

# **THE GOSPEL IN REVELATION**

**Robert J. Wieland**



# Preface

*Let me introduce you to one of the greatest treasures God has given us in the Bible—the Book of Revelation.*

*You would naturally suppose that the last book in the Bible would be the easiest to understand. Even the title assures us that God wants us to understand it—"The Revelation of Jesus Christ." If God had intended the book to be hard to understand, would He not have given it a different title, such as "The Hiding," or "The Obscuring of Jesus Christ"? It is a mistake to suppose that it is hard to understand, or without meaning. God will not mislead us!*

*One Sunday afternoon I was trying to read the Book of Revelation when our pastor called to visit us. "I can't understand this book," I pleaded. "Can you explain it to me?"*

*"He put his hand on my head and smiled as he answered, "Do not try to read that book. It is*

*sealed, and nobody can understand it! You should try to read something else.*

*"But his answer did not satisfy me, for I had already read as far as the third verse, which says: "Blessed is he who reads, and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it." I had learned for myself already that the book was not sealed. I determined that I would seek this promised "blessing."*

*I discovered that God has indeed revealed the Saviour in this book. He never fails to honor that promise of "blessing" to anyone who will prayerfully and diligently study this last book in the Bible.*

*Like a hot, tired traveller longing to plunge into the clear, cool waters of a river, you are now invited to plunge into the study of this intensely interesting Book written by the apostle John. You will be refreshed and delighted with the understanding you will gain. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all*

*liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him." (James 1:5)*

*"Here is wisdom," says the Book of Revelation (chapter 13, verse 18). What a precious gift! Millions of people are crying out for some sure word from God. What is coming on the earth? What can we do to prepare for the future? To understand is worth everything. Such wisdom is worth more than any material security.*

*You will soon discover that the Bible explains itself. "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is of God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Corinthians 2:12, 13).*

*Don't be surprised if there are passages in Revelation that no one as yet fully understands. Even great musicians find new wonders in a Beethoven symphony. The Revelation is not merely*

*a work of spiritual genius. It is divinely inspired, and thus will forever challenge our best understanding. But the Holy Spirit will make the reading of Revelation among the richest and happiest experiences of your life.*

*The Bible text that we use is the New King James Version. It is an excellent translation, and many scholars now believe that the original from which it is translated is the most accurate of Greek texts. But it also takes full advantage of modern textual knowledge.*

*This book is not intended to be like a supermarket where you may look up every little detail of information about Revelation. It is not intended so much to satisfy your appetite as to make you hungry, to activate in your soul a love affair with the Revelation of Jesus Christ that will never be satisfied until you meet Him face to face.*

*The Author*

## Chapter 1

# The Mystery of the Seven Stars

**Revelation 1:1, 2:** The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And he sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, and to all things that he saw.

The very first words of the book encourage us! God thought about us so much that He wanted to impart this Revelation to us. It is a cruel enemy who wants us to feel that God is content for us to remain in darkness and ignorance. Be thankful that this Revelation is His special gift to you.

You can easily see the five steps by which He gave us this book:

- (1) It originated with God, the Father, Himself.
- (2) He gave it to His Son, Jesus Christ.
- (3) Jesus "sent and signified it by His angel."
- (4) The angel revealed it to the prophet John in holy vision.
- (5) John communicated to God's servants (you and me) "things which must shortly take place." It is intended for us to understand. Its "mysteries" are not truths Christ wants to hide from us, but which He longs to impart to us.

**Revelation 1:3:** Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

This is the only book in the Bible that offers a special blessing on those who read it. Even the illiterate person is included if he will only listen to someone else read it to him! Of all the books of the Bible, this is the one that must not be neglected.

**Revelation 1:4-8:** John, to the seven churches

which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first born from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see him, and they also who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. "I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

If these few verses were all that we had of the Word of God, there is enough in them to give us everlasting happiness. "Grace . . . and peace" are freely given to anyone who will believe these words—even the most sinful. Do not any longer feel that you are shut out from the smiles and favor of Heaven. This greeting comes from the Father "who is and who was and who is to come," from

the Holy Spirit, and from Jesus Christ, the mighty One who arose from the grave. All Heaven looks upon you kindly and with tender love. Your job is to believe it, to rest in that confidence.

As soon as you believe this assurance, your heart will join in that glad song of praise "to Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood." If anyone wonders if he is ready for heaven, let him consider whether or not he readily and happily offers praise to the Lord. "Praise is beautiful for the upright" (Psalm 33:1). "Be thankful to Him, and bless His name" (Psalm 100:4). "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17).

The unbeliever knows no joyful feeling of gratitude to God for praise is strange to his heart. He even eats his daily food without realizing who the Giver is, never offers thanks for sunshine and flowers, trees and birds. But he can be taught: "My lips shall utter praise, for You teach me Your statutes" (Psalm 119:171).

With our own eyes, we shall see Jesus come "with clouds." These are no ordinary clouds. They will be thousands of angels (Psalm 68:17, King James Version). "He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26). Even those who don't believe His gospel must watch Him come, and those who crucified Him cannot look the other way. At His trial, Jesus told them, "Hereafter you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64).

"Alpha" and "Omega" are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Christ was in the very beginning, the eternal "only begotten of the Father," and He is the end—He is all in all.

**Revelation 1:9-11:** I, John, both your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as

of a trumpet, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send- it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

"By the emperor's decree, John was banished to the isle of Patmos. . . . Patmos, a barren, rocky, island in the Aegean Sea, had been chosen by the Roman government as a place of banishment for criminals; but to the servant of God this gloomy abode became the gate of heaven. . . . Though banished from the scenes of his former labor, he did not cease to bear witness to the truth. Even in Patmos he made friends and converts."

Because the Bible explains itself, it will be easy to determine what "the Lord's day" is. "The Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath," said Jesus (Matthew 12:8). And what does Scripture say the "Sabbath" is? "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God" (Exodus 20:8-11). The Lord calls the Sabbath, "My holy day" (Isaiah 58:13). "It

was on the Sabbath that the Lord of glory appeared to the exiled apostle. The Sabbath was as sacredly observed by John on Patmos as when he was preaching to the people in the towns and cities of Judaea."

"The names of the seven churches are symbolic of the church in different periods of the Christian era. The number seven indicates completeness, and is symbolic of the fact that the messages extend to the end of time, while the symbols used reveal the condition of the church at different periods in the history of the world."

**Revelation 1:12-17:** Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand

seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last"

When John saw the seven golden lampstands, he knew he was looking into the temple (or sanctuary) in heaven. But where he had expected to see only heavenly beings, he was surprised to see "One like the Son of man." How could it be that there was a man in heaven?

When Jesus became our Saviour, He made a sacrifice forever. Although He is glorified (as we shall be when He comes), He will forever remain a man, one with us. "Unto us a Child is born," never to leave us (see Isaiah 9:6).

John's description of Christ is almost the same as that which Daniel gives in Daniel 10:5-12. Both saw a "man" who was "girded with gold," who had "eyes as torches of fire," "feet like burnished

bronze," and a voice as the sound of many waters. Both Daniel and John fell before Him as dead men and to both He said, "Do not fear."

Those who reject Christ may pretend to despise His word, and may imagine that it will have no effect upon them. But they are mistaken, for it is a sharp two-edged sword piercing to the "division of soul and spirit, ... a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Jesus says of the rejecter of His gospel, "The word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). That word will save you now if you receive it; otherwise it will judge you at the end.

**Revelation 1:18-20:** "I am He who lives, and was dead, and, behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands

which you saw are the seven churches."

Have you ever stood by the grave of a loved one? If so, you know how to appreciate this assurance. To us, the grave is a heavy door, securely barred. Not even the world's wisest scientists can unlock it. But Jesus has the keys.

What are the seven stars? The word "angels" in the Greek has the meaning of messengers, or ministers. If the lampstands are the seven churches, the angels of the seven churches must be the leadership of the churches. "God's ministers are symbolized by the seven stars, which He who is the first and the last has under His special care and protection. The sweet influences that ought to be abundant in the church are bound up with these ministers of God, who are to represent the love of Christ. The stars of heaven are under God's control. He fills them with light. He guides and directs their movements. If He did not, they would become fallen stars. So with His ministers. They are but instruments in His hands, and all the good they accomplish is done through His power."

Are you one of Christ's ministers? Those seven stars include all who give themselves to the service of Christ as pastors, elders, deacons, teachers, yes, including those who teach the gospel to the children—all who have any part in the leadership of the church. Don't fear, because you are held safely in the right hand of Him who is "alive for evermore." Cherish your work; don't try to be relieved of it, for the best place anyone can be is there in the right hand of the Son of God! And let us all respect and honor Christ's ministers." We urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." (1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13).

## Chapter 2

# John Writes Letters to His Followers

**Revelation 2:1:** "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.. .."

As we go along, we remember that "seven" is a word that means complete, or perfect. Thus the seven churches represent the complete church, the church throughout its history from the time of the apostles down to the last days just before Jesus returns the second time. These seven messages apply to seven periods of the church through history.

The "angels" of the seven churches are the messengers, the human leadership of the church in each respective period. God speaks to His people through His ministers whom He has appointed.

The word "Ephesus" means "desirable." It is a beautiful name for the church of the apostles. Impelled by the love of Christ, the early believers carried the Good News of salvation to the whole inhabited world in one single generation (see Colossians 1:23). The dates for the church of Ephesus can be roughly considered as from the time of Christ through 100 A. D.

**Revelation 2:2-6:** "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."

Like a brilliant star shining in a dark sky, the story of the early church thrills hearts in all ages. The Good News triumphed everywhere. Hard, proud, world-loving hearts were subdued by its power. There was no need to urge the believers to work for their friends and neighbors. The love of Christ constrained them. They would not resist. Each saw in his brother a reflection of the beauty of Christ. Hearts were bound together as with a golden chain.

But gradually there came a change. Many lost that first love. They began to forget what it cost the Lord to save them. Mist and clouds covered the cross, obscuring its radiance. The church lost the very idea of what Christ's love means.

Love had been the power of the gospel. Just as an engine sputters and dies when the fuel is gone, so the soul-saving ministry of the early believers stopped when they left their first love.

The word John uses is *agape*, which is like

sunshine in that it has within it all the colors of gospel truth. This love, which the early church "left," was new to the ancient world. It was something very unearthly which came from heaven.

The pagan Greeks thought they had discovered what love is when the beautiful Alcestis was willing to die for "a good man," her noble and handsome lover, Admetus. But the apostles said, No, that is not the real thing: "God shows His agape for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:7, 8, RSV). This love for enemies turned the ancient world upside down (see Acts 17:6).

Leaving that "first agape" prepared the way for the corruption of Christianity. It was like substituting a candle for sunlight, the beginning of the "falling away" foretold by Paul (2 Thessalonians 2:3-7). The Book of Revelation will lead us to the re-discovery of that agape. What can be more important than finding that which was left by the early church?

The Nicolaitans were a group within the church who claimed to be disciples of Nicolas, one of the original seven deacons (Acts 6:5). However, Nicolas himself never taught the evil doctrines which this group believed. They taught that it was right and good to yield to evil lust and passion. This, of course, denied the gospel message.

"John was inspired to record messages of warning and reproof and entreaty to those who, losing sight of the fundamental principles of the gospel, should imperil their hope of salvation. But always the words of rebuke that God finds it necessary to send are spoken in tender love, and with the promise of peace to every penitent believer."

**Revelation 2:7:** "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

A man may have ears, and yet not listen. One

of the first lessons a child should learn is to pay attention. Because human beings are usually too proud to listen, the Lord says, "Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise" (Proverbs 22:17). That wise one is none other than Jesus, "the faithful and true witness." "It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools" (Ecclesiastes 7:5).

Genesis tells us that the tree of life was originally placed in the garden of Eden. To eat of its fruit was to live forever. When our first parents sinned, they were shut out from the garden, lest they eat of the fruit and live a miserable life forever in the sorrow that sin brings. At the close of the thousand years (see Revelation 20), the tree of life will be replanted in the "new earth" where it will bear its "twelve fruits. . . . The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (see Revelation 22:2).

What does it mean to "overcome"? Must we fight a battle?

If you saw a poisonous snake in your pathway, you could not say, "I don't want to get involved in any conflict; I'll just do nothing and be neutral." You would fight the snake and kill it, knowing that if you did nothing, it would either kill you or somebody else.

Jesus does not invite us to fight the other person's battle, only our own. Sin is worse than a poisonous snake, for it kills. Therefore everyone who has appreciated what Christ accomplished for him on the cross will join the battle, and will overcome sin in his own life. Whatever your problem, remember that Jesus had the same struggle that you have. You are not asked to do anything He has not already done, for He says that you are to overcome "even as I also overcame" (Revelation 3:21). Remembering Him, you cannot fail!

**Revelation 2:8-11:** "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you

are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."''

The word "Smyrna" means something that smells sweet. This second period of the church was one of persecution and suffering, extending from about A.D. 100 to about A.D. 313.

God does not enjoy seeing His people suffer, but their faithfulness and loyalty under trial honors the name of the Saviour who died for them. The early Christians were generally poor people. James says of them, "Has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" James 2:5.)

False brethren were a severe trial. The "Jews" mentioned here were members who professed to follow Christ, but who were in heart lovers of self and of the world. These insincere converts made trouble for those who chose to follow the footsteps of Christ. They continually sought to bring in heathen beliefs and customs to corrupt the faith.

The "ten days" of tribulation are a prophetic period of time. Each day stands for a year (see Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6, "I have laid on you a day for each year"). The last and the most bloody pagan persecution was under the Emperor Diocletian between the years A.D. 303-313, which ten years are a remarkable fulfillment of these "ten days" of prophetic symbolic time.

Those who die for their faith in Christ need not fear. The Lord will give them a "crown of life" which is to be given at Christ's appearing when the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ shall rise first (see 2 Timothy 4:8 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17). Some of God's

people today may suffer death. Let them not fear, but trust in this promise.

The "first death" is not to be feared, for it is but a "sleep." "Do not fear those who kill the body but can not kill the soul" (Matthew 10:28). The "second death" is the one to be feared, for it is eternal and hopeless, without any resurrection. The "second death" is the final destruction of the lost after the "thousand years" (see Revelation 20).

**Revelation 2:12-17:** "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the

doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.

The word "Pergamos" means "height, elevation." The original city was built on a high rocky hill rising a thousand feet above the valley. The church between A.D. 313 and A.D. 538 was highly exalted before the world. It had become very obvious that the religion of Jesus was what the world needed, hence the great success in attracting converts. This was the time when persecution practically ceased and even the Emperor Constantine himself professed to be a Christian. Honored and praised by the world, the church entered a time of great danger! Satan had failed to destroy the church through persecution; now he began to corrupt the faith from within.

"Satan's seat" is the special place where he works. During this period, the "mystery of iniquity" was working to mislead the church, and Satan was laying the foundation of a great falling away from the truth.

History does not tell us about any single individual called "Antipas," but it is understood that this name represents a group of people in the church who lost their lives because they defended God's truth against the rising arrogance of the Roman popes. "Anti" means opposed, and "Papas" means father, or pope. Thus the "Antipas" party were those who opposed the growing power and claims of the papacy. Christ commended Antipas!

But some willingly denied God's truth in order to reap the advantages of worldly wealth and honor just as Balaam was willing to curse Israel if paid a high enough price (see Numbers 22-25).

"Almost imperceptibly the customs of heathenism found their way into the Christian

church. ... As persecution ceased, and Christianity entered the courts and palaces of kings, she laid aside the humble simplicity of Christ and His apostles for the pomp and pride of pagan priests and rulers; and in place of the requirements of God, she substituted human theories and traditions. The nominal conversion of Constantine, in the early part of the fourth century, caused great rejoicing; and the world, cloaked with a form of righteousness, walked into the church. . . . This compromise between paganism and Christianity resulted in the development of the 'man of sin' foretold in prophecy as opposing and exalting himself above God. ... To secure worldly gains and honors, the church was led to seek the favor and support of the great men of earth; and having thus rejected Christ, she was induced to yield allegiance to the representative of Satan—the bishop of Rome."

**Revelation 2:18-23:** "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: "I know your works, love,

service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and beguile My servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed, I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death. And all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.'''

During the long centuries of the Dark Ages, God still had a people who remained loyal to Him, even though pressed beyond measure by persecution and the hatred of the world. Thyatira means "sacrifice of contrition." God never forgot them when it seemed to human sight as though they had been forsaken.

Just as Antipas refers not to some individual but to a group of people, so Jezebel is the name God gave to a group in the church whose beliefs and character resembled that of the heathen queen of ancient Israel.

A prophetess of the heathen god Baal, Jezebel did all she could to seduce God's people in Elijah's day. God never called Jezebel to her work. An apostate king of Israel, Ahab, married her and brought her in to seduce Israel. Bitterly she persecuted those few Israelites who remained loyal to God (see 1 Kings 18:13; 19:2; 21:7-14).

We can hardly blame God's people in the Dark Ages for weakening a little now and then to permit the "Jezebel" of Roman apostasy "to teach and beguile" God's servants. Apostasy is very subtle and alluring. But Jesus rebuked His church in the Dark Ages for weakening even a little!

Do not weaken your hold on the Lord and let the enemy discourage you. He will punish "Jezebel," and will honor all who have endured

trial and suffering for His cause.

**Revelation 2:24-29:** "But to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, and who have not known the depths of Satan, as they call them, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—

'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; As the potter's vessels shall be broken to pieces'—as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Not to the proud people of earth, but to the meek, will be given this "power over the nations" at the second coming of Christ. While some people use guns to obtain power in this sinful world, God's people surrender even their lives for Christ's sake. They dare to follow the footsteps of Him who was "meek and lowly in heart."

But they will be rewarded! The "nations" who have despised them will be prostrate before them, and they will "rule them with a rod of iron" in judgment. See comments on Revelation 20:4.

## Chapter 3

# Jesus Speaks to His Church Today

**Revelation 3:1-4:** "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.""

After the longest, darkest night, morning always breaks again. People who must watch through the lonely hours of night watch for the

cheering light of the morning star, herald of a soon-rising sun.

The Thyatira church was the church of the world's dark night. How glad they were for the new note of courage which the early Reformers brought! Many speak of John Wycliffe of England as the "Morning Star" of the Reformation. God found a man whom He could use. He lived in the thirteenth century.

A century later came Huss and Jerome, boldly lifting the torch of the gospel, though they were burned at the stake for their loyalty to Christ.

Then came the church of Sardis, church of the Protestant Reformation.

After the darkness and persecution of the Thyatira period, one would expect the Reformation church to be full of spiritual life, united, joyful, faithful, zealous like the apostolic church. But such was not the case.

The Protestant Christians claimed to take the Bible and the Bible only as their rule of faith. But they were content to continue with certain Romanist errors, doctrines which had their origin in paganism long ago. In the place of following Christ in the acceptance of new truth, various Protestant bodies were content to build walls around them as "creeds," content to go no further than their leaders such as Luther and Wesley had taken them. This is one reason why Protestant churches are divided into many denominations and sects. Sardis professed to be "alive," but in reality was "dead" because the church would not accept more truth as the Lord brought it to them.

Among the "few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments" may be mentioned honest, godly men such as Luther, Count Zinzendorf, Wesley, Whitefield, and others. These men were used of God to awaken the religious life of the people of Europe, including the English-speaking people.

"In some respects the eighteenth century is the

most ill-used period in English history. . . . Nobody has a good word to say about it. ... 'Soul extinct; stomach well alive.' At the point of its faith England was dying. . . .

"The true awakening of the religious life for the English-speaking race dates from Wesley. To say that he reshaped the conscience of England is true, but it is only half the truth. He recreated it! It was dead—twice dead; and through his lips God breathed into it the breath of life again." (W. H. Fitchett, *Wesley and His Century*, pages 11-15). How much the world needs "John Wesleys" today!

**Revelation 3:5, 6:** "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Can you imagine a more thrilling honor than for Jesus Himself to take your name upon His lips, to confess you as His holy child before the Father

in heaven and before the millions of loyal angels? In the Judgment which is now in session (see Revelation 14:6, 7), our text says there will be a time when all the assembled hosts of heaven will look at each of us alone and scrutinize our individual lives.

Will they see all our mistakes, all the shameful things that we hope will never come to light? Jesus knows that it was not our true purpose to do all those ugly things. We have been captives of sin. When we believe in Christ and begin to hate sin, "it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells in me" (Romans 7:17). "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). He will cleanse them with His blood.

Remember that Jesus is seeking to save us. He is not seeking an excuse to condemn us. He wants us in His Kingdom, not out. At this moment, the Holy Spirit is drawing each one to Christ, and imparting to us His heavenly grace so that we may "overcome" if we will cease resisting Him and

yield to His grace. He will draw us all the way. Our real battle is to trust God, to believe that He loves us—sinners, unthankful, impure, mean persons, that we know ourselves to be. "Overcoming" is overcoming doubt that God accepts us individually and personally. "This is the victory that overcomes the world—our faith" (1 John 5:4).

If you believe Him, you will overcome. No one who appreciates the love of Jesus can possibly continue living in sin. "The love of Christ constrains us" (2 Corinthians 5:14).

It is well to think often about that moment soon to come (no one knows how soon) when Jesus will take our names on His lips and say, "Father, this is My true child; he trusts Me, and I cannot abandon him! I died for him, and I must have him in My kingdom!" And when Satan whispers to you that you are too great a sinner, that you must give up hope, remind him of what Jesus said of the greatest sinner on earth, "The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" John 6:37). Claim that promise, and come.

**Revelation 3:7, 8:** "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, "These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens": I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name."""

The word "Philadelphia" means "brotherly love." This was indeed the spirit that pervaded the church at the beginning of the "time of the end," from about A.D. 1798-1844. Throughout the Christian world, the church enjoyed a marvellous awakening. The Bible societies were organized, and the Scriptures published in multiplied editions.

With open minds, people began seriously to study the books of Daniel and the Revelation. They became convinced that prophecy was fulfilling, and that the end of the world was near. Their hearts were set free from selfishness and love of earthly things. Convinced that Jesus was coming soon,

many sold their houses and their farms, and brought the money to be used for the work of publishing the everlasting gospel to the world, "wrongs were made right, confessions were made, many tears were shed in repentance. Never since the days of the apostles was there such a loving spirit among God's people. The message of the "True Witness" to the church of Philadelphia contains no rebuke or censure.

"He who opens and no one shuts." What does this mean?

Let us visit the sanctuary that Moses built long ago. There we will see the "door" that the high priest opened, which no one could shut, a type or symbol of the greater "door" that Jesus, our true High Priest in heaven, opens for us.

Moses was told by God to make the sanctuary after the pattern of the heavenly temple (Hebrews 8:5). So he built two rooms, one to be the Holy apartment, and the other to be the Most Holy. The first room contained important pieces of furniture

that represented Christ's work as Saviour—a lampstand of seven lamps ("I am the light of the world." John 8:12); a table for holy bread ("I am that bread of life." John 6:48); and an altar of incense standing as near as possible to the mercy-seat where God's presence dwelt ("Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." John 14:13). Every day in the year the high priest went freely into this first room.

But there was a veil that barred the way, like a closed door, into the second room. Here was the ark containing God's holy law written on two tables of stone, with the mercy-seat—like the very throne of the infinite God—and angels of gold. No one except the high priest dared even peep behind that veil, lest he be destroyed in judgment, slain by Him whose presence "is a consuming fire to sin" (Hebrews 12:29).

And only once a year on the Day of Atonement did the high priest alone venture to enter the Most Holy apartment, to perform a work of

reconciliation for the people of God. This was to them a type of their day of judgment.

It was to this same work of judgment performed in heaven itself that Jesus referred in His words to the Sardis church, "I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels." This "Day of Atonement" began in heaven at the close of the 2300 years of Daniel 8:14. As our true High Priest, Christ entered the Most Holy apartment in A.D. 1844, and began His closing work of "cleansing the sanctuary," to make a people ready for His second coming. The "door" into the first apartment ministry was closed, and the "door" into the second phase of His ministry was opened. And no one can open what Christ has closed, nor close what He has opened. But this change is not to be misunderstood as merely one of physical place. There are spiritual realities involved.

"The end of the 2,300 days in 1844 marked an important crisis. But while it was true that the door of hope and mercy by which men had for eighteen

hundred years found access to God, was closed, another door was opened, and forgiveness of sins was offered to men through the intercession of Christ in the Most Holy. One part of His ministration had closed, only to give place to another. There was still an 'open door' to the heavenly sanctuary, where Christ was ministering in the sinner's behalf.

"Now was seen the application of those words of Christ in Revelation, addressed to the church at this very time."

The "open door" is a door through which our prayers ascend to the Father. A thoughtful writer has encouraged us: "The simple prayers indited by the Holy Spirit will ascend through the gates ajar, the open door which Christ declared, 'I have opened, and no man can shut.' These prayers, mingled with the incense of the perfection of Christ, will ascend as fragrance to the Father, and answers will come."

The "open door" leads us to a new

understanding of precious truth. The treasury of the jewels of truth is open to all. No sword guards the way through it. The "open door" is also a special opportunity to preach the gospel of Christ throughout the world (2 Corinthians 2:12). It was in the time of the Philadelphia church that the great work of preaching the gospel of Christ to the nations that knew Him not really began in earnest. William Carey went to India from England in 1793, Adoniram Judson carried the gospel to Burma from America in 1813, Robert Moffat went to Africa to preach in 1817 and David Livingstone in 1840. The Church Missionary Society of the Anglican Church was founded in 1799, the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804, the American Bible Society in 1816. New missions were pioneered around the world. Truly the Philadelphia church had "a little strength, and has kept My word." A still more wonderful manifestation of the gospel message is to follow (see Revelation 14:6-12). But the Philadelphia church was to suffer persecution:

**Revelation 3:9-13:** "Indeed I will make those

of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Many who hated the preaching of the second coming of Christ in the time of the Philadelphia church from 1831 to 1844 lost their love for the Bible. A great change came over those churches that rejected the understanding of the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation. They became confused in their religious experience, so that the words of

Scripture were true of them, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city" (Revelation 14:8). Those who reject truth must always change into "the synagogue of Satan."

"Just before us is the 'hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.' All whose faith is not firmly established upon the word of God will be deceived and overcome. . . . Those who are earnestly seeking a knowledge of the truth, and striving to purify their souls through obedience, thus doing what they can to prepare for the conflict, will find, in the God of truth, a sure defence."

The fact that Jesus says, "I am coming quickly," is evidence that the Philadelphia church was living near to the end of the world. The Thyatira church was told, "Hold fast... till I come," but nothing was said about Jesus coming "quickly."

"But as you read these words you can know that His coming is very soon indeed, because the time of both Thyatira and Philadelphia is past. God

has given all who love the Book of Revelation a precious knowledge of His truth for these last days. For this reason, hold it fast, "that no one take your crown." Do not trust anyone so much that you will permit that person to induce you to deny the Lord Jesus. Though you may not see it yet, your crown is already "laid up" for you (2 Timothy 4:8).

**Revelation 3:14-16:** "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth.""

Just as the word "Amen" always comes at the end of a prayer, so this message is the closing appeal of Jesus' seven letters to His churches. This message applies to the church today, in the very last days of this world's history. There is no eighth church yet to come.

"Laodicea" is not of itself a bad word. It means "the judging of the people," or "the vindication of the people." This church lives on the earth during the time of the preaching of the three angels' message: "Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment has come" (see Revelation 14:6-12).

The time period of Laodicea is the same as the work of "judgment" or "cleansing of the sanctuary" which began in 1844 when Christ entered the Most Holy apartment for His final work (see Daniel 8:14). Thus the church of Laodicea covers the period from 1844 to the end of human history, when He will return the second time.

Although this message is one of severe reproof, there can be no mistake in it, for it comes from the "Faithful and True Witness." If one had a cancer in his body, it would be far better for the doctor to tell him the truth even though the news would be very disappointing. If one knew the truth soon enough, he could have surgery and be saved. To know the truth is always better than to be told a lie. Should

we not thank our Lord because He loves us enough to rebuke us and to correct us?

What does it mean to be "hot"? One thinks of being intensely in earnest, full of burning zeal, moved with love for God and for His truth and for those who are in darkness around us. To be "cold" is to feel exactly the opposite, to be shivering, and to realize one's dangerous condition, and to have a strong desire to come to the fire to be warmed.

But Laodicea is neither hot nor cold: she does not have a burning zeal for God's work nor a love for His truth and His righteousness; and neither does she understand and feel her terrible need. Truly, of all the seven churches, Laodicea is the one outstandingly sick and the most needy.

This description accurately reveals the spiritual condition of those who today profess to be looking for the soon coming of the Lord Jesus, yet who have lost their zeal. "The Laodicean message applies to the people of God who profess to believe present truth. The greater part are lukewarm

professors, having a name but no zeal, fervor or devotion. . . . They dare not give up wholly, and run the risk of the unbeliever, yet they are unwilling to die to self and follow out closely the principles of their faith."

To be "spued" out of Jesus' mouth means that Laodicea's prayers and worship are no longer acceptable to Him. However, Jesus did not say that Laodicea's doom is final. The Greek words that are in the original are, *mello se emesai*. The *emesai* means to vomit (our English word *emetic* comes from this Greek word); the *se* is the second person pronoun; the key word is *mello*.

This word means "on the point of," "about to" do something. It occurs in Revelation 10:4 where John says he was "about to write" what the "seven thunders uttered," but he did not write it. The little boy in John 4:47 was "at the point of death" (*mello*), but he did not die because Jesus healed him. The New International Version correctly renders this phrase, "I am about to spit you out of my mouth." In our modern language, what Jesus

said is, "You make me so sick at My stomach that I feel like throwing up." His people give Him nausea.

But there is Good News in this message to Laodicea. Repentance is possible, and Christ can be healed of His nausea:

**Revelation 3:17-19:** "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent."

We do not know how to be a faithful and true witness to other people because we do not know how to judge their hearts. The human heart "is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) Christ's rebuke

is right on target.

Our hearts may say something that our lips would never dare utter. God's people would never presume to claim openly that they are "rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," but Christ reads the language of the heart. He knows their secret pride and satisfaction with themselves. And He says "you do not know" your true condition.

Have you ever been before a crowd of people and did not know that you were improperly dressed or that your face was dirty? How embarrassed you were when you discovered the truth.

God's church in these last days stands before all heaven in pathetic shame. Of all the seven churches, says the Greek, Laodicea is "the one" who is outstandingly, conspicuously "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Why?

Because, living in these last days, we are like

students who imagine they are nearly ready to graduate from high school when they lack the knowledge that kindergarten students should have. We do not even possess the "first love" that the church of the apostles had! (see Revelation 2:4.) And yet our position is more favored in that we should profit from the instruction to all the other six churches of past history. Truly, this message from Jesus is the most serious His people have ever received.

How long must Christ suffer such shame and pain?

If we will accept the remedy He offers, we shall "overcome," and Jesus will again be happy with His people's spiritual condition.

What is the "gold tried in the fire"? Peter says that it is faith which is developed and tested in the fire of trials and troubles endured for Christ's sake (1 Peter 1:6-8). Have you had trials? Perhaps you thought they meant that God had turned away from you. No, He is seeking to give you this "gold" that

will make you truly rich. Faith is strengthened by experience in trials, and love is thereby deepened.

What are the "white garments"? Clearly, something that covers our "nakedness." We can never appreciate what the "white garments" are until we sense what that spiritual "nakedness" implies.

Every healthy person feels a deep shame if he is seen naked. The Bible likens this deep-rooted physical shame to our inborn love of self, and our spiritual enmity against God. "The carnal mind is enmity against God" (Romans 8:7). By nature, we all have such a mind. We may try to deny it, but when we are not watching, our selfishness takes over, and our enmity toward others comes out in the open.

Enmity or resentment toward our fellow men is really directed toward Christ, because He says that "inasmuch" as we have treated others unkindly, we have done it unto Him (see Matthew 25:41-45). How ashamed will the people on His "left hand" be

in the judgment, when they finally realize that all their lives they have been unkind to the Lord Himself! Then when it is too late they will feel the full shame of their "nakedness." To realize the truth now, while we can still ask for the "garments," is a blessing!

No one can "buy" of Jesus the "white garments" until he has come to sense his own inner rebellion against God, and felt ashamed of himself for what he is in his natural unconverted condition. Paul says "all the world" has become "guilty before God" (Romans 3:19). Since Christ is the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8), every sinner on earth from Adam's day to ours has taken part in crucifying Him. Those who feel the shame of this "nakedness" will want to be covered.

We ask again, What are the "white garments"? He who sees Christ crucified and believes, is he who understands that he himself took part in crucifying Him. Peter's listeners at Pentecost received the Holy Spirit when they believed his

words, "God has made this same Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). They felt convicted and broken in soul as they saw the shame and horror of their guilt. Thus they repented (verse 38).

The "white garments" are the forgiveness of Jesus that covers with His own perfect love the shame of our nakedness of soul. Thus, we see that Jesus prayed for us when He prayed for those who crucified Him, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34).

The only deep forgiveness that anyone can receive is that ultimate forgiveness. Do you feel your need of it? Do you want it? If so, your nakedness of soul is covered with the garment of Christ's righteousness.

"When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with

the garment of His righteousness."

What is the "eye salve"? The eye is the inner light of the heart. "Man's conscience is the lamp of the Eternal, flashing into his inmost soul" (Proverbs 20:27, Moffatt). "The word of God . . . is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). The "eye salve," the enlightenment provided by the Word of God, makes the conscience prick and hurt like a needle, because it convicts of sin. But the smarting is necessary, in order that the healing will help us detect sin in all its deceptive disguises. He who has bought the eye salve begins to see himself as God sees him.

He now feels a conviction of sin. Let him be happy, because Christ is now saving him "to the uttermost" (Hebrews 7:25). While the High Priest in this heavenly Day of Atonement goes on saving him completely, the Spirit of God goes on working ever more deeply in his heart. This is how we may overcome.

**Revelation 3:20, 21:** "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."

The purpose of this message is not to condemn, but to save. And it will do its work in the hearts of God's people in all the world.

It is not wrong to be a Laodicean, for Christ makes the same promise "to him who overcomes" in Laodicea as to the overcomer in any of the other churches. No one who believes in Christ will want to leave Laodicea, for it is at the door of Laodicea's heart that Jesus is knocking. If you leave through the back door while a visitor knocks at the front door, you will miss seeing the visitor.

What is wrong is to be content to remain lukewarm, to be satisfied to be "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." It is a

tremendous surprise to many good people to learn that Christ had the same battle to overcome that they have. It is Satan who wants us to believe that Jesus is so far distant from us that He knows little or nothing by first-hand experience of our struggles to overcome our natural selfishness. Christ is near us, knocking at the door of our heart. God sent "his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin; He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Romans 8:3,4). Christ was ever pure and holy, but He was "in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

Christ's promise to the overcomer in Laodicea assures you that whoever you are and wherever you are in your battle with sin, Jesus has taken your full burden on Himself and has overcome in your flesh, suffering all the disadvantages you suffer. You cannot wander so far from Him but that there remains a bond of contact between Christ and your soul, so long as you are willing to believe His promise.

When tempted to discouragement, remember that promise, "even as I also overcame."

In verse 20 the Lord quotes the exact words of the LXX (Greek) version of the Song of Solomon 5:2. That inspired drama shows the selfish girl unwilling to let her lover come in, unwilling to surrender to him fully. Thus Christ sets His seal of approval on this book and shows that He Himself is its true hero, and that His Bride-to-be is His church on earth. As yet she has been unwilling to surrender to Him completely, but she can learn repentance. May it be soon!

**A Prayer:** Loving Lord, we thank You that Your love is so faithful that it rebukes us and chastens us. Those who do not love us flatter us and praise us insincerely. Now, Lord, we come to You to buy what you have to sell without money and without price. What shall we pay? We have nothing to give except ourselves—let us be Your willing servants.

Thank You Lord, for becoming one with us,

fighting our battle. You ask us merely to overcome even as You also overcame. What glorious companionship we have in our overcoming! We choose to bear Jesus' cross with Him day by day, and to follow His footsteps. In His name we pray, Amen.

## Chapter 4

# The Door That Was Opened in Heaven

**Revelation 4:1, 2:** After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.

Heaven is not space where the astronauts make their flights. Even if man should reach some of the other planets in our solar system, he would not see the heaven that John saw in vision. "God is Spirit: and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Heaven is the place of God's throne; but sinful mortals cannot reach it by physical means.

But we are given this opportunity to look by

faith into the open door in heaven. What we shall see is more real than any physical object man can see in space with telescopes.

**Revelation 4:3, 4:** And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.

A rainbow is the union of the sunlight and the rain in the cloud. The rainbow about the throne of God represents the union of His mercy (the sunshine), and His justice (the rainstorm). This mingling of justice and mercy is seen in the cross of Christ, the glory of heaven.

Who are the "twenty-four elders"? They are not angels, for the word "elder" in the Bible never refers to them, but always to human beings of experience and honor. An elder is one who holds a position of responsibility because of his or her

spiritual maturity.

The twenty-four elders have crowns of gold on their heads, from which we conclude that they are overcomers (see Revelation 2:10; 3:11; 2 Timothy 4:8). Further, they feel themselves unworthy to wear these crowns in the presence of Jesus (Revelation 4:10, 11), from which we conclude that they are people who were redeemed from the earth by His blood.

Since the Bible teaches clearly that the dead in Christ are still sleeping in their graves awaiting the resurrection at the coming of Christ (see 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17), how do these twenty-four elders come to be in heaven already? The only answer we can find in the Bible is that they are "the saints" who, "coming out of the graves" after Christ's resurrection, "went into the holy city, and appeared to many" (see Matthew 27:50-53). Paul says that when Christ ascended to heaven, He "led captivity captive" (Ephesians 4:8).

Why are there twenty-four elders, not more nor

less? The priests who served as assistants in the ancient temple ministry were divided into twenty-four groups (see 1 Chronicles 24:1-18). Their duties were to assist the high priest. These twenty-four elders have the honor of assisting Christ in His work in the heavenly sanctuary. They know how to help because they were once weak sinners like we are.

**Revelation 4:5-11:** And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying:

"Holy, holy, holy,  
Lord God Almighty,  
Who was and is to come!"

Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

"You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created."

Who are these four "living creatures"? There are beings in heaven which human language finds difficult to describe. Spacecraft send pictures from Mars or Saturn that modern astronomers cannot describe. If our own planets present such sights, how much more could John see sights in heaven that he could not describe?

These living creatures are very likely the same

groups of angels which prophets of God saw in vision in the Old Testament. Isaiah saw seraphims who "each one had six wings," and who cried one to another, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:3). Ezekiel saw the "cherubims," which were four in number (Ezekiel 10:1, 8-22). They also "were full of eyes all around" and had "four faces." Zechariah also saw "four chariots" which "are the four spirits of heaven, who go out from their station before the Lord of all the earth" (Zechariah 6:1-5). Always the prophet finds it hard to describe what he saw in vision.

These four living creatures stand closer to the throne of God than do the twenty-four elders. All that the throne of God represents, they also represent. They see everything, and are able to report and direct with perfect knowledge and wisdom. It is they who lead in the worship before God's throne, because when they give glory and honor and thanks to God, the four and twenty elders follow.

There seem to be four aspects of their work and

character. They show the reason, intelligence, and love that people have. They also show the majesty, courage, and boldness of a lion. They have the submissive, patient strength of an ox. And they have the vision, keenness of sight, and the swiftness of an eagle. In the sanctuary of Israel they were represented by the cherubim around the mercy seat in the second apartment of the sanctuary. The living creatures are marvelous orders of heavenly beings who do God's will in carrying out the plan of salvation. The organization of God's heavenly government is far more complex than anything in our computer-technology-dominated world.

"In the annals of human history the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as dependent on the will and prowess of man. The shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, behind, above, and through all the play and counterplay of human interests and power and passions, the agencies of the all-merciful One,

silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will. . . . This lesson is taught in a wonderful symbolic representation given to the prophet Ezekiel. . . . The symbols presented to him revealed a power above that of earthly rulers."

## Chapter 5

# The Strange Book No Man Could Open

**Revelation 5:1-3:** And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it.

The usual books of the ancient people were not like ours today. They were long pieces of parchment or paper rolled upon a stick, as we frequently roll cloth in a shop. In the days of the Romans it was sometimes the custom that a man's will before he died had to be prepared in such a manner, and was closed on the outside with the seals of witnesses.

We are not told the name of this book which John saw. But it contained the revelation of unknown mysteries which John hungered to understand. Could it contain not only the secrets of things to come, but also the destiny of the human race and of the universe itself?

The owner of a piece of land possesses a document known as a title-deed which is his guarantee of the possession of that land forever. When our first parents sinned in the garden of Eden, they transferred their title-deed to Satan. But it was not his by right. By right, it belongs in the hands of the Father Himself, who is seated on the throne.

This mysterious "scroll" contains the destiny of everyone on the earth. For example, the decision of the Jewish leaders to crucify the Son of God "was registered in the book which John saw in the hand of Him that sat upon the throne, the book which no man could open. In all its vindictiveness this decision will appear before them in the day when this book is unsealed by the lion of the tribe of

Judah."

**Revelation 5:4, 5:** So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."

Unless this scroll can be opened, no one will be able to wrest from Satan what Adam and we have lost. The reason John wept much is because he saw that no one appeared on the scene who was strong enough or righteous enough to win back what mankind had lost. Only a good man like John can feel to the depths of his soul an anguish of concern for others besides himself or his loved ones, for the salvation of this lost world. Someone has said, "The Revelation was not written without tears, neither without tears will it be understood." Only a sinner needs to be saved and only a redeemed sinner can weep because the world seems doomed to be lost. John was a sinner redeemed by the grace of God. God gave him the ability to shed those

tears! There is no need for us to be afraid of tears. Even "Jesus wept."

Thank God, John is not permitted to weep for long! Someone has been found who can redeem the inheritance, someone who can bring the estranged children back to their possession to recover all that has been lost. And who is this? One who is called a "lion. "Perhaps John expects now to see some mighty conqueror of awe-inspiring might. Imagine his astonishment when he looks again:

**Revelation 5:6, 7:** And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

While John looks here and there to find the majestic lion, he is amazed to see instead a torn and bleeding Lamb. Is this the Mighty Conqueror who

can do what "no one in heaven, or on the earth or under the earth" was able to do?

How can the Lamb also be a Lion? Because He surrendered Himself to the death of the cross. Cruelty, ambition, force, self-seeking, political or military advantage, can never win everlasting power. Through love, the Lamb has conquered. The way of self-sacrifice became the way of victory.

Where is the honest person who can bring himself to despise or ignore such a sacrifice? Love is found to be the strongest force in the universe. Love conquers even the stubborn heart. Everyone in heaven and earth will some day bow before the Lamb who became the Lion. "The love of Christ constrains us" (2 Corinthians 5:14).

Sometimes our hearts are lifted with joy and praise so that we cannot restrain from expressing our feelings. The twenty-four elders, the living creatures, and all the angels, burst forth with an unrestrained and glorious song more majestic than

any music yet heard on earth:

**Revelation 5:8-12:** Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying:

"You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; For You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice:

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and

honor and glory and blessing!"

The world has sometimes heard lovely music, but none so glorious as that song of praise to the Lamb who had been slain. His love went to the farthest boundary of hell itself to search for human souls that were lost. That love has conquered. The lost has been found.

Not one of the countless multitude who sings this chorus sings from fear; every heart is bursting with wonder and praise, genuine adoration for Him who emptied Himself in a sacrifice so complete that it has unveiled to the gaze of all created intelligences for all eternity the depths of the infinite love of God. We can sense in our hearts that beginning pulse of eternal life if we long to join in that song.

That which inspires this glorious song, we can even today begin to study—the cross of Christ. In Christ glorified, the redeemed will ever behold Christ crucified.

The "seven horns and seven eyes" are symbols of the power and wisdom of Christ. Seven is a number denoting completeness or perfection.

**Revelation 5:13, 14:** 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, I heard saying:

"Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever!"

And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worship Him who lives for ever and ever.

At last there will be no trace of rebellion or enmity left in God's great universe. Every creature will join in this worship of the Father and of the Lamb. Since Satan and those who serve him will never agree to join in such a song of praise to Christ, it is clear that these verses look forward to the time when sin and those who have stubbornly

clung to it will have come to their end in the lake of fire (see Revelation 20:12-15).

Is God worthy of such endless devotion? If all we knew of Him were the evidences of His greatness that we see in His creation, we would gladly say yes. But far beyond His majesty and power evident in the things He has made stands that cross with its amazing disclosure of His self-sacrificing character.

The Book of Revelation surpasses all other earthly books in that it recognizes this ultimate reality—this that no earthly science or philosophy can approach.

## Chapter 6

# Breaking the Seals of the Mysterious Book

**Revelation 6:1, 2:** Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see." And I looked, and behold, a white horse. And he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

The "seven seals" bring us either to glorious victory, or to terrible defeat; to adoration and praise at the coming of Jesus, or to calling on the rocks to hide us from the wrath of the Lamb. They bring us to life or to death. To the saved ones, Christ is the Lamb slain; to the lost, He is the avenging lion of Judah. God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes of the saved; the lost will cry with agony in that day.

A fierce battle rages between light and darkness, between Christ and Satan. Each of us acts a part in that battle; we cannot escape.

Horses symbolize messengers for God. The messengers sent bring both salvation and judgment. Cooperation with God means life and victory; resistance means defeat and death.

The four horses and their riders evidently symbolize the work of God's angel messengers to earth, bringing people to repentance, life and victory; protecting the righteous and keeping under restraint the wicked; striving with the wicked, and trying to bring them to repentance; bringing judgments and afflictions upon those who resist God's grace that they might be led to repent; and final judgment and death for those who refuse to repent. Here we see both the love of God and His justice, His mercy and His righteous anger.

For many centuries Bible students have seen these three series of panoramic world events (the

seven churches, the seven seals, and the seven trumpets) as parallel. Like a TV camera panning back and forth, covering many aspects of a scene, these three journeys through world history reveal the footsteps of Christ leading up to the final scenes of victory. This book is "the Revelation of Jesus Christ" in history.

The white horse is naturally a symbol of righteousness and victory. The bow in the hand of the rider can represent the conviction that the Holy Spirit sends into the hearts of human beings. "When the strongholds of kings shall be overthrown, when the arrows of God's wrath shall strike through the hearts of His enemies, His people will be safe in His hands." "The words of the apostles were as sharp arrows of the Almighty, convicting men of their terrible guilt in rejecting and crucifying the Lord of Glory."

The white horse is a fit emblem of the triumphs of the gospel in the first century of Christian history. This would symbolize the church of the apostles, or Ephesus in Revelation 2:1.

**Revelation 6:3, 4:** When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come and see." And another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword.

Although the Bible says that Christ is "the Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6), we can't avoid seeing that the gospel has often brought strife and bloodshed. Not that the gospel itself produces strife; what happens is that when people reject the gospel, they seek to compel others against their conscience and to persecute them. Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34).

The red horse is a fit symbol of the bloody persecutions inflicted on the followers of Jesus after the time of the apostles, the same period as the church of Smyrna in Revelation 2:8.

**Revelation 6:5, 6:** When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." And I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine."

Conditions for God's people were getting more difficult! First, a beautiful white horse, symbolizing purity and victory; then bloody red, symbolizing persecution; and now the color of black.

The "voice" that speaks announces more bad news. "A quart of wheat" or barley was the daily ration, as a pound and a half of maize flour is even today considered a poor man's daily food allowance in some Third World countries. A "denarius" in New Testament times was the wage of a laboring man for an entire day (see Matthew 20:1, 2). No one wants to work hard all day and

earn only a pound and a half of grain. The "voice" announces the bad news of fearful famine.

But this is not a famine for mere physical food. "The days are coming, says the Lord God, that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11). Following the time of severe persecution of the church, she became elevated and prosperous in the world. This was the Pergamos period of Revelation 2:12. Pleasing fables and traditions of men crowded out the Word of God. Those who went to church found little spiritual food on which to feed their souls. Copies of the Bible became rare, and the pure gospel was all but forgotten. A little of the Word of God became as precious as a little food in famine.

But this did not mean that God had withdrawn His Holy Spirit from the earth. Zechariah says that oil is a symbol of God's Spirit (see Zechariah 4:2-6). Spiritual food may be rare, but those who desire it can find access to God's Spirit. All through the Dark Ages God had those who continued to

worship Him in Spirit and in truth. Often they were hidden in the mountains.

**Revelation 6:7, 8:** When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see." And I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.

This color signifies death itself. It has been the understanding of Bible students for centuries that the fourth horse denotes the deathlike conditions of the church in the Middle Ages, from about A.D. 538 to the time of the Protestant Reformers, when the church was partially delivered from the power of papal control and persecutions.

The "fourth part of the earth" would thus mean the territory where millions of martyrs were imprisoned and died during centuries that have aptly been termed the Dark Ages. The light of the

gospel was almost extinguished. This was spiritual famine. Now comes hope for better times:

**Revelation 6:9-11:** When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" And a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

We are not to understand that these martyrs who cry for vengeance are actually alive at this time. The Bible does not teach that when people die they go immediately to heaven. Certainly Lazarus did not, for our Lord said of him, "'Our friend Lazarus sleeps. . . .' Jesus spoke of his death" (John 11:11, 13). The Lord would surely not be so cruel as to imprison the souls of martyrs under "the

altar" if they went to heaven as soon as they died! This has to be symbolic language.

Three texts will help us understand this symbol:

(1) After Abel was killed by his brother Cain, the Lord said, "The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground" (Genesis 4:10).

(2) "The stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the timber will answer it" (Habakkuk 2:11).

(3) "The wages of the laborers who have mowed your fields, which is kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries . . . have reached the ears of the Lord of sabaoth" James 5:4).

No one can suppose that the actual literal blood of Abel cried, or that the stone in the wall, or the wages held back from laborers, literally cried! It was justice that symbolically cried for restitution. John sees the saints as having been slain upon the altar of sacrifice on this earth, and lying dead

beneath it. But they do not live again until at the first resurrection (Revelation 20:5).

It is commonly understood that the expression "a white robe" means the work of the Protestant Reformation, which for the first time honored the martyrs who died as a papal sacrifice. At last men like Huss and Jerome who had been hated by the papacy were honored as true servants of God. Among the most enlightened nations, the corruptions of the papal blasphemies and persecutions were fully exposed. Instead of being considered criminals, the martyrs were praised because they had died "for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held." In this way "a white robe was given to each of them.

"Now we come to the cataclysmic events of the time of the end:

**Revelation 6:12-17:** I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the

stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

The Dark Ages are now past, and great events begin to take center stage on earth.

The entire civilized world was startled by the greatest earthquake on record on the morning of All Souls' Day, November 1, 1755. It centered at Lisbon, Portugal, and extended over almost all Europe and North Africa. Nearly 30,000 people were killed in six minutes.

Many people at once understood this event as the fulfilment of this prophecy. Recent scientific writers say: "The destruction of Lisbon in A.D. 1755 was a disaster which had a profound effect on European thought in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Voltaire was . . . reeling from the mental shock of the news from Lisbon. . . . Goethe, who was six years old at the time, remembered later how the 'demon of fright' spread across the world. Everyone was shocked, . . . Wesley [said], that this warning from God had been directed 'not to the small vulgar, but to the great and learned, the rich, and honorable heathens commonly called Christians. ...'" It would appear that the disaster of Lisbon had as profound effect on the minds and morals of men in the mid and late 1700's as the atomic bombs that were dropped on Japan in 1945 have had on the twentieth century." (Basil Booth and Frank Fitch, Earthshock, London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1978; pp. 95, 96).

The next great event followed a few years later. On May 19, 1780, occurred what is known as the Great Dark Day. Many people also recognized this

immediately as the specific fulfilment of this prophecy. The strange darkness in New England was understood as not caused by an eclipse, because the moon was full that night. About noon of that day, the people had to bring in candles. The cows came home from the pasture, the chickens went to roost, the birds fell silent. It was said to be the greatest darkness since the children of Israel left Egypt. This terrible omen continued until about one o'clock next morning, when the moon appeared red as blood. Multitudes of Christians immediately saw these events as the fulfillment of the sixth seal.

Then, on November 13, 1833, "the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as the fig tree drops its late figs." Never, before or since, has such a sight been seen. An eyewitness reported: "The falling stars did not come, as if from several trees shaken, but from one, those which appeared in the East fell toward the East; those which appeared in the North fell toward the North; those which appeared in the South (for I went out of my residence into the park) fell toward the South; and they fell not as ripe fruit falls. Far from it. But they flew, they were cast like

the unripe fruit, which at first refuses to leave the branch . . . thrown with more or less force."

So it was that these three remarkable signs in the heavens followed each other, all within one person's lifetime. The minds of millions of people were directed to the fulfilment of Bible prophecy. Never had world events so electrified students of Bible prophecy as these three events.

The next great event is yet future—the heavens departing as a scroll when it is rolled together. This will take place at the second coming of the Lord Jesus (Psalm 46:2, 3; Isaiah 24:1, 19, 20; Revelation 16:20). "The mountains shake like a reed in the wind, and rugged rocks are scattered on every side. There is a roar as of a coming tempest. The sea is lashed into fury. There is heard the shriek of a hurricane like the voice of demons upon a mission of destruction. The whole earth heaves and swells like the waves of the sea. Its surface is breaking up. Its very foundations seem to be giving way. Mountain chains are sinking. Inhabited islands disappear. The seaports that have become

like Sodom for wickedness, are swallowed up by the angry waters."

"Who shall be able to stand?" "Kings of the earth" and "great men," and both "slaves" and "free men," will know when earth's last hour comes. They have always been too proud to pray for the forgiveness of sin; now they cannot bear to look into the face of the Lamb of God, or to endure His gaze. They direct their long-delayed prayers to rocks and mountains!

There is no judgment like the judgment of love which has been rejected. There is no wrath so terrible as that of the Lamb who once said He was "meek and gentle in heart." To reject the cross of Christ, to steel the heart against the constraint of Jesus' love, to crucify Him afresh, to trample upon Him and to put Him to open shame, to betray Him as Judas did, is to merit through all eternity the condemning judgment of the universe. Though we may sometimes have been tempted to doubt, there is indeed such a thing as complete justice; and these verses reveal to us one side of its terror.

There is another side of God's character—that of tender mercy and forgiveness through the faith of Jesus. To understand and appreciate that grace is what changes sinners into saints, for it melts the human heart and motivates to obedience to all the commandments of God. God is both "just and the justifier of the one who believes in Jesus" (Romans 3:26), because such belief is the response of an honest heart to the claims of the cross of Calvary. That side of God's justice may be manifest to you today. "The one who comes to Me, I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37).

## Chapter 7

# The Mark God Places on His People

**Revelation 7:1-3:** After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. Then 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 granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."

The seventh seal will not be opened until we come to chapter eight. Its opening takes place at the second coming of Christ. Therefore, the sealing work described in this chapter comes between the events under the opening of the sixth seal and the seventh seal. In other words, these things happen

just before the second coming of Christ, but after the falling of the stars, which was in A.D. 1833. The six seals have prepared the way for the important work of these four angels and that of the special "angel ascending from the east."

We have already learned in chapter four how angels guide in the affairs of men. These "four angels" are now working in every part of the earth to prevent calamities and disasters that would hinder or destroy God's work.

"Wind" in Bible prophecy refers to strife, confusion, and war between the nations. We have all seen what happens when four winds blow at the same time: a whirlwind spirals into a funnel, which can be terribly destructive. Such a political, military, or social hurricane or tornado would hinder the progress of God's saving message in the world (see Daniel 7:2; Jeremiah 25:32). The measure of security and peace we now enjoy is due to the work of those four angels.

Jeremiah describes what will come when the

four winds of human hatred are at last let loose: "Disaster shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the farthest parts of the earth. And at that day the slain of the Lord shall be from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth" (Jeremiah 25:32, 33). This can be nothing but the great impending battle of Armageddon, which God commissions His angels to hold back until He has sealed His faithful people.

Now we ask, What is the seal of the living God? Ezekiel will help us understand, for he mentions the "mark" which is placed upon the foreheads of God's people (Ezekiel 9:3, 4). This "mark" is a sign of victory over sin and of loyalty to the Lord.

In Egypt, as the destroying angel went through the land to slay all the firstborn of the Egyptians, he "passed over" those homes where the mark of blood was placed on the doorpost. So, in the final destruction, the destroying angels are commanded, "Do not come near any one on whom is the mark"

(Ezekiel 9:6). The "seal of God" is therefore the mark identifying God's people as His. Being placed in their "foreheads" signifies that it has to do with the character. The character of His people is God's great concern. The power that applies the seal is the Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 4:30).

John further describes this seal in Revelation 14:1, saying that the 144,000 have "the Father's name written on their foreheads." What is God's name? In 1 John 4:8, we read: "God is love." When the character of the people of God is transformed into perfect love, then will the "Father's name" be written in their foreheads.

But how is love revealed? "Love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10). If we profess to love, but do not fulfill the law of God, we deny the seal of God. And if we profess to keep God's commandments, but do not reveal love in our lives, we deny the Holy Spirit who impresses the seal upon God's people, because "the fruit of the Spirit is love" (Galatians 5:22).

A seal is the sign of authority, and is associated with the laws of government. "Whatever is written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring, no one can revoke" (Esther 8:8). Queen Esther knew that if King Ahasuerus sealed the writing of the Persian law, it could never again be changed. God says through Isaiah: "Seal the law among my disciples" (Isaiah 8:16). Therefore we shall find the seal of God in His law.

A seal must have three details in order to be legal:

(1) The name of the law-giver;

(2) his position, or authority; and

(3) the territory over which he rules. For example, the Queen of England's seal would read, "Elizabeth (name), Queen (position or authority) of Great Britain, Ireland, and the Commonwealth (territory).

"Now we ask, where can we find the seal of

God in His law? Only the Sabbath commandment contains all three essentials of a seal:

(1) "The seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord your God" (name of the law-giver);

(2) "in six days the Lord made" (His position or authority, He is the Creator); "the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them" (the territory over which He rules.)

When Isaiah spoke for God, "Bind up the testimony, seal the law among My disciples," he spoke of a work of restoring God's law to its rightful place of authority. Something in the law of God had evidently been overlooked and neglected by God's servants. This something was to be restored by the angel who places the seal of God upon the foreheads of God's people before the seventh angel brings history to an end.

Now we ask, What is the commandment usually neglected by the Lord's "disciples" today? It is indeed the fourth commandment, the Sabbath

commandment. Many have turned away from the true Sabbath of the Lord, which is the seventh day, and have accepted a rest day chosen for them and commanded by the Roman Catholic Church, which day is the first day of the week. Our Lord says that His Holy Spirit sanctifies His people through the proper observance of the Sabbath: "Surely My sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you" (Exodus 31:13). Further, it is by observing the Sabbath that God's people come to know Him: "Hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God" (Ezekiel 20:20).

The Sabbath was never to be restricted only to the Jews as a nation. It was sanctified for man at creation, long before there was a Jew. It was kept by Jesus, who is our divine Example. He said He had not come to change the law or to destroy it. "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law, or the Prophets. I come not to destroy but to fulfill." "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these

commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17,19).

Further, Jesus told His disciples to keep the Sabbath even after His crucifixion and resurrection (see Matthew 24:15-21). The true seventh-day Sabbath was kept by the apostles and the Gentile Christians (see Acts 18:1, 4; 17:2; 13:42-44). John says that God's people in the last days will keep all His commandments, and this includes the Sabbath: "Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12). Lastly, the Sabbath will be faithfully observed in the new heavens and the new earth that the Lord shall create (Isaiah 66:22, 23).

To receive the "seal of God" therefore is to receive a distinguishing mark that sets one apart from others as very different and peculiar. The destroying angels are told, "Do not come near any one on whom is the mark" (Ezekiel 9:6). But all others including "the elders who were before the

temple," were to be slain. Does the observance of the true Sabbath distinguish a person as different from most people?

Yes, most certainly. In this so-called "Christian age," one of the most peculiar things that a person can do is to observe the true Sabbath of the Lord, the seventh day, the day He set apart and sanctified, which is Saturday. The whole world, Christian and pagan, regularly use the Lord's true Sabbath as their busiest working day. Millions, because of the influence of paganism and the papacy, observe the first day of the week instead. This very peculiarity of observing the seventh day marks one as being different. This points to the Sabbath as being the seal of God.

But it must be remembered that true Sabbathkeeping is the fruitage of a genuine conversion to Christ. It is not merely resting on Saturday. To receive the seal of God through true Sabbathkeeping is to receive the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart, a "rest" from sin and self: "There remains therefore a rest [keeping of the

sabbath, Greek] for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest, has himself ceased from his own works as God did from His" (Hebrews 4:9, 10). These "works" are works of pride and love of self.

The work of this angel in sealing God's people is the most important activity in the world today. It will continue until in "every nation, tribe, tongue, and people" God's true followers shall have been gathered out and sealed. No power on earth or in hell can prevent the accomplishment of this work. For this purpose, the "four angels" continue to hold back the "winds of strife" in all the world a little longer. But only a little longer—soon will come that "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation" (Daniel 12:1).

Revelation 7:4-8: And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed: of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Gad twelve

thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed.

Some may wonder how Christian people could be divided into the twelve tribes of Israel. We find the explanation in the book of Romans: "Nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham. . . . Those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted for the seed" (Romans 9:7, 8). "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly . . . but he is a Jew, who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter" (Romans 2:28, 29). James addresses his letter in the New Testament to

Christian people, but calls them "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (James 1:1). These are God's true people, believers in Christ.

The New Jerusalem is Christ's city, yet the gates bear the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and all who enter go in through one of those twelve gates. Jesus Himself was a Jew—inwardly, "of the heart, in the Spirit."

Why are God's people divided into twelve different tribes? Each of the twelve tribes of Israel had special differences in character which are explained in Genesis 49:1-28 and Deuteronomy 33:6-24. Not all the members of each tribe are finally numbered among the overcomers with the 144,000. "Out of" each tribe were sealed 12,000 only.

The others? They chose not to overcome. The entire tribe of Dan is missing, evidently because of a refusal to overcome the sin of backbiting: "Dan shall be a serpent by the way, a viper in the path" (Genesis 49:16). Let us be among the overcomers!

Now we see that the 144,000 may be a very large company:

**Revelation 7:9-12:** After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying:

"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen."

This "great multitude" may include the 144,000, which is probably a mystical number. Numbers in the Bible are not always counted as we count them. When Jesus fed the 5,000, the number

was "besides women and children" (Matthew 14:21). John first hears the "number of those who were sealed," 144,000; and afterwards he sees "a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues." Evidently this "multitude" are the fruitage of the preaching of the "three angels," who in the last days take the everlasting gospel to "every nation, tribe, tongue, and people" (Revelation 14:6,7). There is room among that great multitude for you!

The 144,000 are doubtless those who will be alive on the earth when Jesus returns. They have had a special experience. The great multitude may also include some who lived in past ages, who will be resurrected when the Lord comes (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17). We learn more about these people:

Revelation 7:13-17: Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great

tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

How kind of one of the twenty-four elders to anticipate John's and our question! God wants us to understand this Book.

This "great tribulation" is the same as that spoken of by Daniel, which comes just before the end: "At that time [when the door of mercy is closed] Michael shall stand up [begin to reign],... and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered every one who is found written in the book" (Daniel 12:1).

"They have passed through the time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation; they have endured the anguish of the time of Jacob's trouble (see Jeremiah 30:6, 7); they have stood without an intercessor through the final outpouring of God's judgment. . . . They have seen the earth wasted with famine and pestilence, the sun having power to scorch men with great heat, and they themselves have endured suffering, hunger, and thirst. But 'they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat' (Revelation 7:16)."

These have lived during the seven last plagues (see Revelation 16) unharmed. These are those spoken of in the Book of Psalms, "Because you made the Lord who is my refuge, even the most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you nor shall any plague come near your dwelling." "Because he has set his love upon Me therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name" (Psalm 91:9, 10, 14).

Can any wealth which this world offers compare with the privilege of being numbered with this "great multitude"? A character like Christ's formed in this life is the fruit of our faith in Christ. When Christ shall come, He will not change the character of any individual. A precious lifetime is given to us to be improved in washing our robes and making them white "in the blood of the Lamb." It is all by grace and not by works.

There are many tears on our faces now; we know sorrow, bereavement; disappointment, and grinding poverty. But there will be no tears when God's people wear the white raiment—they will have learned to trust the Lord, and to know that all He does for us is for our good. Why should we feel discouraged when we believe that the Lord overrules for good all that happens to us?

## Chapter 8

# Seven Angels Blow Trumpets of Alarm

**Revelation 8:1:** When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

What would cause such "silence"?

Chapter seven has been inserted between the events of the sixth seal and the opening of the seventh seal. During the sixth seal, we saw many people, great and small, crying to the rocks and mountains to fall on them and hide them from the face of Him that sat on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. "Who is able to stand?" they cried.

The answer to that question is that no one is able to stand except those who have received the seal of God, the sign of yielding self to be crucified

with Christ. Chapter seven is inserted as Good News to answer that question of questions. But the vast majority of earth's inhabitants have rejected the cross, and have chosen to perish. And as they perish, there is "silence in heaven."

How can God wipe away all tears from the eyes of His redeemed until He has first wiped away His own tears? Can God see all these lost ones perish in their agony of despair and not feel a great sorrow? Every joyful harp in heaven is stilled. The victory of the Lamb has brought eternal salvation to those who have believed; but it has brought eternal loss to all those who have disbelieved. God has dearly loved each one, and so have the angels.

If this "half an hour" is prophetic time, that is, a day equal to one year, the "silence" will last about a week. It may be an indefinite time.

The final triumph of the Lamb in opening the seventh seal cannot take place until His people, the 144,000, submit to receive the seal of God in their foreheads. This is the import of chapter seven. His

servants are not unimportant; they can hasten or delay His triumph.

**Revelation 8:2-4:** And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. And he was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand.

In this portrayal we return for another view of events on earth since the time of Christ. The seven churches and the seven seals gave us glimpses of the progress of God's salvation work on earth as it relates to His people, culminating in its triumph as His servants receive His seal. Now we are to see world history in a different light. Trumpets in Bible prophecy are a symbol of war. The blowing of trumpets is a call to prepare for trouble, a warning.

These trumpets warn of events that are similar

to the seven last plagues of chapter 16, but they cannot be identical for several reasons:

(a) The trumpet disasters are mixed with mercy whereas the last plagues are unmixed with mercy;

(b) trumpets are a warning to people to prepare whereas once the last plagues begin to fall there is no more opportunity to prepare. All the disasters of previous history are a foretaste of the final disasters of the seven last plagues.

Thus the seven trumpets will be a view of the "kingdoms of this world" (Revelation 11:15) in their strife among themselves—always of course, in relation to God's work on earth.

But first, a message of hope and Good News! While "seven angels" overrule the war and strife on earth, "another angel" is commanded to remember the needs of God's people, to offer "much incense . . . with the prayers of all the saints." The clash of arms is never so loud that it drowns out the prayers of God's saints. We are assured that there is mercy

mingled with the judgments about which the seven trumpets warn us. Indeed, all through the agonizing times when the seven trumpets are blown, God has remembered His mercies.

The "golden altar" and the "incense" take us again to the sanctuary in heaven. Incense is fragrant to breathe. It masks disagreeable odors. It was offered continually on the altar in the Hebrew sanctuary, representing the fragrance of Christ's righteousness which covers human selfishness and sin. When we pray, heaven does not see us as sinners unworthy to be heard. Rather, heaven sees us in Christ, and our prayers are rendered fragrant and sweet to the Father in that Christ takes our place.

This is what it means to pray in Jesus' name. He knows the trials of His people living in a world of pain and strife. Christ has put His arms about all of us, so that when the Father accepts Christ, He receives us also. In Christ's perfect righteousness, the Father has gladly accepted the whole human race of sinners. You are Christ's kin, His own flesh

and blood. So, whoever you are, do not fear to pray in His name.

Do you hesitate to pray because you do not know how to do so acceptably? Here is encouragement: "The Spirit also helps our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. ... He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26, 27).

This gracious ministry continues while the seven trumpets are blown:

**Revelation 8:5, 6:** Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake. So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

When Christ will cease His ministry as High Priest and clothe Himself with the robes of a king,

there will be no more sanctuary intercession for sinners. But this throwing of the censer to earth apparently signifies that while the events of the seven trumpets take place, Christ's saving ministry continues for those on earth who choose to believe the light of His gospel. The disasters of which the seven trumpets warn us are not necessarily inflicted by God; nothing in the Book of Revelation indicates that He is the one who sends them. Rather, in mercy He warns His people to prepare for disasters that Satan brings on the earth!

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ" is always Good News, and this passage in chapter 8 can be no exception. The picture we see is this: although there is great distress for those who persist in rejecting truth, at the same time there is a constant ministry of intercession for those who choose to repent. During the seven trumpets, judgments fall on those who persecute and slay the martyrs of Christ, whose blood symbolically cries out for divine vengeance during the fifth seal (Revelation 6:9-11).

Now with the seven trumpets we will be carried back in history again to behold another parallel development of human events on earth. This time we see the outworking of wrath and retribution within history itself among those segments of humanity which have largely rejected the gospel:

**Revelation 8:7:** The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

The Christian era (which the book of Revelation covers for us) opens with the Roman Empire as a beautiful, prosperous, and secure world. This first trumpet shows the beginning of the long series of devastations and conquests which degraded and mined that once beautiful empire. The succeeding trumpets picture a progressive destruction of all that seemed secure in that ancient world. It was as though Europe, America, and all civilized nations were destroyed in our time, and a race of ignorant savages should take over the ruins

and start a new Dark Ages era.

The prophet Daniel had predicted clearly that the Roman Empire, strong as it was, would fall and be replaced with ten independent kingdoms (see Daniel 2:40; 42; 7:23, 24). The citizens of the empire became rich and corrupt, and thus invited their own destruction. In the north were many wild heathen tribes eager to seize the wealth and comforts of the weak and corrupt people in the south.

The first serious invasion of the Roman Empire was by the Goths, led by Alaric in A.D. 395. He conquered many cities of Greece, and captured Rome itself in A.D. 410.

"Hail" may imply that the wild invaders came from the cold north; "fire" may describe the fate that befell cities and farms; "blood" may describe the slaughter of the inhabitants. "Trees" is a common Bible term for prominent men and leaders, an apt term when one remembers how rare big trees were in ancient Bible lands (see Judges

9:8-15).

**Revelation 8:8, 9:** Then the second angel sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood; and a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

Immediately our attention is drawn to the sea, contrasted with the earth, to which the effects of the first trumpet were confined. It is as if we are looking at a great map of the civilized world of the Roman Empire. We see something taking place on the Mediterranean Sea, anciently called The Great Sea or "the Roman lake," over which the ships and commerce of Rome brought great riches. We ask, after the time of Alaric, was Rome punished by invaders who came from the sea?

Yes, it is a fact that the Vandals under Genseric repeatedly invaded the Roman Empire from the sea, between the years A.D. 428 and 469. On a gigantic cinema screen their conquests would

appear like "a great mountain burning with fire, thrown into the sea." This powerful chief sailed from his headquarters in Africa and crossed the Mediterranean to harass the rich Romans in Italy and Greece, and to destroy their ships. One Roman emperor who plucked up courage to resist built a navy of more than three hundred ships in the harbor of Carthage in Spain, prepared for war. Genseric learned of his plans, stealthily penetrated the defenses of the harbor and destroyed the navy.

In A.D. 468 the emperor of the East tried to bring Genseric to his knees. One hundred thousand soldiers and sailors embarked in 1,113 ships at an astronomical cost, to rouse him at Carthage, his headquarters in Africa. But again the Vandal chief outwitted them by sending lighted fire ships among this huge fleet, which surprised the arrogant armies of Rome and caused such utter confusion among them that again they were defeated.

Before Genseric died in the fulness of years and of glory, he saw the overthrow of Western Rome. What a calamity for an empire which had

grown to power for a thousand years! Incidentally, we derive our word "vandalism" from the Vandals.

**Revelation 8:10, 11:** Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water; and the name of the star is Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood; and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter.

The work of destruction of the old world of Rome was not yet complete. Something worse was yet to come; "springs of water" of future generations were to be made bitter. A new warrior arose to destroy Rome, whose name was Attila. He led hordes of savage and cruel men known as Huns (from which we get the name of the country of Hungary today). Writers of history have described Attila's appearance on the stage of history as a brilliant meteor flashing in the sky. He came from the East, gathering his followers, and poured them down suddenly on the Roman empire.

Attila devastated great portions of Europe. "It was the boast of Attila that the grass never grew on the spot where his horse had trod. The scourge of God' was a name that he appropriated to himself. . . . The Western emperor with the senate and people of Rome humbly and fearfully submitted to the rough Attila."

After Attila died in A.D. 453, the army of the Huns almost immediately disappeared from history. They were indeed like a flashing star that comes and goes quickly. The Huns, in contrast with the Vandals, did not sail on the Mediterranean Sea, but came down from the mountains, the source of Central Europe's rivers. They fit the prophetic description.

**Revelation 8:12, 13:** Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened; and a third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night. And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe

to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!"

The natural result of such calamities was "darkness." It is commonly said that the thousand years which followed the fall of Rome were the Dark Ages. Not only was there darkness in the political world, but there was darkness in the professed church of Christ. Civilization itself was dimmed. "The accession of the Roman Church to power marked the beginning of the Dark Ages. As her power increased, the darkness deepened. . . .

"About the close of the eighth century, papists put forth the claim that in the first ages of the church the bishops of Rome had possessed the same spiritual power which they now assumed. . . . The darkness seemed to grow more dense. ... In the 13th century was established the most terrible of all the engines of the papacy—the Inquisition. The prince of darkness wrought with the leaders of the papal hierarchy. In their secret councils, Satan and his angels controlled the minds of evil men. The

noontide of the papacy was the midnight of the world. A moral and intellectual paralysis had fallen upon Christendom. "

But there were more woes to come! Next we behold the rise of another power of darkness which was to punish those professed Christians who worshipped idols and turned away from the pure gospel. For hundreds of years the trembling people of Europe cowered in constant dread of conquest by the Muslims. To this day Islam remains as a scourge of apostate Christianity. The fifth trumpet will now spotlight the rise of this well-known power.

## Chapter 9

# What the Bible Says About the Rise of Islam

**Revelation 9:1-4:** Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. And to him was given the key to the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. And the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit. Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

Here a new religion is brought to view, with some good teachings—it is a star "fallen from heaven," but it is mixed with "smoke" out of the "bottomless pit." The gospel is the sunshine of the

world; but this new power darkens the gospel sun and the spiritual air which the world needs.

Islam began by condemning the evil of idolatry as wrongly practised in the apostate Christian church; and, so far, it was right. Never are we to bow down to idols. There is indeed only one God; and none are to be worshipped but Him. Only by blatant disregard of the teachings of the Bible could the theologians of the Dark Ages justify idol-worship. But the teachings of Islam which were a necessary scourge to an apostate church brought further "smoke" into the world. The rejection of the pure New Testament sunshine of the gospel has prepared the way for darkness to erupt from "the pit."

The "bottomless pit" in the Greek means any desolate wilderness, and thus fitly represents the desert of Arabia whence came the Arab Muslim invaders, in number like unto locusts.

The Greek word for "bottomless pit" is abyssos, from which we get our modern English

word abyss. Modern Muslim writers use that very word in describing the Arabian society from which the power of Islam arose:

### **ARABIA—The Abyss of Darkness**

In that benighted era, there was a territory where darkness lay heavier and thicker. . . . Arabia . . . stood isolated, cut off by vast oceans of sand. Arab traders plodding great distances . . . could hardly acquire any grain of knowledge on their journeys. In their own country, they did not have a single educational institution or library. None seemed to be interested in the cultivation and advancement of knowledge. . . . How saturated were their minds with superstitions, how barbarous and ferocious were their thoughts and customs, and how uncouth and degraded were their moral standards and conceptions.

. . . There was no law except the law of the jungle. Loot, arson, and murder of innocent and weak people was the order of the day. . . . Any trivial incident was enough to cause a war to blaze

out in ferocious fury. . . . Whatever notions they had of morals, culture, and civilization, were primitive and uncouth. . . . They worshipped stones, trees, idols, stars, and spirits, in short, everything conceivable except God."

Out of this "abyss" arose the scourge of Christendom. King Chosroes II of Persia received a letter one day from an obscure citizen of Mecca, inviting him to recognize Mohammed as the prophet of God. The king contemptuously tore up the letter. Little did he know that soon he himself would fall utterly, and his kingdom be destroyed, and that this strange prophet from Mecca would dominate the world.

The fall of Chosroes is said by some to have been the "key of the bottomless pit," because Mohammed could not have arisen to political and military power except as the Persian kingdom should fall first. Then the Saracens from Arabia were "given power," multiplying immensely until they became as locusts for number. One writer, not thinking of the book of Revelation, said of these

followers of Mohammed: "Like locusts, the Osmanlis swarmed in all directions, and no village missed their notice up to the very walls of Constantinople." 22 As a scorpion strikes, so they exacted a cruel revenge in warfare.

When Mohammed died, he was succeeded by Abubaker in A.D 632, who mobilized the Arabian tribes for conquest. He instructed them to respect the religious convictions of people who observed the law of God faithfully. His men were to scourge only those who worshipped idols. This glimpse of history reveals the early spirit of Islam. (Even today Muslims respect those who truly reverence the Word of God). He commanded his soldiers:

"Let not your victory be stained with the blood of women or children. Destroy no palm trees, nor burn any fields of corn. Cut down no fruit trees, nor do any mischief to cattle, only such as you kill to eat. . . . You will find some religious persons who live retired in monasteries, and propose, to themselves to serve God that way; let them alone, and neither kill them nor destroy their monasteries:

and you will find another sort of people that belong to the Synagogue of Satan, who have shaven crowns; be sure you cleave their skulls, and give them no quarter till they either turn Mohammedans or pay tribute."

Who were the people with the "seal of God in their foreheads" that Abubaker's soldiers were commanded to spare? All through history there have been faithful observers of the Lord's true Sabbath, which has always been the "seal of God" (see chapter seven). In the days of Mohammed and Abu-baker there were some such faithful ones. It seems that a higher authority than Abu-baker overruled for the protection of His faithful people! Here we see an example of that incense of mercy still being offered during those dark ages of the trumpets.

But the wars to come of attrition and conquest were terrible enough. John now tries to describe Saracen battle scenes where guns and gunpowder are used when in his day he has never heard of such inventions:

**Revelation 9:5-11:** And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months. And their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them. And the shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. And their power was to hurt men five months. And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon.

This description may seem fantastic to us today, but to the people living within the "security" of the Eastern Roman Empire, reports of the

Saracen hordes of conquest sounded much like this. Like reports of a plague of locusts on its way, citizens of the empire lived under the constant shadow of the Islamic scourge.

The Arabians used horses extensively in their wars of conquest. The "crowns" may be the turban, which was for a long time a distinctive national head-dress of the Arabians. The soldiers had long hair.

Here we have a test of the accuracy of the prophecy and the historical fulfilment of the "five months." In Bible prophecy a day is a symbol of a year (see notes on chapter 2:10). There are 30 days to a month in Bible prophecy (compare Genesis 7:11; 8:4; and 7:24; also compare the 42 months of Revelation 11:2, and the 1,260 days of 11:3 and 12:6). Thus "five months" of prophetic time would equal 150 years.

The Saracens (Muslims) were "given authority" to "torment" the civilized Eastern Roman Empire for these 150 years, but not to "kill them," that is,

not to conquer them. The 150 years should begin from the time that "they had a king over them." The book of Proverbs says "the locusts have no king, yet they all advance in ranks" (Proverbs 30:27). But the "locusts" of the Muslim invaders were highly organized in a destructive work, for they had a ruler whose commands they followed.

For hundreds of years after Mohammed's death, his followers were divided into various groups and factions with no central government or king. But near the end of the 13th century, Othman founded an organized government which has been known as the Ottoman Empire. "The angel of the bottomless pit" is called an "angel" in the sense of the Greek word which also means "messenger" or "minister." The Sultan became chief minister of the Muslim religion. The names in Hebrew, "Abaddon," and in Greek, "Apollyon," mean "one who destroys." Such was always the character of the Ottoman rulers.

Earnest students of the Bible 150 years ago searched out fulfilment of this prophecy in history,

and found that Othman, first "king" of the Muslims, made his initial attack to "torment" the civilized world of the Eastern Roman Empire in A.D. 1299- These prophecy students depended on Edward Gibbons' positive statement that the attack occurred on July 27 of that year.

We ask, did the Ottoman Turks "torment" the Eastern Roman Empire for 150 years? History tells us that they maintained an almost constant war of harassment and torment from A.D. 1299 through 1449, exactly 150 years, without completely dominating them. Then a great change came.

The Eastern Roman emperors had become gradually weaker and more corrupt until it became clear to everyone that they would soon lose their independence. When the Emperor John died on October 31, 1448, his brothers humbly sought the consent of the Turkish Sultan, Murad II, to choose their elder brother to be crowned as the new emperor in January 1449. Thus, in bowing to the Sultan of Turkey, they acknowledged that their independence was at an end. Remember this; it is

an important detail.

**Revelation 9:12-15.** One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things. Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind.

The "one woe" was the rise of the Muslim power. The second "woe" to follow is the triumph of that power. It was to apply the coup de grace to the last vestige of the Roman Empire and henceforth terrorize Europe for hundreds of years. The "third woe" is to be the final frightful anger of the nations, with God's judgment-wrath which will bring a close to our world's history (see chapter 11:18).

Now, in A.D. 1449, the "sixth angel" looses the restraint which had heretofore prevented the

Muslims from actually conquering the wealthy and powerful Eastern Empire. The "four angels . . . bound at the great river Euphrates" can refer to the four separate Muslim provinces of Aleppo, Iconium, Damascus, and Baghdad. The way was opened, the obstacles removed, for the Sultan later to wage successful war against Europe.

Constantinople actually fell to the Turkish armies in A.D. 1453. But note this: In 1449, when the "five months" of prophetic time, 150 years, came to an end, the independence of the European empire was lost not by force of arms, but by the emperor meekly and voluntarily surrendering his independence into the hands of the Turks. In effect he said, "I cannot reign unless you first permit." Remember this, as we proceed, for we will shortly see something most important.

How long was the Ottoman Moslem empire to continue ruling in independence? The text says: for a period designated as "the hour and day and month and year." The article "the" appears in the Greek only once at the beginning of the phrase,

indicating that it is a linear period. In Bible prophecy:

One "year" of 360 days is 360 literal years.

One "month" of 30 days is 30 years.

One "day" of 24 hours is 1 year.

One "hour"  $1 \times 24$ th of a year, or 15 days literally.

Add up the totals and we have 391 years and 15 days.

When did this period of 391 years and 15 days begin? Clearly, at the end of the 150 years when the Moslems should cease "tormenting" the Eastern Empire and proceed to conquer it. Bible students added the 150 years to Gibbon's beginning date of July 27, 1299 and came to July 27, 1449; then they added the 391 literal years and came to July 27, 1840. Then they added the remaining 15 days, which brought the end of the prophetic period to

August 11, 1840.

Did the Turkish Sultan lose his independence on that very day by meekly and voluntarily surrendering it to the European rulers in the same way that the Eastern Roman Emperor lost his to the Sultan in 1449?

Bible students of prophecy boldly predicted in 1838 that the Sultan of Turkey would lose his independence in August 1840. This was a public test of the year-day principle of interpreting prophecy.

The fulfillment would also establish that the Book of Revelation is pointing to something vastly more important than the rise and fall of the Muslim empire. Revelation is the key that God places in our hands to unlock the mystery of His judgment on our modern rebellious world. Where the careless reader sees nothing but desert wastes without meaning, we find in Revelation hidden riches of vast importance to the people of God.

In a moment we shall see what history says happened on August 11, 1840.

First, let us look briefly at what John says as to how the Turkish Muslim armies once terrified the Europeans for centuries. John is intrigued by the use of gunpowder, and may allude to the frightful loss of life that has followed this invention:

**Revelation 9:16-19:** Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million, and I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone. By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed—by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm.

This description is highly figurative. John is

describing what he saw in the best language available to him at the time he lived. He knew nothing, had never even dreamed, of gunpowder or firearms.

There never has been an army of 200 million horsemen; either this is a Greek expression denoting vast numbers in general, or it includes all the soldiers and their supporters in all the armies of the Ottoman empire during the four centuries of its power. As verses 15 and 16 go together, this would seem to be the meaning. It figuratively denotes vast hordes.

It is here that history records the use of gunpower for the first time in human history. To John the sight of fierce Muslim warriors on horseback shooting their guns would look as if the "fire, smoke, and brimstone" issued out of the horses' mouths.

Until A.D. 1453, the walls of Constantinople had resisted attack by many armies. Thus the empire had survived. But now the Ottoman Turks

used the newly-invented massive gunpowder cannon to demolish those once-impregnable walls. Thus was razed the last defence of the proud Roman Empire. The old thousand-year civilization was now in ruins.

But at last in 1840 selfishness and corruption had paralyzed the once-proud Muslim empire. In 1838 there was war between the Sultans of Turkey and Egypt, with Egypt victorious. In 1840, four powerful European nations interfered for fear that Egypt might take the Sultan's throne. In his distress, the weak Sultan voluntarily surrendered his independence into the hands of these four European nations, leaving them to manage his affairs. He sent an envoy to the ruler of Egypt to deliver a message from the four European nations, which message placed his affairs in their hands.

The date? It was on the 11th of August, 1840, that this messenger arrived in Alexandria, and on that day placed the message in the hands of the ruler of Egypt!

On that day, the Sultan had meekly surrendered his independence in the same way that Murad II of the Eastern Roman Empire had surrendered his to the Sultan in 1449. The once vast Ottoman Empire is today splintered into the Balkan states. And since that day, Muslim Turkey in Europe has existed only at the sufferance and with the support of the European nations.

When this fact became known, multitudes of Bible readers were convinced of the correctness of the year-day principle of interpreting Bible prophecy. What seemed to be unimportant history in reality provided the most convincing proof that the books of Daniel and the Revelation are inspired of God, and present a message of the utmost importance to all the inhabitants of the earth today. An apparently insignificant event became a key in unlocking Revelation.

Modern researchers and scholars may differ on precise details of the exact chronology that marked the beginning and the end of this 391 year period. The amazing thing is that the principal events of

the long Ottoman history are so accurately foretold. As we saw in Daniel, the response of history is like one half of a broken stone fitting the other. Many infidels were converted in the 1840's by witnessing the fulfilment of this prophecy which sustained the year-day principle; and the faith of untold millions of people since has been strengthened by it. Surely the Lord directed in those events as a fulfillment of prophecy.

**Revelation 9:20, 21:** But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; and they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Although the hordes of Muslims were let loose on the apostate Christian world, people refused to learn the lesson of repentance. European history during the time of the six trumpets is an almost unbroken record of vanity, arrogance, pride, and

cruelty. Thus we see that God permits "woes" to come upon the world to bring sinners to their senses, and to lead them to respond to the gospel. Woe after woe comes; yet still they love their sin. Will the "third woe" lead them to repentance? When that time comes, it will be too late!

## Chapter 10

# John Eats a Little Book

**Revelation 10:1-4:** And I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow was on his head, his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire. And he had a little book open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars. And when he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices. Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them."

We can know very definitely when this angel comes down with this message, for it is all included in the sounding of the sixth trumpet. The seventh trumpet does not sound until we come to chapter 11, verse 15. Therefore it is clear from what we learn in chapter 9 that the things described

in this chapter must take place after 1840.

The exact fulfilment of the prophecy of the downfall of the Ottoman Empire on that date greatly strengthened the faith of those who over a hundred years ago were interested in the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation. The foundations on which they built their prophetic faith remain solid for us.

This other "angel" symbolizes the proclamation of a great message to the world, based on the teachings of a "little book" which John especially notices is now "open." What book can this be? We read that an angel long before had told the prophet Daniel to "shut up the words, and seal the book" which he had written, "until the time of the end" (Daniel 12:4).

We ask, when did the "time of the end" come? The answer is: at the close of the Dark Ages of persecution. We find the evidence in Daniel: "Some of these of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the

time of the end" (Daniel 11:35). This time of persecution was enforced by the apostate church or churches during the 1260 years of papal supremacy, which period ended in A.D. 1798 (see Revelation 12:6, 14; 13:5). Thus it seems clear that the "little book" which was opened after 1798 was the Book of Daniel. It suddenly captured the attention of Christians everywhere.

Again, we see how accurately the prophecy was fulfilled. In many parts of the world a deep interest in the study of the books of Daniel and Revelation was then awakened. Not only was the British and Foreign Bible Society established in 1804 to publish the Bible to the world, but people everywhere began to sense the meaning of its prophecies. They discovered the amazing truth that they were living in the "time of the end," and that the coming of Jesus was near at hand.

The message was proclaimed on "sea and land," with a "loud voice, as when a lion roars." The attention of the world was arrested, and people everywhere listened in amazement to the message

that Jesus was soon coming, possibly even in their lifetime. Great tents were purchased which were pitched in city after city, where hundreds and thousands gathered to hear the solemn message from the Book of Daniel that the 2,300-year prophecy of Daniel 8:14 was to be fulfilled in 1844. Not since the days of the apostles had the Holy Spirit worked so mightily in turning thousands to repentance.

Especially after 1831 when William Miller began to preach, the message went forth with unusual power. Men even sold their farms and houses to obtain money with which to print tracts and books to circulate the message. Youth and little children were converted. This was the time of the "Philadelphia church" (see Revelation 3:7-12).

But there was something mysterious which God's people were not to understand completely at that time. What the seven thunders uttered, John was not to write. The church was to learn it only by experience. A test of their faith was to be involved:

**Revelation 10:5-7:** And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his hand to heaven and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer, but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets."

The word translated "delay" is kronos in the Greek, which means measured time. Why did the angel declare so confidently that "there should be delay [kronos] no longer"? Because the Book of Daniel said so!

In Daniel 8:14 we read the prophecy which reveals when "delay" should be no longer. The work of God should begin its final phase in the earth: "For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed." A day in prophecy representing a year (see Ezekiel 4:6; Numbers 14:34), these 2,300 years began in 457 B.C., and

ended in A.D. 1844.

It was this prophecy which a few years before 1844 was opened to the understanding of many Bible students in different parts of the world. The amazing fulfilment of the prophecy concerning the Turkish Empire on August 11, 1840 gave great impetus to the preaching, and convinced thousands of its truthfulness.

The word "time" must be understood as meaning prophetic time of the Bible, and not the continued passage of time in human history. This is clear from verse 11 of our chapter, where the prophet John (representing the church) is told that a great world-wide work is yet to be accomplished for "many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings." This must be done after the close of the last prophetic time prophecy in A.D. 1844. But there can be no measured prophetic time after the close of the 2300 year prophecy. From then on, the end is always imminent, its time dependent on the preparation of God's people.

The angel proclaims mightily, "In the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished." What is the "mystery of God"?

In Ephesians 1:9, 10, Paul tells us that God's purpose to gather together all things in Christ is the "mystery of His will." In chapter 3:3, 6 he adds that this "mystery" includes the gathering of the Gentiles as "fellow heirs, . . . and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel." The "mystery of God" is therefore God's great work of gathering out of a sinful world His true people, in preparation for the second coming of Christ.

Paul explains the "mystery" even more clearly in Colossians 1:27, 28: "The riches of the glory of this mystery" is "Christ in you, the hope of glory . . . that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." The great battle between Christ and Satan can never be finished until Christ has a people who follow Him "wherever He goes," who are "without fault before the throne of God" (Revelation 14:4, 5).

Because this work has not yet been fully accomplished, sin, sorrow, and death still curse this unhappy world. "For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now." "For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God." (Romans 8:22, 19) This glorious work of making a people "perfect in Christ Jesus" is a result of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, spoken of by the angel to Daniel.

This is the greatest, most important work being done in the world today. It is a priceless privilege to cooperate with Christ in His great final work of salvation.

But those who love the Bible must learn a bitter lesson:

**Revelation 10:8-11:** Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, "Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the

earth." And I went to the angel and said to him, "Give me the little book." And he said to me, "Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth." And I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. And he said to me, "You must prophesy again about [before, KJV] many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings."

There was something very "bitter" about this experience for the church. John in vision shares it with them. Those who proclaimed that the sanctuary should be "cleansed" in 1844 understood the time prophecy correctly. There was no mistake in their reckoning of the beginning or the end of the 2,300 years. But they did not understand what is the true meaning of the event, the "cleansing of the sanctuary." They thought this referred to the second coming of Christ to this earth at the close of human history. They did not know the true Bible teaching of the sanctuary in heaven, where Christ is our High Priest. They did not know "the cleansing

of the sanctuary" requires a different phase of the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, as prefigured in the types and symbols of the Old Testament sanctuary.

Of old, the Hebrew high priest entered the typical Most Holy apartment on the Day of Atonement, to "cleanse" the sanctuary. Truly, a most important cosmic event was to take place in 1844; but these sincere people did not understand what that antitypical event was.

To expect the second coming of Jesus and the end of sorrow, sin, and death in 1844 was an experience to the church as "sweet as honey." These people loved the Lord Jesus, as a bride loves her husband. It was a sweet and joyful thought to them that soon they would be united with their Lord Jesus Himself, nevermore to part from Him.

But Jesus did not come in 1844. Those who loved Jesus were bitterly disappointed, just as the disciples of Christ were disappointed when He was crucified on the cross and buried in the tomb. But

this great disappointment included a part of God's purpose of love for His people. They learned not to trust the opinions of men in explaining the Bible, but to search the Scriptures more carefully to know precisely what the Word teaches.

They soon learned the reason for their disappointment. The "sanctuary" to be "cleansed" is not this earth destroyed by fire, but the sanctuary in heaven where Christ had entered the second apartment to complete the final phase of His work as High Priest. Then they realized that a world-wide work was yet before them, and that they must "prophesy again" to "many people, nations, tongues, and kings."

This book published for you to read is a part of that great work which is proclaiming the message world-wide.

## Chapter 11

# The Despised Bible Wins a Great Victory

**Revelation 11:1-6:** Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city under foot for forty-two months. And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all

plagues, as often as they desire.

In John's original writing there was no chapter division between 10 and 11. Still in prophetic vision on behalf of the church, he is told to look carefully at the sanctuary of God in heaven, and to note the work of cleansing the sanctuary, which work prepares a people to meet God. Here was the secret that unlocked the mystery of their Great Disappointment.

He is not commanded to "measure" how long or how wide the temple is in meters or inches, nor to "measure" the people who worship therein as to their physical height, nor to weigh them physically on scales. He is to measure them as worshippers. An angel proclaims to all the world, "Fear God, and give glory to Him;. . . and worship Him" (Revelation 14:7).

To measure them as worshippers is therefore to measure their reverence for God and their faith in Him. To "fear God" does not mean to be afraid of Him as we would fear an enemy, but to appreciate

His forgiveness of our sins: "There is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared" (Psalm 130:4). It follows that to "fear God" is to love Him. Bad people become good not because of terror but because they appreciate what it cost the Lamb of God to forgive their badness. When a person knows he is a sinner, and when he knows his sins are forgiven by the blood of our High Priest who is in the heavenly sanctuary, then he cannot help loving God. A person with such a "faith which works through love" (Galatians 5:6) will "measure up" as a worshipper.

To love God is to keep His commandments, because "love is the fulfillment of the law" (see 1 John 5:3; Romans 13:10). In verse 19 of Revelation 11, John tells us that God's people see in the heavenly sanctuary "the ark of His covenant." The law of God, traced in stone by the finger of God, is placed inside that ark as witness that God's law of love is the foundation of His government.

"The court which is outside" evidently refers to the vast host of those who do not worship the Lord,

who are not to be judged at this time. Only God's people are to be "measured" in this judgment. They are the key to the impasse in world history.

The two time periods mentioned here are obviously one and the same. Counting 30 days to a month, as Bible writers reckoned, the 42 months are the same as the 1260 days. This is the same period of time as the 1260 days of Revelation 12:6, the 42 months of 13:5, and the 3 1/2 years or "times" of Daniel 7:25, Daniel 12:7, and Revelation 12:14. Evidently God wants to be sure we understand this time period, or He would not repeat it so often! This is the time of persecution of the church between A.D. 538 and 1798.

During these "Dark Ages" the Bible was not wholly unknown to the people, but it was pretty well hidden and buried beneath a mass of superstition and tradition. The "two witnesses" are understood to be the Old and New Testaments, because the real purpose of Holy Scripture is to give witness to the mercy and truth of God. Our Lord commands us, "Search the scriptures. ... So

are they which testify [bear witness] of Me" (John 5:39).

The prophet Zechariah saw how the Bible gives the world its only true light. He saw a vision of two olive trees supplying oil through golden pipes to the golden lamps (see Zechariah 4:2-6, 11-14). It is the Bible, in the Old and New Testaments, which has supplied light to all the nations. "The entrance of Your words gives light." "Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:130, 105).

During all these past ages of persecution and oppression of the truth, God has not permitted enemies of the gospel completely to destroy His word. In the days of Elijah, the word of the Lord shut the heavens for three and a half years, that no rain should fall; the same word again opened the heavens that rain might come to restore the ruined land. That same word will bring the "seven last plagues" on the earth (see chapter 16), and will finally create a new heaven and a new earth (see chapter 21).

**Revelation 11:7-10:** Now when they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three and a half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

Who is the "beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit"? In Bible prophecy, a beast is a symbol of a kingdom or a nation. The "bottomless pit" is that place which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, "where also our Lord was crucified." This is an evil power which does not acknowledge God.

The king of Egypt said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice? ... I do not know the Lord" (Exodus 5:2). Here is what we call atheism, the idea that there is no God. As we view Europe at the close of the 1260 years of the Dark Ages, do we see an atheistic power arise suddenly? History says that France indeed made itself such a nation at that precise time. For the first time in history, a responsible government proclaimed itself atheistic. This was the root whence has come Communist atheism as we know it today. Stalin found his inspiration here.

A frightful revolution overturned the kingdom of France, and directed its bloody energies against what the people had come to suppose was Christianity. This misunderstanding was not really the people's fault, because the popular church in France had misrepresented the religion of Jesus. Losing all patience with the hypocrisy of those who professed to represent God, the revolutionary French government by an act of the legislature abolished the gospel and the Bible throughout France. They proclaimed that the nation

acknowledged no God. Thus the "two witnesses," the Old and New Testaments, were "slain" throughout France. In one city, the people tied a Bible to the tail of an ass and dragged it through the streets.

At the same time, the legislature formally established fornication by law. The French adopted as a motto, "crush the wretch," meaning, Christ.

And surely Christ suffered in the person of His saints in France! In one night some years before the Revolution, 50,000 people who believed the Bible and trusted in Christ for eternal salvation were cruelly and treacherously murdered in the St. Bartholomew Massacre. Indeed, France was the place "where also our Lord was crucified."

This was the spirit of the "bottomless pit." In the Revolution, Bibles were gathered and burned; the seven-day week was abolished, and every tenth day designated as a day of profane rest. Death was said to be an eternal sleep. A prostitute was called the "goddess of reason," and publicly worshipped.

Other Christian nations were horrified by what France was doing, and condemned these evil things. Christians of other nations were aroused to indignation and to prayer. But many worldly people and infidels rejoiced because of this terrible French Revolution. France had silenced the reproving voice of God's two witnesses. The Word of truth lay dead in her streets, and those who hated the restrictions and the requirements of God's law were jubilant. Crowds publicly defied the King of Heaven. There is a lesson here of interest to the world, including modern atheists.

Was France blessed because of its war on the Bible, and its hatred of Christ? Rome had succeeded in persuading the French rulers to persecute and banish the Christians who loved the Bible. An informed writer says: "Century after century, men of principle and integrity, men of intellectual acuteness and moral strength, who had the courage to avow their convictions, and the faith to suffer for the truth—for centuries these men toiled as slaves in the galleys [ships], perished at

the stake, or rotted in dungeon cells. Thousands upon thousands found safety in flight; and this continued for two hundred and fifty years after the opening of the Reformation.

"Scarcely was there a generation of Frenchmen during that long period that did not witness the disciples of the gospel fleeing before the insane fury of the persecutor, and carrying with them the intelligence, the arts, the industry, the order, in which, as a rule, they pre-eminently excelled, to enrich the country in which they found an asylum. And in proportion as they replenished other countries with these good gifts, did they empty their own of them. If all that was now driven away had been retained in France; if, during these three hundred years, the skill of the exiles had been cultivating her soil; if, during these three hundred years, . . . their creative genius and intellectual power had been enriching her literature and cultivating her science; if their wisdom had been guiding her councils, their bravery fighting her battles, their equity framing her laws, and the religion of the Bible strengthening the intellect and

governing the conscience of her people, what a glory would at this day have encompassed France! What a great, prosperous, and happy country—a pattern to the nations—would she have been!

"But a blind and inexorable bigotry chased from her soil every teacher of virtue, every champion of order, every honest defender of the throne. ... At last the ruin of the state was complete. ..."

"The gospel would have brought to France the solution of these political and social problems that baffled the skill of her clergy, her king, and her legislators, and finally plunged the nation into anarchy and ruin. But under the domination of Rome, the people had lost the Saviour's blessed lessons of self-sacrifice and unselfish love. They had been led away from the practice of self-denial for the good of others. The rich had found no rebuke for their oppression of the poor, the poor no help for their servitude and degradation. The selfishness of the wealthy and powerful grew more and more apparent and oppressive. . . . The rich

wronged the poor, and the poor hated the rich. Deprived of the Bible, and abandoned to the teachings of bigotry and selfishness, the people were shrouded in ignorance and superstition, and sunken in vice, so that they were wholly unfitted for self-government. . . .

"Unhappy France reaped in blood the harvest she had sown. On the very spot where the first martyrs to the Protestant faith were burned in the sixteenth century, the first victims were guillotined in the eighteenth. In repelling the gospel, which would have brought her healing, France had opened the door to infidelity and ruin. When the restraints of God's law were cast aside, it was found that the laws of man were inadequate to hold in check the powerful tides of human passion; and the nation swept on to revolt and anarchy. The war against the Bible inaugurated an era which stands in the world's history as 'The Reign of Terror.' Peace and happiness were banished from the homes and hearts of men. No one was secure. He who triumphed today was suspected, condemned tomorrow. Violence and lust held undisputed sway.

"King, clergy, and nobles were compelled to submit to the atrocities of an excited and maddened people. Their thirst for vengeance was only stimulated by the execution of the king; and those who had decreed his death, soon followed him to the scaffold. A general slaughter of all suspected of hostility to the Revolution was determined. The prisons were crowded, at one time containing more than two hundred thousand captives. The cities of the kingdom were filled with scenes of horror. . . . And to add to the general misery, the nation became involved in a prolonged and devastating war with the great powers of Europe. 'The country was nearly bankrupt, the armies were clamouring for arrears of pay, the Parisians were starving, the provinces were laid waste by brigands, and civilization was almost extinguished in anarchy and licence.' ... A day of retribution at last had come. . . . 'The gutters ran foaming with blood into the [River] Seine. . . . The daily wagonloads of victims were carried to their doom through the streets of Paris.. . . Great flocks of crows and kites feasted on naked corpses, twined together in

hideous embraces. No mercy was shown to sex or age. The number of young lads and of girls of seventeen who were murdered by that execrable government, is to be reckoned by hundreds."

The "three days and a half" as prophetic time are three and one half literal years. It is difficult to prove the precise dates during which the "reign of terror" against Bible truth continued, but some have thought it to be from November 1793 to June 1797. Then the government realized what a horrible mistake they had made and religion was again tolerated. Now the "two witnesses" are to be honored:

**Revelation 11:11-14:** Now after the three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand men were killed, and

the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly.

Whereas Voltaire and other infidels had predicted that the Bible would soon be a forgotten book in all the world, we now see how the Scriptures "ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them." The Scriptures have indeed been exalted since the French Revolution. In 1804 the British and Foreign Bible Society was organized for the translation and publication of the Scriptures in many languages; in 1816 the American Bible Society was organized for the same purpose; and by now the Bible has been translated into well over 1,000 languages and dialects and is published worldwide.

The "great earthquake," in which "the tenth of the city fell," is understood to refer to how the French Revolution cut France's support of the papacy although France had been the original kingdom which established the political power of the papacy. "When France publicly rejected God

and set aside the Bible, wicked men and spirits of darkness exulted in their attainment of the object so long desired—a kingdom free from the restraints of the law of God. . . . But the transgression of a just and righteous law must inevitably result in misery and ruin. . . . Those who had chosen the service of rebellion were left to reap its fruits until the land was filled with crimes too horrible for pen to trace. From devastated provinces and ruined cities a terrible cry was heard, a cry of bitterest anguish. France was shaken as if by an earthquake."

God help our governments in our modern world never to forget the lesson of France!

Chapters 10 and 11 have been an interlude describing events which took place between the sounding of the sixth trumpet and the sounding of the seventh. Now John returns us to the seven trumpets series:

**Revelation 11:15-19:** Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become

the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying:

"We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty,  
The One who is and who was and who is to  
come,  
Because You have taken Your great power and  
reigned.  
The nations were angry, and Your wrath has  
come,  
And the time of the dead, that they should be  
judged,  
And that You should reward Your servants the  
prophets and the saints,  
And those who fear Your name, small and  
great,  
And should destroy those who destroy the  
earth."

Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises,

thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.

At last we come to the sounding of the seventh trumpet, during which the kingdoms of this earth are transferred to the rulership of the victorious Christ. All efforts of Satan and evil men to defeat Christ have failed.

No one doubts that today "the nations are angry." Beginning in 1848, jealousy and hatred among the nations has been the rule rather than the exception. This is especially true in our century, when millions of human beings have been slaughtered in two frightful World Wars, and other equally bloody ones. And still the hatred between nations and races continues.

A final wrath is soon to be poured out in the "seven last plagues." Thank God, those who fear His name, small and great, will receive their reward of mercy and salvation. Jesus says, "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give every one according to his work" (Revelation 22:12).

John sees the crime of those "who destroy the earth." How could he so accurately foretell the ecological crisis of our world today? Since the invention of nuclear bombs this possibility has become terrifying. The Geneva Conference for Disarmament reports that there are reserves of atomic weapons equal to 15 tons of dynamite for each person on earth.

The UN Environment Program insists that nuclear war would ruin the planet. Meanwhile, expenditure continues of a million dollars a minute for more weapons. Already man's pollution of the atmosphere has produced acid rain, which is destroying vegetation, and has damaged the ozone layer creating the "greenhouse effect".

Man has often been angry. But when God gets angry, watch out. When man ruins his beautiful planet created to be his home, God's "wrath has come." The world has never before witnessed it.

Once again, in this time of crisis John calls our

attention to the sanctuary in heaven. In the typical Hebrew sanctuary, the ark of the testament was in the second apartment, called "the Most Holy." Now we are directed to look into the Most Holy apartment of the heavenly antitypical sanctuary, where Christ is now ministering as High Priest in His closing work of atonement. Amid all the insecurity and anguish of this fear-ridden, terror-stricken world, look up into the sanctuary: there you will see your Saviour, the true Christ, ministering His blood on your behalf, to wash you and cleanse you from all sin, that you might be ready to enter into His kingdom.

There He is working to "finish" the "mystery of God," to gather out of "every kindred, nation, tongue, and people," a "remnant" of believers. He will "present every one perfect in Christ Jesus," in whose mouth is "found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God" (Colossians 1:28; Revelation 14:5). Not the "lightnings, voices, and thunderings" of earth should now engage our attention; let us rather fix our attention on Christ the Saviour and what He is now doing in His

temple.

## Chapter 12

# Who Is the Woman Clothed With the Sun?

**Revelation 12:1, 2:** Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.

Nothing in the world can be more beautiful than a woman. When John saw this lovely lady in vision, he was astonished. Her clothing was the most glorious that ever a woman wore—the sparkling brilliance of sunlight itself. Compared to it, the world's most fashionable dress designs look like rags. Who is she?

Man's love for woman is a sweet and tender experience. God has put this love in our hearts so that we might more easily understand the love that Jesus feels for His people. "Husbands, love your

wives just as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for her" (Ephesians 5:25). No man will give himself for a woman unless he finds in her that perfect "other half" of his own being. That is how Jesus feels toward His church.

All through the Bible, a lovely woman is a symbol of God's church. Jeremiah says, "I have likened the daughter of Zion [the church] to a lovely and delicate woman" (Jeremiah 6:2). Paul likens the church to "a chaste virgin" presented to Christ in marriage (2 Corinthians 11:2). The Song of Solomon suddenly comes to life with meaning for us when we consider that it is a song of Christ to His bride, the church.

Therefore a pure woman in Bible prophecy is the true church; and a harlot would be the fallen, apostate church (see Revelation 17:1-6).

The "moon under her feet" is aptly a picture of the old Jewish era passing away as the Christian church arises in glory. The Mosaic ordinances reflected the light of the gospel as the moon

reflects the light of the sun. The "garland of twelve stars" is usually understood to be the ministry of the twelve apostles who established the church.

**Revelation 12:3-5:** And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. And she bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and to His throne.

As is usual, the Bible does not leave us to guess what its symbols mean. Verse 9 clearly says that the "great dragon" is "the Devil, and Satan, who deceives the whole world." But he is not permitted to come to us in person to deceive us or to harm us. He must find someone who will serve as his "hand" to do what he wants done. He always works through human agents. When he sought to destroy the infant Jesus as soon as He was born, whom did

he use for this wicked purpose?

All who have read the story in Matthew 2 know that it was the Roman-appointed Herod the Great, King of Judea. Matthew records that Roman soldiers under Herod's command marched into Bethlehem to kill all the baby boys two years old or under. The "dragon" therefore did his work through pagan Rome. John wants us to recognize that the "seven heads and ten horns" mean that this "dragon" is the same power as the "beast" we see in Daniel 7:7, 8, which also has ten horns. Many threads tie the Revelation to Daniel. Each one explains the other.

All through His life on earth, Jesus felt the force of the "dragon's" wrath against Him. Well He knew that a greater power than pagan Rome lay behind it! History is a great war between Christ and Satan.

Strangely enough, it was in heaven that the war began. Satan was not always the devil, the deceiver. He was "the anointed cherub who covers;

and I [the Lord] established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of the fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you. . . . Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty." Ezekiel 28:14-17. Satan gloried in the highest position held by any created being in God's great universe. Respected and praised by all the myriads of angels, he enjoyed the name of Lucifer, "the morning star."

But sin began with him while he knelt before the altar of God. He desired to be what he was not, to enjoy a higher level of being than he had been created to have. "How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! . . . For you have said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars [angels—compare Jude verses 6 and 13] of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:12-14).

Lucifer loved self—that is why he used the word "I" so much. He also loved to climb up higher than his fellows—that is why he boasted of exalting himself so much. How many of us have indulged the same foolish desire ever since Lucifer invented "the mystery of iniquity," a new principle—love of self.

It was no small thing for the highest created being in heaven to start a rebellion. So serious was the problem started by Lucifer's charges against God that one-third of the angel host ("a third of the stars of heaven") joined in the rebellion. These are now evil angels, who seek to perform Satan's commands, and are ever becoming more masterful in the arts of deception. It is they who pretend to be the spirits of the dead and who work miracles in order to lead men and women and youth to join them in rebellion against God (see 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; Isaiah 8:19, 20; Ecclesiastes 9:5).

**Revelation 12:6:** Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two

hundred and sixty days.

When Jesus was taken up to God and to His throne, He left His people behind. Christ had defeated Satan, and the defeat made Satan angry. Knowing that Jesus loved His church as His dearest possession, Satan turned to vent his rage upon her, hoping either to seduce her away from her loyalty to Christ, or failing this, to destroy her.

He succeeded in seducing many unconverted people who professed to follow Christ, to depart from Him. But he could not seduce those who believed the word of Christ. He therefore determined to try to destroy them.

Thus it was that for 1260 years the true church of Christ was forced to "flee" into the "wilderness" for refuge. From all parts of Europe, persecuted people came to seek this refuge among the mountains of northern Italy and southern France. Some of them were known as Waldenses. Their homes and churches can still be seen in their valleys walled in by the mighty snow-crowned

mountains that kept out the invaders who time and again would have destroyed them were it not for the protecting hand of God.

These were the faithful Christians who preserved the Bible for us, often at the cost of their lives. Throughout the Dark Ages they continued to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, though burdened by persecution and poverty. They were the true church "in the wilderness."

Before we look further at the true church during her centuries of trouble, John takes us back to learn more about the war in heaven:

**Revelation 12:7-10:** And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven,

"Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down."

From reading Jude 9 and Daniel 12:1, we learn that Michael is Christ Himself. The name means, "Who is like God?" Christ is called God in Hebrews 1:8. He alone can bear the name of "Michael."

People are surprised to learn in these verses that all wars had their beginning in heaven; and that Christ Himself fought the first one! But we are not to understand that the war was fought with guns or swords. Rather, it was fought with ideas—good against evil.

Satan charged God with being cruel and unfair to His creatures. He accused Him of trying to keep them down, to prevent them from enjoying themselves. He said that the law of God was a yoke of bondage, and that everyone should be free to do

just as he pleased, to serve himself, to get ahead through selfishness. Satan boasted that he could do a better job than God was doing, and that his rule would bring greater happiness. Christ maintained that the law of unselfish love is the only way that leads to life and happiness.

As we have seen, one-third of the angels joined Satan in rebellion. Two-thirds remained loyal to God. Thus Satan was "cast out" of heaven.

The Bible says that he tempted our first parents. Eve was deceived (1 Timothy 2:13, 14), and Adam joined her in obeying the suggestions of Satan (see Genesis 3:1-19). Thus they actually welcomed Satan "into the earth," their perfect, happy home. From that time Satan usurped the place of "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31).

But not yet was Satan confined to this earth. In the book of Job we read of how he used to be admitted to the parliament of heaven, doubtless as the "ruler of this world" in place of Adam who would have attended as one of the "sons of God" if

he had not sold out his position to Satan (see Job 1:6-12). Satan was a lone rebel in the meeting. The other "sons of God" were watching to see how his plans were working out on the earth. Could Satan indeed produce a better government than God? Were his ideas better than God's law? Sin was something new that they had never seen before. Was it something good?

If a lingering question or doubt remained in their minds, it was settled once and for all when they saw Satan direct his servants to crucify Christ upon the cross. Now, at last, sin had blossomed forth and produced its ripened fruit. Christ, having taken our human flesh and nature, had revealed the unselfish love of God and Satan hated Him for it, acting out his hatred by murdering Him. If it had been in his power to do so, he would have murdered the Father also, because Jesus said, "He who hates Me hates My Father also" (John 15:23). "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15).

When the "sons of God" of the unfallen

universe, with all the loyal angels, saw what Satan's plan meant, they at last realized clearly what sin is. Then it was that Satan was finally "cast out," and the voice spoke from heaven, "Now salvation has come, ... for the accuser of our brethren has been cast down." As Jesus went to His cross, this happy assurance sustained Him. "Now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all ... to Myself" (John 12:31, 32). Not only people, but angels and unfallen beings would also be drawn to Him by His cross. The whole universe would again be reconciled to God. When he crucified the Lord, Satan was overstepping himself, defeating his own cause!

But not only did Christ defeat Satan. Christ's followers, weak and sinful as they are, also defeat him. With the "eye of faith" they see Jesus crucified. His love constrains them to deny self, and to live for their Redeemer. Satan's cruelty cannot turn them from their loyalty. He finds himself being beaten on all sides! Note the next verse:

**Revelation 12:11:** And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.

It is sin to believe that Satan is too strong for Christ, or too strong for you if you believe in Christ. Those who "love their lives," who love self, who cherish earthly security, are voting in favor of Satan's government. They may not realize that they are doing this, but every refusal to bear the cross on which self is crucified with Christ becomes a decision for Satan and his rebellion. If one believes the gospel, he believes the "good news" that Satan is defeated and is "cast out."

Oh, how many people today cringe under the power of Satan, refusing to believe that he is defeated once and for all. "Satan is too strong for me!" they wail. They might as well cry out at noontime, "The midnight darkness is so dense I cannot see!" Only a person who is blind to the "Sun of righteousness" (Malachi 4:2) will live a

moment longer under Satan's cruel darkness. Let us "walk at liberty," and let us sing this song: "O Lord, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, and the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds" (Psalm 119:45; 116:16).

**Revelation 12:12-16:** "Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time." Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.

Why didn't the Lord destroy Satan as soon as he crucified Christ, and put an end to the great war there and then? Why must he be given another chance, as it were, even if it is "a short time"?

There are three reasons:

(1) You and I could never be really happy unless we shared Christ's victory. "To him who overcomes . . . even as I also overcame" (Revelation 3:21) is a precious promise of joyous fellowship with the Son of God. If you didn't have a battle to fight yourself, you would be only a redeemed vegetable.

(2) It is only fair that Satan be given a chance to prove whether or not you and I really choose to "walk at liberty," or whether we are content with the bondage and darkness of sin and rebellion.

(3) God's people are to become the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem, and are to be part of the beautiful "woman" whom Jesus loves as His Bride. A man who is highly educated wants a wife who

has also been educated. Then they will enjoy each other's company. Jesus was "educated" by His experience in our flesh when He defeated Satan. His church is "educated" by sharing the "fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Philippians 3:10).

The "time, times, and half a time" is the Bible way of saying three years and a half. Counting twelve months to a year, this is the same total of 42 months (compare Revelation 13:5, where the same period of time is brought to view). Counting thirty days to a month, 42 months is 1260 days, the same period of time we found in verse 6 of this chapter. As we shall see in the next chapter, this is the same time period which began in A.D. 538 and ended in A.D. 1798.

The "water" which the "serpent spewed out like a flood" may refer to the armies that many times marched against God's people during those dark years of persecution. It may also refer to the many cleverly invented false doctrines which had their origin with Satan. Falsehood is Satan's best tool.

In either case, "the earth helped the woman" in that the persecuted church was saved from destruction. The armies of her enemies were turned back; the false doctrines were overcome by truth proclaimed by men of God such as Luther, Wesley, and others.

Does God have a true church in the world today? Out of all the hundreds of different kinds of churches, is there one that God claims as "the woman" of Revelation 12?

There are sincere people who say that God does not have one true church, that all churches are equally true, and that all paths lead to heaven, regardless of what one believes. But the Bible says that there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all," and "one body" which is "the church" (see Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 Corinthians 12:12, 28). Every true follower of Jesus is seeking to find that true church of which Jesus Himself is the Head.

A good lock cannot be picked by a thief. It will open only at the insertion of its true key which has been made especially to fit that lock. Revelation 12:17 provides us with the key for finding the true church in the world today. Try that key in many churches, and it will not fit. Their doors will not open to God's key. Only one church can be the "lock" that this "key" fits perfectly. Let us note the next verse:

**Revelation 12:17:** And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Let us carefully examine the four characteristics of the true church as found in this verse:

(1) It is a church that the devil hates. We can join most churches and the devil will not oppose us. No sacrifice is required. No cross needs to be borne. There is no opposition from the world.

(2) It teaches the same doctrines as the woman "clothed with the sun in verse 1 of this chapter. In other words, it has the same faith and teachings as the church of the apostles. The true church is one throughout history. The name that a certain church has adopted now may mean nothing more than a coat of paint. Look beneath the surface, and test the teachings and practice with the church which Christ and His apostles founded. If we see a train enter a tunnel, we will see the same train emerge at the other end of the tunnel. The church of the apostles went into the "tunnel" at the beginning of the 1260 years of persecution, as it fled into the "wilderness." When it emerges again in full view before the world, it will be the same church in spirit and in faith as it was originally. It holds the same body of truth through the centuries.

The word translated as "the rest of her offspring" is rendered as "the remnant" in the King James Version. It means the last part of the descendants of the apostolic church—Christ's true followers in the very end of time. If we buy a piece of cloth from the beginning of a bolt, it will have a

certain pattern and color. If we later should buy the "remnant" of that bolt of cloth, it will have exactly the same pattern and color as the first piece we bought. Many churches have added so many teachings borrowed from paganism and traditions of men that the apostles would never be able to recognize the "pattern" today.

(3) The true church "keeps the commandments of God." James tells us that if we break one of the ten commandments, we are guilty of breaking them all (James 2:10-12). Therefore, it cannot truthfully be said that any church is keeping the commandments of God if it keeps only nine of them. Almost all popular churches today continue to transgress the fourth commandment, which says: "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work" (Exodus 20:8-11).

All the crime, selfishness and infidelity that poison modern life are the direct result of violating the ten commandments of God. The Sabbath stands as the seal of that holy law.

If that one commandment (or any other) is violated, no true obedience of the other nine remains possible, for the motive is no longer love for God and loyalty to Him. Keeping the true Sabbath is just as important as keeping the other commandments that God wrote with His own finger. And to keep the commandments of God is to love as God loves. "Love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10). God's true church is therefore a church which is filled with the love of Christ, supreme love for God, and Christlike love for our neighbor.

(4) The true church has "the testimony of Jesus." John explains this for us as being "the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:10). "God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets" (1 Corinthians 12:28). The gift of prophecy did not die out with the apostles. Jesus gave this gift to His church when "He ascended on high" (see Ephesians 4:8, 11), and the gift was to remain with the church through all time right up to the second coming of Christ, because it was given "for the

equipping of the saints till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man" (verses 12-14).

Paul told the Corinthian church that "the testimony of Christ" would remain with them until "the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ," "to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:4-8). The "spirit of prophecy" manifested to the "remnant church" is a wonderful gift, but it does not take the place of the Bible, nor does it contradict any Bible teachings. "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets" (1 Corinthians 14:32).

Each one who yields himself to follow Christ will be led to the true church. "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock, and one shepherd" (John 10:16).

## Chapter 13

# When All the World Will Marvel at the "Beast"

**Revelation 13:1:** Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name.

Step by step God's prophet is revealing Christ to us. Though we may not see His beautiful form with our eyes, we can trace His footsteps in the affairs of history, including our own current history. This chapter presents truth that is intensely interesting, and vitally important. Since "no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Peter 1:12), we know that the Bible itself will interpret the various symbols here brought to view. Let us permit the Bible to make itself plain to us.

In Bible prophecy the sea means "peoples,

multitudes, nations, and tongues" (Revelation 17:15). A beast, likewise, is a symbol of a nation, or a kingdom (see Daniel 7:17, 23). And as a beast's head is what governs him, so the seven heads of this beast would mean its different forms of government, seven being the number of completeness. The ten horns are explained clearly by Daniel himself: they are the ten nations that would arise out of the fourth great world empire, Rome (Daniel 7:24).

But this kingdom in Revelation 13 cannot be an ordinary political nation, because John saw written upon his heads "a blasphemous name." The dictionary defines blasphemy as "indignity offered to God in words, writing, or signs; also, act of claiming attributes or prerogatives of deity." Blasphemy has to do with religion, not politics. Therefore the "beast" is a religious power, that is, a church which has grown out of a kingdom.

As to which religious power or church it is, the following verses will make it clear. The divine Author of Revelation will not leave us uninformed:

**Revelation 13:2:** Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.

A little key can open a big lock, because it is made to fit. The books of Daniel and the Revelation fit together as a lock and key, each one interpreting the other.

For example, Daniel describes four great beasts he saw in vision—a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a strange one more like a dragon than anything else. The lion was a symbol of Babylon, rich and majestic; the bear was Medo-Persia, cruel and bloodthirsty; the leopard was Greece, clever and swift.

—Daniel identifies these three by name (Daniel 2:38; 8:20, 21); and the fourth beast, all-powerful, was a symbol of the empire which followed Grecia, the pagan Roman Empire.

The "beast" we see in this chapter combines the characteristics of the four preceding world empires. He receives his "power, his throne, and great authority" from the "dragon," a symbol of the Roman Empire, while back of pagan Rome stood "the devil, and Satan."

But a new thing happened to the Roman Empire which had never before happened in history: midstream in its history it changed its official religion, and its character changed from a political to a religious power. As the emperors became weaker, they moved their capital from Rome to Constantinople.

This left an empty place which the Bishop of Rome was quick to fill. Soon he began to lord it over the other bishops, and to take to himself the prestige which the former emperors of Rome had exclusively enjoyed. This is how the "dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority." One writer says, "Out of the ruins of political Rome, arose the great moral Empire in the 'giant

form' of the Roman Church."

The identification of papal Rome as the "beast" in this chapter becomes more certain as we read further the words of the prophet John:

**Revelation 13:3-7:** I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast. So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. And it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.

Again the prophet Daniel will help us to unlock

the mystery of this prophecy. In Daniel 7 he describes the "little horn" power identically with this "beast." Note the similarities between Daniel's "little horn" and John's "beast":

1. The "little horn" blasphemes God. "He shall speak pompous words against the most High" (Daniel 7:25).

2. The "little horn" also makes "war with the saints" (Daniel 7:21).

3. Power was given to the "little horn" to continue for three years and a half (Daniel 7:25), or a total of 42 months ( $3 \frac{1}{2} \times 12 = 42$ ). This same period of time is referred to in Revelation 12:6 as 1260 days, each day in prophecy representing a year, as we have seen previously.

Now let us inquire if the papacy fulfils these points laid down in the Bible:

1. Does the papacy blaspheme God, or assume the titles and authority of God? When Jesus

forgave people their sins, the Jews accused Him of blasphemy, saying, "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" Luke 5:21. A Roman Catholic writer says, "The priest holds the place of the Saviour Himself, who, by saying, 'Ego te absolvo' [Latin, I absolve thee], he absolves from sin. . . . To pardon a single sin requires all the omnipotence of God. . . . But what only God can do by His omnipotence, the priest can also do by saying, 'Ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis.'" "

The same writer says further: "But our wonder should be far greater when we find that in obedience to the words of His priests— HOC EST CORPUS MEUM (Latin, This is My body)— God Himself descends on the altar, that He comes wherever they call Him. . . . They move Him as they please, from one place to another; they may, if they wish, shut Him up in the tabernacle, or expose Him on the altar, or carry Him outside the church; they may, if they choose, eat His flesh, and give Him for the food of others. . . . The priest may, in a certain manner, be called the creator of his Creator."

A Roman Catholic encyclopaedia says: "The pope is of so great dignity and so exalted that he is not a mere man, but as it were God, and the Vicar of God. . . . The Pope is as it were God on earth." As late as 1894 Pope Leo XIII said: "We hold on this earth the place of God Almighty."

2. Did the papacy "make war with the saints ... to overcome them"? During the time when the papacy was supreme in Europe, historians tell us that millions of people were put to death because they would not acknowledge the papacy as God's true church on earth. Pope Martin V (A.D. 1417-1431) said to the king of Poland regarding the Christian followers of John Huss: "Make it a duty to exterminate the Hussites. Remember that these impious persons dare to proclaim the principles of liberty."

"They hold that Christ came on earth to abolish slavery; they call the people to liberty. . . . Burn, massacre, make deserts everywhere, for nothing could be more agreeable to God, or more useful to

the cause of kings, than the extermination of the Hussites."

3. How long did the papacy continue in supreme power in Europe? The Roman Emperor Justinian made a decree that the bishop of Rome, the pope, should be the head of all the churches. This decree went into effect in the year A.D. 538 when the Ostrogoths were driven from Rome. In that year began the temporal power of the papacy, which continued unabated through the struggles of 1260 years, until the fateful year A.D. 1798 when the French general, Berthier, entered Rome, proclaimed a republic, and took the pope prisoner. Many people thought the papacy was dead.

But not so! We shall see in a few moments how this "deadly wound" is being "healed" in our time. During the years of its supremacy, "all the world marveled" after the papacy. The great mass of mankind trembled before its haughty arrogance. Life in Europe in the Dark Ages revolved around the Roman Catholic Church. Superstition and fear held the people captive until a measure of relief

came in the great Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century.

**Revelation 13:8-10:** And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If anyone has an ear, let him hear. He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

As we saw in chapter 11, the French had come to believe that the Roman Catholic Church was their enemy. Napoleon's army marched into Italy, determined to put an end to the papacy. Berthier took the pope a prisoner in 1798. Thus the papacy which had led others into captivity was itself led into captivity.

But the world has largely forgotten the bitter lessons taught in the Dark Ages. It has forgotten that the noontide of the papacy was the world's midnight. Today the papacy is making a

remarkable comeback in world power. Through all the new nations of the Third World and in the Western nations, her tremendous rising power is plain to be seen. In many countries she controls education. She is building lofty and massive cathedrals, opening her arms to welcome millions of converts to her faith.

And other churches outside the Roman fold are looking to her for leadership. The Rt. Rev. John Moorman, Anglican leader, said that if there is to be a final unity among the churches, "there will have to be a central head of the church, and that head will clearly have to be the bishop of Rome." With the threat of world destruction if a nuclear war breaks out, men everywhere sense the need for unity and a renewal of spiritual life. They look upon the Roman Church as the only possible leader. Although the Roman Church once was wounded, the wound is being healed today.

Pope John Paul II's great popularity was seen in his unprecedented visits to America, visits "impossible" two or three decades earlier. A

commission of Anglican and Roman Catholic theologians recommend the union of the two churches, to heal their 450 year separation. This plan would unite 760 million Roman Catholics and 65 million Anglicans, including 3 million American Episcopalians. Even Baptist Dr. Billy Graham has said that he sees the Pope of Rome as the one who should head up a union of all the churches.

The time is very near when "all who dwell on the earth will worship him," except those whose names are "written in the Book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." But as we see the great masses turning toward Rome, including Protestant churches which separated from her during and after the Reformation, we must not imagine that everyone is following in that direction. God has a people who will remain loyal to His Word. According to Revelation eventually there will be only two classes on earth: those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life, and those who yield to "the beast" of chapter 13.

In recognizing the application of these prophecies, we honor the many self-sacrificing and sincere adherents of the Roman Catholic Church. It is neither fault-finding nor bigotry to recognize the plain truth of God's word in the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. The prophecies identify the papacy as a system. It is the outworking in history of a principle that operates in every human heart—the natural desire for exaltation and power over our fellows.

Many non-Catholics are equally as prone to compromising with the world as were the early Catholic fathers. Eusebius said: "In order to render Christianity more attractive to the pagan Gentiles, the priests adopted the exterior vestments and ornaments used in the pagan cult." This policy of compromise and prostitution of truth has also produced the impotent confusion pervading modern Protestantism.

A Catholic writer said recently: "It has often been charged—usually by the narrower sort of

Protestant controversialist—that Catholicism is overlaid with many pagan incrustations. Catholicism, it must be added, is ready to accept the accusation—and even to make it her boast ... It regards the process as willingness to absorb the true, the good and the beautiful, wherever they may be found, and to indulge all harmless human propensities. The great god Pan is not really dead; he is baptized." (Theodore Maynard, *The Story of American Catholicism*, pp. 37, 38; imprimatur, [then] Archbishop Francis J. Spellman).

In considering these facts of history, this book assumes no holier-than-thou attitude. We all need the grace of Christ to overcome this natural proclivity in all our hearts. History is our story, but for the grace of God. And God's purpose of grace is to let us see into our own hearts through the enlightenment of history.

"He who has an ear, let him hear," warns the prophet John. Now is the time to yield ourselves fully to the Lamb who was slain for us. The crisis that is fast developing will test to the utmost the

patience and faith of the saints, but God will have a people who stand loyal to His truth in the face of the opposition of the world.

**Revelation 13:11-14:** Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.

We have already seen how the "sea" represents large populations of people. The "earth" must therefore be the opposite—an uninhabited part of the world out of which some remarkable new nation was to "come up" about the time that the

papacy was being led into captivity at the time of its "deadly wound" in A.D. 1798.

What great nation was rising to prominence and power about the time when the 1260 years of papal supremacy ended in 1798? There was only one prominent nation arising at that time in a largely uninhabited part of the world, and that was the United States of America, which declared its independence in 1776, and which was experiencing its early beginnings by 1798. This nation arose in the New World, a vast continent of largely uninhabited land. The rise of this great republic from colonial beginnings is one of the most phenomenal in the history of nations. It has "two horns like a lamb," suggesting the youthful character of the young America, and its twin principles of civil and religious liberty which helped so much to develop the nation into a prosperous world power.

Unlike the horns on the other beasts or kingdoms, these two horns have no crowns upon them. The founders of America determined to learn

a lesson from Europe's past history, by creating a new nation without a king.

But what a pity that its character changes from that of a "lamb" to a "dragon" who "exercises all the power of the first beast." Here we see that America will yet become a persecuting power, and will reach out to grasp the hand of the papacy. So dose will be the union between the two that he will cause "the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed."

The healing of the papacy's deadly wound has been a gradual one; but the most significant step was taken on February 11, 1929, when Premier Mussolini restored to the papacy its temporal power, and the pope again became a king. An official witnessing the signing of the agreement between Mussolini and the papacy said, "We are now witnessing the signing of this document. As the ink flows from these pens it is healing the wound of fifty-nine years."

Meanwhile, the American nation continues to grow in power. The spirit of all the peoples of the world somehow comes to the surface there. Not yet has that nation taken the step that the Book of Revelation says it will take. Not yet has it enforced "worship" of the "beast." But we may know that the time is near.

The "image to the beast" is a copy of the system that made the papacy supreme in the Dark Ages. That system was a union of church and civil government, so that the church had power to enforce its dogmas through the arms of the magistrates and police.

Since the time of the "deadly wound" of the papacy, the nations of the world have generally broken away from any form of domination by the church. Men everywhere have believed that civil government should be free from religious control. They have awakened to realize the truth of Jesus' command that church and state should be separate: "Render to Caesar [the government] the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's"

(Matthew 22:21). The American Constitution guarantees the complete separation of church and state, enabling the people to obey this command of Jesus.

But the Book of Revelation says that the time is coming when America will repudiate the principles which have brought her success, and that she will induce other nations to follow her example. Then will come a revival of the oppression and persecution that was so common during the Dark Ages.

Does this seem unlikely in this modern age of "freedom" and light? Humanity's boasted progress is only skin-deep if underneath human nature is still evil. As wars, bloodshed, riots, drug abuse, crime and natural disasters increase, the world's rulers will naturally be at their wits' end to know what to do. Very easily they can turn in crisis to the Roman Church for moral and spiritual leadership. The fulfilment of these closing verses of this chapter is only a step away from us:

**Revelation 13:15-17:** He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. And he causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

The "mark of the beast" is not a physical mark made by a hot brand, or a daub of paint, nor is it a peculiar type of dress. It is a religious mark, a sign of a certain attitude of heart. What could this mark be which is so certain to bring such terrible disaster on its receivers?

In chapter seven we have noted that the seal of God is the holy Sabbath of the Lord. The keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath distinguishes those designated by John as "saints." The "mark of the beast" is the counterfeit of God's true mark, subtly designed to deceive as many people as possible. Many millions of people are in grave danger of

receiving the mark of the beast while they presume that they are safe in following the majority in religious practice.

Daniel 7:25 reveals how the papacy has attempted to change God's law by the substitution of another day of rest for the day chosen by God. It would not be fair to accuse the papacy of this crime unless she herself were willing to admit its truth. Catholic authorities openly admit that they alone are responsible for the change of God's holy Sabbath. Here are a few examples:

**Question:** Have you any other way of proving that the [Roman] church has power to institute festivals of precept?

**Answer:** Had she not such power, she could not have done that in which all modern religionists agree with her—she could not have substituted the observance of Sunday the first day of the week, for the observance of Saturday the seventh day, a change for which there is no Scriptural authority.

Says Leo J. Trese, an apologist for the Roman church in "The Faith Explained" (Notre Dame: Fides Publishers, 1971), p. 243:

Nothing is said in the Bible about a change of the Lord's day from Saturday to Sunday. We know of the change only from the tradition of the [Catholic] Church—a fact handed down to us from earliest times by the living voice of the [Catholic] Church. That is why we find so illogical the attitude of many non-Catholics, who say that they will believe nothing unless they can find it in the Bible and yet will continue to keep Sunday as the Lord's day on the say-so of the Catholic Church.

The mark of the beast has not yet been enforced. Not yet has the world been brought to its final decision. We must take our stand on one side or the other—either to stand wholly on the side of Christ in obedience to His commandments, receiving His holy seal; or on the side of rebellion against the truth of God's Word.

Some who have heard and who know the truth

may yield to the threat of poverty when they are forbidden to buy or sell unless they have the mark of the beast. Although they know better, they may choose to bow to apostasy. Such will receive the mark of the beast in their hands.

There are others who sincerely believe a lie, and presume that the majority must be right in spite of the clear declarations of Holy Scripture. Such may yet receive the mark in their foreheads.

Miracles will be performed in order to convince people that they must go against their conscience in accepting the "mark of the beast." "He performs great signs so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do" (Revelation 13:13,14).

With many uninformed people, miracles are a final and convincing test of God's favor. They have never realized that Satan and his angels have power to work miracles, just as the heathen magicians in

Egypt in Moses' day counterfeited the genuine miracles which Moses performed by God's power (see Exodus 7:10-12). They are sincerely not aware that the Bible says that Satan will work miracles: "No marvel; for Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Miracles are not a test that God has sent one with a message. The test is whether or not the messenger teaches the full truth of God. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

Genuine miracles wrought by God are performed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Satan has been studying for thousands of years how he may prepare to deceive the world by a false spirit that will pretend to be the Holy Spirit, but which will lead away from the true Christ and His word. Already the teachings of Spiritualism have penetrated into many of the popular churches, and thousands are receiving a strange spirit which they suppose is the Holy Spirit, but which is really a

wonder-working spirit sent from the enemy. Unless we are rooted and grounded in the truths of God's Word, we shall be swept away by the overwhelming delusions of these last days.

The Lord has added in this chapter more truth that confirms our faith. It is as if He knows that this truth revealed in this chapter is a great surprise to many people. Just in case there may be some lingering doubt whether they have truly found the beast and his mark, He will give the number of the beast so that all can be as sure who he is, as though he had a passport or tax number. Let us note the last verse:

**Revelation 13:18:** Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666.

The Romans of John's day spoke and wrote Latin, which the papacy still uses today. This language used the same Roman characters which we use in writing, but it also employed the same

characters for numbers (I is 1, II is 2, V is 5, L is 50, C is 100, et cetera). Adding up all the numeral letters in one's name or title in Roman times equalled his "number," a common practice among Latin-speaking people. The Roman Catholic Bible (Douay version) has a note on this verse: "Six hundred sixty-six. The numerical letters of his name shall make up this number."

"What is the official title or name that the papacy claims as his by right? For centuries the title of the Pope of Rome has been understood to be Vicarius Filii Dei, which means "Vicar of the Son of God." In view of the fact that the Son of God Himself declared the Holy Spirit to be His Vicar on earth (John 14:16-18), this title appears rather presumptuous. These Latin words are found in a Latin document which for hundreds of years the papacy claimed was written by the Emperor Constantine, granting the papacy temporal authority in Rome, and supreme spiritual authority over all the churches. Even after the document was proved to be a forgery, the papacy still maintained that God had given to the popes the position and

title of "Vicar of the Son of God," Christ's personal representative here on earth.

Cardinal Henry Edward Manning said of this ancient document and title:

The manner of conceiving and of speaking, in those simple ages, so represented the providential fact of the donation of God. God gave the Vicar of His Son [the Pope] the possession of the city in which thirty of his predecessors had sealed their testimony with their blood. The donation of Constantine consisted in the simple providential fact... an impulse from God Himself.

Thus a modern cardinal upholds this ancient Latin document and title as an expression of God's will and appointment. The papacy clearly claims to be the Vicar of the Son of God, "Vicarius Filii Dei," in her own language. Note the "number of his name":

$$\begin{aligned}
&V = 5 \\
&I = 1 \\
&C = 100 \\
&A = 0 \\
&R = 0 \\
&I = 1 \\
&U = 5 \text{ (U is the same as V)} \\
&S = 0 \\
&F = 0 \\
&I = 1 \\
&L = 50 \\
&I = 1 \\
&I = 1 \\
&D = 500 \\
&E = 0 \\
&I = 1
\end{aligned}$$

---

TOTAL: 666

As the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" Christ is still suffering today, and He will continue to suffer just so long as there is suffering in this world.

No one who appreciates the sacrifice of Jesus can be willing to enjoy the pleasures of this world if it involves disloyalty to Him. Who would dare to try to change God's law? Strange to say, man has tried to do it! Notice carefully the changes that have been made without God's permission.

## **The Law of God As Given By the Lord**

### **I**

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

### **II**

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

### III

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

### IV

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

### V

Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

### VI

Thou shalt not kill.

## VII

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

## VIII

Thou shalt not steal.

## IX

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

## X

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

(Exodus 20:3-7, KJV)

## **As Changed By Man**

### I

I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt not have strange gods before me.

II

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.

III

Remember thou keep holy the Sabbath day.

IV

Honour thy father and thy mother.

V

Thou shalt not kill.

VI

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

VII

Thou shalt not steal.

VIII

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

IX

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife.

X

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods.

(Peter Giermann, *The Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine*, 1946 Ed., pages 37, 38.)

## Chapter 14

# Heaven Sends a Fearful Warning to the World

**Revelation 14:1:** Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads.

In our previous chapter, the people of God find themselves in a great trial. The whole world yields to the "mark of the beast," either from terror at his threats, or because they have deliberately chosen to "believe a lie" (see 2 Thessalonians 2:11).

But in the midst of all this confusion God has a true people who stand firm as a rock for Bible truth. A decree is made that all who refuse the "mark of the beast" must be killed. Will God abandon those who remain true to Him?

Never! The Lamb is their protection. They say,

"I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around" (Psalm 3:6).

"The Father's name" must represent His character of pure, unselfish love. The Lord promised Moses that He would "proclaim the name of the Lord" before him. "And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty" (Exodus 33:19; 34:6, 7). When God's people learn to love like God loves, they will have His name in their foreheads.

Will only 144,000 people be saved? Evidently this is a symbolic number. Bible numbering may be different from ours. When Jesus fed the multitude by the miracle of the loaves and fishes, "those who had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children" (Matthew 14:21).

Jesus would not make the mistake of inviting everyone, saying, "Come. . . . And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely," and then find He did not have enough room for those who responded! "The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out," He promises (see John 6:37). Believe Him and "come," but don't delay.

**Revelation 14:2-5:** And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. And they sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being first-fruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile, for they are without fault before the throne of God.

Who are these people? Several facts about them can give us an idea:

(1) They are "redeemed from among men," God's remnant delivered from the last generation of people on earth who will see Jesus come. They are the group Paul speaks of when he says, "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them [that is, the resurrected saints] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). It would seem therefore that they are people who will not experience death.

(2) They have gained a new experience not known by any previous generation of God's people. Only by virtue of this new experience can they be said to sing "a new song" which "no man could learn" but they "who were redeemed from the earth." They have not only faced trials greater than any other generation have faced; they have also developed a faultless, mature faith in Christ which has enabled them to triumph gloriously.

(3) They have opened their hearts fully to

receive Christ's salvation from sin, so that it can be truthfully said of them, "They are without fault before the throne of God" (verse 5). They were born in sin just as everybody else in the world has been born in sin; yet they have permitted the great High Priest to cleanse their hearts of all evil. They have become completely, absolutely honest, because "in their mouth was found no deceit." What a wonderful work Jesus has done for them! In their experience will be demonstrated the truth that Jesus "is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God by Him" (Hebrews 7:25). In their characters will be seen the practical results of Christ's closing work in the heavenly sanctuary.

(4) "These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins." In the Bible, a woman is a symbol of a church; a pure woman, the true church; a defiled woman, an apostate church. In Revelation 18:4 we read God's call from heaven to His saints in "Babylon" who are scattered in all churches and religions around the world: "Come out of her, My people, lest you share in her sins." The 144,000 are the people who have responded to

that call. Christ likens those who await His second coming to a group of "virgins" (Matthew 25:1).

(5) "These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes." This means to follow Jesus wherever He leads us, not to lag behind and not to rush ahead, but to keep up with His leading. "Whatever He says to you, do it," said Mary the mother of Jesus (John 2:5). The 144,000 are a group who have joyfully received all the counsel and guidance that Christ has sent to His people. They have submitted to the Holy Spirit so that He could work a complete reformation in their lives. Even their habits of eating and drinking, dressing, amusements, their thoughts and purposes, have been brought into harmony with Jesus' example.

**Revelation 14:6, 7:** Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—and to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and

earth, the sea and springs of waters."

The word "angel" means one carrying a message. This new vision shows the world-wide extent of God's last message of grace to be sent to all people before Jesus comes. God loves everyone alike; how, then, could He neglect to send the message to even one nation or tribe?

We are not to expect to see a literal angel flying above the tree-tops or in the clouds. The prophecy calls for a world-wide movement, or work, which proclaims to the world this message. The message may come through the words of a living preacher, through a sermon on the radio, through a tract some friend places in our hands, or even through the pages of this book. It is God's message to the world! One may possibly hear it only once.

God's last message to the world is nothing new, but is the "everlasting gospel" that has been preached to the world since the days of Adam. But there is a further development of truth for the world's last generation; rays of light from all past

ages are gathered together and focused on the needs of human hearts in earth's last days. The "lost sheep," secular man, has strayed further from the fold than ever before, and the Shepherd must go further to find him.

As we have seen in previous chapters, the hour of God's judgment began with the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, which event followed the end of the 2,300 years of Daniel 8:14. The first angel's message therefore began during the great spiritual awakening of 1831-44, when multitudes of earnest followers of Jesus proclaimed to the world the message that "the hour of God's judgment" was come.

This message calls upon us to worship God as the Creator. And oh, how people need this message now! Many suppose that the earth just "happened" to become what it is through millions of years of "evolution." They assume that we human beings have come up slowly from lower forms of life such as insects and animals. This would mean that human beings are still animals, and it would follow

that the law of the jungle, "the survival of the fittest," must prevail. This philosophy underlies the horrors of Nazism and the Holocaust.

If we search as much as we can, we shall find no genuine scientific proof for evolution. It is a theory, not a proved fact. If "God is love," does He deceive? When He says, "It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves" (Psalm 100:3), is He trying to mislead us? We may not be able to "prove" that the Bible record of creation is true, either, but why not trust the Word of God? Not one of us knows first-hand what happened to him during the first year or two of his life. We have to trust our parents. The "first angel" calls on us to trust our Father's word about our beginning. God has two "books" for us to study: the written Bible, and the "book of nature." Both agree.

For example, the Bible tells the history of the Flood of Noah's time when all human and animal life perished except the life which was preserved in the ark. See Genesis 6, 7, 8. Some scientists today repeat the words that the apostle Peter said they

would be saying, "Since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." But Peter says that "they willfully forget" the truth of the flood (2 Peter 3:3-5). The "book of nature" which all can see for themselves records the evidence of the great Flood which covered the whole world and buried sea creatures, even on the tops of the mountains. Complete animals that once lived in mild, tropical climates, have been dug up in the frozen Arctic North, with green grass still in their stomachs. Only the Biblical flood and climatic changes that followed can explain such mysteries.

However perplexing we may think is the scientific evidence for evolution or creation, the grandest evidence for the truth of the Bible is agape. That love revealed at the cross totally discredits godless evolution and validates all of God's revelation. No scientist or philosopher can account for the origin of agape except that cross on a lonely hill outside of Jerusalem.

The sign of God's creative power is the holy

Sabbath which He made, blessed, and sanctified in the beginning. Because many Christian churches have turned their backs on the true Sabbath of the Lord, the world has lost sight of its Creator. In the nineteenth century, the churches of Germany led the way in higher criticism and theistic evolution. It is more than a coincidence that they could offer no effective antidote to Nazism. God's message of Creation is not out of date; it is present truth (see 2 Peter 1:12).

As soon as one receives the "first angel's message," and his attention is directed to the "everlasting gospel" brought by the angel messenger, he wants to keep the Sabbath because he loves and worships his Creator and Redeemer.

**Revelation 14:8-11:** And another angel followed, saying, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his

hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength 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. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."

What is "Babylon"? There is no great city today by that name. John uses the name as a symbol of a vast organization or spiritual "city" on earth which has proudly exalted itself above God, but which is now "fallen" in that its teachings are seen to be error.

The beginning of the ancient city of Babylon was Babel, which name means "confusion" (see Genesis 11:9). It was there that people after Noah's day rebelled against God. "The Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth" (Genesis 11:9).

In the Book of Revelation the name Babylon is used six times, referring to all false religion. It is indeed "confusion." Babylon has made all nations "drink" of her false doctrines. Professing to teach God's truth, she has taught the traditions and fables of men. The result: the nations have become "drunk."

Why did Nazism take root, requiring World War II to eradicate it? Why do nations even now fight unnecessary wars, and waste huge sums of money on armaments that would not be needed if we would live according to God's commandments? Through centuries of darkness that followed the rejection of the gospel, humanity has lost the way of wisdom. And in rejecting the first angel's message calling upon the world to worship the Creator and keep His Sabbath and to prepare for the hour of God's judgment, Babylon has again deceived the nations. God will hold her accountable!

False doctrines are the "wine" that Babylon

gives the nations to drink. Examples are: the false doctrine that God is a cruel tyrant who torments the lost in eternal flames; the idea that the dead are still alive and conscious; the idea that Christ did not exist from eternity before His birth as a baby in Bethlehem; the keeping of the first day of the week as the Lord's Day instead of the seventh day which God blessed and sanctified; building faith around the love of self instead of the love of Christ so that fear becomes the greatest motivation in such false religion. These and similar falsehoods make the nations "drunk," confusing both leaders and people. Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

The "third angel's message" is "present truth," the most solemn warning in the Bible. No other message is to follow. The whole world will be brought to decide for or against the cross of Christ. All will be brought to the place where the Jews and Romans were when they crucified the Lord of glory. Churches which once rejoiced in the light of truth become "fallen" when they reject further truth which brings a special duty for today.

"Crucify Him" will be the heart-cry of multitudes who choose to persecute Him anew in the person of His brethren here on earth. Jesus regards hatred against "the least of these My brethren" as directed against Himself (see Matthew 25:40; Luke 10:16). This will be the real issue when the "mark of the beast" is enforced. Calvary will be repeated on a world-wide scale.

As we learned in chapter 13, the "mark of the beast" will exalt Sunday in place of the observance of the true Sabbath which is blessed and sanctified by God. Those who refuse to receive the "mark of the beast" are in the minority. They have to endure the scorn and opposition of relatives and friends. Sometimes they have to lose a precious job because of their observance of the Sabbath. But all the hardships they are called upon to bear are nothing compared to the blessed assurance of God's favor on them. But please note: no one as yet has received the mark of the beast. Not yet have the final issues been made plain to everyone. The Lord has many faithful people observing the false

sabbath in ignorance, and they will yet be enlightened.

The issue is not that one day is better than another outwardly, but of loyalty to God.

The appeal made by the "beast" ultimately zeroes in on the love of self. Those who choose to die to self and bear the cross with Christ will gain the victory over the "beast" and his "image" and his "mark." The "mark of the beast" is opposed to the cross of Christ; and the true Sabbath of the Lord thus becomes the sign of bearing the cross.

Is God cruel to "torment" these people who receive the "mark of the beast"? The word in the language John used means to test or try in order to show up defects. When these who have rejected the seal of God come into the "presence" of the holy angels and of the "Lamb," when they see Christ crucified by them anew and realize what they have actually done, they will see all their sin and rebellion exposed for what it has always been. They will see how their whole life has resulted in

only hating and crucifying the Son of God. Such self-knowledge will surely be torment enough to them! The text does not say that God will torment them; He is not a sadist. Their remorse will be torment enough.

In the day of final judgment, every lost soul will understand the nature of his own rejection of truth. The cross will be presented, and its real bearing will be seen by every mind that has been blinded by transgression. Before the vision of Calvary with its mysterious Victim, sinners will stand condemned.

**Revelation 14:12, 13:** Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

John heard an angel proclaim words that single out God's true people on earth. Of all the many

denominations and religions on earth, God acknowledges as His "saints" only those people who keep His commandments through the genuine faith of Jesus. But they are not seeking to keep the commandments in their own strength, neither are they trusting in their obedience to gain for them a place in the kingdom of God. The faith of Jesus is their sole motivation. He is their pattern and example. They are a Christ-centered people. They rejoice in salvation by His grace. They know that "love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10). Christ is both their Substitute and Example.

Many who have clung to the hope of Jesus' soon coming have had to go into the grave to rest awhile. They are "blessed" in that henceforth there is laid up for them a crown of righteousness (see 2 Timothy 4:7, 8). It is better to die in Christ than to live without Him. Satan will always slink away in defeat when you and I tell him, "I choose rather to die and be buried than to do what I know is wrong; God help me!"

There will be no further message of mercy sent

to the guilty inhabitants of the earth, because these three angels' messages are followed immediately by the second coming of the Lord Jesus in the clouds of heaven:

**Revelation 14:14-20:** And I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So He who sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped. Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe." So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath

of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.

There are two ways in which "the harvest of the earth is ripe":

(1) Those who have chosen to believe in Christ have grown in character until they reflect the image of Jesus as beautifully as a mirror reflects the brightness of the sun. "They are without fault before the throne of God." Verse 5.

(2) Those who have chosen to reject the Saviour's love have filled up the cup of their iniquity until they have abandoned themselves to rebellion against God. In the person of God's saints they have sought again to murder Christ, and have brought upon themselves by their hatred of God's truth the same condemnation that came upon those who crucified Christ. They have become "ripe" for judgment. The Lord forgave those who crucified Him the first time. But when the deed is repeated

with full knowledge and inflicted on Christ's followers, then comes "the wrath of the Lamb."

Consider how deep is that river of blood that flows from the "winepress of the wrath of God" in the last day.

**A Prayer:** Lord, forgive us for wondering sometimes if You might be dead, or if You cared about us in this world of confusion and darkness. As we have read this chapter in Revelation, we are awakened to see that You are indeed working night and day in all the world to save people from that terrible fate of crucifying Christ again. Thank You, Lord, for the gospel in the three angel's messages of Revelation 14. It is good news that You have risked everything to redeem us from the awful fate of rebellion against Your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## Chapter 15

# When It Will Be Too Late to Be Saved

**Revelation 15:1-3:** Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete. And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying:

"Great and marvelous are Your works,  
Lord God Almighty!  
Just and true are Your ways, O King of the  
saints!"

Now the world's "harvest" is ended. For long ages God has shown mercy to earth's guilty

inhabitants. But this longsuffering and patience are only a measure of the terrible extent of His wrath once it bursts forth unmingled with mercy. But not until the world finally turns its back on the grace of God can these plagues begin to fall.

So long have we been used to enjoying the mercy of God that we find it hard to imagine what will happen once that shelter is taken away. The final wrath will be as irresistible as the swirling waters of a giant dam pouring forth from broken walls that once held back the flood. As wars, riots, storms, earth-quakes and other disasters have occasionally disturbed the calm of our lives we have had a little taste of what is to come. But until now, mercy has always been mixed with wrath. When the seven last plagues come, they will be different, for there will be no mercy mixed with them.

John shows us that there will be one group of people who will not need to drink of the wrath of God in these plagues. They have followed the Lamb "wherever He goes," and like Christ have

preferred to die rather than to join in rebellion against God. They stand on God's great parade-ground, the "sea of glass" before His throne (see also Revelation 4:6). They are a demonstration of His power to save. These are the 144,000 whom we met in chapter 14.

Some of them have once belonged to the great apostasy itself, for they have gained the victory over the "beast"; others have been gathered out from the great fallen churches, for they have gained the victory over the "image" to the beast (see chapter 13, 14, 15); all have gotten the victory over the "mark of the beast" because they were willing to lose friends, money, and business, even life itself, rather than to disobey the commandments of God. Still others have gained the victory over "the number of his name," the very hierarchy of the "beast." As the "everlasting gospel" is proclaimed to all the world in the last great crisis, men and women highly placed as bishops, cardinals, and nuns, will gladly yield themselves to Christ to follow Him all the way.

These 144,000 will have gone through the deepest experience of trial of any human beings on the earth with the exception of Christ Himself. Their joy of victory will be like that of Moses when God brought him and his people safely through the Red Sea (see Exodus 15:1-19). Because they have known the fellowship of Christ in His sufferings, they are privileged to sing the "song of the Lamb." Do not imagine that your personal suffering has no good purpose; believe that Christ is close to you and understands.

**Revelation 15:4-8:** Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested.

After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of

the wrath of God who lives forever and ever. The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

As we write these lines, the time has not yet fully come when all the judgments of the Lord are made "manifest." There are still mysteries we cannot understand. But the one who has learned to trust in Him can know by faith that eventually "all nations shall come and worship" before the Lord. Even Satan will at last bow his knee before Christ, and acknowledge that God has been just in the great battle with evil.

Again John leads us into the heavenly sanctuary where Christ is our High Priest working day and night to give repentance to every sinner. Before it is possible for the seven last plagues to be poured out, He must cease His work as Saviour and High Priest. That is why John says, "No one was able to enter the temple, till the seven plagues . . . were completed." Christ is still a man, the God-

man. So long as He bears the world's guilt in the sanctuary, full retribution cannot fall on a guilty world.

Just before Jesus leaves the sanctuary to make way for the pouring out of the plagues, He pauses to pronounce this decree: "He who is unjust let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still" (Revelation 22:11).

From that moment on, it is too late to seek forgiveness, too late to confess. Even those who gain the victory over the beast, his image, and his mark, must now live without a High Priest or Intercessor to plead for them. The reason is simple: The ministry of Christ as High Priest has at that time come to an end. Now He will lay aside His priestly garments and clothe Himself with the robes of the King of kings and Lord of lords. That is why it will then be too late for the confession and forgiveness of sin, too late for our robes to be washed in the blood of the Lamb. Now is the time

for that blessed work!

"Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above, are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort, they must be conquerors in the battle with evil. While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God's people upon earth. When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing. . . . Then the church which our Lord at His coming is to receive to Himself will be a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."

## Chapter 16

# The Ruin Brought by the Seven Last Plagues

**Revelation 16:1, 2:** Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth." So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.

Never has the Lord been forced to give a command that He dislikes so much to give as this one! He "is longsuffering toward us not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). He said long ago, "I have no pleasure in the death of the one who dies, says the Lord God. Therefore turn and live" (Ezekiel 18:32). If He could have His way He would save everybody: "God our Savior . . . desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the

truth" (2 Timothy 2:3, 4). "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:2). The only reason anyone will ever suffer the seven last plagues is that he has resisted and rejected the salvation that the Lord has already given him, because "God has dealt to each one a measure of faith" (Romans 12:3).

But painful as this work is to God, He has no choice but to let it come. "The winepress is full, the vats overflow—for their wickedness is great" (Joel 3:13).

It will not be "the blood of the grape" that flows from this great winepress, but the blood of wickedness. Such a terrible sight has not yet been seen on this earth. These literal plagues have not yet fallen, because they are declared to be the "last plagues." They cannot fall until the world has been warned, and the work of salvation has closed. And that work cannot close so long as there is one human soul somewhere who will yet respond to the Good News of the grace of Christ.

So long as the Holy Spirit has been working in the earth, judgments and disasters have brought many people to think and to repent. It has been true up until this time, as Isaiah says, that "when Your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isaiah 26:9). But before the last plagues can be poured out, the Holy Spirit will have been driven finally from the earth by the rejection of the wicked. It will then be demonstrated that troubles will not bring to repentance those who have rejected God's goodness, for only "the goodness of God leads you to repentance" (Romans 2:4). Revelation says that Satan will then have full control over the inhabitants of the earth. "They did not repent" (Revelation 16:9).

It is during the pouring out of these plagues that the warnings against worshiping the beast and his image and receiving his mark will be fulfilled, and the rejectors of God's grace will "have no rest day or night" (Revelation 14:10, 11). These plagues will bring the downfall of Babylon in "one day,"

which in harmony with the year-day principle of interpreting Bible prophecy, could mean one year of literal time.

"What would this world be like if it were not for the restraining power of the Holy Spirit. Multitudes do not realize that they owe all their security and happiness under what measure of law and order prevails, to the blessed ministry of God's Spirit in the earth. During the time of the plagues, all will see clearly that when men give themselves up to the control of Satan, they will themselves produce a hell here on earth.

The plague of grievous sores falls on those who have yielded to pressure to receive the "mark of the beast," either sincerely by having the mark in their foreheads, or insincerely by having it in their hands. But to His loyal people, the Lord gives this assurance: "You shall not be afraid of the . . . pestilence that walks in darkness. ... A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you . . . neither shall any plague come near your dwelling" (Psalm

91:5-10).

**Revelation 16:3-7:** The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died. Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters saying:

"You are righteous, O Lord,  
The One who is and who was and who is to be,  
Because You have judged these things.  
For they have shed the blood of saints and  
prophets,  
And You have given them blood to drink,  
For it is their just due."

And I heard another from the altar saying,  
"Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous  
are Your judgments."

The second and third plagues are similar; one falling on the sea, and the other on the rivers and fountains of waters, turning all of them to blood.

We are not to understand that these plagues are completely universal, else no living thing on earth could survive. But the news will travel world-wide. The wicked will have passed a decree to shed the blood of God's people (see Revelation 13:15). Although they have not been permitted actually to kill them, their desire to do so has made them guilty before God of the sin of murder (see 1 John 3:5). They have chosen to re-activate the unjust persecutions of the Dark Ages. Because they have wanted to drink the blood of God's people, the heavenly judgment decides that it is appropriate that they should now be given blood to drink.

But note God's promise to His people: "The poor and needy seek water, but there is none, their tongues fail for thirst. I the Lord will hear them; I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in desolate heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys" (Isaiah 41:1, 7, 18). The child of God "will dwell on high; his place of defence will be the fortress of rocks; bread will be given him, his water will be sure" (Isaiah 33:16).

**Revelation 16:8, 9:** Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.

In the days of Elijah, Jezebel led Israel to worship Baal, the sun-god of the Phoenicians. In justice, God permitted the sun to scorch Israel for three and a half years. A very slight change in the balance of the atmosphere can permit the sun now to afflict men with such heat, for scientists warn us that our materialistic lifestyle already threatens to deplete the ozone layer.

If any of the wicked would humble their hearts and repent under this or any plague, they would be saved; but the fact is that they will not and therefore cannot repent. Their only response is to blaspheme the name of God. People have chosen to lock themselves in to follow the way of the great rebel and his evil angels.

It would be a good thing for us to pause just here, and each one to inquire of himself: When trouble comes to me, what is my first reaction? Do I feel inclined to murmur, to resent it, and to blaspheme God? By the way in which we react to the setbacks of our daily life now we may be choosing our place during the time of the plagues. If we believe the gospel, we will remember that since "God is love" (1 John 4:8), even our present troubles do not separate us from His care. He is concerned when even a little bird falls to the ground (Matthew 10:29). Those who choose to reject this truth that "God is love" place themselves in that group who will blaspheme God during the final plagues.

**Revelation 16:10, 11:** Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. And they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

Those who suffer under the fifth plague are apparently the same people who have suffered under the first plague, in that the plague of darkness adds to the misery of those suffering still from their sores. And still the strange report is added that they "did not repent of their deeds." The throne of the beast" (see Revelation 13:2) is the city which many people consider is the "holy city."

**Revelation 16:12-16:** Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame." And they gathered them together to the

place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

The wrath of God does not stem from any petty jealousy. The world has rejected truth and chosen falsehood; it has rebelled against the very principles of life and righteousness. And now, during the plagues, the wicked prove to everyone that they have passed the boundary of rebellion, and will not in the least repent.

Under the sixth plague, they now prove themselves to be as foolish as they are also rebellious. Without exception, they trust "the spirits of demons, performing signs [miracles]." To be deceived by error is just as much a plague as to be smitten with sores. During this time only those who have watched and kept their "garments," that is, who have felt the need of Christ to "cover" them, will be secure against the threefold deceptions that come from the "beast," or Romanism, from the "false prophet," or apostate Protestantism which will join with Romanism, and from the "dragon," the symbol of paganism, or the popular religion of evil spirits. All will have tried to unite in one great

world religion. Deception led them there; deception will hold them there. Revelation here discloses to us the future of ecumenism when it is fully developed.

The glue which will finally bind together Romanism, apostate Protestantism, and non-Christian religions, will be the influence of these evil spirits who are angels who fell from heaven with Satan. They have deceived people by pretending to be the spirits of their dead friends and loved ones. The people of God who have believed the testimony of the Bible have refused to receive these deceptions, clinging to the scriptural declaration that "the dead know nothing" (See Ecclesiastes 9:10; Psalm 146:3, 4; Job 14:12-22; John 11:11-14).

Satan will finally become so expert in his arts of deception that he will give a false "holy spirit" to the religious bodies which have rejected the truth. As men have rejected the plain testimony of the Bible, they have cast off their only defence against those pretensions of evil spirits. "As

spiritualism more closely imitates the nominal Christianity of the day, it has greater power to deceive and ensnare. Satan himself is converted, after the modern order of things. He will appear in the character of an angel of light. Through the agency of Spiritualism, miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and many undeniable wonders will be performed. And as the spirits will profess faith in the Bible, and manifest respect for the institutions of the church, their work will be accepted as a manifestation of divine power."

While imagining that they are being blessed with a marvellous outpouring of God's Holy Spirit, these rejectors of truth will in reality be gathered together for the last great battle against God Himself. It is of these deceived people that Jesus spoke in His Sermon on the Mount: "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you'" (Matthew 7:22, 23).

Although the lost have been rebellious against the principles of God's truth, they have not previously dared to try actually to fight against God. They have known such a battle would be hopeless for them. But now these "spirits of demons . . . gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty,... the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon." Imagine their shock of surprise when they finally realize what they have been gathered to!

Why is the "place" called Armageddon? We can learn what it means by considering the meaning of the word, because the Hebrew people had a very striking experience that stamped its meaning on their minds for more than a thousand years.

They immediately thought of a famous battle where angels fought from heaven, showering great hailstones on the enemies of God and of His people Israel. God's people had gathered to fight for their lives against King Sisera and all his hosts in the battlefield of Megiddo in the land of Canaan. God

Himself went to battle for His people: "The kings came and fought, then the kings of Canaan fought in Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo. . . . They fought from the heavens; the stars from their courses fought against Sisera. The torrent of Kishon swept them away" (Judges 5:19-21). So marvelous was the deliverance of Israel that fathers told the story to their children for generations.

This decisive battle against Sisera at Megiddo is a type of the final battle of this world's history. Someone may say today, "I don't want to give my heart to follow the Lord Jesus in obedience, but one thing I will never do, I will never fight against God!" But unless that person decides to follow Christ, he will at last join in war against Him. He will be "gathered," propelled, motivated, under the deception of the sixth plague when Satan will present his lying wonders. There is no place to stand in between, no place of "non-alignment" in the great battle between Christ and Satan. The war is on and it must be fought to its end.

The Bible teaches that we are saved by faith,

not works. But this faith is a positive heart response to the love of God revealed at the cross where Jesus died. It "works through love" and involves the entire life of the believer (see Galatians 5:6; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21). A negative response to God's love is what the Bible calls "unbelief." Such unbelief is not merely a passive, neutral, or "not involved" attitude. No one can be neutral where God's love is revealed. Unbelief is active rejection of God's grace. The Battle of Armageddon is therefore the Bible way of speaking of the final fruit of an active rejection of grace. The veneer is at last peeled off and man's basic "enmity against God" comes out in the open (see Romans 8:7). It is the spirit of Satan in final war against Christ, but now embodied fully in humanity.

Already we see evidence of these deceptions of Satan who is presently manifesting his deceptive power through the New Age movement. As frogs jump in all directions, and one cannot tell where they will jump next, so deceptions appear here and there all over the earth. Men do not realize that the forces which are driving the nations to

Armageddon proceed from the false religions of the world. What Satan wants is to enlist every human being on earth to join with him in his hopeless war against God. Until a person rejects the truth that God sends him, he cannot be fully tricked by the lies that Satan sends him; but once he finally rejects truth, he has no defence against them.

According to Revelation, the nations of the world will pass a decree authorizing the people to put the saints to death after a certain time. But Christ, as always, identifies Himself with His persecuted people. He accepts this declaration of war against His people as a declaration of war against Himself. When mystic Babylon passes this decree, she will have made her last tragic mistake. She will be doomed forever.

The drying up of the "river Euphrates" also made the Hebrew people think of another epic event in their history. It too has meaning for us in these last days. When the kingdom of Babylon stood in its glory and pride, the Lord sent His

agent, King Cyrus, to overthrow it. But Babylon was a city with tremendous walls and battlements. How was Cyrus to get in?

God found a way to help King Cyrus to capture the city. Cyrus dried up the waters of the Euphrates River which flowed through the city of Babylon, turning the waters out of their channel into a lake nearby. Then his soldiers marched through under the brass gates of the city and captured it (See Isaiah 44:27 to 45:13). So will the power of mystic Babylon's defences "dry up." The city built on lies will collapse.

We will each one stand on one side or the other in that final battle. Judas Iscariot never imagined that his unbelief would lead him at last to make the awful mistake of betraying Christ into the hands of His enemies. He began by thinking he would only play with sin, and stop before he went too far. But he was swept away by a tide of evil until he did the terrible deed that has earned for him undying shame.

Those who join to fight against God in the battle of Armageddon will repeat the sin of Judas and the Jewish leaders who crucified Christ. Thus the whole world will judge themselves, and pass sentence on themselves. When Christ comes the second time, He will catch them in the very act of open, defiant rebellion.

**Revelation 16:17-21:** Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, every hailstone about the weight of a talent. And men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

This plague is universal. The vial of wrath is "poured out. . . into the air," and all who breathe will partake of it except those who are protected by the Lord. The battle of Armageddon is cut short by the appearance of the King of kings with the armies of heaven. The nations "will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them; for He is Lord of lords, and King of kings" (Revelation 17:14).

When Jesus hung on the cross, the wicked people who had crucified Him were about to fill up their cup of iniquity. When they had followed their sinful passions to the end of the way and murdered the Son of God, Jesus cried out, "It is finished." Now the wicked inhabitants of the earth follow their footsteps, and fill up their iniquity. The voice from the throne says, "It is done."

When one mighty angel approached the tomb of Christ on the morning of the resurrection, there was a great earthquake. Imagine the earthquake when all the angels of heaven come to this earth!

The great cities of the earth such as London, Paris, New York, Tokyo will fall. Tall buildings topple over like a pile of blocks pushed by a child. The Old Testament prophet says, "The Lord has opened His armory, and has brought forth the weapons of His indignation" (Jeremiah 50:25).

A "talent" is said to weigh about 50 pounds (nearly 23 kilograms). Although these frightfully heavy hailstones fall all over the earth, not one of the wicked will repent. They still "blasphemed God."

Many Scriptures describe these same last plagues. "The Lord also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and the earth will shake; but the Lord will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel" (Joel 3:16).

He has warned the world of the coming of this plague. "I will make justice the measuring line, and righteousness the plummet; the hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters will

overflow the hiding place" (Isaiah 28:17).

The same earthquake that shakes the cities breaks open the graves. "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). Those who had part in crucifying Christ, such as Caiaphas, must be given a special resurrection that they may see Christ coming in glory, for He promised them, "Hereafter you will see the Son of man . . . coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64). Caiaphas complained, "He has spoken blasphemy," but he must be among those who will "see Him" and mourn because of Him together with those "who pierced Him" (Revelation 1:7), Caiaphas and those who pierced the Saviour will die three times—once when they died long ago, a second time after their special resurrection, and the third and final time in the "second death" at the end of the thousand years (see chapter 20, verse 14).

But many at that time will be brought to life to experience everlasting happiness. "The Lord

Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first." Together with those who have honored the Lord, who have been living on the earth during the time of the seven last plagues, they will be "caught up ... in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air," and be with Him forever (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17). Thus will God's people be delivered. No plagues will come near their dwellings; the promise is that not a hair of their heads will perish.

A certain rich man in London wanted to help a young man who had not yet found Christ as his Saviour. One evening he said to the young man, "When Jesus comes, I will give you all my money, my house, and my fancy car!"

"Will you?" asked the delighted boy.

But that night as the boy lay in his bed thinking about the offer, he asked himself, "What good will all the money, the house, and the car do me on the day when Jesus comes?" He knelt by his bed, and

gave his heart to Christ.

Before Jesus comes, all the wealth of this world will lose its value. "In that day a man will cast away his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each for himself to worship, to the moles and bats, to go into the clefts of the rocks and into the crags of the ragged rocks, from the terror of the Lord, and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth terribly" (Isaiah 2:20, 21).

The Revelation of Jesus Christ has given us a preview of that day.

## Chapter 17

# The Mystery of the Harlot, Mother of All Evil

**Revelation 17:1-5:** Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication." So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written:

MYSTERY,

BABYLON THE GREAT,  
THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND  
OF THE ABOMINATIONS  
OF THE EARTH.

The purpose of the Book of Revelation is not to give us exact knowledge of every little detail of future events. Some things we shall not understand clearly until the final events unfold before us. Our priority now is not to try to pinpoint each item of chronology, but to proclaim the gospel of salvation. "The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever" (Deuteronomy 29:29). Jesus told His disciples the reason why He had given them some information about future events: "And now I have told you before it comes to pass, that when it does come to pass, you may believe" (John 14:29).

But there are many details in this chapter that we can know now:

(1) John is given this view of the final

judgment of Babylon as it will come during the seven last plagues. One of the angels having the vials of wrath is sent to explain it all to him. The angel reviews Babylon's historical background and links it with the prophecy of Daniel.

(2) Because in prophecy a woman is a symbol of a church, a pure woman being a pure church and an evil woman an evil church, the "harlot" pictured here is a symbol of a church which has professed to be Christian but has been untrue to Christ (See Jeremiah 6:2; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 12:1,17).

(3) Not only one church is represented by the harlot woman Babylon, but the term includes her "daughters"—churches which were once a part of her but which have come out of her. The creed of Pope Pius IV says, "I acknowledge the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church for the mother and mistress of all churches." The word "Babylon" means confusion (see remarks on Revelation 14:8). "Babylon the Great" therefore is a term God applies to the ecumenical union of all those

churches of the world which share a common apostasy from the truth of God, and which will eventually unite together for the purpose of putting pressure on the nations to join in rebellion against God's truth, and to oppress His people. It will be a re-enactment of the persecutions of the Dark Ages.

(4) The "waters" on which the harlot woman "sits" are declared in verse 15 to be "peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues." The word "multitudes" indicates that there will be great crowds of people in the last days supporting Babylon's rebellion against God. "Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision" (Joel 3:14). The majority choose the side of rebellion against God.

(5) A change has come over these multitudes of people since the second angel proclaimed his message, "Babylon is fallen... because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (Revelation 14:8). Now, the angel tells John, the "inhabitants of the earth were made

drunk" with that evil wine. The preaching of the pure, true gospel of Jesus Christ gives wisdom and good judgment to the nations. In the light of God's truth, they can make progress. But false doctrines taught by Babylon open the door to the most confusing lies sent by Satan himself. When the seven plagues begin to fall, the Holy Spirit has been driven away by those who have so long resisted Him. They are left without their normal good sense, as a drunken man does not know what he is doing.

(6) In prophecy a "beast" is a symbol of a nation or kingdom (see Daniel 7:17, 23). The seven heads and ten horns apparently identify this beast with the dragon of Revelation 12, the leopard beast of Revelation 13, and the fourth beast of Daniel 7. The nations of this world are not in themselves evil. God "has made from one blood every nation of men . . . and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord" (Acts 17:16, 27).

He approves of law and order and prosperity.

But Revelation 17 indicates that the time is coming when the nations of the world, symbolized by the scarlet-colored beast, will renounce the principle of separation of church and state which has brought progress to most nations, and support the harlot "woman." They will use the power of the state to enforce her untrue religious practices. Thus the union of church and state will be so close that the symbol of the harlot riding upon the beast will apply. This desperate measure will doubtless be taken in an effort to solve the problems of crime, drug abuse, and general corruption.

Notice the contrast in the manner of dress of the harlot "woman" and that of the true church of Christ. The "woman" of Revelation 12:1 is God's true church, and is dressed in plain white garments. Many see in the manner of dress of some religious leaders a striking similarity to the way the harlot woman arrays herself in John's vision. The followers of Christ will dress in a simple, plain manner, without gold, or silver, or jewels (see 1 Timothy 2:9,10; 1 Peter. 3:3-5).

**Revelation 17:6, 7:** And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement. But the angel said to me, "Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns."

The "blood of the saints" may be that which was shed during her 1,260 years of papal supremacy between A.D. 538 and 1798, when millions of Christ's followers were slain for their faith. Or it may be the blood which Babylon will in future seek to shed of those who refuse to receive the mark of the beast. God cannot permit His people to be slain for their faith after the seven last plagues begin, because their example as martyrs could not serve to encourage future generations as was the case with the martyrs of the past. His promise is: "The Lord is your keeper ... The Lord shall preserve you from all evil" (Psalm 121:5-7).

But even though Babylon the Great may not be

permitted actually to slay the righteous as she desires, God will hold her accountable because of her determined purpose to do so (See 1 John 3:15). John marvelled that the whole world could blindly repeat the sin of the Jews in their rejection and crucifixion of Christ in that they will seek to do to His followers what they did to Him.

**Revelation 17:8-11:** "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time. And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition."

John sees this "beast" or civil power united

with the "harlot" or apostate church. For 1,260 years, this was how Babylon controlled the nations of Europe. The angel could explain that "the beast. . . was" during the Dark Ages. But just before the end of the 1260 years a rebellion occurred against the papacy in the French Revolution. John saw that mysterious terrorism symbolized as "the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit" (Revelation 11:7). The same expression is in chapter 9:2, speaking of the cruel terrorism of the Muslim Ottoman Empire.

Terrorism has become the dark shadow that looms over much of human life today. International terrorism, whether Communist, capitalist, Irish, Muslim, Arab, Nazi, Israeli, racial or religious, thrives on secrecy and intrigue, Satan's principles. Fear is his principal motivation. Love is God's principal motivation.

The Book of Revelation lifts the curtain to show us the real origin of this modern phenomenon of terrorism: the French Revolution of the 1790's. Modern terrorism is identical in many ways:

ruthless, brutal, blasphemes religion, considers people as slaves to be exploited, and operates in secrecy.

Revelation 17 is a continuation of chapter 16, a close-up as when a TV camera zooms its lens to bring us nearer. Its climax is verse 14, the "war with the Lamb." Sad but true, apostate Christianity will at last unite with the "beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit." To reject the pure gospel of Christ is at last to cooperate with the principles of the French Revolution.

The number seven in prophecy is an emblem of completeness. The "seven kings" are probably symbolic of all the nations of the world which have supported apostasy from God. If the angel's explanation is understood to refer to the time when he explained the vision to John, we could gather that the "five . . . fallen" kingdoms were Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece. The "one is" would then be pagan Rome under which John lived contemporaneously; and the "other, not yet come" would be the papacy, which was to

continue for a time that could be considered "short" in comparison to the over-all history of the world. The "eighth" is not actually a separate kingdom, but "is of the seven," and is thus the real root and authority behind the "seven" through all history—Satan standing in the shadows behind them. He will come out of the woodwork in the last days, developing consummate skill, openly impersonating Jesus Christ.

When the future unrolls before our eyes, we shall be able better to understand the details. This harlot "woman" is the "mother" of all rebellions in the world. Our duty now is to see that our names "written in the Book of life" are retained there, so that we may be saved from the sin of "marveling" after the "beast" and the harlot "woman" and joining in their rebellion against the Lamb.

**Revelation 17:12, 13:** "And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority

to the beast."

It may be that these "ten kings" are identical to the ten divisions of the old Roman Empire which formed the kingdoms of Europe during the time of papal Rome's supremacy. This motif of the ten horns is often repeated from Daniel 7. In the time of John they had "received no kingdom as yet," but they did "receive authority as kings" together with the beast in the Dark Ages, and were united to it for much of that time. (The expression "one hour" in Greek can mean an indefinite space of time). Modern nations all over the world which are seeking "progress" are in many ways beneath the surface related to those original "ten kingdoms" of ancient Europe.

Because the inhabitants of the earth will be "drunk" with the wine of Babylon's fornication, they will have lost their good judgment and will again "give their power and authority" to Babylon, and thus commit "fornication" with her. It has not been God's plan that civil government join with the churches, to oppress the conscience.

**Revelation 17:14-18:** "These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with him are called, chosen, and faithful." And he said to me, "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth."

Here we are brought back again to the Battle of Armageddon, when the world in apostasy will actually "make war with the Lamb." The Lamb died on the cross to reconcile the world to God. The message of the New Testament is, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. ... We implore you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to

God" (2 Corinthians 5:19, 20).

But Paul says that "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Romans 8:7); and all human beings are born into the world with that same carnal mind, which means that unless we are converted, we will at last be driven by our own sinful nature to join in this war against the Lamb. The Book of Revelation is a profound disclosure of the history of the world which is encapsulated in each one of us individually.

Those whose names are written in the Book of life are those who have welcomed the new birth, and who have become the sons of God (see John 1:12, 13). They have yielded their hearts to be reconciled to God, and their enmity has been changed to reconciliation with the Lamb who died for them.

But those who have refused the cross of Christ have set themselves in a path of resistance to the Holy Spirit. This will drive them to be fully reconciled to Satan's ways, and thus to "make war

with the Lamb." Oh, what a terrible end the lost will face! The shame of it, fighting against the world's Saviour! Sin is madness.

Christ will overcome them, not in the capacity of a fierce lion, but in His character of a Lamb. He has never conquered by force. In the last great meeting with the lost when God gathers all the inhabitants of the world before His throne, He will cause to pass before their eyes as in a giant cinema the scenes of Christ's life on earth, His loving ministry, His miracles of healing, His rejection by those He came to save, and His crucifixion on the tree.

Every lost soul will then see that he has in fact taken a mysterious but very real part in the murder of the Lamb of God. The cross will be seen as an event of timeless meaning. Men and women will see that by their choice to live a life of sin, they have joined in driving the nails through His hands and feet. Each one will then understand the true nature of his life-long rebellion against the Lamb. He will see that by a life devoted to self, he has

prepared himself at last to go to war against the Lamb and against the righteous government of God.

The sight of the cross of Christ in its true meaning will bring a sharp pain of conviction to the lost. They will condemn themselves. They cannot bring themselves to look into the face of the Redeemer whom they have spurned and rejected, and will cry to the rocks and mountains to fall on them and hide them "from the face of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Revelation 6:16). The punishment that Love inflicts upon its rejecters is the most painful that there can be!

Without exception, everyone has been "called." God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). It depends on how we respond to the call as to whether we are "chosen." Christ has chosen all who will choose Him. Our "election" is not a mysterious accident which depends on the whim or fancy of God.

A wise old man said once that God is voting for us, and Satan is voting against us, and it thus depends on our own vote which way "the election" goes. Those who simply choose Christ will be enabled by His grace to be faithful to the end.

If you knew positively that a certain thief was determined tonight to break into your house and steal your goods, you would be very wise to hide yourself in the house and permit him to break in, so that you could catch him in the very act. No one would ever doubt then that the thief is guilty.

God has known for a long time that the wicked are determined to make war against Him. During the time of the seven last plagues He simply gives them the opportunity to fulfil their evil purpose, and then catches them in the act. The universe of God will never doubt God's justice, or the full guilt of the wicked. It is in this way that God has "put it into their hearts to fulfil His purpose . . . until the words of God are fulfilled."

## Chapter 18

# Babylon Falls Like a Millstone Into the Sea

**Revelation 18:1-3:** After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a habitation of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the 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 have become rich through the abundance of her luxury."

Our previous chapter closed with the story of the end of human history. We saw the world deceived by Satan and joining with him in a hopeless war against God. Will God permit the inhabitants of the world to fall into this mistake

without giving them an adequate warning? No, His love is greater than that. Something very wonderful must come first.

John sees a mighty angel come down from heaven, and as one would watch a movie on a cinema screen, he sees our world from the viewpoint of an angel in heaven. The entire world is encircled with a glorious light reflected from this special angel's message.

Never has a Good News message from heaven penetrated so thoroughly into all the world. After Christ's ascension the apostles preached to all the then-known world, and great were the results of their work (see Colossians 1:6). But the inhabited world is much larger now, and there are many times more people in it. The work of this mighty "angel" far surpasses that of the early church.

In Bible lands farmers sowed their seed in time for the "early rain" which came just at the right time to make the seed germinate. Towards the end of the season, as the crops of grain neared the time

for maturing, a second rainy season known as the "latter rain" came, and ripened the grain in time for the harvest.

The Bible likens the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles on the day of Pentecost to the early rain" of the gospel; and the "latter rain" is that which comes at the close of earth's great "harvest" (See Joel 2:23-32). That final outpouring of God's Spirit is the work of this mighty "angel."

It would not be fair for God to bring judgments on great Babylon without giving her one last warning. Heretofore it has been difficult to arrest the attention of the multitudes. But the Holy Spirit now gives God's servants power to tell the truth so clearly and forcefully that light is flashed into every human heart. Every nation, city, village, even every home, hears the warning cry. Prejudices and misunderstandings which have prevented many from considering God's last message of truth for the world are swept away; and Christ and His truth are uplifted and glorified.

The second angel's message said, "Babylon is fallen" (See Revelation 14:8). Since that message was first given, Babylon has continued to "fall" ever deeper. As she has persistently rejected truth from heaven, unclean spirits have entered into her. Not yet has her "fall" become complete; but the time is near when the startling message of this fourth mighty angel from heaven will be completely applicable.

The most effectual way a murderer could claim his victim would not be to openly feed him straight, undiluted poison; but to mix it cleverly with good food. Such is Satan's method to seduce the world.

For the superpowers in a hungry world to spend over a million dollars a minute for armaments, is crazy. Surely a visitor from another planet would think we are mad. Christ came to the world as the "Prince of peace." What creates war is not the acceptance of His message, but its rejection. And to ensure its rejection, Satan invented the confusion of Babylon. Lenin was mistaken because he did not

understand the Book of Revelation: true Christianity is not the "opiate" of the people. The difficulty is caused by its clever perversion perpetrated by "Great Babylon."

What is the "Wine of the wrath" of Babylon's false teachings? This teaching is indirectly responsible for the increase of crime and violence in the world today:

(1) Religious teachers proclaim that the law of God is either no longer binding upon men, or that it cannot be obeyed. This naturally leads to lawlessness.

(2) A man-made sabbath imported from sun-worship is exalted in place of the seventh-day Sabbath of the Lord. This also casts contempt on the law of God.

(3) With the neglect of the Sabbath, the Bible doctrine of creation is also denied by most modern churches. No longer is it believed that man was created "in the image of God" as Genesis tells us.

What follows naturally is the jungle rule of "survival of the fittest," or dog-eat-dog.

(4) Whereas the Bible clearly teaches that baptism is a symbol of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ repeated in the experience of the believer, many churches teach that sprinkling or pouring a little water on the head of an infant is sufficient. Meaningful commitment to Christ is thus undermined. This mistaken understanding of baptism hides the truth that self must be crucified and buried with Christ, and the soul rise to a radical newness of life in Christ.

(5) Seldom does one hear Christ-centered, Bible-centered sermons in the many churches today. It is no longer common practice for the professed followers of Jesus to "search the scriptures." The prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation are particularly neglected. The only truth that can effectively conquer sensuality and materialism is silenced.

(6) The precious doctrine of the sanctuary in

heaven where Christ is now ministering as our High Priest in His closing work of atonement is wholly lost sight of in the churches of Babylon. The result is that they have no knowledge of the special work that Christ is doing today. Thus they are unprepared to follow Him by faith in His work of making a people ready for His second coming.

(7) Whereas the apostles taught the followers of Christ not to "love the world, or the things in the world," pride, luxury, and display are as common in the professed churches of Christ as in the ungodly world itself. "Know this, that in the last days . . . men will be lovers of themselves, . . . lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

(8) Scripture teaches us, "Whether you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). Yet the churches of Babylon have almost entirely ceased from giving any instruction in harmony with Scripture about healthful living or control of appetite. No

distinction is made between the "clean" and "unclean" foods (see Leviticus 11), nor is there generally any teaching given concerning the moral and physical evils of the use of tobacco, intoxicating drinks or other harmful things.

(9) The doctrine that the lost are forced to endure eternal consciousness in the fires of hell has driven many thoughtful people to hate God for such terrible and unjust cruelty. Many professed Christians who still attend church doubt much of the Bible because they cannot bring themselves to believe a doctrine that is so obviously cruel and untrue. This error rests on still another one:

(10) The first lie Satan ever told in the garden of Eden was, "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). The ancient heathen religions without exception incorporated that lie and taught that the dead are still alive. This false doctrine was passed on to the popular churches of today. If the dead are still alive, is it not the next logical step for them to come and visit with us and talk with us? This is Spiritualism itself and is one of the most dangerous

false doctrines of Babylon, and will eventually make the nations "drunk." Evil angels who fell from heaven with Satan pretend to be the spirits of the dead. In this way they can gain complete control over the minds of those who do not know the truth.

Unscriptural ideas about Israel also make the nations "drunk." The Middle East is the sizzling fuse of the powder keg of world war. False ideas of prophecy about Israel add to this confusion.

**Revelation 18:4-8:** And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix for her double. In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, 'I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.' Therefore her

plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her."

The voice of-the Holy Spirit calls God's people to awaken from their sleep. They must separate themselves from those churches which are soon to suffer the just reward of their apostasy. One writer has said:

Notwithstanding the spiritual darkness, and alienation from God, that exist in the churches which constitute Babylon, the great body of Christ's true followers are still to be found in their communion. There are many of the these who have never seen the special truths for this time. Not a few are dissatisfied with their present condition, and are longing for clearer light. They look in vain for the image of Christ in the churches with which they are connected. As these bodies depart further and further from the truth, and ally themselves more closely with the world, the difference between the two classes will widen, and it will finally result in separation. The time will come

when those who love God supremely can no longer remain in connection with such as are "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof (2 Timothy 3:4).

Will God's people listen to this voice and come out of Babylon? Yes, every one! Jesus says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27). The people of God will be like Matthew when he was sitting at his table receiving money as a publican. When Jesus passed by, He said, "Follow me. So he left all, rose up, and followed Him" (Luke 5:27, 28).

**Revelation 18:9-13:** "And the kings of the earth who have committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.' And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore:

merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men."

John sees the symbolic fall of Babylon as though it were a literal seaport city in flames. The "merchants" in their ships and kings stand far out at sea bewailing the loss of the city where they had intended to bring their cargoes for profit. Some of these "merchants of the earth" are literal businessmen who have become rich through trade and commerce supported by Babylon. Others of the "merchants" may be priests, prelates, cardinals, and ministers, who have "sold" false doctrines to the multitudes. The false doctrine of purgatory, for example, has terrified many people into paying large sums of money in the hope that loved ones tortured in purgatory can be released. This money has found its way into the pockets of the

"merchants of the earth."

Babylon's sin has been pride in her wealth, and a growing selfishness. God said to Jerusalem of old, "This was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters had pride, fulness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty" (Ezekiel 16:49, 50).

Selfish human nature has been the same through all ages, and now at last judgment comes upon this pride. Revelation 18 is God's comment upon the rampant materialism of our modern "civilized" world. The same sin is growing in the Third World as it has grown elsewhere; and the same judgments will come worldwide as come to the "merchants" of the richer nations.

**Revelation 18:14-19:** "And the fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, who became rich by her,

will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.' And every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What is like this great city?' And they threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.'"

It seems as if the very foundations of civilization itself are destroyed. The economy is shattered beyond repair. All that people thought made life worth living comes to an end. "In one hour such great riches came to nothing." The language used is that of John's day; the figures of speech encompass all the materialistic wonders of our day which John could not have dreamed of. If John were writing today he would describe the

airlines and their jet passengers. The merchants and others who bewail the fall of Babylon realize that they will soon share a fate similar to hers.

For some important reason the Lord has devoted this entire 18th chapter to a heart-moving description of the financial and economic ruin of the most prosperous civilizations of all time. We may note two important lessons: (a) This ruin follows speedily on the national abandonment of the principles of religious liberty which have made it possible for the progressive nations to become so prosperous and secure, (b) Our present economic and cultural securities are dependant on the continued blessing of God, holding back that tornado of passion symbolized by the loosing of the "four winds." In truth, not one of us holds even one dollar in security. We are only stewards temporarily entrusted with the wealth which we at present control, and we must soon face God's judgment as to how, as stewards, we have used what the cross of Christ proves is really not our own.

Now comes the sad story of no more Christmases, shopping malls, car factories, TV, skiing, bars, weddings, symphony or rock concerts, etc:

**Revelation 18:20-23:** "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!" Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and threw it into the sea, saying, "Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore. The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. And no craftsmen of any craft shall be found in you anymore. And the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore. And the light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore. And the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth."

Babylon has always been the enemy of God's truth and of His people. It is not a petty, selfish vengeance that causes those who inhabit heaven to rejoice over her fall. Every right-minded man and woman is glad when evildoers are finally brought to justice, and principles of right are upheld.

No figure could be more vivid than that of a mighty angel taking up a great millstone and casting it into the sea. No more will the music of her choirs and pipe organs be heard in her giant buildings; no more will master craftsmen labor to build her ornate cathedrals; no more will the pomp and grandeur of extravagant weddings be seen in her; no more will soft candles flicker in the mysterious shadows of her altars to idolatry.

**Revelation 18:24:** "And in her was found the blood of prophets, and saints, and of all that were slain on the earth."

What an astonishing disclosure! The source of all evil in the world has been Babylon. False religion is "the abomination that makes desolate"

the human heart (compare Daniel 11:31, 12:11). Satan has done his most successful work when he has professed to be "an angel of light," attempting to misrepresent and impersonate Christ Himself. The vast majority of earth's inhabitants will in future confuse Satan for their God. What will lead them to make this tragic choice? Love of self.

Only in the light of the cross can man learn what to do with his natural-born selfishness. There self is crucified with Christ, accomplished by faith. But because Babylon has professed to honor the sign of the cross and yet has denied the reality of the truth of the cross, the world will have been deceived to its eternal ruin. Thus Revelation depicts the great battle between the principles of its Hero, the Lamb, and those of the world's hero, Satan.

## Chapter 19

# When the Lamb Will Marry a Wife

**Revelation 19:1-4:** After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her." Again they said, "Alleluia! And her smoke rises up forever and ever!" And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, "Amen! Alleluia!"

It may be that you seem to be the only follower of Christ in your family or neighborhood. Here is encouragement. Although it may seem that God's people on earth are only a minority, there is "a great multitude" in the universe of God, a far

greater majority, who are loyal to Him. A nation sends its ambassador to another nation's capital. He and his staff are a minority there; yet he can never forget the mighty nation which he represents and which stands behind him. As a follower of Christ, we are ambassadors to this world.

The word "alleluia" in Hebrew word means, "Praise the Lord." It is not because He has conquered by force of arms that the "great multitude" of heaven praise the Lamb for His victory. He has conquered only through truth and righteousness. This glorious victory was won when Jesus died on His cross and rose again. Therefore, this song of praise is not offered in the way that weak, selfish sycophants would praise an earthly ruler or tyrant in order to obtain favors, but in wholehearted sincerity. Glory and honor belong to the One whose unselfish love for sinners is the most amazing sacrifice of eternity.

Why is it that since Jesus died for the sins of the world, the world has not become better but has become worse? Why is it that the vast majority of

the world's inhabitants have not been changed by Christ?

The whole world would indeed have been saved by the religion of Christ had it not been for the work of a clever enemy who interposed himself and hindered His work. This enemy is spoken of in the Bible as the "Antichrist," one who fights against Christ in the most wicked and deceptive way possible, that is, by pretending to take the place of Christ (see 1 John 4:1.3). There is no way that an enemy could do one greater harm than to impersonate him and write damaging letters in his name. Even one's best friends might find it hard to keep their faith in him!

The "great harlot," Babylon, has done that very thing. Satan has spoken through her in the name of Christ, and countless millions of uninformed people have been deceived. Many have openly despised Christ because Babylon has misrepresented Him, and millions of others have supposed that they are following Christ when in reality they are being led to fight against Him on

the side of the Antichrist. This is why our text tells us that it was Babylon "who corrupted the earth with her fornication."

The expression "her smoke rises up for ever and ever" is a quotation from Isaiah 34:10, where the same words speak of the destruction long ago of the land of Idumea: "Its smoke shall ascend forever." Although this land is desolate today, there is no literal smoke going up. The Hebrew expression means finality. The same scripture says, "From generation to generation [the land] shall lie waste; no one shall pass through it for ever and ever."

Thus "for ever and ever" means that Babylon's destruction will be complete and final.

**Revelation 19:5, 6:** Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!" And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia!

For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!"

Whose voice is this that comes out of the throne? It is the voice of Christ that calls His servants to praise God. Although Jesus has been declared the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead (see Romans 1:4), He still considers Himself our brother. After His resurrection, He said to Mary, "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God" (John 20:17). Jesus does not lead us away from the Father, but to Him.

**Revelation 19:7-9:** "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."

Can it be that the Lamb will someday be

married? His marriage is the great event toward which the world has been moving for thousands of years. He is lonely without His bride. Uninformed people have often wondered why the Song of Solomon has been included in the Bible. Now we can see why. It is a song expressing the love of Christ for His church, and her response to that love.

Who is the Lamb's wife? Revelation 21 tells us that she is "the great city, the holy Jerusalem." Verses 9, 10. But what is the New Jerusalem? Is it merely the streets of gold, the palaces and walls built of precious stones, and the gates of pearl? When Jesus stood on the hill overlooking old Jerusalem and cried, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. . . . How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chick under her wings, but you were not willing," was He speaking to the bricks and stones and timber of the city? We understand that He was speaking to the people who inhabited the city.

The real "New Jerusalem" must likewise be the people who inhabit it. The material city of gold and

pearls cannot be said to have "made herself ready," or to be "arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright." The beautiful garment which the Lamb's wife is clothed with is the "righteousness of saints."

It is clear therefore that the "city" itself which Jesus loves is the redeemed people who inhabit it. He has at last found a community of saints who have grown up "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." At last they can understand Him and appreciate Him for what He is, not because they seek a reward for themselves. This is the reason that the Lamb's "wife" is arrayed in such beautiful garments.

The righteousness of Christ is not merely imputed unto them; it has been imparted to them so fully by their faith in Christ that it has become a part of themselves, and is spoken of as "the righteousness of saints."

Had she "made herself ready" sooner, the "marriage of the Lamb" could have come sooner. The Bridegroom has been ready for a long time;

the reason for the delay in the return of Christ is not that He has delayed His coming, but rather that the "bride" herself has delayed to make herself ready. She holds the key to the final fulfilment of the wonderful prophecies of the Book of Revelation.

**Revelation 19:10:** And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

Although angels are glorious beings, we must not worship them. Neither should we worship or even praise any human being. The angel declares himself to be a "fellow servant" with us, in captivity to the love of Christ. The angel is happy that he has the privilege of belonging to the same group to which John belongs, those who have the "testimony of Jesus." You know how happy you are if you are on speaking terms with the prime minister or president of your country. Those who

have the "testimony of Jesus" are those to whom He speaks. John was a prophet, as was Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and many others. All prophets have the testimony of Jesus, for the "testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

Someone may ask, "Why can't I hear God speaking to me? When I use the telephone to speak to a friend, not only can he hear me at the other end, but I can also hear at this end what he is saying to me. Why can't I hear God speaking to me in answer to my prayers?"

Long ago, in the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve did talk with God face to face as a schoolchild can talk with his teacher. But when sin came, our first parents "hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden" (Genesis 3:8). There was now no way for God to speak to them, except through the ministry of special ones whom He should call as prophets. "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord will make Myself known to him in a vision; I will speak to him in a dream" (Numbers

12:5, 6).

We talk with someone who does not know our language by employing a translator to stand between us. The prophet is the "translator" who hears what God has to say to us, and passes the message on to us. The Bible is God's message to us sent through the prophets of old. "Prophecy never came by the will of man; but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

Have there been prophets in New Testament times, and in our times today? Jesus promised the gift of the Holy Spirit in the church after He went to heaven: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men. . . . And He gave some to be apostles, some prophets,... till we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:8-13).

God likens His church to a human body,

composed of many different members, each with a different work to do. The prophet is the "eyes" of the church: "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets. . ." (1 Corinthians 12:27, 28). The eyes tell the body where it is going. So the work of a prophet, which is called the "spirit of prophecy," is to tell the church where it is going, and to guide it in safe paths.

This gift of prophecy is to remain in the church until the time when Jesus shall return again: "The testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:6, 7). Thus the spirit of prophecy is one of the gifts that distinguishes the true church of Christ, known as the "remnant church" (see Revelation 12-17). The one who believes and follows this "testimony of Jesus" is honored by heaven as one of John's and the angel's fellow servants.

**Revelation 19:11-16:** Then I saw heaven

opened, and behold, a white horse, And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written:

## KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS

Again we see the battle of Armageddon. In Revelation 16:12-16 we witnessed the inhabitants of this world preparing to make war on the Lamb. Now we see preparations in heaven as Christ rides forth to meet them upon a "white horse," a symbol

of glorious victory. His eyes are as a flame of fire, because His character is love. Love is the mightiest power in the universe: but when rejected, it brings the most fearful judgment possible. His name which no one knows but Him comes from the experience He went through on the cross, which no one, not even the angels in heaven, can fully appreciate. His "robe dipped in blood" is His garment of righteousness dipped in the blood of His sacrifice on His cross.

Those great armies in heaven are twice as many loyal angels as those who fell with Lucifer. Victory is on their side.

Why should we fear to worship Him who is above all earthly power? He who is King of kings and Lord of lords is well able to rescue the weakest of His followers. Put your trust in Him and do not let Satan terrify you.

Some years ago in lion-infested country in Africa, farmers would keep their cattle locked up in a kraal with a wooden fence which enclosed them

and protected them from the lions. The fence was strong enough so that no lion might break through it. But when the clever beast would roar at midnight, the cattle did not know enough to trust the farmer's fence. Terrified, they would stampede until they themselves broke down their only protection. All the lion had to do was to roar.

If we put our trust in the Lamb, He has surrounded us with His love. We must not let fear break down that fence of protection. The extent of Christ's victory is unimaginable:

**Revelation 19:17-21:** Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great." And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the

horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

The angel standing in the sun occupies a place close to Christ as His armor-bearer. A kind and gracious invitation had been faithfully extended to these "captains," mighty ones, and everyone, both free and slaves, small and great, to attend the "marriage supper of the Lamb" as honored guests. But they made light of the invitation, took the King's servants, "treated them spitefully, and killed them" (see Matthew 22:2-7). Now having refused the invitation to the "marriage supper of the Lamb," they must attend a gory feast where their flesh becomes food for "the birds that fly in the midst of heaven." This of course is symbolic language. It denotes the complete and final

judgment of all who have joined with Satan in his rebellion against God.

But the "beast," the kings of the earth, and their armies, do not know that as they gather together to make war against "Him who sat on the horse," whose name is called, "The Word of God," that they are heading for the most awful carnage that this world has ever witnessed. Special punishment is meted out to the "beast," and the "false prophet" who "wrought signs by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image."

The kings of the earth and their armies are not so much to blame, therefore, as those religious leaders who have deceived them. The "false prophet" is the two horned beast of Revelation 13, who acts as a "prophet" or mouthpiece for the "beast," and seduces "those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast." The beast and the false prophet are captured in the very act of making war against the Lamb. They have deceived the world by pretending to represent Him.

Why are the inhabitants of heaven so enthusiastic about the Lamb? Something about His achievement makes them overjoyed! And why are we down here on planet earth so blase about it? The reason is that they see something we haven't yet been able to see very clearly—"the width and length and depth and height . . . [of] the agape of Christ which passes knowledge" (Ephesians 3:18,19).

The New Testament idea of righteousness by faith is essential to understand if we are to share in that joy of heaven. And we can begin to share it now, for "the agape of Christ constrains us, . . . that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15). In other words, if we believe the gospel, it's impossible to go on living selfish lives! The theme of Revelation is the glory of the cross; it meant everything to the apostle John for he says:

In this the agape of God was manifested toward

us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is agape, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 1 John 4:9, 10.

The scenes that we have seen in Revelation 19 are not intended so much to show the exact chronological order of events as to show their deeper significance. Christ won His title of Almighty Conqueror and King of kings by virtue of His self-sacrificing death. At last the entire world and the universe itself will have come to see it in its true light, some to rejoice in its glory forever, others who have despised it to suffer the most awful shame that it is possible to experience.

Together with the "great multitude in heaven," the four and twenty elders, the four living creatures, and the armies in heaven which follow Christ upon the white horses, we also cry out, "Salvation and glory and honor and power, belong to the Lord our God!"

## Chapter 20

# When Satan Is Bound in Chains for 1000 Years

**Revelation 20:1-3:** Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.

When Satan is tied with chains, his time of imprisonment will be a literal thousand years. The reason why John was forced to use symbols until now was that evil men might destroy his book if they understood his meaning as referring to them or to their kingdoms. But from chapter 20 onwards John describes events to take place after the battle

of Armageddon, and there is no further need to use symbolic language.

All too often demented gun-lovers shoot innocent people in wild sprees of hatred. Sometimes the police can catch the offender and lock him up. This chapter discusses a number of questions: "Why doesn't God tie the devil up? Once Satan is securely bound, won't all bad people become good?" "If evil people have a second chance, will they choose to be saved?" "Will God give them a second chance?" "Will Satan someday be converted?"

Many blame Satan as the cause of their doing wrong. But if God should tie the devil up today, would they suddenly become good tomorrow? James says, "Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed" (James 1:14). That would indicate that it is the evil within us that is the cause of our trouble, not the devil outside of us.

We shall see in this chapter that if the lost

should have a second chance, they would choose again to follow the path of rebellion against God and against all that is good. We dare not wait until the angel ties Satan with chains before we surrender to the love of God!

What is the "bottomless pit"? In the Greek Old Testament it is the same word (in Greek) that we find in Jeremiah 4:23-27. The prophet describes the earth during this same time: "I beheld the earth, and it was indeed without form, and void (abyssos); and the heavens, they had no light. ... I beheld and indeed there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens had fled. I beheld, and indeed the fruitful land was a wilderness, and all its cities were broken down at the presence of the Lord, by His fierce anger. ... The whole land shall be desolate."

We remember that when the seventh plague is poured out, all the cities of the world are broken down by giant hailstones. This earth in its ruined condition after the second coming of Christ is thus the "bottomless pit" where Satan will be bound for

a thousand years.

What are the "chains" with which the angel binds Satan? Jeremiah says of this same time, "For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black." In other words, during the thousand years neither the sun, moon, nor stars will shine. If one is shut up in a place of total darkness, he is bound just as securely as if he were tied with chains. Peter says that Satan and his angels will be "delivered . . . into chains of darknes" (2 Peter 2:4).

Why can't Satan deceive the nations any more until the thousand years are finished? All those who have taken part in the war against Christ in the battle of Armageddon have been slain by the brightness of Jesus' coming. Jeremiah says, "The slain of the Lord shall be from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried" (Jeremiah 25:33). How can Satan deceive dead people?

Neither can he deceive the saved people because they have been taken to heaven at the

coming of Christ: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout. . . . And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17). With the wicked dead and the righteous in heaven safely beyond his grasp, whom can the devil tempt?

**Revelation 20:4-6:** And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

When do these thousand years begin? John makes it clear that the "first resurrection" of the dead in Christ will mark the beginning of the thousand years; and the resurrection of the wicked will mark the end of the thousand years. Jesus says: "The hour is coming, in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28, 29).

The word "blessed" means fortunate, or happy. Such are those who will hear the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God when Jesus comes the second time. Like someone who has been inoculated by an injection against a fatal disease such as diphtheria, they will be "inoculated" against the horrors of the second death. "Over such the second death has no power."

But think of those who will not hear the voice of Jesus when He comes! If we should plan to rise early in the morning to catch an important plane,

and we should sleep right through the ringing of our alarm clock, we would miss the plane. Can you think of anything more terrible than to sleep through the first resurrection!

What will God's people do in heaven for a thousand years? Many will be looking for friends and loved ones whom they expect will be saved, as survivors after an earthquake or a storm look anxiously for their relatives. Some whom we hope and expect will be saved may not be there. How anxiously the redeemed will want to know the reason why someone has missed coming up in the first resurrection!

To satisfy them and in order to answer all questions forever, Jesus will open the books of heaven, and permit them to read for themselves the records of the lives of those who have been lost. In this way, as John says, "judgment was committed to them." Paul says to the Corinthians, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know

that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?" (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3) When the thousand years are finished, this great work of judging the lost will have convinced everyone that God has been both just and merciful.

Through history there have been many who were beheaded because they were faithful to the truth of Christ. Although they lost all their earthly possessions, and even life itself, they did not lose their souls. In the crisis so soon to come upon us, the people of God will lose their possessions, their friends, and some may even lose their lives. But those who refuse to worship the "beast" or his "image," and refuse to receive his "mark" on their foreheads or in their hands, will not lose their souls.

You can be sure that the first five minutes they spend in the presence of the Lord will convince them that being loyal to Him and to His truth has been well worth while. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. . . . The

things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:17, 18).

**Revelation 20:7-9:** Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

Satan is loosed out of his prison by the fact that the wicked are raised from their graves again. He can once more begin his work he loves so well, that of deceiving others. The lost come up, not in the bloom of health and vigor as the righteous came up in the first resurrection, but with the marks of sin and the curse still upon them. They look about them and see their world in a ruined state. They know that this destruction has been caused by their own sinfulness in following the ways of Satan.

Everyone in heaven watches now to see what they will do. Have they learned their lesson? During these thousand years when Satan has had nothing to do but think, has he also decided to repent? Has his heart been changed?

It has been necessary for God to give him this opportunity so that everyone can see clearly that his character is completely and hopelessly evil. Never does he say, "I am sorry, Lord; I shall repent now." We have all known criminals released from prison who turn right back again to commit more crimes. All the wicked resurrected from their graves choose again to follow Satan's deceptions. They love a lie (see 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). Thus they prove that there is no hope for them.

Notice how many people will be among the lost: the number "is as the sand of the sea." Jesus told us that we should be careful not to follow the great crowds or the majority in matters of faith: "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go

in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13, 14, KJV). This is why, as we look out upon the world today, we find so few who are walking in the pathway that leads to eternal life.

The way that Satan deceives his followers seems foolish to us, but we must remember that sin is always foolish. He puts into their minds the hopeless idea that they are able to capture the holy city of God, the New Jerusalem, which has come down from God out of heaven to rest on the earth (see Revelation 21:2). The wicked imagine that because of their great numbers they can overcome Christ and His saints. But how can their plan succeed?

Although Satan has had plenty of time to consider the results of his rebellion, he still hates God and His people. If he can only enter the Holy City, he hopes to pull God from His throne, and proclaim himself king. The loyal angels and the redeemed saints watch. "It is enough," they say,

"now we see the final results of sin. Let justice be done."

**Revelation 20:10-15:** And the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

The great host pause as they gather about the

New Jerusalem. Far above the city appears a great white throne. Upon it is seated the Son of God in all the glory of His Father. The wicked have opportunity now to consider their past lives. As on a giant cinema screen, they behold the events of the life of Christ, His rejection and crucifixion. Each sees the part he played in a lifelong war against the Lamb. Every thought of their evil minds, every word, every deed, is seen in terrible distinctness as rebellion against God and His truth.

Now at last they understand their sin. They perceive how they have constantly resisted the pleading of the Holy Spirit, rejected His warnings, beaten back His mercy by their stubbornness, and despised His faithful messengers. They see that they have daily crucified Christ afresh. Shame and remorse grip their hearts. The awful reality of their own guilt overwhelms them.

Even Satan is unable to look the other way. He sees a bright crown placed upon the head of Christ by a glorious angel whose place he knows could have been his. The multitude gaze in wonder. The

wicked realize the value of the eternal reward that they have spurned and rejected by their stubborn refusal to repent. Satan and the vast host of the lost fall on their knees before God, confess the justice of their sentence, and acknowledge their unfitness to enter heaven. Thus will be fulfilled Paul's words, "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10,11).

Note that none of these people are judged by their faith. They have had none! Now they are judged solely by their works, which have all somehow been motivated by the love of self.

The fire which falls from heaven does not come because God hates these poor lost people. The fire comes only because the very presence of "our God is a consuming fire" to sin (see Hebrews 12:29). Because the lost have chosen to cling to their sin as a vine clings to a tree until both become one, so they must be destroyed by a fire which was

intended to destroy only sin. On the other hand, because the redeemed have yielded to the love of Christ and have repented of, confessed, and separated from their sin, "over such the second death has no power." They have been delivered from fear by agape (1 John 4:17,18).

God never intended that a single human being should have to perish in that fire. It was prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). Why should any of us choose to share their fate?

The Book of life is still open before God, and our names can still be retained there. There will be no second chance after the thousand years begin. Just now is our opportunity; and today may be our last. Thank God, His Holy Spirit is working constantly to draw us. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself," says Jesus (John 12:32). His love is so active and persistent that only those who resist Him can at last be lost with Satan.

This Book is the Revelation of Jesus; it

contains "the everlasting gospel" (chapter 14:6). That gospel is always Good News. God has made it easy to be saved, and hard to be lost. The Book of Revelation teaches us that only those who "make war against the Lamb" can be lost; but let us remember that we are right now deciding where we stand by our attitude toward the Holy Spirit's pleading with our hearts.

## Chapter 21

# Your Home in the New Jerusalem

**Revelation 21:1-4:** And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from 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 will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

The first three chapters of the Bible tell of a perfect new world created for our enjoyment. In the first two chapters there is no sin; and God and man

walked together in the garden of Eden talking face to face. The third chapter tells how the tragedy of sin entered.

The third from the last chapter in the Bible which we studied in our previous chapter tells of the final destruction of sin, when even "Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire." Thus the entire Bible, from the third chapter from the beginning to the third chapter from the end tells the story of seven thousand years of conflict with sin, and of its final and eternal defeat. The last two chapters of the Bible, like the first two chapters, again point us to "a new heaven and a new earth" in which there is no more curse or sin, and no more pain or tears.

God's original purpose in creating the earth will be fulfilled: God himself "formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited" (Isaiah 45:18). As we have seen, the wicked meet their final reward here on this earth; and now we find that the redeemed will likewise receive their

reward here. "The righteous will be recompensed on the earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner" (Proverbs 11:31). "The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Psalm 37:11, (see Matthew 5:5). "The Lord shall be king over all the earth. . . . And no longer shall there be utter destruction" (Zechariah 14:9-11).

The common idea that many people have of the reward of the saints is that they will sit on a cloud, forever doing little more than playing harps. No one in his right mind would enjoy doing nothing forever. The Bible picture of the home of the saved is dear: "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth." "They [My people] shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards, and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands" (Isaiah 65:17, 21, 22).

Why is there no more sea? The surface of our

present world is three-fifths water. These vast oceans are the remains of the flood when "all the fountains of the great deep were broken up" (Genesis 7:11). Our present earth is under a three-fold curse: (a) when man sinned, the earth was cursed, and began to bring forth "thorns and thistles" (Genesis 3:17, 18); (b) after the first murder was committed the ground suffered another curse (Genesis 4:11, 12); (c) the third curse was the great flood, after which God said, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake" (Genesis 8:21). "The world that then existed, being flooded with water, perished" (2 Peter 3:6). But in the new earth, "there shall be no more curse" (Revelation 22:3).

Not only did Jesus die to redeem humanity; He also died to redeem this ruined earth itself. When the blood flowed from His wounds onto the tree, fell through the air to this earth, and sank into the ground, it redeemed the elements themselves. Even the soil beneath our feet has been purchased by His sacrifice! To this redeemed earth God will transfer His throne and His capital from their present place

in heaven. Here where the cross of His dear Son was set up, He will establish His everlasting kingdom.

**Revelation 21:5-8:** Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My Son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Do you feel sometimes a fear gripping your heart lest you shall not find entrance into the New Earth? Please note that the Lord will give of the water of life freely "to him who is thirsty." It is only those who feel no thirst who will not have the privilege of drinking from that fountain: "Blessed

are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). To be hungry for the bread of life, and to be thirsty for the water of life, is a gift which only the Holy Spirit can give.

How do you spend your spare time? If you are content not to read the Word of God, not to study, and not to seek for truth, this is evidence that you have no hunger and thirst after righteousness. When you are converted, you will seek entrance into the kingdom of God.

It may be that you do not yet sense a natural hunger for the Word of God. No one does. This is because our heart is carnal, and we are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). All the promises of Scripture are to "him who overcomes." God will give that precious hunger and thirst for righteousness to him who asks for it. And salvation comes with the righteousness!

Who are "the cowardly, unbelieving," who will have their part in the lake which burns with fire

and brimstone? A wise writer has said to Christian people:

Those outside of the city are among the most confident, boastful, and apparently zealous ones, who love in word, but not in deed and in truth. Their hearts are not right with God. His fear is not before them. The fearful and unbelieving, who are punished with the second death, are of that class who are ashamed of Christ in this world. They are afraid to do right and follow Christ, lest they should meet with pecuniary loss. They neglect their duty, to avoid reproach and trials, and to escape dangers. Those who dare not do right because they will thus expose themselves to trials, persecution, loss, and suffering, are cowards, and with idolaters, liars, and all sinners they are ripening for the second death.

The "unbelieving" have not humbled their hearts to appreciate the sacrifice of Christ on His cross. Unbelief is not a difficulty of the mind, but of the heart. If one will not appreciate that great love of God, he is lost already. The "abominable"

are those "whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame" (Philippians 3:19). Rejecting Christ, rebelling against love, they give themselves up "to vile passions," "without natural affection" (see Romans 1:26-32). The heart that despises purity learns to love filth. God never makes any man "abominable;" he makes himself that way by resisting the "good news" of God's love.

"Sexually immoral" people are classed with "murderers." Why does God regard sexual immorality as such a terrible thing? Why do they want to stay outside the city? Is God unhappy when people have "pleasure"? No, He wants people to be happy. But He knows that sexual immorality does not bring happiness to anyone. It brings pain and sorrow to all who engage in it, and many innocent people are hurt by it.

But why is it classed together with murder? "None of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself" (Romans 14:7). All love of self works harm to our neighbor, both now and later. "Love

does no harm to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10). Only those who have learned to love their neighbor as themselves could possibly be happy inside the City. Love respects the other person as an individual, and will not use him or her as an instrument for lust. True love is not fickle, but is everlasting.

As we journey through life we either build up or we tear down our fellows. Sexual immorality tears them down. God is not a kill-joy but a joy-giving Saviour. Only marriage can sanctify sex. Best of all, Christ saves the believer from the sin that leads to illicit sex. "The mouth of an immoral woman [or man?] is a deep pit; he who is abhorred of the Lord will fall there" (Proverbs 22:14).

The seventh commandment becomes a divine promise to he one who appreciates what it cost the Saviour to redeem us. No matter how enticing the temptation may be, "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). The believer who permits the Holy Spirit to hold him by the hand

will "not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts [strives] against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another," "so that ye cannot not do the things that ye would" (Galatians 5:16, 17, KJV). Yes, the "flesh" will tempt us, but the Spirit will hold us!

"Sorcerers" are those who use evil powers to gain advantages over others. They are classed with liars because they use deceit in their work. "Idolaters" are those who place the material things of this world before God, as the object of devotion. While they have known that "God is Spirit" and "God is love" (1 John 4:8), they refuse to bow their souls before the Holy One whom they cannot see. Objects, things, material wealth, sensual pleasure— these are what they worship. Their mistake has come from refusing to believe truth that they cannot "see." They began as "unbelieving" ones, and they end up as "idolaters."

"Liars" act out their love of self either by words or by actions. Every lie has its root in self-seeking. Even the truth that we neglect to tell when it will

help someone else, burdens our conscience as a lie. "White lies," "business lies," "social lies," and "diplomatic lies," are all the work of "liars." Except for Christ, there was never a man or a woman born thoroughly honest. But we can all be changed. "Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts." "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:6, 10).

**Revelation 21:9-13:** Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. And her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on

the west.

When a man marries a wife, it is not the house or the apartment that he loves, but the woman. Surely Jesus is not an idolater, that He would be in love with the material city itself. It is the inhabitants of the city whom He loves. A city with no people in it would be a terrible place.

Never has the world seen a city like this, without criminals, slums or police. This city is declared to be "the Lamb's wife," and is a beautiful home for those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. It is a real, literal city, inhabited by real, literal people. It will be a fulfilment of Abraham's desires, "for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God . . . God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them" (Hebrews 11:10, 16). None of the cities of this world have genuine "foundations," because all of them will pass away as did the ancient cities of Abraham's time.

All who enter will pass through one of the

twelve gates named for "the twelve tribes of the children of Israel." If anyone says, "I don't like anything pertaining to Israel, because Christ has delivered us from everything Jewish," he will have to remain outside the city. James addresses his Christian epistle "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (James 1:1). Jesus Himself was a Jew, and said that, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). He declared that "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). "If you are Christ's then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29).

**Revelation 21:14-21:** Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a

man, that is, of an angel. And the construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass."

We could spend years just revelling in the details of this description, but there is work to be done here on earth just now—souls to be won for the Lamb and battles to be fought for His honor. We accept every word above as truth, but are content to leave the enjoyment of its reality to the glorious future.

A furlong is about 606 feet (184.6 meters), so that 12,000 furlongs would be about 1,378 miles

(2,217 kilometers). Perhaps this is the distance all around the city; and if so, the city is about 344 miles (553.6 kilometers) on each side. Perhaps the point of this detailed description is to assure us that there is room enough for everyone who desires to enter! The word "equal" means proportionate, pleasing to the eyes in dimensions.

Many people have ruined their happiness in this life in their search for gold. If only they had known that there is an abundance of it in the New Jerusalem, they might have been willing to wait patiently for it. When Jesus was here on earth, He possessed no gold, yet He had the genuine thing which people suppose gold will buy—happiness.

Most of us have seldom seen precious stones with which to compare the foundations of the City. Neither have we seen many pearls. We can only trust that John's words of description are true. But we know that pearls are produced by suffering. When a grain of sand works its way into an oyster shell, the little creature patiently builds a beautiful pearl to cover up the object which causes suffering.

All who enter the New Jerusalem will pass through a gate of pearl, a symbol of the suffering which they have endured for the sake of Christ. Has the Lord permitted some experience of trial and pain to come to you? If so, you may rejoice that you are being given the experience which will enrich your happiness when you arrive.

**Revelation 21:22-27:** But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and the Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of life."

When absent from a friend, we communicate by writing letters. But when we are living with the

friend, we have no more need of letters to pass between us. In this world of sin, we cannot see the Father's face, and we must depend on faith and worship to communicate with Him. But because God Himself will dwell with us in the Holy City, there will be no need for a "temple" in it.

This passage makes clear that in the New Earth people's gifts and abilities will vary as they do here in this earth. There will be "kings" who bring their "glory and honor" into the Holy City. The people of God will have their homes out in the earth made new. And every Sabbath and every month they will come to the Holy City to worship. Isaiah says, "As the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me, says the Lord, so shall your descendants and your name remain. And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me, says the Lord" (Isaiah 66:22, 23).

There will be "nations" in the earth made new, but they will never quarrel and fight among

themselves as nations do here. All who enter will have learned from Christ the spirit of unselfish love for others. Are we learning that spirit now?

As individual redeemed human beings, we will still enjoy our talents and personalities. There our deepest hungers will be satisfied; each will be free to develop his or her abilities to the fullest.

## Chapter 22

# You are Invited to "Come"

**Revelation 22:1-5:** And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 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. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

These last two chapters of the Bible have been a continual comfort to God's people who have "had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment," who have "wandered in deserts and in mountains, in dens and caves of the

earth" (see Hebrews 11:36, 28).

The water flowing out of the throne of God and the Lamb is that which Jesus promised to the woman at the well in Samaria, when He said, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (John 4:10). Zechariah said "living waters shall flow from Jerusalem," whose source, Jeremiah said, was "the Lord, the fountain of living waters" (Zechariah 14:8; Jeremiah 17:13). Ezekiel was shown that this river was "waters in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed," a river bringing healing wherever it flowed (see Ezekiel 47:1-9). This is the eternal life which flows from the cross of Christ. We may taste of it here and now by receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The "tree of life" is apparently like the "banyan" tree which can have two trunks. It joins at the top over the river, but grows out of the two banks on either side. Ezekiel saw the tree in vision: "Along the bank of the river, on this side and that,

will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine" (Ezekiel 47:12). The food that grows out of this sin-cursed earth cannot sustain life for more than a few years. It has no real life in it. But the fruit of this tree provides both healing and eternal life. It will be both delicious and satisfying. And it will be free! Why are the "leaves" of the tree needed "for the healing of the nations"? Will people raised to life in the first resurrection need to be healed, or to grow? The Lord says, "To you who fear My name the Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves" (Malachi 4:2). It was only sin that brought the curse upon our present world Floods, droughts, earthquakes, salt seas, swamps, wildernesses, deserts, useless mountains, deathly sickness, ferocious animals, sorrow, fear and human tears—this is the curse we know so well. As the "tree" was cast into the cursed waters of Marah making them sweet (Exodus 15:23-25), so the

"tree" on which the Lamb of God died for us has taken away the curse.

With the curse taken away, no fear will drive us to hide from God. Adam once ran away from Him in the garden of Eden. Cain mourned bitterly as he cried to God, "I shall be hidden from Your face" (Genesis 4:14). Like a sigh there sounds throughout the Psalms the entreaty, "Do not hide Your face from Your servant" (Psalm 69:17). Even Christ on the cross forgot the pain of the nail wounds as He sensed the hiding of His Father's face: "Why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46) The sweetest benediction in the Bible is the blessing. "The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace" (Numbers 6:25, 26). Now, once again, the children of God will look on His face with joy and not be afraid.

Good people have ever loved the light of day, and have sometimes imagined the night to harbor enemies, creatures of Satan. Now, with sin and fear forever ended, "there shall be no night there."

**Revelation 22:6-7:** Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

The angel seems to fear that John cannot believe that all this glorious future is real. But we can know that "these words are faithful and true" because faith in Christ has kindled in our hearts "the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). The fact that God has given to our human hearts a place for love and gratitude, which is only by faith, is proof that He will give us all other gifts as well.

It is one thing to read Revelation hastily, but it is another thing to "keep the words of the prophecy of this book." To "keep" in this sense is to cherish, as one would cherish a precious jewel. Do you long to have a better mind, one more capable of grasping truth and retaining it? If so, commit the words of this book to memory. The reward that will be yours will enrich your life because your

mind will be strengthened and your spirit will be renewed. But above all, let your heart learn to love these inspired words.

And as we learn to love this Book, we shall love the Christ who is revealed there, and we shall want Him to come soon.

**Revelation 22:8, 9:** Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, "See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."

An angel is a wonderful being, but he has no desire to be worshiped. King Herod proudly accepted the worship of the multitude when they shouted, It is "the voice of a god and not of a man!" knowing full well he did not deserve it (see Acts 12:21-23). The angel immediately sets John on his feet and assures him that he is only "your fellow

servant."

The angel knows no pride such as Herod yielded to. What a pity when a man or ruler wants to be worshiped by his fellow men! Few are as humble as this angel who directs the glory to God. No one who wants to be worshiped or praised can long enjoy the respect of others.

All who "keep the words of this book" share in the rewards to be enjoyed by John and his fellow prophets. God is generous in giving out rewards. Even "he who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward" (Matthew 10:41). To "receive" the messages of the Spirit of prophecy is simply to welcome them into the heart.

**Revelation 22:10:** And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand."

The time for us to understand this book has always been "at hand." The weakest and most unworthy person has only to pray earnestly and

humbly for light, and God will immediately send angels to instruct him in its meaning. But let no one pretend that he is wiser than he really is. Let him seek with tears for help, even as John wrote the book with tears; and its secrets will become his possession.

There is a reason why the Lord told John not to "seal" this book. The prophet Daniel was commanded to "shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end" (Daniel 12:4). Thank God, Revelation has never been sealed, but of all the books of the Bible it is the one that religious people seem most inclined to regard as sealed.

For many years Christ has carried on His work of changing men and women into new people, cleansed from sin. The unjust have become just, the filthy have become clean. No one who asked has been denied. But when the High Priest must complete His work in the Most Holy apartment of the sanctuary in heaven, He will pause as He leaves the temple to pronounce these solemn words which

will thereafter "freeze" every man's character and leave him as he is for all eternity:

**Revelation 22:11, 12:** "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work."

When will this decree be spoken? As soon as the likeness of Christ's character is reflected in His people, as the sun is reflected in a mirror. Then the cosmic Day of Atonement will end, and the door of mercy so long open to repenting sinners will swing shut. No man can open it again. Nevermore will the Holy Spirit plead with the guilty one, "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:7, 8). The long, merciful "today" has at last ended forever.

Have you already learned to believe that Christ loves you, that He is your Saviour? Have you

yielded to that "constraint" of love that motivates you to obedience to all His commandments? Someone may receive this book in his hands only a moment before Jesus will speak these final words.

Everyone can have exactly what he wants above all else. If he really wants to stay just like he is, forever, he can have his heart's desire. But how better to ask to be converted! The Lord once said of His people long ago, "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone" (Hosea 4:17). Saddest words that could be spoken!

It is of this time that the Saviour has spoken, "Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all who dwell on the face of the whole earth" (Luke 21:34, 35).

After probation closes, those who have sent their sins on beforehand to judgment will never fail again (see 1 Timothy 5:24), because their sins will

have been eternally blotted out of the books of heaven (see Acts 3:19; Revelation 3:5).

How will the "reward" have been determined for everyone before Christ comes? In the "investigative" or pre-Advent judgment. Good people of long ago who have gone to their rest never dreamed of the good fruit that would continue to grow, long after their death, from the seeds they planted. What a rich harvest they will find in the resurrection day! Imagine the surprise of the martyr Stephen as he realizes that his sermon has been preserved in the Book of Acts, and that the apostle Paul was converted because of his martyrdom. Each receives a reward "according as his work shall be" in full fruitage. What a joy to devote all we have to the service of our Lord and of His people, so when our journey is over we can look back with gratitude for the grace of the Lord manifested in our lives.

**Revelation 22:13-16:** "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last." Blessed are those who do His

commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie. "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star."

The "third angel" says, "Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12). The true remnant church of Jesus Christ is distinguished thus: "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" (Revelation 12:17, KJV). Many are deceived into thinking that the keeping of the commandments of God is old-fashioned and useless. But the one who receives Christ as his Saviour will find it impossible not to keep them, because he is "under grace," and therefore cannot "make void the law" (see Romans 6:14; 3:31).

The "dogs" outside symbolically designate those whose characters are filthy. Peter speaks of certain people in his day who "have known the way of righteousness . . . [and] turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. ... It has happened to them according to the true proverb, A dog returns to his own vomit" (2 Peter 2:21, 22). Can you think of anyone more miserable at last than he who remembers that he was once in the way that led into the Holy City, but that he turned back again to the "vomit" of the world's vain and selfish ways?

Included in that group will be some who have trained their mental tastes to enjoy untrue fiction, filthy books or magazines or movies. "Whoever loves a lie" could never be happy inside.

**Revelation 22:17-19:** And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. For I testify to everyone who hears the

words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

No one who truly desires to drink the water of life will be refused. It was an Arab custom, as camel caravans would tread their way through the hot desert, that if the leader saw water he would wave his arms, calling, "Come! Water!" The men behind him would do the same, and so on down the line until all had heard the joyful news. As we come to the end of our book, we are urged to pass on the invitation, "whoever desires," to others.

Those who add false doctrines borrowed from heathenism or from Babylon, and present them as though they were Christ's teaching, "add" unto the words of this prophecy. They suppose that what church councils and other great men have approved must be truth. God pities them in their ignorance,

and for this reason sends them this message of warning.

As sure as day follows night, to add teachings not found in the Bible leads them to "take away from the words of the book of this prophecy," so they can make room for the false doctrines. John's warning sounds very severe; but the Lord would not send it unless it was needed.

**Revelation 22:20, first part:** He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen.

While the author was writing this last chapter, something happened to impress these words of Jesus on our minds more clearly. For a week we had been expecting important visitors. A friend told us they would come "tomorrow." Well, we thought, we would have "tomorrow" to clean the house and prepare for their visit. Suddenly we were called from our work of writing to go out and meet them, because they had come today instead!

Jesus told John two thousand years ago He was coming "quickly," but He hasn't yet come. Has He delayed His coming?

Some friends once asked a certain woman, "When is your husband coming home?" "I don't know," she replied, "but I hope he doesn't come back soon!" It's not hard to guess what was wrong with her.

Jesus is ready to come, and the only reason He has not come as yet is that His people are not ready for Him. He has not delayed His coming; we have delayed it. People hopelessly ill on hospital beds are willing for Jesus to come. But people who are well, full of life and fun, earning money, seeking pleasure, enjoying the things of this world, seldom want Jesus to come now.

To be ready for Jesus' coming is to desire His coming as a loving, faithful wife desires the coming of her husband. Because she loves him, she has forsaken all others, and desires only to see him and to be with him.

Jesus will come any time His people really want Him to come. It is because they love this world that they have this world. When they love Jesus' appearing, they will have His appearing!

Things—houses, lands, cars, furniture, clothes—lose their appeal when we see the glory of the cross of Christ So do sensual pleasure and love of ease. "God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14). When we see His cross, we grasp the reality of life. We sense that nothing is ours by right: "If one died for all, then all died." Had He not died, you and I would be dead. It follows that our lives are not our own; grace has imposed on us a debt.

Understanding this and believing it, no one can live for the things of this world. Christ died in place of him. Henceforth, he is "crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20). In this way "the love of Christ constrains us" (see 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15), and living for Him becomes a joy. Everyone who believes will want to pray as John did:

**Revelation 22:20, last part:** Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

There remains only one little verse as we come to the end of our book. And there is enough gospel truth in it to save our souls if this were all we had of the Book of Revelation. To each one who will simply say "Amen!" from his heart, no matter how great a sinner he has been, these words will be fulfilled forever:

**Revelation 22:21:** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

**A Prayer:** Our loving Father, as we began to study this Book of Revelation, we asked for the "blessing" which You promised "to him who reads" (Revelation 1:3). Now we pause to thank You for keeping that promise. The book has been opened to us, and we have begun to see the mysteries unveiled. That which has been revealed is Christ. Oh, Lord, let us each join someday in helping to place a crown of victory on His head!

And let us live to his glory now. In His name,  
Amen.

# Appendix

Notes for those who wish to study the Revelation more thoroughly.

## Who Wrote The Book of Revelation?

Almost all of the early Christian writers of the first centuries believed its author was the same John who wrote the Gospel, "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria (third century after Christ) was the first to question this. His main reason was that the language and grammar of Revelation differ from that of John's Gospel. The Gospel is written in perfect Greek grammar, whereas Revelation uses unusual and even incorrect grammar. Further, some words that appear in both are spelled differently.

While it is true that the literary styles of John's Gospel and the Revelation differ, this does not mean that the "beloved apostle" could not be the author of both books:

(a) The Gospel which bears John's name could have been written with the help of others after the Revelation. He wrote the Gospel when he was old. Probably he dictated it. We read at the end what appears to be a notation added by his secretary and friends: "This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24). Such a secretary would be expected to put John's dictation into correct, idiomatic Greek. John himself being an unlearned fisherman (Mark 1:19, 20), we would hardly expect him to write his Gospel in such impeccable Greek if he were writing on his own.

(b) The author of Revelation tells us that when he had the visions he describes he was exiled to the island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9). Quite likely John would not have a secretary when transcribing his visions, and would be writing on his own. We need not wonder that his literary style would be different. This could even account for the fact that he spells "Jerusalem" differently!

(c) Early Christian writers confirm that the

Gospel and the Revelation were written under different conditions, and even intimate that the Gospel of John was written by dictation.

(d) There are similarities in the Gospel and the Revelation that point to a common author: the frequent expressions "water of life," "living water," "let him that is athirst come," and "if any man thirst, let him come" (compare Revelation 22:17 and John 7:37). The Greek word for "appearance" or "face" (opsis) appears only in John's Gospel and in the Revelation, as also the expression, "keep My saying." Both the Gospel and the Revelation speak of Christ as "the Lamb," but no other New Testament book does, except when quoting the Old Testament.

(e) The author of Revelation introduces himself simply as "John." Not a word as to which John. The John of New Testament times was the apostle. Everybody knew who he was.

(f) The early Christians saw in Revelation the fulfilment of Jesus' promise that He would "come"

to comfort them, and "manifest" Himself to them (John 14:18, 21). When He promised that the Holy Spirit would "show you things to come" (John 16:13), it was natural for the early Christians to see in Revelation the fulfilment of that promise, for John said that he "was in the Spirit on the Lord's day" and saw this vision of heaven and "things which must shortly take place" (Revelation 1:10, 1). And who would be better fitted to receive and pass on the news of the vision than the "disciple whom Jesus loved," the closest to Him of the Twelve?

What Is the Correct Method Of Interpreting the Revelation?

All interpretations of Revelation follow one of three basic methods:

- (1) Preterist;
- (2) Futurist; or
- (3) Historicist.

(1) The Preterist method considers the

prophecy as relating to events that took place within the lifetime of the author, a purely local, contemporary application. In other words, the dragon and the beast are notorious emperors of Rome in John's day, such as Nero. This method does not accept Revelation as a prophecy of the future; indeed, Preterists generally consider that genuine prophecy is impossible. (Neither do they accept the miracles of the Bible as genuine). Most so-called Higher Criticism favors the Preterist interpretations.

The practical impact of the Preterist method is to relegate the Revelation to the attic. If it concerns only events that took place nearly two thousand years ago, why should we study it today? The special "blessing" pronounced on the one who reads and hears the book is rendered meaningless, for it would have no special significance for us.

Incidentally, the Preterist method of interpretation was espoused by the Jesuit Alcazar from 1569 on as an attempt to counter the thrust of the Protestant Reformation. Many Protestants of

today who accept this view are unaware that they are following the lead of the Roman Catholic Church in an attempt to evade identifying the beast as the papacy.

(2) The Futurist method is almost the exact opposite—it relates the prophecy to the distant future at the end of time. Some Futurists of every generation "find" applications of the prophecy that fit their notorious contemporaries such as Hitler or Stalin, or whoever happens to be the current villain. Sensationalists seize on these new and ingenious interpretations, but the excitement soon dies away until another novel application comes on the scene. Naturally, these wild guesses turn many sensible people away from serious study of the Revelation. Again, the special blessing pronounced on those who study the book is nullified.

The Futurist interpretation is largely the brain child of the Jesuit scholars Francisco Ribera and Cardinal Bellarmine, who saw that Alcazar's Preterism was too unbelievable to be a serious answer to Protestant prophetic interpretation. Their

purpose was to deflect the Antichrist prophecies from the Papacy. Most Evangelical Protestant interpreters of Revelation today follow Cardinal Bellarmine's and Ribera's views, unaware of their Roman Catholic origin.

(3) The historicist method of interpretation sees "the Revelation of Jesus Christ" continuously in history from the time of John down to the end of the world. It sees Christ revealing Himself through the Holy Spirit in the great historical movements of time which have a bearing on preparing a people to meet Christ at His second coming. It recognizes in history the outworking of the great conflict between Christ and Satan.

Thus the Revelation had meaning and encouragement for the early Christians of John's day, and helped them understand the great struggle yet to come before the Second Advent. It appealed to followers of Christ in every generation through history, and has particular import for those living in the time of the end. It fixes the identity of the Antichrist with pinpoint accuracy and illuminates

the otherwise mysterious confusion that pervades the modern Christian scene.

Revelation is to the New Testament what Daniel is to the Old. Much of what was sealed in Daniel is unsealed in Revelation. Revelation contains about 500 quotations or allusions to Old Testament books. It builds on Daniel by starting with Daniel's fourth world empire, Rome, which was contemporary with John. Thus it complements and confirms our understanding of Daniel.

The historicist method of interpretation was the one held by the Protestant Reformers. In fact, it was Luther's recognition of the Papacy as the Antichrist that provided the impetus for his break with Rome, and the establishment of Protestantism. Faithful scholars all through the ages have held to the historicist interpretation, while both Preterism and Futurism are relatively new inventions.

Bible scholars in the past have held to the historicist interpretation. Large numbers saw the 1260 days as literal years reaching to about 1800.

As early as 1639 Thomas Goodwin recognized France as the "tenth part" of the "city" which should suffer a revolution. In 1755, Thomas Prentice declared the Lisbon earthquake of that year to be the opening of the sixth seal (Revelation 6:12). Many in past centuries also saw the Muslim empire in Revelation 9. The prophetic positions taken in this book are in harmony with those of the finest scholars over many centuries. Their truthfulness can be attested by common sense investigation. This book follows the historicist understanding of the prophecy.

Did John Copy Parts of the Revelation From Other Books?

Scholars have found similarity in some of the ideas in Revelation and statements in the pseudepigraphical ("falsely entitled") Book of Enoch that was in circulation as early as 150 years before John wrote. Similarities include references to a multitude that could not be numbered, a star that fell from heaven, the first heaven departing and a new heaven appearing, horses walking in the

blood of sinners up to body level, and names blotted from the book of life.

But this does not mean that John was dependent on the so-called Book of Enoch. The content of John's visions is original with him; only certain phrases and expressions in describing what he saw are similar to the book of Enoch. If the latter was in wide circulation in John's day (as it may have been), it would only be natural for John to employ certain well-known phrases or concepts already familiar. He also used phrases and allusions common to readers of the Old Testament—as many as 500.

For a Bible writer to borrow or quote from other writers does not compromise the integrity of his divine inspiration.

### **Revelation 1:1, 2**

Did Revelation promise that Christ would return within the lifetime of its original readers? Because it speaks of "things which must shortly

take place, "and "the time is at hand," and "behold, I come quickly," etc. some assume that the book is crying "Wolf! wolf!" and that we can therefore never know when Christ's coming is truthfully near. If God inspired John to tell the people in his day that the coming of Christ was near, was He not deceiving them with false hopes? Is it possible that He will not come for another one or two thousand years?

Seven statements in Revelation are superficially assumed to say that Christ would come in the lifetime of John. But when we read them in context and take them for what they say, we can see that the Lord was not misleading His people:

**Revelation 1:1:** "Things which must shortly take place." When Revelation is understood according to the historicist interpretation, this statement comes in focus as saying that events foretold therein would "shortly" or immediately begin unfolding throughout history, such as the seven churches, the seven seals, etc.

**Revelation 1:3:** "The time is near." In other words, the time for these events is now, and continues until the end (compare verse 19, where the Lord instructs John to write about subsequent events "which will take place after this").

**Revelation 3:11; 22:6, 7,12, 20:** "Behold, I am coming quickly," etc. Four such statements come in the conclusion of the book, chapter 22. Any reader in early centuries who grasped the historical oversweep of the prophecies in chapters 1-18 would understand that the Lord's coming would be near when the events there foretold had already taken place historically. The prophecies of Daniel are the key to unlock those of Revelation, and early Christians already understood that the events foretold in Daniel would take centuries to fulfill. Thus the coming of Christ could not take place until the events foretold there had run their course, such as the supremacy of the little horn for 1260 years, etc. The apostle Paul clearly saw this, for he told the church of his day that the Lord would not return in their lifetime (2 Thessalonians 2:1-8).

The nearness of the Lord's coming began to be generally recognized, even widely so, in the early part of the nineteenth century, the "time of the end" pinpointed by Daniel (see Daniel 11:3, 5; 12:4).

Since then it is correct to see the Lord's coming as always "near" in that it is imminent. It is God's purpose that He come soon, and the Lord wants to come. But God's love requires that the message of the gospel first go to all the world, and only "then the end will come" (Matthew 24,14).

### **Revelation 1:10**

When John says that He "was in the Spirit on the Lord's day," could he have meant Sunday? Or did he mean that in vision he was transported to the final day of judgment as "the day of the Lord"?

Well after the time of the apostles, some of the church "fathers" referred to Sunday as the Lord's day. And today many Christian people assume that Sunday is the Lord's day. But as the old farmer

said, calling a lamb's tail a leg doesn't make it one. The Bible never speaks of the first day as "the Lord's day."

Since the Bible consistently designates the Sabbath as the Lord's day and Christ Himself emphasized the same (see Isaiah 58:13, 14; Matthew 12:8), the apostles would not have dared to refer to any other day of the week as the Lord's day.

The Futurist method of interpretation assumes the Lord's day to mean the future day of judgment. But this is contrary to the context. What John saw in vision in chapter 1 was not events of the far-distant future from his day, but Christ's current exalted position as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary—before the final day of judgment (see verses 12-18).

When the New Testament speaks of the day of judgment as "the day of the Lord," it uses the term *hemera tou kuriou* or *hemera kuriou*; but John here uses the term *kuriake hemera*. (Compare 1

Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 1:10.) This means that "the Lord's day" cannot here be understood as the day of judgment.

### **Revelation 2, 3**

Can dates be assigned to the seven periods of the church symbolized by the letters to the seven churches? Not exactly, because major developments of history can seldom be pinpointed by precise dates. Scholars who recognize the seven churches as seven major periods of the church's history often disagree as to the exact times of transition. As the colors of a rainbow merge from one to another without a precise demarcation, so the times of the seven churches blend from one to another. But their broad outlines are clearly recognizable. From our perspective in this "time of the end," it is possible to discern the general outline of these seven periods as the fulfilment of John's prophecy.

### **Revelation 3:5**

The reality of a pre-Advent or "investigative" judgment is so clearly taught here that another look is in order. Some who contend against such a judgment say it is unnecessary because "the Lord knows them that are His." It is true that the Lord's omniscient knowledge makes such a judgment unnecessary from His point of view. An investigative judgment is not a time for the Lord to decide whom to save. Rather, it is a time for Him to defend the decisions He has already made, and to convince the world and the universe that He is just and righteous in making them.

Further, Christ's seven promises "to him who overcomes" show that a superficial "once-saved-always-saved" assumption is spiritual arrogance. It is a misunderstanding of Scripture to say that when a sinner initially professes faith in Christ that he has already come into judgment in the sense of a final acquittal. In a purely legal sense this is true; and it is true so far as God's desire and intent are concerned; but if a believer turns from his faith and resists the ministry of the Holy Spirit in

overcoming, he frustrates the grace of Christ and chooses that his name be blotted from the book of life.

This passage reveals a heavenly investigation of every man's character to determine if he has in fact continued to believe toward the goal of overcoming. The present tense of the verb in John 3:16 also emphasizes this continuity: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever keeps on believing in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

### **Revelation 3:14**

What does "the beginning of the creation of God" mean? Could Christ be a created being? The original word for "beginning," arche, can have both an active and a passive meaning, depending on the context. Thus it could mean either the one who is created, or the one who initiates the creation.

But Revelation clearly defines the meaning here as the one who creates. Christ is introduced as

the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending (1:8). In the Gospel John speaks of Christ as "in the beginning with God," the Word who "was God," in whom "was life, and the life was the light of men." "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:1-10). John could not contradict himself by declaring that Christ Himself was "made."

Paul says of Him, "By Him all things were created, ... and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist" (Colossians 1:16, 17).

Therefore the only way that arche can be understood in harmony with Scripture is in the active sense. Christ is the "beginning of the creation of God" as the Creator Himself, the initiator of the whole creation.

### **Revelation 3:16**

According to the NKJV, Christ says to Laodicea, "I will vomit you out of My mouth." Is

this therefore a promise to reject Laodicea? Is Laodicea's condition hopeless? Should individual Christians in "Laodicea" move back to "Philadelphia?"

The original wording is *mello se emesai*, "I am about to vomit you out," or "I am sick with nausea." The word *mello* has the meaning of "intention, to be about to do something," "indicating a design" (W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, pp. 15, 48, 266). The word conveys the idea of conditionality, intention not yet necessarily actualized. The same word in John 4:47 means that the sick boy was "at the point of death," but he definitely did not die. So the meaning in our passage is that Christ is "at the point" of vomiting (see NIV), but this final act is conditional on Laodicea's rejecting His call to "repent." No way can Laodicea's doom be considered as hopeless.

Neither does Christ counsel individual Christians in Laodicea to move to some other church. His counsel is to "repent" within Laodicea.

Although principles expressed in all the seven messages apply to the last church, Philadelphia does not exist side by side with Laodicea any more than Thyatira or Ephesus does, unless the entire consecutive sequence of the seven churches is meaningless.

Israel of old were often in a terribly backslidden condition, but the Lord never called on His people to move from Israel to some other land. His call by His prophets was always to "repent." Israel of old and the church of today are a body; and if one's body is sick, the solution for any individual member such as a sore ringer is not to cut itself off from the body, but to cooperate in promoting the healing of the entire body. Individual members of Laodicea can help only if they do as Daniel did long ago (in his chapter 9)—confess the sins of the body as their own, and thus promote repentance until it permeates the body of the church.

Philadelphia is one of seven stages in the development of the church as it grows up into

Christ in preparation for His second coming. The final stage will be Laodicea's repentance and overcoming, preparing a people to stand as the bride of the Lamb. Christ's message to Laodicea is a part of gospel "good news," if she will repent. Only Christ's enemy would try to distort the message into bad news of final condemnation.

### **Revelation 6, 7**

Are the seven seals parallel to the seven churches? Do they cover the two thousand years of the Christian era?

Since the early centuries, the majority of scholars have understood the seals to extend from the church of the apostles to the time of the second coming of Christ. Those include Tertullian and Victorinus in the 3rd century, Andreas of Caesarea in the 7th, the Venerable Bede in the 8th, Bruno of Segni in the 12th, Joachim in the 13th, the Lollards in the 15th, and of course many of the Reformers in the 16th. In seeking to oppose the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Futurists placed them all

in the far future, while their colleague Ribera relegated them to the past, before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

But again we see that both Futurism and Preterism are relatively new inventions, both "private interpretations" not upheld by careful scholars through the ages. The seals do not make sense in a Preterist interpretation, and Futurist attempts are guesswork, but they fit perfectly in a historicist identification.

### **Revelation 8 and 9—The Trumpets**

Bible scholars for 15 centuries have seen the seven trumpets as seven periods of upheaval and crisis throughout the Christian era, from the time of John to the end. The seven churches and seven seals are almost unanimously applied to the Christian era as a whole; it is reasonable to apply the seven trumpets likewise. Of course, the fact that many scholars have seen the trumpets in this way does not prove that this view is necessarily correct, but this application should not be lightly

dismissed unless firm evidence requires it.

From the 8th century on we find that thoughtful Bible scholars understood the 5th trumpet to refer to the Saracens. As early as 1587 John Foxe understood the "five months" as 150 literal years, followed by the 391 years of Revelation 9:15. Luther saw the Turks in the 5th and 6th trumpets. Thomas Goodwin, president of Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1654 saw the 6th trumpet as beginning in 1453- Bible students representing many denominations laid the foundation for the position taken in this book. It is reasonable to see the Revelation as including a relevant exposition of the rise and progress of Islam. God foresaw world attention focused on the Middle East.

A large number of scholars for centuries have seen in Revelation 9:15 "the hour, and day, and month, and year" to be "linear"—that is, a prophetic day for a year representing 391 years. Some in recent times suggest that the phrase should be understood as "punctiliar"—that is, a definite point of time, the precise hour of the day of the

month of the year. But this is not what the Greek says. This would be an unnatural and awkward expression, an idiom nowhere else used in Scripture. This is symbolic language as the trumpets are symbolic.

The Greek syntax points to a "linear" understanding. The article ten appears only once, to cover the entire phrase, "the hour and day and month and year." If the intent was a point of time, the article would have been used repeatedly with each word.

If this unusual time phrase is punctiliar, no one has ever come up with a fulfilment that seems appropriate. On the other hand, to understand the phrase as linear fits in as a "remarkable fulfilment of prophecy."

A host of Bible expositors prepared the way for Josiah Litch in 1838 to predict on the basis of this prophecy the fall of the Ottoman Empire some time in 1840. In July of that year he went a step further and proclaimed the "hour" to be 15 days of literal

time. Thus he fixed on August 11, 1840 as the date for the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The actual event that occurred on August 11 of that year was widely recognized as a fulfillment of this prophecy. It was a significant step in a series of events that progressively destroyed Ottoman independence, undoing in a reverse order the events that led to its rise to glory 391 years earlier.

### **Revelation 11:3-13**

In 1698 one Drue Cressener of Ely dated the 1260 years from Justinian to "a little before the year 1800." He did not identify France as the "tenth part" of the "city" that was to fall but understood this passage to describe a revolution in Europe followed by a "revival of true religion" about 1800. Thomas Goodwin in 1639 said that France was the nation to suffer such a revolution. In America, others held the same view (John Cotton and Increase Mather, 1655 and 1708 respectively), and in France itself some of the Huguenots took the same position.

English and Scottish scholars predicted the French Revolution on the basis of this prophecy, decades before the event occurred. When the Revolution itself came, there was a wide chorus of scholars who proclaimed the fulfilment of the prophecy. The bulk of the scholars were unanimous in recognizing the general features as we have presented them in this book.

### **Revelation 12:17**

Two details can be considered further: what is "the testimony of Jesus Christ"? And what is "the remnant" of the woman's seed"?

Some modern translations of this verse render "the testimony of Jesus Christ" as "the truth revealed by Jesus" (GNB), or "their testimony to Jesus" (NEB), or "bearing testimony to Jesus" (RSV). The Greek genitive case allows this phrase as (a) the testimony or witness that Christians give to Christ; or (b) the testimony or witness that comes from Jesus to His people. The context must decide which. According to the context, the King

James and New King James translations are correct—"the testimony of Jesus," that is, from Him to His people.

The reason is that Revelation elsewhere settles the matter. An angel defines the phrase for John as "the spirit of prophecy" (ch. 19:10); which is what the Greek says. (The RSV agrees with the KJV.) The angel tells John not to worship him, because "I am your fellowservant, and of your brethren the prophets." In other words, he says that "the testimony of Jesus" is the work of prophets, or the spirit of prophecy.

Nothing in the Bible gives a hint that the divine gift of prophecy should cease with the inspired writers of the New Testament. It is to be active in the church "till we all come to the unity of the faith ... to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:8-11). The church that awaits the coming of Christ is to "come short in no gift . . . that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:4-8).

Of course, we may expect Satan to send false prophets to confuse and deceive; but this does not mean that God will not send true prophets. We are to test them, prove them, and so reject the false and accept the true (1 John 4:1; Matthew 24:11, 24; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21). God has a right to select whom He will to exercise the gift of prophecy, either men or women (see 2 Samuel 7:2; 1 Chronicles 29:29; Acts 11:27, 28; 21:10; Judges 4:4; 2; 2 Chronicles 34:22; Act 21:9).

According to Revelation 12:17, therefore, we are to expect to see the gift of prophecy among the people of God in the time of the end.

The word "remnant" in this verse means "those which are left over" or that "which remains," *loipoi* in the original. Another word translated "remnant" occurs in Romans 11:5, *leimma*. The two words are related to each other and are virtual synonyms. The New Testament idea of "the remnant" is an extension of the oft-repeated Old Testament idea of a "remnant" who survive terrible Satanic

opposition from without and corroding apostasy from within. Jacob's family preserved in Egypt are a remnant (Genesis 45:7); the 7000 in Israel loyal in Elijah's time are a remnant (1 Kings 18:22); Sennacherib conquered all of Judah except Jerusalem, the remnant (2 Kings 19:4); a remnant would return from captivity (Isaiah 11:11-13). After many centuries, only a remnant would receive the Messiah (Isaiah 4:2, 3; Jeremiah 23:3-6; Micah 4:7; Zephaniah 3:1; 3:13).

This is the idea expressed in Revelation 12:17. As in ancient Israel, the great apostasy of the ages would engulf the masses who profess to be Christian, and only a remnant would remain loyal. Our passage distinguishes them by several criteria: they suffer the wrath of the dragon; they preserve the pure faith of the apostolic church (the woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet), for they are her "seed" or spiritual descendants who keep the commandments of God—a remarkable distinction suggesting that the mass of Christ's professed followers do not; and they have the direct communication of Jesus Christ through the

living testimony of the gift of prophecy.

Such a unique and "different" people are identified in Revelation 14:12 as "the saints."

### **Revelation 13**

It is said that one picture is worth a thousand words. God has wisely "signified" the Book of Revelation through its symbolic pictures. One has only to look at the precise prophetic details and compare the fulfilment spread out before one's eyes in history.

For over a thousand years, the view set forth in this book that the first beast of Revelation 13 is the papacy has been held by many Bible students. By the 13th century, the chorus of voices proclaiming the beast to be the papacy was so widespread that Pope Innocent III tried to parry the thrust of this view by labelling the beast as Islam. Wycliffe, Huss, and the majority of the Reformers boldly proclaimed the beast to be the papacy. This was the general Protestant view. The details of the

prophecy fit no other power.

Identifying the second beast depends on identifying the first. Thomas Goodwin in the 17th century was probably the first to declare it to be a Protestant image of the papacy. As time went on and the phenomenal growth of the United States became the marvel of the 19th century, many scholars came to recognize it as the fulfilment of the second half of this chapter. As we continue in the wild armaments race, the excessive materialism, the crime, terrorism and violence of the closing years of our 20th century, America's projected character of speaking "as a dragon" appears ever more apt.

As far back as the time of Tertullian (2nd century), 666 has been understood as the numerical identification of Antichrist. Even in the early centuries, Bible students made applications to titles that represented the apostasy in one form or another. In 1612, Andreas Helwig published a book entitled *Antichristus Romanos* (Roman Antichrist) in which he said that the pope's title *Vicarius Filii*

Dei was the basis of computing 666. It is common knowledge that the basis of the pope's claim to authority is that he is "vicar" of the Son of God. The exact wording of this title is found in the long-venerated "Donation of Constantine."

The all-too-common tendency to select the names of notorious contemporary tyrants for identifying 666 is wrong, because the text in Revelation specifies that the number pertains only to the beast. Many thousands of people have names that could be totalled up to 666, but this is irrelevant. The name must be in a language which employs letters as numbers, such as Latin. Thus it is futile to count the numerical values of letters in English names or those of other modern languages. The number 666 is only one of many precise points that identify the beast power. Again, a name such as the Greek word Lateinos is irrelevant, because it is not "the number of a man," that is, a specific man. Neither could any one individual's personal name be the one intended, because the beast is a power that exists through successive generations as supreme for 1260 years.

## **Revelation 14:11**

Does this passage teach that the lost will be immortal and suffer never ending torture? Are the wicked never to die the second death?

The expression in the original is *eis aionas aionon*, literally "multiplied ages," and in scripture always denotes finality. When the expression is associated with God or Christ, it means immortality, for God alone is immortal. When the expression is associated with mortal beings, it means up to the end of their lives, finality, their complete end.

Revelation often quotes from the Old Testament. The figure of smoke is quoted from Isaiah 34:10 where the doom of Edom is described as "the smoke thereof shall go up for ever." However, everyone knows that Edom has not kept on burning literally ever since. The expression denotes utter destruction, and the verses that follow speak of desolation, and wild animals inhabiting

Edom.

The Bible must not be made to contradict itself. "The wicked shall perish, .. shall vanish. Into smoke they shall vanish away" (Psalm 37:20).

Sodom and Gomorrah suffered "the vengeance of eternal fire," yet they are not still burning literally (Jude 7). The fire was eternal in its finality. The cities were totally destroyed, forever. "All the proud, yes, all who do wickedly, will be stubble. And the day which is coming will burn them up, says the Lord" (Malachi 4:1).

Consistent Bible teaching is that fallen man is mortal, subject to death; and that immortality is only "in Christ." How could anyone, God included, be happy in eternity knowing that untold millions of people were suffering torture infinitely worse than anything the Nazis inflicted on their victims, and forever and ever with no hope of a solution or end to it? "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting

life" (John 3:16). "The wages of sin is death," even "the second death" (Romans 6:23; Revelation 2:11; 20:14).

### **Revelation 14:15-18**

Here the time for the second coming of Christ is said to depend on the "harvest of the earth" getting "ripe" (Greek, *xeraino*, "to become dry" as of grain being ready for the sickle). Jesus explains the symbol in a parable: "The earth yields crops by itself, first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the ear. But when the grain ripens (Greek, *is ripe*), immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come" (Mark 4:28, 29).

Of course, the time when this fruit will ripen is known to the Father—He alone knows the "day and hour" of Jesus coming (see Mark 13:32). But this foreknowledge of the Father does not mean His predestination, or that we have no responsibility in the matter as believers in Christ. Peter says it is possible for those who believe to hasten the coming of Jesus: "Look eagerly for the

coming of the Day of God, and work to hasten it on" (2 Peter 3:12, NEB).

After the "harvest of the earth" (those who believe in Christ) is reaped, comes the second harvest, the treading of the "great winepress of the wrath of God," the punishment of those who have chosen rebellion against His government. Their wickedness has developed side by side with the pure faith of those who believe, so that the two harvests ripen simultaneously.

### **Revelation 16:12-16**

There have been Bible students in the past who saw the Battle of Armageddon as a literal war fought by armies from the East and the West gathered in Palestine. World Wars I and II, they thought, were leading to Armageddon. They understood the River Euphrates to be a symbol of the political power of Islam to be dried up at the time of the sixth plague. The "kings of the east" they understood to be the nations of the East mobilized against those of the West.

While I favor the view set forth in the comments on this passage in this book, I believe we would be unwise to ridicule the other view held by so many in the past. This passage is obviously unfulfilled prophecy, for the seven plagues have not yet been poured out. We must not be dogmatic or arrogant in understanding unfulfilled prophecy.

If we let the Book of Revelation explain itself, it appears that the Euphrates is indeed a symbol of Islam, for it is presented thus in chapter 9:14. Surprisingly to many people, the oil crisis in our time has catapulted Islam into unprecedented world influence. Adherents of that religion see themselves involved in a new jihad for world domination, eager to see Islam vindicated as the true way of life for everyone. At the time of the capture of American hostages in Iran in 1979, the militant university students in Tehran said "that Islam represented the only possible answer to the West" (Mohamed Heikal, Nairobi Standard, August 16, 1981). A writer in the Sacramento Bee for May 9, 1989 says: "Having suffered moral

degeneration, the West is now craving truth. Islam is another name for the truth." After centuries of missionary endeavor, we must admit that the faith of Christ has made very little headway among the Islamic millions.

Again if we permit Revelation to explain itself, it would seem that "the kings of the east" are related to the angel "from the east" of Revelation 7:1 who brings with him the seal of God. According to Revelation 9:4, Islam has always had an innate sense of respect for the seal of God (understood in its deeper sense as a sign of His approval of a true godly character). What has aroused modern Islam to a jihad heat of indignation against Christianity is not the truth of Christianity but its perversion by Babylon, so that "Christian" ethics appear to them as more immoral and ungodly than even paganism. Hence Islam feels its destiny to save the world from the corruption of apostate Christianity. It claimed this also as its initial motivation.

Could this passage in Revelation presage a final

breakthrough of genuine, uncorrupted, Christlike godliness to penetrate to the heart of Islam? The Greek tenses of Revelation 16:12, 13 could be understood as delineating events that lead up to the final event of gathering the nations to Armageddon (verse 14). The "unclean spirits like frogs" have obviously been at work before the pouring out of the sixth vial; likewise, the drying up of the Euphrates and the coming of the "kings from the sunrising" could here be viewed by the prophet as preparatory to the final act of gathering at "the place called ... Armageddon."

If this gospel of the kingdom is to be proclaimed "in all the world for a witness to all nations" (Matthew 24:14), it must penetrate even to the hundreds of millions of modern Islam. Perhaps the harvest of the earth will yet include a generous reaping from those ranks who respond to the message of the seal of the living God. There may be many individuals in Islam who are weary of the violence and fanaticism that characterize so much of its modern militancy. They would be ready to welcome a revival of pure, apostolic faith. The

process of the ripening of the grain for the harvest includes a retrospective view of history that at last brings the truth into focus. Perhaps the fanatical powers that now resist the free proclamation of the gospel in Islamic areas may in the Lord's providence be "dried up" so that those who wish may receive the news of the seal of God preparatory to the Lord's coming.

### **Revelation 17:7-18**

Many brilliant scholars have wrestled with these details and have come up with contradictory conclusions on some of the minor matters. Apparently the Lord has not yet let the picture be focused very sharply. Until we do see things more perfectly, we must rely on these words of wisdom: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). Rather than seek to pry into things the Lord has not revealed as yet, we should give more attention to making good use of the light we already have!

In the meantime let us stand on the solid basic principles that will keep us from getting lost in mazes of speculation:

- (a) the Bible must be allowed to interpret itself;
- (b) no scripture is of any private interpretation—that is, speculation or guesswork is out (2 Peter 1:20);
- (c) the main purpose of the prophetic revelation—the focus on the war against Christ—must be kept in mind;
- (d) we must not forget the time when this passage was written: the angel is talking to John, and the past, present, and future must be related to his time;
- (e) the expressions "short space" and "one hour" may be indefinite time periods having the meaning of "a while."

We must not bend the prophecy from its grand sweep covering the conflict of the ages to minor episodes that in our myopic vision may assume disproportionate importance.

The revival of the papacy in modern times is that part of the picture which is sharply focused in current events. And the movement of Protestantism to unite with her is also clearly evident. On Pope John Paul II's visits to America he has been welcomed by many Protestant leaders and praised as "the moral leader of the world." When he visited Kenya in 1980, local Protestant leaders hailed him as "our Pope, too." For the first time since Henry VIII, a Roman Catholic officiated in St. Paul's Cathedral in London at the wedding of the Prince of Wales. The General Synod of the Church of England has asked Anglicans to pray with Roman Catholics for the "advance [of] the movement of our two churches toward visible unity." Rome views the goal as that of a "single church" and "organic unity" of all Protestants under herself. The stage is being set for the time when "they that dwell on the earth shall wonder" at the woman who rides upon the beast.

## **Revelation 20**

If we allow this chapter to speak its message unhindered by speculation, there need be no confusion. We must study the Word and accept its clear, obvious teaching. The following are some simple Bible facts that will help to establish the truth about the thousand years:

(1) God's promises to restore the glory and power of ancient literal Israel were conditional: "If you will obey, men you shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people" (see Exodus 19:5 Deuteronomy 7, 8, 27-30; Jeremiah 18:6-10).

(2) Ancient Israel repeatedly failed to meet the appointed conditions, and rejected her Messiah, the Son of God (see Matthew 21:43; 23:38; 27:25; John 19:15).

(3) Those who believe in Christ have become the true Israel (see Galatians 3:16, 26-29; Romans 2:29; Acts 2:16-21; 13:47; 15:13-17).

(4) The apostle Paul made it clear that true children of Abraham have always been those who

had faith, not merely his unbelieving genetic descendants (see Romans 4; Galatians 3:7-9). The many references to Israel in the Revelation confirm that God's purposes will be fulfilled in a worldwide family of believers in Christ from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people (see Revelation 7:1-17; 14:6, 7).

(5) The second coming of Christ comes before the thousand years, because it is portrayed in Revelation 19:11-21 as preceding the events of chapter 20.

(6) Those who have rejected the grace of God perish at the second coming, so that the earth is depopulated (the righteous having been taken away to heaven with Christ). See Revelation 19:18-21; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; 2:8, 9; Jeremiah 25:31-33.

(7) The first resurrection occurs at the second coming of Christ and includes all who have believed in Him truly (see John 5:28, 29; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:18-23, 51-54).

In harmony with these and many other Scriptures, Revelation 20 fits into the picture perfectly as describing what will take place on earth during the thousand years after the second coming of Christ.

### **Revelation 21, 22**

Shall we accept as literal the beautiful descriptions in these two chapters?

Yes, for all the promises of the Bible find their final focus in these descriptions of the new earth. There is no hint in Revelation that these things are merely symbolic or figurative.

The only reason that anyone could give for doubting that the good news of the future is this good is the age-old sin of unbelief which has been such a curse for so many thousands of years. These two chapters have been an immense comfort and encouragement to countless millions since John wrote them. If anything in the Bible is reliable,

these things are: "And he said unto me, these words are faithful and true" (ch. 22:6).

This is our opportunity to exercise perfect faith and confidence in God's love. All this and more is the happy future for those whose heart sympathy is with the plan of salvation effected in Christ, and who have committed their all to Him as He gave all for them.