse 15. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.**

A sharp sword is pictured as coming out of the mouth of our Lord. Since it comes from his mouth, it must represent the words that he speaks. We have the spoken word of Jesus in written form constantly at our disposal. We have the sword of Christ – the Bible (Eph. 6:17).

Christ uses this sword to smite the nations of this world. This is similar to the statement in verse 11, which says he will make war. The meanings must be similar. (See comments on v. 11.) This statement is also similar to 11:6. In that passage the saints (witnesses) use the Word of God to smite the earth with all plagues. (Also see comments on that verse.) As Christians, we must realize that the hearing of the gospel is not a pleasant thing to those who refuse to obey it because it condemns them.

Christ will rule the nations with a rod of iron. This statement is also made in 2:27 and 12:5. The rod of iron represents the almighty power of Christ. (See Ps. 2:9.) We know that the gospel is the power of God (Rom. 1:16). Therefore, this rod represents the gospel. Christ rules his kingdom (the church) today, which is made up of those who have obeyed the gospel. This, in turn, gives us a better understanding of the gospel, which is possibly not being emphasized in the church today as it should be. The gospel is a rod of iron that will not bend or break. It is the same today as it was in the first century. The only way we can be a follower of Christ is to obey his Word exactly as he has proclaimed it. Many men, or religious organizations today, try to bend this rod. They design their own “church laws.” They grant membership into “their church” according to rules they have made. The gospel of Christ will not bend. If we are to be members of the Lord’s church, we must obey the gospel as God designed it. No other way will do!

Christ also treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. According to 2Thess. 1:7-9, our Lord will return in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who know not God and obey not the gospel. (See comments on 14:18-20.) God is a loving God, but he is also a just God. He will punish those who do not obey his commands and reward those who do.

**Verse 16. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.**

The name of this rider on the white horse is KING OF KINGS and LORD OF LORDS. This definitely identifies him as Jesus Christ. This same title is used concerning our Lord in 1Tim. 6:15. We must realize that he is now our King and Lord. He has ascended to his throne in heaven to rule his spiritual kingdom – the church. We do not have to wait for some proposed period of one thousand years before his second coming for him to reign over his people. We do not have to wait for heaven. He reigns today!

What does it mean to be King of kings? It means that Jesus is the supreme ruler of all things. Everything on earth is under his power and control. This is the obvious meaning, but there may be a deeper meaning. Rev. 1:6 states that Christ has made Christians “kings and priests unto God.” A Christian is a king because he reigns with Christ in the church today. (See 1:5; 20:4; 1Cor. 4:8.) Christians are kings; Christ is our King. Therefore, he is King of kings.

## **THE BEAST DEFEATED**

**Verse 17. And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God;**

Verses 6 through 16 give a description of the church as it exists today. Christ is our leader. He rides throughout the world today on a white horse, and we as Christians follow upon our own white horses, dressed in white raiment. He leads us in fighting a spiritual war against the forces of evil. Verse 17 removes us from that period of time and takes us into the Judgment scene. The angel invites all the fowls that fly in heaven to gather themselves unto the supper of the great God. This symbolism of the fowls of the air eating the supper of God is most likely related to events such as Joseph’s interpretation of the baker’s dream in Gen. 40:16-

23. Concerning the baker, Gen. 40:19 states, “Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee and shall hang thee on a tree; and the birds shall eat thy flesh from off thee.” This shows the completeness and totality of the destruction. When those who have opposed God are gathered to this great supper, their destruction will be complete.

The “supper of the great God” is in direct contrast to the “marriage supper of the Lamb” in verse 9. The marriage supper of the Lamb represents the great eternal feast that Christians will eat in heaven. This supper of the great God is the eternal destruction that those who have disobeyed God will suffer.

**Verse 18. That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.**

This verse shows that men of all walks of life will be subject to this destruction. The position a person held on earth will not matter at all. Kings, captains, mighty men, free men, and bond men will all be present for this supper of destruction. Both small and great will suffer eternal punishment. The only thing that will have any value at this time is the fact that one is a faithful member of the church of our Lord. (Compare with the interpretation of the sixth seal of 6:12-17.)

Also destroyed at this time will be “the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them.” This shows that those who have persecuted Christians will be destroyed. This symbolism is taken from the series of seven seals. Three horses are described in that vision which represent all types of persecutions Christians will suffer. They are: (1) the red horse, the second seal (6:4); (2) the black horse, the third seal (6:5, 6); and (3) the pale horse, the fourth seal (6:8). When the time of this great supper arrives, those forces will be destroyed. (For meanings of these horses and riders, see comments on 6:4-6,8.)



When these horses and riders are destroyed at Judgment, all persecutions of God's people will end. Christians will enter into that place Jesus has prepared and live free of trouble and persecutions forever and ever. Those who have persecuted Christians will have their place in torment for all eternity. The roles will be reversed from the situation now on earth.

**Verse 19. And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.**

The last three verses of this chapter picture the final destruction of all forces that have oppressed God's people, as well as all those who have been disobedient to his will. Verse 19 gives reasons why they are deserving of the destruction that they are to receive.

The war being described is not some literal physical war to be fought on earth where actual battle lines are drawn. This is the war that the forces of the devil constantly wage against Christ and his followers. In verse 11 Christ is also pictured as making war. We need to understand that there is a constant war taking place on earth between the forces of the devil and Christians. The forces of the devil use all types of weapons to attack Christians – everything from actual physical persecution to subtle enticements that war against the soul. “To make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army” (v. 11, 14) is to make war against Christ and those who follow him (Christians). The weapon used by Christians in this war is the sword of the mouth, which is the gospel (v. 15, 21).

“The beast, and the kings of the earth,” which have their armies gathered together, represent those ungodly, powerful civil forces that persecute God's people. This beast must be the beast that rises up out of the sea in 13:1 because its interpretation compares with that of the “kings” of the earth in 17:10-16. (See also 16:14.) In these verses we are viewing the destruction of those forces, described by symbolic language in chapters 12 through 18, that persecute Christians. The first one destroyed is the beast

out of the sea (13:1-8). The second one destroyed is the false prophet or the beast out of the earth (13:11-18). Reasons are given in comments on the next verse concerning why these two symbols are synonymous. The last force that will be destroyed is the devil, and chapter 20 is devoted to that subject. The devil is described in chapter 12 as the great red dragon. Therefore, we are being assured of the destruction of those forces that have persecuted Christians throughout the ages. (To fully understand verse 19 and the meaning of the beast being destroyed, refer to the interpretation of chapter 13.)

**Verse 20. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.**

This describes the fate that awaits the beast of verse 19 and the false prophet. They will be cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. A false prophet is a religious impostor. This is one who claims to know Christ and follow him but does not follow according to the ways God has outlined in his Word. He substitutes his ways for God's ways. He also goes about convincing others to follow him in his error. He is a false prophet. There are many references concerning false prophets in the New Testament. (See Mt. 7:15; 24:24; 2Pet. 2:1-22; 1Jn. 4:1-3.)

The false prophet in this verse had wrought miracles before the beast and had "deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshiped his image." This is a direct reference to 13:13-15. This is exactly what the beast out of the earth that had two horns like a lamb did. (See the interpretation of 13:11-15.) This means that the beast out of the earth was also a false prophet. Verse 20 is a further description of that same force which has deceived many in the world by its false religion. The false prophet is also a representation of the "great harlot" of chapter 17 and the "great city of Babylon" of chapter 18. A comparison of

these symbols needs to be made, but it would not be practical to repeat the interpretation of each of these symbols. Instead, we will list some passages that should be compared in order to understand the connection between these symbols. They are as follows:

- (1) 13:3, 8; 17:8; 13:12; 13:1
- (2) 17:3; 13:17; 18:3; 17:2; 14:8
- (3) 13:14; 19:20; 16:13
- (4) 17:18; 18:2; 18:23; 13:14
- (5) 18:24; 13:15

All the related passages are not listed, but we trust these will suffice to show the connections. Study and compare each of these symbols in depth. This will tremendously increase your understanding of how Revelation is structured. It will become apparent that the devil, the beast, and the false prophet are the three main symbols used in Revelation to describe those forces that affect people. The beast out of the earth, the great harlot, and the great city of Babylon are further descriptions of the false prophet. (Refer to comments on 16:12-13.)

The beast and false prophet will eventually be cast alive into the “lake of fire.” According to 20:14 and 2 1:8, this lake of fire represents the second death. Rev. 14:10-11 explains that this second death will be eternal torment where there will be no rest day or night.

The main point for Christians to realize is that the beast and false prophet are alive and well in the world today, waging wars against Christians, and deceiving many people. It is our hope that having a good understanding of these symbols will make us more aware of the forces that operate today, and will in turn help us to remain faithful until our Lord returns. Let us remain in the army of our Lord who sits upon the white horse!

**Verse 21. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.**

Anyone who is not included in the beast or false prophet and has been unfaithful to God will also be destroyed. This could include such people as those who do not even pretend to associate themselves with any religious organization. The false prophet is made up of people who claim to be religious, but there are many people in this world who believe all religion is foolishness. These ungodly people will also be destroyed along with those who have practiced false religion.

They will be destroyed by the sword that proceeds out of the mouth of the rider of the white horse. This, of course, is the Word of God that was given by Christ. God has given a law that we must obey. For those who distort it, or simply refuse to obey it, the Word itself will be used as a means of their destruction. Speaking concerning those who refused to obey his teachings, Christ says, “the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (Jn. 12:48). The Word of God will condemn those who refuse to obey it.

For the fowls to be filled with their flesh shows the completeness of their destruction. We should not try to determine if these fowls represent any specific being. Instead, they indicate a method of destruction. They point out that those who have been unfaithful to God will be totally destroyed. They also show that many will be destroyed at this time because these fowls are filled. This is the supper of the great God (v. 17). Let us make sure we attend the marriage supper of the Lamb (v.9) and not this great supper of everlasting destruction!

<sup>1</sup>James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979), p. 442.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p.442.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 445.

# CHAPTER 20

## INTRODUCTION

Chapter 20 is possibly the most misused chapter in the entire Bible. Other chapters such as Dan. 7 and Mt. 24 are also greatly misused in order to support certain theories about chapter 20. As we study this chapter, we must strive to interpret it in light of other teachings in the Bible, not according to what we may hear on the radio or television. Contrary to what many believe, the meanings of the symbols used in this chapter can be derived with a great deal of certainty. Probably the reason this chapter is so misunderstood is because so many different ideas and theories are proposed that it becomes difficult to choose what is right and what is wrong. We must cast aside those theories proposed by men and study the chapter solely in light of the teachings of the New Testament.

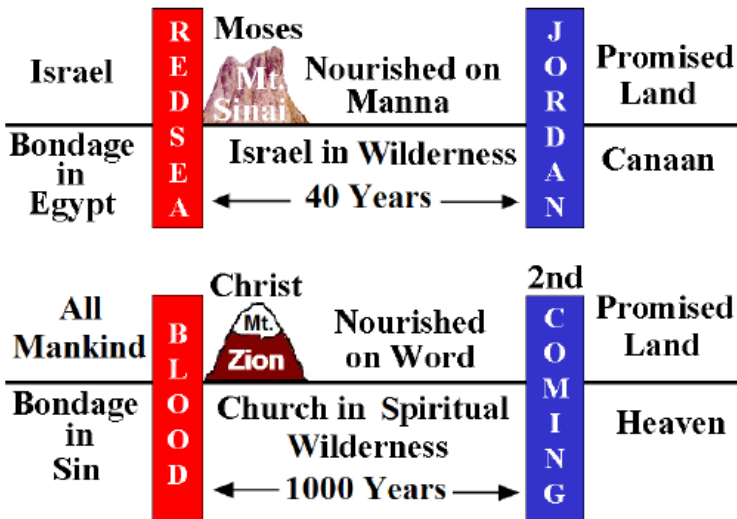
Before studying the chapter verse by verse, we need to clearly establish the meaning of one symbol – the period of time described as a thousand years. Once this is established, many other symbols in this great chapter will become clear.

Many in the religious world today believe and teach that there will be a literal period of one thousand years after the second coming of Christ in which he will set up an earthly kingdom in the land of Israel and reign as king over his people on this earth in a physical, earthly kingdom. Seemingly, the disciples of Christ had this same mistaken belief when he was on earth during the first century.

Shortly before his ascension, in Acts 1:6 they asked, “Lord, will thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” They thought Jesus would set up an earthly kingdom and reign as king on a literal throne upon this earth. He did not! He set up a spiritual kingdom, the church, and reigns on his throne in heaven today (Heb. 1:3). Then, when does this thousand year reign occur? Verse 4 says that we live and reign with Christ during the thousand years. Rev. 5:10 says that we will “reign on the earth.” Since Christ is reigning today in heaven and we are reigning with him upon this earth, we must presently be in the period of time called the “thousand years.” The “thousand years” then becomes symbolic. It describes the period of time upon this earth in which Christians live and reign with Christ as he reigns in heaven. This would be the Christian dispensation or the gospel age. The time period of a “thousand years” represents the complete amount of time upon this earth that people will heed the gospel of Christ, render obedience to it, and reign as Christians.

Please notice in the drawing that the period of 1000 years is parallel to the 40 year period of time that Israel wandered in the wilderness. Israel literally wandered in a physical

### A Parallel Comparison of Israel and the Church



wilderness from the time they crossed the Red Sea until they crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land. The church is a spiritual entity, and it is wandering in a spiritual wilderness of sin in this world today. This period of time began at the cross and will last until Christ comes again. Therefore, the “1000 years” is a symbolic period of time that represents the entire gospel age.

The number “1000” is used symbolically to represent ultimate completeness. It is derived by multiplying the complete number “10” by itself three times ( $10 \times 10 \times 10$ ). Therefore, the number “1000” is used to describe a period of time that is complete in the sight of God. It is not a literal thousand years. The “thousand years” is this present gospel age. It began with the first coming of Christ and will last until he comes again. Verse 7 also indicates that there will be members of the Lord’s church alive on this earth when he returns, but they will be surrounded by a world of sin.

Many times in Revelation, we find the same event being described by several different symbols. Each of these symbols, although describing the same event, gives us different information about that particular event. This is true in the case of the “thousand years.” This “thousand years” covers the same period of time as; (1) the first six seals, 6:1-8:5; (2) the first six trumpets, 8:6-11:19; (3) the first six plagues, 16:1-21; (4) forty-two months, 13:5; and (6) time, times, and half a time, 12:14. Although all of these symbols are describing events taking place during our present gospel age, each gives a different perspective of this time period. The symbolic “thousand years” simply shows that it is a complete period of time. After the thousand years are finished, there will be no further opportunities for mankind to become obedient to God’s will. God’s gospel plan will be completed. Those who have chosen to be obedient to that gospel will dwell with God in heaven forever, and those who have rejected the gospel will have their place in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone (21:8).

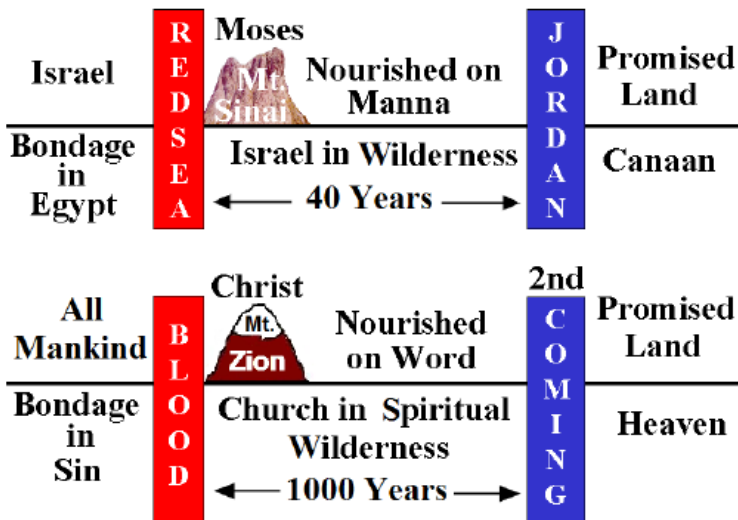
Another important fact that needs to be brought out about

chapter 20, is that the subject of verses 1-10 is the destruction of the devil. This is the natural order to follow because chapter 19 described the destruction of the beast and the false prophet. The devil is responsible for the evil that is in the world today, with the beast and false prophet being manifestations of that evil. When God destroys evil in this world upon the second coming of Christ, the devil himself will finally be destroyed. Therefore, chapters 19 and 20 teach that those who reject God in order to follow the devil will ultimately spend an eternity in hell with him.

One other point should be made about the “thousand years.” Verse 7 seems to indicate that there will come a time upon this earth when men will cease to listen to the call of the gospel and become obedient to it. This period of time is called the “little season.” This is figuratively described as a time when the devil will gather his followers together. At this time, Christ will return to take his children home and destroy those who oppose him. Therefore, the gospel age will last until Christ returns, but at the end of this age there will be a short time when sin will prevail upon this earth and people will refuse to become obedient to the gospel.

As we begin the study of chapter 20, we should once again let the Biblical parallel between Israel and the church determine the meaning of these symbols. The portion of the parallel diagram that is used in this chapter is the parallel

### A Parallel Comparison of Israel and the Church

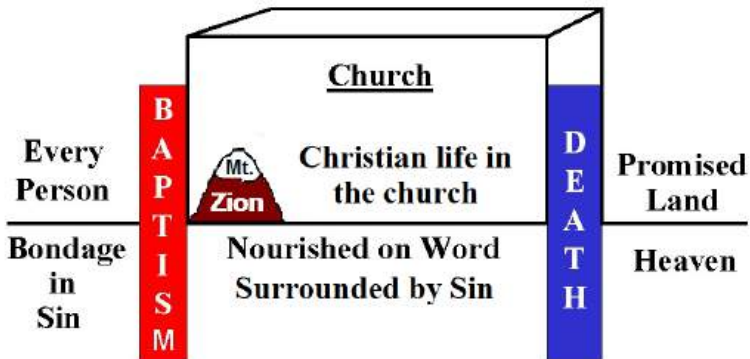




between the Red Sea and the blood of Christ. Just as Israel escaped physical bondage by crossing the Red Sea, mankind today escapes the bondage of sin by crossing the red sea of the blood of Christ. When we cross the blood of Christ by our obedience to the gospel, we come to Mt. Zion. As members of the church, we then wander in the wilderness of sin as we strive to live a Christian life. Our spiritual nourishment is the Word of God.

The key verse to build on while studying chapter 20 is verse 6. It says if we have a part in the first resurrection, the second death will have no power over us. Christ was the first person resurrected from the grave, never to die again. We have a part in that resurrection by our obedience to the gospel through baptism. Just as Christ was resurrected from the grave, never to die again, we are resurrected from the spiritual grave of sin never to die spiritually. If we remain faithful, the second death (hell) has no power over us. When the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, they were delivered from the bondage of slavery. When we cross the red sea of the blood of Christ through baptism, we are delivered from the bondage of sin. We then reign with Christ in the church during the symbolic 1000 years. This is illustrated in the drawing below. Every Christian will follow this pattern.

### **Christians Follow the Pattern**



## THE BINDING OF SATAN

**Verses 1, 2. And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,**

Verses 1 and 2 picture an angel taking a great chain and binding the devil for one thousand years. With the interpretation of the thousand years as being this present gospel age, the obvious question would be: Is Satan bound today? The answer to that question is, Yes! He is not bound in the sense that he cannot function on earth today, but he is bound to the extent that he has no power over God's people. Concerning Christ, Heb. 2:14b says that "through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." Christ through his death and resurrection destroyed (bound) Satan in the sense that Satan no longer rules in the world. Those people who lived under the law of Moses had no immediate forgiveness of their sins. They could only make yearly atonement for their sins while looking forward to Christ's sacrifice on the cross for complete forgiveness (Heb. 10:3-4). The sins of those under the old law were not forgiven until Christ died on the cross (Heb. 9:15). Therefore, Satan ruled in the world until Christ died on the cross and destroyed or bound him.

Those becoming Christians today have forgiveness of their sins immediately available through Christ. Satan can no longer control the Christian's life. As long as we remain faithful to our Lord by being obedient to his will, our sins are continually forgiven (1Jn. 1:7), and Satan has no control over us. He is bound!

The angel that bound Satan used a great chain. A chain would symbolize a powerful restraint. Rom.



1:16 says that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. We bind Satan in our own lives when we become obedient to the gospel and obtain the salvation offered to us. If the gospel is God's power unto salvation, then it follows that the symbolic chain refers to the gospel. Satan is bound by the gospel.

Satan being bound by the angel illustrates the fact that this binding came from God. We know that Satan was bound when man received the gift of forgiveness of his sins, and this took place when Christ died and rose again. Therefore, the angel is used in verse 2 to illustrate the works that Jesus has performed. There are several passages in Revelation where an angel is doing the works commanded by God or is serving as a messenger from God. (See 14:15,18.) Angels are used throughout Revelation to show John these visions. This verse is no different. This angel is showing John, as well as all Christians, that the gospel has been sent from God, and it will bind the devil during the Christian age (thousand years) for all those who are obedient to it.

**Verse 3. And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.**

This angel cast the devil into the bottomless pit and sealed it, thereby making sure he would have no chance of escape. This bottomless pit is a figurative description of the dwelling place of Satan. He dwells only where there is sin. He has no right or opportunity to dwell in the righteous life of the saints unless they elect to let him enter. Eph. 1:3 says we (Christians) have all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. These heavenly places, the church, is the dwelling place of the saints. The devil cannot enter! He is bound from these heavenly places and can dwell only where sin prevails – the bottomless pit.

The devil is told that he will be unable to deceive the nations any more until the thousand years are finished and

then only for a little season. (For a discussion on the loosing of Satan for a little season, see v. 7.) The idea that Satan is unable to deceive the nations is synonymous with the binding of Satan in verse 2. Satan no longer deceives those who are willing to accept Christ and the salvation offered in him. This concept is also presented in 12:9, which should be studied in close connection with this verse. It states, "And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which *deceiveth* the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him." (Emphasis mine) This verse defines the time in which Satan was to deceive the whole world. It was before he was cast out of heaven into the earth. Rev. 12:10 says that salvation and the kingdom came at the same time the devil was cast out of heaven. This obviously took place when Christ died on the cross. The devil could no longer accuse the brethren before God. Therefore, he was able to deceive the nations or accuse the brethren before God only up until the time Christ died on the cross. After that time, he could no longer deceive the whole world. He only deceives those who choose to follow him, thereby rejecting God. This situation will exist throughout the gospel age. Verses 7 and 8 indicate there will come a period of time at the end of the gospel age, the "little season," when Satan will once again deceive the nations. This seems to say that at that time no one else will render obedience to the gospel. (For more on this subject, see verse 2 and the discussion of the binding of Satan.)

## THE THOUSAND-YEAR REIGN

**Verse 4. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.**

This verse is a description of those people who are living and reigning with Christ during the thousand years (the gospel age). They are Christians. They are the ones who have not worshiped the beast (13:4, 8); neither his image (13:14-15); neither have received his mark upon their foreheads or in their hands (13:16-17). Some of these people had also lost their lives because they had refused to worship anyone or anything other than the true God. (For further information concerning the meaning of worshiping the beast and his image, refer to the discussion of chapter 13.)

Those who are reigning with Christ are seated upon thrones and have been given judgment. Jesus told his twelve apostles in Mt. 19:28 that they would sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel, at the same time the Son of Man sits in the throne of his glory. Christ is now sitting on his throne at God's right hand (Heb. 1:3). Therefore, we must be in the period of time when the apostles are judging the twelve tribes of Israel. "The twelve tribes of Israel" is a figurative representation of the church. (For more information, see 3:9.) Then, how are the apostles judging the twelve tribes or the church today? Jn. 12:48 says that man shall be judged by the words spoken by Christ. This is obviously a reference to the Bible or the gospel. Christ did not actually speak all the commandments we have to follow today but gave them by inspiration through the apostles and the letters they wrote to the various churches. The apostles were responsible for giving many of the commandments we must follow today. In this manner, the twelve apostles are judging the twelve tribes of Israel. In the likeness of this today, Christians are responsible for teaching, preaching, and spreading the gospel, the commandments of God, throughout the world. Also, 3:21 says that when anyone overcomes (obeys the gospel) they are granted to sit with Christ in his throne. (See comments on 3:21.) Therefore, it is figuratively stated in this verse that Christians are sitting on their thrones today with Christ and are responsible for the spreading of the gospel or the judgments that God has given unto us. We

are presently living and reigning with Christ during this gospel age or the thousand years. (See 5:10.)

Those who do not worship the beast or his image are the ones who live and reign with Christ a thousand years. They are Christians. They have taken part in the first resurrection as described in verse 6. The key to understanding this verse is understanding that this resurrection is a spiritual resurrection. Eph 2:1 states, “And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins,” (NKJV) To be “made alive” is to be resurrected. Those who have not obeyed the gospel are “dead in trespasses and sins.” We undergo a spiritual resurrection when we are baptized into Christ. The rest of the dead (the spiritual dead) lived not again until the thousand years were finished. Those who have not obeyed the gospel are spiritually dead. They have not take part in the “first resurrection.” Christians are the ones who take part in the “first resurrection” as they are resurrected from the grave of sin to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). When one becomes obedient to the gospel, he is resurrected from his grave of sin and begins a new life with Christ. He reigns with him during the thousand years, or the gospel age.

**Verse 5. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.**

Verse 4 taught that Christians are the ones who were resurrected to live with Christ during the thousand-year period. This verse says that the remainder of the people who are dead lived not again, or were not resurrected, until after the thousand years are finished. One group of people are resurrected to reign during the thousand years; they are Christians. There is another group who are not resurrected until after the thousand years are finished. They are non-Christians. With this in mind, it becomes extremely important to determine exactly what is meant by the first resurrection. There is a definition for this first resurrection in Col. 2:12-13. It states, “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the

operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.” (Emphasis mine.) Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised from the dead by God. We are dead in our sins outside of Christ. Through baptism we are buried with him. We are also “quickened” or “made alive.” We are resurrected with him. Col. 3:1 says, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above.” A Christian is one who has become dead to sin and has been raised or resurrected to walk a new life in Christ (Rom. 6:3-11). According to Rom. 6:11, we are dead unto sin but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Therefore, the Christian's first resurrection is the resurrection of the soul from the grave of sin. It is a spiritual resurrection. Col. 1:18 says that Christ was the firstborn from the dead, and Rom. 6:3-5 says that we have a part in that resurrection by baptism, which is a likeness of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Because of this, we are to walk in “newness of life” (Rom. 6:4) or reign with Christ during the thousand years (v. 4). Those who are not obedient to our Lord through baptism will not live (spiritually) during this gospel age or thousand years. They are dead in their sins.

**Verse 6. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.**

This is the key verse in understanding this chapter. It determines how we should interpret the symbols throughout this vision. The first symbol that must be understood is the “first resurrection.” This is a direct reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He was the first person to be resurrected from the dead – never to die again. Speaking of Christ Col 1:15 says, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” Also, in Col 1:18 we read, “And He is the head of the body, the

church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” The “first resurrection” is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. A blessing is pronounced on those who have a part in his first resurrection. The question that must be answered here is: How do we have a part in his resurrection? Some of the following comments have been made in the preceding verses, but we believe it is important to put everything in context in this verse. Rom 6:5 states, “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his* resurrection:” We have a part, or participate, in Jesus' resurrection when we do something that is in the “likeness” of his death and resurrection. This is defined in Rom 6:4, which says, “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Through our baptism we emulate the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. We have a part in his first resurrection.

Those who have a part in the first resurrection will be priests of God. We know that Christians are the priests of God today. In Rev. 1:5-6 we read:

Rev 1:5 And from Jesus Christ, *who is* the faithful witness, *and* the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,

Rev 1:6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him *be* glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Through our baptism, Jesus washes us in his blood and we become priests of God.

According to this verse, those who have a part in the first resurrection will reign with Christ during the “1000 years.” The meaning of the “1000 years” has previously been discussed in this chapter. Simply stated, it is the period of time between the cross and second coming of Christ. The

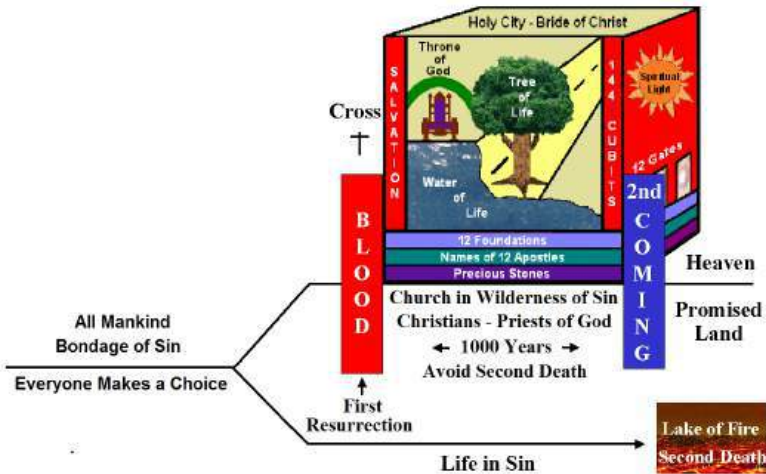


church will exist all during this period of time, and all those who become members of it will live spiritually and reign with Christ as priests of God. This will occur all during the symbolic “1000 years.”

We also know that this is the correct meaning of the “first resurrection” because this verse states that the second death will not have any power over those who have a part in the “first resurrection.” According to Rev. 20:14 and 21:8, the second death is hell. It is defined as the lake of fire or the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. We have a part in the “first resurrection” by our obedience to the gospel through baptism. This how we avoid the second death.

It should be noted here that this verse is in total agreement with Rev. 2:11. In that verse we are told that we avoid the second death by “overcoming.” We also “overcome” this world of sin through our baptism. This makes the two symbols of “overcoming” and “first resurrection” refer to the same event. (See Rev. 2:11 for a complete discussion.)

This verse can be illustrated by the drawing below. Please look closely at the drawing and read the explanation given.



In this drawing the church is pictured as existing between the blood of Christ and his second coming. That is the symbolic “1000 year” period of time. Every accountable person in this world will make a choice between being obedient to the gospel of Christ and living with him in the church or living a life of sin and spending eternity in the lake of fire. Those who choose to be obedient to God will be priests of God and avoid the second death. When Christ returns, Christians will cross over into our promised land of heaven.

Rev. 5:10 says Christ has made us kings and priests and we shall reign on the earth. Those who are obedient to the gospel are reigning on the earth today and are a holy priesthood offering up spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ (1Pet. 2:5).

## **SATAN LOOSED**

**Verse 7. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,**

This is undeniably a difficult verse to interpret, mainly because it deals with events at the close of the thousand year period, which will take place sometime in the future. Anytime there is a difficult symbol, it must be interpreted strictly in accordance with the meanings of the symbols that are understood. Notice that Satan will be loosed after the thousand years are expired. This means that Satan will continue to be bound by the gospel all during the symbolic “thousand years.” Since Satan is bound by the gospel, this must mean that there will come a “little season,” or short period of time, when the gospel will no longer bind Satan. This takes place at the end of the thousand years. The only logical meaning to this is that there will come a time shortly before Christ comes again in which people will refuse to hear the gospel. All people who will ever become obedient to the gospel will have done so. Therefore, this very likely means that there will be a time near the end of this physical earth and shortly before the second coming of Christ when sin will dominate the world. The gospel will

spread no further. This is a frightening interpretation, but when we look at the world around us, we see sin on every hand. Seemingly, fewer and fewer people are willing to listen to the teachings of God's Word. They choose rather to enjoy the pleasures of sin. This makes us believe that this may be an accurate description of the situation in which the world is heading.

There is also another Biblical foundation for this interpretation. Mt. 24:36-39 teaches that the end of this world will come when a situation similar to the time of Noah exists on this earth. Mt. 24:37 states, "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." During that time, the only people who were faithful to God were Noah and his family. No else would listen to the preachings of Noah. Gen 6:5 states, "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." God destroyed the world with water at a time when everyone, except Noah and his family, had their minds on doing evil. They would not listen to Noah as he warned them of the coming destruction. We believe it is very possible that this "little season" is a symbolic description of a time similar to the days of Noah that will exist shortly before Christ comes again. The thoughts and actions of the people of this earth will be on evil continually, and no one will listen to the teachings of the gospel. Everyone who will obey the gospel will have done so.

**Verse 8. And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.**

The interpretation of verse 7 is further strengthened by this verse, which explains that during this "little season," Satan will deceive all nations in the four corners of the earth. All people on earth who are not already Christians will be deceived by Satan and will be under his control due to their sinful state. According to 2Thess. 2:10-12, God will

send a “strong delusion” to those who “believe not the truth” that they should believe a lie and be damned. With these things in mind, it becomes very likely that near the end of time, sin will rage throughout the world and people will totally reject God. These verses seem to teach that the end of time will come when all people who will ever become obedient to God’s law will have done so. Of course, we have no idea when that time will occur. It could be today or many, many years in the future.

“Gog and Magog” are terms that first-century Christians recognized as representing all people who oppose God and his followers (Eze. Chapters 38 and 39). They represent vast numbers of people who cannot be counted, just as the sands of the sea could not be counted. These people will be living in sin as followers of Satan. The gathering together to battle in this passage is figurative. It does not mean that Satan will literally gather his followers together into a certain area on the earth to prepare for a physical battle against God’s people. It means that Satan will rule in these people’s lives, and they will make war against God’s people by attempting to cause Christians to engage in the sins in which they are practicing. This could also be a time of great persecution.

**Verse 9. And they went upon the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.**

Once again it is stated that sin will completely surround the camp of the saints, which is the church. All those who are not in the church, also referred to as the beloved city, will be intent on remaining in their sinful ways. The borders of the kingdom, the church, will spread no further. When the world reaches this point, fire will come down from God and destroy Satan and his followers. This is representative of the second coming of Christ. At this time, God will destroy all who oppose him and gather his faithful to live with him eternally in heaven. This interpretation coincides perfectly with 2Thess. 1:7-9 which says, “And to

you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.”

**Verse 10. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.**

Upon Christ’s second coming, the devil will be cast into hell where he will dwell for all eternity with those whom he has deceived. They will be in complete torment forever and ever. This eternal destruction will take them forever out of the presence of God and his people. In heaven all things will be holy. There will be no evil, no temptation, and no sin to bring suffering on God’s people.

It should be noted again that the subject of verses 1-10 in chapter 20 is the destruction of Satan. Verse 10 is a description of that destruction. A description of the destruction of the beast and the false prophet was given in 19:20. The meanings of the beast and false prophet are given in chapter 13. Basically, they are followers of Satan. The beast represents the forces that oppose God and persecute those who follow him. The false prophet represents those who practice false religion, or those who claim to follow God but are unwilling to submit to his commands. (See Rom. 10:1-3.) All of these people will spend eternity in hell with Satan who deceived them.

## **THE FINAL JUDGMENT**

**Verse 11. And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.**

The preceding verses gave a description of events that are to take place here on earth during the gospel age (the thousand years) and up to the second coming of Christ.

Verse 11 takes us into the time of Judgment. God is sitting on the great white throne, and all physical things as we know them, the earth and heavens, will no longer exist. When the Lord shall come, “the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2Pet. 3:10).

The throne of God is described as being great and white. As always, white indicates purity and holiness. The throne is great because it is the seat of God Almighty. Christians of the first century were suffering tremendous persecutions originating from the throne of the Roman emperors, but God’s Throne is the greatest throne of all. There is no power greater than God’s. When we obey God’s laws, we come into the presence of the greatest throne of all, and if we continue faithful, we will live with him eternally. (For more discussion about the throne of God, see comments on chapter 4.)

**Verse 12. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.**

The event that will immediately follow Christ’s second coming is Judgment. At this time everyone who has ever lived will stand before the Throne of God to be judged. Both small and great will be there. No one will be able to escape, regardless of how insignificant they may have been in man’s eyes, or how powerful or great they may have been.

The books will be opened, and we shall be judged according to the things that are written in those books. There can be little doubt concerning the identity of these books. They must represent the laws that God gave man to follow. This would be the law of Moses, as recorded in the Old Testament, and the law of Christ, as recorded in the New Testament. Jn. 12:48 quotes Christ saying, “The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last

day.” We who live in this present Christian dispensation will be judged according to the new law, which was established by Christ when he died. (See Heb. 9:15-17.) Those who lived under the Law of Moses will be judged according to that law.

The book of life represents God’s record of those who have been faithful to him. (See Phil. 4:3.) There are also references to the book of life in 3:5 and 22:19.

All who stand before the judgment seat of God will be judged according to their works or deeds done on earth. The books that will judge us are available to us today in the form of the Bible. We are to read and study that book and do the things contained therein in order to be obedient to God. This is what it means to be judged according to our works. We read in 2Cor. 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”

**Verse 13. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.**

This verse emphasizes the fact that all must stand before God to be judged. Everyone who has undergone death at this time will be resurrected to stand before God’s Throne. Verse 13 restates the fact that man will be judged according to his works. We must do the works God expects of us in order to be acceptable to him. Anyone who believes otherwise needs to read these two verses very carefully. (For further comments about being judged according to our works, see v. 12.)

**Verse 14. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.**

This is a description of the final destruction of all things opposed to God. Death and hell, or the grave, will be destroyed. The last enemy to be destroyed will be death (1Cor. 15:26). Man brought death into the world by his sins

(Rom. 5:12), and Christ through his righteousness will destroy that death. God's people will dwell eternally in a place where there will be no death and no grave.

This final destruction is referred to as the second death. This is the final destruction of the soul. It is a spiritual death to which those who oppose God will be doomed to suffer for all eternity.

**Verse 15. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.**

Those who have not been obedient to God's laws will be cast into the lake of fire, which represents eternal destruction and torment in a place totally away from the presence of God. Without God's presence, nothing good can exist. The only things that can exist in a place such as this will be torment and sorrow.

The ones who avoid this place of eternal torment will be those whose names are written in the book of life. The book of life is in direct contrast to the second death. Those who oppose God will undergo the second death, but those who are obedient to God will not die again (2:11). They will have the right to eternal life. Those who have had a part in the first resurrection (v. 5) will not be affected by this second death. They are the same ones who have their names written in the book of life. They have been resurrected spiritually, never to die again. Those who have not had a part in the first resurrection are spiritually dead and will also suffer the second death or hell.

Verse 15 tells of the final dwelling place of those who are disobedient to God, but in this chapter we are told nothing concerning the final dwelling place of Christians. It is our belief that 21:1 is the concluding verse of this vision. In that verse, we see a new heaven and a new earth that, according to 2Pet. 3:10-13, is the final dwelling place of Christians. If we include 21:1 with this vision, it becomes complete. All will stand before the great white throne to be judged (v. 11). Sinners will be cast into the lake of fire (v. 15), but Christians will dwell in a new heaven and a new earth (21:1). (For a complete interpretation of 21:1, see



comments on that verse.)

# CHAPTER 21

The last two chapters of Revelation contain some of the most beautiful writings known to man. We often hear passages quoted from these chapters in sermons. We also use them to reassure and comfort those who have lost loved ones. As we study these beautiful symbols, let us keep in mind that these symbols have figurative meanings, not literal. We have searched for figurative meanings throughout the book and should not change our method of interpretation for these last two chapters.

Before studying these chapters, it is important to recognize a division in chapter 21 between verses 8 and 9. The beautiful description of the holy city of God, the Lamb's wife, begins with verse 9. Further introductory remarks concerning chapters 21 and 22 are given at this division in a section titled "The Holy Jerusalem." We believe that 21:1-8 is much more understandable after 21:9 - 22:21 has been studied; therefore, we encourage you to begin your studies of these last two chapters with verse 9. Once the symbols in that section are understood, we are certain that the proper interpretation of verses 1 through 8 will become clear.

**Verse 1. And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away and there was no more sea.**

Assuming you have studied verses 21:9 through 22:21, you will recognize that this verse does not fit the time frame of the remainder of this vision. This verse introduces a new heaven and a new earth. If we interpret this verse in light of 2Pet. 3:13, which says, "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness," we must assume that this verse is speaking of our final eternal abode called heaven. Since the bride, the Lamb's wife (v. 9), is a symbolic description of God's church, which is in existence today, this places a description of heaven before the

description of the church. There can be little doubt that the placement of this verse causes many to interpret the remainder of Revelation as a description of heaven. We recognize this fact, but believe there are some logical explanations concerning the placement of this verse.

To begin with, we must recognize that the subjects of verse 1 and 2 are different. Verse 1 is referring to a new heaven, but verse 2 is speaking of the holy city of God that came down out of heaven. That holy city that came down from heaven is the church of our Lord. Heaven is the final dwelling place for those who have been faithful members of his church during their lives on this earth. Since the subjects of verse 1 and 2 are different, we must be dealing with two different visions. Verse 2 is the beginning of the vision of the new Jerusalem or the church. Since verse 2 is the beginning of a new vision, then verse 1 must be the concluding verse to the previous vision.

Considering the subject of chapter 20, not only is it possible that this verse concludes that vision, but it serves that purpose extremely well. In fact, without this verse the vision of chapter 20 almost seems to be incomplete. To understand this, consider the last section of that vision (20:11-15), which is a description of the Judgment scene. Verse 11 describes a great white throne from which God is about to judge the world. Also, notice that the earth and the heavens have fled away at this time. In the last two verses of the chapter, a description of the final abode of those who have followed the devil is given, but a description of the final dwelling place for those who have followed Christ is not given. This is the purpose of verse 1. At the time of Judgment, the heavens and earth as we know them will have been destroyed; however, God will make a new heaven and earth in which his people will dwell forever. We should not expect this “new heaven and new earth” to be anything like what we have today. This shows us that those who have followed Christ will live in a totally new place designed by God. It will be the Christian's final dwelling place forever. This present heaven and earth will flee away at Christ's second coming (20:11), and a new heaven and earth will come into existence (21:1). This

completes the vision of chapter 20.

This interpretation also aids in understanding the meaning of the phrase “and there was no more sea.” Throughout Revelation the “sea” is symbolic of the masses of people dwelling upon this earth who are not Christians. (See comments on 12:16.) After Judgment there will be no more sea. Only those people who have been faithful to Christ will be residents of the new heaven and new earth.

## THE HOLY CITY: NEW JERUSALEM

**Verse 2. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.**

This verse introduces the last section of the book of Revelation, which describes the holy city of God. Here John sees the holy city as a bride adorned for her husband. It is almost impossible to even imagine how this vision may have appeared because it is hard to comprehend how a city could be dressed as a bride. This is truly figurative language, and it must be interpreted by letting the Bible define the symbols.

The first symbol that must be defined is the “holy city” or, as it is also called, the “new Jerusalem.” Many commentators today believe that the “new Jerusalem” refers to heaven or that eternal abode of the saints. However, we must interpret the symbol according to how it is used in Scripture. In Heb. 12:22-23 we read, “But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn.” This verse defines the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, as the church of the firstborn. The writer of Hebrews also tells these people that they “are come” unto this city. Therefore, Christians are presently in the “new Jerusalem.” This must be the intended meaning of this holy city because it is also referred to as “a bride adorned for her husband.” Rom. 7:4 says that we are “become dead to the

law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead.” The church is married to Christ today; it is the bride of Christ. We do not have to wait until Judgment to be the bride of Christ or to be married to him; we are Christ’s bride today. Therefore, the holy city, which John saw in this vision, was the spiritual city of God, the church. (For more information, see the section entitled “The Holy Jerusalem” at the conclusion of v. 8.)

Also notice that this holy city is pictured as coming down from God out of heaven. This should serve to show that the holy city and heaven are two different places. The bride of Christ (the church) has already descended from God out of heaven. This took place on the first Pentecost after Christ’s resurrection. Since John performed such a major part in the establishment of the church, certainly he would have recognized that it would be symbolically described as a holy city, a new Jerusalem, or as a bride adorned for her husband. This spiritual city, the new Jerusalem, replaced the physical city of Jerusalem as man’s place of worship to God. When this took place, God’s chosen people would no longer dwell in a physical, earthly kingdom (Israel), but rather in a spiritual heavenly kingdom (the church).

**Verse 3. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.**

The great voice out of heaven proclaims that the “tabernacle of God is with men.” This is a reference to the church. During the forty years the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness, the High Priest communicated with God by entering into the Holy of Holies located in the tabernacle. Today, when one becomes a member of the church, he becomes a priest of God and can communicate directly with God through the avenue of prayer. The tabernacle of the Old Testament was a likeness of the church today. When Christ died on the cross, he did away with the old law and established the new (Heb. 10:9-10).

He gave us the church, which is the tabernacle of God, and it is with men today.

Just as the tabernacle was the dwelling place of God under the old law, the church is the dwelling place of God today. (See 2Cor. 6:16.) This is an extremely important point that all Christians need to fully understand. Nothing is more important than the church because God dwells in it, and if we become members of it, we come into contact with God and have our sins forgiven. We live under a much better law than the children of Israel lived under. We have God dwelling with us if we are members of his church. We do not need a “priest” to talk to God on our behalf; we can commune directly with him through our own prayers.

Understanding the importance of the church will also greatly assist in our understanding of the “holy city,” which is described beginning with verse 9. In that vision, we are given a beautiful description of the church, which helps us understand its value and importance.

**Verse 4. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.**

The key to this verse is understanding the meaning of the “former things” that have passed away. There can be little doubt that this is referring to the Law of Moses. This is an important point in the interpretation of this vision. For many years, we in the church have believed that this refers to this present physical world which will pass away at the end of time. It is understandable that many have interpreted this passage in this manner because of the type of figurative language being used, and especially in light of the fact that in verse 1 a new heaven and a new earth appear after the old passes away. This makes it important to understand that verse 1 is the concluding verse of the vision of chapter 20. Once the correct placement of verse 1 is understood, it becomes much easier to interpret this entire vision.

The context of verse 4 demands that the phrase “former things” refers to the old Law of Moses. The announcement is made that former things are passed away, and God says

in verse 5 that he has “made all things new.” In verse 6, he announces, “it is done,” and because of this we can partake of the “water of life.” Rev. 22:17 explains that we can drink of that water of life today. We are able to drink of that water of life because these “former things” have passed away. The water of life refers to the gospel, and we have that gospel because Christ did away with the old Law of Moses and “made all things new” through his death on the cross. The Law of Moses has been abolished; the former things are passed away. The Law of Christ is now in effect; all things are made new. “It is done,” and because of this we have access to the “water of life,” which is the gospel.

The obvious question to ask now is: If the “former things” refer to the Law of Moses, then what is meant by the statement, “There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away”? Without any doubt this causes many to believe that this vision refers to heaven. We also believe that this situation will literally exist in heaven, but we must remember that Revelation is written in figurative language. These statements figuratively describe our spiritual situation today under the Law of Christ as compared to the situation of those who lived under the Law of Moses. Under the Law of Moses, the children of Israel experienced the pain and sorrow of sin. The Law of Moses was a law of spiritual death because it could not provide the forgiveness of sins. There are many passages in the New Testament that confirm this. Rom. 3:20 says, “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” Rom. 5:12 states, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Rom. 5:21 states, “That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.” The people who lived under the Law of Moses did not have the opportunity to have their sins forgiven under that law. Therefore, they lived with the spiritual pain and sorrow of sin. Because of the pain and sorrow of sin, they are figuratively described as weeping and crying and having

tears in their eyes. This is situation is described in Isa. 59:11-12, which states, "We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves: we look for judgment, but *there is none*; for salvation, *but* it is far off from us. For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions *are* with us; and *as for* our iniquities, we know them."

Today, under the law of Christ, we have forgiveness of our sins. The tears of our spiritual sorrow for sin have been wiped away.

Since this verse is so important in determining how these last two chapters of Revelation are interpreted, we are going to deal more extensively with some Old Testament passages that relate to this subject. As we study these passages, it must be remembered that the main emphasis of the prophecies made by the Old Testament prophets concerned the coming of Christ and the church. Many today would have us believe that the Old Testament prophecies are dealing with events leading up to the end of time or the second coming of Christ. These same people will take passages such as Dan. 9:24-27, which deals with the prophetic seventy weeks of Daniel, and equate them to certain passages in Revelation, thereby coming up with some predictions concerning the end of time that are totally contrary to other teachings in the New Testament. These Old Testament passages do deal with the end of a "time" and the coming of Christ. But the "end time" referred to is the end of the Mosaic dispensation, and the coming of Christ is referring to his first coming. Let us keep these concepts firmly in mind as we examine these Old Testament passages.

The book of Isaiah contains several passages that definitely should be studied in connection with these last two chapters of Revelation. Isaiah uses many of the same symbols to prophesy the coming of the church as is used in these two chapters of Revelation to describe the church. It is not feasible to include a complete study of these passages, but we would like to point out some specific verses that should help to understand how these same symbols are used in Revelation to describe the holy city of



God, the church.

Isa. 25:7-8 states, "And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it." Notice that the tears are to be wiped away at the same time the veil that is cast over the people is destroyed. In order to know when these tears are wiped away, all we have to do is determine when this covering was destroyed. The answer to this is found in 2Cor. 3:14-16 which states, "But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away." This veil was destroyed when Christ did away with the old law and established the new. Therefore, this is also when he wiped away tears. He wiped away the spiritual tears of being unable to receive forgiveness of sins. This meaning is confirmed in Isa. 25:9, which says that in that day "he will save us" and "we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." When Christ made salvation possible for all men, he wiped away spiritual tears from our eyes. This is exactly what is meant by this verse in Revelation. Because the "former things" (the old law) have passed away, God will now wipe away the spiritual tears from the eyes of those who enter into his spiritual city, which is the new tabernacle or church. Our tears are wiped away because we have obtained salvation. We should be glad and rejoice.

Isa. 60:20 states, "Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended." Isa. 65:19 states, "And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying." One way we may be sure that these passages are prophesying the coming of the church is given in Isa. 60:3. It says, "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the

brightness of thy rising.” We know that the Gentiles “came to the light” when they received the gospel of Christ. Eph. 3:6 says, “That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.” The gospel is for all men, not just the Jewish nation. The Gentiles could “come to the light” at the same time the weeping and crying ceased. (See also Isa. 60:11.) Another way we may be sure that these passages refer to the establishment of the church is given in Isa. 61:8b, which says, “And I will make an everlasting covenant with them.” We know that this everlasting covenant was established by Christ after his death on the cross. (See Heb. chapters 8-10; 13:20.)

Other passages could be studied concerning these symbols, but this should be sufficient to show that this verse is teaching that God wiped away the tears of spiritual sorrow from our eyes when he made the new covenant with mankind. This covenant provided for forgiveness of sins, which was not attainable under the old Law of Moses until Christ died on the cross.

Verse 4 also says, “There shall be no more death.” This is referring to spiritual death. Rev. 20:6 says, “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power.” When one obeys the gospel, he obtains everlasting life. He will never die again spiritually, providing he remains faithful to Christ.

**Verse 5. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.**

There may be some question as to who is speaking in this verse, God or Christ. Some say it is God because he is sitting upon the throne and in verse 7 he says, “I will be his God, and he shall be my son.” Possibly this is true, but according to Heb. 1:3, Jesus is also sitting on the throne in heaven, and he is also referred to as God in many passages. (See Jn. 1:1.) Verse 6 identifies him as Alpha and Omega. In 1:8 and 22:13, this phrase is used to identify Christ. Sometimes it becomes difficult to separate God and Jesus, and perhaps we should not even try. The one who made this

statement is also the one who “made all things new.” Since this statement is referring to the new Law of Christ, it becomes likely that Jesus is the one doing the speaking in this verse. On the other hand, Jesus came to earth to do the things his Father in heaven had commanded. Perhaps in this verse we should simply consider them as one.

The things that are made new are those things that took the place of the “former things,” which have passed away (v. 4). Since the “former things” refer to the Law of Moses, then “all things new” would refer to the new Law of Christ. Heb. 10:20 says that Christ has made for us “a new and living way.” This is in contrast to the old law that could never take away sins (Heb. 10:11). Christ has made a new way for us. He has given us a new law of grace whereby we have remission of sins through his blood.

**Verse 6. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.**

This verse greatly strengthens the above interpretation because Jesus says, “I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.” This must be a reference to the gospel. In Jn. 4:14, Jesus said, “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst.” Also in Jn. 7:37, he said, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.” If we are thirsty for the truth of the gospel, Jesus will freely give it to us today! Rom. 1:16 says that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. This is figuratively represented in this passage as the “water of life.” Obedience to the gospel will save us now and forevermore.

Therefore, “It is done,” must refer to the completing of God’s will by establishing the new law of faith. In Jn. 19:30, John quoted our Lord’s last words as he was dying on the cross: “It is finished.” Obviously, one thing that was finished was Christ’s physical life; however, there was probably much more meant by that statement. In Jn. 4:34, Jesus said, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” Christ came to this earth to do his

Father's will, which was to fulfill the old Law of Moses and establish a new one. In Jn. 17:4, as Jesus prayed to his heavenly Father just prior to his crucifixion he said, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." Then in verse 8 of the same chapter, that work is defined as Jesus said, "For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me." The work Jesus came to earth to do was to speak the commandments of God, which established the new law or the gospel. (Also see Jn. 12:48-50.) When he died on the cross, he finished that work. It was done! He had made all things new (v. 5), and the former things were passed away (v. 4).

**Verse 7. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.**

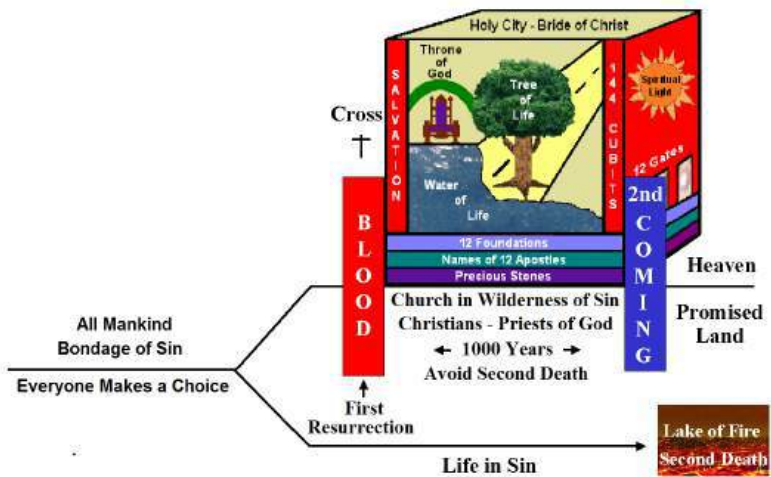
Each of the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3 ends with a promise to those who "overcome." In 1Jn. 5:4, we read, "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." We overcome by being born of God, which is to be obedient to his Word. (See 1Pet. 1:23.) When one becomes obedient to God's will, he overcomes this world of sin, and this enables him to inherit all things that God has promised. When we overcome, we become the sons of God. We are "now" the sons of God, according to 1Jn. 3:1-2. Therefore, verse 7 is referring to overcoming this present sinful world. When we do this, we inherit spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3), as well as eternal life if we remain faithful (2:10).

Included in the introduction to chapters 2 and 3 is a section dealing with the meaning of "overcoming." It should be noted that the interpretation of "overcoming" in chapters 2 and 3 is in complete agreement with the interpretation of chapters 21 and 22. When we overcome this world of sin through obedience to the gospel, we enter into God's spiritual city, the church, and receive the promises revealed in chapters 2 and 3.

**Verse 8. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and**

**sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.**

This is a listing of those who have not overcome worldly things but have lived their lives committing acts that are sinful in the sight of God. Since they have not overcome these sinful acts, nor have they obtained forgiveness for them by being obedient to God’s Word, they are not the children of God. They are the children of the devil. Therefore, they will have their place in the lake of fire and brimstone along with their master, the devil, the one who deceived them (20:10). (For more on the “second death,” see comments on 20:14.)

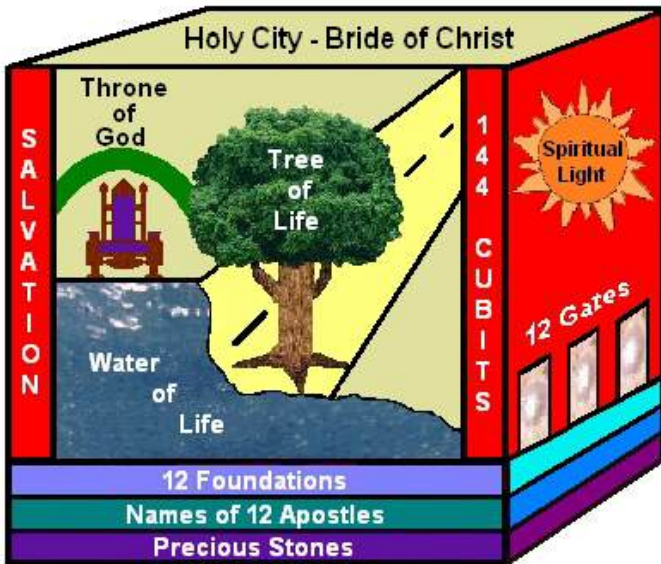


The first section of chapter 21 is a contrast between those who are obedient to the will of God and those who oppose him. Those who thirst, or seek to find and do the will of God, will be able to partake of the water of life (the gospel) freely. When we partake of this water of life, we overcome the sinful things of this world and become children of God. We shall inherit all things. We are the chosen people of God. We are the church. Those who do not overcome or partake of the water of life will not inherit these things but

will receive a place of eternal torment, completely separated from God where nothing good can exist.

## THE HOLY JERUSALEM

The drawing below is taken from the symbols describing the “holy city” in chapters 21 and 22. Please refer back to this drawing as you study these two chapters. Hopefully, it will be helpful in understanding how these symbols are used to describe the church that Jesus established.



This final section in Revelation gives a beautiful description of the holy city of God. This city is described by using items that man considers extremely valuable. For example, (1) there are twelve precious stones garnishing the foundation of the city; (2) the street is pure gold; (3) each of the twelve gates is one giant pearl; (4) the wall is jasper; (5) the entire city is built of gold so pure it is transparent; and (6) even the light of the city is crystal clear jasper. The wealth and value of such a city could never be

measured in monetary terms. The point of this description is to show man the great value of the city of God. No material place on this earth is even slightly comparable to the value of this spiritual city. God is telling us that living in his city is far more valuable than any wealth we could possibly acquire or imagine on this earth. If we desire to be rich beyond measure, we must do those things necessary to enter into this holy city.

Since the value of this city is so great and man should seek to enter into it at any cost, then it becomes extremely important to know exactly what this city represents. Many believe that it represents the eternal abode where the faithful will live throughout eternity with God. This is true to the extent that those who dwell in this city will be the ones who will inherit the things that God has prepared for them that love him (1Cor. 2:9). However, we are not told what God has prepared for us. Furthermore, it would most likely be impossible for man to understand such matters. In 1Jn. 3:2, we read, “Beloved, now we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” We do not know what heaven will be like, but we do know that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us, and if we believe in him, he will come again and receive us unto himself to dwell with him forever in that eternal abode (Jn. 14:1-3).

Then what does this holy Jerusalem symbolize? A brief discussion of several key verses will be given here with more details in the verse by verse comments.

*Rev. 21:9.* This holy Jerusalem is defined in this verse. John was to be shown the bride of Christ. Without any doubt, the bride of Christ, the Lamb’s wife, refers to the church. (See Rom. 7:4.) It is also referred to as that “great city” in verse 10 and the “holy city” in verse 2. This symbol stems directly from the Old Testament. In Isa. 52:1, Jerusalem is referred to as the “holy city.” The temple, which was the designated place of worship to God, was located in this city. Jews from every nation would gather in Jerusalem to worship God. (See Acts 2:5.) God’s chosen people of today do not worship in a physical, earthly city.

Instead, we worship in a spiritual, heavenly city designed by God. That spiritual city in which all of God's people live is the church. Christians are the spiritual Israel of God today, and we are living in the spiritual city of God, the church. (See Gal. 3:29; 6:16.)

*Rev. 21:14.* The names of the twelve apostles are in the twelve foundations. This indicates that the city is built upon foundations laid by the twelve apostles. In Eph. 2:20, Paul says that the church was "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone."

*Rev. 21:24.* We are told that the saved shall walk in the light of it, and 1Jn. 1:5-7 says that if we "walk in the light," the blood of Jesus will cleanse us of our sins. The saved today are in the church, walking in the light. Verse 24 explains that the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. It is hard to imagine how kings of this earth could take their glory and honor into heaven. If kings of the earth are converted to Christianity, they bring their honor into the church. (See Isa. 60:11.)

*Rev. 21:25.* The gates of the city are never closed. We know that a person may be added to the church by our Lord at any time. Man neither has the means nor the right to refuse any believer admittance to the church, the holy Jerusalem.

*Rev. 21:27.* Nothing which defiles can enter into the city, but only those whose names are written in the book of life. (See 1Cor. 6:9-10.) Phil. 4:3 indicates that as Christians today our names are written in the book of life. Therefore, those whose names are written in the book of life are residents in the holy city of God, the church. Their sins have been forgiven. No sin (nothing which defiles) can enter the church.

*Rev. 22:1.* We find the water of life in the city, and in 22:17 we are bidden to partake of that water of life. It would be difficult, to say the least, to go to heaven to partake of that water. This water represents the gospel, which is located in the church. When we are obedient to that gospel, we partake of that water of life flowing in the city of God.



*Rev. 22:2.* The tree of life is described. It says that the leaves are for the healing of the nations. After judgment, when all people have received their final destiny, there will be no healing of the nations. Those who have received eternal punishment must remain in their eternal abode. The healing of the nations takes place today as people become obedient to God's laws and are added to his church.

*Rev. 22:14.* The requirement for entrance into the city is explained. We must do his commandments: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (1Jn. 5:3); "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love" (Jn. 15:10). We are in Christ if we keep his commandments. We are living in his holy city. The next verse, 22:15, shows that all types of sinners are outside the city. This is not speaking of being outside the gates of heaven. It is speaking of sinners being outside church in the world today.

*Rev. 22:19.* The warning is given that our names will be taken out of the book of life, or away from the tree of life (ASV), and out of the holy city if we take away from the prophecy of God's book. This is speaking of this present time. If man takes away from the Word of God today, God will erase his name out of the book of life and remove him from the holy city. He would no longer be a part of the church or the saved. This must refer to the church because once we reach heaven, there will be no danger of losing our eternal inheritance.

In our opinion, this section of Revelation holds one of the most needed, and at the same time, most beautiful and reassuring lessons to be found in the entire Bible. It describes, in terms that we can understand, how God views his kingdom, the church. It is a spiritual city with value and beauty beyond comparison. Those who are residents of that city are the wealthiest people on earth. They have their treasures laid up in heaven (Mt. 6:19-20).

On the other hand, many times Christians fail to view the church in this manner. By their actions, some say they believe "church" is a meeting they are "required" to attend on Sunday morning. Others attend "church" if it is convenient. However, let us be thankful that there are still

many faithful Christians who attend church services and do the things commanded because they love the Lord. We must learn to view the church as God has described it in these last two chapters of Revelation. It should be more valuable to us than anything on this earth. We should desire to be a part of it more than any earthly club or organization. We must hold it in the highest regard and esteem. We should seek to show others its great value and help them to enter through the gates into the city. We must recognize the glorious beauty the church has in God's sight, and it should be equally beautiful and precious to us.

This city, the church, is the spiritual city built by Christ. It is the place where those people dwell who have their sins forgiven by the blood of Christ. Remember, Christ did not come to earth to set up an earthly kingdom. Instead, he came to establish a spiritual kingdom. He accomplished that with the establishment of the church, and if we desire to spend an eternity in heaven with him, we must be a part of that spiritual kingdom because that is where the tree of life is located. As long as we are in this beautiful city and partake of the tree of life, we shall live spiritually forever.

## **THE BRIDE: THE LAMB'S WIFE**

**Verse 9. And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.**

One of the seven angels, which had the seven vials containing the wrath of God, bids John to see a vision of the bride of Christ. There may be no specific reason why this vision is introduced by this particular angel, but it is significant that the vision which John is about to see is the method of avoiding the plagues that were poured out by this angel in chapter 16.

As has been previously discussed, the bride of Christ, the Lamb's wife, is a definite reference to the church. John is about to see a vision of the church as God describes it. This is the church that was established by Christ when he first

came to this earth, and we can be members of that church today. We do not have to wait until Christ comes again to set up some thousand-year kingdom. It is present in the world today. When Christ comes the second time, he will take those home with him who are members of this church, his bride, and they will spend an eternity with him.

**Verse 10. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,**

As is the case in many of the visions in Revelation, this one covers the entire gospel age. This is a description of the church that Christ established while on earth. It is a description of the spiritual city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem. Heb. 11:10 says that Abraham “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Heb. 12:22 states, “But ye are come.., unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” Abraham looked for this city or the church. We have come unto it. When we obey the gospel, we enter into that city which Abraham desired to see.

We see this great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. This marks the beginning point of the church here on earth. We know that the church was “sent from heaven” on the day of Pentecost when the apostles preached the first gospel sermon. In Acts 1:6-8, the apostles asked Christ, “Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” They were told that it was not for them to know “the times or the seasons,” but “after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and Judea, and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Acts 2:1-4 describes this coming of the Holy Ghost and the preaching of the first gospel sermon. This is when the church descended out of heaven from God. Let us not be among those who make the mistake of believing that Christ will come again to set up an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem and reign here on earth for a thousand years. Christ has already set up his kingdom, and we who are members of his church are in that kingdom.

John was taken to a great high mountain to view this

city. At the time of the writing of Revelation, one would be required to go to a high point around a city in order to overlook the entire city. This is the type of symbolism being used in this verse. This mountain was great and high in order to show the vastness of this great city.

**Verse 11. Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;**

This verse is the beginning of the detailed description of the holy Jerusalem, the spiritual city built by God. It is extremely important to keep in mind that the description is figurative. The numbers must be interpreted as descriptive, just as they are throughout the entire book.

There are many who believe this city describes heaven, and some even go so far as to take the dimensions of the city and figure how many people heaven could hold. This type of thinking is totally foreign to the proper interpretation of this book. This city is the spiritual city built by God and will hold all those people who are obedient to his will.

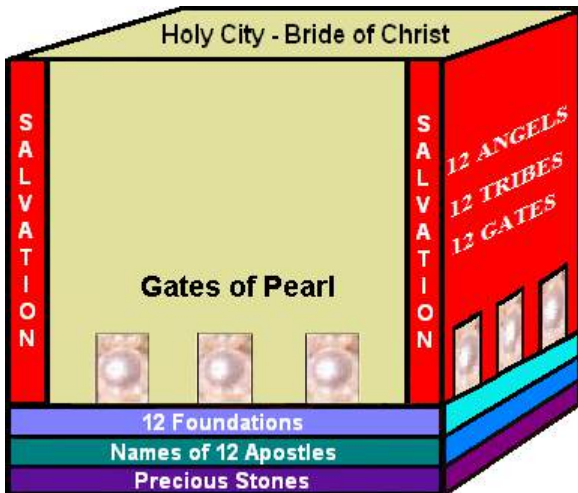
The city has the glory of God. This indicates that God is present in this city. This statement is similar to verse 3, which says that God shall dwell with men and be their God.

The light of this city is described as being like a precious jasper stone, which is clear as crystal. It is hard to understand how light could be compared to a stone, but most likely the intent of this symbol is to show the value of the light. We cannot even be certain what the jasper stone is. Some say it is diamond; others say it is a fiery red stone. We do know that the light of the church today is Jesus. He said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12a). To walk in the light of Jesus means to be a member of his church. If we are members of his church, we are cleansed of all sins. In 1Jn. 1:7 we read, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light., the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

Christ is also described as a stone in other places in the New Testament. For example, Eph. 2:20 describes Jesus as

the “chief cornerstone.” This jasper stone was clear as crystal indicating its purity. This again points to the fact that Jesus is the light of the church, and he is completely pure. There are no flaws or blemishes in our Lord. He has no sin (Heb. 4:15).

**Verse 12. And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:**



The city is pictured as having a great high wall with twelve gates. This type of description was common to people of the first century because many cities at that time had walls built around them for protection from enemies. The enemy that attacks this spiritual city is sin which exists in the world today. We are protected from sin by a great high wall or the law that God has given us to follow. If we are obedient to the Law of Christ, sin cannot harm us, and we are under God’s protection as long as we remain obedient. (See comments on v. 14-19.) We must remember that sin separates man from God (Is 59:2), but as long as we are living inside the walls of this city, our sins are

forgiven and we are in a close relationship with God.

We also note from 22:15 that all manner of sin is outside the wall of this city. Those inside the church are free from sin. They have forgiveness of their sins and will be the ones whom Christ will deliver up to God to live with him eternally (1Cor. 15:24).

This wall has twelve gates with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel written upon them. Gal. 3:9, 16, 29 explains that the church is the seed of Abraham, or in other words the church is the Israel of God today. The number “12” is used in Revelation to identify organized religion. Therefore, the church is described as having twelve gates. Those who enter into the city through the gates are God’s chosen people or the Israel of today. They are Christians.

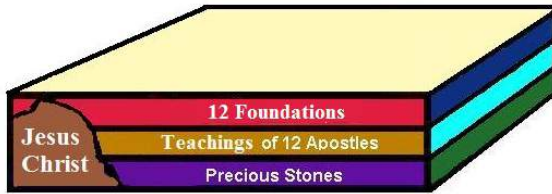
Symbolic language very similar to this is used in Isa. 60:18b to prophesy of the coming of the church. It states, “But thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.” We know this is referring to the church because Isa. 60:3 says this is the time when the “Gentiles shall come to thy light.” The Gentiles had no part in the Law of Moses, but the Law of Christ brought all men, Jew and Gentile, under one law. (See Eph. 3:6; Gal. 3:28-29.) When we obey the gospel, we enter in through the gates of Praise. We pass through the wall of Salvation and receive forgiveness of our sins. This great wall of salvation protects us from the devil. He cannot control the destiny of our souls because our sins are forgiven. Christians are under the protection of God, and if we remain faithful, we will never die spiritually.

**Verse 13. On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.**

The city has three gates on each of the four sides of the wall. Again, we are dealing with descriptive numbers. All four directions of the earth are mentioned. This indicates that a person may enter the church wherever he is located. There is no place on this earth where one would find it impossible to enter into the city. It is accessible to all. It is also interesting to note that the number “3” is the divine

number. Therefore, it would be a divine entrance into the holy city of God, which is located on this earth today in the form of a spiritual kingdom.

**Verse 14. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.**



The names of the twelve apostles of Christ are written in the twelve foundations of the wall of the city. Eph. 2:19-20, referring to the church, says that it was “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*.” The apostles laid the foundation of the church as they proclaimed the gospel, which was given to them by inspiration of God. (See Gal. 1:12-13.) God gave man the law of Christ through the apostles. That law of Christ, the gospel, is the foundation of the church today. It is the basis of all practice in worship and life-style of Christians today. Again, the number “12” is used to refer to organized religion. The old nation of Israel was made up of the children of the 12 sons of Israel (Jacob). The church is made up of those people who choose to follow the ways of God given to mankind by the 12 apostles. In order for any building to be stable in construction, it must be built upon a solid foundation. In order for any local congregation of the church to be acceptable to God, it must be built upon the solid foundation of the gospel of Christ.

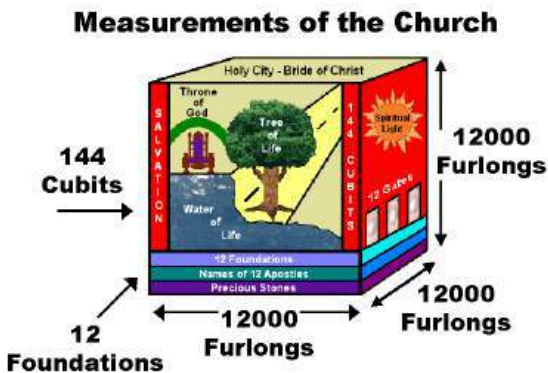
**Verse 15. And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof.**

The one who talked with John must have been the angel in verse 9 who showed John this vision. This angel had a golden reed that he was to use to measure the city of God.

This reed is a figurative representation of the gospel. (See 11:1.) This measuring indicates the ability to determine who is in the temple and who is outside of it. That determination is made by the gospel. Those who are obedient to it are inside the temple and those who are not are outside. Interestingly, the temple in 11:1 is also referred to as the holy city in 11:2. This is one more reason why the interpretation of this holy city in chapters 21 and 22 as being the church is correct.

Let us remember that the dimensions which are to be given in the following verses are figurative. These measurements are going to describe some feature of this city, the church, and must not be interpreted literally. We might also note that the dimensions of the gates are never given although this verse indicates they were to be measured.

**Verse 16. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.**



The angel measures the city and finds it to be in the shape of a square with its length and width measuring 12,000 furlongs, The city is also 12,000 furlongs high. Using our present-day measurement of a furlong as 220 yards, 12,000 furlongs are equal to 1,500 miles. This makes the city 1,500 miles square and 1,500 miles tall. If these



numbers were literal, this city would almost be too large to comprehend. Attempts such as this by using literal measurements are futile in determining the meaning of these numbers. The number “12,000” is figurative. It is used to describe the church. The number “12” is descriptive of organized religion that has been set up by God. The old law was given to the twelve tribes of Israel, and the Law of Christ was given by the twelve apostles. If we take “1,000,” the number of ultimate completeness, and multiply it by “12,” the product is “12,000.” Therefore, the number 12,000 represents the complete law given by God. All who have ever lived and have been obedient to God’s commands are inside the wall of this city. This is a descriptive measurement of a spiritual city.

**Verse 17. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.**

There is some question as to whether the 144 cubits refers to the height of the wall or to its thickness. It seems reasonable to assume that the measurements given in the preceding verse are taken around the wall of the city because everything inside the wall would be considered part of the city. The height of the city also measured 12,000 furlongs, which would seemingly refer to the height of the wall. This would leave the 144 cubits as the thickness of the wall. The real key to this verse is in understanding why the number 144 is used as a measurement of the wall. Again, the number “12” refers to the laws given by God, and if we multiply “12” by “12” for the two laws, we get “144.” (For other comments, see v. 12.) This is the same way we arrive at the meaning of the 144,000 in 14:1. The number “144” represents the giving of the two laws, or the wall of the city, and the 144,000 represents all who have obeyed those laws and have entered in through the gates into the city. The “entering in through the gates” of verse 27 simply means that one has rendered obedience to the law set up by God. Those inside this wall are the redeemed of all ages, the 144,000.

The “measure of a man” establishes the measurements as

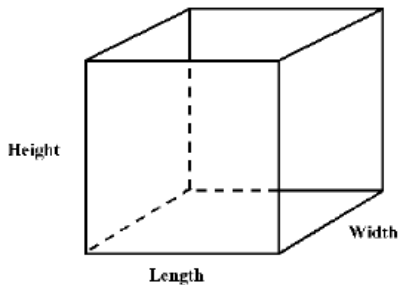
being those that man would understand.

## MEASUREMENTS OF THE CHURCH

There are some extraordinary relationships throughout the book of Revelation that can be understood by the measurements of the church given in the above verses. Although most of the numbers in Revelation are symbolic, some of them work together in mathematical relationships that are truly amazing, and because of this, we can begin to understand how several of the visions in Revelation work together. It would be impossible to discuss all of these relationships in the space available here; therefore, we will give some basic information with the hopes that you will explore this subject further.

All of these numbers have mathematical relationships to the number 144,000; therefore, it becomes very important to understand the symbolic meaning of this number. In chapter 14:1, the 144,000 are those who are standing around Mt. Zion with the Father's name written in their foreheads. This would define the 144,000 as Christians. In chapter 7:3-4, the 144,000 are those people who are sealed by God. Again, this would define these people as Christians. Since the number 144,000 symbolically represents Christians, then it would represent the people located in the Holy City (the church) pictured in these last 2 chapters of Revelation.

The first relationship we need to examine is the total measurement of the Holy city described in the above verses. We are told that the length, breadth, and height of the city are all equal measurements of 12,000 furlongs. That would make the city a perfect



cube with each measurement being 12,000 furlongs. In the drawing, notice that it takes 12 perfect measurements to form a perfect cube. Since each of the measurements is 12,000 and there are 12 measurements, the total measurement of the church would be  $12,000 \times 12$ , or 144,000. All Christians are part of the 144,000 and dwell in God's Holy City that has a total measurement of 144,000.

Again, in chapter 7:3-4, the 144,000 (Christians) are those who are sealed by God. In the following verses in that chapter, we are told that 12,000 are sealed from each tribe. It might be impossible to really understand that this is a symbolic description of all Christians, not the literal 12 tribes of Israel, if it were not for the following mathematical relationship. As discussed in that passage, Christians are the Israel of God today. In our description of the church in this passage in Revelation, the names of the 12 tribes are written over the gates. This would indicate who enters these gates. Now notice, there are 12 gates and 12,000 are sealed from each tribe in 7:5-8. Again, 12,000 times 12 gates equals 144,000. All those who enter the gates of the church are among the 144,000. They are Christians.

Next, the thickness of the wall of salvation is 144 cubits. The number 1000 is used in Revelation to symbolize completeness. ( $144 \times 1000 = 144,000$ ) Therefore, all those who pass through the great wall of salvation become a part of the 144,000.

**Verse 18. And the building of the wall of it was of jasper and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.**

The symbol of the precious jasper stone was also used in verse 11 to describe the light of the church. We may not know exactly what this stone was, but that probably makes no difference in the interpretation. This enormous wall was built entirely of jasper, and the city itself was made of gold so pure you could see through it. This picture points to the value of the city. Nothing is more valuable or precious in the sight of God than his church. This is one of the most important lessons regarding the church in the entire book of

Revelation. Many times we fail to understand the importance and value of the church. On many occasions, members cannot get along and fight among themselves. Many ask, "How often do I 'have' to go to church?" We must learn to view the church in the same manner as God does. It is the most valuable thing on earth. The richest people on earth are those who live in this beautiful city of God, his church.

Concerning the color of the jasper stone, some say it is diamond and other believe it was some type of fiery red stone. Since the wall is a wall of salvation, diamond would show the extreme value of this wall. However, the wall of salvation is also well defined by the color red since Christ gave his blood in order to provide salvation. When we are baptized, we pass through the blood of Christ, which would also be the same as passing through the wall of salvation. Blood is always symbolized by the color red. For that reason we prefer the definition of jasper as a fiery red stone. That would also be the color of this great wall of salvation around the holy city of God.

**Verses 19, 20. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper, the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.**

Verse 14 states that the 12 foundations of this wall have the names of the apostles inscribed in them. The foundation of the church is the teachings of the 12 apostles. These two verses list twelve precious stones that garnish the twelve foundations of the wall. It would be hopeless to try to ascribe a meaning to each of these individual stones since we are not even sure what some of them look like. The meaning is derived from the beauty and value of these stones. The gospel is the foundation of the church, and its value is truly extraordinary because it will provide eternal

life to all who follow its teachings.

**Verse 21. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.**

Each of the gates to this city is one enormous pearl. This illustrates that obedience to God's commandments and entrance into this city is priceless. This is comparable to the parable of the pearl of great price in Mt. 13:45-46. In this parable, a merchant finds one pearl of great price and proceeds to sell all he owns in order to buy it. This is how we should consider the church. It is priceless. We should be willing to give up all earthly goods in order to enter into God's kingdom.

The street of this city is pictured as pure transparent gold. This once again illustrates the enormous value of the city. It is far beyond comparison to any physical city that might exist. We might note that this city has only one street. To those who interpret these numbers literally, it would be hard to visualize how a city 1,500 miles square could have only one street. They would have us believe that the "street" includes all streets in the city, but this interpretation totally misses the point. This is a spiritual city with only one street. It is the street of righteousness! It is the way that leads to eternal life. Jesus said, "I am the way." The only street we can walk down, or the only way we can get to heaven, is by following Christ.

This street is defined in Isa. 35:8 as Isaiah prophesied of the coming of the church. He said, "And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein." The church is our place of righteousness on earth. No unclean thing shall enter into it. The only way anyone may enter the church is by being obedient to God's commands and receiving forgiveness of their sins. Therefore, the unclean shall not pass over this street of holiness.

Also, Isa. 35:9 says, "But the redeemed shall walk there." The street of gold, the way of holiness, is located in the

church today, and only the redeemed may walk there. This is the reason the street is described as pure gold. This figurative street, “the way of holiness,” located in the spiritual city of God, the church, is the most valuable street in existence. If we walk on it, we shall receive eternal life.

**Verse 22. And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.**

Under the old Law of Moses, the temple was the place of worship. Located in this temple was the Holy of Holies where the priest entered once each year to make atonement for the sins of the people. Today, as Christians in the church, we have no need of a priest to make atonement for us because Christ dwells with us. (See v. 3.) Christians are priests of God today. We have direct access to the Throne of God through prayer whereby we can receive forgiveness of our sins. Therefore, there is no need of a physical temple in the spiritual kingdom of God today.

In 2Cor. 6:16-17, Christians are admonished to come out from among those who practice sin. If we do this, God says, “I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” This was prophesied in Ezek. 37:26-27. Referring to the new law given by Christ, God says, “Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them.” In Ezek. 37:27, God also says, “My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” We know this is referring to this present Christian dispensation because this was to take place when God made the everlasting covenant with his people. We know this everlasting covenant was put into effect by Christ’s death on the cross. (See Heb. 8.)

The church today has no need of a physical temple because God and Christ dwell with Christians in the church. They dwell in us and we dwell in them. To dwell in the church is to dwell in God and Christ. They are our temple. We do not have to go to some specific physical place in order to worship God because we are in a close relationship with him in the church, and we can worship him directly.

**Verse 23. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.**

The church of our Lord needs nothing to light it except the glory of God. Jn. 8:12 says Jesus is the light of the world. Christians are spoken of as being the “children of light and the children of the day” (1Thess. 5:4-9). If we are in God’s holy city, we are walking in the light (1Jn. 1:7). Col. 1:12-13 refers to those in sin as being in darkness, and to those who are in the kingdom as being in the light. It states, “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.”

Language similar to this is used in Isa. 60:19-20 to prophesy the coming of the church. It states, “The sun shall be no more thy light by day neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.” The glory of God and Christ is the light of the church today. The spiritual kingdom of God has no need of the physical lights that illuminate this earth.

**Verse 24. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.**

People from every nation upon the earth are in Christ’s church. This is in contrast to the old Law of Moses in which only those who were born of the seed of Abraham (the Israelite nation) were able to be among God’s chosen people. Today, all people, from the least to the greatest, have the opportunity to enter into the city of God and be one of his chosen. If there are kings on this earth who choose to follow Christ, they can bring their earthly honors into it by simply becoming members of the church. In 1Pet. 2:17 we are told to “honour the king.” Therefore, this must be speaking of this present time upon the earth. It is hard to believe that earthly honors of this kind will be of any value in heaven. Kings of the earth do not bring their glory and

honor into heaven; they bring it into the church when they become obedient to God's laws and enter in through the gates into the holy city. Isa. 60:11 is a prophecy of kings of the earth bringing their glory and honor into the church. This will be discussed in the next verse.

**Verse 25. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day for there shall be no night there.**

There is no darkness (sin) in the church. Those who are in the church have had their sins forgiven. They are in the light. Christians are the "children of the day" (1Thess. 5:5). They are the light of the world.

The gates to the church are never closed. A person may obey the gospel and enter in through the gates into the spiritual city of God at any time, day or night. In ancient times, the gates to the cities were closed at night for protection from their enemies. Because of this, no one could enter into the city at night. This is not so with God's city because there is no night in this spiritual city. Therefore, the gates are never closed. Entrance into the church is possible at any time. Verse 23 stated that God and Christ are the light of this city. These spiritual lights never go out so there is no night in the church.

Prophesying the coming of the church, Isa. 60:11 says, "Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day or night; that men may bring into thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought." Hopefully, it is clear that the book of Revelation describes the church in terms similar to those used to prophesy its coming in the Old Testament.

**Verse 26. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it.**

The glory and honor of all nations are in the church. Today, people of all nations can be a part of God's chosen people, not just one nation as was the case under the Law of Moses.

**Verse 27. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh**



**abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.**

The church, God's spiritual city, is a place where no sin can enter. When we become obedient to God's law and pass through the gates into the city, our sins are forgiven.

Today, all types of sins surround the church.

Those who commit such sins are outside his city.

They have refused to turn from these acts and receive forgiveness by obeying the commandments of God.

This is illustrated by the drawing.

The church exists today in a world of sin and is surrounded by spiritual darkness.

The only people who can enter into the city are those who have had their sins forgiven and have had their names added to the Lamb's book of life.

Rev. 22:19 explains that it is possible for a person's name to be removed from the book of life.

Therefore, this entrance is to the church, not heaven, because once we enter heaven, there will be no danger of losing that inheritance.

Verse 19 also refers to the possibility of losing our part in the holy city.

When we enter into the holy city, we must remain faithful in order to keep ourselves inside the walls of this spiritual city of God, his church.

As referred to in verse 21, Isa. 35:8a states, "And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it."

Only those who have had their sins forgiven will be allowed entrance into this spiritual city.

They are the only ones who will be able to walk down the street of gold.

Nothing that "defileth" shall enter into the church.

Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life are part of the church.

We know that Christians' names are



written in the book of life today because in Phil. 4:3 we find two people “whose names are in the book of life.”

# Chapter 22

## THE RIVER OF LIFE

**Verse 1. And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.**

Out of the throne of God and Christ flows the river of water of life. In Jn 4:10, Jesus tells the woman of Samaria, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.” Then in verse 14, Jesus explains to her that this “living water” he was offering her would give her everlasting life. Therefore, the “water of life” represents the words of Jesus or the gospel that is available to all people of this world today. Those who believe and obey the gospel will receive everlasting life.

Water is a substance that our bodies must have in order to sustain physical life, and the gospel is the message from God that we must have in order to sustain our spiritual life. This river of water of life flows in the church today. In verse 17, everyone is invited to come into the church and partake of this water of life. It would be impossible to go to heaven to drink this water; therefore, it must be available to mankind today in this present world. It is in the world; it is located in the church. It is our duty as Christians to spread the gospel and make this water of life available to all mankind. As we teach others about Jesus Christ and how to

become members of his church, we are offering people the spiritual water of life. As long as we partake of this water of life, or remain faithful to the Word of God, we have eternal spiritual life. We will never die spiritually.

This river of life is described as being pure and clear as crystal. This refers to the infallibility of the Word. The gospel was given by inspiration and is perfect in every way. It contains no impurities. There is one other possible meaning of the phrase “clear as crystal.” Today, we would use this phrase to indicate that a statement is easily understood. The gospel plan of salvation is easy to understand if man is willing to read and accept it. We have many different interpretations of God’s Word today largely because people refuse to submit to God’s commands. They seek to make God’s Word coincide with their own ideas. The water of life is crystal clear, and we must make every effort to follow it precisely.

A prophecy concerning this water of life was made in Zech. 14:8 which states, “And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea.” This must refer to the salvation that Christ made possible by his death on the cross. We have often heard the statement made that when Christ died his blood flowed in both directions. It saved those who were faithful to him under the Law of Moses or the hinder sea. It also made salvation possible for all those who live in this Christian age or the former sea. These waters of life began flowing out from Jerusalem at Christ’s death and the preaching of the gospel on Pentecost (Acts 2). The gospel is our water of spiritual life, and anyone who partakes of it will be granted an entrance into the spiritual city of God, his church.

**Verse 2. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.**

The meaning of this tree of life can be derived from the

Old Testament. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had access to a physical tree of life, which would have enabled them to live forever in their physical bodies (Gen. 2:9). Today, we have access to a spiritual tree of life that will enable us to live spiritually forever. When an individual partakes of this spiritual water of life, he enters into God's city where he has constant access to the spiritual tree of life. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (Jn. 14:6). Christ is our spiritual tree of life. The lesson presented here is that if we are faithful to him, we will be able to live spiritually forever.

Jesus became our tree of life by his death on the cross. Act 5:30 says, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree." Jesus was crucified on a tree thereby becoming our tree of life. Through his death we have life.

Several symbols are used in Revelation to describe Christ: (1) the Lamb, (2) the Alpha and the Omega, (3) the offspring of David, (4) the morning star, and (5) the tree of life. All of these symbols provide specific information about our Lord. By combining the meaning of these symbols, we can derive a more complete description of him. This same situation exists in these last two chapters of Revelation concerning the church and the gospel. There are several symbols used to describe the church and the gospel. Together they give a complete picture of the spiritual kingdom of God (the church) and the message (the gospel) that enables man to be a part of God's spiritual kingdom.

This tree of life produces twelve manner of fruits and yields fruit every month. The key to understanding this symbolism is understanding that the number "12" is used to represent organized religion. To yield twelve manners of fruit would mean that this tree yields all the spiritual fruit we need to eat in order to be acceptable to God. As people obey the gospel and enter into the spiritual city of God, this tree of life is yielding spiritual fruit. To yield fruit every month shows that this is a continual process. This is once again connected with the meaning of the number "12"

because as we count time, twelve months make up one year, or a complete period of time. Therefore, the basic meaning of this verse is that Christ, who is our spiritual tree of life, is continually yielding spiritual fruit. As long as we eat of the fruit of that tree, we will live spiritually forever. Christians offer this fruit to others by preaching and teaching the gospel today.

The leaves of this tree are for the healing of the nations. This is referring to the healing power of the gospel. In Mk. 2:8-11 Jesus says, "Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house." As one obeys the gospel, he partakes of this tree of life and is healed of his sins. This spiritual healing is taking place today. This once again points to the fact that these last 2 chapters of Revelation give a symbolic picture of the church. Once we reach heaven, the healing of the nations will be completed. Those who have been healed of their sins while on earth will reside in heaven with our Lord forever. There will be no need for healing at that time.

An Old Testament definition of this tree of life can be found in Ezek. 47:12 which states, "And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine." Notice that this tree puts forth fruit according to months. This verse in Revelation says that it puts forth 12 manner of fruits and they are yielded every month. That would be "according to his months" (Ezek. 47:12).

**Verse 3. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his**

**servants shall serve him:**

This verse again points to the difference between the old law and the new. Those who lived under the old Law of Moses were under a curse because the only way they could obtain righteousness in God's sight was to live that law perfectly. Obviously, this was impossible for anyone. Therefore, Christ came to earth; lived the perfect life, and became the perfect sacrifice so we would no longer be under the curse of the old law. Gal. 3:10-11 states, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith." Today, we are no longer under the curse of the old law. We are under a new law – the law of faith. (See Gal. 3:23-26.)

The Throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it. This throne is located in the spiritual city of God, the church. We read in 2Cor. 6:16b, "As God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Christ is presently sitting on his throne as he rules his spiritual kingdom. (See Acts 2:33-36; Eph. 1:20-23.)

As the Lamb sits on his throne, his servants shall serve him. Christians are the servants of Christ today. We are serving him as we do the things that he has commanded. This concept is also present in 7:15 which says "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them." (Refer to comments on 7:15.)

**Verse 4. And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.**

The most common explanation of the phrase "they shall see his face" is that it is referring to the time of our eternal abode when we will literally see the face of God. However, in keeping with our interpretation of chapters 21 and 22 as being a figurative description of the church on earth today, we believe this is a figurative statement symbolizing the

closeness of the relationship Christians have with our Lord today. For example, 1Cor. 13:12 says, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” Verses 8 through 10 of that chapter define that which was known “in part” as the gospel. There were still gifts of tongues, knowledge, prophecies, and etc., but when the full revelation of the gospel came, those things would vanish away. Today, we have the complete record of the gospel (Bible), but it was only partially complete at the time Paul penned those words. With this in mind, it is likely that seeing him “face to face” refers to the ability of the gospel to bring us into a close relationship with God. Obedience to the gospel figuratively brings us face to face with God. We do not “see through a glass, darkly” because we have the full revelation of God.

Another passage which indicates that this phrase “face to face” can be used symbolically is Isa. 59:2 which states, “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.” Sin separates man from God. Because Israel sinned, God “hid his face” from them and would not hear their prayers. Today, when we obey the gospel, our sins are forgiven, and God does not hide his face from us. We see him “face to face,” and he hears our prayers.

Having Christ’s name in our forehead shows our allegiance to him, or that we belong to him. This same symbolism is used in 14:1 to describe the 144,000 who are the redeemed of the earth. If we are the servants of God today, we are among the 144,000, and his name is in our foreheads. We belong to God, not the devil. (See comments on 14:1.) This also points to the idea that “face to face” is used symbolically in this verse. Those who are the servants of God will “see his face” and “his name shall be in their foreheads.” Both phrases refer to the same people at the same time. Christians today symbolically have the Father’s name written in our foreheads and we see God “face to face.” We can be in a close relationship with God because our sins have been forgiven. He will not turn his face from



us. We see him “face to face.”

**Verse 5. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.**

The same symbolism is used in this verse as in 21:23. Light is symbolic of the sinless state in which Christians live. Darkness represents sin or the dwelling place of those outside the church. In Jn. 8:12 Jesus says, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” If we are in the church, we are in a sinless state and Jesus is our light. (For more on this, see comments on 21:23.) There is never any spiritual darkness in the church. We have no need of a candle or the sun to give us light. The Lord is the light of the church.

We are also told that we shall reign forever and ever. This must refer to our eternal reign, but we must remember that our reign has already begun. When we overcome this world of sin by becoming Christians, we begin reigning with Christ. This is the description given in 20:4 as it pictures Christians living and reigning with Christ for one thousand years. Rev. 5:10 says that we reign on the earth. As Christians, our reign with Christ has begun, and if we remain faithful, we shall continue to reign with him throughout eternity.

## THE ANGEL CONCLUDES

**Verse 6. And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.**

The angel proclaims that the things which John has seen are faithful and true. They are definitely going to take place. He says they must “shortly be done.” This is similar to 1:1, which states that Jesus is going to show John things that must “shortly come to pass.” This means that the

events recorded in Revelation are soon to begin taking place. It does not mean that they will shortly be finished. It means that they will take place all during the Christian dispensation. (See comments on v. 7 and 1:1.)

**Verse 7. Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.**

Some try to determine if Jesus or the angel makes this statement. It really makes no difference because angels are often used as messengers for God. Since Jesus says in verses 12 and 20 that he will “come quickly,” we will interpret this verse as being a statement made by Jesus. This verse helps us to understand how certain phrases and symbols dealing with amounts of time are used in Revelation. Jesus said he would come quickly, yet approximately two thousand years have passed since this statement was made. In terms of man’s understanding of time, two thousand years does not pass “quickly,” but with God this is a short time.

There is a phrase similar to this in 1:1, which many people use as a basis of interpretation for the entire book. Speaking of the things revealed in Revelation, Jesus states that he is going to show his servants things which must “shortly come to pass.” Many people say this means that the events foretold in Revelation will be fulfilled within a few hundred years after its writing. This interpretation uses man’s understanding of time rather than God’s. In verse 6, an angel repeats this phrase by telling John that he had shown him “things which must shortly be done.” In this verse Jesus says, “Behold, I come quickly.” It does not coincide to interpret “shortly” as a few hundred years, but interpret “quickly” as two thousand years or more. They refer to the same identical period of time, the entire gospel age.

A blessing is also pronounced upon those who “keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.” If we follow the commandments of God, we will of all men be most blessed.

**Verses 8, 9. And I John saw these things, and heard**

**them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.**

After this great vision was finished, John fell down to worship before the angel. The angel immediately tells him not to do this because he is John's fellow-servant. John is admonished to worship God. Another incident much like this one is recorded in 19:10. The question then arises; Why did John repeat the same mistake? After being admonished in 19:10 not to worship the angel but to worship God, he apparently makes the same mistake again. Coffman gives an excellent explanation of this: "There [19:10], John fell down to worship the angel; here he fell down to 'worship God' in the presence of the angel."<sup>1</sup> Our worship must be presented directly to God. We cannot worship him through another man, image, or even an angel. This is a great lesson for the world today. Everyone is responsible for his or her own acts of worship to God. Certainly, if John was not permitted to bow down before an angel in order to worship God, we must not bow down before other men to worship God.

## **JESUS' FINAL STATEMENTS**

**Verse 10. And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.**

Jesus begins speaking in this verse. We know this because of statements made in verses 12-13 and 16. He instructs John not to seal the prophecy of this book, but to leave it open for all to read.

The prophecies in this book deal with our present gospel age or the "last time" (1Jn. 2:16). Therefore, the time of the fulfillment of these prophecies was "at hand." This does not confine the events described in Revelation to a short period of time. Rather, it means that they are to begin

immediately. In fact, the process of fulfillment had already begun because Christ had already established his kingdom, and much of Revelation deals with events that affect the church from its beginning until it is taken to heaven at Christ's second coming. These prophecies were to begin immediately, but they will not be completely fulfilled until Christ returns.

**Verse 11. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.**

Many ideas have been presented concerning the meaning of verse 4. We will attempt to interpret it according to its context in this chapter. Verse 10 states, "Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book." Then verse 11 indicates that there will be no change in the spiritual status of individuals because of these prophecies. Those who are unjust will still be unjust; those who are filthy will continue to be filthy; those who are righteous will remain righteous, and those who are holy will still be holy. The book of Revelation is the final message from God to man, but it revealed nothing that would change the plan of salvation, which God had already given to man. Those who were unjust before this revelation was given to John would still be unjust after it was given. The same would be true for those who were filthy, righteous or holy. This revelation did nothing to change the way one renders obedience to God's will.

This is important from the standpoint that many people, based on their interpretation of the one thousand years of chapter 20, believe that God gave an entirely new method of salvation. God did not set up another dispensation of one thousand years after this present Christian dispensation whereby man might have a second chance at salvation. The book of Revelation in no way changed God's plan of salvation.

**Verse 12. And, behold, I come quickly; and my**

**reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.**

When Christ comes again, it will be to reward those who have been faithful to him. There will be no second chance; no period of tribulation for the wicked, and no setting up of an earthly kingdom for a “thousand years.” Everything on this earth will be finished and Judgment will take place. Everyone will be judged according to their works or “the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2Cor. 5:10). (For comments on “Behold, I come quickly,” see v.7.)

**Verse 13. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.**

Christ identifies himself as the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and ending. Interestingly, Christ identified himself in this manner in both the beginning and the ending portions of Revelation. (See 1:8.) Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet; therefore, Christ is saying that he is complete in every way. Today we might use a similar expression by saying, “He covers everything from a to z.” (For other comments on this subject, see 1:8.)

**Verse 14. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.**

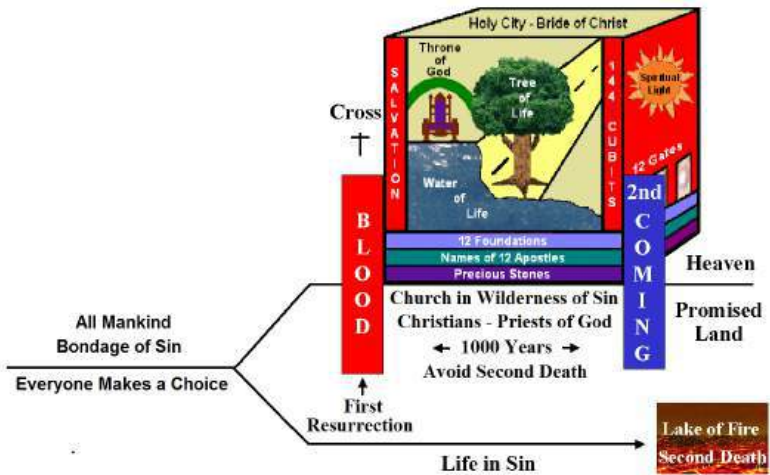
This verse makes it plain how anyone can enter into God’s beautiful city, the church, where the tree of life is located. We enter by rendering obedience to the commandments he has spoken.

Those commandments are given through his written Word, the Bible. Today, when anyone obeys the Law of Christ, he enters into God’s spiritual city, which is the church of our Lord. By becoming members of the Lord’s church, we have a right to eat of the tree of life, which enables us to live spiritually forever. We must always be certain not to make the same mistake as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. If we sin willfully, the Lord will remove us from his spiritual city, just as he removed Adam

and Eve from the Garden of Eden. (See v. 19.)

**Verse 15. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whore-mongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.**

All types of sins are located outside the walls of the city, the spiritual kingdom of God. Those who have not obeyed the commandments of God and have not entered into the city are living in a world of sin. The only way to escape a life of sin, which yields sure spiritual death and destruction at Judgment, is to obey the commandments of God and enter into his beautiful city. The amazing thing about this is that the gates to this city are always open, and anyone at



anytime may choose to enter in; however, the majority of people today seem to choose the ways of sin for a season rather than to follow Christ and live forever.

**Verse 16. I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.**

John was instructed to declare the things that he had seen to the churches. In chapters 2 and 3 there were specific messages addressed to each of the seven churches of Asia.

Verse 16 shows that lessons contained in this great book are intended for all congregations of the Lord's church. Just as Revelation was intended for all seven churches of Asia, it is also intended for all churches of all ages. Revelation was written for our study and understanding today as much as it was for Christians of the first century. We must believe the meanings of these visions are the same today as they were when first read. The lessons taught in the Bible do not change with time.

Jesus first identifies himself as the root and offspring of David. To be the offspring of David would mean that Jesus was born (sprang) from the seed of David. A root is the structure that anchors a plant and supplies its nourishment. With this in mind, it is unnatural for us to think of something as being both the root and offspring of anything. But, this is exactly what Christ was. He not only came from the seed of David, he was also the root of David. The Law of Moses was given to the Israelite nation in order to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah. Gal. 3:19 states, "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." This seed is referring to Christ. Therefore, Christ was the reason the Law of Moses was given to the Jewish nation of which David once reigned as king. So, Christ not only was the offspring of David, he was the root also.

Christ also identifies himself as the bright and morning star. To be identified as a star shows the greatness of an individual. We even use this same type of terminology today to describe people whom we consider to be important or well known. Christ was a bright star – the brightest of all. He gave mankind the most wonderful gift of all. He gave us the opportunity to live forever.

The morning star is one that shines brightly just before the dawn of a new day. A new day represents the coming of a new era, which is better than the previous one. This also describes Jesus perfectly. He came to earth and his glory radiated brightly among men. He brought in a new day or time, the gospel age, in which man could be reconciled to

God by receiving forgiveness of his sins. Jesus is truly our bright and morning star.

**Verse 17. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.**

Christ is bidding all that will be obedient unto him to “come.” The first part of this verse, “The Spirit and the bride say, Come,” is referring to the Holy Spirit and the church. Through the Word, the Holy Spirit constantly bids all to come. We in the church should constantly bid those who are lost in a world of sin to come in and dwell with us. This is further proof that the beautiful city described in these last two chapters is the church. Rev. 21:9 says that this city is a description of the bride of Christ. In this verse, the bride is bidding all who will to come. The church is not bidding people to come into our final dwelling place of heaven. The church is bidding all who will obey the commands of God to come into it. Those who hear will be able to enter. Rom. 10:17 says, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Therefore, anyone who hears the Word of God and obeys its commands may enter into that beautiful city, the church. Rev. 3:20 says, “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.”

“Let him that is athirst come” is making reference to the person who desires the truth and seeks to find it. Mt. 5:6 says, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” When one seeks and finds the truth, he may enter into God’s city by obeying that truth. Anyone who is thirsty for righteousness may take of the water of life, which flows out from the Throne of God through his city. (See v. 1-2.) Again, this water of life is referring to the gospel. All who are obedient to it will be added unto God’s kingdom and have the promise of eternal life if they remain faithful (v. 19).



**Verse 18. For I testify unto every man that heareth 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:**

This is a warning against adding to the prophecies that have been presented in this book upon the penalty of receiving the plagues described therein. Verse 18 is used by many to teach against adding to any part of God's Word, not just the prophecies of this particular book. Others question this application. The point is that Revelation deals largely with spiritual matters, and if man tampers with God's method of entrance into his holy city, he is adding to the things written in this book. If any man does this, God will surely add unto him the plagues recorded therein. The plagues must be referring to the series of seven last plagues recorded in chapter 16. As was noted in that chapter, these plagues are directed against non-Christians. If anyone adds anything to God's Word, he is not a Christian because he is attempting to be saved according to his own method. We must follow God's plan in order to be acceptable unto him. God has never allowed man to add to his Word. (See Prov. 30:6.)

**Verse 19. 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.**

This verse explains what will happen to man if he takes away from the things written in this book. We should not make the mistake of believing that different things will happen to man depending on whether he adds to or takes away from God's Word. Having one's name taken out of the book of life and out of the holy city will place him directly in contact with the plagues of this book. Rev. 9:4 and 15:2-4 explain who will not be harmed by the influences of the devil and the plagues. They are those whom God has sealed. They have gotten victory over the beast and sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. They are Christians. They have their names written in the book of

life (21:27) and are in the holy city (v. 14). If anyone adds to or takes away from God's Word, his name will be taken out of the book of life and out of the holy city.

This is also an admonition to Christians to live faithful lives. Having our names added to the book of life and entering God's holy city does not give us a license to commit any sinful act we might desire and still expect God to take us home to heaven with him. If we do those things, our names will be stricken from the book of life, and our part will be removed from the holy city. If we expect to reach heaven, we must "keep ourselves unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1:27). We must keep ourselves in God's spiritual, holy city.

It should also be pointed out that this verse proves that one may be a Christian and then do those things that will cause him to be lost. The "holy city" is a symbolic reference to the church, and these two verses specifically says that God will remove anyone from the church who practices things that are added to or taken away from his Word. We must follow the Word of God precisely as he has given it to us.

**Verse 20. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.**

Jesus once again announces that he will come quickly. This is the third time this statement has been repeated in this chapter. (See v. 7, 12.) We should be constantly aware that Jesus could come at any time. We must be watchful and keep ourselves prepared for this great event. This has been a constant admonition throughout the book of Revelation.

John answers, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Christians should look forward to Christ's second coming. One of the main purposes of Revelation is to comfort and assure Christians that their situation will be much better after Christ returns than it is now. Many times Christians also get caught up in the pleasures of this life and forget that our life to come will be much preferred to this one. Let us strive to live our lives so that we might truly be able to say,

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

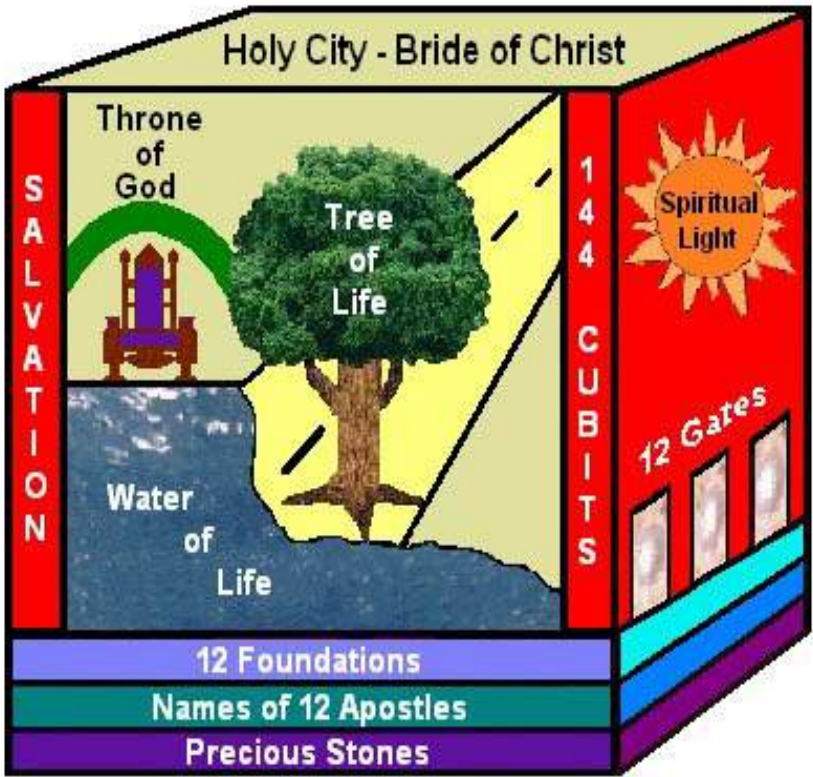
**Verse 21. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.**

John closes Revelation with a personal salutation to all who read this book through the many generations to follow. As was stated in verse 16, Revelation was intended for all who are members of the Lord’s church. It is our firm belief that we may read, study and understand this book just as Christians of the first century did. We also believe that the lessons contained therein are the same for us as for those of the first century. As we close this study, we wish for you many hours of fulfilling and profitable Bible study. We hope this book will aid you in some way as you continue to study this great book of Revelation. Remember, “blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy” (1:3).

<sup>1</sup>James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex., Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979), p. 523.

## **CONCLUSION TO CHAPTERS 21 AND 22**

As we conclude this study of Revelation, we would like to once again refer to the following drawing. It contains some of the major symbols used in these last two chapters that describe the beautiful spiritual city of God – the church. Hopefully, this will help us to develop in our minds a better picture of the church that Jesus built for us. This is the place where Christians dwell in a close spiritual relationship with God on this earth today. It is also our desire that we may truly begin to appreciate the fact that this great prophecy of Jesus Christ is a revelation for Christians today.



## THE BRIDE—THE LAMB’S WIFE

In 21:9 an angel tells John that he is going to show him “the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” This is definitely a reference to the church. The symbolic language that follows is used to describe a magnificent spiritual kingdom in which Christians dwell today. It is described in physical terms that

we can understand. All of these symbols are taken from the Old Testament prophecies that describe the first coming of Jesus and the establishment of the church. The Old Testament prophecies told the people of Israel what the church would be like when Jesus established it. Revelation shows us that we have the church as it was prophesied.

The church that Jesus built is constructed on the most solid foundation of all – His Word. The gospel is the foundation for all the Christian's worship to God and gives us complete instructions concerning how we should the conduct our physical lives. It is so valuable that it is garnished with all manner of precious stones. The wall of this city represents the Law of Christ that we must obey in order to become obedient to the will of God and obtain salvation from our sins. As described in Isa. 26:1, it is our wall of salvation. It is an indestructible wall of tremendous size that will protect us from the destruction of Satan. He is unable to come into the church and bring us under his control. All he can do is tempt us to come out of the church on our own will. When we obey the gospel through our baptism, we enter this city by passing through the priceless gates of pearl, which represents the value of entering into this beautiful city. Entrance into the church is priceless. We have found the pearl of great price. These gates are never closed because entrance into this city is possible at any place or at any time. Passing through the wall of this great spiritual city by the gates of pearl represents our leaving a world of spiritual darkness and entering into the spiritual light of God's spiritual paradise on earth. The spiritual light of this city is Jesus. A spiritual city needs no physical light such as the sun or moon.

Once we have entered the city, we walk upon the street of gold. According to Isa. 35:8, this is the highway upon which the redeemed walk. It is the "way of holiness." We also have access to the tree of life (Jesus Christ). As long as we remain faithful, we can partake of the tree of life, which will enable us to live spiritually forever.

The great, magnificent Throne of God is located in the spiritual kingdom of God. As Christians, we are gathered

around this great Throne as we serve God day and night, continually, in his temple, which is the church. The spiritual water of life, which nourishes our soul, flows out from this Throne. All we have to do in order to partake of this spiritual water of life is obey the gospel of Christ. This enables us to pass through the gates and enter into this beautiful paradise where our sins are forgiven. The pains and sorrow for sin have been wiped away and we will never die spiritually. We then look forward to God's promise that this spiritual city, the church, will be taken to heaven to dwell with him eternally. As members of the church, we have the spiritual blessings of this life and the promise of eternal life to come.

May God bless you in the study of His Word!