

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION

\* \* \* CONSUMMATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD \* \* \*

S.L.H.  
Soli Deo Gloria!

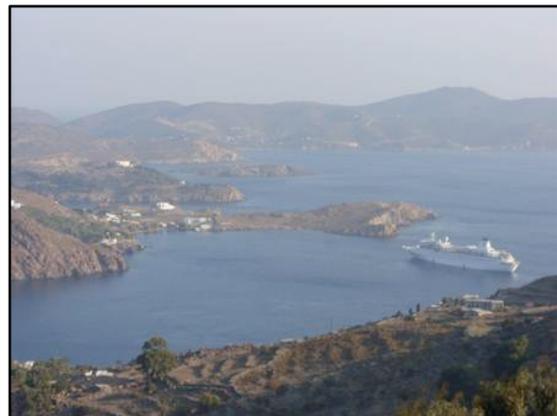
"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand."

Revelation 1:3

AUTHOR: John the Apostle (c. 95 AD)

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE/PLACE OF WRITING. The author of the Book of Revelation was John the Apostle (cf. Rev1:1,4,9; 21:2; 22:8), who also wrote the Gospel of John and the 3 Epistles that bear his name; in his writings John reaches farther back (Jn1:1) and farther forward (Rev22) in time than any other writer of Scripture. Irenaeus (born 130 AD in Smyrna), a disciple of Polycarp (born 69 AD in Smyrna), who was a disciple of John himself, recorded that John wrote Revelation "toward the end of Domitian's reign", which ended in 96 AD (this was virtually universally accepted by the early church for several centuries). This date is well after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in AD 70; therefore, this book must be primarily a book of future prophecy just as it claims to be (Rev1:3; 22:7,10,18,19). A minority view has arisen late in church history, held exclusively by Preterists, that the book was written prior to AD 70 (an early date for Revelation is required in the Preterist understanding of eschatology, explained below).

John received his visions and wrote the book on Patmos (Rev1:9), a small island located near Ephesus off the coast of (modern day) Turkey. In the first century, the Roman Empire used Patmos as a penal colony. Tradition holds that John was exiled to Patmos by the Emperor Domitian, "for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev1:9).



AUDIENCE. John wrote to seven local churches in Asia: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (Rev1:4,11). However, he repeatedly stresses that the message of the book has application to all (Rev2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22; 13:9).

HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION. The major approaches to interpreting the Book of Revelation can be grouped into 4 broad camps:

**IDEALIST** - This interpretation totally allegorizes the events of the book; they are thought to teach spiritual lessons for the church today, but should not be taken as literal or historical events.

**PRETERIST** - This interpretation sees (essentially) all events in the book to have been fulfilled in the events leading up to and culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans in AD 70 (and views Caesar Nero as the Antichrist). This interpretation only makes sense if the book was written before AD 70 (since the book asserts that it is "prophecy"; Rev1:3), which is a minority view with no real support.

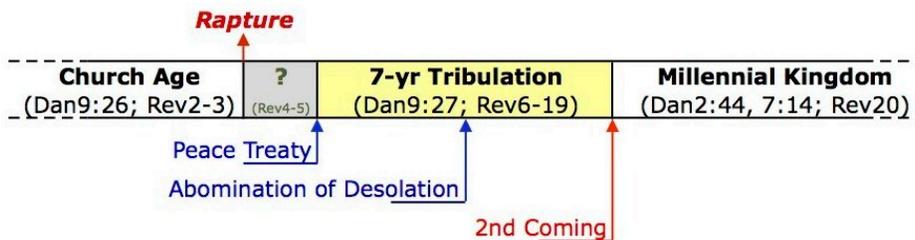
**HISTORICIST** - This interpretation sees the events described in the book as being fulfilled progressively during the course of the Church Age. Thus, some of its prophecy has already been fulfilled, while other parts are still future.

✓ **FUTURIST** - This interpretation sees the book as primarily yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecy (i.e., Revelation 4-22 are regarded as still future) of future events that will literally take place in the chronological order outlined in Revelation.

Admittedly, understanding of the Book of Revelation can be challenging, in that it assumes a complete command of all revelation that has preceded it (especially the O.T., and the Book of Daniel in particular).

THEME OF REVELATION. The Book of Revelation, the concluding book of the Scriptures, brings all of history to its logical, just, and preordained completion. Every great truth, doctrine and prophecy introduced in the Bible finds its consummation in the Book of Revelation, but the ultimate consummation is that of the Kingdom of God (i.e., the righteous rule of God over the whole of His creation, but especially on earth; Matt6:10). The ultimate consummation requires the creation of a new heaven and a new earth in order to finally resolve the so-called problem of evil (see CHART: The Problem of Evil in the Pagan vs. Biblical Worldviews).

The majority of the Book of Revelation deals with the Tribulation period (Rev. 6-19) and is essentially a detailed, chronological revelation of the events that will take place during Daniel's 70th "week" (Dan9:27), the 7-year period immediately preceding the Second Coming of Christ, at which time the Lord Jesus Christ will establish His Millennial Kingdom and in His physical presence rule in righteousness over all the earth (Isa11:1-10; Zech14:9).



VALUE OF REVELATION. The Book of Revelation contains no direct quotes from the O.T., but includes ~550 references or allusions to it. According to Arnold Fruchtenbaum, the value of the book is not that it contains a lot of new information not given in the O.T., but rather that it takes the multitude of scattered O.T. prophecies and sets them in chronological order so that the sequence of end-time events may be understood.

REVELATION AND FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD. Interestingly, the Holy Spirit seems to link the concept of being the "friend of God" to God's revealing of His future plans. In the O.T., Abraham was uniquely known as the "friend of God" (2Chron20:7; Isa41:8; Jas2:23) and was treated to much prophetic insight (Gen12:1-3; Gen18:22); in the N.T., Jesus called the disciples His "friends" in the upper room the night before His crucifixion (Jn15:15) when He disclosed to them the Rapture (Jn14:1-3), the coming of the Holy Spirit (Jn16:7), and other revelations concerning the Church Age. The ultimate manifestation of "friendship" is love. The two writers of Scripture explicitly called the "beloved" of God are Daniel (Dan9:23; 10:19) and John (Jn20:2; 21:7; 21:20), both of whom were given grand visions of God's prophetic plan extending to the very end of the age.

OUTLINE OF REVELATION. The inspired outline of the book is [Rev1:19](#).

<b>I. THE THINGS WHICH THOU HAST SEEN (PAST)</b>	<b>Revelation 1</b>
A. Vision of the Glorified Lord Jesus Christ	Rev1:1-20
<b>II. THE THINGS WHICH ARE (PRESENT)</b>	<b>Revelation 2-3</b>
A. Letters to the Seven Churches in Asia	Rev2:1-3:22
1. Ephesus	Rev2:1-7
2. Smyrna	Rev2:8-11
3. Pergamos	Rev2:12-17
4. Thyatira	Rev2:18-29
5. Sardis	Rev3:1-6
6. Philadelphia	Rev3:7-13
7. Laodicea	Rev3:14-22
<b>III. THE THINGS WHICH SHALL BE HEREAFTER (FUTURE)</b>	<b>Revelation 4-22</b>
A. Scene of God's Throne Room in Heaven	Rev4:1-5:14
B. Seal Judgments	Rev6:1-17
C. Revival Led by 144,000 Jewish Evangelists	Rev7:1-17
D. Trumpet Judgments	Rev8:1-9:21
E. The Little Book	Rev10:1-11
F. The Two Witnesses	Rev11:1-14
G. Prophecy of the Bowl Judgments	Rev11:15-19
H. The Great Parenthesis	Rev12:1-15:8
1. The Woman and Her Male Child	Rev12:1-17
2. The Two Beasts	Rev13:1-18
3. The Lamb on Mount Zion	Rev14:1-20
4. Prelude to the Bowl Judgments	Rev15:1-8
I. Bowl Judgments	Rev16:1-21
J. Babylon the Harlot	Rev17:1-18:24
1. Mystery Babylon	Rev17:1-18
2. Babylon the Great	Rev18:1-24
K. Marriage Supper of the Lamb	Rev19:1-10
L. The Second Coming	Rev19:11-21
M. The Millennial Kingdom	Rev20:1-10
1. Binding of Satan	Rev20:1-3
2. Thousand Year Reign of Christ	Rev20:4-6
3. Release of Satan and Final Rebellion	Rev20:7-10
N. The Great White Throne Judgment	Rev20:11-15
O. The New Heaven and New Earth	Rev21:1-22:21

## CHAPTER 1

### VISION OF THE GLORIFIED LORD JESUS CHRIST

- [1] This "revelation" was given by "God" the Father to "Jesus Christ"<sup>1</sup>, who communicated it to "John" the Apostle, primarily by means of an "angel" (which may have been a human *messenger* rather than a spirit creature; cf. Rev22:8-9).

The English word "revelation" is a translation of the Greek word **ἀποκάλυψις** (from which we get the English *apocalypse*), meaning "an unveiling" or "a disclosure of that which was previously hidden or unknown". Although considered a hopelessly incomprehensible book by many, its very name indicates that in giving this book God intended to communicate with His "servants".

By "signified" is meant that much of the revelation given to John has been rendered into signs/symbols, for reasons clarified in v2. In interpreting these signs/symbols, we are not free to independently decide their meaning for ourselves (2Pet1:20), but must allow scripture to interpret scripture (1Cor2:13). Every symbol used in Revelation is defined, if not in the immediate context of Revelation, then in the broader context of the whole of the Bible (most often from the O.T.).

- [2] John "saw" and heard the events in this book in a vision, then attempted to write down what he had seen. Thus, his descriptions use first century language and understanding in an attempt to communicate scenes that are, even relative to today, yet future (i.e., modern technology, advanced warfare, geopolitics, etc.). More than 70 times John uses the comparative terms "like", "as", and "as it were" in attempting to describe what he "saw". This also serves to explain the prominence of symbols in Revelation.
- [3] While there are many places in the Bible that commend the reading/study of Scripture in general (e.g., Luk11:28), Revelation is the only book of the Bible that promises a special "blessing" to those who study it in particular (repeated in Rev22:7; and yet, it is probably the book of the Bible most neglected/avoided by Christians). Note that "he" who reads is singular, while "they" that hear are plural, suggestive of an oral reading of scripture to an audience of listeners (such as would have occurred in the early church, where believers were not privileged to possess personal copies of scripture).

By "the time is at hand" is meant that the commencement of the prophetic program described in the Book of Revelation is imminent. This sequence of events, beginning with the **Rapture** (Rev4:1), could start at any moment<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Jesus, in His human nature, could learn (Luk2:52; esp. Mk13:32), even while His divine nature knows all things (e.g., Luk6:8).

<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that the Second Coming of Christ is imminent. Since the 70th Week of Daniel (Dan9:27) has not yet begun, the Second Coming is at least 7 years in the future. However, because the Rapture of the Church precedes the 7-year Tribulation, it can be imminent (i.e., no prophesied event must take place before it can occur). The prominent N.T. exhortations for believers to expect an imminent

- [4] The author identifies himself as "John". He gives himself no title, as he would be very well known to those he is addressing<sup>3</sup>. John's book (of Revelation) is addressed to "seven churches" in the Roman province of "Asia" (present-day Turkey).

In the Bible, the number 7 is often used symbolically to signify completion. It will be evident in Revelation 2-3 that these "seven churches" were selected/addressed in a way such that they represent the complete or total church, in all places and at all times. The message transmitted to these "seven churches" is comprehensive and sufficient for all churches throughout the course of the Church Age.

"Grace" is the customary greeting in the Greek culture, "peace" in the Hebrew. Grace and peace come only from God (e.g., Rom1:7; Col1:2; 1Thess1:1), who is revealed in scripture as a Trinity of divine Persons.

God (the Father) is denoted as Him "who is, and who was, and who is to come", which is the very phrase from which is derived the divine name, YHWH (or Jehovah; cf. Exod3:14). The "seven spirits" should be regarded as the seven-fold ministry of God the Holy Spirit (cf. Is1:2).

- [5] And lastly, from "Jesus Christ" who is God the Son. The order of the divine Persons differs here from the usual Father, Son and Holy Spirit (e.g., Matt28:19; 1Jn5:7), perhaps because Jesus is being portrayed as the glorified Son of Man, perfect humanity who is Himself "the first begotten of the dead" (i.e., the first man to experience resurrection; 1Cor15:20-23), and as "the faithful witness" (Heb3:1-2) He is communicating the revelation He received from God to His servants (Rev1:1).

Note that the three offices of Jesus Christ are in view: 1) Prophet, as "the faithful witness", 2) Priest, as "the first begotten of the dead" and He who "washed us from our sins in his own blood", and 3) King, as "prince [Lit., ruler] of the kings of the earth".

John dedicates the book "unto him that loveth us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (i.e., Jesus Christ).

- [6] Only the Church, the Body/Bride of Christ, is privileged to serve as both "kings<sup>4</sup> and priests" (cf. 1Pet2:9), patterned after our Head (Eph1:22-23; Ps110; Zech6:11-13); we will reign with Christ in His

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coming of Christ (e.g., Matt24:42-28; Luk12:40; Philip4:5; Jas5:8-9) is one of the strongest arguments for a pre-trib rapture.

<sup>3</sup> Church history records that John ministered in the church at Ephesus prior to his exile to Patmos, and that he returned to Ephesus after his release.

<sup>4</sup> A textual variant of significant doctrinal consequence occurs here, resulting in "kings" in the KJV/NKJV (based on the Textus Receptus) and "kingdom" in all modern translations (based on the critical Greek N.T.). The N.T. is filled with promises that Christians will one day reign with Christ, so "kings" is consistent with those clear promises. On the other hand, the Church is never referred to as a "kingdom", neither is the relationship between Christ and His Church one of King/Kingdom, but rather Bridegroom/Bride or Head/Body (in contrast, Christ will be King over the nation of Israel). The inspired and preserved words of God in Greek are always to be found in the Textus Receptus.

Millennial Kingdom (2Tim2:12; Rev20:6). In contrast, for Israel under the Mosaic covenant, kings came from the tribe of Judah and priests from the tribe of Levi; these two offices were never combined in one man<sup>5</sup>. Note that in this verse Jesus is referred to as "God".

- [7] The return of Christ will be a physical, bodily coming, just as he departed (Dan7:13; Matt24:27-30; Act1:10). Jesus will be recognized by Israel (i.e., "they who pierced him"; Zech12:10) as their Messiah.

Everyone will know when Christ returns; it will not be a secret return as some cults have taught. All men will "wail" at the coming of Christ. Why? Because His coming the second time will be in judgment (cf. Rev19:11-21).

- [8] This verse is a forceful assertion of the deity of Jesus Christ. The divine attribute of eternity is applied to Jesus in the descriptions "Alpha and Omega" and "the beginning and the ending", as are the divine names: 1) "I am<sup>6</sup>" (Exod3:14), 2) "who is, and who was, and who is to come" (i.e., the three tenses of the verb 'to be', a contraction of which is the origin of YHWH), and 3) "the Almighty" (Gen17:1; Exod6:3).

- [9] John was exiled to the Island of Patmos by the Roman Emperor Domitian from AD 86-96 for his Christian witness; Domitian was the brother of Titus, who destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70. Patmos is a rugged, volcanic island 37 miles off the west coast of Turkey, 10 miles long and 6 miles wide.

- [10] John was taken "in the spirit" (Cp., 2Cor12:1-4) to receive a vision of that period of time the Bible refers to as the "Day of the Lord" (subject of entire books of Joel and Zephaniah), which he records in the Book of Revelation. The "Day of the Lord" is the period of time when God supernaturally intervenes in world history for the purpose of pouring out His wrath in judgment (cf. Isa2:11-12; Zeph1:14-18); it includes all of the 7-year Tribulation (i.e., 70th Week of Daniel; Dan9:27).

- [11] Whereas Daniel was told to "seal up" the apocalyptic visions he received "till the time of the end" (Dan12:4,9), John is commanded to "write" his down and "send it" to the "seven churches"; John is forbidden to seal this book of prophecy, for the time of the end is "at hand" (cf. Rev1:3).

These seven churches here addressed are located in present-day Turkey, whose mountains are virtually within sight of Patmos.

- [12] These "seven golden lampstands" are reminiscent of the 7-branched lampstands in the Tabernacle and Temple (Exod25:31-40; 1Kgs7:49). Such lampstands are not candlesticks, but oil-fed lamps. When used symbolically, oil is a type of the Holy Spirit, and its use in anointing prophets, priests, and kings is a picture of being filled with the Spirit (e.g., Exod29:7; 1Sam15:1). These "lampstands" are a

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<sup>5</sup> For example, King Uzziah was severely disciplined by God for intruding upon the office and prerogative of the priesthood (cf. 2Chron26:16-21).

<sup>6</sup> Just as the Gospel of John, the Book of Revelation contains seven "I am" statements made by the Lord Jesus Christ (Rev1:8,11,17; 2:23; 21:6; 22:13,16).

fitting symbol for local churches (Rev1:20), which are comprised of believers who are indwelt/filled with the Holy Spirit (Jn14:16-17; 1Cor6:19; Eph5:18), and by means of His divine power shine the light of Jesus Christ into the world (cf. Matt5:14-16; Jn1:4-9).

- [13] The "Son of man" is the title the Lord Jesus Christ most often used of Himself; it is clearly messianic, and it emphasizes the authority given by God to Him to rule and to judge (e.g., Jn5:25-27; Dan7:13-14). The garments described are those of a priest (Cp., Exod28:39-40). The office Jesus occupies today is that of High Priest (cf. Heb4:14; 7:25). In the Tabernacle/Temple, the High Priest alone was responsible for lighting and trimming the golden lampstand (Num8:2-3). Here, Jesus is seen as High Priest "in the midst of the seven lampstands", which are His churches (v20; Cp., Matt18:20; Jn15:1-8).
- [14] The description of His "hair" is the same as that of "the Ancient of days" (i.e., God; Dan7:9), and His "eyes like a flame of fire" suggest judgment.
- [15] His "feet like fine brass" further emphasizes the picture of the Lord Jesus Christ coming in judgment, as the sacrifices in the Tabernacle/Temple were consumed by fire on the altar made of brass (cf. Exod27:1-2; 29:38-42). The description of His "voice like the sound of many waters" is similar to how Ezekiel described "the voice of the Almighty" (Ezek1:24) and the voice of "the glory of God" (Ezek43:2).
- [16] Jesus holds "seven stars", which are "the angels"<sup>7</sup> of the seven churches" (v20), in his "hand" (Cp., Jn10:27-29). The "sharp two-edged sword" is the Word of God (Heb4:12), by which He will judge the nations (Rev19:15). John's Gospel is the only one in which Jesus' transfiguration is not recorded (Cp., Matt17:2; Mk9:2-3, Luk9:28-29), but John records his vision of the glorified Lord Jesus Christ here.
- [17] Fallen and sinful man is always struck with fear in the presence of the holy and righteous God (Cp., Isa6:5; Dan10:15-18).
- [18] There is no doubt that it is Jesus speaking; He "liveth", then "was dead", and is now "alive forevermore" as a resurrected and glorified Man. That He has "the keys of Hell and of death" means He has authority over both the spirits and the bodies of all men (Cp., Matt10:28; Jn5:25-29).

**Hell/Hades in English Bibles.** The KJV renders the Greek ἄδης as "hell", whereas most modern versions give the transliteration *hades* (analogously, *sheol* in the O.T.). Hell is the temporary place of torment for the unbelieving dead (cf. Luk16:19-28), to be distinguished from the Lake of Fire which will be their final and eternal place of damnation. All unbelieving dead in Hell are cast into the Lake of Fire following judgment at the Great White Throne (Rev20:10-15).

<sup>7</sup> These "angels" may be human 'messengers' rather than spirit creatures, as discussed in the introduction to Revelation 2.

- [19] This verse is a divinely-inspired outline to the Book of Revelation and the structural key to understanding the book. The "things which thou hast seen" is the vision of the glorified Lord Jesus Christ which John saw in Revelation 1, the "things which are" are the seven churches of John's day addressed in Revelation 2-3 (which represent the entire Church Age), and the "things which shall be hereafter" relate to Revelation 4-22, which will begin only after the Church Age has concluded. The opening words in Revelation 4:1, "After this" (Greek, **μετὰ ταῦτα**), are identical with those rendered "hereafter" in this verse.
- [20] A "mystery" (transliteration of the Greek **μυστήριον**) denotes something that was previously unknown (i.e., unrevealed in the O.T.), but is now (i.e., in the N.T.) revealed by God (cf. Rom16:25-26; Eph3:3-5). In this verse, Jesus defines the symbols He has used in this chapter, those of the "seven stars" (v16) and the "seven lampstands" (v12).

The truth symbolically portrayed in Revelation 1 should be a great comfort to believers, seeing that the glorified Lord Jesus Christ walks in the midst of His churches (v13; Cp., Matt18:20; 28:20). Note, however, that these seven local churches each stands on its own base, and while all are gathered around the same Lord (1Cor12:5), each is independently responsible to the Lord, not to any man-made church authority or hierarchy (cf. Matt13:31-32).

## CHAPTER 2

### THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN ASIA

How many epistles (i.e., letters) are there in the New Testament? Paul wrote 14 (Romans through Hebrews), and James through Jude make 7 more. Often forgotten, however, are 7 additional letters addressed to 7 churches in Asia, recorded in Revelation 2-3.

These letters were dictated by the glorified Lord Jesus Christ to John the Apostle while he was exiled on the Island of Patmos (Rev1:9-11); written c. 95 AD, these letters dealt with churches as they existed more than a generation removed from those described in the Book of Acts or the other N.T. epistles.

The letters are addressed to the "angels" (cf. Rev1:20) of the churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. The English "angel" is a transliteration of the Greek **ἄγγελος**, which means 'messenger'; while it is often used as a technical term for heavenly spirit creatures, it can and is used of human messengers in the N.T. as well (e.g., Rev22:8-9). Some have interpreted the addressees of these letters to be particular angels who have some charge or responsibility over these local churches. However, the letters charge these "angels" with various sins; since elect angels do not sin, these "angels" are most likely human messengers, perhaps pastors/leaders of these churches.

Ephesus was the recipient of an important letter from the Apostle Paul, Thyatira (Act16:14) and Laodicea (Col2:1:4:13,15,16) are mentioned in passing elsewhere in the N.T., but Smyrna, Pergamos, Sardis, and Philadelphia do not appear in the Bible outside of Revelation 1-3. It is possible that all of these churches were planted as a result of Paul's extended ministry based in Ephesus which reached all of Asia with the

gospel (Act19:1-10). Regardless, at least by the end of the 1st century, each of these cities had established N.T. churches. The vision that John saw in Revelation 1:12-16 was that of the glorified Lord Jesus Christ coming in judgment, and in these 7 letters we find Him passing judgment on 7 particular churches relative to matters of both doctrine and practice.

**Enduring Relevance for Churches/Believers Today.** These 7 churches were literal, historic churches in 1st century Asia; they really had the characters/issues described in these letters. And yet, these 7 churches were providentially selected by the Lord Jesus Christ to be the recipients of 7 unique letters in order to provide (in some sense) a *complete* message to all churches (i.e., believers) during the present Church Age.

**"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches..."** (Rev2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22)

Each of the 7 letters follows a common format (although some sections are omitted for particular churches), which can be outlined as:

- I. Salutation. Includes one or more (metaphorical) titles for Christ (generally taken from the vision in Revelation 1) appropriate for the message to the church. The name of the church addressed also seems to have meaning that is relevant to its character/situation.
- II. Commendation. 2 of the churches receive no commendation (Sardis and Laodicea).
- III. Criticism. 2 of the churches receive no criticism (Smyrna and Philadelphia).
- IV. Exhortation. Instruction and/or warning for the church directed to the whole congregation.
- V. Promise. Each letter closes with one or more promises for individual believers extended to "him that overcometh" (cf. 1Jn5:5).

#### LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT EPHEBUS

Historical Context. At the time this letter was written, Ephesus was a major seaport for the Roman province of Asia. It was also home to the legendary Temple of Diana (a.k.a. Artemis; cf. Act19:27,34), one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, which totally dominated the religious and commercial culture of Ephesus (cf. Act19:23-27,35). On his third missionary journey, the Apostle Paul spent three years in Ephesus (Act20:31), first preaching in the synagogue and then teaching in "the school of Tyrannus", which resulted in the establishment of the church at Ephesus, from which "all they who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Act19:8-10). Paul subsequently wrote his epistle to the Ephesians, as well as his two epistles to Timothy (who was ministering to the church in Ephesus at that time; 1Tim1:3). A decided emphasis on the teaching of sound doctrine as well as the refutation of doctrinal error prevails throughout 1 Timothy (1Tim1:3,10; 2:12; 3:2 4:6,11,13,16; 5:17; 6:1-3), consistent with Paul's previous prophecy/warning to the Ephesian elders that after his departure from Ephesus "grievous wolves" would enter into their fellowship (and even rise up from amongst them) "speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples

after them" (Act20:27-31). Timothy's labors in this respect were apparently successful, since the Lord's letter to the church at Ephesus, dictated to the Apostle John some 3 decades later, commends the church for their attention to sound doctrine (Rev2:2).

#### I. SALUTATION

[1] The meaning of Ephesus is 'desirable', 'beloved', or even a term of endearment such as 'darling'. Christ chooses for Himself two titles, both of which come from John's vision of the glorified Christ in Revelation 1. First, "he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand" (Rev1:16), emphasizes that the angel/church is secure in Christ (Jn10:28). Second, "who walketh in the midst of the seven golden lampstands" (Rev1:12-13), emphasizes that Christ is present among His churches (Matt18:20).

#### II. COMMENDATION

[2] Christ begins His evaluation of the church with the words "I know". In Greek, οἶδα is a perfect, active, indicative verb that emphasizes the fact that Jesus performs His evaluation having complete and perfect knowledge of all facts/circumstances (cf. 1Cor4:4-5). The Ephesians are commended for their "labor" (i.e., works) and "patience" (i.e., perseverance). Their "labor" seems to be an allusion to diligence in "tr[ying] them which say they are apostles, and are not" (Cp., 2Cor11:3-4,13-15). This church gave rigorous attention to sound doctrine and rooted out false teachers<sup>8</sup>, presumably in response to Paul's prophetic warning of several decades before (Cp., Act20:27-32) and Timothy's subsequent ministry among them (1Tim4:6,13,16).

[3] Their "patience" seems to relate to their perseverance in the work of enforcing doctrinal purity. This work was undertaken "for [Christ's] name's sake" (i.e., for the glory and honor of Jesus Christ), which is the purest of all motives. While it is fashionable to deemphasize the importance of doctrine today, note that diligence in maintaining pure, Biblical doctrine within the church is the first characteristic to be commended by the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### III. CRITICISM

[4] With "nevertheless", Christ turns to His criticism of this church, in that "thou hast left thy first love". In the previous generation, the Ephesian believers had been known for their love for the Lord Jesus and all His saints (Eph1:15). Has their "labor" for the Lord now taken priority over their love relationship with Him (Cp., Martha vs. Mary; Luk10:38-42)? In matters of doctrinal discernment, it is necessary to "speak the truth", but we must do so "in love" (Eph4:15).

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<sup>8</sup> In contrast, most churches today are unwilling to test their own pastors/teachers. But this same Apostle John commands, "Try the spirits, whether they are of God..." (1Jn4:1).

IV. *EXHORTATION*

- [5] Christ's exhortation to the church of Ephesus is to "repent" and to return to their "first works". This is not a call to forsake or diminish their priority on doctrine, but to conduct their ministry by "speaking the truth in love" (Eph4:15). Failure to heed this exhortation to "repent" is accompanied by a warning that Christ would "remove thy lampstand out of his place"; this is not a threat of individual believers losing their salvation, but that their local church (i.e., the lampstand; Rev1:20) would be removed as an earthly witness (Cp., 1Jn5:16).
- [6] This verse is actually an additional commendation added as a postscript. The Ephesians are commended because they hate "the deeds of the Nicolaitans". Church history has not preserved any record of a sect known as the Nicolaitans, so the meaning of the name must provide insight into the group. The name is composed of two Greek words, *νικάω* meaning 'to conquer' or 'to be superior to' and *λαός* meaning 'people'. The "deeds of the Nicolaitans" relate to a nascent tendency to make a distinction between the (so-called) clergy and laity. What began as "deeds" in Ephesus developed into "doctrine" in Pergamos (Rev2:15).

V. *PROMISE*

- [7] Each of the seven letters includes the refrain, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches", which indicates that all seven letters contain messages that are relevant and applicable to all believers throughout the Church Age; for this reason, Revelation 2-3 are the most important chapters in the Book of Revelation for the Christian.

**Who is the Overcomer?** All seven letters in Revelation 2-3 contain one or more distinct promises "to him that overcometh". Who is the overcomer? As the Apostle John uses this term, it would seem to be an appellation for genuine believers (1Jn5:4-5). Since local churches then, as now, were assemblies of professing believers (both false and genuine), the promise to the overcomer should be understood to be a special message/promise intended only for true believers within local churches.

Christ's promise to the overcomer is that in the future he will have freedom to "eat of the tree of life". In the new earth of the eternal state, all believers will again have full access to "the tree of life" (Cp., Gen3:24; Rev22:2,14).

LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA

Historical Context. Like Ephesus, Smyrna was a major seaport for the province of Asia; the city is still a seaport in modern Turkey, but its name was changed from Smyrna to Izmir in 1930. Historical tradition recognizes Smyrna as the birthplace of the ancient Greek poet, Homer. More importantly, Polycarp, who was a disciple of the Apostle John, may have been bishop (i.e., pastor) of the church at Smyrna when this letter

was written<sup>9</sup> (if so, he is the "angel" to whom the letter is addressed; v8). Polycarp was burned at the stake in Smyrna by the Roman Governor of Asia in AD 155 for his refusal to offer incense to an image of the Roman Caesar and to confess, "Caesar is Lord"; he testified at the time of his martyrdom to have faithfully served the Lord Jesus Christ for 86 years. Polycarp's burning was instigated by the Jews in Smyrna, whose virulent hatred for the Christian bishop is reputed to have resulted in them 'gathering fuel for the fire on the Sabbath'.

#### I. SALUTATION

- [8] The meaning of "Smyrna" is myrrh, an aromatic resin obtained from the sap of a number of small, thorny trees in the Middle East, used in ancient Israel to prepare dead bodies for burial (Cp., Jn19:39); thus, connotatively, myrrh has a strong association with death. Christ chooses for Himself two titles, both of which were used in Revelation 1. First, "the first and the last" (Rev1:11,17) relates to Christ's attribute of eternity and emphasizes His divine nature; it is a title ascribed solely to Jehovah in the O.T. (e.g., Isa44:6). Second, "which was dead, and is alive" (Rev1:18), calls attention to His human resurrection. To these believers experiencing severe persecution and death (v10), Christ holds out the assurance of their resurrection (1Cor15:20-22).

#### II. COMMENDATION

- [9] Christ again begins His evaluation of the church with the words "I know". In Greek, *οἶδα* is a perfect, active, indicative verb that emphasizes the fact that Jesus performs His evaluation having complete and perfect knowledge of all facts/circumstances (cf. 1Cor4:4-5). Smyrna is a church experiencing "tribulation", which the Lord Jesus asserted would be **the expected norm** during the Church Age (Jn15:18-20; 16:33; cf. 2Tim3:12). Smyrna is also a church that would consider themselves to be in "poverty", but Christ asserts "thou art rich". It is common in these seven letters that the self-evaluation of the churches is always incorrect (Cp., Rev3:17).

Christ's reference to "the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan" contains manifold truth and application. First, those who "say they are Jews, and are not" are presumably the (ethnic) Jews of Smyrna who were unbelievers (Cp., Rom2:28-29; 9:6). It is these Jews who were instigating the persecution of Christians at Smyrna, so that Christ refers to them as "the synagogue of Satan". It is "blasphemy" that the ancient, elect people of God (i.e., the Jews) are actually being used by Satan to destroy Christians (i.e., believing Gentiles following the Jewish Messiah) in Smyrna. Satan no doubt believes himself to be achieving two victories simultaneously. First, the fledgling church in Smyrna is being destroyed. Second, by using the Jews as his instrument to destroy the church, he probably believes it will incite God's wrath against the Jews, incurring His judgment<sup>10</sup> (as when Balaam counseled Balak to tempt Israel to commit harlotry, and subsequently idolatry,

<sup>9</sup> Even if Polycarp did not become bishop of Smyrna until after the writing of this letter, he was certainly a Christian in the church at Smyrna when the letter was received from John the Apostle.

<sup>10</sup> Satan always has, and always will, hate the Jews and seek their extermination as a race/nation. By doing so, he believes he can prevent the return of Christ (Hos5:15; Matt23:37-39).

with the daughters of Moab, believing God would be forced to judge His own people; cf. Num25).

III. *CRITICISM*

[NONE]

IV. *EXHORTATION*

- [10] Christ exhorts these believers to "fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer", which includes "prison", "tribulation", and "death" (Cp., Matt10:28). Such "trials" are for the purpose of testing/validating a believer's faith (1Pet1:7). Those who remain "faithful" to Christ even to the point of "death" are promised to be rewarded with "a crown of life", a reward elsewhere promised to the one who endures trial/temptation, which evidences that he loves the Lord (Jas1:12). Crowns in the N.T. symbolize rewards given to some believers, but not all, on the basis of work/merit (1Cor3:11-15; 2Cor5:10), such that this promise of "a crown of life" is not an allusion to the eternal life promised to all believers on the basis of grace.

The assertion that the believers in Smyrna "shall have tribulation ten days" has been the subject of varied interpretations. Historicists have argued that the Roman persecution of Christians was carried out by "ten" individual emperors<sup>11</sup>, suggesting that "days" as used here is a metaphor for their reigns. However, it is probably better to understand this as a prophecy of an intense persecution to be experienced by this local church during a literal period of "ten days".

V. *PROMISE*

- [11] Again, each of the seven letters includes the refrain, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches", which indicates that all seven letters contain messages that are relevant and applicable to all believers throughout the Church Age.

Christ's promise to the overcomer is that he "shall not be hurt of the second death". In this sentence, the English "shall not" is a translation of the Greek double negative οὐ μὴ, which is used to express an absolute impossibility. The "second death" is to be cast into the lake of fire (Rev20:6,14; 21:8); since no genuine believer will experience this, "he that overcometh" **must include all believers** (consistent with 1Jn5:5).

LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT PERGAMOS

Historical Context. Unlike the coastal cities of Ephesus and Smyrna, Pergamos was located about 20 miles inland. It was renown for manufacturing parchment/paper, and it was home to a university that had a library housing over 200,000 volumes (rivaling, if not surpassing, the library at Alexandria). Pergamos was very wealthy, but extremely wicked.

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<sup>11</sup> The Roman persecution of Christians is often characterized as having begun under Nero in AD 64 and ended with the death of Diocletian in AD 310. In reality, it began before Nero (cf., Act12:1-4) and continued after Diocletian.

The city was an epicenter of paganism, with major cults worshipping Athena, Asclepius, Dionysus, and Zeus; it was the location of the Great Altar of Zeus, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. From the days of Nimrod (Gen10:8-10), the false, pagan, occult religious system of Satan had been headquartered at Babylon. When the Medes and the Persians conquered Babylon under Belshazzar (Dan5:30-31), the priestly class of that Satanic system moved in mass to Pergamos, where it remained for centuries (until it migrated to Rome; cf. Hislop, The Two Babylons). In the first century, Satan's earthly headquarters (and quite likely his personal presence<sup>12</sup>), was in Pergamos.

#### I. SALUTATION

[12] The literal meaning of Pergamos is 'mixed marriage', which connotes the union of two things that should not be joined. Christ chooses for Himself a single title, "he who hath the sharp sword with two edges" (Rev1:16), which is a clear reference to the Word of God (Cp., Jn1:1; Heb4:12; Rev19:13). Scripture makes clear that it is the Word of God that will be used as the ultimate standard of judgment (Jn17:17; Rev19:15).

#### II. COMMENDATION

[13] Christ again begins His evaluation of the church with the words "I know". In Greek, οἶδα is a perfect, active, indicative verb that emphasizes the fact that Jesus performs His evaluation having complete and perfect knowledge of all facts/circumstances (cf. 1Cor4:4-5). Christ notes that the believers who "dwell" in Pergamos live in a city "where Satan's throne is", undoubtedly a reference to the pagan/occultic priesthood headquartered in the city, and "where Satan dwelleth", perhaps a reference to the personal presence of Satan himself. They are commended for remaining faithful to the "name" of Christ and refusing to deny "the faith" in the place on earth that is quite likely most hostile to Christianity at that time.

Christ mentions by name Antipas, a "faithful martyr who was slain among [the believers at Pergamos]". The English word "martyr" is a transliteration of the Greek word that means 'witness'. Early witnesses for Christ (Cp., Act4:20) were so frequently "slain" for their faith that the ordinary word for witness came to mean "martyr" as we understand it today. Antipas is a Greek name that means 'against all/everyone'.

#### III. CRITICISM

[14] "But I have a few things against thee", with which Christ turns to His criticisms of this church. Christ denounces "them" within the church who hold the "doctrine of Balaam" (v14) and the "doctrine of the Nicolaitans" (v15). When the pagan prophet Balaam realized the LORD would not allow him to curse Israel, as his patron King Balak was paying him to do, he counseled Balak to entice the men of Israel to **intermarry** with the women of Moab (Num31:15-16), knowing this would tempt Israel to compromise with the pagan worship of the Moabites (Num25:1-3), for which the LORD Himself would be forced to curse (i.e., judge) Israel. As Balaam tempted Israel to compromise

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<sup>12</sup> Satan is not omnipresent, as God is, so at any given time he is genuinely and uniquely present in a literal location.

with paganism, beginning with mixed marriages, so some in the church at Pergamos were tempting believers to similarly compromise. Such compromise frequently begins with a mixed marriage, which is why God has always forbidden believers to marry unbelievers (cf. 2Cor5:14-17).

- [15] As discussed at Revelation 3:6, Nicolaitanism was a tendency to make a distinction between the (so-called) clergy and laity, resulting in an exalted priesthood that is foreign to the N.T. What began as "deeds" in Ephesus has become entrenched "doctrine" in Pergamos, concerning which Christ asserts, "which thing I hate".

#### IV. EXHORTATION

- [16] Christ exhorts the church to "repent" of these two doctrines, threatening to "come unto thee [in judgment]" suddenly if they fail to do so, "fight[ing] against them with the sword of my mouth" (i.e., judging them by the standard of the Word of God).

#### V. PROMISE

- [17] Again, each of the seven letters includes the refrain, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches", which indicates that all seven letters contain messages that are relevant and applicable to all believers throughout the Church Age.

Christ's promises to the overcomer (i.e., the genuine believer; 1Jn5:4-5) are: 1) to "eat of the hidden manna". The Lord Jesus Christ declared Himself to be the true "bread of God" who comes down from heaven and "giveth life" to all who eat it (Jn6:32-35,53-58), so this is a promise to all believers of eternal life. And, 2) to receive a "white stone" with a "new name written [on it]". The significance of the "white stone" is unclear, but probably the more important aspect of it is that it contains a personal "new name" from God, just as God gave new names to Abraham, Israel, Peter, etc.

### LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA

Historical Context. The city of Thyatira was a growing agricultural community and trade center. It had a particularly famous industry associated with the manufacturing and selling of a purple dye. The most prominent feature of the city's culture was the abundance of trade-guilds, with guilds of bakers, potters, brass workers, tanners, workers in wool and flax, clothiers, and dyers, membership in which was required in order to practice one's trade, but all of which were saturated with pagan practices/rituals. Thyatira is mentioned once in the N.T. (outside of Revelation) as the home of "Lydia, a seller of purple" (Act16:14), and it is possible that her conversion under the ministry of the Apostle Paul was connected to the founding of the church at Thyatira.

#### I. SALUTATION

- [18] The meaning of Thyatira is 'continual sacrifice', suggesting a work of (or for) God that is not complete. Christ uses the title, "the Son of God", a Hebrew idiom asserting that He has the same nature as God (i.e., an assertion of deity; cf. Jn10:31-36). In addition, He notes two of the similes used in Revelation 1:14-15, "his eyes like

unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass", both symbols indicative of impending judgment.

## II. COMMENDATION

- [19] Christ again begins His evaluation of the church with the words "I know". In Greek, οἶδα is a perfect, active, indicative verb that emphasizes the fact that Jesus performs His evaluation having complete and perfect knowledge of all facts/circumstances (cf. 1Cor4:4-5). The church is commended for its "charity", "service", "faith", "patience" (i.e., perseverance), and "works", an admirable list of good works, which are increasing rather than decreasing (a trend that is opposite to that in Ephesus).

## III. CRITICISM

- [20] "Notwithstanding" introduces the section of criticisms of Thyatira, suggesting that the long list of commendable attributes of the church does not offset her serious faults. The sins in the church are associated with "that woman" called "Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess" (i.e., she claims to speak with infallible authority from God); whether this woman was actually named Jezebel, or the name is a metaphor used to direct the reader to her Phoenician namesake (1Kgs16:31), is unclear. The expression "that woman" (Greek, γυναῖκα σου) could legitimately be translated as "your wife" (i.e., the pastor's wife!). Note that the sin is not Jezebel's alone, but also the church's, "because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel". It is not only those that practice error, but even those that *passively tolerate* the error, that come under Christ's judgment.

The first issue is that the **woman** Jezebel<sup>13</sup> is "teach[ing]", which is forbidden in the N.T. church (1Tim2:12). The second issue is her teaching contained errors intended to "seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols", likely associated with participation in the rituals of the trade-guilds that included sexual immorality and sacrifices to pagan gods (which were subsequently eaten by participants). Presumably, Jezebel was teaching that it was acceptable for believers to participate in the required rituals of the trade-guilds, apart from which they would lose their jobs.

- [21] God is indeed long-suffering, allowing time for people to "repent", but His judgment will eventually come (cf. Num14:18; 2Pet3:9).

## IV. EXHORTATION

- [22] Christ refers to the sin of Jezebel and her followers as "adultery", which is spiritual unfaithfulness by those who would claim to be united with Him. He exhorts the church at Thyatira to "repent", else they will suffer "great tribulation" as judgment. This probably

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<sup>13</sup> Analogies between the O.T. pagan priestess Jezebel, who became the wife of the Jewish King Ahab, and the medieval Roman Catholic Church (RCC) are difficult to ignore. Jezebel counseled Ahab to acquire land for the state by falsely accusing his subjects of heresy (1Kgs21:1-16), which was the basis of the so-called Holy Inquisition. Furthermore, RCC ritual is centered around the Eucharist (i.e., the Sacrifice of the Mass), which is asserted to be an on-going and perpetual re-sacrificing of the literal body of Christ, implying that His work of propitiation is not yet complete.

pertains most immediately to a local judgment on the church in Thyatira, but may typologically suggest that it will be churches like Thyatira that will comprise the harlot church of the Tribulation (Rev17:1-9).

- [23] The judgment to be visited on the church at Thyatira (and the harlot church of the Tribulation?) will be intended as a lesson for "all the churches" that Christ's judgment is not according to mere profession, but according to the intent of the "heart". For Christ to judge "according to your works" is a dire threat, as it is the Great White Throne Judgment of unbelievers where this occurs (Rev 20:11-12).
- [24] The church at Thyatira has good works but bad "doctrine". Jezebel's "doctrine" (i.e., teaching) is referred to as "the depths of Satan"; it is more than just human error, it is Satanic in origin. Those in Thyatira who separate from it, called "the rest in Thyatira" (i.e., the believing remnant, analogous to the 7,000 in Elijah's day who had not compromised with the original Jezebel; cf. 1Kgs19:18; Rom11:4), are apparently promised to be excepted from the coming judgment (is this a subtle allusion to the rapture of the true church?).
- [25] This is the first mention of the return of Christ (for His Church; i.e., the rapture) in the seven letters, but it will be mentioned in each of the remaining letters.

#### V. PROMISE

- [26] A structural change occurs in the letter to Thyatira<sup>14</sup>. In the first three letters, the refrain "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" precedes to the promise(s) to the overcomer; in the last four letters, this order is reversed.

Christ's first promise to the overcomer, to be given "power over the nations", is in the context of the believer's perseverance "unto the end". Since the immediate context is the coming of Christ (for His Church; v25), "the end" should be understood to mean "the end" of the Church Age. Thus, the promise for the overcomer to rule "over the nations" will be realized in the future millennial kingdom that Christ will establish on earth at His second coming.

- [27] This verse is virtually a quotation of Psalm 2:9, where the promise to rule over the nations with a rod of iron is given by the LORD (Jehovah) to "his anointed" (i.e., Messiah; Ps2:2). Here, the promise to rule over the nations in the coming kingdom, given by God to Christ, is revealed to include the Body/Bride of Christ (i.e., the Church; Cp., Rom8:17; 2Tim2:12; Rev20:6), "even as [Christ] received of [His] Father".
- [28] Christ's second promise to the overcomer is to give him "the morning star". The only other occurrence of "morning star" in the Bible is a

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<sup>14</sup> There seems to be some sort of distinction between the first three and the final four letters. Most obviously, the return of Christ is not mentioned in the first three letters, but it is mentioned in each of the final four. The exhortation to "hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" precedes the promise(s) to the overcomer in the first three letters, but follows it in the final four. And the promises made to the overcomer are more general, including believers of all ages, in the first three letters, but appear to be unique to members of the Church (the Body/Bride of Christ) in the final four.

clear reference to Jesus Himself (Rev22:16). Since the present Church Age is referred to metaphorically as the "night" (1Thess5:4-5), and the second coming of Christ to establish His Kingdom as the rising of the "sun" (i.e., the dawn of a new day; Mal4:2), and the morning star precedes the sunrise, Christ's promise to give the overcomer "the morning star" is likely an allusion to the rapture of the Church (which precedes the second coming).

Whereas the promises made to the overcomer in the first three letters would appear to be shared by genuine believers of all ages, including O.T. saints, the promises made in this letter are unique to the Church, the Body/Bride of Christ (which appears to be true of the promises in each of the final four letters).

- [29] Again, each of the seven letters includes the refrain, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches", which indicates that all seven letters contain messages that are relevant and applicable to all believers throughout the Church Age.

### CHAPTER 3

#### LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT SARDIS

Historical Context. The city of Sardis was the ancient capital of Lydia, which comprised the western half of modern Turkey (c. 1200-546 BC). The citizens of Sardis were infamous for their historical failures to be watchful. The city was a mountain fortress that was extremely difficult to capture, except through the negligence of its defenders (i.e., the citizens of Sardis). Historically, it fell to both Cyrus the Persian and Antiochus the Greek in exactly the same way. After long sieges, enemy soldiers infiltrated Sardis by scaling mountain cliffs on the backside of the city—since the Sardians considered the city safe from attack because of these cliffs, they were left unwatched and unguarded.

#### I. SALUTATION

- [1a] The meaning of Sardis is not entirely certain, but could come from the Lydian meaning 'new, renewed' or the Hebrew meaning 'remnant'. Christ's title for Himself notes that He has "the seven spirits of God" (Rev1:4) and "the seven stars" (Rev1:16,20). To a church that Christ will classify as "dead" (v1b), he emphasizes that He has the Holy Spirit who can "give life" (Rom8:9-14).

#### II. COMMENDATION

[NONE]

#### III. CRITICISM

- [1b] There is no commendation given for the church in Sardis. Christ again begins His criticism of the church with the words "I know". In Greek, οἶδα is a perfect, active, indicative verb that emphasizes the fact that Jesus performs His evaluation having complete and perfect knowledge of all facts/circumstances (cf. 1Cor4:4-5). Though the church has a "name" (i.e., reputation) for being alive, Christ's evaluation is that it is "dead". The word "name" (reputation) is particularly prominent in this letter, suggesting perception over

reality. This is similar to Christ's assessment of the Pharisees, who had the external appearance of righteousness, but inwardly they were "full of hypocrisy and iniquity" (Matt23:27-28). In the case of Sardis, not only is their self-assessment incorrect, their assessment by others (churches?) is also incorrect. They are reputed to be a healthy, effective church, which is not the case.

#### IV. EXHORTATION

- [2] Christ's exhortation to the church at Sardis (a city infamous for its historical failures to be watchful) is to "be watchful", else even those few traces of spiritual life that "remain" will "die". When Christ asserts, "I have not found thy works perfect before God" (in the context of Sardis' reputation before others to the contrary), it denotes a church that falls short of Christ's expectations of them.
- [3] It cannot be overlooked that Christ's exhortation of believers to "watch", else "**I will come** on thee as a thief" is characteristic phraseology used in association with the doctrine of the rapture (Matt24:37-44; 1Thess5:1-6). Is this a church that is ignorant of, or neglects, Christ's promise to return?
- [4] As in Thyatira (Rev2:24), the "few" in Sardis that comprise the faithful (believing) remnant will be treated differently than the (dead) majority in the church. To "walk" in a manner that is counted "worthy" of the Lord is the objective of a believer's sanctification (cf. Eph4:1; Col1:10; 1Thess2:12).

#### V. PROMISE

- [5] Christ makes three promises to the overcomer. First, he will be "clothed in white raiment" (also in v4), suggesting he is a member of the Bride of Christ who will participate in the "marriage of the Lamb" (Rev19:7-8), a promise unique to the Church. Second, his name "will not" be blotted out of "the book of life" (Cp., Philip4:3; Rev13:3; 20:15), which is a promise of eternal life. Some have suggested that this promise implies that it is possible for a believer's name to be removed from the book of life (i.e., a genuine believer can lose his salvation), but it is only the opposite that is affirmed. The English "will not" is a translation of the Greek double negative (οὐ μὴ), indicating in the strongest possible way an *impossibility*. Third, Christ will personally "confess his name before my Father, and before his angels", a promise Christ previously made to those who "confess me before men" (Matt10:32; Luk12:8), indicative of one who is a redeemed possession belonging to the Lord.
- [6] Again, each of the seven letters includes the refrain, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches", which indicates that all seven letters contain messages that are relevant and applicable to all believers throughout the Church Age.

#### LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA

Historical Context. Philadelphia was named for Attalus Phladelphus (d. 138 BC), a king of Pergamos who built the city. Its notable industries were primarily centered around agriculture and associated agricultural products. It was located in an area subject to frequent earthquakes,

which destroyed the city on several occasions (most recently in 37 AD). The city of Alaşehir in modern Turkey is the ancient city of Philadelphia, and a significant Christian presence remains in the city to this day.

#### I. SALUTATION

- [7] Philadelphia means 'brotherly love' or 'love for the brethren'. Christ's titles for Himself are 1) "he that is holy", which is an attribute of God, the standard of which is defined by God's own character (Lev11:45; 1Pet1:15-16), and which is the goal of sanctification for every believer (Rom8:29); 2) "he that is true", which means not only that it is impossible for Him to lie (Tit1:2), but that it is impossible for anything He says to fail to come to pass (Num23:19); and 3) "he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth", which emphasizes His sovereign (governmental) authority inherited from King David (Isa9:6-7; Luk1:31-33), giving Him absolute control over access to God and His coming kingdom (Isa22:20-23; Matt16:19; Jn14:6).

#### II. COMMENDATION

- [8] Christ again begins His evaluation of the church with the words "I know". In Greek, *οἶδα* is a perfect, active, indicative verb that emphasizes the fact that Jesus performs His evaluation having complete and perfect knowledge of all facts/circumstances (cf. 1Cor4:4-5). Although the church in Philadelphia has "little strength" (which provides the opportunity for the grace of God to be magnified; cf. 2Cor12:9), they have "kept my word" (for which Christ opened the book with a promised blessing; Rev1:3), and "hast not denied my name", which means Christ will not deny them before the Father (cf. Matt10:32-33; 1Jn2:1).

The "open door" promised to the church might refer to one of two ideas (or possibly both). The Apostle Paul repeated uses the idiom of an "open door" to refer to the freedom to evangelize (Cp., 1Cor16:8-9; 2Cor2:12; Col4:3). However, as used in the Book of Revelation, the "open door" is also connected with the rapture of the Church (cf. Rev4:1), a clear allusion to which is also made in v10.

#### III. CRITICISM

[NONE]

#### IV. EXHORTATION

- [9] As in Smyrna (Rev2:9), opposition to the church in Philadelphia was apparently led by unbelieving Jews, referred to as "the synagogue of Satan". The promised retribution for this grievous sin will include the compelled worship of Christ by these unbelieving Jews in the very presence of the Philadelphian believers whom they persecuted (cf. Philip2:10-11), demonstrating that Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, "loved" these believing Gentiles.
- [10] The church in Philadelphia receives the assurance that Christ will "keep [them] from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth". This is an allusion to the **rapture of the Church**. The "hour of temptation"

spoken of here is not merely a local phenomenon, but a time of universal (global) tribulation "which shall come upon all the world", clearly a reference to Daniel's 70th Week (Rev6-19). Note that a purpose of this time of tribulation is said to be "to test *them that dwell on the earth*", which is used throughout the Book of Revelation as an idiom for rebellious unbelievers who refuse to repent (e.g., Rev6:10; 11:10; 13:8; 17:8).

**The Purposes of the Tribulation.** God reveals two purposes for the Tribulation period (i.e., Daniel's 70th Week). First, it is to be a time of testing of those who dwell on the earth (Rev3:10) in order to demonstrate that unbelievers will not repent, even in the face of undeniable, supernatural revelations of God (cf. Rev6:14-16; 9:21; 16:9,11; Cp., Luk16:27-31), so that their condemnation is just (Rev20:11-15). Second, it is to be a time to purge out the unbelieving element of Israel (Jews) and bring the elect remnant to faith in Christ, so that Israel can enter the millennial kingdom as a fully regenerate nation (Ezek20:32-38; Hos5:15-6:3; Zech13:8-9; Rom11:26). Neither of these two stated purposes of the Tribulation have anything to do with the Church (which is not the nation of Israel, and which has already repented and believed in Christ). Not only is the Church's presence on earth during the Tribulation not necessary, it would be inconsistent with God's stated purposes for this period of time.

The preposition used in this verse, translated "keep thee from", is the Greek *ἐκ*, which means 'out of'. The promise is to keep (Church Age) believers **out of** "the hour" (i.e., the very time period) "of temptation", which is consistent with a pre-tribulational rapture of the Church. If the promise was, rather, to divinely protect/preserve the Church while it went through the Tribulation, this would more properly be expressed by use of the Greek prepositions *ἐν* (in), *εἰς* (into), or *διὰ* (through). Furthermore, the notion that divine preservation of the Church during the Tribulation period is the intention of this promise is refuted by the fact that Tribulation saints suffer persecution, torment, and death throughout the Book of Revelation (Cp., Matt24:22).

- [11] Christ reminds the church that "I come quickly" (also in Rev22:20), an expression intended to nurture an expectation of the imminent return of Christ (only true if the rapture occurs before the Tribulation begins). Christ exhorts believers to "hold fast" (i.e., persevere in their works of keeping His word, and not denying His name; v8), so as not to lose any "crown" (meaning a believer's reward; not his salvation; Cp., 1Cor9:24-27).

#### V. PROMISE

- [12] Christ makes two promises to the overcomer. First, he will be made a "pillar" (i.e., permanent fixture) "in the [heavenly] temple" of God, emphasizing the privilege of (Church Age) believers to forever dwell in the presence of our Lord (Cp., Jn14:1-3; Rev21:22). Second, Christ will "write upon him" the names of "my God", "the city of my God", and "my new name", indicating our permanent identification with God [the Father], Jesus Christ, and our eternal abode in the "new Jerusalem" (Rev21:2-3).

- [13] Again, each of the seven letters includes the refrain, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches", which indicates that all seven letters contain messages that are relevant and applicable to all believers throughout the Church Age.

#### LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA

Historical Context. Laodicea was an *extremely* wealthy city. It was a major banking center for the whole region, and it's primary industry was the production of (black) wool/cloth. It was also home to a medical school associated with a temple to Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine (whose symbol was a serpent-entwined staff, still used by the medical profession today; cf. Num21:5-9); the school was renown for a salve effective in treating a variety of eye maladies. The city was completely destroyed by an earthquake in 60 AD; an offer of assistance in recovery from the Roman Senate was declined, and the citizens of Laodicea completely rebuilt the city using their own wealth and ingenuity. The city's source of water was hot springs in Hierapolis, approximately 6 miles to the north, which was piped in to Laodicea but arrived lukewarm.

There is no record that the Apostle Paul ever visited Laodicea, although he personally knew believers there (Col4:15), he expressed concern for their spiritual condition along with that of the Colossian believers (Col2:1), and he made mention of a personal letter written to them (Col4:16) which is no longer extant.

#### I. SALUTATION

- [14] The name Laodicea is made up of two Greek words, **λαός** (people) and **δίκη** (rule, judgment), and means 'the people rule/judge' (i.e., democratic or mob rule). The Lord addresses this epistle "to the church **of the** Laodiceans", whereas the previous six letters were addressed as "to the church in [city]", which suggests a fundamental difference of character in the Laodicean church; the church reflects the character of the Laodicean people more than that of Jesus Christ.

Christ's titles for Himself are 1) the "Amen", which is the Hebrew word for 'truth' (Cp., Isa65:16), 2) "the faithful and true witness", in contrast with the Laodiceans, which are unfaithful to Christ and false witnesses of His character, and 3) "the beginning of the creation of God". The Greek word translated "beginning" is **ἀρχή**, which can connote 'origin' or 'active cause'; this title emphasizes Jesus Christ as the divine agent of creation (cf. Jnl1:1-3).

#### II. COMMENDATION

[NONE]

#### III. CRITICISM

- [15] There is no commendation given for the church in Laodicea. Christ again begins His criticism of the church with the words "I know". In Greek, **οἶδα** is a perfect, active, indicative verb that emphasizes the fact that Jesus performs His evaluation having complete and perfect knowledge of all facts/circumstances (cf. 1Cor4:4-5). The Lord's first criticism is that the church is "neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot". This is undoubtedly an allusion to the fact

that the city's water supply arrived from Hierapolis "lukewarm" (v16). Both "cold" water and "hot" water are desirable, having many (albeit different) uses; either can be used and enjoyed in drinking.

- [16] However, "lukewarm" water is useless and undesirable. An attempt to drink water that is unexpectedly found to be "lukewarm" can result in a reflexive reaction to "spew" it out of one's mouth. This analogy is used by Christ relative to the church of the Laodiceans. He finds it useless, good for nothing. If it were a metaphorical drink, He would find them not only unsatisfying, but disgusting, resulting in His desire to immediately "spew" them out of His mouth.
- [17] The Laodiceans' self-assessment is horribly wrong. Whereas they believe themselves to be "rich" and "in need of nothing", exhibiting not only a lack of discernment but dangerous spiritual pride, Christ's devastating assessment is that they are "wretched", "miserable", spiritually "poor" (despite considerable material wealth), spiritually "blind" (although famous for an effective eye salve), and spiritually "naked" (although well-known as merchants of the most luxurious woolen garments).

#### IV. EXHORTATION

- [18] Christ's exhortation to the church is to "buy" from Him as the only solution to their "miserable" condition. While some have taken umbrage with the use of the term "buy", fearing that it inappropriately suggests Christ's favor is for sale, that is not the intended connotation. The Laodiceans are wealthy. They can buy/have anything they want. Christ's concern is that they are spending their great wealth on things that have no spiritual value. Rather, their desire should be to acquire: 1) "gold tried in the fire", which is a strong and mature faith in Christ (1Pet1:7); 2) "white raiment" (in contrast to the black wool they sell), which indicates righteous works rewarded by Christ (Rev19:8), and 3) an "eye salve" capable of treating spiritual blindness (Jn9:39; 1Cor2:14).
- [19] The "rebuke and chasten[ing]" of believers by the Lord is not evidence of His hatred and rejection, but rather His "love" and reception (Heb12:6-8). But "repent[ance]" is the response Christ desires (Cp., Jn8:11). The Greek verb translated "be zealous" literally means "to boil", another (ironic) allusion to the undesirable water supply of the Laodiceans. This exhortation makes clear that Christ is addressing (at least some) genuine believers, albeit carnal Christians (cf. 1Cor3:1-3) in the extreme.
- [20] Christ is portrayed as being outside this church, desiring to be inside. Christ's offer to "sup" (i.e., enjoy a meal) with any individual believer who is willing is a metaphor for fellowship<sup>15</sup>. Jesus loves this church and desires fellowship with the believers in it, but He has been shut out by its arrogant and indifferent members.

#### V. PROMISE

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<sup>15</sup> Although Revelation 3:20 is commonly used to express an invitation for unbelievers to receive Christ for salvation, this verse in context clearly relates to Christ's desire for fellowship with believers.

[21] Christ makes a single promise to the overcomer, "to sit with me in my throne", which is the privilege of ruling and reigning with Christ in His coming Millennial Kingdom (cf. 2Tim2:12; Rev20:6); this is a promise that is unique to the Church, the Body/Bride of Christ. Note that a clear distinction is made in this verse between Christ's "throne", which is the throne of the Davidic dynasty ruling over the nation of Israel on earth (Isa9:6-7; Luk1:31-33), and the "throne" of God the "Father" which is in heaven (Matt6:9; Rev4:2). Christ indicates that during His present session He occupies the Father's throne, not the throne of David<sup>16</sup>.

[22] Again, each of the seven letters includes the refrain, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches", which indicates that all seven letters contain messages that are relevant and applicable to all believers throughout the Church Age.

#### HISTORICAL-PROPHETIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

There is a final way in which the 7 churches described in Revelation 2-3 have been interpreted by some, often called the historical-prophetic view. This interpretation understands these 7 churches to have been literal churches of the first century that really had the characteristics described in Christ's epistles to them. In addition, at any particular time during the course of the Church Age, churches exhibiting all of these same characteristics will be found, such that Christ's messages to these 7 churches remain always relevant. However, at any particular time in Church history, the characteristics of one of the 7 churches will tend to be dominant. Furthermore, church history will progress in the exact order that Christ addressed the 7 churches, such that the early era of Church history is best characterized by the church at Ephesus, whereas the concluding era of Church history (immediately preceding the Rapture) will be best characterized by the church of Laodicea. This view sees the order of the 7 churches as a prophetic revelation of the progression of the Church Age [see CHART: **Historical-Prophetic Significance of the Seven Churches of Revelation**]. Although there would have been no recognition by John's original audience (i.e., the seven churches in Asia) of this prophetic aspect of these seven letters and the order in which they were given, it has become increasingly apparent to believers approaching "the time of the end" (Cp., Dan12:4).

While not giving a precise time for the conclusion of the Church Age (i.e., the Rapture), a recognition that the visible church on earth can be best characterized by Christ's epistle to the church of the Laodiceans would indicate that believers were living in the season of the Lord's return. Such a view, if correct, would be consistent with Christ's own expectation that His people be able to "discern the signs of the times" (Matt16:1-3) and that they diligently "watch" for His sudden coming (Mk13:32-37), as well as Paul's teaching that the rapture of the Church should not catch believers unaware (1Thess5:1-4).

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<sup>16</sup> This verse includes a clear refutation of a central tenet of both Covenant Theology and (so-called) Progressive Dispensationalism; namely, that Christ's present session in heaven is a fulfillment of the prophecy that He will sit upon the throne of David.

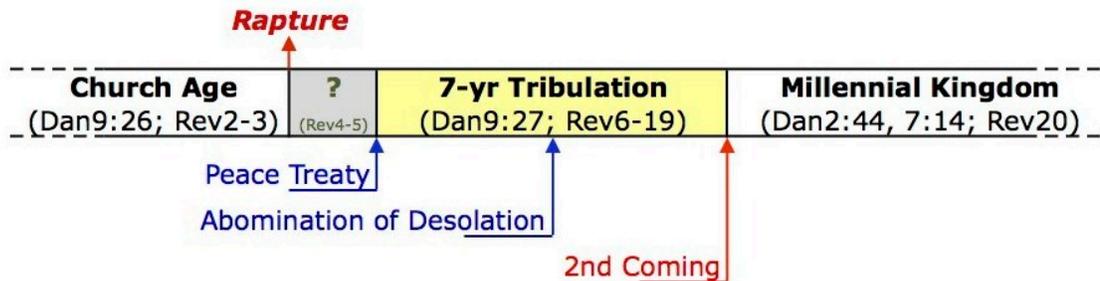
**CHAPTER 4**

**THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH**

[1] This verse opens and closes with the Greek **μετὰ ταῦτα** (translated “After this” and “hereafter”, respectively), which is the identical phrase used in Revelation 1:19, indicating that the revelation of those things that are future (relative to the Church Age) now begin. The Church Age ends with the rapture, seen here in **type** with John (the last living apostle) being caught up to “heaven” with a “voice [of an archangel]” and the “trumpet [of God]” (Cp., 1Thess4:16-17).

Note, it is a covenant (i.e., peace treaty) with Israel enforced by the Antichrist that begins the 7-year Tribulation, the 70th Week of Daniel (Dan9:27), not the rapture. Since the Antichrist is revealed and the Tribulation begins in Revelation 6:1-2, John’s rapture in Revelation 4:1 is pre-tribulational. Revelation 4-5 reveal a number of events that take place after the rapture occurs, but before the Tribulation begins, suggesting there will be a period of time of unspecified duration<sup>17</sup> between these two events, as indicated in the figure below.

**The Pre-tribulational Rapture.** Although Revelation 4:1 by itself does not prove the validity of a pre-trib rapture, it is entirely consistent with it. Before the 70th Week of Daniel (Dan9:27; Rev6:1) begins, John is supernaturally caught up into the very presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and views the events of the entire Tribulation period from heaven. If Revelation 4:1 is not a typological indicator of the Rapture of the Church, there is no other place in the detailed chronology given in the Book of Revelation suggestive of it. If the rapture occurs either during or near the end of the Tribulation (i.e., including mid-trib, post-trib, or so-called pre-wrath views), it is inconceivable that Revelation would make no mention of it.



**THE THRONE ROOM OF GOD**

[2] John “immediately” (Cp., 1Cor15:52; described by Paul as “in a moment” and “in the twinkling of an eye”) is in “heaven”, in the very presence of God sitting on His “throne”. John says he was “in the Spirit”, suggesting he was not literally/bodily caught up to heaven

<sup>17</sup> Since the rapture is followed by the marriage of the Lamb to His Bride (the Church), Deuteronomy 24:5 may suggest a period of at least one year between the rapture and the start of the Tribulation.

at that time, but was taken there as part of his vision experience (Cp., 2Cor12:1-2).

- [3] The vision of God's throne room in heaven is described using similes (i.e., "like") involving gemstones, including "jasper", "sardius", and "emerald", which also figured prominently in the ornamentation of the Tabernacle (Cp., Exod28:17-20), divinely designed to be an earthly "pattern" of what John now sees in heaven (Heb8:5). The prominence of gemstones, and their multifaceted ability to reflect light, may be an attempt to describe/simulate the appearance of God "Who covereth thyself with light as with a garment" (Ps104:2). God's throne is surrounded by a "rainbow" (Cp., Ezek1:28), which was designated by God as the sign of the everlasting covenant He made with Noah (and all living creatures) to never again destroy all flesh with the waters of a flood (Gen9:12-17; contrast with 2Pet3:10-12).
- [4] Surrounding the "throne" of God are an additional "four and twenty thrones" occupied by "four and twenty elders". These 24 "thrones" suggest that the 24 "elders" have been entrusted with authority delegated to them from God. This idea is supported by the fact that the "elders" are "clothed in white raiment" and wearing "crowns<sup>18</sup> of gold", indicating that their judgment has been completed they have received their reward.

**Who Are the Twenty-Four Elders?** The 24 elders are "redeemed" men (Rev5:9), not "angels" (Cp., Rev5:11; 7:11). They represent a company from "every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Rev5:10), so they cannot be symbolic of the nation of Israel. They appear to be recipients of the promises made to the overcomers in the letters to the seven churches of Revelation 2-3, specifically: 1) they are clothed in "white raiment" (Rev3:5), 2) they have received "crowns" as rewards (Rev2:10), and 3) they apparently have delegated authority to rule (Rev2:26-27; 3:21). Furthermore, they are both "kings and priests" (Rev5:10), roles never mixed in the nation of Israel. Taken in aggregate, the characteristics of the "four and twenty elders" are a unique identification of **the Church**, the Body/Bride of Christ. This is also consistent with the fact that "elder" represents the highest position of authority in the Church (Tit1:5; 1Pet5:1). Finally, the number 24 is associated with priesthood (cf. 1Chron24:1-19); whereas Israel had a priesthood, the Church in whole is a "royal priesthood" (1Pet2:9).

The fact that by the "four and twenty elders" a representation of the Church is seen in heaven (having already received its reward) before the Tribulation begins (Rev6:1) is consistent only with a pre-tribulational rapture.

- [5] The "lightnings" and "thunderings" and "voices" associated with the very presence of God also accompanied God's revelation of Himself to the nation of Israel at Sinai (Cp., Exod19:16). It should not escape notice that the "seven lamps", filled with the "seven spirits of God" (i.e., the full and manifold ministry of the Holy Spirit; cf. Isall:2), which were said to represent the seven churches in Asia in Revelation 1:20, are now present in heaven. Since the seven churches

<sup>18</sup> The Greek word used for the crowns worn by the 24 elders is **στέφανος**, a victor's crown given as a reward, not **διάδημα**, the crown worn by a sovereign (i.e., God).

in Asia, in addition to having been real local churches of the first century, are also a symbolic representation of the complete Church, their presence in heaven before the Tribulation begins (Rev6:1) is consistent only with a pre-tribulational rapture.

- [6] The throne room of God includes "a sea of glass *like* crystal"; by analogy, the new heaven and new earth in the eternal state will have "no more sea" (Rev21:1). Also present are "four beasts" (Greek, ζῴα; living creatures, a completely different word than the one translated "beast" in Rev13:1 and having no malevolent connotation).
- [7] The "living creatures" are cherubim, noted elsewhere in Scripture to be heavenly creatures having four faces: a "lion", a "calf", a "man", and an "eagle" (Ezek1:5-11; 10:14-15). John, describing what he sees, presumably records the particular faces looking toward him on each of these four cherubim. Cherubim are consistently associated with the throne/presence of God. The divine instructions for the design of the Tabernacle (Exod25:9) included cherubim as part of the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant (Exod25:17-21), which was located in the Holy of Holies where God would manifest His presence (Exod25:22). Finally, recall that Satan is himself said to be a cherub (Ezek28:14).
- [8] Isaiah's vision of God on His throne included "seraphim" with "six wings" leading the continuous worship of God with the repeated refrain, "Holy, holy, holy" (Cp., Isa6:1-3); apparently seraphim are synonymous with cherubim, or the "living creatures". Note the allusion to "the Lord God Almighty" as the One "who was, and is, and is to come", the three tenses of the verb 'to be', a contraction of which is the basis of the name of God (i.e., YHWH, or Jehovah; cf. Exod3:14-16).
- [9] The one "seated on the throne" is identified as having the attribute of eternity (which must be God).
- [10] The "four and twenty elders" worship God in the Jewish manner by prostrating themselves (cf. Gen17:3; Josh5:14; Matt26:39; Cp., Judg7:5-7). As an offering to God, they "cast their crowns before the throne", "crowns" being idiomatic of the reward they have received from the Lord Himself (Cp., 1Cor3:12-14).
- [11] There can be no doubt regarding the identity of the One seated upon the throne, for it is He who "hast created all things" (i.e., God). Throughout Scripture, God reveals Himself, above all else, as the one and only Creator<sup>19</sup> (Gen1:1; Exod20:11; Jnl1:3; Rom1:20; Act17:24; Rev10:6).

## CHAPTER 5

### JESUS TAKES POSSESSION OF THE SEVEN-SEALED SCROLL

The judgments of God poured out on the earth are unleashed as the Lord Jesus Christ opens a scroll sealed with seven seals [cf. CHART: Nested Nature of the Judgments of Revelation]. This scroll with seven seals

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<sup>19</sup> To profess to worship God, while denying His work of creation, is rank idolatry, since the object of worship is not the God who has revealed Himself in the Bible.

appears to be the title deed to the earth, which God the Father gives to God the Son in Revelation 5.

- [1] The "scroll" is in possession of "him that sat on the throne" (i.e., God). The fact that it contains writing on both sides indicates that it is a title deed—in this case, the title deed to the earth and all its inhabitants. That is, the writing on the inside of the scroll, which cannot be seen when the scroll is rolled up and sealed, would be the precise description of the property. The writing on the outside of the scroll, visible even when the scroll is rolled up and sealed, would be an enumeration of the requirements that must be fulfilled in order to redeem the property if it were lost or sold. In the Law of Moses, the requirements for redemption of lost property (including land and/or persons) are given in **Leviticus 25:47-49** and beautifully illustrated in the Book of Ruth (see also Jer32:9-14).
- [2] The question voiced by a "strong angel" points to the central motif of the Bible. God's original purpose was for man (i.e., humanity), as His representative created in His very image/likeness, to exercise dominion over all the earth (Gen1:26-28). The fall of Adam, the progenitor of the human race, into sin (Gen3:1-6) disqualified man for that purpose, resulting in Satan's usurpation of man's role (cf. Jn12:31; 2Cor4:4). The Bible reveals that the redemption of planet earth, including the restoration of the righteous dominion of man over it, is the central motif of human history. Here, one is sought who is "worthy to open the scroll, and to loose its seals"; that is, a Kinsman-Redeemer (Heb., *goel*), one who is qualified, able, and willing to redeem what God has lost (i.e., planet earth as God's property and humanity as His righteous representatives).
- [3] Note that it is a "man" (i.e., human) who is sought. The Law of Redemption requires that a redeemer be a near kinsman (Lev25:49; Cp., Ruth2:1; 3:9). This means only a man can redeem the human race, which is why the incarnation was necessary (cf. Heb2:14-16).
- [4] The redeemer must be a kinsman in order to redeem "man"; but he must also be "worthy", meaning he cannot himself be guilty of sin, from which man is to be redeemed. Only one "man" is without sin, "Jesus, the Son of God" (Heb4:14-15).
- [5] One of the 24 "elders" (i.e., the Body/Bride of Christ) reveals that there is one who has "prevailed" (i.e., is worthy) to "open the scroll and to loose its seven seals", which is to execute the redemption of the earth and humanity. He is called "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Gen49:9-10) and "the Root of David" (Isa11:1; Rev22:16), which are messianic titles for the Lord Jesus Christ.
- [6] For whatever reason, John's description in Revelation 4 of the throne of God and all those attending it had not made mention of Jesus. But now, in the "midst" of this scene John sees "a Lamb, as it had been slain" (another messianic title; cf. Jn1:29). This is the Lord Jesus, in (glorified) human form, yet still bearing the scars of His crucifixion (Cp., Zech13:6; Jn20:27). He is also said to have "seven horns", a metaphor for omnipotence, and "seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God", indicating He is filled with the Holy spirit (Isa11:2) and possibly a metaphor for omniscience.

- [7] Jesus, the Lamb of God, alone is worthy to "[take] the scroll" and execute its requirements for redemption, which is necessary to bring the Kingdom of God to earth (Cp., Dan7:13-14).

WORSHIP OF THE LAMB AS REDEEMER AND COMING KING

- [8] The taking of the "scroll" elicits worship in the throne room of heaven, led by the "four living creatures" and the "four and twenty elders". Note here that "incense" is seen as a symbol for "the prayers of saints" (Cp., Exod40:5; Lev16:13; Ps141:2).
- [9] A "new song" is sung in heaven in praise of "the Lamb" (v8) and His work of redemption. Those singing the song are the "four and twenty elders" (v8), the nearest antecedent of the pronoun "they" (v9); thus, the "four and twenty elders" are subjects of the Lamb's work of redemption and those who have come from "every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation", consistent with the understanding that they are a symbol representing the completed Church in heaven (see the discussion at Revelation 4:4).

**Us or Them?** Several textual variants occur in Revelation 5:9-10 associated with the use of pronouns, which have a major impact on the identification of the 24 elders. The vast majority of Greek manuscripts (>99%) have the pronouns "us" and "we", which serves to make the 24 elders personal beneficiaries of the Lamb's work of redemption about which they are singing; thus, the 24 elders would be redeemed men. In contrast, a few Greek manuscripts have instead the pronouns "them" and "they", which would indicate that the 24 elders are not themselves beneficiaries of redemption, about which they are singing, and must be a class of angels rather than men. The KJV and NKJV go with the majority reading, whereas all other English translations accept the minority reading (believing its manuscript support is older).

- [10] The destiny of the "four and twenty elders" (v8; i.e., the Church) is to be both "kings and priests" (never permitted within the nation of Israel), and to "reign" with Christ (a promise made to the overcomers in Revelation 2-3; cf. Rev2:26-27; 3:21) "on the earth", which must occur during the millennial kingdom.
- [11] Note that in this verse "angels", "the living creatures", and "the [24] elders" are distinguished as separate creature classes, the number of which were impossible for John to number.
- [12] The "worth[iness]" of "the Lamb" is linked to His vicarious death, a necessary element of His work of redemption (Cp., Philip2:5-11).
- [13] The heavenly chorus led by the "angels", "the living creatures", and "the [24] elders" (v11) is joined by "every creature", directed to both "him that sitteth upon the throne" (i.e., God the father; Rev4:3; 5:1) and "the Lamb" (i.e., God the Son, who is Jesus Christ).
- [14] The "four living creatures" (i.e., cherubim) affirm the truth of all that has been revealed with "Amen", and the "four and twenty elders" fall prostrate in "worship" of God, who alone "liveth forever and ever" (the divine attribute of eternity).

## CHAPTER 6

## THE SEAL JUDGMENTS

Jesus revealed to His disciples that the Father has given authority for all judgment to Him as the "Son of man" (Jn5:22,27), a clear messianic title (Dan7:13-14). As the Lamb (i.e., the glorified man, Jesus Christ) begins removing the seals on the seven-sealed scroll given to Him by God the Father (Rev5:1,7), judgments are poured out upon the earth and those dwelling on it. The first seal judgment releases the divine restraint on Antichrist (2Thess2:7-12), allowing him to rise to power. Thus, the 7-year Tribulation period (i.e., Daniel's 70th Week; Dan9:27) begins in Revelation 6 (and will conclude in Revelation 19). The Lord Jesus' own teaching concerning the signs that will precede His return at the end of the age (Matt24:3-31; Mk13:3-27; Luk21:7-28) are an abbreviated account of this same period of time, and the connections between Revelation 6-19 and the Olivet Discourse recorded in the synoptic gospels will be apparent. Finally, note that due to the nested nature of the seal-trumpet-bowl judgments, there is a sense in which the seven seal judgments are the complete judgments of the Tribulation [cf. CHART: Nested Nature of the Judgments of Revelation].

[1] It is the action of "the Lamb" removing "the seals" that causes the judgments; for this reason, the resulting catastrophes that come on the world are referred to as "the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev6:16-17). The judgments initiated by the loosing of the first four seals are announced by the "noise" (i.e., voice) of the "four living creatures", the effect of which is likened to "thunder". The first four seal judgments are seen by John under figures of riders upon horses of varied colors; these have long been referred to as the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

[2] The result of the loosing of the first seal is the coming of a rider on a "white horse". Though this figure appears similar to the triumphant return of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rev19:11-16), this is a counterfeit Christ (Cp., Matt24:5) who will subsequently be referred to as "the beast" in the Book of Revelation, although John designates him as the "antichrist" in his epistles (1Jn2:18,22; 4:3; 2Jn7). The first sign given by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse is the appearance of a false Christ who will deceive many (Matt24:5; Mk13:6; Luk21:8).

Antichrist is seen wearing a "crown" (στέφανος in Greek, a victor's crown) and carrying a "bow". Much has been made of the fact that no arrows are mentioned in connection with the "bow", suggesting that Antichrist's "conquering" activity is accomplished peacefully; that is, Antichrist rises to his position of governmental authority in the revived Roman Empire of the end times through political, rather than military, means. It is also possible that this "bow", rather than (or in addition to) being a reference to a weapon, should be connected to the sign used for the first **covenant** (cf. Gen9:13); recall, it is Antichrist's enforcement of a covenant that is the formal initiator of Daniel's 70th Week (cf. Dan9:27).

[4] The result of the loosing of the "second seal" (v3) is the coming of "another" (Greek ἄλλος; another of the same kind) "horse that was red". Although Antichrist will rise to power through peaceful, political means, even enforcing a peace treaty between Israel and her enemies (Dan9:27), war will subsequently ensue (cf. Matt24:6-7;

Mk13:7-8; Luk21:9-10). It is likely that this eruption of war, apparently during the first half of the Tribulation, is the Gog-Magog invasion of Israel prophesied in Ezekiel 38<sup>20</sup>.

- [5] The result of the loosing of the "third seal" is the coming of a "black horse", whose rider holds in his hand "a pair of balances". In the ancient world, when coinage was not uniformly employed, such "balances" were used to regulate commercial transactions.
- [6] In the Roman empire, a "denarius" was the daily wage for a common laborer. Since "a measure of wheat" or "three measures of barely" represent the food needed to feed a family for a single day (or a few days), this judgment appears to involve an economic crisis that includes massive monetary inflation; money will be worth so little, it will take one's entire salary to purchase necessary food. Alternatively, this inflation relative to the price of food may be related to its scarcity, likely a result of famine conditions that commonly arise in the aftermath of war (i.e., the second seal) and/or caused by a lack of rain during the first three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation (cf. Rev11:3,6).

The passing command to "see thou hurt not the oil and the wine" has been understood in a variety of ways. It probably merely communicates that the consequences of the inflation/famine of the third seal judgment will fall primarily on common people, who will struggle to feed their families, whereas the wealthy will still have the means to purchase even luxury items.

- [8] The result of the loosing of the "fourth seal" (v7) is the coming of a "pale" (Greek, *χλωρός*; pale green) "horse". The "name" of the rider of this horse is "Death". Following this rider is "Hell" (it is unclear whether this suggests a fifth horse); whereas "Death" claims the body of the deceased, "Hell" claims the soul (Cp., Matt10:28). The result of this judgment is the death of "the fourth part of the earth" (i.e., 25% of the world's population, or 1 to 2 billion people according to current world population figures) by means of "sword" (i.e., war), "hunger" (i.e., famine), and "death" with "beasts of the earth" (i.e., disease and pestilence). This judgment may be the natural results and aftermath of the war and famine unleashed by the second and third seals (cf. Matt24:7; Mk13:8; Luk21:11).
- [9] The result of the loosing of the "fifth seal" is a great persecution of believers resulting in widespread martyrdom. The source of this persecution would seem to be the (Roman) Harlot Church of the Tribulation directed at genuine Gentile believers (cf. Rev17:1,6), as the persecution of the Antichrist directed toward believing Israel

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<sup>20</sup> There is not a general consensus concerning the timing of the Gog-Magog war described in Ezekiel 38-39. It's occurrence relative to the 7-year Tribulation has been historically postulated as: 1) before the Rapture, 2) between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation, 3) during the Tribulation, and 4) at the very end of the Tribulation (i.e., essentially equivalent to the Battle of Armageddon). The best understanding would seem to be that the initial phase of the attempted invasion of Israel by Magog (Russia), Persia (Iran), and various other (presently) Muslim nations, described in Ezekiel 38, begins relatively early in the Tribulation period (likely initiated by the second seal judgment), but that the prolonged and lingering after effects of that war continue into the second half of the Tribulation and eventually merge with the Battle of Armageddon, described in Ezekiel 39 (i.e., a synthesis of options 3 and 4 in the list above).

comes later (cf. Rev12:17). John sees the "souls" of the martyred saints "under the altar", which is where the blood of the burnt offering was poured in the Tabernacle/Temple (cf. Lev1:11; Cp., Matt24:9-11; Mk13:9; Luk21:12-19). Though a great multitude of Gentiles will come to faith during the Tribulation (Cp., Rev7:9-14), many will be martyred.

- [10] The lament of these martyrs is akin to an imprecatory psalm of Israel (Cp., Ps13:1-6). Note that "them who dwell on the earth" (i.e., earth-dwellers) is used as a description of rebellious unbelievers who refuse to repent, and who persecute genuine believers during the Tribulation.
- [11] The "white robes" given to these martyrs may be analogous to the "crown of life" promised for "faithful[ness] unto death" (Cp., Rev2:10). Though persecution of believers begins early in the Tribulation, this verse indicates it will continue throughout, with vengeance coming only with the destruction of Babylon (cf. Rev18:20).
- [12] The result of the loosing of the "sixth seal" are great geophysical and astronomical disturbances, including "a great earthquake", what would seem to be eclipses of both the "sun" and the "moon" (normally not simultaneously possible), and "the stars of heaven [falling] unto the earth" (v13; cf. Matt24:7; Mk13:8; Luk21:11).
- [13] The Greek word for "star" is ἀστήρ (from which we get the English word asteroid), which can have a range of meanings that generally denote various celestial bodies; in this case, it probably means *asteroids* or a massive meteor shower, which could also explain the simultaneous eclipses of the sun and moon.
- [14] John's description of "the heaven departed as a scroll" may be analogous to Joel's "the stars shall withdraw their shining" (Joel2:10), and could be that the massive wave of asteroids/meteor shower simply blots out of view the light coming from the stars. Similarly, the moving of "every mountain and island" could also be a result of the asteroid impacts, or might suggest massive volcanic activity throughout the world.

These geophysical and astronomical events were prophesied to be signs of "the day of the LORD" (e.g., Isa13:6-13; 34:4,8; Joel2:10-11), which is "the day of the LORD's wrath" (cf. Zeph1:14-18). Thus, there is no warrant for confining "the day of the LORD" to a short period of time near the end of the Tribulation (as done by pre-wrath rapture advocates); the entire 70th Week of Daniel is "the day of the LORD's wrath".

- [15] The result of these world-wide geophysical and astronomical disasters is that all men (i.e., "them that dwell on the earth"; v10) seek to hide themselves "in the rocks of the mountains".
- [16] In the face of what they themselves recognize is "the wrath of the Lamb", these earth-dwellers hide rather than repent.
- [17] Note that part of the cry of the earth-dwellers (vv15-16) includes the announcement that "the great day of [the Lamb's] wrath is come". This announcement should be regarded as a summary statement that encompasses the effects of all six seal judgments; similar summary

statements that include the fact that the earth-dwellers refuse to repent also occur after the trumpet and bowl judgments (Rev9:20-21; 16:21).

In recent years, the traditional translation of the verb in this verse as "is come" (KJV; or "has come" in NASB, ESV) has been challenged. To avoid the necessary conclusion that the wrath of God has begun at or before this point in the Tribulation that results from a translation as a present or past tense verb, advocates of the pre-wrath rapture position argue that the verb should be translated as a future tense (i.e., the wrath of God will be coming in the near future, but has not yet begun). The Greek verb is ἤλθεν (**ao**rist tense, active voice, **indicative** mood). According to leading Greek grammarian Daniel Wallace, the aorist tense generally "presents an occurrence in summary, viewed as a whole from the outside, without regard for the internal make-up of the occurrence. This contrasts with the present and imperfect, which portray the action as an ongoing process... In the *indicative*, the aorist usually indicates *past* time with reference to the time of speaking"<sup>21</sup>. Thus, there is absolutely no grammatical support for the assertion that this verb should be translated as a future tense.

Implication for Timing of the Rapture. The cry of the earth-dwellers, "For the great day of [the Lamb's; v16] wrath is come", has historically been understood by the pre-tribulational rapture position to be their conclusion regarding the effects of the first six seal judgments, meaning that they have been/are experiencing the wrath of God (from which the Church is promised exemption; cf. 1Thess1:10; 5:9; Rev3:10). Both the mid-tribulational and pre-wrath rapture positions must view this cry as anticipatory, meaning that the wrath of God is about to come, but has not yet begun (i.e., the first six seal judgments are not the wrath of God), since they see the Church as still present on earth at this point in the Tribulation; however, such a view would have unbelieving and unrepentant earth-dwellers in possession of a knowledge of the future (i.e., what has not begun yet, but soon will), which makes no sense. Simply given who is making this assertion (i.e., unbelievers), it must be a conclusion drawn from what has already occurred, not predictive of what is yet to come. Thus, the first six seal judgments are the wrath of God, consistent with the pre-tribulational understanding that the entire 70th Week of Daniel is a time of God pouring out His wrath on the world.

## CHAPTER 7

### TRIBULATION REVIVAL LED BY 144,000 JEWISH EVANGELISTS

Revelation 7 is the answer to the question that ended the previous chapter. In "the day of [the Lamb's] wrath", "who shall be able to stand?" (Rev6:17). That is, will anyone be saved during the Tribulation? At least 144,000 Jews and a great multitude of Gentiles will be saved.

[1] We tend to unconsciously believe that meteorological phenomena on earth are purely natural; although apparently true in general,

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<sup>21</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996, pp. 554-555.

Scripture indicates that is not always the case. Here, "four angels" are used to calm the "winds" world-wide, indicating they have power to control earth's climate (Cp., Gen8:22).

- [2] These "four angels" will be agents used in the coming judgments that will physically devastate the planet, resulting in the deaths of a majority of people alive when the Tribulation began.
- [3] The imminent work of these four angels is temporarily restrained (i.e., the judgments are paused) to allow other angels to "seal the servants of our God in their foreheads". This divine "seal" is analogous to the coming mark of the beast that will also be applied in the forehead (cf. Rev13:16-17); both are linked to the eternal destiny of the individual who receives them (Cp., Rev14:3,9-11).
- [4] The 144,000 who are sealed are said to come from "all the tribes of the children of Israel". These Jews are not only saved (cf. Rev14:3), they are supernaturally protected from the judgments that will come in order to ensure their physical survival to the end of the Tribulation.

**Analogies between Noah's Flood and the Tribulation.** There were three general categories of people relative to the world-wide judgment of God at the time of Noah's Flood, and there will be exact parallels in the coming world-wide judgment of God during the Tribulation (cf. 2Pet2:9). 1) The vast majority of people on earth perished in the Flood (Gen7:21-22), and most people alive during the Tribulation will also die (Matt24:38-39). 2) Noah and his family were chosen by God to be supernaturally preserved through the judgment of the Flood in order to restart the human race in the new world (Gen6:8,18), and the 144,000 Jews are chosen by God to survive to the end of the Tribulation in order to restart the nation of Israel in the Kingdom of God (Rev7:4; 14:3). 3) The righteous Enoch was supernaturally removed from earth without dying before the Flood began in order to escape the wrath of God (Gen5:24; Heb11:5-6), and the Church will be raptured before the Tribulation begins to be with Christ (Jn14:1-3; 1Thess1:10; 4:13-18; 5:9; 2Thess2:3; Rev3:10).

- [8] Verses 5-8 indicate that "twelve thousand" from each of 12 tribes of Israel<sup>22</sup> will make up the 144,000 Jews who are "sealed". While Jews in the modern era do not know their tribal affiliation (with the possible exception of those from the tribe of Levi, whose identification may be preserved in their surnames), the omniscient God undoubtedly possesses this knowledge.

Both the tribes of "Manasseh" (v6) and "Joseph" (v8) are named; thus, the tribe of Ephraim is included, though not explicitly named (i.e., Joseph - Manasseh = Ephraim). The tribe of Dan, however, is omitted. Despite having no member of the tribe "sealed", a remnant of the tribe of Dan must survive the Tribulation since it inherits land in

<sup>22</sup> The straightforward and best understanding of the 144,000 is that they are literal Jewish persons, an interpretation that makes perfect sense; in the context of Revelation 7, they are obviously being contrasted with the "great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues" (i.e., saved Gentiles; Rev7:9ff). Approaches that attempt to identify the 144,000 with any non-Jewish group (e.g., the Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.) must allegorize this portion of Scripture, for which there is no textual warrant.

the Millennial Kingdom (cf. Ezek48:1). Much speculation exists around the question of why Ephraim and Dan<sup>23</sup> do not appear in this list of the tribes of Israel. A possible correlation is that it was in the tribal areas of Ephraim and Dan that Jeroboam erected his two golden calves (cf. 1Kgs12:28-30) as national centers of idolatry in the apostate northern kingdom.

- [9] "After this" suggests that the "great multitude" that John now sees is a direct result of the sealing of the 144,000 Jews (vv5-8). It would appear that the purpose of their sealing, which results in their supernatural preservation through the Tribulation, is to serve as God's primary witness on the earth (cf. Matt24:14), by which a "multitude which no man could number<sup>24</sup>" are saved, coming from "all nations, and kindreds, and peoples and tongues" (i.e., Gentiles). Seen in "white robes", these Gentiles are best understood to be the believers martyred during the Tribulation as a result of the fifth seal judgment (Rev6:9; Cp., Rev7:14). Thus, not only will the entire nation of Israel that endures to the end of the Tribulation be saved, but a great multitude of Gentiles will be saved as well.
- [10] These saved/martyred Gentiles ascribe the glory of their "salvation" to "God, who sitteth upon the throne" (i.e., the Father) and "the Lamb" (i.e., the Son). That is, "salvation" of the believer during the Tribulation will be "by grace ... through faith ... not of works" (Eph2:8) as it always has been and always will be (Cp., Gall:6-9).
- [12] In response to the doxology offered by the martyred Gentiles (v10), the "angels", the "[24] elders", and the "four living creatures" prostrate themselves in worship of "God" (v11), offering their own doxology (v12).
- [13] The identity of this multitude of martyred Gentiles is an important question. If they represent the Church in some way, either as raptured at some intermediate point during the Tribulation<sup>25</sup> or as completed at its end, it would seem that the answer to the question posed by this "elder" (i.e., a representative of the Church; see note at Rev4:4) would make mention of it.
- [14] John, a representative of the Church, does not recognize this multitude of saved Gentiles. As the "elder" explains, these are a new category of Gentile believers (often designated as Tribulation saints), distinct from Christians. Tribulation saints are not members of the Church, the Body/Bride of Christ, which was completed at the rapture of the Church prior to the Tribulation.
- [15] The reward given to the Tribulation saints is the privilege to "serve [God] day and night in his temple". Since there will be no "night"

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<sup>23</sup> Extra-biblical Jewish tradition from the second temple period (i.e., the inter-testamental period) teaches that the Antichrist will come from the tribe of Dan, an idea which some Christian commentators use in an attempt to explain the absence of Dan in Revelation 7; this is an obvious error, however, since Scripture clearly teaches that the Antichrist will be Gentile (Dan7:17-27; 9:26-27).

<sup>24</sup> Since John describes the army coming from the east as numbering 200,000,000, presumably the number of Gentiles saved/martyred during the Tribulation exceeds this number.

<sup>25</sup> Advocates of the pre-wrath rapture view argue that the rapture of the Church occurs after the sixth seal judgment, but before the seventh, and that the great multitude of Rev7:9-17 are the raptured Christians seen in heaven.

in the eternal state (Rev22:5), the fulfillment of this service must occur during the Millennial Kingdom.

- [17] The promise of the "Lamb" to comfort these Tribulation saints is more than metaphorical. Experiencing the judgments of Tribulation prior to their martyrdoms, these saints would have very literally experienced "hunger" and "thirst"<sup>26</sup>, presumably as a result of an inability to buy/sell (cf. Rev13:17), excessive "heat" caused by abnormal solar activity (cf. Rev16:8), etc.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE TRUMPET JUDGMENTS

- [1] Prior to opening the seventh seal judgment, there is a foreboding "silence in heaven". This may be a fulfillment of the prophecy in Zephaniah 1:7. There is an interesting parallel to Joshua's destruction of Jericho, where the people were commanded to "shout with a loud shout" following the blowing of the "trumpet" (at which time the walls of the city fell down; Josh6:5), but before which the people were commanded to remain absolutely silent (Josh6:10).
- Recall that the nested nature of the seal-trumpet-bowl judgments means that all of the trumpet and bowl judgments that follow (i.e., Rev8:2-19:10) are the result of the opening of the "seventh seal".
- [2] Whereas the four living creatures (i.e., cherubim) were heralds of the seal judgments (at least the first four), "seven angels" will be heralds of the "seven trumpet" judgments.
- [3] Recall that the Tabernacle that God instructed Moses to construct on earth was intended to be a "pattern" of the "heavenly" Tabernacle (Heb8:5), which is what is seen by John. As the "incense" was burned on the "golden altar" in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle, with its smoke/aroma penetrating the veil into the Holy of Holies (i.e., the very presence of God), we learn that this was a picture of the "prayers of all the saints" entering into the "throne" of God (Cp., Rev5:8).
- [4] In context, these "prayers of the saints" would seem to be those of the martyred believers seen following the fifth seal judgment, crying out to God for vengeance (Rev6:9-10).
- [5] By filling this "censer" with "fire from the [golden] altar" and casting it "upon the earth", the judgments that follow (i.e., trumpets and bowls) should be understood to be God answering the martyrs' prayers for vengeance; their vengeance is complete after the destruction of Babylon (cf. Rev18:20,24).
- [7] As the "first angel sounded" his trumpet, a storm that rains "hail", "fire", and "blood" on the earth destroys a "third" of all "trees" and "all the green grass". While many commentators have sought a naturalistic explanation for a judgment such as this (e.g., a large-scale nuclear war with its associated radioactive fallout, or the

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<sup>26</sup> Similar deprivation is suffered by Jewish saints during the Tribulation (Cp., Matt25:32-45).

earth passing through the tail of a comet) and those that follow, the context is clearly supernatural; and even if some natural elements contribute in part, even these are at least miracles of providence that occur at God's appointed time and place. Such is further evident when it is recognized that the first trumpet judgment has an historical parallel in the seventh plague associated with God's redemption of His people Israel from their bondage in Egypt (Exod9:23-25). In any event, this judgment will cause massive disruption to the world's agricultural production.

**Trumpet/Bowl Judgments and the Plagues on Egypt.** There are obvious similarities (parallelism) between a number of the trumpet and bowl judgments in the Book of Revelation and the plagues on Egypt in the Book of Exodus, albeit the scale is global rather than local. Such similarity is not coincidental, since God is doing similar things in both events. In Exodus, God supernaturally redeemed the nation of Israel out of bondage to Pharaoh. In Revelation, God will supernaturally redeem the entire world out of bondage to Satan. Implicit in the designation of the 7-year Tribulation (i.e., Daniel's 70th Week) as "the day of the LORD" is the idea that it is a period of time when the LORD (i.e., Jehovah) personally, directly, and supernaturally intervenes in the affairs of men and the order of the cosmos (Zeph1:14-18). Thus, the divine judgments that take place during the Tribulation will be just as supernatural as the divine plagues on Egypt.

- [8] As the "second angel sounded" his trumpet, a "third part of the sea became blood" caused by something like (note the comparative language, "as it were") "a great mountain" being "cast into the sea". Perhaps this will be a providentially timed/placed massive meteor impact on earth, or perhaps it will be a purely supernatural event.
- [9] The result is that all sea "life" in this "third part" of the world's oceans will "die", and any "ships" present will be "destroyed". This scale of destruction of ocean life and transport will cause a massive disruption to the world's food supply. By causing the "sea" to become "blood", this second trumpet judgment has obvious similarity to the first plague on Egypt (Exod7:19-21).
- [10] As the "third angel sounded" his trumpet, another astronomical object ("a great star ... burning as though it were a lamp") falls upon "the third part" of "the rivers, and ... the fountains of waters" (i.e., fresh waters). It may be that this astronomical object enters the earth's atmosphere, largely burns up, but its residue rains down upon one-third of the earth and contaminates all the associated fresh water bodies<sup>27</sup>.
- [11] The "star" (Greek, **ἀστήρ**) is called "Wormwood", the name of a "bitter" herb/plant, since it has the effect of poisoning one-third of the earth's fresh water, needed not only for drinking but also for agricultural uses.

<sup>27</sup> If this is a providentially timed natural phenomenon, it would presumably contaminate the salt water bodies as well. However, the point/purpose of this judgment seems to be related to the pollution of human drinking water (v11).

- [12] As the "fourth angel sounded" his trumpet, darkness envelopes "a third part" of both "the day" and "the night" by a judgment that affects a portion of the light that reaches the earth from the "sun", "moon", and "stars" (Cp., Isa13:9-10; Joel3:15); this could result from dense cloud cover, smoke, or other physical disturbances on earth, or could be a purely supernatural phenomenon affecting the astronomical objects themselves. Regardless, it will have the effect of shortening the day, resulting in unimaginable consequences on human society. This fourth trumpet judgment has obvious similarity to the ninth plague on Egypt (Exod10:21-23).
- [13] At this point, John sees/hears an "angel" heralding a foreboding announcement to "the inhabitants of the earth" (i.e., the earth-dwellers, hardened unbelievers who refuse to repent). The "angel" makes his pronouncement while flying through "the midst of heaven"; this likely should be understood as the *second* "heaven" (i.e., earth's atmosphere, the sky), as the message is intended to be heard by "the inhabitants of the earth" (Cp., Rev14:6; 19:17). Essentially, the message is that the three trumpet judgments yet to come will be far worse than the four already experienced. The fifth and sixth trumpet judgments both involve the release of angelic/demonic beings to wreak havoc on earth, and the seventh trumpet judgment will be the entirety of the seven bowl judgments.

Textual Variant. A textual variant occurs in Revelation 8:13; a majority of Greek manuscripts read "eagle" in contrast with fewer that read "angel" (KJV, NKJV). In context, it would seem that "angel" is the more natural reading. However, if "eagle" is correct, John could be referring to one of the living creatures (i.e., cherubim), which he previously described as "like a flying eagle" (Rev4:7).

## CHAPTER 9

### THE TRUMPET JUDGMENTS (CONTINUED)

- [1] As the "fifth angel sounded" his trumpet, John sees a "star" which is also referred to as "him". When a star is used symbolically, it virtually always refers to a heavenly spirit creature (i.e., an angel; cf. Job38:7; Isa14:13; Rev12:4). This "star" may be Satan, who is elsewhere referred to as "fallen from heaven" (Isa14:12; Luk10:18). To him was given the "key" (i.e., authority to control access) to the "bottomless pit" (Greek, *ἄβυσσος*, the Abyss).

What is the Abyss? The demons of Legion feared Jesus would command them to go into the Abyss. The Abyss, equivalent to Tartaros (translated as "hell" in 2Pet2:4), is the deepest section of Hell/Hades, which has been used to confine "the angels that sinned" (i.e., "the sons of God", whose sin is the reason given for the Flood in Genesis 6:1-4; cf. 2Pet2:4-5; Jud6-7).

- [2] The "star" (v1; possibly Satan himself) "opened" the Abyss, which allows what has been confined there to be released. The "smoke" that comes from it testifies to the fact that it is a place of fiery torment (cf. Luk16:22-25).

- [3] The "locusts" released from the Abyss are not normal insects, as is clear from their description that follows. They are best understood as demonic creatures that have the "power" to inflict pain like that of a "scorpion". This fifth trumpet judgment has at least a *linguistic* similarity to the eighth plague on Egypt (Exod10:12-15), which is probably why these creatures are described as "locusts".
- [4] Much as God decreed the limitations on what Satan could do to afflict Job (Job1:12; 2:6), here He limits what these "locusts" can do on the earth. They cannot "hurt" any of the earth's vegetation, which would normally be the target of destruction of a literal swarm of locusts. Rather, they can only harm "those men who have not the seal of God in their foreheads" (in context, this must refer to the 144,000 sealed Jews; Rev7:3-4).
- [5] As Satan was not allowed to kill Job (Job2:6), these locusts are not allowed to kill, only to inflict pain "like the torment of a scorpion" on men for a period of "five months".
- [6] So great will be the torment caused by these locusts that men will desire (but be unable) to die, believing that death will cause the torment to cease; this is a foretaste of the unending suffering that will occur in "Hell" (Cp., Mk9:43-49).
- [10] Clearly these "locusts" are not normal insects. The description of them in vv7-10 repeatedly and consistently uses "like" (a linguistic key that similes are being employed), making clear that this is a figurative, not a literal, description. The terms used to describe these demonic "locusts" are strikingly similar to those used by the prophet Joel to describe the plague of locusts he witnessed (Joel1:4,6; 2:1-4), which was a type of the judgment of God to come during the "day of the LORD" (cf. Joel1:15; 2:1,11; 3:14).
- [11] These demonic locusts have a "king", but the normal insects known as locusts "have no king" (Prov30:27), another indication that these are not literal locusts. Their "king" is an "angel" whose name in Hebrew is "Abaddon" and in Greek<sup>28</sup> is "Apollyon", both of which mean 'destruction' or 'destroyer'. The Hebrew "Abaddon" occurs frequently in the O.T., usually translated "destruction" and linked with Sheol/Hell (cf. Job26:6; 31:12; Ps88:11; Prov15:11). This is a fallen, malevolent angel distinct from Satan.
- [12] The fifth trumpet judgment was the first of the previously announced three "woe[s]" (Rev8:13). The sixth and seventh trumpet judgments will be the final "two woes".
- [13] As the "sixth angel sounded" his trumpet, John hears a "voice" that originates from the heavenly "golden altar" (i.e., altar of incense), which may suggest that what is about to occur is God's answer to the prayers of His martyred saints (cf. Rev5:8; 6:9-10; 8:3).
- [14] This trumpet judgment has the effect of releasing "four angels" who have until this time been "bound" to the river "Euphrates". The Euphrates river has great significance in the Bible, being the eastern boundary of the Promised Land (Gen15:18) and essentially the

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<sup>28</sup> It is a characteristic of the Apostle John to provide translations in both Hebrew and Greek (Cp., Jn6:1; 19:13,17,20; 20:16).

western boundary of Babylon (cf. Jer46:2). Symbolically, all that lies east of the Euphrates river is associated with the pagan idolatry of the Gentiles, which is actually the worship of demons (Deut32:16-17; 1Cor10:20) that began at Babel/Babylon (Gen11:4), from which Israel was called to separate (cf., Exod20;2-3; Deut4:19-20).

[15] Apparently these "four angels" and their vast demonic hordes (vv16-17) have been restrained from flooding into the west (i.e., Israel), until God's appointed time. These unleashed, demonic forces of the east will now be used to "slay the third part of men". Together with the fourth seal judgment, which killed "the fourth part of the earth" (Rev6:8), at least one-half of earth's population will have perished following the sixth seal judgment.

[16] These "horsemen" are not human, as their description that follows will make clear, but demonic (as in the fifth trumpet judgment). Their number is so large (200,000,000) it would have been impossible for John to count, so he was given "the number of them". This demonic army led by four fallen angels, unleashed by the sixth trumpet judgment, appears to have been described by the prophet Joel (Joel2:1-10).

A Two Hundred Million-Man Army from Asia? Many link/equate this demon horde with the army of the "kings of the east" unleashed in the sixth bowl judgment (Rev16:12), but there is no warrant for doing so. They are clearly different. The army of Revelation 16:12 is a human army from "east" of the "Euphrates" river, which must be literally "dried up" to allow their passage, and their number is not given.

[17] The figurative description of these "horses", "them that sat on them", and their abilities to inflict damage have been viewed by some as an attempt by John to describe futuristic military weaponry/warfare (e.g., tanks, helicopters, nuclear weapons). However, as was the case in the fifth trumpet judgment, these are malevolent angelic/demonic creatures having supernatural powers.

[18] One-third of earth's human population are killed by the "fire", "smoke", and "brimstone" that issues from the "mouth[s]" of these malevolent creatures. There is a striking similarity with the powers possessed by God's two witnesses in Jerusalem (Cp., Rev11:3-5), so there is no warrant for insisting that these powers be natural rather than supernatural.

[19] Here John says their tails were "like" serpents, explicitly using simile (as was exclusively the case in the fifth trumpet judgment; Rev9:5,7-10). Although similes were not prominent in v17, that does not preclude those descriptions from being metaphorical, which the overall context suggests.

[20] God only allows one-third of men on earth to be killed "by these plagues" (i.e., the sixth trumpet judgment), providing a gracious call to repentance of the remaining two-thirds. However, those who survive this judgment "repented not", which is a repeating pattern in the Book of Revelation. After the first six seal judgments were completed, there was a pause to evaluate the response of the earth-dwellers, who hid from God rather than repent (Rev6:15-17). Here, after the first six trumpet judgments are completed, the response of the earth-dwellers has not changed. The first, greatest sin ascribed

to these earth-dwellers is idolatry, which is the worship of "demons" (cf. Lev17:7; Deut32:16-17; 1Cor10:20).

- [21] Those remaining alive on earth, in addition to their idolatry (the greater sin), also refuse to repent from their lesser immoralities: "murders", "sorceries"<sup>29</sup>, "fornication", and "thefts".

## CHAPTER 10

### THE LITTLE BOOK

Revelation 10 represents a pause in the chronological sequence of visions John is receiving. Rather than advancing the chronological narrative, this chapter is an insertion of background information concerning the nature of the seal, trumpet, and (coming) bowl judgments.

- [1] Much debate has centered around the identity of this "mighty angel" (i.e., messenger). He is said to be "another", distinct from the angels sounding the seven trumpets. Though not identical, his description bears similarity with the description of the glorified Christ (cf. Rev1:15-16). The "rainbow" on his head is an obvious allusion to: 1) the throne of God (Rev4:3), and 2) the previous world-wide judgment of God at the time of Noah (Gen9:11-17; Isa54:9).
- [2] In his hand is a "little scroll". The diminutive form of "scroll" used here would seem to distinguish it from the 7-sealed scroll of Revelation 5; however, whereas that scroll was previously sealed (i.e., closed), it would now be open since all seven seals have been removed (Rev8:1). The image of this angel setting one foot upon the sea and the other upon the earth is symbolic of his authority (to exercise judgment) over all the world. If this "angel" is Christ, this is authority intrinsic to the Son of Man (Jn5:27).
- [3] The cry of this angel being likened to "when a lion roareth" would seem to be another link to the person of Christ (Cp., Rev5:5). The "seven thunders" may be a metaphorical representation of the "voice of the LORD" (cf. Ps29:3-9).
- [4] John is forbidden to "write" (i.e., to share with others) the revelation he heard from the "seven thunders", much as the Apostle Paul was forbidden to speak of all that he heard when he was caught up to heaven (2Cor12:4); this particular portion of the revelation is for John alone.
- [5] The fact that this "angel" swears an oath to the Creator (i.e., God; v6) does not preclude the possibility that he is divine (i.e., Christ; Cp., Gen22:16; Heb6:13), which only serves to reinforce the "immutability of his counsel" (Heb6:17).
- [6] The object of the oath that is sworn is God, uniquely identified by His attribute of eternality and His work of creation. The subject of the oath is that the judgment of God will no longer be "delay[ed]"

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<sup>29</sup> The word translated "sorcery" in the N.T. is the Greek **φαρμακεία** (from which we get our English word *pharmacy*) and simply means 'the use of drugs'. In the ancient world, drug use was almost exclusively associated with witchcraft and magical arts.

(in contrast with the fact that God has long suffered the rebellion of His creatures; cf. 2Pet3:3-16).

- [7] With the sounding of the "seventh angel" (i.e., the seventh trumpet judgment, which contains the seven bowl judgments), the "mystery of God" will be "finished". This terminology is unusual, since "mystery" is most often used in the N.T. to refer to new revelation, which was not previously revealed to prophets in the O.T. (cf. Rom16:25-26; Eph3:3-4). Here, however, this "mystery of God" is said to have been "declared to his servants, the prophets". In comparing this with Revelation 11:15, the "mystery of God" seems to be the inauguration of the kingdom of God on earth with Christ as King; while the certain coming of God's kingdom was revealed in the O.T. and well known to "the prophets", its timing (because of the gap of unspecified duration introduced between the 69th and 70th weeks; Dan9:26) was a "mystery".
- [8] The fact that John is directed to "take" this "little scroll" has been used as an argument against its being the 7-sealed scroll, since no man was worthy of that privilege save Christ (cf. Rev5:4). However, much more is at issue in Revelation 5 than merely touching the scroll; the issue is who has the authority and power to open it (i.e., accomplish the redemption it represents).
- [9] Ezekiel the prophet had a very similar experience (Ezek2:8-3:14). The act of John in eating the "little scroll" would seem to be a process of identifying with God's sovereign and prophetic plan for the world's redemption and judgment.
- [10] Such a plan, which includes God's attributes of both grace/mercy (in saving those who believe) and judgment (of those who refuse to believe) in perfect harmony, has aspects that are both "sweet" and "bitter" (Cp., Rom9:21-23). The return of Christ is the blessed hope of the Church (Tit2:13), but in preparation for it and the Kingdom of God it will inaugurate, an unbelieving/rebellious world must pass through the Day of the Lord (i.e., divine judgments more severe than ever before experienced; cf. Jer30:6-7; Matt24:21).
- [11] Though John was forbidden to reveal the message spoken by the "seven thunders" (v4), he is yet to receive more revelation which he "must prophesy" (i.e., communicate to the world as the "oracles of God"; cf. Rom3:2).

## CHAPTER 11

### THE TWO WITNESSES

Revelation 11 continues the pause, begun in Chapter 10, in the advancing chronological sequence of visions in order to give John an overview of the the ministry of the two witness, which spans the entirety of the first three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation (Rev11:3).

- [1] John continues to be directed by "the angel" of Revelation 10 (who may well be Christ Himself; cf. notes on Rev10:1-3). He is given a "reed" (i.e., a measuring "rod") for the purpose of measuring the dimensions of the "temple of God" and its "altar". Presumably John uses the reed to "measure the temple" he sees in the vision, as

commanded, though this action is not recorded. Presumably, also, John would realize upon measuring this temple that it was not Herod's temple with which he was personally familiar (which would seem to be the purpose of having him measure this temple), which had been destroyed in 70 AD; this is not a vision of a temple from his past, but a prophetic vision of a temple that will exist in the future (i.e., the Tribulation Temple<sup>30</sup>).

- [2] When the Bible speaks denotatively of the "temple", in both the O.T. and N.T., it properly means the physical structure containing the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies (into which only priests, or the high priest, had access), distinct from the "court[yard]" (which was accessible by Jews and proselytes). In this temple, the "court[yard]" has been given over to "the Gentiles" (which is not how proselytes to Judaism are categorized). This is the "temple" that the Antichrist will defile at the mid-point of the Tribulation by his act described as "the abomination of desolation" (cf. Dan9:27; Matt24:25; 2Thess2:3-4). In addition to his defilement of the Tribulation Temple, his people (the "Gentiles") will "tread under foot" the "holy city" (i.e., Jerusalem; Cp., Luk21:24) for "forty and two months" (i.e., the last three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation), since all believing Jews will flee from the city of Jerusalem, abandoning it to the Gentiles, following the abomination of desolation (cf. Matt24:25-20).
- [3] During the first three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation, "a thousand two hundred and threescore days" (1,260 days), God will supernaturally empower "two witnesses" to "prophesy" (i.e., speak authoritatively on behalf of God) in Jerusalem (cf. v8). That they will be "clothed in sackcloth" indicates they are in mourning; presumably they are lamenting the fact that an unregenerate nation of Israel has entered into a covenant with the Antichrist, which the prophet Isaiah called a "covenant with death, and with hell" (cf. Isa28:14-18).
- [4] The "two olive trees" and "two lampstands" are metaphorical allusions to Zerubbabel and Joshua, who oversaw the rebuilding of the Temple when the Jews returned from exile in Babylon (Cp., Hag1:1-8; Zech4:1-14). While some take this reference to suggest that the two witnesses of the Tribulation will literally be a return of the historical persons Zerubbabel and Joshua, that is unlikely; more likely, the allusion connects the two witnesses of the Tribulation to Zerubbabel and Joshua in that both minister during the rebuilding of the Temple following a Jewish regathering to the land of Israel.
- [5] The ministry of these two witnesses in Jerusalem will not be popular, and apparently there will be "enemies" who attempt to kill them. However, anyone who tries to harm them will be killed supernaturally by "fire", which was previously associated with the ministry of the prophet Elijah (Cp., 2Kgs1:9-12; Luk9:54).

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<sup>30</sup> There is nothing in scripture that requires the Tribulation Temple to be constructed prior to the Rapture, or even the start of the Tribulation. However, it must be built and in operation no later than the mid-point of the Tribulation, when the Antichrist defiles it (2Thess2:3-4). It is possible that the covenant that initiates Daniel's 70th Week (Dan9:27) will include a provision to allow the rebuilding of the Temple, which could occur during the first half of the Tribulation.

- [6] The ministry of the two witnesses will be accompanied by other supernatural signs. The "power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy" is a sign previously unique to the prophet Elijah, who withheld rain from Israel for three-and-a-half years during the days of King Ahab (cf. 1Kgs17:1; Luk4:25; Jas5:17). The "power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues" were signs previously unique to the ministry of Moses in Egypt (Exod7-12).

**The Identity of the Two Witnesses.** It could be that these two witnesses during the Tribulation are two new prophets God will raise up from among that future generation of Jews. However, many speculate that they could be two former prophets who return from the dead for brief, three-and-a-half year ministries during the first half of the Tribulation. Within this camp there are three proposals for the identity of the two witnesses.

1) Zerubbabel and Joshua, based on the metaphorical allusion to them made in Revelation 11:4. This allusion, however, probably only serves to connect the two witnesses to the rebuilding of the Temple, not specify their identity.

2) Enoch and Elijah, based on an argument that these are the only two individuals who never died (Gen5:24 and Heb11:5; 2Kgs2:11) and the assertion that Hebrews 9:27 demands that all men die at least once. However, this understanding of Hebrews 9:27 is refuted by the existence of an entire generation of believers who escape death by means of the Rapture (1Cor15:51-52). Also, Enoch was not Jewish, which seems inappropriate for a ministry directed to the nation of Israel.

3) **Moses and Elijah**, which has the most apparent support in the Biblical record. The signs to be performed by the two witnesses were signs unique to the former ministries of Moses and Elijah. The prophetic ministries of both Moses and Elijah appear to have been cut short by God, with neither experiencing natural deaths (Deut34:5-7; 2Kgs2:11). Moses and Elijah are seen with Jesus at His transfiguration, discussing His prophetic future (Luk9:27-31). There is a strange allusion made to the fact that the Devil desired to steal the body of Moses after his death (Jud9). Finally, the O.T. closes with a prophecy that the prophet Elijah will return "before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD" (Mal4:5-6).

- [7] The two witnesses are supernaturally protected from harm during their three-and-a-half year ministry. However, once they have "finished their testimony" at the mid-point of the Tribulation, God allows them to be killed by "the beast" (i.e., the Antichrist; cf. Rev13:1-10; 17:8). Here, "the beast" is said to "ascend out of the bottomless pit" (Cp., Rev9:1), whereas in Revelation 13:1 he is said to "rise up out of the sea", causing some to distinguish these as two different beasts. However, rather than suggesting two different beasts, this probably suggests two natures or sources of power for the one beast known as Antichrist. He will be a real, Gentile man, suggested by the metaphorical connection to the "sea" (Rev13:1; Cp., Rev17:15), yet at the same time he will be demonically, even Satanically, empowered (Rev13:2).

- [8] The two witnesses are real men who die. Their ministries and deaths occur in Jerusalem, "where also our Lord was crucified". However,

Jerusalem is here referred to metaphorically as "Sodom and Egypt" relative to its state of apostasy at this time<sup>31</sup>.

- [9] As an act of desecration/defilement of the city, and perhaps the Temple (cf. Deut21:23), the Gentiles do not allow the "dead bodies" of the two witnesses to be buried (cf. v2). The fact that all "peoples" and "nations" are able to "see their dead bodies three days and a half" requires something like global, satellite television only made available in the late 20th century.
- [10] The (preaching) ministry of the two witnesses, here called "two prophets", has been a continual "torment" for three-and-a-half years to "them that dwell on the earth" (the idiom used throughout the Book of Revelation for hardened, rebellious unbelievers who refuse to repent). Apparently repeated attempts to kill the two witnesses had been thwarted (v5), but the unbelieving world now "rejoice[s]" over their deaths.
- [11] It would appear that the unbelieving (Gentile) world would have been content to leave their dead bodies unburied indefinitely, but after three-and-a-half days they are raised from the dead by "God".
- [12] The revived two witnesses are taken to heaven with the same call, "Come up here", by which John himself was summoned (Rev4:1), and they ascend "in a cloud" as did the resurrected Lord Jesus (Acts1:9). This supernatural event is witnessed (on television) by the whole world.
- [13] The ascension of the two witnesses is followed, "the same hour", by an "earthquake" that destroys one-tenth of the city of Jerusalem and kills 7,000 people. The "remnant" (i.e., genuine believers), in contrast to the earth-dwellers (i.e., hardened unbelievers), recognize this as a supernatural work of "the God of heaven" and "[give] glory" to Him.
- [14] The fifth trumpet judgment was the first of the previously announced three "woe[s]" (Rev8:13), and the sixth trumpet judgment was the "second woe". The "third woe" will be the seventh trumpet judgment (which includes all seven bowl judgments).

#### THE PROPHECY OF THE BOWL JUDGMENTS

The seventh trumpet judgment includes the seven bowl judgments. Although the actual execution of bowl judgments will not begin until Revelation 16, their announcement here by means of the sounding of the seventh trumpet is a momentous event.

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<sup>31</sup> Although there is a revival of Judaism within Israel during the Tribulation, it is apostate for two primary reasons. First, as evidenced by the rebuilding of the Temple, it is a return to the former Dispensation of the Law which functioned to anticipate the coming of the Messiah (Gal3:24-25), with its ultimate obligation on the nation of Israel to enthrone Messiah as King at His coming (Deut17:14-15); however, Israel still rejects Jesus as the Messiah who has come (Matt23:37-39). Second, the nation of Israel has made a covenant with the Antichrist, believing he will ensure their peace and security (Isa28:14-18; Dan9:27), rather than turning to and trusting the LORD (Isa31:1).

- [15] As the "seventh angel sounded" his trumpet, John hears "great voices in heaven". The inhabitants of "heaven" understand the significance of the seventh trumpet judgment (i.e., the seven bowl judgments). Namely, by this final divine judgment God's ultimate purpose for history will be consummated, which is the manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth over which the Lord Jesus "Christ" will personally and physically "reign forever and ever" (Cp., Isa9:6-7; Zech14:9; Luk1:31-33). This purposeful consummation of history is the very first petition for which believers are instructed to pray (Matt6:10).
- [16] The "four and twenty elders", representing the completed Church in heaven, are seen seated on "their thrones", consistent with the promise that they will rule with Christ in His coming Kingdom (cf. 2Tim2:12; Rev2:26-27).
- [17] This doxology offered by the 24 elders recognizes that the "reign" of the "Lord God Almighty" over all kingdoms of this world is the purposeful consummation of history.
- [18] In contrast to the rejoicing of the Church (in heaven) in response to this announcement, the "nations" (on earth) are "angry" that the righteous rule of God through Jesus Christ His Son is coming to earth. The establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth must be preceded by: 1) the pouring out of God's "wrath" (i.e., righteous judgment) on a world in rebellion against Him. This is the Day of the LORD (Zeph1:14-18), or the 7-year Tribulation period; 2) a time of judgment in which all the "servants", "prophets", and "saints" of God (i.e., believers of all ages) will receive rewards to be enjoyed during the Kingdom. This includes the Judgment Seat of Christ (1Cor3:12-15; 2Cor5:10), at which resurrected Church Age believers will be rewarded, but must also include rewards given to O.T. saints who will also be resurrected to enter the Kingdom (Dan12:1-2); and 3) a time of judgment of all living unbelievers, who will be "destroy[ed]" (i.e., removed) from the earth such that they will not enter the Kingdom. This will take place at the Sheep and Goat judgment (Joel3:1-17; Matt25:31-46).
- [19] Whereas access to the former Temple on earth was strictly controlled, such that none but priests could ever view the Holy Place, and none but the high priest could ever view the Holy of Holies and the ark of the covenant, here the heavenly Temple is opened for all believers to see (Cp., Heb4:14-16). This is not the earthly Temple and/or Ark caught up to heaven, as some have supposed, but the original Temple of God in heaven (cf. Heb8:2), after the pattern of which the earthly Temple was constructed (Heb8:5).

## CHAPTER 12

### THE WOMAN AND HER MALE CHILD

Revelation 12 is an historic and prophetic overview of Israel from her birth as a nation to her persecution by the Antichrist during the second half of the Tribulation. This chapter clearly reveals that the nation of Israel and her Messiah have been the subjects of unique, intense, and unrelenting attack throughout all history, and that this attack is Satanic in origin.

- [1] The word translated "wonder" (Greek, **σημεῖον**) is better translated *sign*; it is from the same root word translated 'signified' in Revelation 1:1. Revelation 12 reveals a "great sign" that is not to be taken literally, but understood to *signify* truth in a symbolic way. As always in the Book of Revelation, the symbolism used is drawn entirely from the Bible itself (in this case the O.T.).

Many commentators wrongly identify the "woman" as the Church. Although the Bible does at times refer to the Church symbolically as a woman (i.e., the Bride of Christ; Eph5:31-32), it always portrays her as a "chaste virgin" (2Cor11:2), whereas the woman in Revelation 12 is pregnant! Furthermore, this "woman" gives birth to the Messiah. The Church did not give birth to Jesus; rather, it is Jesus who builds His church (Matt16:18) and will one day take her as His bride (Rev19:7).

The "woman" is the nation of **Israel**. This exact symbol is used and defined in Genesis 37:9-10, where the "sun" and "moon" are Jacob and Rachel, and the "twelve stars" are the sons of Jacob (who become the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel).

- [2] Israel, under the symbol of a "woman", is pregnant, "travailing" to deliver a "child". This symbol should not be confused with Mary giving birth to Jesus, which *literally* occurred.
- [3] A second "wonder" (as in v1, *sign*) is introduced, a "great red dragon". When used symbolically, the color "red" connotes blood and destruction (Cp., in the second seal judgment, a "red" horse brings war; Rev6:4). The "dragon" is explicitly defined to be "the Devil and Satan" in this chapter (Rev12:9). However, the "dragon" has "seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads"; this exact symbolism will be used in Revelation 13:1 as characteristic of the "beast" (i.e., Antichrist). Thus, the second sign should be understood as **Satan** and/or the Antichrist as empowered by Satan (cf. Rev13:2). It is not uncommon for Scripture to address Satan through a man which he controls (e.g., Isa14:4-17; Ezek28:12-19).
- [4] When used symbolically, "stars" represent *angels* (cf. Job38:7; Isa14:13; Rev9:1). By the action of the dragon, one-third<sup>32</sup> of the "stars of heaven" are "cast" to "earth". This should be understood to mean that Satan and all forces under his control (i.e., the fallen angels) were deployed to the earth for the purpose of destroying the "child as soon as it was born". Historically, this is evident in a multitude of ways, but certainly includes: 1) Herod's slaughter of all the babies in Bethlehem (Matt2:16-18); 2) Satan's temptation of Christ (Matt4:1-11; Luk4:1-13); and 3) Satan's indwelling of Judas to betray Jesus (Luk22:3; Jn13:27). This is consistent with the primeval prophecy of ongoing enmity between the seed of the woman (i.e., Christ) and the seed of the serpent (i.e., Satan/Antichrist) recorded in Genesis 3:15.
- [5] The "male child" brought forth by the "woman" is Jesus the **Messiah**. Paul makes it clear that physically ("as concerning the flesh"),

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<sup>32</sup> Many infer from this verse that it was one-third of the angelic host that sinned and fell with Lucifer (cf. Isa14:12-14; Ezek28:12-19) and are now under his direction.

Christ came from Israel (cf. Rom9:3-5). It is Messiah whose destiny is to "rule all nations with a rod of iron" (Ps2:9; Rev2:27; 19:15). In His ascension, Christ was "caught up" to heaven (Luk24:51, Act1:9) to sit with "God" His father on His throne (Heb1:3; Rev3:21).

- [6] The "woman" (i.e., Israel) will flee Judea to be supernaturally protected by "God" from the persecution of the Antichrist/Satan (v13), who will be intent on destroying the nation of Israel. This persecution will begin following the "abomination of desolation" event (cf. Matt24:15-21; Mk13:14-19; 2Thess2:3-4), which takes place at the mid-point of the Tribulation (Dan9:27). Thus, these "thousand two hundred and threescore days" correspond to the last half of the Tribulation.

A Place Prepared by God. God has prepared in advance a place where He will protect the Jewish remnant during the last three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation, the wilderness sanctuary of "Bozrah" (Isa63:1-6), which later came to be known as **Petra**, located southeast of the Dead Sea in the modern nation of Jordan. Built by the Nabataeans in the 4th century BC, it is virtually inaccessible by mechanized military forces, is capable of sheltering several million people with a reliable water collection and supply system, and has been unoccupied for centuries (it is currently a protected UNESCO World Heritage Site). This preordained purposed undoubtedly explains the reason why prophecy indicates "Edom", "Moab", and "Ammon" will escape the reach of the Antichrist (Dan11:41).



- [7] Following the mid-point of the Tribulation, the "dragon" (i.e., Satan and his Antichrist) and "his [fallen] angels" will be focused on destroying Israel and the Jews. This will result in "war in heaven" as God's holy "angels", led by the archangel "Michael", will defend Israel against this Satanic attack (cf. Dan12:1).
- [8] In this angelic war, Michael and his angels will prevail over the dragon and his angels. Even in their fallen states, Satan and his angels have had continuing access to "heaven" (Cp., Job1:6; 2:1). However, as a result of this war, "Satan" and "his angels" will be "cast out [of heaven] into the earth" (v9).
- [9] Here it is explicitly revealed that the "old serpent" from Eden (Gen3:1) was none other than "the Devil and Satan", symbolized as "the great dragon" in the Book of Revelation.
- [10] The removal of Satan and his rebellious angels from heaven will be a monumental event. It is apparently necessary for God to bring "salvation" to the nation of Israel (Rom11:26-27), which is a

prerequisite condition for the return of "Christ" to set up the "kingdom of ... God" on earth. Satan's incessant activity of "accus[ing] the brethren before our God" will finally come to an end at this time. In the context of this message to the Apostle John, these "brethren" would seem to be the Jews. However, Satan's ministry of accusing all believers before God is not limited to the Jews alone (cf. Job1-2) and is continually resisted by the intercession of Jesus Christ (Heb7:25) as our "advocate" (literally, our *defense attorney*; 1Jn2:1-2).

- [11] Here, "they" are John's "brethren" (v10), the Jews. This is a preview of the "salvation" of the nation of Israel (the Jews) that will occur during the last half of the Tribulation. There is only one way of salvation, whether Jew or Gentile, which is personal faith in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ (i.e., "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony"; cf. Rom10:9).
- [12] Contrast rejoicing in "heaven" with the "woe" experienced by the "inhabiters of the earth" (i.e., *earth-dwellers*, hardened unbelievers who refuse to repent; Cp., Rev11:10). Whereas the entire 7-year Tribulation period is a time of God's wrath, during the last half of the Tribulation earth will also experience "great wrath" from "the devil". Satan can read the Bible, and he will see that all that has been prophesied is in the process of coming to pass exactly as recorded; for this reason, "he knoweth that he hath but a short time" to thwart the plan of God which at this time is rapidly approaching its consummation.
- [13] When "cast unto the earth", the "dragon" (i.e., Satan) focuses all his energy on "persecut[ing] the woman" (i.e., Israel). Why does Satan desire to destroy Israel? He knows that the prerequisite condition for the return of Jesus Christ to establish His kingdom on earth (Rev19:11-16), which will be immediately followed by his own judgment and incarceration in the "bottomless pit" (Rev20:1-3), is the regeneration of the nation of Israel and her national petition for the return of Messiah (cf. Hos5:15-6:3; Zech12:10-13:2; Matt23:37-39; Act3:19-21); Satan must destroy Israel in order to prevent this. While Satan's attempt to destroy Israel will intensify during this period of time, it has been an unrelenting objective of his throughout the ages (including the present Church Age; see article, WHAT ON EARTH IS SATAN DOING?).
- [14] As discussed at Revelation 12:6, Israel's "place" of refuge and provision in the "wilderness" will be Bozrah (Mic2:12; Isa16:4), known today as Petra. The expression "wings of a great eagle" is an idiom used in the Bible for divine, supernatural deliverance (Cp., Exod19:4; Isa40:31). The duration of her refuge there will be "a time, times, and half a time"<sup>33</sup>, or the final 3.5 years of the Tribulation (Cp., Rev12:6).
- [15] Since Revelation 12 is an extended "sign" (Rev12:1,3), "flood" is best understood as a metaphor, probably suggesting an overwhelming

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<sup>33</sup> This expression for the last 3.5 years of the Tribulation period is used twice in the Book of Daniel (Dan7:25; 12:7), where the generic expression for "time" is used to mean year (Cp., Dan4:25,32-33). The second occurrence, "times", is not the normal plural, but a dual form (indicating two in number) that exists in both Aramaic (Dan7:25) and Hebrew (Dan12:7).

military force (Cp., Isa59:19) used by the Antichrist in pursuit of the Jewish remnant fleeing Judea for refuge at Bozrah (analogous to Pharaoh's army that pursued Israel into the wilderness at the time of the Exodus; cf. Exod14:8-9).

- [16] Although it is impossible to know the specific mechanism the LORD will use, this verse indicates He will use a supernatural geophysical event to deliver the fleeing Jewish remnant from the pursuing army of Antichrist (analogous to Pharaoh's army being destroyed in the Red Sea; cf. Exod14:26-28).
- [17] This verse indicates that it is during the last half of the Tribulation period that the conversion of the nation of Israel takes place, in that "the remnant of [the woman's] seed" embraces "the testimony of Jesus Christ". Since conversion must take place at the level of individual Jews exercising faith in Christ, conversion of the nation probably occurs over an extended period of time; however, before the end of the Tribulation, all living Jews will believe (Cp., Rom11:26). Nonetheless, the persecution of the Jews by Satan and his Antichrist during this time will be unimaginably intense. Many Jews will still be dispersed throughout the world (cf. Matt24:31), and without the supernatural refuge afforded by God at Bozrah many of these will be killed. According to the prophet Zechariah, two-thirds of Jews living during the Tribulation will perish (Zech13:8-9).

## CHAPTER 13

### THE TWO BEASTS

The two central (malevolent) persons of the Tribulation period are formally introduced in Revelation 13, both characterized as beasts. The first beast is a political ruler who attempts to exercise control over the whole world (Rev13:1-10), whom John calls the Antichrist in his epistles (1Jn2:18,22; 4:3; 2Jn7). The second beast is a religious leader who attempts to direct the whole world to worship the Antichrist (Rev13:11-18); subsequent to his introduction in this chapter, he is referred to as the false prophet (Rev16:13; 19:20; 20:10). Thus, Satan is seen mimicking the Holy Trinity with his own counterfeit version: 1) as the dragon, Satan substitutes himself in the role of the Father, 2) he raises up and empowers the Antichrist in the role of the Son, and 3) he uses the false prophet in the role of the Holy Spirit.

### THE ANTICHRIST

- [1] This "beast" is the Antichrist. When used symbolically, the "sea" denotes the Gentile nations (Cp., Dan7:3; Rev17:15). Thus, the Antichrist's rise "out of the sea" indicates he will be a Gentile; this is consistent with prior revelation to the prophet Daniel that he will rise to power as leader of the fourth and final Gentile world power, the revived Roman empire (cf. Dan7:7-8,23-25; 9:26). The "ten horns" having "ten crowns" are the ten original kings/rulers of the revived Roman empire, among whom Antichrist will rise to prominence (Dan7:24; Rev17:12). The "seven heads" are the seven historical Gentile kings/kingdoms that persecute the nation of Israel, including six of the past and one yet future (cf. Rev17:9-10). These seven kingdoms are labeled as "blasphemy" since they have persecuted the

nation of Israel (Luk21:24), which God has promised to bless along with all Gentile nations who also bless them (Gen12:1-3).

- [2] The symbols of the "leopard", "bear", and "lion" all come from the vision of Daniel 7 (Dan7:4-6), where they represented the kingdoms of Greece, Medo-Persia, and Babylon, respectively. Along with the "beast", who will be the ruler of the (revived) Roman empire, these are the four Gentile world powers still to rule before the Kingdom of God comes, from the perspective of Daniel in 6th century BC (cf. Dan2:44). Although the (revived) Roman empire will be the kingdom of the Antichrist, these prior Gentile kingdoms were types of the kingdom of the Antichrist, and their rulers were types of the Antichrist. The Antichrist and his kingdom will be the ultimate realization of all these types that preceded him. The Antichrist's political position and personal power<sup>34</sup> are given to him by "the dragon" (i.e., Satan; Cp., Dan8:24).

For a background summary of the prophetic dreams/visions in the Book of Daniel that relate to the Gentile world powers that precede the coming Kingdom of God, see the Chart: CORRELATION OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM WITH DANIEL'S VISIONS.

- [3] The "seven heads" of the "beast" (v1) represent seven Gentile kings and/or kingdoms which persecute the Jews during the "times of the Gentiles" (Luk21:24). This has resulted in two different understandings of this verse. First, "one of his heads . . . [was] wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed" is understood symbolically as the destruction of the Roman Empire, which will be revived in the days leading up to the Tribulation. Second, it is understood literally to be an assassination attempt on the Antichrist himself, from which he recovers. Revelation 13:12-14 certainly affirms the second view, although the first view may also be true, in that the Antichrist will personally recapitulate an historical event associated with his kingdom<sup>35</sup>. During the Tribulation period, the Antichrist will receive an apparently "deadly wound", which is "healed". It will appear to be a death/resurrection, a "wonder" mimicking that of Jesus Christ, and giving the Antichrist even more appeal as a world leader in the eyes of an unbelieving world.
- [4] This apparently miraculous event leads many to worship not only "the beast" (i.e., the Antichrist), but also "the dragon" (i.e., Satan) who empowers him; that all creation would worship him rather than "the Most High" has been the desire of Lucifer from ancient times (cf. Isa14:12-14). The apparent death/resurrection of the Antichrist could well be "the lie" of "Satan" that deceives the world during the Tribulation, spoken of by the Apostle Paul (Cp., 2Thess2:8-12).
- [5] One of the prominent and often mentioned characteristics of the Antichrist is his "mouth" (Cp., Dan7:8,11,20,25), with which he will persuade/deceive many with his "blasphemies". The Antichrist's power reaches its zenith during the final "forty and two months" (i.e., 3.5 years) of the Tribulation.

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<sup>34</sup> Recall that Satan, in his temptation of the Lord Jesus Christ, offered to give this same position and power to Him in exchange for worship (Matt4:8-9; Luk4:5-7).

<sup>35</sup> Just such a personal, literal recapitulation of a national, historical event was noted in the life of Messiah (cf. Hos11:1, Matt2:15).

- [6] The message of the Antichrist will blaspheme: 1) "God", 2) God's name (which could relate to Satan's ecumenical agenda to unite humanity under a global, one-world religion<sup>36</sup>), 3) God's "tabernacle" (i.e., the rebuilt Temple, which he will defile), and 4) "them that dwell in heaven" (which could be a reference to the raptured Church; the Antichrist will have to offer a plausible explanation for the sudden disappearance of millions of Christians).
- [7] During the last half of the Tribulation, the Antichrist will wage open "war" against the "saints", and he will "overcome them" (Cp., Dan7:21). These "saints" are genuine believers in the Tribulation, both Jew and Gentile, who refuse to worship the beast and are killed (Rev13:15); this cannot include the Church (which will be raptured before the Tribulation begins), since Christ promised that "the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt16:18).
- [8] Note that "all that dwell upon the earth" (i.e., earth-dwellers, hardened unbelievers who refuse to repent) will worship the Antichrist. This is contrasted with those written in the Lamb's "book of life", who are or will become believers, who will refuse to worship the beast, and most of whom will be martyred (cf. Rev20:4)
- [9] And yet, God's exhortation to hear His words and repent is, and remains, open to anyone who would respond in faith. This precise language was used as an exhortation to all seven churches in Asia addressed in Revelation 2-3, but there it is appended with "what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Rev2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22); that the same exhortation appearing in this verse, occurring *during* the Tribulation, does not include an appeal directed "unto the churches" is consistent with the fact that the Church has been raptured prior to the start of the Tribulation.
- [10] However, those willing to hear God's word must understand that their response may result in their "captivity" (i.e., imprisonment; cf. Matt25:36,44-45) or death (cf. Rev13:15; 20:4). The "faith of the saints" will require "patience" (i.e., perseverance) in order to survive to the end of the Tribulation and be saved (i.e., physically delivered) at the return of Christ (Cp., Matt24:13).

#### THE FALSE PROPHET

- [11] This second "beast" is "another" (Greek, *ἄλλος*, meaning another of the same kind) person, distinct from the Antichrist; he will subsequently be referred to as the False Prophet (Rev16:13; 19:20; 20:10). In contrast to the first beast who symbolically "rose up out of the sea" (Rev13:1), this beast is seen symbolically "coming up out of the earth" (or land), which suggests he is Jewish<sup>37</sup>. This beast is likened to a "lamb", which could suggest that he presents himself to

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<sup>36</sup> A global, one-world religion (i.e., the Harlot Church of the Tribulation; Rev17:1,18) will emerge in the last days under the Antichrist and his false prophet. The whole world will literally, though perhaps unwittingly, be worshipping Satan. Unfortunately, modern Bible versions are subtly preparing Christendom to be included in this Satanic religion; note the NIV, NASB, ESV, etc. substitute Jesus Christ (the "morning star" in Rev22:16; the "day star" in 2Pet1:19) for "Lucifer" (KJV) in its single occurrence in the Bible (Isa14:12).

<sup>37</sup> Land is used to symbolize Israel, and sea is used to symbolize the Gentile nations, in two parables given by the Lord Jesus Himself (cf. Matt13:44-46).

Israel as a messiah figure; he speaks, however, is "like a dragon" (i.e., Satanically inspired).

- [12] The second "beast", the False Prophet, is apparently empowered by Satan just as the Antichrist. His role (or ministry), however, is a religious one; namely, he will direct the world to worship the beast following the Antichrist's apparent death/resurrection.
- [13] Satan empowers the False Prophet to perform "great wonders" such as those exercised by the Jewish prophets Elijah (2Kgs1:9-12) and the two witnesses (Rev11:5), perhaps in an attempt to authenticate his messianic persona. On the other hand, the Antichrist might portray his False Prophet as Elijah himself, whose return is prophesied at the close of the O.T. (Mal4:5).
- [14] The role of the False Prophet is to direct "them that dwell on the earth" (i.e., hardened unbelievers who refuse to repent) to worship the Antichrist, with the blessing/approval of the Antichrist himself. He does so through a ministry of deception, with a message that is apparently authenticated by "miracles" (Cp., Matt24:24; 2Thess2:9-12). The world-wide religion of Antichrist will be idolatrous, including the making and worship of his "image" (cf. Exod20:3-5; Deut5:7-9).

**Signs, Wonders, and Miracles.** Through the power of Satan, Antichrist and the False Prophet will perform "signs", "wonders", and "miracles" (2Thess2:9; Rev13:13-15), presumably in an attempt to authenticate their diabolical ministries and deceive the world into following them. While it is true that signs, wonders, and mighty deeds were performed by God's prophets and apostles (as well as the Messiah) to validate their ministries (cf. 2Cor12:12), such displays of power alone are not a definitive sign that a person speaks for God or with His endorsement. The message must also be compared with the Word of God (Isa8:20; Jn17:17; Act17:11). Scripture commands that even with a ministry accompanied by signs and wonders, any prophet who attempts to lead away from the worship of God to any other must be rejected (Deut13:1-5).

In his attempted assassination, the "sword" that inflicts the wound on the Antichrist could be a metaphor for another weapon, or it could literally be a "sword". Regardless, even after recovering from his attack, his "arm" and "right eye" will be permanently disabled (cf. Zech11:17).

- [15] The False Prophet will make an "image of the beast", to which he (empowered by Satan) will "give life". The "image" will be able both to "speak" an act, killing those who refuse to worship Antichrist. Since Satan does not have the power to create life, presumably it is the indwelling of the idol by demons that gives it its animation. Presumably this image of the beast will be set up in the Temple (the Holy of Holies), following Antichrist's defilement of it (2Thess2:4), since that was the pattern of Antiochus Epiphanes when he committed the abomination of desolation (cf. Dan8:9-13; 11:31). As in the days of the original Roman Empire with its enforced Caesar worship, it is likely that subjects will be required to come to the Temple to pledge allegiance to Antichrist or be "killed".

- [16] All, without exception<sup>38</sup>, will be required to pledge allegiance (i.e., worship) to the Antichrist, which will be certified by a "mark" placed on the "right hand" or the "forehead". Though there continues to be considerable debate as to whether the mark is place "on" or "in/under" the hand/forehead, the Greek preposition used is ἐπί, which normally means "on" or "upon"; if the intention was to communicate that something will be placed "under" the skin, it would have been more appropriate to use the proposition ὑπό. Rather than being an embedded (invisible) electronic transmitter, it is more likely that the "mark" is intended to be a clearly visible sign that the individual has pledged allegiance to the Antichrist (i.e., a tattoo).
- [17] During the last half of the Tribulation, anyone refusing to worship the beast, certified by receiving his "mark", will be unable to "buy or sell". Such complete economic control has never been possible before the 21st century, and even now is not yet fully in place. Such control will require the total elimination of cash, replaced exclusively by electronic transactions that can be permitted/rejected by a central banking authority. These electronic transactions will be predicated on the individual displaying the Antichrist's "mark", either his "name" or the "number of his name".
- [18] A multitude of unique characteristics of the Antichrist are given in Scripture, so that those with "wisdom" (Prov9:10) and "understanding" (Prov1:7) will have no difficulty in identifying him. His most infamous characteristic is the "number of his name" (v17), which is "the number of a man"; namely, "six hundred three-score and six", or **666**. Certainly this number is significant from the perspective of Biblical numerology, since the number "6" often typifies the natural "man"<sup>39</sup>. However, in the context of the Apostle John and 1st century Jewish culture, this number almost certainly relates to gematria.

Though virtually all cultures today make use of Arabic numerals, this was not the case in the ancient world. Both the Hebrew and Greek cultures used letters as numerals, so every letter has a numerical value (see table below); thus, a Hebrew/Greek word has a numerical value one can "count" by summing the numerical values of all the letters in the name<sup>40</sup>. Using this procedure, the (presumably) Greek name of the Antichrist will sum to **666**.

A	B	Γ	Δ	E	Z	H	Θ	I	K	Λ	M
α	β	γ	δ	ε	ζ	η	θ	α	ι	λ	μ
1	2	3	4	5	7	8	9	10	20	30	40
N	Ξ	O	Π	P	Σ	T	Υ	Φ	X	Ψ	Ω
ν	ξ	ο	π	ρ	σ	τ	υ	φ	χ	ψ	ω
50	60	70	80	100	200	300	400	500	600	700	800

<sup>38</sup> In the Roman Empire, Jews enjoyed a special dispensation exempting them from the requirement to perform the Caesar worship ritual, which early Christians also enjoyed for a time since Rome initially regarded Christianity as a sect of Judaism (cf. Act18:12-15). Eventually Christianity came to be understood as distinct from Judaism, and Roman persecution of Christians began in earnest when they refused to perform the Caesar worship ritual.

<sup>39</sup> Man was created on the 6th day, he was commanded to work 6 days in a week, and the number 6 is one short of 7 (the number used in the Bible to typify completion and/or perfection).

<sup>40</sup> Using Gematria, the number of the name of Jesus (Greek, Ἰησους) is **888**.

The table of numerical values of the Greek letters is missing letters having values for "6" and "90". Two letters in classical Greek, *digamma* (or *stigma*) and *koppa*, had the numerical values of "6" and "90", respectively. These two letters fell out of use as letters in Koine Greek (the language of the N.T.), but continued to be used as numerals; the letter *stigma* is used in this verse as a numeral, where the number of the beast is given as three Greek letters: *chi* ( $\chi$ ), *xi* ( $\xi$ ), and *stigma*, or 600 + 60 + 6.

## CHAPTER 14

### THE LAMB ON MOUNT ZION

Revelation 13 formally introduced the two beasts (Antichrist and the False Prophet) who, as empowered by the dragon (Satan), will exercise global control over government, economics, and religion during the last half of the Tribulation, having the power to kill those who refuse to worship the beast and take his mark. From an earthly (human) perspective, the situation could appear hopeless. However, Revelation 14 provides the heavenly (divine) perspective; namely, God remains in sovereign control of history (cf. Isa46:9-11). Revelation 14 announces six events that will take place during this same period of time (i.e., the last 3.5 years of the Tribulation), which will lead to God's ultimate victory: 1) the ongoing ministry of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists (vv1-5), 2) a universal angelic proclamation of the everlasting gospel (vv6-7), 3) the destruction of Babylon (v8), 4) the judgment/damnation of those who worship the beast and take his mark (vv9-12), 5) the blessing/rewarding of the Tribulation martyrs (v13), and 6) the destruction of all nations in rebellion against God and His Son at Armageddon (vv14-20).

### PRESERVATION OF THE 144,000

- [1] In contrast to the mark of the beast on the foreheads (or right hands) of those who worship/follow him, the 144,000 Jewish evangelists (cf. Rev7:4) worship/follow the "Lamb" (i.e., Jesus Christ; cf. Rev5:6) and have "his Father's name written in [Greek,  $\epsilon\pi\acute{\iota}$ , "on" or "upon"] their foreheads".

The critical interpretive issue relative to this vision is whether this scene of the 144,000 with the "Lamb" on "Mount Zion" is presented as an earthly or a heavenly scene. In the Bible, Mount Zion most often refers to a literal mountain range in Israel, on which the city of Jerusalem is built; however, though rare, it is occasionally used as a metaphor for "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (cf. Heb12:22). If this scene is heavenly, the interpretation should probably be that the 144,000 are all martyred during the course of the Tribulation period; this understanding raises a number of problems, the most formidable of which is finding a coherent answer to the question of what the divine seal of protection placed on them accomplished if they all die (cf. Rev7:1-4). However, if the scene is earthly, the proper interpretation would seem to be that the 144,000 are the mortal Jewish "first fruits" (Cp., v4) who, along with the Jews who find refuge at Bozrah, survive the Tribulation alive to enter the Millennial Kingdom and

repopulate the nation of Israel<sup>41</sup>. This understanding connects well with Psalm 2:6, where the installation of Messiah as king is explicitly connected with the literal "Mount Zion" (Cp., Zech14:4). Thus, the 144,000 are analogous to Noah and his family as a divinely preserved, faithful remnant that passes from one dispensation into the next. This understanding seems more consistent with the tenor of the entire chapter, which is one of God's certain victory over Satan, the Antichrist, his False Prophet, and all of their followers. Immediately following the revelation that Satan/Antichrist will attempt to annihilate the Jews during the last half of the Tribulation (Rev12:13-17), this vision reinforces the certainty that Satan's attempt will fail.

- [2] The "voice from heaven" is that of God (Cp., Rev1:15; 4:5). The heavenly "harpers" are unidentified here, but later seem to be saints martyred during the Tribulation (Cp., Rev15:2-3).
- [3] These heavenly "harpers" (v2) sing a "new song" that only the 144,000 can "learn". The 144,000 are said to be "redeemed from the earth". Here, "from" is the Greek preposition ἀπό, which carries the idea of "separation from". Some have taken this to suggest that the 144,000 are raptured from earth to heaven (supporting the interpretation of this scene as heavenly; cf. v1); however, redemption is never used to imply rapture elsewhere in the Bible, and the preposition previously used in Revelation to denote rapture was ἐκ (i.e., "out of"; Rev3:10).
- [4] The 144,000 are "virgins" (i.e., unmarried<sup>42</sup>) who can be totally devoted without distraction to their ministry of evangelism during the Tribulation (Cp., 1Cor7:29:32-33). That they "follow the Lamb wherever He goeth" likely refers to some special association with Jesus Christ in administering His millennial kingdom, presumably their reward for faithful service during the Tribulation. Their designation as "first fruits" indicates that they were the first to believe after the rapture of the Church and suggests they will be the first "among men" alive when Christ returns to be granted entrance into the kingdom (Cp., Matt25:31-34).
- [5] Like Nathanael, one of the first Israelites to recognize Jesus as Messiah at His first coming (Jnl:49), the 144,000 are characterized as having "no guile" (Cp., Jnl:47). Unlike many/most during the Tribulation, they will not be deceived by Satan, the Antichrist, or the False Prophet (Cp., Matt24:4-5,24-26; 2Thess2:8-12).

#### UNIVERSAL PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

- [6] During the Tribulation, God will pour out His wrath (i.e., righteous judgment) on a rebellious and unbelieving world (cf. Zeph1:14-18; Rev6:16-17). Nevertheless, His grace is still available for those

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<sup>41</sup> This understanding also explains the "elect" Jews who must be gathered from every nation on earth at the second coming of Christ (Cp., Matt24:30-31). These would be the 144,000 Jews still engaged in world evangelization (cf. Rev7:9) right up to the time of Christ's return.

<sup>42</sup> The note that the 144,000 are "not defiled with women" should not be taken to mean that the sexual relationship between a man and a woman in marriage results in defilement; it does not (cf. Heb13:4). However, it does suggest that sexual immorality/perversion (i.e., fornication) will be the norm during the Tribulation (Cp., Gen6:2-4; Matt24:37; 2Pet4-9; Jude6-7).

who will receive it. This is seen in the world-wide evangelistic ministry of the 144,000 Jews, which results in the salvation of a "great multitude" (cf. Rev7:9). Additionally, an "angel" will supernaturally "preach" the "everlasting gospel" to "them that dwell on the earth", including "every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people", such that all who enter the Tribulation are "without excuse" (Cp., Rom1:18-20) for their rebellion against God. This supernatural proclamation will satisfy the requirement of a world-wide witness of the "gospel" before "the end come" (Matt24:13; Mk13:10).

- [7] The evangelistic message of the angel (v6) will include the command to "Fear God" and "worship Him" in contrast to Satan/Antichrist (Cp., Matt10:28). Here, "God" is depicted as "him that made heaven, and earth" (i.e., Creator), suggesting that a denial of God as the Creator is a sin that somehow uniquely characterizes the last days (Cp., Rev3:14).

#### DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON

- [8] At this point in the Tribulation, the destruction of "Babylon" is certain and imminent; it will be accomplished with the seventh bowl judgment (Rev16:17-19). The sins of Babylon that have spanned all ages since Babel (Gen11:1-9), by which "she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (Cp., Jer51:7), will be the subject of Revelation 17-18.

#### CERTAIN DAMNATION OF THOSE WHO WORSHIP THE BEAST

- [9] An unpardonable sin was associated with the first coming of Christ, namely the attributing of the prophesied messianic signs, wonders, and miracles performed by Jesus to the power of Satan (Matt12:24-32). Analogously, there will be an unpardonable sin associated with the second coming of Christ.
- [10] The sin of worshiping the beast and receiving his mark is a sin that God will not forgive. To worship the beast and receive his mark ensures one of certain and eternal damnation. The "wrath of God" experienced by those who worship the beast will be "poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation". This is a metaphorical allusion to the practice, common in the ancient world, of diluting wine with water to reduce its potency. Thus, this frightful metaphor indicates that God's wrath directed upon those who worship the beast will be the maximum conceivable, without any degree of moderation<sup>43</sup>.

The eternal torment of the damned is carried out "in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb". It is difficult to comprehend the full ramifications of this revelation, but it would seem that just as the rich man suffering torment in Hell was aware of the bliss experienced by Lazarus (Luk16:19-24), so all the damned

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<sup>43</sup> Jesus Himself taught that just as not all rewards for believers will be equivalent, so also not all punishments for unbelievers will be equivalent (Cp., Luk12:46-48). Since all damnation is eternal, the difference must be in the degree of torment suffered by unbelievers.

will be conscious of the "rest" (v11; i.e., comfort) experienced by the saved.

- [12] The "patience of the saints", that is the perseverance necessary to endure (alive) to the end of the Tribulation (Matt24:13), requires that they have "faith [in] Jesus" and "keep the commandments of God". The context of the requirement to "keep the commandments of God" should be narrowly construed; this does not suggest that works are required for salvation during the Tribulation, but it does acknowledge the reality that those who do not "Fear God" and "worship Him" (v7), but instead worship the beast and take his mark, cannot be saved (vv9-11).

#### BLESSING AND REWARD FOR TRIBULATION MARTYRS

- [13] Here is a blessed promise that those saints (v12; i.e., believers) who do not survive the Tribulation, but suffer martyrdom, will experience "rest" (i.e., comfort; cf. Luk16:25) and will be rewarded for their "labors" and "works" for the "Lord" (Cp., 2Tim4:6-8).

#### ARMAGEDDON FORESHADOWED

- [14] The one like "the Son of Man" upon a "white cloud" and wearing a "crown" (Greek, **στέφανος**, a victor's crown) is **Messiah** (i.e., Jesus Christ; Cp., Dan7:14; Rev1:13). This is clearly a foreshadowing of the Second Coming of Christ (Cp., Matt24:30). The "sharp sickle", an instrument used in reaping, indicates symbolically that Christ's return brings judgment (Cp., Joel3:12-13).
- [15] Jesus used this metaphor when He taught the "parable of the tares of the field", where "the harvest is the end of the age" (Matt13:24-30,36-43). Note that one of the reasons for the delay of Christ's return is that God, who is both righteous and longsuffering (cf. Rom9:14,22), awaits the time when the iniquity of the world is "ripe" for judgment (Cp., Gen15:16).
- [16] Jesus Christ as the Son of man, to whom the Father has committed all judgment (Jn5:22), personally oversees the "reap[ing]" of the "earth"; He is the "lord of the harvest" (Matt9:38; Luk10:2).
- [18] Although Jesus Christ personally oversees the harvest, He uses "angels" as His reapers (Cp., Matt13:39-42). It is noted that the "grapes" (i.e., the harvest) are "fully ripe", emphasizing again (Cp., v15) that God's judgment at this time (the end of the age) is just, being "fully" deserved (Cp., 2Thess2:7-12).
- [19] A "vine" or "grape" harvest, which culminates in the gathered grapes passing through the "winepress", is a metaphor used for the judgment Messiah will bring when He returns (Cp., Isa63:1-3).
- [20] This extended reaping/harvest/winepress metaphor is a foreshadowing of Armageddon (Rev16:16), the great battle that is in progress when Christ returns (Rev19:11-14), at which He destroys the armies of the earth (Rev19:15-21). This battle will be centralized in the Valley of Megiddo, or the Jezreel Valley (see photo below), also called the

Valley of Jehoshaphat<sup>44</sup> (Joel3:2), which is located “outside the city” of Jerusalem. When the battle ends, the carnage will encompass an area “a thousand and six hundred furlongs” (approximately 180 miles). That the “blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles” is evident from the blood-stained garments of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Isa63:1-3; Rev19:13).

Modern Photograph of Jezreel Valley



## CHAPTER 15

### PRELUDE TO THE BOWL JUDGMENTS

Revelation 15 ends the parenthetical pause, begun in Revelation 10, and returns to advancing the chronological progression of events prophesied to occur during the 7-year Tribulation (i.e., Daniel’s 70th Week; Dan9:27). Revelation 15 represents an ominous prelude to the coming bowl judgments, described as “the seven last plagues” (Rev15:1) that will complete God’s wrath upon the earth, which will be poured out in Revelation 16. It is the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Rev11:15) that initiates the seven bowl judgments.

- [1] Another “sign in heaven” is seen, similar (Greek, ἄλλος) to the woman and the great red dragon of Revelation 12:1,3, namely “seven angels” who symbolically possess “the last seven plagues”, which are the seven bowl judgments (Cp., Rev15:7; 16:1). Since the bowl judgments are said to be “the last seven plagues”, the implication is that the previous judgments (i.e., seals and trumpets) were also “plagues”, analogous to the supernatural plagues visited upon Egypt at the time of the Exodus (cf. note on **Trumpet/Bowl Judgments and the Plagues on Egypt** at Rev8:7). Furthermore, that the bowl judgments are “last”

<sup>44</sup> Jehoshaphat means “the LORD (Jehovah) judges”.

reinforces the fact that the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments of the Tribulation are sequential events, not parallel or cyclic. Finally, in the bowl judgments the wrath of God "is filled up" (from the Greek verb *τελεώ*, meaning 'to finish', 'to end', or 'to bring to completion'); thus, the bowl judgments complete the pouring out of God's wrath<sup>45</sup> upon the earth that began with the seal judgments (Rev6:16-17).

- [2] The "sea of glass", associated with the throne of God, is different than before; previously it was unoccupied and clear "as crystal" (Cp., Rev4:6). Now it is "mingled with fire", perhaps representative of successful trials of faith endured by Tribulation saints (cf. 1Pet1:6-7). Those standing on it are clearly Tribulation saints who were "faithful unto death" (i.e., martyrs; Cp., Rev2:10), since they have "gotten victory over the beast" and his program of persecution that will take place during the last half of the Tribulation. Having the "harps of God", these would appear to be the "harpers" who taught the 144,000 a "new song" (Cp., Rev14:2-3).
- [3] This particular group of Tribulation saints may be Jewish, since they sing "the song of Moses", which was sung by Moses and the Israelites after God had delivered them from the army of Pharaoh (cf. Exod15:1-21). These Tribulation saints are anticipating another mighty (i.e., supernatural) deliverance of Israel by the "Lord God Almighty".
- [4] The doxology sung by these Tribulation saints calls attention to several important truths: 1) God, and God alone, should be feared (not Satan or his beast, who can do nothing more than kill the body; Cp., Matt10:28), 2) only God is "holy", and our absolute standard of holiness (Lev19:2; 1Pet1:16), and 3) although all nations will worship the dragon during the Tribulation (Rev13:4), all nations will worship God during the millennial kingdom (Zech14:16).
- [5] John sees "the temple . . . in heaven" opened a second time (Cp., Rev11:19). The "tabernacle of the testimony" that it contains is the heavenly original, not the earthly pattern Moses was commanded to construct (cf. Exod25:9; Heb8:5; 9:23).
- [6] The "seven angels" seen in v1 are dressed in priestly garments, required of those who minister in the "temple" (Cp., Exod28:39-43).
- [7] The English "vials" (KJV) is a transliteration of the Greek *φιάλας*, which means 'bowls' or 'saucers' (as used in the tabernacle/temple to transport the blood of the sacrifices).
- [8] The earthly tabernacle and temple were at times filled with a cloud, which was a physical manifestation of "the glory of God" and which prevented anyone from entering (Cp., Exod40:34-36; 1Kgs8:10-11). Here, the physical manifestation of "the glory of God" which fills the heavenly temple is "smoke"; having its origin from fire, "smoke" speaks ominously of judgment.

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<sup>45</sup> Since the entire 7-year Tribulation is a time of God's wrath poured out on the inhabitants of the earth (cf. Zeph1:14-18), and God has specifically promised that the Church will forever be exempt from experiencing the wrath of God (1Thess1:10; 5:9), the rapture must remove the Church from earth before the Tribulation begins (i.e., the rapture of the Church must be pre-tribulational).

## CHAPTER 16

### THE BOWL JUDGMENTS

The bowl judgments, which comprise the completion of the wrath of God, are poured out in sequence during the last half of the Tribulation. However, so devastating are the consequences of these judgments on the earth and its ecology, such that natural life could not long persist on earth after experiencing these judgments, it would seem reasonable to understand these judgments as occurring in rapid succession near the very end of the Tribulation period.

- [1] The "great voice" that comes from the "temple" and commands the "seven angels" to "pour out the bowls of the wrath of God upon the earth" is undoubtedly the voice of God.
- [2] When the "first [angel] ... poured out his bowl upon the earth", all who had taken the "mark of the beast" or "worshiped his image" are afflicted with painful "sore[s]"; thus, in this judgment a distinction is made between believers and unbelievers. This first bowl judgment is similar to the sixth plague on Egypt (Exod9:8-10).
- [3] Whereas in the second trumpet judgment one-third of all life in the seas died (Rev8:8-9), when the "second angel poured out his bowl upon the sea" every remaining living "soul" (i.e., creature) in the seas (i.e., salt water) will die. This second bowl judgment is similar to the first plague on Egypt (Exod7:20-21).
- [4] Whereas in the third trumpet judgment one-third of all rivers and fountains of waters were turned bitter (Rev8:10-11), when the "third angel poured out his bowl upon the rivers and fountains of waters" all remaining fresh water is poisoned. This third bowl judgment is similar to the first plague on Egypt (Exod7:20-21).
- [5] The "angel" who poured out his bowl upon the "waters" proclaims the "righteous[ness]" (i.e., justice) of this judgment of the "Lord".
- [6] At this point, all bodies of water on the earth (both fresh and salt) have been turned to "blood". The last half of the Tribulation will be a time when the dragon, his beast and false prophet, and their worshipers have "shed the blood of saints and prophets", so it is only fitting that they be given "blood to drink". The expression "for they are worthy" carries the idea that they (i.e., the earth-dwellers) are getting what they deserve (i.e., justice).
- [7] Another angel from "out of the altar" (i.e., temple) provides a second witness (Deut19:15; 2Cor13:1) affirming the "righteous[ness]" of this (and all) "judgments" that come from the "Lord God Almighty".
- [8] The "fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun". The energy output and "power" of the sun is the primary, dominant factor controlling temperature on earth.
- [9] This judgment results in the "scorch[ing]" of men on earth with "great heat". Rather than repent, however, men "blasphemed the name of God, who hath power over these plagues". Note, they are not ignorant of the fact that these plagues come from God (Cp., Rev6:16-

17), but their hard and rebellious hearts refuse to "give him glory" (Cp., Rom1:21).

- [10] When the "fifth angel poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast", "his kingdom" will be turned to "darkness". This darkness may not extend over the whole world. While Satan is the god of this world (2Cor4:4), the kingdom of Antichrist may be narrower in scope (e.g., the Revived Roman Empire). Somehow this "darkness" inflicts pain upon the subjects of the kingdom of Antichrist. This fifth bowl judgment is similar to the ninth plague on Egypt (Exod10:21-23).
- [11] Though this is not the final time in the Book of Revelation that men "blasphemed God", it is the final mention that they "repented not".
- [12] When the "sixth angel poured out his bowl upon the great river, Euphrates", the river will be "dried up" in order that the armies of the "kings of the east" can pass through on their way to the battle of Armageddon (Cp., Is11:15; Dan11:44).
- [13] In conjunction with the sixth bowl, three "unclean spirits" are sent out of the "dragon", the "beast", and the "false prophet". That these unclean spirits are likened to "frogs" may serve to connect them with the second plague on Egypt (Exod8:5-6).
- [14] These three unclean spirits are miracle-working "demons". These demons will have the power to deceive all the "kings of the earth", enticing them to bring their armies to "the battle of that great day of God Almighty", which will take place outside the city of Jerusalem (cf. Zech12:3; 14:2). Though the armies of all the earth appear, ostensibly, to be coming to Jerusalem to make war on the Antichrist who has established his headquarters in Israel (Dan11:41,45), even being enticed to do so by Satan, the Antichrist himself, and the False Prophet (v13), the actual reason Satan is assembling the combined armies of the world outside Jerusalem is to wage war on the Lord Jesus Christ at His (second) coming (Zech14:4). At this point in the Tribulation, Satan knows that the prophesied time of Christ's return is near.
- [15] The Lord Jesus, Himself speaking, declares "I come as a thief". This expression suggests a sudden, unexpected coming that catches most people unprepared. While the expression is often used in the N.T. in connection with the Rapture (Cp., 1Thess5:2,4; 2Pet3:10; Rev3:3), it is used here in association with the Second Coming. Just as Christians of the Church Age are not to be unprepared for or surprised by the sudden coming of Christ to rapture the Church (1Thess5:4), so believers living near the end of the Tribulation are not to be unprepared for or surprised by the sudden return of Christ.
- [16] The place to which Satan draws all the armies of the earth is "Armageddon". In "Hebrew", this name means 'the mountain of Megiddo', the name of a mountain at the north end of the vast Jezreel Valley, to the north of Jerusalem.
- [17] When the "seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air", the "voice" of God announces from His "throne" in heaven, "It is done". This announcement is the translation of a Greek verb in the perfect tense, indicating that with the judgment of the seventh "bowl" the

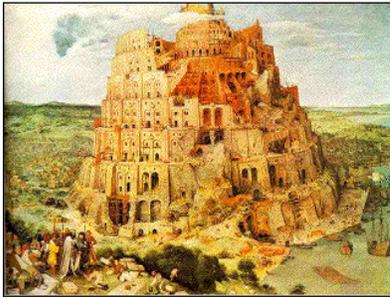
program of God pouring out His wrath upon earth has been fully completed (Cp., Rev15:1; 16:1).

- [18] The announcement is accompanied by "voices", "thunders", and "lightnings", analogous to the completion of the seventh trumpet judgment (Cp., Rev11:1,19). The greatest "earthquake" in all of history occurs, apparently centered in Israel, but extending out a great distance in all directions (Cp., Ezek38:19-20).
- [19] The effects of this earthquake extend all the way to "the great city", that is "Babylon" (Rev18:2), causing it to be split into "three parts". The "cities of the [other] nations" that have come against Israel (Zech14:2) are also impacted, but the primary purpose of this judgment is that execution of "the fierceness of [God's] wrath" which results in the destruction of "Babylon". The destruction of Babylon is the culmination of God's program of earthly judgment during the Tribulation. The identification of "Babylon" and the details of her destruction will be the subjects of Revelation 17 and 18.
- [20] The magnitude and extent of the earthquake associated with the seventh bowl judgment cannot be imagined, nothing like it having ever before taken place on earth (v18), such that the topography of the entire planet will be altered.
- [21] Also included in this judgment is "great hail out of heaven", similar to the seventh plague on Egypt (Exod9:18-19), although unimaginably more devastating. The weight of the hailstones will be a "talent" (approx. 100 lbs.). Rather than repent, however, "men blasphemed God".

## CHAPTER 17

### BABYLON THE HARLOT

When the Antichrist rises to power during the Tribulation, he will attempt to exercise world-wide economic and religious control (Rev13:19-22). The accelerating trend toward a cashless, totally electronic, interconnected global society and religious ecumenism appears to be setting the stage for this kind of global control to become a reality. Prideful human globalism began at Babel (Gen11:1-9) and will once again be centered in the Babylon of the end times. Thus, just as the Roman Empire must be revived, Babylon must return to prominence (Rev17-18). Ancient Babylon was never destroyed as prophesied (Isa13:19-22; Jer50:40); it will be destroyed by fire in one hour during the Tribulation (Rev18:8-10). Debate persists regarding how to distinguish prophecies concerning Mystery Babylon (Rev17), which would clearly seem to be Rome (Rev17:9,18), and *literal* Babylon (Rev18) in Chaldea (Isa13:19) on the banks of the Euphrates river (Jer51:63). It is an historical fact that the Babylonian mystery religions that originated at Babel (Gen11:4) and continued to be centered in Babylon following the dispersion (Gen11:8-9), migrated from Babylon to Pergamos (cf. Rev2:13), then to Rome (Rev17:5); a prophecy of Zechariah suggests a yet future migration from Rome back to a literal Babylon "in the land of Shinar" (Zech5:5-11). It is eerie to watch the ascending European Union, presumably the foundation of the revived Roman Empire (i.e., the kingdom of Antichrist) intentionally take for herself the Biblical symbols of Babylon.



"Tower of Babel"  
by Pieter Brueghel (1563)



EU Parliament Building  
in Strasbourg



2 Euro Coin

### MYSTERY BABYLON

- [1] One of the "seven angels" who poured out the judgments of the "seven bowls" speaks directly and personally to John. Apparently additional explanation is needed to properly identify Babylon (cf. v5), here portrayed symbolically as "a great whore". Whoredom, meaning sexual licentiousness or marital unfaithfulness (i.e., adultery), when used in the Bible in a figurative way always means **idolatry** (i.e., the worship of gods other than Jehovah; cf. 1Chron5:25 Jer3:6-9; Ezek23:17-21; Hos9:1). The fact that this great whore symbolically "sitteth upon many waters" suggests her composition and spiritual influence extends to all the nations of the world.
- [2] The "kings of the earth" (i.e., all nations) "have committed fornication" with her, meaning all nations are involved in the idolatry she represents. The fervor with which all nations have engaged in spiritual "fornication" (i.e., idolatry) with her is likened to being "drunk with wine", meaning men have abandoned the restraints normally associated with sobriety and have given themselves over to pursuing their lusts unbridled, typically associated with drunkenness.
- [3] John is then shown a vision of this "woman" (i.e., the great whore; v1) riding upon a "beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns". This "beast" is clearly the Antichrist (Cp., Rev13:1). Just as Christ is to have a bride, which is the completed Church (2Cor11:2; Eph5:31-32; Rev19:7), Antichrist will also have a bride, which will be apostate Christendom (i.e., the harlot church left behind on earth following the Rapture). What follows in this chapter are the clues that allow this harlot church (the bride of Antichrist) to be identified.
- [4] The colors "purple and scarlet" are characteristic of Roman Catholic clergy, with the "purple" worn by bishops and "scarlet" worn by cardinals. The Pope alone wears white exclusively, analogous to Christ (Rev19:11) and **Antichrist** (Rev6:2). According to *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, "The pectoral cross [suspended by a chain around the neck of bishops, cardinals, and the Pope] should be made of gold and . . . decorated with gems", and the gold chalice used as part of the mass in every Roman Catholic Church around the world is "the most important of the sacred vessels". The wine offered in that "golden cup", worshiped as the very blood of Christ, is described as "full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication" (i.e., to worship

that which is not God/Christ is, by definition, **idolatry**, which God always calls an abomination; cf. Deut7:25-26; 12:30-31).

- [5] In the Hebrew scriptures, there is no distinction between Babylon and Babel (Gen11:9); they are equivalent. The record of the Tower of Babel is a foundational historical event necessary for correctly understanding **human civilization**. All of humanity (without exception) is descended from Noah and his three sons, who all experienced the Flood, and who brought with them personal knowledge of the pre-flood world. After the dispersion and confusion of languages at Babel, not all nations had access to the continuing revelation of God (i.e., Hebrew prophets and the Scripture they recorded), but all had societal remembrances of the events of Genesis 1-11. This is the explanation for why all societies and pagan people groups (without exception) have legends about how the world was created, how evil was introduced into the world, how "gods" descended upon the earth and inter-bred with humanity to produce the heroes of antiquity, and a catastrophic world-wide flood (i.e., world history from Genesis 1-11). Unbelieving sociologists presume that the Hebrews merely had their own version of these "legends", but are unable to explain why all cultures have such remarkably similar traditions. Genesis 1-11 is the divinely revealed explanation for this phenomenon, and the Tower of Babel event is an indispensable component of it; it explains the origin/existence of all the other traditions.

All pagan religions trace their origin back to Babel (and are often referred to as Babylonian mystery religions). The Tower of Babel was not merely a building project. The Tower was a temple built to centralize the idolatrous worship of the "heavens" (Gen11:4). When the people of Babel were dispersed into all the world, they took with them not only their knowledge of the pre-flood world, to be preserved (albeit in a variety of corrupted forms) in their myths and legends, but they also took with them the pagan religious system instituted at Babel. This explains why all pagan religions have in common essentially the same pantheon of "gods", and these "gods" are always associated with astronomical objects (i.e., the sun, moon, planets, and stars). It also explains why virtually all ancient societies built "towers" (i.e., ziggurats, pyramids, mounds, etc.) as part of their religious practice; even if they did not build a tower per se, their religious ceremonies were performed at "high places". The basic idea seems to be that worship of the heavenly host should be practiced in close proximity to the heavens. In contrast, Israel was forbidden to worship "the host of heaven" (Deut4:19) or even worship Jehovah on "high places" (cf. Lev26:30; Num33:22; Ps78:58).

Furthermore, the religion at Babel included the worship of Nimrod's wife **Semiramis** (referred to as the Queen of Heaven; cf. Jer7:18; 44:17-19,25; Rev18:7) and their male child **Tammuz** (cf. Ezek8:14). For this reason, all pagan religions have a mother-child cult associated with them (e.g., Isis-Osiris in the Egyptian pantheon, Aphrodite-Eros in the Greek pantheon, Venus-Cupid in the Roman pantheon, and Mary-Jesus in Roman Catholicism<sup>46</sup>).

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<sup>46</sup> Roman Catholicism is not a form or denomination of Biblical Christianity; it is not Christianity at all, but rank paganism. Roman Catholicism emerged following Emperor Constantine's Edict of Milan (also known as the Edict of Toleration) in 313 AD. Far from representing a conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity, as it

- [6] This "woman", the great whore (v1), is responsible for innumerable deaths of "saints" and "martyrs of Jesus". There is no organization in the history of the world responsible for the murders of more Christians (and Jews) than the Roman Catholic Church.

The Roman, medieval, and Spanish inquisitions conducted by the Roman Catholic Church terrorized genuine believers throughout Europe for more than a thousand years. Canon Llorente, Secretary to the Inquisition in Madrid from 1790-1792 and who had access to the archives of all the tribunals, estimated that in Spain alone the number of condemned exceeded 3 million (mostly Christians and Jews). Concerning his slaughter of Jews (and Christians), Adolf Hitler boasted in 1936 to Roman Catholic Bishop Berning of Osnabruch that, "I am only doing what the Church has done for fifteen hundred years, only more effectively"; Hitler was a member of the Roman Catholic Church until the day he died.

The incalculable wealth of the Roman Catholic Church has been amassed over centuries by three means: 1) confiscation of all property of those condemned in the inquisitions<sup>47</sup>, 2) exorbitant tribute paid by kings under threat of excommunication, and 3) sale of indulgences (still practiced today).

- [7] The "great wonder" (v6) this vision caused John was undoubtedly the revelation that the organization responsible for the deaths of these believers would call itself the Church of Jesus Christ, or the Roman Catholic (i.e., universal) Church.
- [8] The "beast" (i.e., Antichrist) is both Satan's ultimate "man of sin" and "the son of perdition" (2Thess2:3; i.e., a literal person of the end times), but it is also his kingdom (Cp., Dan2:36-38; note how Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, is indistinguishable from the kingdom of Babylon). The origin and power of the beast and his kingdom is Satanic, as it "shall ascend out of the bottomless pit". The description of the beast, "the beast that was, and is not, and yet is [Lit., is to come]", pertains to the manifestation of the beast as Daniel's fourth (and final) Gentile kingdom (Dan2:40-43), which is the Roman empire. The Roman empire existed historically and was the dominant governmental power at the first coming of Christ, it subsequently faded from prominence for many centuries, but it must return to prominence/power (i.e., the revived Roman empire) in the last days which precede the second coming of Christ (cf. Dan2:44).
- [9] Just as "wisdom" will allow one to identify the Antichrist (Cp., Rev13:18), so "the mind which hath wisdom" will understand the identity of the "woman", the great whore riding the beast who has "seven heads and ten horns" (v3). Here the "woman" is said to sit on "seven mountains". It cannot be escaped that Rome has been known throughout history as the city build on seven hills. The seven hills of Rome are: 1) Aventine, 2) Caelian, 3) Capitoline, 4) Esquiline, 5) Palatine, 6) Quirinal, and 7) Viminal.

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is portrayed by secular historians, it was nothing more than a re-branding of Roman (i.e., Babylonian) paganism with Biblical terminology.

<sup>47</sup> This explains why the bodies of many already dead saints were exhumed, tried, and convicted of heresy, so that the property they left to their heirs could be confiscated.

The poet Virgil (70-19 BC) wrote, "Rome has both become the most beautiful city in the world, and alone has surrounded for herself seven heights with a wall". Even *The Catholic Encyclopedia* notes, "It is within the city of Rome, called the city of seven hills, that the entire area of Vatican State proper is now confined". The "woman", the great whore (v1) who is also called "mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth" (v5), is clearly linked geographically with the city of Rome.

#### THE KINGDOM OF ANTICHRIST THROUGHOUT HISTORY

The kingdom of Antichrist is not merely an end times phenomenon, but it has been an on-going work of Satan throughout history. Historically, it has manifested itself as the Gentile kingdoms and their leaders that have oppressed and persecuted the Jews/the nation of Israel. That history is reviewed symbolically in Revelation 17:10-13. See the Chart, **MYSTERY BABYLON: SEVEN WORLD KINGDOMS**.

- [10] The kingdom of Antichrist (i.e., the beast) has historically manifested itself as "seven kings" (and/or kingdoms). Of these, "five are fallen", which are: 1) Egypt, 2) Assyria, 3) Babylon, 4) Persia, and 5) Greece. From the perspective of the Apostle John, writing at the end of the 1st century, "one is", which is: 6) Rome. And "the other is not yet come", which will be: 7) Rome Revived. Note that whereas the first six kings/kingdoms endured for considerable periods of time, the future 7th king/kingdom "must continue a short space" (i.e., in contrast to the preceding kingdoms, the duration of the 7th will be relatively brief).
- [11] The person of the Antichrist (i.e., "the beast"), he who "was, and is not" (referring to his apparent death during the Tribulation period; cf. Rev13:3,14), is in a sense "the eighth" king/kingdom, since the Revived Roman Empire (the 7th kingdom) reemerges in the end times as an empire ruled by 10 kings, over which the Antichrist comes to dominate by seizing power from 3 of those kings (Dan7:24). Nonetheless, the final Antichrist is "of the seven" kings/kingdoms that preceded him, in that he is merely the ultimate manifestation of Satan's on-going kingdom program throughout history. The destiny of the Antichrist is to "goeth into perdition" (i.e., to be destroyed; Dan2:45; 7:26; Rev19:20).
- [12] The "ten horns" are the "ten kings" who initially rule over the Revived Roman Empire (Cp., Dan7:24). From the perspective of the Apostle John writing at the end of the 1st century, they have not yet received their power, but will reign "with the beast" during the Tribulation. The expression "one hour" should be taken figuratively, representing a short period of time. In contrast to the kingdom of God which will be set up when Christ returns, "which shall never be destroyed" and "shall stand forever" (Dan2:44; Cp., Luk1:33), the reign of the Antichrist will be relatively brief.
- [13] Once the Antichrist is revealed and ascends to power within the hierarchy of the Revived Roman Empire, the initial 10 kings will rally behind and fully support his personal program of global conquest.

- [14] As discussed in connection with the sixth bowl judgment (cf. Rev16:14), whereas superficially it appears that the Antichrist is waging war against the world, his Satanic agenda is actually to draw all the armies of the world into Israel in order to "make war with the Lamb" at the second coming of Christ. This is foolishness, as "the Lamb", who is "Lord of lords, and King of kings" will instantly and easily "overcome them" upon His arrival (Cp., Rev19:11-21). Accompanying the Lord Jesus Christ as His "armies" (Rev19:14) at the second coming are those characterized as "called", "chosen", and "faithful", designations that best describe believing Israel (Cp., Rom8:30; 9:1-7).

#### THE IDENTITY OF THE WOMAN

- [15] The angel (v1) now provides the interpretation for several of the symbols used in this chapter, thus allowing the identity of the "whore" to be known with certainty. The "waters" on which the whore sits are "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues", meaning that her pagan and idolatrous influence extends throughout the entire world; there is no nation or people that have not been corrupted by her idolatry.
- [16] The "whore" rides the beast (v3), so she has the favor and support of the Antichrist. However, the "ten horns", which are the ten kings who initially govern the Revived Roman Empire (Dan7:24), "hate the whore". These ten kings will somehow participate in the destruction of the "whore" by "burn[ing] her with fire" (Cp., Lev21:9; Rev18:8).
- [17] The ten kings of the Revived Roman Empire will be providentially used by God "to fulfill his will", both in giving their empire over to the control of the Antichrist and in judging the whore (i.e., the Harlot Church of the Tribulation) with destruction, by which "the words of God shall be fulfilled".
- [18] Here is provided a straightforward assertion of the identity of "the woman" (i.e., the whore). She "**is** that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth". Note the present tense verb "is". The city is not one that will reign over all other kings in the future, but the city that did so in John's day, the day in which this revelation was received (c. 95 AD). There is no question that the "whore", the Harlot Church of the Tribulation, is the city of **Rome**. The Latin poet Propertius characterized Rome as, "The lofty city on seven hills, which governs the whole world".

#### CHAPTER 18

##### BABYLON THE GREAT

Revelation 17 concerned a city designated as "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT" (Rev17:5), which was identified as Rome (Rev17:18). Revelation 18 concerns "Babylon the great", whose description is very different from Rome. In order to be reconciled with the great prophecies of the end times destruction of Babylon given in Isaiah 13-14 and Jeremiah 50-51, Revelation 18 must be speaking of the literal city of Babylon which previously existed in the plain of Shinar on the banks of the Euphrates River (in modern day Iraq). Such a city does not yet exist, so we should

expect it to be rebuilt in preparation for the end times scenario set forth in the Bible. Zechariah 5:5-11 would appear to prophesy the migration of the ancient system of pagan idolatry back to "the land of Shinar" (Zech5:11) at the time of the end, presumably from Rome. It may be that the Antichrist, who ascends to power as the leader of the Revived Roman Empire (whose capital would naturally be Rome), will move his capital from Rome to a rebuilt city of Babylon, much as the Roman emperor Constantine moved his capital from Rome to Byzantium (renaming it Constantinople) in 330 AD.

#### THE DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON

- [1] Another "angel", similar to but distinct from the angels of Revelation 16 and 17, appears with great brilliance in order to command the attention of all "the earth", to make a pronouncement of profound importance.
- [2] The angel pronounces the imminent destruction of end times Babylon, which has become (by the time of the end of the Tribulation) the location on earth where all "demons", "foul spirits", and "unclean bird[s]" are concentrated, consistent with the prophecy of Zechariah 5:5-11. Scripture uses birds as symbols or types of Satanic or demonic activity (Cp., Dan4:12-14,21; Matt13:4,19).
- [3] This Babylon now bears the guilt of leading "all nations" into spiritual "fornication" (i.e., idolatry) that was introduced in Revelation 17:2, such that the cities of Revelation 17 and 18 share the same pagan heritage. However, this Babylon is now identified as a thriving commercial enterprise responsible for producing great wealth for all "the merchants of the earth". Apparently, merchants who cooperate with the global economic system controlled by the Antichrist (Rev13:16-17) will be rewarded with great financial gain.
- [4] Another pronouncement comes from "heaven", presumably the "voice" of God (Cp., Rev15:8-16:1), commanding "my people" (i.e., the people of God) to "Come out" of Babylon. People should abandon the city of Babylon for two reasons: 1) their presence in Babylon necessitates they be "partakers of her sins", and 2) they will perish as a result of the destruction of Babylon if they remain.
- [5] God, who is longsuffering (Exod34:6), has endured the coordinated, worldwide rebellion of man that originated at Babel (i.e., the "sins" of Babylon; Cp., Ps2:1-3) since Genesis 11. By the end of the Tribulation period, Babylon is ripe for judgment (Cp., Gen15:16).
- [6] Babylon's "reward" is just. She has been judged by God "according to her works" and found to be deserving of destruction.
- [7] Babylon is the classic (biblical) example of the temporal prospering of the wicked, an ethical dilemma that has caused so much concern for the people of God throughout the ages (Cp., Hab1:2-4). Babylon, despite her wickedness, has indeed "glorified herself" and "lived luxuriously", even boasting "I sit a queen, and am no widow". This boast refers to Semiramis, the wife of Nimrod (founder of Babel; Gen10:9-10), whose position in the Babylonian pantheon was "queen of heaven"; this title was formally conferred to the Mary of Roman Catholicism by Pope Pius XII. The allusion to not being a widow is

an attempt to mock her rival Jerusalem, implying that Israel as the wife of Jehovah has been abandoned by Him (cf. Lam1:1; Jer3:8; Hos1:8-9). Although she believes she "shall see no sorrow", she will be judged.

- [8] The judgment/destruction of Babylon will occur suddenly, "in one day", which does not comport with the progressive decay into insignificant that occurred over several centuries of the historical city of Babylon. The sudden destruction of Babylon by "the Lord God" refers to a future event involving a rebuilt city. Babylon will be "burned with fire", never again to be inhabited as analogous to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Cp., Isa13:19-22; Jer50:39-40).
- [9] Three groups are mentioned as "lament[ing]" the destruction of Babylon, the first being "the kings of the earth". World leaders have "lived luxuriously" because of their "fornication" with Babylon.
- [10] The "judgment" of Babylon will occur suddenly, "in one hour". Observers will remain "standing afar off for the fear of her torment", which has led some to suggest that the city's destruction could be the result of a nuclear detonation.
- [11] The second group who "weep and mourn" over the destruction of Babylon is "the merchants of the earth". The city's destruction ends the system of worldwide commerce controlled by the Antichrist (Rev13:16-17), apparently centered in Babylon, by which the merchants who participated in it "waxed rich" (v3).
- [13] Verses 12-13 contain a litany of "merchandise", the trading of which ends with the destruction of Babylon. The list is probably not exhaustive, but it is nonetheless lengthy in order to indicate that every product imaginable has come under the control of the Antichrist's economic system. The last two items in the list are remarkable: "slaves" and "souls of men". Historically, more than half of the people who lived under the Roman Empire were "slaves", and this suggests that slavery will again be practiced in the Revived Roman Empire of the Antichrist. Roman Catholicism, with its abominable doctrines of purgatory and indulgences, has long made "merchandise" of the "souls of men", by which it has amassed unimaginable wealth.
- [14] The products and materials that bring men temporal pleasures will no longer be available.
- [15] Like the kings of the earth (vv9-10), the "merchants" observe the destruction of Babylon from "afar off" out of the "fear of her torment", suggesting they will also suffer harm if they approach the burning city too closely.
- [16] The Babylon of Revelation 18 is here described as "clothed" in the same colors and ornamentation as the whore (Cp., Rev17:4), which either means the cities of Revelation 17 and 18 are one in the same, or that the idolatrous system that has long been centered in the city of Rome has, by the end of the Tribulation, been transferred to a rebuilt city of Babylon, consistent with the prophecy of Zechariah 5:5-11.

- [17] The third group that mourns the destruction of Babylon is "every shipmaster", which also acquired "great riches" through "trade by sea" under the economic system controlled by the Antichrist.
- [18] During the last half of the Tribulation, the global commercial enterprise centered at Babylon and controlled by the Antichrist will be unlike anything that has existed previously.
- [19] The kings, merchants, and "all that had ships in the sea" were equally "made rich" by their participation in the global economic enterprise administered by the Antichrist, which comes to an end with the destruction of Babylon. The Antichrist himself, however, is not present in the city at the time of its destruction.

#### HEAVEN REJOICES OVER THE END OF BABYLON

- [20] With the judgment of Babylon, the prayers of the martyrs (Rev6:9-10) for justice and vengeance have finally been answered. Not only have the martyred Tribulation saints been "avenged", but also the "holy apostles" (N.T.) and "prophets" (O.T.) who have suffered under every form of antichrist system operative throughout the ages, all of which have had their origin in Babylon (i.e., Babel; Gen11:1-9), and which during the Tribulation return again to be centered "in the land of Shinar" (Cp., Gen11:2; Zech5:11).
- [21] The gradual and progressive decay of the ancient city that occurred in history cannot be the prophesied destruction of Babylon, for it must be "thrown down . . . with violence" at the end of the Tribulation. Whereas many cities will be rebuilt during the Kingdom, Babylon "shall be found no more at all".
- [22] The city of Babylon will never again be inhabited (cf. Isa13:20; Jer50:39).
- [23] Babylon as "the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth" (Rev17:5) has been the origin and source of every form of idolatry that has plagued humanity since the world began again after the Flood of Noah. Satan has used the demonically inspired and empowered "sorceries" that came from Babel to "deceive all nations" into worshiping him rather than God (Cp., Isa14:12-14; Rev13:4).
- [24] The Babylonian system of idolatry is also responsible for the persecution and murder of "prophets" and "saints", the people of God throughout the ages.

#### CHAPTER 19

- [1] All "heaven" rejoices and praises "the Lord God" for His long-awaited and much anticipated judgment of Babylon.
- [2] In order for God to be "righteous" and "His servants" to be "avenged", Babylon must be judged. While Babylon at the time of the end will have become a thriving commercial enterprise profiting from the suffering of men, it is the "fornication" (i.e., idolatry) of "the great whore" that is the principal focus of the judgment of God.

- [3] For the destruction of Babylon, it is God who is to be praised. The end of Babylon will be permanent; as a city and an idolatrous system she will never be revived. It may very well be that "smoke" will literally rise from the place of her destruction throughout the millennial kingdom as a continuous testimony of her judgment.
- [4] The worship of "God that sat on the throne" is led by "the four and twenty elders" representing the Church in heaven (see notes at Rev4:4) and "the four living creatures" (i.e., the cherubim; Cp., Rev4:8-11).
- [5] The praise of God is not only due Him, because He is worthy, but it is a command of all God's creatures, "both small and great".
- [6] The "voice of a great multitude" in heaven proclaims, "Hallelujah! For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth". Hallelujah is a transliteration of the Hebrew word meaning 'Praise the LORD' (Lit., Jehovah, or Yahweh); used a multitude of times in the O.T., the four occurrences of "Hallelujah" in Revelation 19:1-6 are their only uses in the N.T. These verses are the inspiration for the "Hallelujah Chorus" in Handel's *Messiah*, written and sung in English and based on the text of the King James Bible.

#### THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

While the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments are being poured out upon the earth, culminating in the destruction of Babylon and her worldwide, age-long system of idolatry, heaven has been preparing for the marriage of the Lamb.

- [7] The "marriage of the Lamb" (i.e., Jesus Christ) occurs in heaven during the time of the Tribulation. Thus, the Bride (i.e., his "wife") must be a people who are complete and in heaven during the 7-year period of the Tribulation. The Bride (of Christ) is the completed Church (Cp., 2Cor11:3; Eph5:22-32), which has been raptured prior to the beginning of the Tribulation. Any view of the rapture that is not pre-tribulational faces the insurmountable difficulty of not having a completed Church in heaven to participate in the marriage of the Lamb during the Tribulation period, which is preceded by "the judgment seat of Christ" (2Cor5:10).
- [8] The Bride of Christ is clothed in "fine linen, clean and white" representing the "[Lit., righteousnesses] of the saints". These "righteousnesses" are not righteous acts of unbelievers that merited justification before God, but are the righteous acts of "saints" (i.e., believers) rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ (cf. 1Cor3:8-15). That the Bride is already adorned with rewards received at the judgment seat of Christ necessitates that this judgment is already past (though not recorded in the Book of Revelation).
- [9] Distinct from the Bride are "they who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb". The marriage supper is the celebration that follows the marriage. Furthermore, the Bride is not invited to the supper, she and the Bridegroom are the ones who extend the invitation to their friends. Thus, those "called" to participate in the marriage supper are other believers in heaven (i.e., O.T. saints, primarily Israel; note Jn3:29). While it is surely a blessing to be

invited to attend the marriage supper of the Lamb, the greater blessing is to be the Lamb's Bride/wife.

- [10] Apparently caught up in the emotion of the moment, John attempts to "worship" the one who is speaking to him (v5). He is immediately prevented from doing so (Cp., Rev22:8-9), as God alone is worthy of worship. The one speaking to John is "thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus" (i.e., a Jewish believer). The final clause in this verse asserts that the purpose of all "prophecy" is to testify of "Jesus"; this is consistent with the opening of the Book of Revelation, which is a book of prophecy (Rev1:3), the purpose of which is "the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Rev1:1).

#### THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

- [11] This is the **Second Coming of Christ** from "heaven" to earth. Whereas His first coming was on a donkey (Zech9:9; Matt 21:1-9; Mk11:1-10; Luk19:28-38; Jn12:12-16), signifying a peaceful and non-threatening arrival, Jesus Christ will return riding "a white horse" (i.e., an instrument of war). Since the purpose of Christ's return is to "judge and make war". He is called "Faithful and True", the very title Jesus used of Himself in the last of the seven letters, the letter to the church of the Laodiceans (Rev3:14).
- [12] The symbolic use of "fire" is consistent with His coming in judgment. The "many crowns" on His head are **διαδήματα**, or crowns worn by a sovereign, indicative of His inherent right to rule because of who He is (cf. Mic5:2; Matt2:2). The "name written", apparently on His "vesture" and "thigh", is "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS". The comment in this verse that it is a name "that no man knew" (a perfect tense verb, signifying completed action in the past) probably does not indicate that this name is a new, never before revealed (secret) name of the Lord, but that no one has known Jesus Christ in His proper and intrinsic glory until this time (since it was veiled at His first coming; cf. Matt17:1-2; Philip2:7).
- [13] The "blood" seen on His "vesture" is not His own blood which was shed at His first coming, but the blood of His enemies He destroys at His coming (Cp., Isa63:1-6). His "name", not the one written for men to see, but the fundamental "name" indicative of who He is, is "The Word of God" (Jn1:1; 1Jn1:1; 5:7; Cp., Heb1:1-3).
- [14] The Lord Jesus Christ is accompanied at His return by "armies" coming from "heaven". These are resurrected saints (Cp., Jud14-15), since they are "clothed in fine linen, white and clean" indicating their time of judgment/reward is past (v8), and include the Church (N.T.) and Israel (O.T.) as both are promised to participate in the Kingdom.
- [15] At His return, Jesus will slay the wicked with nothing more than words "out of his mouth" (Cp., Isa11:4), seen here under the figure of "a sharp sword" (i.e., the word of God; Heb4:12). The figure that He "treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" is an allusion to Isaiah 63:2-3. The "smit[ing of] the nations" occurs when He destroys the armies of the world assembled at Armageddon, whereas He "shall rule them with a rod of iron" during

the Kingdom (i.e., righteousness will be enforced during His kingdom rule; cf. Ps2:8-9; Is1:3-5).

- [16] The repetition of a substantive in the genitive is a Hebraism expressing a superlative. "KING OF KINGS" means greatest of all kings, and "LORD OF LORDS" means greatest of all lords.
- [17] The "supper of the great God", to which are called "all the fowls ... of heaven", will be the slain bodies of the armies of the earth destroyed at Armageddon.
- [18] All the birds of earth will literally be drawn to the Valley of Megiddo to "eat the flesh" of the great multitude of corpses of men and carcasses of animals following the so-called battle of Armageddon (Cp., Ezek39:17-20). While this will be a practical necessity to deal with the carnage, it is also symbolic of the merciless and absolute victory of the Lord Jesus Christ over His enemies.
- [19] Here is seen the true purpose of "the beast" (i.e., Antichrist) in drawing "the kings of the earth" and all "their armies" into the great Valley of Megiddo in the land of Israel at the end of the age; it is "to make war against him that sat on the horse" (i.e., Jesus Christ; v11) in fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 2:1-3.
- [20] As the first order of business following victory on the battlefield is to slay the king/commander of the enemy army, without delay both "the beast" (i.e., Antichrist) and "the false prophet" will be "cast alive into [the] lake of fire"; these two are the very first persons to go into the lake of fire (cf. Rev20:14-15), the place of everlasting torment created for "the devil and his angels" (Matt25:41), but which will be used for judgment of all unbelievers.
- [21] There will be none among the armies of the earth, who gathered together to make war against the returning Lord Jesus Christ (v19), who survive. No quarter will be offered, no mercy will be granted, all will be "slain with the sword of him that sat on the horse" (v11).

## CHAPTER 20

### THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM

God's ultimate and over-arching purpose for His creation is widely misunderstood, even by the people of God. It is not the personal salvation of individuals so they can spend eternity in heaven (as is commonly taught by the system known as Covenant Theology), although after the Fall the redemption of a people is necessary to His purpose. God's purpose from the beginning was to establish a **kingdom on earth** over which man, created in His image, rules in righteousness as the steward of God (cf. Gen1:26-27). Any theological understanding of the purpose of God that does not culminate in a literal kingdom on earth is unbiblical<sup>48</sup>. The

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<sup>48</sup> A failure to recognize and emphasize a premillennial understanding of scripture is a failure to understand the very purpose of God for His creation. Far from being an unimportant or peripheral theological subject, eschatology (i.e., the study of last things) is vital and indispensable to correctly understanding all of history, both past and future. Theological views that spiritualize the concept of

Kingdom that will be established at the return of Christ, and which will endure on this present earth for one thousand years (i.e., the Millennium), is the fulfillment and consummation of the ultimate purpose of God, for which Christ taught His disciples to pray (cf. Matt6:10; Luk11:2).

#### THE BINDING OF SATAN

- [1] The "bottomless pit" (Greek, **ἄβυσσος**, often transliterated as 'abyss') is a place of temporary imprisonment for angelic creatures (Cp., Rev9:1-11; see discussion of **The Abyss** in notes at Rev9:1).
- [2] Satan, who has also been known throughout history as the "dragon", the "old serpent" (i.e., the serpent of Genesis 3), and the "Devil", will be "bound" in "the bottomless pit" for the "thousand years" of the millennial kingdom. Though not stated here, Zechariah 13:2 indicates that in addition to Satan every "unclean spirit" will be excluded from the Kingdom (also Isa24:21-22).
- [3] The purpose of confining Satan in "the bottomless pit" during the Kingdom is so "that he should deceive the nations no more". This is significant, since Satanic deception has characterized every age (2Cor4:4) that has preceded the Kingdom, even including the Garden of Eden (1Tim2:14). Nevertheless, he will be "loosed" for a brief period of time at the very end of the "thousand years" (v7).

#### THOUSAND YEAR REIGN OF CHRIST UPON EARTH

- [4] John sees a vision of the same "thrones" Daniel saw (Dan7:9), although they are now filled with occupants. The privilege of "judgment" is given to those who "sat" on these thrones; previously, the duty to participate in future judgment is said to be granted to Jesus' apostles (Matt19:28) and the Church (1Cor6:2-3).
- John also sees the "souls" of the Tribulation martyrs. They will be resurrected to "live and reign with Christ a thousand years"; that is, they will be resurrected and rewarded with special responsibilities in Christ's administration during the Kingdom.
- [5] There are two categories of "resurrection". The "first resurrection" is the "resurrection of life" (Jn5:29), also called the "resurrection of the just" (Act24:15). This is the resurrection of the saved. However, it does not occur as a single event. Rather, it occurs in 3 stages patterned after the harvest cycle in Israel: 1) the firstfruits, which was Jesus Christ (cf. 1Cor15:20-23), 2) the general harvest, which will be the Body of Christ at the time of the Rapture (1Cor15:51-53; 1Thess4:13-18), which precedes the Tribulation, and 3) the gleaning, which will be Israel (Dan12:1-3) and the Tribulation martyrs (v4) after the Tribulation.
- [6] Since the "first resurrection" is the resurrection of all believers, all who are a part of it are "blessed and holy". None of these will experience "the second death", which is to be resurrected and cast

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the kingdom in an attempt to somehow make the kingdom of God a reality today have an unbiblical understanding of the kingdom.

alive into the Lake of Fire (v14). It is the resurrected saints, both Israel and the Church, who will "reign with [Christ] a thousand years", meaning they will be rewarded with special responsibilities in Christ's administration during the Kingdom.

#### RELEASE OF SATAN AND FINAL REBELLION

- [7] God still has a dispensational purpose to accomplish during the Kingdom Age. The final test for man is, after the blessing of living under the righteous rule of King Messiah for one thousand years, completely free of Satanic/demonic deception<sup>49</sup>, how will man respond to one final temptation to follow "Satan" in rebellion against God?

Humanity and Regeneration in the Kingdom. The Kingdom Age will be a unique period of time on earth in which mortal men/women (believers who survive the Tribulation and are granted entrance into the Kingdom) live along side resurrected saints of past ages (who are part of King Messiah's righteous administration<sup>50</sup>). The dispensational test in the Kingdom applies to the mortal, not the resurrected, population of men/women in the Kingdom. Although the mortal population is wholly regenerate at the start of the Kingdom, continued procreation among mortals during the Kingdom Age will give rise to new generations of mortals who must be saved by exercising personal faith in Jesus Christ (who is present among them as King Messiah). While all will superficially submit<sup>51</sup> to the righteous rule of Messiah, or face a just reprimand, not all will believe and be saved.

- [8] Upon his release, "Satan" (and his demons; cf. Isa24:22) will once again "deceive the nations", tempting men to follow him rather than King Messiah. The number of those who choose to follow "Satan" in this final rebellion is innumerable (presumably unbelievers born during the Kingdom Age). The rebel leader in this "battle" is "Gog", and his people are "Magog" ("Magog" means 'land of Gog'; cf. Ezek38:2). "Gog and Magog" will also lead a coalition of Islamic nations to attack Israel during the Tribulation (cf. Ezek38-39), but that "battle" before the Millennium should not be confused with this one that occurs at the end of the Millennium. "Magog" is the Biblical name for the modern nation of Russia (i.e., the people who, relative to Israel, come from the "uttermost parts of the north"; Ezek38:15), with "Gog" being essentially a title used for the leader of Russia.

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<sup>49</sup> Although the dispensations of Innocence and the Kingdom are in many ways very similar (e.g., an abundantly productive earth, a tame animal kingdom, very long lifetimes, and the presence of God on earth with man), a major distinction between them is that Satanic deception was present in the Garden of Eden, whereas it will be excluded from the Kingdom.

<sup>50</sup> Perfectly righteous government is one of the unique dispensational distinctions of the Kingdom. Governments during the Kingdom will be utterly free from corruption, ensuring justice for all, since all nations will be ruled by King Messiah and His administration of resurrected saints (cf. Isa11:1-10; Zech14:9-21).

<sup>51</sup> Psalm 66:3, speaking of life under King Messiah in the Kingdom, says, "Through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies **submit** themselves unto thee". The Hebrew word translated "submit" means 'feigned obedience' (i.e., external compliance out of fear, rather than obedience motivated by love/loyalty/faith).

- [9] Similar to the Battle of Armageddon, the attack that comes from "the four quarters of the earth" (i.e., all nations; v8) is focused on "the beloved city" (i.e., Jerusalem), presumably because Jerusalem is the location where King Messiah resides and is worshipped (cf. Zech14:16). The rebellion is ended swiftly by "fire ... from God out of heaven".
- [10] It is at this point that "the devil" (i.e., Satan) is "cast into the lake of fire". For one thousand years, "the beast and the false prophet" have been its only occupants (cf. Rev19:20), Satan being the third creature to enter it. Satan, the creature originally known as "Lucifer", finally receives the judgment prophesied for him long ago (cf. Isal4:15). The Bible never teaches any notion of annihilation (i.e., the idea that eternal judgment means a creature's extinction); rather, those assigned to the lake of fire "shall be tormented day and night forever and ever".

#### THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT

- [11] The final judgment will occur before "a great white throne", upon which sits God (cf. v12) in the Person of Jesus Christ, for "the Father ... hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (Jn5:22).
- [12] All the "dead" will "stand before God" at this judgment. This must be immediately preceded by the second resurrection, which is the "resurrection of damnation" (Jn5:29), also called the "resurrection of the unjust" (Act24:15). This is the resurrection of the unsaved from every age, which occurs after the millennial kingdom. At this judgment, two sets of records are "opened": 1) "**books**" (plural), in which are recorded the "works" of "the dead", and 2) another "book" (singular), which is "the book of life". Note, "the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the **books**, according to their works". Since all who appear at this judgment are unbelievers, their names are not found in "the book of life"; thus, they must be judged according to their own works.
- [13] All the unbelieving dead, "every man" without distinction and with no exceptions, will appear at this judgment. Both "death and Hell" deliver up their dead as part of the second resurrection preceding this judgment. Note that "death" is what claims the bodies of the dead, whereas "Hell"<sup>52</sup> is the place where the souls of the dead await resurrection (Cp., Matt10:28).
- [14] All the unbelieving dead, resurrected from "death and Hell", are "cast into the lake of fire" as a consequence of the great white throne judgment. They are judged "according to their works" (vv12,13), and none will be justified before God on this basis (cf. Rom3:20; Gal2:16). To be sent to "the lake of fire" in a resurrection body is "the second death" (since it necessarily follows physical death), which is eternal. In fact, the purpose of resurrecting the unbelieving dead is to equip them with bodies fit for eternity; the unimaginable horror, however, is that these

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<sup>52</sup> In the Bible, Hell is not the same thing as the Lake of Fire; Hell is temporary, the Lake of Fire is eternal. See the discussion of this distinction in the notes at Revelation 1:18.

resurrected bodies will spend eternity suffering torment in the Lake of Fire (Cp., v10).

- [15] Unlike unbelievers, the names of believers will be "found written in the book of life", so they will not be "judged according to their works" (vv12,13), but according to the work of Christ on their behalf (cf. Rom3:25; 1Cor15:1-4; 2Cor5:21).

## CHAPTER 21

### THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH

With the close of the Great White Throne Judgment that follows the thousand year Kingdom, the history of the present "heaven and earth" (Gen1:1) comes to an end. Because the present heaven and earth have been defiled by sin, heaven by angelic sin and earth by human sin, both must be destroyed (2Pet3:10). God's creation of a new heaven and earth is generally called the eternal state, since they will never be defiled by sin and thus endure forevermore (2Pet3:13). Note that in contrast to the common misconception, which is that the destiny of redeemed men is to dwell forever with God in heaven, Revelation 21-22 reveals rather that man's destiny is for God to dwell forever with men on a new earth (Rev21:3).

- [1] The present heaven and earth, called here "the first heaven and the first earth", are destroyed (not renovated; Cp., 2Pet3:10) and "passed away" since they have been defiled by sin: heaven by angelic sin (Isa14:12-14; Ezek28:12-18), earth by human sin (Gen3:1-6). God creates "a new heaven and a new earth". Whereas 71% of the earth today is covered by oceans, "there was no more sea" in the new earth. There is no reason given for why the sea will be excluded from the new earth. Recall, however, that most of the sea water on the present earth is a result of the judgment of Noah's flood (cf. Ps104:5-9), giving the "sea" a decidedly negative connotation.
- [2] God also creates a "new Jerusalem", which John sees descend "out of heaven". This "new Jerusalem" is mentioned prophetically by both Paul (Gal4:25-26; Heb13:14) and Jesus; Jesus calls the new Jerusalem "the city of my God" (Rev3:12). Many commentators note that no mention is made of the "new Jerusalem" actually reaching the earth and suggest that it will remain forever suspended above it; this probably reads more into this scene than is supported by the verse. The more natural understanding is that the "new Jerusalem" will exist on the "new earth". The fact that the "new Jerusalem" is likened to "a bride adorned for her husband" suggests that it will be the eternal residence of the Church, which is the bride/wife of the Lamb, Jesus Christ (cf. Rev21:9-10).
- [3] Note that in contrast to the common misconception, which is that the destiny of redeemed men is to dwell forever with God in heaven, "a great voice out of heaven" reveals rather that man's destiny is for "God" to "dwell" forever with "men" on a new earth. Redeemed men "shall be His people"; however, in the Greek text "people" is *plural*, indicating there is more than one 'people of God'. In fact, there are two distinct peoples of God: 1) the nation of Israel is the wife of Jehovah (cf. Jer31:31; Hos2:16-20), and 2) the Church is the Bride of Christ (cf. Eph5:22-32; Rev21:9-10).

- [4] In the new creation, there will never again be "sorrow", "crying", "pain", or "death". These are all "former things" associated with the present creation that (since the Fall) is under the curse of God (cf. Gen3:14-19; Rom8:20-22) and will "pass away" with it.
- [5] The "new" creation of God, which will be eternal, has already begun in: 1) the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1Cor15:20,47-50), and 2) the regeneration of believers (2Cor5:17). However, the whole of the present creation "groaneth and travaileth together in pain" (Rom8:21-22) and must be made new in order to be eternal.
- [6] In the mind and purpose of God, the work of the new creation "is done" since He as the "Alpha and Omega" knows with equal certainty "the beginning and the end".

Jesus declared, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" (Jn7:37), speaking of the free offer of "the Holy Spirit" (Jn7:39) to any who would "believe on [Him]" (Jn7:38). Here God announces the free offer to drink of "the fountain of the water of life", which will be a literal river in the new earth (cf. Rev22:1).

- [7] Each of Christ's seven letters in Revelation 2-3 made promises to "he that overcometh", which was a designation for genuine believers of the Church Age (see discussion at Rev2:7). Here is an additional promise to "inherit all things", which apparently will be fulfilled in the new creation. The believer's relationship with "God" is that of a "son", which is consistent with, and necessitates, inheritance (Cp., Rom8:14-17,32).
- [8] All "unbelieving" people are characterized as "abominable", "murderers", "fornicators", "sorcerers", "idolaters", and "liars". In contrast to "he that overcometh" (v7), who enters the new creation, unbelievers are forever excluded from it; their destiny is the spend eternity in the "lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" (Cp., Rev20:13-15). This is God's solution to the so-called Problem of Evil (see CHART: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL IN THE PAGAN VS. BIBLICAL WORLDVIEWS).

#### THE NEW JERUSALEM

- [9] One of the same "seven angels who had the seven bowls" (Cp., Rev15:1; 17:1) desires to give John additional revelation concerning "the bride, the Lamb's wife", which is the completed Church in heaven (Cp., Rev19:7-9).
- [10] While being "carried away in the spirit", John sees a vision of "that great city, the holy Jerusalem" as it is "descending out of heaven". The implication is that the "holy [i.e., new] Jerusalem" will be the eternal residence of the Church, the Bride of Christ, in the new creation. Although the descent of the new Jerusalem from heaven was mentioned in the overview of the new creation as a whole (v2), it is now revisited in much more detail; according to the Hebrew pattern of historical narrative, this indicates that the new Jerusalem is the focal point of most importance in the new creation.

- [11] The "light" of the new Jerusalem is compared to that of "precious [gem] stones", suggesting beauty and brilliance. The fact that the city is said to have "the glory of God" indicates that it will be that place in the new creation where the presence of God is uniquely manifested (Cp., v22).
- [12] The fact that the new Jerusalem has "a wall great and high" and "twelve gates" indicates that entry into the city is controlled, presumably by the "twelve angels" stationed at the gates (Cp., Gen3:24). The "twelve gates" will be named for the "twelve tribes" of Israel; but this introduces a paradox, since there are actually 13 tribes<sup>53</sup>.
- [13] The new Jerusalem is laid out as a square (v16), with three gates on each wall. The millennial Jerusalem will have a similar layout, prophesied by Ezekiel (cf. Ezek48:30-35). If the naming of the gates in the new Jerusalem corresponds to that of the millennial Jerusalem, the gates on the north will be named Reuben, Judah, and Levi; the gates on the east will be named Joseph, Benjamin, and Dan; the gates on the south will be named Simeon, Issachar, and Zebulun; and the gates on the west will be named Gad, Asher, and Naphtali. Thus, the names of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh have been subsumed into Joseph.
- [14] The "twelve foundations" of the new Jerusalem will be named for the "twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Cp., Eph2:20), introducing a paradox similar to that for the twelve tribes. All the lists of the twelve apostles that appear in the N.T. include Judas, but presumably the name of Judas will not be used; is Matthias (Act1:26) or Paul (cf. Rom1:1; 1Cor1:1) the proper replacement for Judas?
- [15] Much like the occasion of measuring the Tribulation Temple (Cp., Rev11:1), the measuring of the new Jerusalem serves two purposes. First, it is simply revelatory, giving the actual dimensions of a literal city (i.e., the city is not a figure or an allegory for something else). Second, since the dimensions are utterly different from those of the past or present cities of Jerusalem, or of the millennial Jerusalem (Cp., Ezek48:8-20), it calls attention to the fact that this city is a new and distinct city of Jerusalem that will exist in the future eternal state.
- [16] The city is laid out "foursquare", and "the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal"; thus, it will be cubical<sup>54</sup>, just like the Holy of Holies in the Temple/Tabernacle (Cp., 2Chron3:8). A "furlong" is the Greek *stadia*, which was approximately 600 feet. Thus, "twelve thousand furlongs" is something like 1,300 to 1,400 miles!

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<sup>53</sup> Since Joseph was the son of Jacob who received the double portion (1Chron5:1-2), both of his sons (Ephraim and Manasseh) are reckoned as tribes (Gen48:8-22), creating 13 tribes. However, throughout Scripture, whenever the tribes of Israel are listed, only 12 appear; one tribe is always omitted. In the only list that occurs in the Book of Revelation (Rev7:4-8), the tribe of Dan is omitted.

<sup>54</sup> The text does not specify that the city is a cube, and some commentators suggest it could be a pyramid with a height equal to its length/breadth. However, since the new Jerusalem is to be the dwelling place of God on the new Earth, the analogy to the Holy of Holies in the Temple would seem to be a more compelling connection.

- [17] The "wall" will measure 144 cubits, or approximately 216 feet (presumably this is the thickness of the wall). Although it is an "angel" that is doing the measuring, the dimensions he communicates are those of a "man" (i.e., they are the normal dimensions with which we are familiar, not something unique to heaven).
- [18] The "wall" will be made of "jasper", again suggesting brilliance and beauty. The "city" itself will be made of "pure gold, like clear glass" which suggests transparency (Cp., v21).
- [19] The twelve (v14) "foundations" of the city are described as being made of "precious stones" (vv19-20). There is some overlap of these twelve "precious stones" with those used in the high priest's breastplate (6 of 12), which represented the twelve tribes of Israel (Exod28:17-21); some overlap is not unexpected, but the significant differences may indicate these lists and any symbols associated with them are not correlated. Nonetheless, the "first foundation" will be "jasper", associated with the tribe of Benjamin (Exod28:20), the tribe of the Apostle Paul (Philip3:5). Whereas "jasper" occurs last in the breastplate (since Benjamin was the twelfth son of Jacob), it occurs first in the foundations of the new Jerusalem (Cp., Matt19:30).
- [21] The "twelve gates" of the city are each made of a single, apparently huge, "pearl". The "pearl" is not a precious stone per se, since it is produced inside a living organism. Jews did not value pearls since shellfish, including oysters, were unclean under the Mosaic law (Lev11:10); when used symbolically in the Bible, pearls always carry a decidedly Gentile connotation. The "pearl of great price" that occurs in the sixth kingdom parable (Matt13:45-46), properly understood, almost certainly represents the Church (Cp., Act15:14). The "street" of the city will be "pure gold", likened to "transparent glass" (Cp., v18).
- [22] The place on the present earth where the presence of God was uniquely manifested (i.e., dwelt) was in the Tabernacle/Temple (Cp., Exod40:34-35; 1Kgs8:10-11). However, in the new creation there will be "no temple in it".
- [23] The dwelling place of "the Lord God Almighty" and "the Lamb" (v22) will be in the new Jerusalem. The "glory" of their presence will "light" the city, making unnecessary the "sun" and "moon" as natural light bearers. Something like this may explain the source of light during the first three days of the (original) creation prior to the existence of the sun, moon, and stars. Since the "sun" and "moon" (and virtually all astronomical objects) became the principal objects of idolatry in the original creation (Cp., Gen11:4), it is probably not surprising that they are absent from the new creation.
- [24] The new creation will be populated exclusively by individuals "who are saved" (all unsaved having been assigned to the lake of fire; Rev20:15). It will also have "nations" and "kings", suggesting that ethnic distinctions and national hierarchies with which we are familiar in the present creation will endure into the new creation. The new Jerusalem is not the residence of these "nations", but they will have access to the city.

- [25] Since the (pearl) "gates" of the new Jerusalem "shall not be shut at all", the nations of the saved will have unfettered access to visit/worship the Lord. With the glory of the perpetual presence of "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb" providing light, "there shall be no night" in the new creation.
- [26] The "glory" and "honor" of the "nations" will be brought into the new Jerusalem, presumably as a periodic act of worship of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb (as will occur in the millennial kingdom on the feast of tabernacles; Cp., Zech14:16-17).
- [27] God's solution to the so-called Problem of Evil is a new creation, from which evil, sin, and unrighteousness will be forever excluded (see CHART: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL IN THE PAGAN VS. BIBLICAL WORLDVIEWS).

## CHAPTER 22

### THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH (CONTINUED)

- [1] A "river of water of life" will flow out from "the throne of God and of the Lamb", which is presumably in the new Jerusalem (which tends to undermine the interpretation of some that the new Jerusalem remains suspended above the new earth; Cp., Rev21:2). The implication seems to be that the lives of the human inhabitants of the new creation are sustained (in part) by drinking "water" from this "river of life".

Note that the "throne" in the new creation/new Jerusalem will be occupied by both "God" and the "Lamb" (i.e., Father and Son). Thus, even after Christ "shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father" (1Cor15:24), the Son will continue to reign forever over it with His Father.

- [2] The new creation will also have a "tree of life", just as in the Garden of Eden (Gen2:9; 3:24), which will span both sides of the "river" [of life] and which will bear "twelve kinds of fruit", a different kind each "month" (implying that 'time' will be marked by months<sup>55</sup> in the new creation). Again, the implication seems to be that the lives of the human inhabitants of the new creation are sustained (in part) by eating "fruit" from the "tree of life" (Cp., Rev2:7) and using its "leaves" for "healing" (which implies there will be no sickness).
- [3] The new creation will be forever free of the "curse" and all its effects that have existed in the present creation since the Fall (Gen3:14-19; cf. Rom8:18-22). That means the earth will be abundantly productive (true also in the millennial kingdom; cf. Isa65:23; Amos9:13) and creature death will be eliminated (not true in the millennial kingdom; cf. Isa65:20). People who are privileged to dwell eternally in the new creation will be the "servants" of "God", and their purpose will be to "serve Him".

<sup>55</sup> The existence of "months" in the new creation creates a paradox, since months are linked to the recurring cycle of lunar phases, which is problematic if no moon exists in the new creation. It is possible that the new creation will include a moon (and perhaps even a sun); Revelation 21:23 and 22:5 do not actually say no sun or moon will exist, but that they are not necessary for light.

- [4] For the servants of God to see His face indicates not only blessing from God (Cp., Num6:24-26), but intimacy with Him (Cp., Exod33:11). For the name of God to be [written] upon their "foreheads" emphasizes personal possession, which was a promise Jesus made to the overcomer in His letter to the church at Philadelphia (Rev3:12).
- [5] The perpetual presence of "the Lord God" in the new creation will provide unending "light", making the "sun" unnecessary (for that purpose), such that there will never be "night". In the last clause, the antecedent of the pronoun "they" is still the "servants" of God (v3); thus, in a paradoxical way, the servants of God "shall reign forever and ever", which was a promise made to the Church (2Tim2:12; Rev5:10) and the Tribulation martyrs (Rev20:4,6).

#### FINAL EXHORTATIONS

- [6] In concluding the revelation to John, it is reiterated that the things shown to him "must shortly be done" (Cp., Rev1:1); as discussed in the notes at Revelation 1:3, this is best understood as imminency rather than nearness in time. The words of this prophecy are "faithful and true", implying absolute certainty; it is not possible that either the whole or any part can fail to come to pass.
- [7] Suddenly, Jesus Himself speaks. "Behold, I come quickly" reiterates the **imminency** of the coming of Christ at the rapture; it is an event that can occur at any moment, after which the events described in Revelation will be set in motion. For this reason, the reader of this "book" should "keepeth the words of the prophecy" if he would receive its blessing (Rev1:3). Considering this unique promise, it is ironic that the Book of Revelation has been the most neglected (and maligned) book of the Bible throughout the Church Age.
- [8] As occurred previously (Rev19:10), John gets caught up in the emotion of the moment and attempts to "worship" the "angel" who is speaking to him.
- [9] Again, he is immediately prevented from worshipping a creature, as God alone is worthy of worship. Note, however, that the "angel" (v7) speaking to John is "thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren, the prophets" (i.e., a Jewish prophet, who presumably lived during the O.T.). Thus, "angel" (Greek, **αγγελος**) is being used here in its non-technical sense simply to mean 'messenger' (in this case, a human messenger).
- [10] The prophet Daniel was told to "shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end" (Dan12:4), suggesting that the visions given to Daniel were for a time in the distant future (from his perspective), before which much intervening prophecy would have to be fulfilled. In contrast, John is commanded to "seal not the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand", since from the perspective of the Church Age these events could begin suddenly (immediately following the rapture, which is an **imminent** event), and may begin without the necessity of any unfulfilled prophecy occurring beforehand.

- [11] The idea behind this verse is that there is the possibility for individuals to believe, repent, and receive grace from God today, during the Church Age (i.e., the dispensation of the grace of God; Eph3:2); this is why the Apostle Paul asserts, "behold, now is the day of salvation" (2Cor6:2). Once a person dies or Christ returns, repentance is no longer possible, for judgment immediately follows (cf. Heb9:27).
- [12] The return of Christ brings judgment, resulting in condemnation, for the unbeliever, but "reward" for the believer "according [to] his work" (cf. 1Cor3:11-15). Whereas salvation is according to grace received through personal faith, works having no part whatsoever (Eph2:8-9), "reward" will be based on good works performed by the believer. The promise/possibility of rewards ought to motivate holy living on the part of the believer after he has been saved (Cp., 1Cor9:24-27; 1Jn3:2-3).
- [13] Christ's assertion, originally made in Revelation 1:8, it reiterated here. It is a clear and forceful assertion of the absolute deity of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- [14] Note, there is a variant of some significance in the Greek textual basis for this verse<sup>56</sup>. This verse is not defining obedience (i.e., keeping commandments) as a requirement for salvation, but it does recognize that those who obey God will be "blessed". By definition, those who dwell eternally in the new creation will obey God, and among the blessings they will receive are to be entry into the "city" of the new Jerusalem (i.e., access to the presence of God) and the "right" to eat from the "tree of life" (i.e., eternal life).
- [15] In contrast, those who would be disobedient, committing all manner of sins, will be excluded from the new creation.
- [16] The "churches", which occupied such a prominent role in Revelation 1-3, have not been mentioned by name since Revelation 3:22. This is consistent with the fact that the prophecies given in the Book of Revelation (Rev6-19) concern the 7-year Tribulation (i.e., Daniel's 70th Week; Dan9:27), a period of time during which the Church will not be present on earth (Cp., Rev3:10). However, it was to the seven "churches" in Asia that John was commanded to deliver this book (Rev1:11).

The final "I am" statement of Jesus Christ occurs in this verse<sup>57</sup>. As the "root and offspring of David", Jesus is rightful heir to the throne of David (Luk1:31-33) promised in the covenant God made with him (1Chron17:11-14). The assertion that Jesus is "the bright and morning star" is most significant. The "morning star" rises late in the nighttime sky, shortly before the rising of the sun at dawn to begin a new day. According to this pattern, Christ will come as the "morning star" to claim His Bride, the Church (i.e., the rapture),

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<sup>56</sup> Whereas the KJV reads, "Blessed are they that do his commandments", most modern versions read something like, "Blessed are those who wash their robes" (ESV). The KJV follows the reading preserved in the vast majority of Greek manuscripts and should be accepted as the genuine reading.

<sup>57</sup> Just as there are recorded seven "I am" statements of Christ in the Gospel of John, there are also seven "I am" statements of Christ recorded by John in the Book of Revelation: Rev1:8,11,17; 2:23; 21:6; 22:13,16.

shortly before coming as the "sun of righteousness" (Mal4:2) to save the nation of Israel (i.e., the second coming).

- [17] As the role of God the Holy "Spirit" is to guide believers into all truth and direct attention and worship to Jesus Christ (Cp., Jn16:13-14), He now joins with the "bride" (i.e., the Church) to exhort those who read this book to, "Come" (i.e., believe on Christ; Cp., Jn6:35). This exhortation is extended to "whosoever will" (i.e., all men without distinction or exception), indicating that anyone may come to Christ, with the promise that no one who comes will be rejected (Cp., Jn6:37). This is the final reiteration in scripture of the free offer of salvation to all men, to be received by personal faith alone (cf. Rom 4:3-5; Eph2:9-9).
- [18] Verses 18-19 contain a dire warning to any who would pervert the words recorded by John in the Book of Revelation, either by adding to or taking away from them. The one who does so will experience the "plagues" of judgment revealed in this book, he will be removed from the "book of life", and he will be excluded from the "holy city" (i.e., the new Jerusalem), which means he will spend eternity in the lake of fire (cf. Rev20:15). Since this same kind of oath of malediction is recorded elsewhere in scripture (e.g., Deut12:32; Prov30:5-6), it would seem to be a universal principle that those who corrupt the Word of God are lost.
- [20] The final promise in the Bible is from the Lord Jesus Christ, "Surely, I come quickly". The return of Jesus Christ is both sure and imminent. John responds with, "Amen", the Hebrew word for 'truth', expressing his agreement that the Lord's assertion is true. The final prayer in the Bible, "Even so, come Lord Jesus", is John's personal petition for the return of Christ (Cp., Song8:14; Matt6:10).
- [21] John closes the Book of Revelation, indeed the completed Bible, by commending its readers to the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ". God's "grace" is the all-sufficient answer for every human need.

--- S.D.G. ---

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